

# LILLY-JADE

*Mystic Adventures in Big Sur*

**Volume V**

**J.W. WINSLOW**

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**Mystic Adventures in Big Sur**  
**Volume V**

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For MaryJo

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## PROLOGUE

**It was a tiny twinge** in the belly that ignited her life, from my point of view. I was stirring at dawn, and reached over to find Hawk sound asleep beside me. His hand was just touching my shoulder.

I stared at the ceiling and sure enough, another odd flip flop in the core of my womb. She was on the way. I just knew it was time.

In the bathroom, I emptied my bursting bladder and stared at the light coming through the window. It danced on the grooves of the rough hewn redwood, making a pattern. I was so calm that I surprised myself. You know the feeling, when you have a secret all to yourself?

I washed my hands with Uma's dandelion soap and bent over to run damp fingers through my tangled hair. Today I wanted to be beautiful.

The final touch was a bit of the Blossom Energy splash that I loved, dabbed behind my ears and between my breasts.

Things would never be the same.



I had fallen back to sleep, reveling in the thought that I was free to do so. I snuggled into the pillow, buried my face in the soft cotton, and drifted off immediately. The last few weeks of pregnancy allow for this, since you are so tired, but elated at the same time. Any excuse to close your eyes and zone off is welcome.

When I awoke to the bright midmorning sun, the room was warm and I was alone. I could hear sounds of water running and knew he was in the shower, in that vast amazing new room that Gabriel West called Hawk's lounge. It was a joke, of course, since Hawk rarely lounged at anything, but appropriate for the huge space with high ceilings and lots of windows.

I lay quietly, awaiting another message from the inside, but nothing came. When he appeared in the doorway, Hawk's smile gave him away.

"Hey you," he said, wrapping a towel around his waist. "Want some tea?" He lifted the covers and tickled my feet.

When I pulled back my leg, the nip in my belly came again. Hawk was busy traveling up my ankle with his fingers, and laughing out loud at the sight of my belly. From that angle, I'm sure it looked like Mt. Rushmore!

No worries, baby, I thought! Enjoy it while you can, because this is the end of my waiting period. You'd better run for your life when I get back on my feet, I will paint your toenails and bind your ankles together!

Only my laughter was audible, and muffled by a kiss. He couldn't lay on top of me anymore, but up on all fours, he kissed my lips. He was very excited to be a father, after all. And why not?

No heavy lifting required.



I wrapped a light pink robe around me and stepped outside, hungry for the scent of my new Cecile Brunner rose. It was already climbing on the trellis that Gabriel had designed especially for this purpose. My little wing of the house, as he put it, was going to be full of all my favorite things. A huge copper bathtub had been installed, and one whole wall of sink was made of Big Sur Jade. The basins were copper as well, oval and slightly deeper than usual. I had a flexible handheld hose to facilitate washing various body parts (and maybe the baby), or my hair. Gabriel didn't know that I was a bath shampoo girl, did he?

The sun was blazing through the trees, and the scent of the sea mixed with my tiny pink roses was more magical than usual. Hawk found me standing on the path near Runner's little home, and approached with a large cup of steaming green tea. I turned to greet him, and it was then that my water broke.

## CHAPTER ONE

Uma had been anticipating the life of my daughter for many months, and was not surprised when Hawk called her about the flood of amniotic fluid rushing in rivulets down the path to the beach. I laughed at his expression, as if he had somehow caused this event, and asked for a clean towel. He carefully placed the tea on a bench and returned with the goods.

I was literally standing in a puddle when he put his arms around me, and held me very tight. My feet were wet as well, so we were a muddy pair when she arrived a few minutes later. "Oh, my," Uma said, hurrying toward us. She took the towel from her brother, put her arms around both of us and let out a lovely whoop that might have alerted all of Big Sur. No tiptoeing around this time. She was ready!

Soon I was sipping my tea on the side of the bed while she cleaned me up. "Why didn't you tell me, Moana?" she said, in with a stern smile. "There must have been some indications this morning."

"I had a little quirky twinge or two, that's all." I was enjoying the moment. Hawk stood there watching us, preparing himself. No matter what they tell you, when the baby is on its way, who knows what comes next. Uma was the veteran of many of births, being a certified Wyama Birthing Midwife and Esalen Medicine Woman. She had never been an aunt, but I was in good hands, and not the least bit worried.

She had taken precautions from the beginning, given my age and medical history. I had months of massage and herbal therapy during my gestation period, and was in good shape. But this was at least two weeks before she had planned, so we were excited. When she moved into the cottage and set up shop, I was amazed at the array of oils and herbs she had accumulated. My old bedroom was now a "guest space" for her, or a patient, now that we were safely ensconced in the new wing. She saved that room and bed for my massages, as well as the old closet room lounge where we always met for my treatments in the early days. It was very comforting for me to be at home, with the people I love.

Uma patted my legs and feet dry and lifted them onto the bed, gently pushing me back into the array of pillows. "Let me know when the next twinge arrives, ok?" She looked at her watch, and I knew she would be timing them from now on. "How are you feeling?" She bent over my head and looked into my eyes with such power that I jumped a little. Those huge brown eyes studied my face as she touched my ears and felt my neck on the sides, and listened to my heart with her ear between my breasts.

I could hear Hawk breathing, for suddenly the room was silent and still. When she opened the robe and touched my belly, I could see him leaning against the wall with a very odd smile on his face. He was thinking, ruminating about the events, planning. It was second nature to him.

"I'm going to prepare your bath, Moana! Relax and breathe deeply. It will raise the endorphin levels." She stopped at the foot of the bed and touched my feet, tickling the bottoms.

Hawk watched his sister move purposely out the door, and laughed out loud. "She is a piece of work, isn't she?"

"I'm used to her, Hawk. Remember she has been giving me body work since the days in the cave. She is masterful and strong, like her brother."

He approached the bed and put his hands on my ankles, leaning forward slowly, traveling up my legs. He spread them gently and knelt before me, running his hands over my enormous protruding belly. It was at that moment the first real pain cut through my womb, and I gasped out loud.

“What is it, Dyanna? Are you having a contraction?”

“I don’t know, something just happened, more like a cramp.” I looked at his face and started to laugh. “Can you even believe we are having this conversation?”

Now he looked at his surgical watch, which had a special memory button, as Uma returned to the room. “Are you planning to assist, my dear brother? Here, help me with her pulse and lungs.” Now Hawk was in familiar territory, and automatically grabbed my wrist. Uma sat me up and he listened to my breath. He just happened to have the scope around his neck, under the gray tee. Business as usual.

He nodded to Uma and she took my hand. “[We are going to prepare for the baby](#), Dyanna. Come with me now.”

We walked across the bedroom to my bath, which was a large room with high ceilings and skylights. Gabriel West had chosen that spectacular copper tub for me, and installed it across a corner. The faucets were in the center near the walls, surrounded by the fronds of cymbidium orchids. He had designed a copper planter with jade inserts that matched the handles of the Hot and Cold. It had been a surprise for my birthday in March, but I never had a chance to use it. We had been in the old part of the cottage during construction, and the big claw foot tub in there was like an old friend.

The room was warm and sunny from the rooftop and windows, with slits of light cutting across the stone floor. A deep green rug covered the area next to the copper lip, so your feet never touched the floor after a bath. There was a window open, gazing at the back pastures behind the house, where a new garden had been planted. My favorite vines and fragrant roses covered the beds and there was a bench under the oak tree. John Soaring Meadow’s touch was all over the wood, with carvings on the arching back and arms. I cried when he delivered it, amazed at the detail and beauty.

Uma removed my robe and led me to a built-in massage table across the room. It was under another window facing the sea, with a special view that was cleared between the brush and trees. Gabriel had anticipated my needs for privacy and the open spaces, generously providing for both. She helped me climb onto the table and lie down. Then she propped a pillow under my neck, and one under my bottom.

I knew what was coming next, because she had been massaging my vagina for months with special oils and tinctures. She explained that the muscles in that area were flexible and with some help would make my delivery much easier. The scent of the spicy herbal oil filled the room as she gently spread my legs and inserted her fingers against the vaginal canal. “I am going to see if you have begun to dilate,” she whispered. “Let me know if you feel this or have any pain.”

My training had taught me to breathe deeply and relax my muscles from the core of my body. I inhaled and slowly released the air from my lungs as she measured the area with a white ring. “Good,” she nodded, “breathe down to the end of your lungs.” Now she began to massage the tissue with warming oils and her strong fingers. At first I had been uncomfortable with this practice, but her tenacity had paid off. Now, when I needed it, the pressure on my flesh was tolerable, even

welcome. She told me that It would serve to relieve my pain as well.

Hawk entered the room and tapped on the wall, not wanting to disturb us. Uma nodded to him as he approached, watching her deft hands manipulate my body. He was fascinated with this procedure and had told his associates at Stanford of his sister's methods. They were mostly unimpressed, but one young OB resident was already using her own version in the delivery.

"Do you want me to call Sandy Bond?" He stood at the foot of the table, watching intently. "No fair," I teased, watching him through the slits of my eyes. "You don't get to see all this..."

While it was true that he had not witnessed much of the preparation Uma had applied, I knew they had long conversations about the actual birthing procedures. This was not a specialty he had been close to in med school, and rarely ventured near the Neo-natal wing at Stanford. His specialties didn't include repairing the soft bones of infants, at least not yet!

"I don't think we need anyone here now, Stephen. Let's see how things go. I want solitude and privacy, this is a family occasion." I sensed a note of protectiveness in Uma's voice, one that I recognized from the cave at Jade Beach. She scolded John for taking me outside earlier than she wanted, when I was very weak at one point. She dressed him down, and he obeyed her instructions. I understood from then on that Uma was my protector, and my healing angel. No question.

Hawk squeezed my right foot and left the room. I opened my eyes and looked at Uma, so very fierce in her quiet way. "Are we keeping this quiet until the baby is born?"

"Do you have a preference, little mother? I will do as you ask, if you wish to see someone, or have them in attendance." She continued her massage, which gave me a curious warmth rising into the groin area.

"I have no objections to Hawk or John, if they want to be here. Isn't Ampalia ready to help you as well?"

"She will assist with the linens and preparation, and cleaning up the baby for presentation. She is wonderful, very quiet and loving, as always".

"What about Gabriel?"

"Oh, Moana, I doubt that Gabriel West will want to be anywhere near these rooms during the birthing time. He is a lovely bachelor with little experience when it comes to women. Aside from lovemaking and sports, I don't think he is interested in the workings of the female."

I laughed out loud, because I knew that she was far afield in her observations about the Golden God, as I called him. At first he hated that nickname, but eventually realized that I was very fond of him and admired his godlike looks. He had always reminded me of the roman statues I sketched and the men who prowled around Venice. "He might surprise you, Uma. He is much deeper than meets the eye."

"Perhaps. Now, let's roll you onto your side, and I will massage your back."



Those first hours of labor were kind of dreamy for me, and I remember only gazing at the sea from that table, sipping warm liquids with a straw, and dozing off. I am sure Uma began my path to the birth with some type of herbal medicine to calm me, but she never mentioned it. And I never asked. This is the one thing I would always say to women who probed me for advice later on. You must put yourself into the hands of the midwife, or doctor or nurse, and allow them to help. Giving birth is a process that is very foreign to the new mother, and you are not in any shape to make a lot of decisions.

I had decided months before to listen and learn from Uma, basically leaving the stack of books on my bedside table unopened. A foolish mistake, you might say, but I didn't want to fret. This was a miracle in my life, never meant to happen but for a twist of fate. I was told years before that my body was unable to conceive, and I just wrote it off.

It didn't hurt that I was entirely too busy for that kind of life anyway, not married or even thinking of such a thing. There was no long-time man around for years. The guys I slept with were happy to be as free as I, always a given. By the time I knew I was pregnant, I had survived near death, fallen over a 400 foot cliff, spent months in secret seclusion and recovered by a pure miracle. Modern medicine had established my condition, but the practice of magic and ancient herbs had saved my life. Uma and her women tended to me for months, never once faltering while I slept away and healed my body.

I promised never to speak of the Cave or my recovery to another human being, and had kept my word. Only the family knew of the Cave at Jade Beach and its whereabouts, the secret paths to the mouth and the beach that disappeared under the tides. It was a sacred place for the Esalen people of Big Sur, many generations before me.

As my labor slowly advanced to rapid and painful, the floating sensation became more pronounced, allowing a chance to rest between the unbelievable lightning bolts shooting through my back and belly. I dreamed of the Cave and pictured my bed under the curve of the rocks. I saw the yellow flowers painted on the ceiling above my head upon awakening. I knew that one day my child would see this, and it comforted my pain. There was a magical sense to the room, as the light faded and candles were lit.

They moved me to the Great Room, where a low, narrow bed had been established. The idea was that I could move about and even stand up if I wanted to. Sometimes, Uma explained, you must walk in order to help the delivery process. Every time I looked, she was there.

In moments of clarity, Hawk was close to my right side, kneeling next to the bed and holding my hand. He whispered things I cannot recall, except for the gentle tone of his voice. He kissed me from time to time, when I would allow it, but eventually I knew that I was fighting like a warrior to push that huge head through my canal, and didn't want anyone touching me.

They built a soft flame in the fireplace, where the large polished jade stones reflected the light. I wanted the windows open, to hear the sound of the sea, and so it was. At one point, I needed the music of the amazing Evan Galbraith that tore into my brain. I gritted my teeth and howled with him.

Evan had been composing some music for me, to usher the baby into the world. I had once given him a copy of the love poem that I wrote for Hawk, after our first encounter at the ranch. I was shy about sharing it, but he had been visiting the cottage most every day, playing his fabulous guitars and stretching those fingers over the chords. It was a reminder to both of us that Hawk had saved his hand, and his career. Evan obviously adored him, in a friendship that had

expanded far beyond doctor and patient.

He wrote a special song that accompanied the poem, and played it for me several times during my last few weeks of pregnancy. It was a beautiful twelve string acoustic piece, outside his usual forceful strong style. Ginger told me later that she had heard some hints of this music early in Evan's career, when they sat on the bus during his tours. She would bake her famous cookies and he kept her company with his music.

On the day of my labor, John Soaring Meadow arrived around sunset, having waited as long as he could to see me. I believe his intention meant to appear in concert with the birth, but that was not to be the case. Instead, he entered the room with the blazing sparks of a Big Sur evening bouncing off the walls. I thanked God for the many windows in that space during my gestation, and spent a lot of time in there. I meditated before the large pieces of jade set gently into the redwood trees that formed a semi-circle, housing the stone fireplace between the two giants that secured the peak in the roof.

I had been breathing deeply after a tortuously hard contraction, and opened my eyes to see John walk into the room. He had on the vest he always wore during our first times together, made of sheepskin and soft leather. His hair was slicked back in a ponytail and his eyes sparkled when he saw me. I must have smiled when I reached out to him, and he approached the foot of the bed slowly. Hawk had stepped away to check his messages from Stanford, and Uma stood at the window with her back to us. It was perfect timing.

He took my hand and rubbed it between his rough palms, in the loving greeting of the Esalen nation. "Hello, my beautiful girl" he said. "Looks like you're having quite a time here." He spoke so softly that I strained to hear him, and leaned forward.

"No, no," he warned, pushing me back into the pile of pillows. "I have come to kiss your belly, for the good luck of the earth and the sun, with all my love."

It touched my heart to hear this, since, of course, my emotions were raw and tangled up in knots. He quickly squeezed my hand. "Dyanna, did I make you cry? I'm so sorry."

"No, no! Be my guest." I pulled the soft white shirt that covered me aside, exposing my belly. "You can't miss it." I had to laugh through my tears, while he leaned in and kissed the protruding belly button.

"This is a blessed moment, my girl. Remember tonight as the beginning of a new life, for both you and the baby. But also for all of us around you."

He squeezed my hand and backed away, taking a mental picture for his memories. The streaks of setting sun covered his strong arms as they glistened in the fiery light, just as another blast of pain began to visit upon me.

He turned and left the room.

In the back corner, Ginger Malone had watched this display of deep love unfold, waiting for a moment of her own. She had accompanied John with a special message, and waited for the right moment.

Ginger was the oldest of five rowdy kids, all born in a house set back from the road in Alamo, Texas. Her mother was a tiny woman who loved to keep house, cook, bake and make love.

She taught her firstborn many of the tricks of the trade, growing up there in such a historic place. Alma Malone was freckled and plump, and very tasty to look at, her father would say, ushering her off to the back bedroom. They made no bones about the joys of marital bliss between the sheets, as they called it, often closing the thick door behind them. Ginger knew that was her cue to take over, and became a little mama to her siblings. Often she prepared something to eat, having learned from her mother the secrets of a good kitchen.

Uma came to feed me some cool water and wipe my tears, and I lay back to rest. Ginger approached the bed quietly and laid her hand on my arm. "I have something for you, little mother."

I opened my eyes to her warm smile, and that wonderful face full of freckles. Her blue eyes sparkled as she leaned over and kissed my cheek. Her thick auburn hair tickled me when she reached over and inserted something into my ear. "Evan has put all your music on this little player, sweetie. You can listen or not, just touch the earbud to start."

I was not sure what she was talking about until she brushed her finger against the tiny rubber insert, and the notes from his music floated into my ear. It was the song from Hawk's poem that I heard, the soft guitar chords and successions of strings echoing in a room of my own. Amazing.

Ginger hugged me with a light touch and stepped away, speaking to Uma as I drifted into the heaven of Evan Galbraith. I closed my eyes and pictured him playing under the oak tree on the edge of the cliff, hunched over in the wooden chair, tapping his foot.

This was the image that carried me through the hardest part, when the head began to crown and I was pushing with all my might. Uma reached in to be sure the baby was in position to arrive, and I saw the cave of Jasmine where Hawk and I almost drowned. With the final thrust, a huge wall of water carried me away from the killer wave. I screamed in an ecstasy that belongs to the passage of life into the world. When I looked down, Uma was holding the baby, and Hawk was next to her. Ampalia had a blanket and some towels, next to the table and basin on the counter.

Far back at the door stood Gabriel West. I knew he would be there.

## CHAPTER TWO

Never in my life had I seen a newborn baby. I don't know how it came to pass, but that is my way of explaining the amazing sight of my daughter when I awoke to find her nestled next to me hours later. I was aware of her birth and saw the tiny slippery mass that was lifted up by Uma in the soft light. It was enough that she was whole and alive, which became apparent with a little howl when her father took over.

Hawk cradled his daughter while Uma guided the afterbirth from my body, and Ampalia prepared the table with warm towels. I could hear him talking, but my relief was so grandiose that it overshadowed everything. Regardless of what they tell you, the feeling of accomplishment is divine and well received by the mother. I'm sure after five or six, the thrill may turn to pure joy, but the first (and only time) for me was such a rush. It took all the remaining energy from my body.

They cleaned her up and brought her over as is the custom. I feasted my eyes on the curious tiny sweet human being I had spoken to for months.

Uma placed her in my arms after Hawk slipped a pillow behind me, and the lights came up in the room. Her eyes were closed and a curious grin seemed to emerge, only to change her mouth into a sigh and quiver. I could not take my eyes off her, and kissed the damp forehead. It was the most amazing feeling, she was so alive and yet unbelievable.

Hawk stood next to us, shooting photos from his phone while smiling in a very foolish fatherly manner. I looked up at him in wonder, it was that kind of moment.

Soon the business of cleaning me up took over, while she was weighed and measured and checked by Uma. Being an aunt was new to her, and you might have thought she would be smug about it, having delivered many infants into the world. I caught a glimpse of her with Hawk as they inspected each toe and finger, like two kids in a candy store.

Ampalia helped me into the bathroom, where a warm steamy tub awaited. It was filled to the middle with a fresh scent of herbs. I stepped in with her hand holding mine, and stood still while she washed my body with a soft sponge. I was not to sit down until she was finished, but the water rushing over my limbs felt so good that my toes tingled. It was nice to feel another part of my body for a change.

The sponge bath was followed by a pat down with warm soft towels. Uma arrived soon and led me to the chaise lounge which had been placed there by her as a gift for my child and me. It was covered with more thick warm towels, so soft that my skin felt embraced and luxurious. She applied some soothing liquid to my aching vaginal

area, gently rubbing it in around the perimeters and up my belly. I was to lay back and close my eyes, while being anointed, and was therefore pleasantly shocked by a cold compress on that area. The pain was overwhelmed and made the rest of my body tingle with warm sparks.

"Now we take care of you, Moana! You will feel wonderful soon, and sleep like a baby yourself."

The bed was prepared with pure white cotton sheets in the softest blend, light as a feather. It smelled like sunshine in the room, and I knew she had washed them by hand and dried them in the sun.

The oils that had been applied to my body had left me with a wonderful sense of peace, and I followed her to the bed with her hand in mine. My breasts were especially tight and seemed to sting a bit, but the rest of me was in heaven.

She helped me into the bed and I lay back on the soft pillows. My feet relaxed under the sheets, along with those weary legs and back. Ampalia arrived with a cup of sweet tea, and I sipped gratefully while Uma combed my damp hair and laid it over the pillows.

I was going to ask about my daughter, but closed my eyes instead. Ampalia took the cup from my hands, and backed away, while Uma rubbed some special oil on my forehead and breasts. She sat next to me as I let it all go.



Gabriel West had seen many births in his life, none human, but up close. The fawn he fed in the back forest of his house came to him pregnant when she was very young. He made her a little cozy nesting place in the thick bushes behind his gate and she birthed her first of many early one morning. It was a curious sight for him, savoring his huge cup of strong java while he looked down from his office window to the space below. He knew she had been in there all night, since the cover was askew, but assumed just shelter was in mind.

His curiosity got the better of him, and he tiptoed down the stairs and out the back door to the large patio area. His high black Ugg Boots were perfect for the chilly Big Sur dawn, and kept him as quiet as could be. It was not necessary to sneak around, for he soon witnessed the small hoof poking out of the tail end, while the little doe writhed like a snake. The rest emerged with a small head tucked between the forelegs, and soon the job was complete. She looked up at him without fear, and knelt before the tiny fawn, licking his head and face. As she chewed a bit on the ears, Gabriel stood very still, hoping to comfort her. She was so young, and probably not sure what to do, he surmised. How could he help?

By the time he ran the options through his mind, the tiny fawn had wiggled and stretched out, and his mother was cleaning herself as well. [It was all so perfect, how nature took](#) care of things.

These were the thoughts that ran through his mind as he lay in bed the night of my daughter's birth. He knew I had seen him, our eyes met just long enough to connect. He didn't know that I would remember anything, having witnessed some hearty rumbles coming from my throat. He told me later that I sounded like a wild animal. Instead of screaming like a woman, I let the pain lead me through the contractions.

Hawk had been there to help, but in truth, was also more of an observer. Uma believed in the path of natural birth, and given the condition of my body and mind, had no doubts about our wellbeing. This gave the room an air of confidence, one that Hawk was accustomed to in his surgical proceedings. It as a gift from their mother, who instructed her two children to always stand back and think before acting.

Gabriel had adored Helena Odessa Hawk, from the day he met her. She was delivering young Stephen to the bus for Captain Cooper School, and Gabriel was waiting with his lunch and book bag. She drove up in a large black Jeep, and slipped out of the driver's door to hug her son. No matter that he was probably ten, she was a passionate loving mother who saw little of her children at times. Her work for the state of California led her to Sacramento for long periods of time, as the first woman to head the State Parks division. It was an important job for an indigenous

woman from Big Sur, and particularly for a female native medicine warrior. She carried it well, and Gabriel secretly wished his blond, fragile mother was more like Helena. She always wore black steel cut jeans, a heavy belt with silver carvings and a fabulous leather jacket with slit pockets. It was her uniform, changed only on State occasions when demanded. A soft tank underneath was replaced with heavy cashmere black sweaters in the winter, for layers of warmth.

She wore no jewelry or ornamentation except a huge amazing marquis diamond ring which was given to her by her beloved husband Madrid after many years of marriage. They were too poor in the early days to afford such a piece, but now as Gabriel focused on Helena, he realized how important Hawk's gift to me had been. I wore it all the time, except while painting, but soon would learn that fingernails and jewelry are fair play for tiny digits.

Gabriel closed his eyes and pictured the scene he had left a few hours before. It was too early for him to deliver his gift, so maybe some good shuteye was in the cards.

He dreamed of the huge piece of jade that was delivered to the cottage, and the careful pickings of the men who took it apart piece by piece. They had been in the back of the cottage, where the boulder was delivered by the Jade Man and his crew. It was an amazing task to convey that rock up the coast, and people stood on the road as they passed. The Big Sur community had seen many sights and would see many more, but this was the last of the outcropping stones to leave Jade Cove. The time had come to close the doors on the world of scavengers and titans, to preserve the land of God's Country. When he awoke at dawn, he rose and went to up the huge corner office where all the architectural work was done. Plans and blueprints lay on several large tables, coming into focus with the windows surrounding the room.

This area had been his parent's audacious bedroom for years, taking the entire top floor of the massive wood and slate house. His mother was determined to have the luxury she left behind, and pushed for the best of everything. Now the recessed lights and curved glass were mainstream, but in the beginning, the West Mansion was looked upon by the people of Big Sur as a place of wonder. They could find nothing wrong with it, nestled into the side of the hills, with rough hewn redwood and oak walls.

The front door was carved by the first Esalen man who worked on the house, whose name was Tinderfoot. He was the teacher of John Soaring Meadow during those times, when John was mostly stoned out of his mind, and carved for days at a time on the free wood of Big Sur forests. Tinderfoot offered his services early on, when the house was in the design stage, being a cagey and talented indigenous warrior. He was the best wood carver on the coast, all the way up to Washington State, he would tell you. "After that, I stopped comparin' and came home. Too cold up there. No sun."

Eric West hired him on the spot as a handyman, unaware of the talents that lay in the hands of the small dark skinned indigenous man. It was Tinderfoot who found the slab of oak for the door, and suggested a design. The rising sun between the giant trees was carefully carved into the thick door, giving an artistic home to many Big Sur creatures as well. Gabriel's favorite was the falcon who rested at the top of the trees, and watched over the visitors.

Upstairs the light poured into the room and Gabriel looked at the corner where his own wooden masterpiece stood on a soft packing blanket. A peculiar little overhang topped the beautiful wooden cradle, designed and created by Gabriel himself in the wood shop downstairs. His father had left a stunning array of power tools for woodworking, and taught his son the nuances of safety and dexterity. He often wondered how much of this education had affected his desire to design and create spaces. Architecture had come upon him during his years in school, slowly

approaching the picture of what he thought would be a great life.

After learning that a baby was growing in my womb, with the father being his beloved boyhood friend, there was only the question of what to create for us that dogged him. It had to be perfect, and something no one else would tackle. Almost immediately a cradle came to mind, the beginning bed of the angel he had begun to imagine.

He strolled over to the corner where a sturdy oak table held his precious Technivorn Mocamaster. Next to it was a large Gaggia custom grinder which was set for a semi- fine blend of roasted coffee beans. He remodeled the setup his mother had designed for her early morning sunrise meditations, which included a corner for tea and spices, sanding down the hand painted flowers to a smooth finish. Now he could select any one of several large greasy jars that held freshly roasted coffee beans from around the world, and grind enough for a large cup of coffee. It was a pristine time of day for Gabriel, who took his early rising from a passion for surfing in his early days in Big Sur.

There had been no such thing available in New Hampshire, where the yen for things older and more historic were held in high esteem.

Surfing had been his first rebellious act upon arriving in California. He found a path that cut down to the highway and through a creek bed that poured in to the blue Pacific in the winter. The beach below had a long stretch of smaller coves, and huge boulders spaced out in the sea. The footprints he followed around the bend belonged to a couple of guys who worked at Esalen, and stopped to catch some waves before work. He climbed onto a ledge and watched the sun rise over the coves of Big Sur, as the men carried their boards into the water and paddled out. They wore long rubber suits that covered their limbs against the cold frothy waves, and smeared something on their faces before entering the water. It was a sight to behold, when the first wave drew back against their approach and they quickly turned to ride into the shore.

He watched until they rode the last set and carried their boards up the hill to a big red truck, determined to learn the ways of these daring athletes. It gave him a purpose for the summer, while Meredith decorated her new home and Eric supervised the finishing touches. At breakfast, Gabriel asked his father about the big boards and the sport of riding them. He was surprised to see the expression that peered from around the newspaper, and his mother's wide eyes. Meredith had summered in Nantucket with her family, and knew more about the Atlantic Ocean than her husband, but neither of them were familiar with surfing. It was a California thing, they said, returning to their repast. Gabriel sighed at the singularity of being an only child, and decided it was time to explore this place on his own. It was the beginning of his adventure with Stephen Hawk and the Esalen nation.



Hawk had been up most of the night, studying the tiny bundle that lay next to me, and wondering when one of us would awaken. It was a curious predicament, and one that he rarely experienced. At the hospital, there were people who informed the doctors of all conditions, and were ready to assist. Now he stood alone at the window next to our bed, watching the sun rise. He heard the sounds of the waves breaking below, and thought about a run, but he didn't want to miss anything! He wanted to be there when we opened our eyes and came back to him.

Uma had warned him to let us sleep, for we both had quite a night and journey across the adventures of her arrival. The baby was wrapped snugly and placed between two pillows

propped into place to encourage natural breathing and circulation. She was very close, but far enough to avoid a roll over or flailing arm from her mother.

For my part, I had sunk into the depths of slumber and peacefully lay under the covers. Ampalia was preparing food in the kitchen and came to the room at intervals to be sure things were ok. She knew Hawk was skulking around, but Uma as also taking a well deserved break and snoring quite loudly from my old bedroom. It was a peaceful time for all concerned, and one to be celebrated.

Ampalia had decided to bake some of her special bread, wound with cinnamon into the loaf and topped with a buttery caramel sauce. She made several loaves, knowing the family would be famished with all the excitement of the new baby girl. She smiled thinking of the tiny face she held while Uma carefully cleaned her body and submerged it in the pure water of Paragoh creek. It was only for a split second, but Ampalia gasped as she watched, worrying that something would ruin the joy of the moment.

Uma smiled and hung the tiny girl upside down, allowing any fluid remaining to drain thoroughly out of her body. The baby accepted her fate for a moment, and then released a strong hiccup and burst of crying. She was making herself known, in her first act of nature. She was wide awake and looking around as Uma placed her next to me. She would be the first thing I saw, and I would instinctively bring her to touch my skin.

As the sun rose, Stephen Hawk fought the urge to climb into bed, and changed quickly into his running shorts. This would be a day to remember for the rest of his life, and he wanted to share it with the blazing sun of his native beach and the pounding waves. He slipped out the door and down the path just as I opened my eyes.

I looked over to see the tuft of dark hair on her head, leaning toward me as she opened her eyes. Now we were face to face, in the rays of the morning light, and I could see her bright green eyes, huge and round in that tiny face. I sat up and put the pillows behind me, and brought her gently to my chest, pushing aside the blanket. She gazed up at me with a crinkled little smile. When she opened her mouth, I knew what to do, and moved her face to my breast. Her cheek lay against my soft skin, as I turned her around to the nipple that was already dripping with clear liquid.

As I think of it now, it was rather miraculous that she opened her mouth and began to lick and suck, but she seemed ready for breakfast and I had something to offer besides dreaming. Needless to say, she had spent the last months cooped up inside a very small space, and it was time to stretch out those fingers and toes. She kicked her leg against me and started to feed in earnest. I didn't know any better, so I just let her go at it.

It was quite a sensation to feel the colostrum move through my nipple and into a warm little mouth, like nothing I had ever experienced. I kind of liked it, and relaxed enough to give her some juice.

Uma found us a few minutes later, snuggled together in a pile of pillows with a humming sound coming from me and a distinct chirp from this tiny little human engine. "I see you have started nursing her already, Moana! I was going to help, but it appears that you two have figured things out."

I grabbed a tiny finger that emerged from her blanket, and brought her closer in to me. She had this amazing scent of pure clean flesh, with no interference of powders or clothing or the mess that would become part of the deal very soon. I rubbed her head as she continued to suckle,

not sure what was happening except some good fun and practice.

"Is she getting any nourishment yet?" I asked.

Uma sat beside me on the bed and gently squeezed my left breast. More of the clear liquid appeared, and she put a tiny bit on her finger. "Your milk is already coming in, which is really quite wonderful. You must be ready for each other." Her eyes filled with tears, and she wrapped her arms around both of us.

Hawk entered the room dripping with sweat, to find the tableau that was forever burned into his mind: the three people he loved more than anyone. He wasn't sure what was happening and approached the bed, trying to unravel us to see what was going on.

Uma looked up at him and shook her head. "Wash yourself quickly now, and come see your daughter." He nodded and disappeared into his bathroom. Soon the shower was running and we laughed as he sang some kind of song about California Girls.

## CHAPTER THREE

Jacob Walnut had not slept a wink all night. It was a curious thing that he would be so attuned to another place and time, a woman he could not have and a birth he would not witness. It was one of the few things in life he was unable to orchestrate or control, which drove him mad.

He had been reading the galley of *ENDLESS LOVE*, the edited version that would be adapted into a new film for the Walnut Brothers production company. It was one way to keep in touch with my life and still remain sheltered in the background. You could always call and inquire about the script and how the new house was going, in a friendly way, but I was on to him. In a way it was flattering, after all that we had been through, to find this brilliant mogul and visionary in a simplified version of himself. He had doffed the attitude during the last six weeks of my pregnancy, to which I attribute Uma's firm hand, allowing open access to my phone and life. I could tell him anything I wished, or not, but he was definitely interested. He didn't even claim to be worried about the new film, or the pages I had begun in the past months.

He just wanted to know that I was going to live through this ordeal, as if it were some kind of marathon. Stephen Hawk did not exist in Jacob's mind, except as a satellite in my orbit. This too shall pass, he thought, as he waited out the result of my childbirth.

Uma had visited several times over the spring months, to check on Belinda and discuss with Jacob and Teddy the best way to rehabilitate her. Big Ted remained as her guard, which was known only to the family. He was a "staff member" of the household, but in truth he was on it 24/7 to be sure the wayward daughter of Kevin Stone did not wander into the wilds of Los Angeles again.

Belinda had begun to care for herself in a simple way, adopting better personal habits like brushing her teeth and showering on a regular basis. She had been influenced greatly by Uma's straightforward style, there was just no bullshit with her. Belinda knew if she wanted to be in Big Sur, she had to toe the line. Jacob continually traveled for work, which left Ty and Big Ted on duty. Teddy had refused to become involved, having mixed feeling about Belinda. She reminded him of her father every time he saw her, and that pain was a deep one. Kevin Stone was Teddy's favorite playmate for a long time, and they shared many adventures. It was a crushing blow to lose him, and it all came back to me and Big Sur.

Teddy Walnut loved me and was a wonderful friend, but he would always despair about how things went down on Christmas Day two years ago. There was something about the whole setup he hated, Kevin Stone losing his life at the prime apex. It was a waste of time and money for everyone, this guy was a genius when it came to appeal. He had that thing that made you care about him, kind of like the late Paul Walker of the *Fast & Furious* series. They effortlessly drew you in, which is magic on film. And Teddy was a great film producer.

Belinda would never be like her father, she was the victim of her mother's genes, Teddy would say, when the tequila was flowing. He would be glad to have her gone up to the woods and out of his life. It was just that simple.

This left Jacob in a curious position, for his brother was his best friend. They could talk about everything except Belinda, and me.

Uma had told Jacob about my condition well into the 7th month, artfully disguising the truth by talking about the new compound and Hawk's arrest for murder. It was only when he insisted

upon having a face to face about ENDLESS LOVE that Uma revealed her secret. She had two important months to go, watching over my gestational adventures and the child growing in my womb. She promised me that she would not allow anything to upset our plans to finish the house, or interfere with the birth.

It was a great load off my mind, and I was aware that she had moved heaven and earth in Walnutville. It was laughable that this one man could threaten our peace so much, but we all knew the power of Jacob Walnut.

Hawk rarely spoke of him, but Uma was brutal in her distinction of Jacob's presence in my life. I was in a very precarious place during the time my daughter was developing, and things had gone so well.

They sat outside one evening after a Thai feast for Uma and Big Ted. Ty had outdone himself, serving various delicacies such as [Tom Gum Yung soup in his own style](#) and [Gang Keo Wan with green curry rice](#). He special ordered the free range chicken from the Farmer's Market in L.A. for the Panang Guay. Several bottles of Sauvignon Blanc had also disappeared, guilty of flattering the spicy meal.

Uma was sated by the glorious food, so unfamiliar to her palate but scrumptious anyway. She nibbled on a mild sweet cookie while Jacob opened a fresh bottle of the chilled white wine. The others were inside watching a Lakers game, while Ty cleaned up the kitchen. Uma sank into the soft cushions and gazed at the clear Los Angeles sky, savoring the meal and banter with these men. Jacob in particular was always interesting when it came to travel and food, and he sat next to her explaining the ingredients of each dish. When they moved outside, she knew he was preparing her for a favor of some kind, and wisely allowed him to speak.

"We will send you home on the jet, Uma, with a bunch of Thai leftovers" said Jacob, laughing at the thought. "Did you enjoy the meal?"

"You know I did. I must learn to prepare some of the more simple dishes." "Does Dyanna like the Thai? I can't recall ever having it together."

"I don't know, she usually prefers more simple greens and maybe some fish. That food is really spicy. It might not be the best thing for her right now."

"She has always been adventurous in French cuisine, and Mas cooks for her whenever he can. He asks after Dyanna all the time."

"She has been busy with the new compound, they are working on a deadline to finish it. Gabriel West has designed it, do you know of him?"

"Dyanna told me that months ago, and I did investigate. He is a student of Muenning, the famous architect up there."

"Much more than that, Jacob. Gabriel has designed some fabulous structures himself, and this compound is one of them. Did you know that he is my brother's best friend?"

"Of course not. You never tell me anything, woman! Unless there is a need to know, as you say." He emptied his glass and poured another. Uma waited quietly, watching a shooting star fly across the sky over Malibu.

"And it will always be that way with me, Jacob. I keep my confidences with everyone, including Belinda. Did you know that?"

"But it is Dyanna that I'm after tonight. We are at a point in the new production that I must see her and discuss the changes. You know that Brad Pitt has withdrawn, given his family problems and divorce. What a shock."

Uma laid her hand on his arm and patted calmly. "Dyanna will not be able to meet with you now, Jacob. I will not allow it. She is seven months pregnant." She felt the tendons tighten as she spoke, and he clenched his fist for a moment.

"What are you saying, Uma? That she is knocked up? That is impossible, she told me herself."

"Stranger things have happened. You never know about children, sometimes they just have a mind of their own. Dyanna and Hawk will soon be parents. This child is the first Esalen to be born on the property, and it will be a huge celebration."

"Why didn't you tell me? Don't I have a right to know, after all I have done for her?"

"Jacob, you have been very generous with yourself and the fortune of Kevin Stone. But let's not forget the circumstances that were revealed to Dyanna when she found you with another woman."

"I will always be sorry about that. Marrisette is a strong-minded wench. She waited until I was vulnerable."

"As John would say, *BULLSHIT!* You hurt Dyanna very deeply, with her cousin just passed on, and needing a friend. She has never forgotten it, and probably never will."

"So I will be punished for that the rest of my life? Now that's bullshit." He threw the wine glass onto the lawn and stood up. "You should be ashamed of yourself for hiding this from me. I have a vested interest."

"You have no such thing, Jacob. You gave up any chance with Dyanna when you betrayed her. I have heard the story, and it was not a pretty scene. She had just come from the hospital. She was alone and torn up, and came to you for comfort. She wanted you to know about Louise's passing. You allowed that woman to say some awful things while she was servicing you. Pretty harsh, I'd say."

"Yes. That is true. I am not proud of that day, but I cannot take it back. None of us can. Surely she has forgiven me by now."

"Let's just say that Dyanna has put the past with you behind her, including Marisette Mendez. She is a tender soul, Jacob. And now she is vulnerable and growing a child inside of her. It is a miracle that was given to us, and I am asking you to cooperate and do as I say."



"Do I have a choice?"

"No."

They made a pact to allow Jacob to know how I was doing, including news of the compound construction. Uma was happy to comply with him, for she knew the extent of his generosity to all concerned. Things might have taken a different turn, had Jacob not divided the estate of Kevin Stone between Belinda and me. The fortune involved was enormous, but he was intent upon including the woman who made Kevin a new man.

Jacob had also changed the life of John Soaring Meadow during the time that I was recovering at Jade Beach. When he returned to Big Sur after settling Belinda under hospital care, John had been living at the cottage. He was curiously calm and hopeful, considering the fact that I had disappeared over the cliff and most likely drowned. Jacob knew there was more to the story, but immediately took a liking to the huge Esalen warrior who had befriended me. He was an awesome man who was not afraid of Jacob Walnut or impressed with his money. There were many wealthy people in Big Sur, sheltered behind inland gates and the tall trees.

John felt sorry for the wounded man who arrived one afternoon with his driver, looking rather worse for the wear. It was not an easy trip that he took to Provo, Utah with the frail butchered body of Belinda in his care. Luckily, the staff at Genoa was accustomed to clients who were blinded by sorrow, fear and despair, and they gently removed Belinda from his care. The paperwork had been done electronically while they were enroute from Monterey, and signed before the patient had been admitted. He watched as Belinda was wheeled away under several blankets which mercifully hid her wounds.

"How about a good shot of JD" said John, when Jacob was seated at the kitchen table. A bottle and two small glasses were placed in front of them, and John poured a good shot. Two fingers, for hard times.

A couple of shots and there was some color under the stubble as Jacob focused on the dark eyes of John Soaring Meadow. Instead of talking about the tragedy of Belinda and me, he started telling Jacob about the history of the cottage, and how the Esalen tribal family had lived on that land many years before it was developed by the British Phelps family.

Soon there were steaks defrosting from the freezer, and some good bread warming in the oven. John could not have known the Walnut brothers yen for the hearty country bread that was baked from scratch in Big Sur, but he had a pretty good idea that the man was just depleted down to his toes. Rich or not, everyone has to eat.

They cooked three slabs of beef on the bbq in the back, and invited Miguel to join them inside. He would not drink, knowing the Walnut penchant for travel, but enjoyed the rare bloody filets, baked potatoes and warm bread with butter. It was a true male bonding between two very portentous men, each the leader of his own clan.

It was decided that John would represent the Walnut Brothers in Big Sur and handle the property including the Phelps ranch above Highway 1 as well as my cabin during the settlement of Kevin's estate. John was astounded at the manner in which Jacob came to life with some good food and firewater in his body. He had no idea that Jacob was legendary in the circles of film production for deal making under the edgiest circumstances. It was his forte to come from behind and save the day.

When they finally departed at 9pm, Miguel had refueled the chocolate Mercedes and Jacob was on his way home with a "real Indian caretaker" on board.

John cleaned up the dishes and fell asleep on the sofa, with the empty bottle of Jack Daniels

sitting nearby. It had been a good day.



Uma kept her promise to tell Jacob about my daughter's birth as soon as she awakened the next morning. He would have no way of knowing except for the general timeframe, but she was a little early and fooled everyone. After Uma watched me with the tiny bundle nestled at my breast, she knew it was time to make some announcements. Just a few very special people, for the moment, and she made Jacob Walnut the first.

She walked out into the warm Big Sur morning with a large cup of black coffee, remembering Jacob's tantrum the night she last saw him in L.A. He was definitely under the influence, but mostly furious at his loss of control. He stood up and hurled his wineglass twenty feet into the grass, leaving her alone under the stars. The blinking lights of the valley were clear from that particular spot, and she studied them for a bit. She could hear voices from the kitchen as Ty cleaned up, and looked at her watch. It was almost 9 p.m. She would go and talk to Belinda before bed. As she rose to enter the house, Big Ted opened the sliding glass door and stepped out. His eyes were wide, as he closed the door behind him.

"I have been sent to collect you, Uma. I hope you don't mind traveling home a bit late tonite."  
"I'm leaving in the morning," she replied. "I was on my way to see Belinda."

"Jacob Walnut has informed me that you will be driven to Burbank Airport now, and Mas will accompany you to Monterey."

Uma chuckled, and shook her head. "Is that so? And why did he send you as the messenger? I hope he didn't bite your head off."

"Well, I've never seen him like that before, even when we snuck Belinda out of the hospital in Utah. His face was kind of purple." Now Ted began to laugh along with her, and soon tears rolled down their cheeks.

Ty opened the kitchen door with a large basket in his hand, wondering what the hell was going on. Mr. Walnut had stormed into the kitchen and demanded that he pack up the remains of the feast immediately because Uma was leaving!

"OK, I get it. The axe has fallen!" said Uma. She wiped her eyes and entered the house with Ty following. Her bags and purse had been placed in the white Mercedes idling at the door. Big Ted stood silently as Ty loaded the food into the trunk, and Uma walked outside.

The driver opened her door, while Ty hugged her tight. "So sorry," he whispered, almost afraid to speak. Uma was still laughing when they drove way, waving goodbye while the scent of all that Thai food wafted up from the back. So be it!

She and Mas had a dandy time on the short trip to Monterey, with a cup of fragrant Marco Polo Tea he had saved for Dyanna. They put their feet up on the table between the lounge seats, and dipped coconut cookies from Paris into the brew. Mas had recently purchased a small flat on the Ill St. Louis with the help of friends, and he was quietly preparing it for his retirement. "I love my work, and would not trade the Walnut family for anyone," he said, sipping the fragrant liquid, "but it has begun to wear me down."

"Jacob, in particular?" He nodded to Uma, with whom his bond of secrecy was safe, for she had shared as well.

"Yes, he is troubled with your secrecy about Dyanna. He cares very deeply for her, in his own way. I watch him stare out the window as we travel across the ocean, and I know his mind is pondering. I think he believes he made a big mistake."

"You mean by screwing the disgusting Marrisette Mendez?" "Uma, it is not like you to speak like that. I'm shocked."

"No, you're not. She is a piece of trash that has wrecked her children's life, and her lovely husband in Big Sur as well. She is off the rails."

"Actually, she has stayed in Paris for awhile. After he left her there." "You've seen her? Her family is desperately hoping she will return."

"Not likely. The men of Paris, and some of the women, have found her to be quite amusing. She is a beautiful woman and very brave. She will try anything."

"I have known her all of my life, Mas. She will burn out in a blaze of smoke one day, sooner rather than later."

"Surely you would not wish that on her family." He laid his hand on hers as they touched down in Monterey.

"It would be the best thing for all of them."

## CHAPTER FOUR

I stretched out on the bed and carefully placed my daughter beside me. With her eyes closed, I saw the long thick lashes inherited from her father, and the beginnings of a strong eyebrow. The dark tuft of hair that covered her head was coarse and thick, curling from the damp warmth of our bodies. She was long and lean, with tiny fingers

that clamped on to me with amazing strength. I had to empty my bladder, and left her between two pillows as I slid down to the end of the bed.

When I stood up, I was surprised to feel fairly normal. My legs carried me to the bathroom and sat me down very well. I could feel the peculiar ache between my legs, but it was not painful. More like an incredible reminder of the past twenty four hours. The warm urine rushing out of my body felt good, as it always does first thing in the morning. I don't know what I expected, but being fairly comfortable was not in the running. We all hear stories of women in dire straits in childbirth, but never about the lucky ones who pop those suckers out with ease.

In my case, there was a lot of help, and I had no stress. Uma will tell you that stress is the factor that kills the joy of birth. She does everything she can to alleviate this, managing the rooms like a warrior. I flashed on a memory of her during the night, shooing Hawk outside with his phone. The lights played on the door as he closed it behind him.

At that point, I didn't care who was there, but now I wanted to see him. I wanted to touch his face and feel his skin, because I was looking at evidence of our incredible love. There is no better example of God's will than a tiny newborn little human being, before a word spoken or a voice heard. I stepped over to the window and looked at the summer morning, perfectly Big Sur with a few clouds, and a hint of chill in the breeze. It was time to introduce that sweet thing to her home.

I splashed my face with cold water and brushed my teeth vigorously, smiling at the image in the mirror as if to say *We did it!* I brushed my hair upside down before returning to gather the precious tiny girl in my bed. A white terry robe was hanging behind the door, and I slipped into it, carefully tying the sash. I was a mother now, I had to take care of myself and be sure things were in order. I pulled the blanket close and tucked her into my robe before I opened the door.

Gabriel had fashioned a small patio outside like the one that Penelope Phelps had up at the ranch, with the pink Cecile Brunner roses cascading to the ground. The path led around the house to the front, and out onto the grass. My bare feet touched the damp lawn, and I shivered a little. Now I could feel my daughter was moving, so I raised her face up to the light. The trees blew in the wind and shadows played over us as I snuggled her in and sat down on the bench that John Soaring Meadow had fashioned for me that first year. I could not help but smile at the thought of him kissing my belly during the intense labor. Yet it seemed a lifetime ago, miles away and his soft voice whispering to me. Did I imagine all that?

She began to wiggle, demanding my attention, and it was then that she opened her eyes. Suddenly, the huge green orbs appeared under the dark lashes, and she looked at me. The sun brushed us through the trees and now I noticed the yellow flecks and large black pupil, and specks of blue around the edge. It was reminiscent of the beautiful Big Sur jade that had been hauled up to the cottage, rumbling over the bumpy road before landing in the back yard. The colors of her eyes were so undoubtedly and startlingly green, with the hints of the sky and the sun and the sea.

Hawk had come upon us from behind, having been down at the beach visiting the jasmine cove where we almost lost our lives. He was restless and anxious to see his daughter and her mother. He found a long strand of jasmine that had fallen from the caves, and wound it around his wrist. The scent reminded him of a time before we could know the baby was alive, and now it was really true.

He climbed the path and watched me sit down under the trees before approaching us. The jasmine dangled from his arm and he stopped to entwine it into a crown, while I looked into my daughter's eyes. By the time he reached us, she was gazing up at me. He stood above us in awe at the perfect moment unfolding, and gently kissed my head. I was aware before he touched me of the strong scent of jasmine, but the unveiling of her eyes was astounding.

"She has your eyes" I said, "with a little bit of the world mixed in."

Hawk came around in front of us and placed his wreath on my head. He grabbed a few locks and pulled them over the back to anchor it against the wind, and knelt down in front of us. "You know that she probably can't see us very well," he said.

"I think she can, and if not, who cares. We can see her, and look! She is so beautiful, Hawk! I can't believe it."

"She looks like her mother," he said, with a smile. He grabbed her tiny hand, and looked carefully at the fingers.

"They're all there," I laughed, holding her up for him to see. "And I know what her name is now." He kissed her forehead and waited.

"Lily Jade."

He sat down beside me, and I placed her in his arms.

"She is Lily Jade! Just look at her, Hawk! Lily is for the first gift John Soaring Meadow ever gave me, and Jade for the stone that protects her in this house, and in the cave. Your favorite color."



Gabriel found Uma standing in the back garden, inspecting the newly planted roses. It was late in the year, but she would take extra care of them. He had pulled his truck onto the gravel near the back entrance, out of sight. She heard him approach and turned to see his bright yellow hoodie and golden hair. He was smiling ear to ear, and greeted her with a hug.

"Good day, Auntie Uma," he said, holding her tight. "Are you all in one piece?"

"Yes, Gabriel, I believe we are. How are you? I'm assuming that was your first live birth!"

"I was thinking of that earlier, and actually I have seen my little doe in labor months ago. But it was a little different." He laughed and put his hands on her shoulders. "I have to say, Uma, that you are amazing in action, you were masterful in there, managing everything with such calm."

"Well, Dyanna wasn't too calm by the time you arrived. I hope you understand that all of that pain is natural and perfect."

"Of course. I was surprised to see her awake and participating. I thought maybe you might put her out."

"Never, unless it's necessary. She wanted to see everything. You know that girl, she is stubborn and strong."

"She's not a girl anymore, by any means. And I have something to show you that is very special."

He led her to the bed of his truck, where a bundle was wrapped in several heavy quilts and covered with a down jacket.

"What have you done, Gabriel?"

He removed the jacket and slowly pulled away the quilt on the top. A pointed roof appeared, and then the cradle, bound on its bottom to a rocking piece. As he removed the last covering, Uma stepped forward and touched the smooth redwood. The large piece of jade inset into the top glowed in the sunlight, blinding her.

"It's a cradle! You have made her a cradle! Oh, my sweet sweet man, what a lovely surprise! Dyanna will love it."

"That's the thing! I want to put it in the bedroom and have her see it there. Can you give me a hand?"

Uma opened the door to my bathroom and peeked inside. The bedroom was empty as well, and she saw us on the grass under the trees.

"Come now, Gabe, and bring it inside!"

He lifted the large cradle and carried inside with care. No scratches or nicks would be allowed, it had to be perfect.

He placed it on the floor in the corner of the bedroom, where two windows came together and there was a small bench built into the wall. "It has wheels, and a rolling system, so she can move it anywhere". He swiveled the cradle around, and Uma was speechless.

"What do you think?"

She hugged him again, for a long time, and whispered in his ear. "It's perfect."

He brought in another box and Uma unwrapped the tiny custom mattress with several covers. She placed it inside the cradle with a soft pink blanket and cover that matched. Gabriel looked on and beamed. "I picked all this out myself. Can you believe it?"



Hawk had chosen to take some photos of his baby girl, and we sat under the trees for longer than I expected. Lily Jade was beginning to squirm after awhile, and rubbed her face against my chest. I could feel the weariness seep into my body, and smiled one more time for Hawk. My eyes were getting heavy.

"I kept you out here too long," he said, encompassing us with his long brown arms. We walked back around the path and came to the patio just as Gabriel and Uma stepped outside. They carried some packing materials and a large box, along with a very guilty look.

"There you are," said Gabriel, and set down the box. He approached us while I opened my robe and uncovered the tiny face. She looked so small in this setting, with the roses and trellis full of leafy branches. Gabriel stared at her for a minute, and looked up at me. "She is so perfect, Dyanna! So beautiful and new."

"Wait until you see her eyes, my brother," said Hawk, flipping his phone shots into view.

Lily Jade Falconer Hawk had a mind of her own, and managed to steal the thunder of the moment by opening those amazing eyes.



Those first days have become a blur for me, with a few windows of memory. Mostly, it was learning to care for Lily Jade and myself. Uma began her tutorial of breastfeeding on the first day, gently helping me to learn the signs of hunger and sleep. She gave me a special oil for the nipples which was a great help during those times when we

were both awkward. It was a getting to know you thing, like all living creatures, finessing agreements between us.

I was aware of the milk arriving in my breasts, and the cycle of comfort as they emptied into her mouth. She experienced the basic hunger and need for warmth and love, and stayed very close to me all the time. I wanted it that way, and except for sleeping, we were conjoined as one. She watched me from her cradle as I bathed, and rocked her gently. Hawk began to take a lot of photos at the most intimate moments, which seemed intrusive at times, but I am grateful now. I realized he was left out of a lot of the bonding between mother and child, so he held her when he was able. He was a natural as well, using his skills as a doctor to understand and observe. He sang things I had never heard, and stared at her tiny body when Uma showed him how to change a diaper.

I laughed and laughed at him when he approached the cleaning of her tiny bottom like a surgery, lining up the tissues and oil to wipe the folds of her legs and perfect little buns. I don't think he had seen many new born babies, and I certainly had not. We were the doofus twins in awe, how cool is that?

Uma stayed in the cottage bedroom for the first few days, but she didn't hover. She explained the blackish first poop that appeared soon after Lily Jade was born. It was all a part of the birthing process, and waste from the long period in the womb. When she began to drink my milk, her digestive system reacted normally, with burps and waste that was pale yellow.

Luckily, Hawk was used to the peculiarities of the human body, and helped me to explore every inch of our tiny pink daughter. Although we are aware of how all this unfolds, it is not the same when that seven pounds of life is yours! This is a feeling that cannot be totally understood by those who have not been there, trust me. I thought I knew it all, that I would see immediately how everything works. But the learning process is part of the way nature builds that bridge between human beings.

I would never have believed the feelings that arose inside me, just watching her breathe. It was such a miracle. Hawk often wondered what she was seeing from inside her head. Typical of a doctor, and a new father as well.



Belinda had discovered a new way to amuse herself, in her secret wanderings around the Walnut estate. It seemed that Uncle Teddy lived on the other side of the main house, in a set of rooms that were not available to her. When he was in town, he merrily appeared in the kitchen and dining area, and spent a lot of time entertaining in the large theater lounge.

She had often wondered what was around the corner from the main entrance, and became bolder in her trysts into the real world. It was easy to sneak around the back area when the gardeners were there, because they were so noisy. Everyone closed the windows and doors to block the sound of the *mowers and blowers*, as they were called. Little by little, Belinda made her way around the outside gardens, feigning a fascination for the huge Rhododendrons that bloomed on the property. She had discovered a small gate on the opposite side of the house, covered in heavy vines and passion flowers. The gardeners never went inside, but trimmed around the area.

She would have never thought to peek, but one day when Teddy arrived home in his bright yellow Maserati, he opened the trunk and carried something directly through that little gate. Belinda was sitting on the lawn in front of her bedroom door, reading a book. She was partly hidden by the bushes, and peeked over as he opened the gate. He disappeared inside along with two suitcases, carefully closing the gate behind him.

Something about his manner struck a chord, and Belinda closed her eyes against the sun, picturing her dad sneaking into the back yard when she was a small child. She remembered him putting something in the garage and then racing over to pick her up. Her mother had made quite a scene from the second floor balcony. It was the first of many such fights between them, but she had learned to hide out in the closet and plug her ears. Now she was curious, but returned to her book. She was not about to spy on Uncle Teddy in broad daylight and lose her phone again.



Jacob Walnut was in deep despair after Uma called him, announcing the birth of Lily Jade. He had prepared himself for weeks, counting out the specified time of birth and marking the date on his calendar. She was early, he noticed, as he turned the pages on his desk notebook. Typical of Dyanna, and of course, he was out of the loop beforehand. This was not a situation to his liking, being a man who managed all things that concerned him and his business affairs. When he told Teddy of the impending birth over dinner one night, his brother was adamant that it was none of his business. "You've got to get that whole situation under control, Jake," said Teddy, cutting into a rare piece of Ahi fillet. "We will be in pre-production soon and Dyanna has done us a favor. Look at it that way."

Jacob took his concerns to bed with him, staring at the ceiling in the white bedroom. The antique fan overhead caught the light from the moon, and cast an eerie shadow on the wall. He thought maybe this room and bed would bring some comfort to the angst he felt, from better times with me. But it was not so, and only encouraged the melancholy mood that encompassed him. Finally,

he got out of bed and stood at the glass doors that opened onto the patio. He looked at the spot where the infamous chaise lounge had been, with vivid memories of the turning point in our lives together. If only he could take back that one day, things would be different. It might even have been his child, who knows?

## CHAPTER FIVE

Uma was well aware of her impact on Jacob Walnut, and walked outside with her phone to untangle the results of their conversation. She had put him aside in her mind during the last weeks before the baby was born, because she had no idea how to handle the touchy subject of his feelings. Of course he had been surprised, but he had no monopoly on that! **She chuckled and grabbed a stray Cecile Brunner bud** that had begun to tickle her neck. The fragrant scent of the spicy pink rose reminded her of the gardens at the ranch, and she yearned for a day in the beds, digging in moist soil and planting new vegetables. The last days had been thrilling and bountiful in their joy, and she hated to taint that feeling with any negativity. In a perfect world, that would be possible, but not one where Jacob Walnut resided in his corner, and I in mine.

It was her process to tell the truth in life, as clearly as possible. Her mother and father had both insisted upon this serum for behavior, despite the pain it brought at times. This is not a world designed for the truth anymore, she thought, and buried her face in the bower of vines and roses cascading into the patio. Only nature truly calmed her these days. The great Mother herself, although battered by her own causes, was the standard bearer. The ocean was always the ocean, the oak trees continued their gnarly bark and falling leaves, and Jacob Walnut was forever a thorn in her side.

He had made so many wonderful things happen, by way of his generous gifts and dividing Kevin Stone's estate between his daughter and his lover. It was a surprising move, considering Jacob's general distain for women. This was something Uma had discovered by watching him operate under circumstances where he was open for observation. While it was true that he enjoyed sexual prowess and freedom with any number of the female gender, he rarely carried a true respect for them. It might have been that years of empty headed starlets had ruined his soul and closed the door of compassion and vulnerability. Perhaps he became immune by a place where everyone was beautiful and talented.

I discovered her sitting quietly on a bench designed by Gabriel West to show off my patio. It was made from a large stump of redwood, and sanded down to a smooth curve that fit the human booty. Her face was raised up to the sun, and her eyes closed, but I knew she was aware of my presence.

"LJ is sleeping in the cradle," I said, putting my hands on her shoulders. "Auntie Uma, are you tired of us? We have taken up all your time, as usual."

She reached over and patted my hand, without opening her eyes. "The sun is bright orange behind my eyelids" she replied. "Good strong energy."

"And what are you doing out here? I thought you would be in the kitchen." "Why, are you hungry?"

"No, I had a smoothie, but Hawk is looking for quesadillas or a sandwich." "Why don't you make him one? You are the lady of the house now, Dyanna."

"Well, I would be happy to, but you and Ampalia have spoiled us rotten. I think maybe you prefer it that way. I can hardly find anything in there anymore."

"The Galley will be stocked as soon as we fire up that stove. I didn't want it used before the birth. I am superstitious that way." She rose and opened her eyes, fixing them on mine. "You look

beautiful, almost like a séance instead of a real person.”

She touched my hair and then my cheek. “Come on, let’s feed the hungry man and his family.”



Ginger Malone was deep in the garden at the Stone/Falconer Ranch, fourth row, second paddock, digging out the weeds around some lovely carrots. She had worn old jeans for the protection of her knees, but the warm sun soon nudged her to change into the cutoff version. The fragrant soil did not bother her, but instead was a reminder of her early days at home. She and her siblings all worked on the property, the boys mostly tending to the trees and vast lawn, with her dad at the helm. But her mother was a fine cook and loved to grow vegetables and fruit for her family. The carrots in Uma’s garden were huge, twice the size as the scraggly long ones at home. Times had changed since she had tended to such things, and she knew Uma was a staunch advocate for organic farming. She had a row of books from *Sunset Magazine* as well as professional type manuals stacked in the rows of the sheds that stood at the top of the hill. Each garden had a fence around it, to keep the pesky deer from eating everything, and various decoys to scare away the birds. It was quite an operation.

She and Evan had visited the ranch early on, wandering the meadows below and hiking into the forest. His arm and wrist were still healing from the surgery, but Dr. Hawk approved of the vigorous exercise they took outdoors. Both were native Texans, and used to being in the open air. Evan Galbraith always chose outdoor venues for his concerts, because it gave him a chance to feel free and open with his work. The guitar sounded different inside, he said, having vast experience behind him. The earbuds that wired him in during the performance cancelled out any distortion, but during the sound check, he always went “pure”, nothing but his very own ears to judge the bounce and echos out there. Ginger was a great help during these times, patiently holding the extra mic at long distances. She would speak back to him like they practiced in the early days, just the two of them.

Now Evan had returned to the road, dipping his toes into the frenzied life he left behind during his recuperation. Ginger had decided to accept Gabriel’s offer to stay as long as she liked, for she had fallen in love with Big Sur.

It started with her first meeting of Dr. Hawk, during Evan’s recovery. She had not been allowed to see the patient during the first weeks of his surgical healing, but Elena was kind enough to give her the encouraging reports. She explained to Ginger the method they used to heal the body and soul of the patient, by means of total quiet and peace. No yammering family members or rowdy buddies for this rock star, the doctor simply would not allow it. She accepted the rules and became the spokesperson for the millions of Evan Galbraith fans who loved him. It was a good deal for both sides, and soon Ginger felt closer to her dearest friend.

Many of their friends were aware of the bond between Evan and Ginger, and knew that they were tight. The typical roadie/girlfriend had slowly morphed into his confidant, cook and massage therapist. They still enjoyed some great sex, but it was more of a friendly way to communicate. That was where they had started, when she was sixteen and he was one year older, two lonesome wranglers from the Texas burbs.

The legend of Stephen Hawk did not elude Ginger, however, and thanks to Elena she was privileged to know the path of healing that Evan had taken. By the time she actually laid eyes on Dr. Hawk, Ginger had made it her business to study his career in medicine. His specialties were

heroic in their track record, saving limbs and shattered bones of pathetically injured human beings. He was rarely in the public eye, but did consult generously with his fellows at Stanford and other hospitals.

On the day she delivered two of the famous Stratocasters to the hospital, Ginger was not prepared for the man who sat cross legged in front of Evan, carefully examining both his arms and wrists. He looked up at her with those dark deep eyes, smiling a bit and nodding, dressed in grey sweats with a head of long thick Esalen hair. He was among the most amazing looking men she had ever seen, and that was saying a lot! Regardless, she was cool, offering coffee to both of them, while her little old heart beat a mile a minute.

Hawk was the kind of a man who put ideas in your head by simply being himself, unaware of his affect on women. She could not know that he had been pursued most of his life by the ones that got close enough, or that he was now deeply in love. He did not have time for foolish games, and obviously took his work very seriously.

Evan had described his recovery at great length, knowing that Ginger would not share his confidence. He was amazed at how Dr. Hawk had treated him like a brother and a friend, instead of a poor sad beat up and scared young man. They hit it off immediately, and Evan gave himself over to the therapy 100%. It was this fact alone that made all the difference, the power of the human mind to heal, through love and patience.

She watched as the two men went through their paces, Evan performing his exercises with perfect timing and confidence. He had practiced long and hard to impress his mentor, and himself. She left the two of them deep in conversation, knowing that Evan would eventually perform his magic on those electric axes.

Sweat dripped down her forehead and into her eyes, signaling a break. There was a large bucket of fresh water next to the bed, and Ginger crawled over to the side, half blinded by the salty tears. She reached up and wound her red hair into a knot, and splashed her face with the cool water. The liquid ran down into her red tank top in rivulets, and she threw her head back to the sun. Now, this was the way to live!

John Soaring Meadow was watching Ginger from his perch in the Carriage House, as was his habit since the early days of the ranch recovery. He was up before dawn, and into his second large cup of coffee before the crew arrived, seated behind the large curved desk. The windows spanned the entire front and corner where he sat, by design. He realized early on that his position as manager of the property demanded a vast knowledge of the work. He had his two right hands to oversee the men, but Tomas and William were too kindhearted at times. They believed in the siesta theory of labor, which came from their early days in Mexico. Here, John required a schedule that included good breaks and lunch with a rest period. He knew he got better work from his men this way, but had to ride herd on them.

After the murder of Axel Tuner, there was a period where he was too ill to pay attention, and they soldiered on without him. But now John was back, with a yen to complete the new ranch house for the estate. This morning, he had begun a strenuous workout at dawn, stretching and easing his sore muscles from the months of recovery. Hawk had demanded rest for his limbs to heal properly and John acquiesced. He knew how close he came to losing the left leg, and was thankful for the intervention.

It was not easy for a man like John to take orders from anyone, and he still resented being ambushed that night at the cottage. Everyone but him knew what was coming down, and they

just let him get shit-faced drunk anyway! He needed to reestablish his power and juice, for his own sake.

These were the things that roamed his mind as he watched the cute little freckled woman of Evan Galbraith crawl around the gardens. Gabriel had dropped her off early in the morning, and waved to him as he sped away to a client at Tassajara in Carmel Valley.

He rose slowly out of the leather swivel chair, stiff from the workout, but determined to get back into the groove. Maybe it was time for a howdy to that lovely visitor. It would take his mind off the pain!



Belinda returned to her spot behind the pink rhododendron several times before she was able to gather the courage to proceed. She was enchanted with the comings and goings of Uncle Teddy after her first encounter, hiding there in the garden. He often had them bring his car around to the curve near his private gate, and slipped away from the house. She had become more of a night owl since Big Ted cut off her meds, which were meant to keep her calm during the stay at Genoa. It was the first thing that Uma suggested, and they gradually eliminated all the toxic psychotherapeutic drugs from her frail body. Belinda had been in a coma-like state for so long that it took her awhile to return to reality.

This left the sixteen year-old girl at odds with herself, having buried many of the feelings she held about her father's death. Marianne Stone had enjoyed the time she lorded over her daughter, believing she was a lost cause and would need heavy supervision the rest of her life. It had been a shock when Jacob Walnut visited with Dyanna, who managed to awaken the wasted young spirit.

Fortunately, Belinda was not present at the brutal attack of Jacob by her mother, and the bloody escape during Marianne's rampage. Big Ted had taken her back to the dark room where she spent her days wrapped in a strait jacket and strapped to her bed. She was blissfully unaware of the mayhem that transpired, and the Walnut Jet departing for Monterey with a brutally wounded passenger. Big Ted made sure that her routine was not interrupted, while he slowly began to ease away the medication.

On some level, Belinda knew that the large black man who whispered to her and held her hand was a friend. It was enough for them to proceed slowly, while Jacob Walnut fought for his life and recovery.

Somewhere in her memory was the strong image of Dyanna and her father, and she recognized the scent of flowers when Dyanna knelt before her and touched her cheek. The power of life surged forward, opening her eyes to the spectacle of strangers in a dark room.

Now, the memories of her life slowly returned as much as Belinda would allow. She was never really sure she wanted to know what lay behind the wall of her past, for it seemed so terribly hard and scary. Wasn't it enough that she was alive?

She heard a noise from inside Teddy's rooms, and crawled between the bushes to a place where she could see. Hidden behind a huge branch of foliage, she focused on the woman inside who was completely naked, and tanned all over. Her body was very curvy with large breasts that stuck straight out, and a tiny waist. She swayed with the rhythm of music coming from a huge wall

of screens behind her, which had black men like Big Ted playing horns and drums. The beat was loud and rising as she danced, and then it would stop. The woman kept moving, as if in a dream.

Uncle Teddy emerged from a door with a towel around him, and Belinda drew back, afraid of discovery. Teddy's attention was focused on the dancer as she turned out toward the gardens, swaying to the beat. Her wispy blond hair flew about as she shook her head, and touched the area between her legs. Teddy grabbed her from behind, and Belinda closed her eyes. When the couple moved away, she quickly pushed through the bushes and opened the gate.

The silence of night enveloped Belinda as she ran to her room and opened the door. She dove into her bed and pulled the covers over her face, aware of her heart pounding, gasping for breath.



Uma was in her element with Hawk and me, laughing and smiling as she grated sharp cheddar cheese and mild mozzarella. She had taken a liking to the juxtaposition of these flavors, replacing the standard Monterey Jack, and it made a difference. Quesadillas are an art meant to be enjoyed without a chance of recognizing the ingredients. They were gone before anyone thought of such a thing. Stephen Hawk finished three in record time, while she sliced pineapple and guava for the finishing touch.

I went back to check on Lily Jade, and left them to savor some precious time together. They were so comfortable and happy that I didn't think they would miss me. I entered the bedroom and noticed the streaks of light coming from the west window as the sun crossed the sky. A beam was set directly on the cradle, and I approached my daughter with great interest. She looked different to me every time I returned, and I imagined I might miss something if I stayed away too long.

Until you have experienced this novelty, you may not realize that life takes on a new cloak of beauty when a very young creature is born. They stretch, feeling the need to do so after a long time cramped up in there.

I thought I had all this figured out, and Uma laughed with delight to hear my musings on motherhood. "You must keep a journal, Moana," she said, folding clean white towels one morning. "We will look back in ten years and live this all over again."

I had been very groggy at the time, and not listened much, but the journal did appear on my bedside table along with a fresh lily. It had come from John Soaring Meadow, who had been eavesdropping from afar. Uma made sure to tell him everything, as the days progressed into weeks.

I realized he was shy about intruding, having experienced life with a new mother many years ago. He rarely spoke of Joanne, but the time when his daughter Wynonna was born was a favorite of his. She popped out in an easy delivery, from the wide rounded hips of her portentous mother, and quickly became just a distraction. Nine months is a long time for a red hot mama to be out of service, and Joanne had suffered the tales of her friends and their parties while growing into an abundant pregnant woman. She quickly forgot how much she wanted that big John Soaring Meadow in her bed, and blamed him for ruining her life.

John soon found a nanny to nurse his daughter, after turning to Uma for advice. He moved

Wynonna to a small back room and slept with her at night. He was working on the Post Ranch excavation at the time, and traveled down the coast every day to his job. The idea of the tiny little blond cherub at home filled the long days with love and he returned every night instead of bunking at the site. Wynonna became his pleasure and focus, so he knew very well what my eyes and ears were experiencing first hand. It was only when he suggested to his wife that he assume full custody that all hell broke loose. Joanne realized that she had only one piece of bargaining power, and that was her daughter. The war between them began and continues to this day.

John had not spoken of his marriage or his child to me in the first months we were acquainted, and I would have never believed he was capable of such tender love and care. He was a rough, scary looking big old Esalen man who hung around carving wood at the General Store in Big Sur. He looked dirty and was abrupt with me to the point where I was apprehensive. Only the legend of the Jasmine Dogs brought me the courage to approach him, and the rest, they say, is history. Once the barrier of pain was cracked open and he began to trust me, both of our lives changed forever.

## CHAPTER SIX

John approached the gate in a stealthy way, hoping to surprise the visiting gardener. He went around the side and peeked through the crack to watch her splash her face and neck with water. He felt a curious rush of excitement, something that was almost forgotten by his manhood in the past few months. He had begun to feel like a used up old man during his second recovery. The incident of Axel Turner's death and the time in jail had hurt his pride as well as his body, and taken its toll. The feelings of weakness washed over him in the hours when he was alone, and realized how compromised his exuberant soul had become. He was vulnerable and dependent upon Uma and his men, and hated every moment. It probably set him back a bit, he admitted now, but things were looking up.

He opened the gate and peered in. Ginger had her eyes closed as the rivulets of water dried on her body, and seemed unaware of his presence. He shuffled his feet while opening the gate, hoping to cue her in, while he whistled a little. ["Hey there, Miss! What you doing in my gardens?"](#)

Ginger laughed and threw her head back, peering at him upside down. "You think I didn't hear you coming, huh?"

"Don't know about that" he said, feeling a bit sheepish. "I just wanted to say hello."

She stood up and brushed off her legs, revealing a lovely tanned belly button with a diamond stud. "So hello, John Soaring Meadow. I was wondering if anyone was here today. Uma told me to start on the carrots, so that's what I'm doing."

She looked up at him with a bright smile, comfortable with his glances up and down her body. "Do you have a place up here?"

"Yes, I live in the first carriage house, right over there."

"The one with all the windows?"

"How did you know?" He edged closer to the bed and stood above her.

"I've been around a few blocks, here and there. My daddy was a farmer and ran several ranches as well. He had a big tower in the middle of the field, to watch the help."

"Well, I guess you know the tricks of the trade. Tell me again what your name is."

"Ginger Malone. I've been living here with Gabriel for weeks now. He dropped me off today, and Uma will be coming to show me the ropes."

"Don't know a thing about that, but how about a cool drink? Looks like you have been working pretty hard. It gets warm around noon."

"I don't mind if I do," said Ginger, brushing off the dirt from her legs. "Lead on."



Jacob stared out the window at the skyline of Los Angeles, the City of Angels. *What a crock that is, he thought. There is nothing angelic about this town or the people, everyone is out for himself.*

He did not hear Brian Shoupe enter the conference room and stand behind him until there was a polite shuffling of papers. Jacob turned to see the bright smiling face of a man half his age and ready for a go at most anything.

"Good morning Mr. Walnut. May I get you some coffee or water?" His light blond hair fell onto the tanned forehead as he bent down to settle the area with his iPad and some note paper. "Jack will be in shortly. He is on the phone for a moment".

Jacob bristled again at the thought of my lawyer, not at the ready quite yet. In fact, he had to contain himself and his tart tongue before he spoke. "Water will be fine." He turned back to the window, gathering his thoughts, and Brian slipped out of the room.

He had driven himself downtown, as a challenge to his mood, and was quite pleased to have recalled the exact building and underground garage. It was the memory of the last visit that made him grit his teeth: Olvera Street. The meeting with Jack Walters that had named me as my cousin's executor, and our trip to Louise's Mexican haven close by. He could smell the tacos now, as he watched the bustle on the streets below.

"Hello, Jacob," said Jack Walters, as the door opened and he walked into the room. Brian followed him with a glass and a bottle of water. "It's good to see you."

Jacob smiled as he turned and reached across the table to shake Jack's hand. His firm grip said that he was now in control, although the mood in the offices of Walters and Benson was always cordial and relaxed. It was their stock in trade, and helped the distressed client feel an immediate calming of the nerves. Next to the dentist, the most stressful visit for the average person is a visit to his lawyer. Nothing much fun there. Jack had interned early in his career with Harry Benson Sr., and learned the ropes from the crack Midwestern attorney. "Start things off with something pleasant, regardless," said Harry. Jack recalled his first case with Harry as his mentor, and watched with amazement as he turned the nastiest people around with his homespun way.

Jacob Walnut was not someone with whom Jack was especially comfortable taking a meeting. The glowering dark eyes seemed moody today, so special Harry tactics applied. "How's the Walnut empire these days?"

Jacob grinned at the thought of his work, and remembered that he liked this guy. "Pretty good. We are opening three films this year."

"And I hear that Dyanna is working on a big project for you as well. She was quite excited about it. All about David Bellford, the Hollywood icon."

"It will be based on the book by Samuel Bekker. I got her a first edition in New York last year."

"My wife is a real film buff and read Bekker's book several times. How did you manage to get the film rights?"

"My brother Teddy is the man for that. He knew a family member and negotiated at the right time. Bekker left a messy life behind when he died, and they needed the money.

Pretty simple." Jacob pulled out a chair and settled in.

"Timing is always the key to a good agreement." Jack sat opposite from him, as Brian poured the water and took his seat as well. "So tell me, what are we talking about today? You mentioned something about Dyanna's new baby in your message. Quite a surprise, wasn't it? I had no idea she was pregnant until she told me the story."

"That is typical of her, as you will learn soon enough. This new relationship with Stephen Hawk has only added to her secrecy. She operates on her own time and in her own way."

"I find Dyanna to be quite cooperative when it comes to the business of her cousin's estate. She will be making all the decisions about the new dog park Louise wanted for the Palisades Highlands."

"I have something different to discuss with you, sir. It has nothing to do with Louise or the Dog park. And I must ask for a confidential conversation before I proceed."

"I understand," said Jack Walters. "And in what capacity do you wish to execute this business? Dyanna Falconer is a client of ours, by way of Louise Guy. She is protected by our policy of privacy."

"I want to be sure that what is discussed in this room will not be repeated to anyone unless I approve of it. Would it be a conflict of interest for you to represent me with this matter? "

"I can guarantee that nothing leaves this room, Mr. Walnut. I thought Dandy Brown was your man in the legal field. I will be happy to talk about anything you like, and we will see what you are facing here. Do you wish to have him attend as well?"

"No, Dandy himself has a real yen for Dyanna. I am afraid his judgment might be colored by that."

Jack Walters laughed out loud, and asked Brian to bring him a fresh cup of coffee. When they were alone, he leaned in and stared into Jacob's eyes. "I am very curious about your query, Jacob. Tell me what you have in mind."

Brian returned and placed the steaming mug in front of his boss. He sat down at the end of the table and opened his electronic tablet.

Jacob looked at the ceiling, as he spoke. "I want to create a trust for Dyanna's daughter. It has to be completely private and secret except for the principles."

"That is not such an extraordinary request, Mr. Walnut. We contract such things all the time."

"In this case, I wish to be the only executor. I do not want Dyanna or the child's father to be involved."

Jack Walters sipped his hot brew and considered Jacob's words. "There are obvious red flags here, child custody being the most important. California law states that all minor children are governed by their natural parents until the age of eighteen, unless there are extenuating circumstances."

"I am aware of that. I am placing several million dollars in this trust, to be used by the girl, and for her only. Her father can have nothing to do with it."

"You must disclose this arrangement to her mother, if you want it to be accessed before she is

eighteen. That is a long time. The child is barely a month old.”

“Then you suggest that I keep Dyanna in the loop, for her protection? Can that be supervised by a third party, responsible to me? Someone she knows and trusts, like you?”

“That is a possibility as long as there is no conflict of interest.”

“I want to have it all set up before we contact anyone. Air tight.”

“May I ask why you wish to exclude the father of Dyanna’s child? I believe they are all living together and building a new compound on the shore property.”

“Stephen Hawk is the wrong man for Dyanna. He has wormed his way into her life, and will be of no use when his true conscience is revealed. It will end badly, mark my words.”



Hawk found us out on the back patio, sunbathing in the nude. It was almost 10 AM and Lily Jade was due for a bath. We actually slept in a bit, which was becoming the norm, and he had been up for hours. There was a special project in the making and he had Ampalia’s brother hard at work. They met at the second old ranch carriage house, so nobody would be aware of the proceedings, except John Soaring Meadow.

Slow Dove was a young wiry man with wild hair that fell in ringlets down to his shoulders. He had been raised in the back woods by his family, determined to miss as much school as possible. He was interested only in the arts classes at Cooper Molera, and a good game of tennis once in awhile. Otherwise, he put his skills to creating magical pieces of jewelry taken from the tales of the indigenous people of Esalen. His mother said that he began to grab at her earrings and necklaces the day he was born, and opened his blue eyes. He was a sight to behold from that day forward.

Hawk had been searching for the right gift, and met with Slow Dove on the day Lily Jade was born. It was quite by accident, if you believe in such things. He was sure the gods had blessed them, for Hawk rarely traveled up there. The memories of the fire and the murder of Rex Phelps kept him at a distance. But John had to be watched, even now in the last days of his healing, and Hawk found himself wandering around the meadow that day. The trees that we had planted were flourishing in the summer of Big Sur, and they provided shade and quiet for the new father.

Slow Dove was gathering pine needles and the twigs and leaves of the Oak trees when Hawk strolled down the path from the gardens. He looked up to see the great

Doctor approaching, and his heart began to beat very fast. Stephen Hawk was his idol, the true leader of the Esalen family of Big Sur. John Soaring Meadow was known to be the Fire God, but Hawk quietly ruled. That was just so obvious to the young boy who followed him around at gatherings, and grew his hair long when Hawk was away at medical school. He had gone along once with Gabriel and Hawk to the shores of Lime Kiln, and watched them surf the treacherous waves. They were like two gods, and Slow Dove imagined himself as one of them.

He learned that Hawk had become a famous surgeon while scouting around on his laptop for the Zenith Methods of his particular calling. Searching Google had become his favorite pastime when he was not working. Hawk believed in a strong work ethic, and so did his young admirer.

Today, the burlap bag full of natural materials was open when Hawk spotted him under the trees. He stood up and brushed off his hands.

Hawk held out his arms and held the young man strongly in a greeting. "Hello, my artist friend. How are you?"

"You have a new daughter! Many good wishes, Hawk."

"How did you know that already?" Hawk smiled, noting that they were face to face. "Everyone knows. It is a big deal around here, you and Dyanna and that house on the ocean."

"Yeah? Well, I watched my child being born last night, and it was really something. I'm not quite sure I'm ready to be a father, but don't tell anyone." Hawk's smile gave him away.

"You are proud?"

"Of course. You will understand some day."

"No, I will never marry. Women don't like me. I am too shy."

"I was that way for a long time, son. They come after you anyway, you'll see. But today I have a question for you. Do you have time to sit with me?"

"Yes! Of course I do. I was just taking this bag of materials up to the carriage house. John gave me room for a studio there."

"Let's walk first. I need to feel the wind and the sun."



On the morning that he joined us, Hawk had returned from his collaboration work with Slow Dove. He was on an important mission, and had to be clever. He kept busy during the first month of my recovery, saving himself for the heat of our first lovemaking.

Lily Jade had a sense of her father from the moment she was born. It was he that held her up to the light when she emerged from the womb. Uma handed her to Hawk in a soft white towel, while I released my best and last howl of the night. It was a hooray, I would say, to anyone who asked.

Today she lay on her belly next to me, and looked up when Hawk approached. She made a sound of greeting, as Uma would say. After all, they tell me she could not really see us for weeks, but I will never believe that. She saw it all, and was truly present.

He sat down and lifted her tiny body up to his chest, nuzzling the sweet scent of her neck. "Hello, my beautiful girls," he said, but I knew he was really talking to her. Who could resist?

I must have smiled, and pretended to watch them, while he stood and held Lily Jade up to the sun. I was about to stop him, but he saw me and quickly sat down. "It's ok, Momma. I know the rules."

"You might end up with a nice glob of her breakfast." I laughed and stood next to him. "Do you

want to change her diaper?”

“Sure. But first, a kiss.” He leaned over and kissed my mouth in the sexiest tender way, and stirred my juices. I had almost forgotten that feeling, believe it or not. Way too much going on, but now things had begun to calm down and I was feeling good. He looked at my body as I pulled on my robe, with different eyes than before. Ha!

“Wow, haven’t done that for awhile.” I watched him gently place LJ on the padded diaper shelf that slid out of the wall next to her cradle. I could not see his face, but he was winking at her as she stared up at her father. There is something in that look that lives until this day. It is the bond between father and daughter that begins at the first moment he holds her. If they are lucky, it starts at birth, when Hawk grabbed his first born child from my belly.

The Esalen people believe with all their heart that love is the only bond that saves the soul. Say what you may, but the men are almost stronger in that respect than the women. The bonds between brothers are sacred and never broken, even by death.

John Soaring Meadow had spoken to me about this conviction on the first night he sat on the steps of my cottage and got so drunk on Jack Daniels. The fire water loosened his tongue and emboldened him enough to share with me. He had a great despair about women in general at that time, and hated to let down his guard. Lucky for me, he opened his heart. I saw further evidence of his great faith and love at the cave on Jade Beach, when I watched him while pretending to sleep during my recovery. He tended to little Wynonna with a soft touch and voice. It was the only time I witnessed his tenderness until I was ready to return to the world.

Little did I know that the gruff way he treated me during my first walks on the beach and climbing the rocks was to toughen me up for the world. These indigenous people have been known for centuries as great healers and warriors, something you might not use in the same sentence until you have experienced the grace of their spirits. I understood John’s trek back from his favorite place when the great fire invaded Big Sur and almost killed him. There is no other way for a true warrior to behave, the mind imposes over the body, until one or the other gives way.

All of this flashed through my mind as I put my arms around Hawk and nuzzled his back. The very scent of him was indulgent, and it had been too long. He told me later that he was advised to let me make the first move, if he wanted a good marriage. Thank God he listened.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

In my mind, the true beginning of our marriage was that first encounter after Lily Jade was born. There was no question as Hawk turned to me that he would be my lover once again. He handed over the warm sleepy baby and I put her down while he cleaned up the changing area. He carefully set a new diaper out for later, and washed his hands like the surgeon ready for work.

He looked at me in a new way, as he reached up and pulled the leather tie from his hair. I had forgotten how long it was, after many months of growth during my pregnancy. He took my hand and fastened it as a bracelet around my wrist, carefully tying a slip knot in place. He stood waiting for my next move.

I looked at the bracelet and his thick hair hanging around his shoulders, and felt a sense of emotion from inside my body, rising slowly as I touched his hand. He stood perfectly still while I traced his arms and shoulders up to the neck. I started to kiss him like a butterfly, very lightly and barely brushing his lips. I went back and forth, touching his chin and cheeks and eyes with my mouth, while Lily Jade sighed from her cradle.

He fell to his knees and buried his face in my belly. The sound of his daughter had undone Hawk's cool, and there were tears in his eyes when he looked at me. I smiled and pulled him up, touching his beautiful thighs. When I reached in between, he came alive.

We were wound around each other on the bed under the window, with the noonday sun burning in the skies. There were sounds of life all around us, but we were oblivious. The tether that had formed long ago appeared, and we were magnets to each other. The passion erupting was soft and hot, careful not to burn. We explored each other once again, like two foreigners in the dark.

He was afraid to hurt me, but I was wet and ready, with a pulsating beat inside my body that demanded attention. I touched him and knew he could reach inside me easily, so I guided him. When he hit the sweet spot, it was over. We melted into each other, and held on for dear life.

I never wanted to move again. We were one.



It was a sexy time for Belinda as well, lying on the carpeted floor of her bathroom practicing the art of masturbation. She had become addicted to watching Uncle Teddy and his women over the past few weeks, and it finally got to her. Early that morning she heard Teddy's car arrive and the familiar voices escaping behind the gate. She slept in her hoodie and sweats these days instead of having to change for bed, so it was only a minute before she slipped outside and behind the bushes beside the plate glass wall. She rubbed her eyes while the lights dimmed and a new model stretched out on the big sofa. This woman was smaller than usual, with thick dark hair and a pale body. Teddy handed her a drink before making his escape to the bedroom. She often wondered what he did in there every time, before making his appearance totally naked. But this time, the woman began to touch herself between the legs, with her hand holding the panties open under her dress. She was conveniently seated facing Belinda, who shrunk back into the brush for fear of discovery. She did not know that the glass reflected the occupants to themselves and they could not see the outdoors.

Within minutes, the woman was sprawled out with her legs apart, moving her hand very fast

and cupping her own breast. What was she doing thought Belinda, fascinated beyond belief. As Teddy opened the door, the woman threw her head back and appeared to scream, lifting herself up at the bottom. He stood in front of her sipping some wine, and reached down with his finger to touch her panties. It was then that she returned to life and quickly pulled the dress over her head. Teddy knelt in front of her, and the usual antics began, leaving Belinda to slip away to her bed.

When she was safely under the covers, she felt her heart pounding like never before, and reached down to touch herself. She wasn't sure what you called it, but she knew it couldn't be too hard to learn. She fell asleep with her hand between her legs.

When Big Ted came in to wake her for breakfast, she was buried in her covers. She had dreamt of the sexy movies her dad used to play for the imbecile chicks after the divorce. Belinda had learned to spy on people during that time and often peeked through the glass of the screening room upstairs, which was conveniently placed next to his bedroom. They knew that the house had once belonged to an old Hollywood movie king, and he had all the walls covered in soft suede leather. That was only the first clue to the rest, which included a [bed of nails](#) in the dark basement. Belinda had been too young to understand that, as her dad ran his hands over the sharp points. They had been exploring the basement looking for his snow skis, which had disappeared along with her mother.

Later she saw a similar type bed in a film he made with one of his girlfriends which was a comedy. They all laughed like fools when he ran the first cut for his friends, and she watched through the glass behind them. So being the child of a sexy movie star did have its perks, she thought now. You don't need a man to make love. You can do it yourself.

She was too young for any such urges, but now it all came back to her as she went into the bathroom and closed the door. Big Ted always made her bed at this time, because she was likely to return there otherwise. She sat on the toilet to pee and looked down at her mound, covered with wispy dark ringlets. Then she lay down on the soft carpet and carefully ran her finger inside the lips of her vagina. She sniffed it, and spread her legs like Teddy's woman. Then she got up and locked the door.



At breakfast, she asked Ty about women without pubic hair, and he informed her that they all waxed it off. Men too.

"Do you?" she said, eating dry granola with cranberries.

"Belinda, honey, where did you see a woman's snatch like that? You been watching porn?" Of course he was kidding, as he broke two eggs into the pan for Big Ted.

"I've been watching Uncle Teddy," she said, without the filter of fear. "Holy shit, girl. Are you serious?"

Belinda nodded and continued to pour milk over her cereal. At that moment Big Ted swung into the chair next to her and gave her a hug. "Serious about what?"

"Oh, nothing. Ty and I were just joking about a movie I saw."

And so it began, with Ty as her confident. He did not tell his good friend Ted for fear it would cause havoc in the household. And besides, he had his own ideas about Belinda these days.



Annoka had gifted me with a beautiful soft baby sling for Lily Jade, knitted in multiple colors of green and blue. It was lined with a washable fabric that was also weather resistant, and I was impressed with her cleverness. She smiled with her shy face and showed me how to use it. The design was very simple, wide circular neck and a snug bottom sack for the baby. There was also a small pocket in the back for a tissue or other needs.

“You will need to carry Lily Jade when you go for your beach walks, in case she misses you,” she said, with a giggle. Annoka was most likely a virgin at the ripe old age of 20 or so, that was my guess. But she was wise beyond her years, quiet and private, and wonderfully sweet. When I was in the cave recovering, Uma brought her in to help Ampalia with the chores of tending to me twenty four seven. It was Annoka who sat beside my bed for hours at night, when I was fighting for my life. Now she had become the housemother for my cottage and knew the new digs.

I had quickly returned to my habit of long walks on the beach, which started when I was writing the script for SENSUAL INDIGO years before. After the initial shock of the birth, my body went into high gear with the schedule required to care for my daughter. I learned the art of catnapping, and used my meditation skills to cope. I wanted to be as Zen as possible, which amused both Hawk and Uma to death.

The first time I took LJ out, I walked her down the path in the warm sunshine and stood over the landing spot. I wanted to hit the beach, but I couldn't just jump with her, could I? I found a place ten feet away where I could actually slide into the sand, and soon had my feet in the ocean. It was heaven, and I hugged her tiny body to mine, celebrating her life.

When I returned to the path, Uma was waiting for me like a nervous mother. “Are you feeling well, Moana?”

“Very well, thank you. And so is Lily Jade Falconer Hawk, who has wiggled her toes in the sunshine of Big Sur. Wahoo!”

“Please don't disappear like that without a word, she is only a few hours old.”

“She is three days old, and just fine.” I walked to the spot where I could climb back up, and did so without a struggle. Uma peeked into the blanket as I passed her, determined to express my independence.

Uma told me later that she was pleased with my condition, and proud of the birth. She was giving me a full body massage after my bath, as her niece slept nearby. “You must be as intuitive as possible with your body, Dyanna. Actually, you are recovering from the birth very well.”

“I had a good coach. The familiar hands flipped me over and started upward from my ankles. When she reached my hips, she lifted me up and I could feel the remainder of sore muscles.

“Your long years of yoga and walking has served you well. The body likes to move, it was designed that way.”

“How about good sex? Doesn't that count?”

She laughed out loud and continued to slap my buttocks until they stung. Uma never discussed my activities with Hawk when it came to our lovemaking, and believed it was sacred between us. It was only when I inquired that she rolled me over and smiled. “It is generally recommended to abstain for at least a month to six weeks.”

My eyes widened at the thought, and I considered it.

“You will know when you are ready. They say my parents were together right away. They had their own house, you know. When we were growing up, we had the main bedrooms and they built a small place next to us, for privacy.”

“Sounds good to me...”



Hawk and I walked along the beach later that day, with Lily Jade snuggled into her cozy sling. We all took a nap after our first encounter, and awakened to the familiar sounds of infancy. Hawk opened his eyes and jumped out of bed before I could move, giving me a chance to watch him pick her up. He still had the best male butt in civilization – at least in my eyes – and it was fun to spy on them for a minute.

I felt my breasts begin to fill with milk, and realized that it was good that we were together just after she had nursed. (Lesson #1). Now he placed her next to me and propped up a pillow. She had on more clothes than her parents, something that she might have teased us about, had she known.

Hawk jumped in the shower while I fed the baby, and returned with a couple of bananas. He ate both of them after I declined, lusting more after a tall glass of water.

Soon we were dressed and making our way down the path, slipping away as the last crews completed Gabriel's instructions for finishing the wood. The compound, as he called it, had unfinished redwood on the exteriors of all the buildings. There is only one way to age redwood gracefully, he informed us, and besides, it would match the original cottage. Uma had gone up to the ranch to work with Ginger Malone, which was news to Hawk.

“She has been spending a lot of time up there,” I said, peeking into the sling to be sure things were good. “Apparently John has taken it upon himself to show her around.”

“That old horndog. I can't say I blame him. Ginger is a lovely piece of art.” “Did you get to know her while Evan was recovering at Stanford?”

“I only saw her a couple of times. He was in isolation for six weeks, you know.”

“Why?” Lily Jade made a little gurgling/burp sound at that moment, which was perfectly timed and cracked us up.

“My protocol for patients with his type of injury is very intense. The healing process takes a lot of concentration, and the body must be in tune with the mind. Visitors often distract and upset without realizing it, and the patient takes time to deal with that. It dilutes his intensity of mind. In

Evan's case, Ginger was the only one he wanted to see, and she fell in with us immediately about our requests. We did allow one short phone conversation per day."

"For six weeks? Didn't he get lonely?"

"Oh, Dyanna, don't underestimate my Elena! She is the best of the best when it comes to care giving. And she is very easy on the eyes."

"Did you choose her for those virtues?" I reached over and punched his arm, rousing my daughter a bit. She started to fuss and Hawk stopped long enough to lift her out of the sling. He loved to hold her, and had never walked with her outside on the sand. It was part of his history and his legend to carry the little princess into the sea, and today was the day. We had not planned it, but he strolled into the waves and held her above his head. She was so tiny from my vantage point, with the sun shining around her body.

Hawk whirled her around once more and returned to me. I took her into my arms and looked at those huge eyes, but not a whimper was heard from Lily Jade Falconer Hawk. She was officially a true Esalen Princess now.

"She must have no fear of the water, Dyanna. We will teach her to swim as soon as she can walk."

I guided her tiny body into the sling and felt the warmth between us. "I have seen children in the islands who go out on a boat with their fathers to fish. They begin by dangling them in the ocean."

"I learned to swim in Paragoh Creek," said Hawk. "My mother and Uma were always there and we swam naked in the summer. I remember Uma pushing me under the current, so we could swim upstream."

"You have quite a few plans for Lily Jade, for such a busy man." I was really just making conversation but he stopped walking and turned to me.

"Funny you would say that, I have been thinking about my life now for a month. Ever since the night of her birth, Dyanna. It was such a miracle."

"Yeah, I was there too, remember?"

"I never pictured you as the warrior woman you have become. John has always said you are a mighty force of a human being, but that didn't really appear to me until now. They say that women can endure twice the pain as men, and now I believe it."

"What do I feel like inside?"

"What do you mean? Emotionally?"

"No, when you are deep inside me, does it feel the same?"

"I have to say I can't tell you right now. Today was our first time. I was out of my mind with pleasure."

The waves were beginning to break close to the shore, and I felt a weariness come over me. He took my hand and we walked slowly back to the compound, where men were installing copper

drain pipes on the Galley roof. Gabriel was up on a ladder, directing the placement, and waved to us. It felt like things had always been this way.



Ginger scooped out the last glob of Cowboy Cookie dough from the stainless steel bowl, and patted it into place next to the others. Gabriel had kindly allowed her to inhabit the kitchen, which contained most of his mother's cookware and some dandy cookie sheets and bowls. Meredith West went through the typical Big Sur state where everything had to be homemade and homegrown. She acquired a superb cache of baking items at the famous Peppercorn stores in Carmel, along with the beautiful pots and pans from Al Clad, Ltd.

Gabriel himself used one sauce pan, a small non-stick skillet and a cookie sheet, and stored them in a small area under the sink. The stash of fabulous gourmet cook ware was left untouched for years, until Ginger arrived. She questioned Gabriel about his girlfriends, and wondered why they didn't play house, but only in a teasing way.

Today Ginger had taken off from the Gardens of Uma, as she called them, to create some of her favorite things. Evan was coming home and off the road soon, and he loved her cooking. Besides, she wanted to tell him about John Soaring Meadow. She felt a soft pang in her soul when she thought of that man, there was something so strong and yet so fragile about him. Nobody seemed to notice except Uma, and she was more like a sister to him. Under his bravado and gruff actions was a tender hearted man who loved women. How could he still be single? All these questions ran through her mind as she slipped the cookies into the oven and set the timer.

Outside the sun was burning down on the deck, straight up noon. She had a yen to strip off her little dress and soak up the rays, so why not? Gabriel was at the compound, and would not be back for hours and there was not a soul around. She spread the big fluffy towel out on a lounge and stepped out of the dress and tiny black panties. Lately she had taken to going without a bra or bodysuit because the Big Sur heat just made her sweat more than usual. It was almost like the Texas range at times.

She lay on her belly and loosened her hair around the head. This was a trick the chicks on the tour had taught her: an hour of sunbath time will lighten the hair one whole shade! Her golden strawberry locks had grown a few inches and she liked the idea of being a real blonde. John seemed to worship the blondes, with photos of his ex and young daughter on the desk in his office. Of course, there was his beloved Dyanna, the new mother and queen of the coast as she liked to call me. Ginger did not have a jealous bone in her body, having grown up in a family that nurtured and loved her dearly. And then there was Even Galbraith, who found her as a virgin in the front row of a concert, and explored her amazing body. It was a mutual thing, she loved his long lanky legs and arms, and the fingers that played his axe so well. Even in the beginning, they were just made for each other.

The sex was a first for both of them, Evan being 16 and Ginger a year younger. He had played around with a few girls in school, but shied away from penetration. He knew that was the ultimate commitment for a teenage boy in Bryce County, Texas. The only thing in the world he wanted to give that kind of romance was his new electric guitar.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Evan had been on the road for six weeks before his first return to Big Sur. Dr. Hawk was unsure about his ability to last that long without tiring, but Evan was young and strong. He was determined to regain his stature in the endless throngs of musicians who vied for the crowds and performance thrills. Thanks to Ginger and his fan club, they were waiting for him to return and counting the days of recovery. Hawk had toughened him up with numerous exercises and a strong diet of lean protein and fresh vegetables and fruit. He had begun to eat huge chunks of the heavy whole wheat farmer's bread baked by Uma and her companions, comparing it to cake.

The nutrients and exercise were bound to meditation as well, for Dr. Hawk had taught him to visualize his return to the stage. It wasn't much of a task, since Evan dreamed of his playing during the long periods of sleep in recovery. He was saturated in music, as Ginger would say, it was his life blood.

He did not tire on stage, and was anxious to walk out in front of the crowds, because of the buzz. They just couldn't get enough of his licks, and the band was playing at its best. They had hung together during his recovery and written some new songs. Their complete faith in Evan grew while Ginger pumped them up with daily reports and improvements.

It was such a marvel to believe the injury had healed, and many naysayers lined up to witness his music first hand. The press was given a special hour each night for a week before the tour, to watch him warm up. He still could not believe they paid him to do this.

He missed Ginger on the road, after she went back to Big Sur, but his band was full of good friends and they traveled on the bus in the Western states. It was like old times. She kept in close touch by phone and sent lots of photos of the Big Sur gardens of Uma, and the coastal beauty she loved.

When she told him she was gardening up at the ranch, Evan wondered about her safety, with the murder of a worker up there and such. But John Soaring Meadow was living on the Ranch, and Ginger's safety was assured.

During the summer festival series, California was filled with hot nights and huge crowds. The band played with him every night for weeks, staying up late and sleeping in. They had a chef who cooked for them on the bus, Doctor's orders, and worked out every day. They had a good rep for being the best looking guys on the tour.

When they had a break after Coachella, the bus left Evan off on Highway 1 at the gate to Gabriel's road with a promise to hook up the next day. He hiked up the hill, never thinking of a toothbrush or clothes, because Ginger was there. She always took care of everything.

He marveled at the fresh coastal scent of Big Sur, and walked slowly among the trees. His flip flops were soon in the back pocket, allowing the soft dirt on the road to cover his feet. He was still a boy from Texas, after all.

The house appeared to be empty, with Gabriel's truck gone and the front door locked, so he went around the back for the key. He and Ginger had stayed there several times during the spring, while the new compound was being built on the coast, so he knew the way things worked.

Upstairs in the kitchen, the scent of cookies filled the warm room, and he could hear the timer ticking on the oven. Ginger would not be far away. He looked past the dining room to the large patio, and smiled. Her strawberry blond hair was blowing in the breeze, as she lay naked on a chaise lounge. Nothing like good timing!

He opened the sliding glass door and stepped outside, savoring in the beauty of Ginger's body. He was always surprised at her rounded high bottom, which ranked up there among the best, and curved up below her strong lovely back and arms. She was belly down on the lounge, with her hair spread out over the shoulders and side of her face. Bless her heart, she was sound asleep, while the sun deepened her freckles and turned her skin a dangerous pink. It didn't take long in Big Sur to get burned.

He hesitated to waken her, wanting just a minute to enjoy the view, but the timer began to buzz inside as he approached. She opened her eyes as he pulled back the veil of long ginger hair, and he knelt down beside her.

"Hey, girl! What's up?"

"Evan! Hi, Honey! What are you doing here?"

"Wanted to stop and check up on you! We've got a break before Outside Lands in San Francisco. I'll get the buzzer." He hurried into the house to turn off the noise, and open the oven door. The scent of the Cowboy Cookies filled the room and he let out a hoot, while Ginger pulled on her little pink dress.

"Smells like they're done," she said, pushing him aside with a big oven mitt. "Let me look."

Evan popped his little finger onto the top of a light brown mound, and Ginger carefully moved the two cookie sheets to the butcher block in the center of the room. Then she jumped into Evan's arms and hugged him hard. She wrapped her legs around his waist and he whirled her around. "I'm so happy to see you, baby!"

"Me too," said Ginger, taking a long sniff of his neck and ears. "You smell good." He put her down on the thick wooden counter for a close look. He brushed her hair aside and took her face in his hands. "What are you starin' at, sweetie?"

"I forget how amazing you are, Ginger. You always make me smile. I just wanted to see how you're doing without me taking care of you."

That was a huge laugh, and they both knew it. She jumped down, got a spatula from the drawer and lifted a cookie up to him. "Here, fancy pants. Welcome home."



John Soaring Meadow was thinking of Ginger at that moment, while he walked in the gardens at the ranch. It was awfully quiet up there without her sassy chatter and conversation. It had been a long time since a woman had affected him that way. Uma had given Ginger a lot of work to do, and then hightailed it back to her newborn family on the coast.

Well, fine thing! He was kind of left to watch over the lovely freckle faced girl, who turned out to be a strong and capable lady. She was not just the window dressing for some fancy guitar god,

but a down to earth woman with a great sense of humor.

They spent a lot of time laughing that first day when he invited her up for a cool drink, and she stayed for hours. They ended up eating his lunch which was prepared by Uma or Ampalia each morning, and drinking a couple of cold beers.

When Gabriel stopped by to pick her up, he found them strolling in the meadow below, examining the seedlings in the second row of Sierra Pines. Each tree had to be tagged and marked at 90 day intervals, since the trees were part of the California State Plan to reforest the land damaged by the fire. He ended up helping reach some high branches, before they all walked up the hill together.

Gabriel was happy to see Ginger cultivate the family of Hawk and me, at such a wonderful time in our lives. She had been steadfast in her care of Evan during his recovery and recuperation. She deserved a break and Gabriel loved having her at the house. It had been a long time since the rooms smelled like fresh bread and the ocean breezes. His parents had been active and often had people in the house when he was growing up, so his solitude was not really second nature. It had grown out of years of practice, after they died.

Ginger cooked dinner for Gabriel that evening, and they talked about the family that I had inherited by some miracle. He told her about my romance with Hawk and John Soaring Meadow's near death in the fire. They finished with dessert in front of a fire in the living room, another place that Gabriel rarely inhabited. Ginger had spent enough time in Big Sur with Evan to know that what appears to be the culture is really the working class of the area. The locals, as they are called, were families who had generations of kids grow up there, leave home, come back, or not. Many young people loved their home in Big Sur, but longed for the rush of the city, the busy highways and fine universities.

She and Evan happened to enter the underground world of Hawk's family through his injury, when Dr. Stephen Hawk saved Evan's left hand. It was a good story, Ginger would say, and she for one was very happy to be out of Texas and in the central part of California.

John had no way of knowing all the stories that filled Ginger's head after that, but she seemed to accept him as he was. He felt like damaged goods after the surgeries on his leg and inability to walk properly, but the work on his body each day was helping with that. His arms were strong again and the heavy thighs and calves of his legs had recovered. His crew was ready to return in the fall after some time off helping with the Falconer/Hawk compound, and they would begin rebuilding the ranch.

During the days that Ginger worked in the gardens, she found comfort in the Big Sur aura, the profound sense of beauty and peace that prevails during most of the year. She could let her hair down and relax, with Evan on tour and well again. He was the most important person in her life, but more like a brother than a lover. It was complicated.

John never mentioned Evan and his connection to Ginger, except for his comments on the musical performances witnessed when Hawk returned to us from jail. The music of that first evening, and many others around the outside table at my cottage had beckoned to John and reminded him of his first serious love. It wasn't Joannie or even his beloved Wynonnah, or football or carving. And while the good smoke of the weed stood tall in his eyes, it was really music that fired his soul. He learned to play the harmonica from his father, and mastered the nuances of sound early on. He dreamed of having a holder like Dylan to bring the instrument to his mouth while playing guitar, and was saving up for his first axe when the voluptuous blond cheerleader

seduced him at the River Inn. Somehow, all that went sideways, lost in the days of young marriage and parenthood.

The divorce and custody laid him a blow from which he never recovered, and left him adrift and aimless, and depressed. The man I met at the General Store years before was at the end of his rope. No wonder he snarled at me, and refused to admit any kind of friendship for a long time. Along with the music, his most tender feelings of love had been trampled and he was commandeered into a negative state of pot and Johnny Walker.

The appearance of my inability to cope with the wild life of Big Sur was a matter of humor at first, helping him to get back in the male dominant position. But eventually, he could see that I was neither an evil nor scheming woman, and actually treated him with kindness. He was a man to behold, in those days, big and strong and kind of mean. The perfect man to teach me a few things.

He never guessed that a gift he placed on my kitchen windowsill would endear me so much. It was a tiny white wild lily that John had picked and placed in a small cracked pottery bowl. He added some soil for the roots and set it in the kitchen one day when he knew I was feeling lonely. Lily Jade was named that day in the back of my mind, although I had no idea at the moment.

It came to me on the way home from my visit to Dr. Sandy Bond, having been assured that Hawk's announcement of my condition was true. Driving from Monterey out to the coast is always a source of mind-clearing inspiration: the escape from normal society to Big Sur. I had a vision of my child being a girl, and the name just flew across my brain. It was a perfect marriage of John and his love and devotion and Hawk, who was the reminder of Big Sur Jade in all its glory.

Now John had regained himself by caring for the Ranch in the early days of my recovery, when the Kevin's estate was divided between me and Belinda. Jacob Walnut had no idea of the intricate healing process taking place in the cave at Jade Beach, and held on tight to John Soaring Meadow for comfort during those first months. He took John into Monterey for new clothes, and had his teeth repaired and whitened. Years of neglect had worn away the enamel and saliva full of tobacco chew stained his smile.

The process took several weeks, and John went into town driving my red Jeep Cherokee, feeling like a new man. He stopped to see Wynnonah at middle school, and was amazed at how much she had grown. She was the lanky little string bean playing tetherball when he arrived the first time, and he almost missed her. She spotted the tall foreboding man standing next to a car, and knew it was her dad. Like many children of divorce, his visits were few and far between. This was partly due to the distance of Big Sur, but mostly because her mother forbade her to see him. Neither of them paid the least bit of attention to Joanie, who settled into middle age as a bookkeeper for a famous bar called Estabans. She often stayed after work for a few drinks, and brought home food for them instead of cooking. Wynnonah learned nothing from her mother except how to avoid having a conversation about her father. Eventually, he brought Wynnonah to the cave during my recovery, and she was there during the time I awakened. I always thought of her as a little blond angel with a book in her lap, snuggled next to the fire where the women cooked. I didn't even know she belonged to John for weeks, coming out of the fog induced by my healers. By then, John was taking me out for walks and building up my strength for a return to real life.

John thought of his daughter on the afternoon of Evan's return, wondering what Ginger was up to on this day off. She was the only young woman besides Wynnonah that he had been around since his brief encounter with marriage, and he reveled in the pure scent of a woman again. She

was so open with him, admiring his ancient leather drawings on the walls. She loved the big desk setup to watch over the Ranch, and bounced on the enormous bed one afternoon while they were taking a break. He handed her a cold beer which she placed against her cheek, to cool off after pulling weeds in the hot sun.

He went into the bathroom and stared at his reflection, wondering what Ginger saw when he was with her. His hair was pulled back tight into a ponytail during the day, to ensure that his men recognized the strength of his position. Without realizing it, he carried a rather gruff set to his mouth, and now he smiled at the reflection. He took off the band that held his long thick black hair, and it fell over his shoulders. Surprisingly the man in the mirror almost resembled that hero he used to be, give or take a few years. Maybe he wasn't a total loss after all. He went to his console and pushed the remote to queue up some Dylan, and a record that Robbie Robertson made a long time ago for his mother. Soon Bobby D was singing about *Cold Irons Bound*, and John had a beer in his hand. He looked at his harmonica on the shelf above his bed, and decided maybe it was time to clean it up a little. One never knows when one might want to play along with those guys, huh?



The afternoon had faded into evening when Evan and Ginger brought their dinner outside to the deck, and watched the sunset. She made his favorite stacked sandwiches by request, and a big fruit salad, while Evan leaned against the counter and caught up with her life. He had kept her posted on the shows and always texted her before he went on stage. It was a habit they made in the first days of travel together, when she sat in the audience to help cheer him on.

With all the excitement of his return, he realized now that he had not really asked her much about what was up in Big Sur. As he looked across the round oak table, he knew how much he loved her. She dug into the big sandwich and licked a piece of avocado off her thumb, with the familiar "whoops" that was her trademark.

"This is so good, Baby," said Evan. "I have been getting some wonderful grub from our chef, but he's not in your league."

"Come on, look at you! I see a little pot under that shirt, from all those fancy meals." She laughed and took another bite.

"I have been working out every day, you would be surprised. He runs a tight ship."

"You know I'm teasing. You look wonderful, Evan. To think of what you have been through, it's a miracle." She glanced at his left wrist which held part of the huge sandwich, and smiled. "You can barely see the scars now."

"I know. Nobody believes how bad it was, Ginger. Dr. Hawk doesn't speak about his patients, so he has them all under a spell about my procedure."

"What do you mean?"

"When *Rolling Stone* came out to see us in Santa Barbara, they told me that they were unable to get Hawk for a quote. Elena handled the whole thing. She does everything for him anyway, you know."

"What's she like, anyway? I know she has worked for him a long time, and she really took good care of us when he was in jail. But it was her job, you know? She never really let down her guard."

"I think you are jealous of her, Ginger. She is very pretty."

"Oh, come on. She doesn't hold a candle to Dyanna, and Hawk is just so smitten with her that he can't see straight."

"When they are working, Elena is his right hand. She takes care of everything, and keep the patient records as well. She stayed with me a couple of times at night, when I was in bad shape. I was lucky to have her company."

"So there's no bad blood there? You know how women are!" Ginger poured the chilled Riesling into her glass, and took a sip. "Sure you don't want any?"

"No, I have stayed away from alcohol, and part of that is actually from Elena's teaching. The sugar produced by alcohol in the body slows healing, did you know that? It is a process of being turned into acetate."

"Is that so?" Ginger giggled, and took another sip. "Well, I will drink your share of this fine wine from Gabriel's store."

"You seem to be having quite a time here, Ginge. I'm glad they have welcomed you into the family. I would be jealous of him, but I think Gabriel is sweet on Dyanna. In a secret way."

"Really? Did you see them together or something?"

"The night of Hawk's big return, when we had the party outside, I was warming up and nobody was paying attention. I watched Dyanna come outside with Gabriel, they were arm in arm. She came over to join Hawk in the circle and he stayed in the background. When we did the big cheer and Hawk lifted her up, I looked into Gabriel's eyes. It was just a chance thing. He was crying, but it struck me as a sadness in him."

"You know that he made this fabulous cradle for the baby, and took it over there to surprise her. It is just beautiful. I helped him with the linen colors."

"We won't ask for trouble here, they have all been so good to us. It's probably just our Texan imaginations."

## CHAPTER NINE

Gabriel West was the subject of my discussion with Hawk that night as well, while we talked about the tribal services to be arranged for Lily Jade. He was waiting for us when we returned from our first beach walk, and took some amazing photos as we climbed the hill. The breeze was blowing and stirred my hair around, making a bright halo in the sun. We looked like an ancient painting in the shots he sent later by e-mail, and Hawk was excited. He wanted to start an electronic book of our daughter's earthly adventure, which struck me as somewhat out of character.

Hawk found us snuggled together in the galley, leaning against the huge slabs of polished jade, and snapped several more photos with his phone. Then he sat down beside me and opened his laptop, so we could view the family. In the late afternoon a cool wind had come up, so the fire was lit in the copper room, reflecting on the walls and ceiling. "I will handle the book, Dyanna. I want it to be available for the Ceremony of Life, which will be one year and one day after her birth." He paced around the room as I looked at the photos he had carefully placed in order, including the new ones.

There were several from the night of Lily Jade's birth which I had never seen, taken in the darkened room while I was in labor. Hawk was careful to capture only the slightest image of my body in the candlelight, and Uma hovering over the crowning. It was all kind of eerie, the way the fire burned next to us and the room hung in splendor with reflections of the action. If I had known about this, I would have guessed that Gabriel orchestrated the whole thing with his visual finesse. But it was Hawk who was the creator of the masterpiece, with [soft still photos of the night she was born](#). He would put it to music as well, which was something I had never expected. Soon the memory of Ginger bringing Evan's compositions to my bed came rushing back.

"I kept the music just as he recorded it," said Hawk, pushing the button on his computer. Now the room was full of the lilting sounds of soft strings, and the beat of hands against the guitar, with a steady rise to the finish. I don't think I heard much of that, but Hawk says I did listen over and over, as the loop passed through the earbud. It calmed me down and gave some structure to the pain. Now we were together, listening with LJ in my arms. She opened her eyes to look at me, and Hawk went ballistic!

"See, she recognizes those sounds, they were part of her birth! I knew it! We should ask Evan to play for us at the ceremony, if that is possible. You know he is on tour now. His reviews are incredible".

I watched his face as he kissed the tiny nose of our daughter, and wondered who this guy was? Fatherhood had turned him inside out. I had never seen him so focused on anything but his work, including me.

"Well now we know why you tried so hard to knock me up!" Our eyes met at the very moment Lily Jade made her first real smile!

"Dyanna, do you realize how this has changed my life? I don't think so. You have always been caught up in your own drama, and I have been part of that, but you never see me at work. Or any place except here with you. I am a father! The father of this incredible gift of a girl! And we created her together out of love and the mystery of nature. She is a miracle, made from the messengers swimming upstream to meet you. I knew it that night, I swear I did. I stayed inside you until dawn and I prayed. Now I know that really happened."

He was so close to me that I could feel his breath, and it was shocking. So this is why Uma was not surprised. She knew every detail. They both knew before I did. It hit me between the eyes, like a bolt of lightning. Hawk studied my face for a moment, and lifted Lily Jade out of my arms. He walked over to the windows holding her, and speaking softly.

I stood up and went to the bedroom where her little cradle stood in the corner, and noticed the blankets had been folded on the rocking chair. We put them outside each morning when she was with me. I wondered if Gabriel West was in on the conspiracy as well, and the thought of this made my stomach churn. I felt like one of the Stepford Wives, a character from the old classic film where women were robotic Barbie Dolls. I began to question the entire path of our love affair, for Uma had known all about my body for a long time. Did she plant Hawk under my nose and hope for the best?

The voice of Jacob Walnut rushed through my mind, warning me of the indigenous family that cared for me and saved my life. "They have something in mind for you," he said one day, while harping at me about my stubborn rules for the ranch house. "You are a wealthy woman, Dyanna. You have a lot of land and the sweetest spot on the coast. Mark my words."

"Hey," said Hawk, standing behind me with the baby in his arms. "What are you doing in here? We are talking about the Celebration of Life".

"I was just thinking of something Jacob said about you a long time ago."

"Well, that can't be good. Listen, she is wet and I am going to call Gabriel about the party. Shall I ask him to come for dinner?"

"He was here all day, Hawk. How about tomorrow? I'm kind of tired." He nodded and handed over LJ to me.

I found myself dropping huge tears on her little tummy as I changed the diaper. My breasts ached and my head was full of lousy feelings. The bubble of heaven popped, as I knew it would. Only this time I was on a mission to find out exactly what they did to me in that cave at Jade Beach.



Jacob Walnut was not thinking of me at the moment, but considering Big Sur in general as the place where Belinda would move very soon. Ty had confessed some things to him that morning, after a terrible argument in the kitchen. Jacob had been away for three weeks in Europe, and returned to find an unsuitable situation at home. The routine seemed to be centered around Belinda, and Ty had been creating a lot of dishes to please the girl.

He knew that she enjoyed the delights of sushi, and spicy Thai dishes, and the larders were full of candy twizzles and M&Ms, and lots of Orange Crush. He opened the refrigerator late on the night of his return, on a day when Ty had been off, and found messy half eaten take-out food still in the paper wrapping. It was the last straw.

He rose early the next morning and lumbered into the kitchen like a grizzly bear. Ty was setting out the eggs to warm before cooking, and didn't notice his boss arrive.

"Good morning, Ty," said Jacob, in a voice so loud that the man jumped an inch off the floor. He

gently laid the eggs down and turned with a smile to face his boss. He was well aware of the moods that accompanied Jacob, and the fact that they had increased once again after the disappearance of Uma and me. Ty was not aware of the incident of my discovery of Jacob with Marisette Mendez after Louise's death, but knew that something awful must have torn us apart. He was hoping for a good woman to balance out the dueling brothers, and they could all settle down a bit. As it was, Teddy had taken to texting requests for food and drink to be delivered to his suite of rooms while en route, and Ty rarely saw the man.

He knew from Belinda's descriptions what was going on with the women and Teddy, but that was none of his business. He actually wished Jacob had somebody to lavish his energy on, but dared not breathe a word.

This particular morning Ty had been very happy with the peaceful routine of Belinda and Big Ted, and arose thinking he might just get lucky one of these days. He was barely able to hide his attraction for the budding teenager, who had begun to ripen into a woman. It was the best time to share a few months and reap the benefits of a virgin.

Ty knew the way to Belinda's heart was fairly easy, she was still a bit confused by life and liked to keep things simple. She trusted him because Uma did, neither one of them having a clue about his underlying character. He was an amazing attractive man in fabulous shape, with a job to die for, and could have had any number of Beverly Hills nannies, actresses, models or hippie chicks. Instead he chose Belinda for his next subject. "Good morning Mr. Walnut," he said, standing straight and tall. "Welcome home."

"I am not happy with the condition of this kitchen, Ty, or the vast amount of cash you have spent on crappy junk food and drink. What are you thinking? I'm sure this is all for Belinda, who is barely able to tie her own shoes."

"You know, that is really not true anymore, Sir. Belinda has made a great deal of progress. She..."

"Spare me the excuses, I'm tired of this whole thing. Every time I come home something has occurred that concerns that girl. She is a pain in the ass. Sorry, Kevin." Jacob patted his heart and looked up for a moment, and Ty laughed, thinking he was supposed to.

Instead, Jacob slammed his fist on the granite counter and rattled all the miniature orchids in their pots. "I am not kidding here, and you are treading on thin ice. I have placed my trust in you to run this household and ride herd on Teddy, and you have totally screwed up. What the fuck is that?"

"I don't know what you are so upset about, Mr. Walnut. Your favorite dishes are all at

the ready, the wine cellar is stocked, we have two closets of fine linens and a garden of organic produce and herbs. Perfect for entertaining your guests, which is what you hired me to do." Ty stood with his hands on his hips, and bright red cheeks.

"I think you are paying way too much attention to Belinda, which will end very soon because she is on her way to Big Sur!" Jacob took the white cup set out for him and filled it with black coffee. Ty watched him quietly, trying to read the angry thoughts in Jacob's head.

"I am very fond of Belinda, as is Big Ted and your brother as well. We thought that was the idea, to bring her back to life. Well, she's here. She eats and drinks, she laughs, she actually talks."

"Horseshit. Something is up around here, and I have a feeling you are in the middle of it. Where is Belinda anyway?"

"She is asleep, like she always is at 7:15 AM."

"And how do you know that? Did you do a bed check? Teddy has told me that she has been spying on him and his antics down the hall in the house of mirrors." Jacob poured a generous shot of Jack Daniels into his coffee, something Ty had never seen him do. He sipped his brew and walked over to the sliding glass doors.

"Yes, I am aware of this, Mr. Walnut." "And how is that?"

"She told me. Belinda told me one morning, while she was eating her cereal. Like it was nothing. I thought maybe she learned from her dad. He was quite a ladies' man, wasn't he?"

"Kevin Stone was a great guy, and never brought his daughter into the picture with his women. Until Dyanna..."

Jacob gulped from the cup and burned his throat with hot coffee. He began to choke and Ty ran over to help. He placed the cup on the counter and slapped Jacob soundly on the back.

"Are you Ok, sir?"

"Yes, Goddamn it." Jacob sunk into a high backed stool at the counter, wiping his eyes. Ty handed him a glass of water, and returned to the eggs. The room was silent as Big Ted joined them.

"Good Morning all," said Big Ted, placing the newspapers on the counter. "Here's your dailies, Mr. W." Jacob continued to stare at the ceiling.

"Hi, BT" said Ty. "I'm making omelets this morning, care to join."

"I don't want an omelet," grumbled Jacob. "I want a fried egg sandwich."

"Coming up" said Ty, as he carefully selected a warm brown egg.

"Did you have a good trip, Mr. Walnut?" Big Ted was oblivious to the tension in the air, having lived most of his life under such circumstances. He had learned the first week at work in Utah to shine it on. Genoa was not a place to make jokes or nose into anyone's business, especially for a young black man who was unable to read.

Ty shook his head signaling Big Ted to be quiet, but Jacob would have not have any part of it. "My trip was fine, thank you. What is not fine is what I have come home to."

"What do you mean, Mr. Walnut?" Big Ted stepped forward and puffed out his chest, as he was prone to do when on the offensive. He was an impressive sight in his white shirt and khaki pants, fresh from the shower.

"He is unhappy with Belinda, and her behavior around here," said Ty.

"I am quite capable to speaking for myself," said Jacob. He pushed the empty cup across the counter for a refill, and turned to Big Ted. "That little shy innocent disabled girl has grown into a

spoiled teenaged monster. Both of you should realize how she is playing you. I can't believe she spends her evenings watching my brother and his women outside the window, while you two merrily sleep or watch dirty movies."

Big Ted looked at Ty with eyes wide open, and found him to be carefully cracking the egg in a small pan of melted butter. He knew he was on his own. "Mr. Walnut, I have done my best to ride herd on Belinda, but I had no idea that she would recover some of her past behavioral patterns. If she actually did that. I'm not sure what happened..."

"We are going to make a plan today to move Belinda up to Big Sur, which is where Uma wanted her after her recovery. I would say that is an understatement with regard to becoming a teenaged Peeping Tom and runaway. You had to chase her down into Laurel Canyon with that phone you insisted on giving her. She could have been raped, or murdered down there. On second thought, maybe not."

"I will do as you ask, sir. I am fully aware of her deficiencies, but I thought her current mode of operation was much more normal than being in a catatonic state." Ted stepped back and stared directly at Jacob. He waited for several moments while Jacob swirled his fresh coffee with cream, and sipped a bit. Then he stood up and carried the cup into the hallway and disappeared.



My phone sounded a gentle bling in the morning, while I was feeding Lily Jade, and I made a mental note to find it as soon as we were finished. But we were having some problems, with my daughter learning the trick of moving her mouth and almost tugging on my nipple. The first time she did this I jumped, thinking something was wrong, and quickly stood up with her in my arms. She immediately started to cry, while I rubbed the sore nipple, which was also unusual. "Hey, Sweet pie, what's wrong?"

So we switched to the other side, and she settled down. She was too young to be teething, so this was a new twist. The bling from my phone sounded again twice, reminding me I was being rude according to Apple. Now I was kind of upset, wishing someone would join me so that I could look at my phone without disturbing the baby. But I was too tired to worry about it, and time passed before we were both in the realm again. Hours later, she was asleep in my arms and I was asleep in the chair. It was Uma's laugh that awakened me.

"Sorry Moana! But you two are such a sight there, curled up in that rocker."

"I had a hard time with her this morning, she kind of bit my nipple. I had to keep switching her around."

"Here, let me take her." Uma gently lifted the baby into her arms and I stretched my legs out. "I was wondering where you were."

"Where else would I be?" I was hungry and cranky, no doubt about it.

"How about some lunch, and a walk? Or a nice bath? I'll take her into the other room with me."

She walked away with my daughter and I stood up, stiff as a board. This was not any fun, I thought.

Just then, the phone went off again, and I remembered it from earlier. It was laying on the table in my bathroom, and there was a message from Jack Walters. He wanted me to call him.

I stepped out of the long white t-shirt which had belonged to Hawk, and started the water for my tub. Soon I was stepping into a fresh bath with my hair piled on top in a knot, and listening to Jack's message. There was news about the Dog park. I sunk into the water and laughed out loud, thinking of the issue that was so important to Louise. It had completely slipped my mind during the past few months.

"Hello, Dyanna! How are you, little Mother?"

"Well Jack, I must say I've had some ups and downs today, but that's how it goes when you have a new baby."

"Yes, I know. I have four of them. All grown now, but I remember those times. How is she doing, this miracle child?"

"Oh, Jack, she is so incredible. I can't believe she is real sometimes. Especially since I never expected her to be in my life."

"Yes, I guess it was quite a surprise. Jacob Walnut filled me in on some of the details." "What does Jacob know about this? He hasn't even seen her."

"He seems to be quite interested, my dear. I believe Uma has spoken to him since the birth. He is very much involved in this new occasion in your life."

"Her name is Lily Jade Falconer Hawk, and she was born here at the new house on my property about seven weeks ago. She is doing fine, and so are we. Hawk is over the moon."

"I hope to meet him one day, Dyanna. But the reason I called was that Anthony Bravano, Jr. has surfaced. He wants a meeting with you as soon as possible about the property in Pacific Palisades."

"You mean Louise's Dog park? I thought you said they were not interested in discussing it." "That was the first comment from the family, after we finally tracked him down in Sicily. Complete resistance."

"I was in Sicily with Louise when she got so ill. What a beautiful place. It figures he would be there. It is supposedly full of gangsters."

"Yes, I believe you were in Corleone?"

"Teddy Walnut saved our lives, he owns a house there. They took such good care of us, Jack."

"Well, the Bravano family has ranches in the area near Corleone. We found the deeds to several parcels in the search for the Palisades property. It is in a trust owned by the three brothers."

I put the phone on speaker and turned on the hot water. "Sorry, Jack. I'm in the tub! Hope you don't mind."

"Of course not. But we have had several conversations since then with Mr. Bravano, and he is determined to meet with you face to face. I told him you have just given birth, but that didn't

phase him. He called this morning and said you have had time to recover enough to come down to LA. I guess he has quite a few kids of his own."

"No big deal, huh? Well, what happens if I don't?"

"He may have another buyer."

"I thought the property was not for sale!"

"That was his first salvo. Now, apparently, things have changed. I know how much you want to do this for Louise, or I would never bring it up now. Do you think it's possible to come down here for a day or so?"

"I would have to bring Lily Jade, I'm breast feeding. But other than that, we are in good shape. I don't see why not. Let me talk to Uma, ok? I'll get back to you."

I stared at the reflections on the ceiling on this quiet afternoon, and thought about the vices of Los Angeles. The traffic and smog, the hustle and all that stuff. But something inside me wanted to go, and face a challenge now that I was a mother. It might be good for me. And most of all, for my dear Louise.

## CHAPTER TEN

Uma had no objections to my trip at all, as long as she could drive and keep an eye on her niece. Surprisingly, it was Hawk that hit the ceiling, stomping around like a spoiled kid, ranting about the dangers of traveling with Lily Jade at this age.

“Stephen, she is almost eight weeks old. Our mother took us to Sacramento with her when you were tiny. I remember it. Don’t be such a crabby Dad. Go on back to Stanford for some surgery. It will do you good.”

It didn’t help that I laughed out loud, folding some things into the soft tote bag for Lily Jade. I had decided it was best to keep her things separate, which turned out to be a very good way to manage a child. Uma supplied the travel supplies for the baby, quickly folding storage bags into the pockets for laundry and fresh diapers. Despite the eco war on paper diapers, she actually believed they were better for all of us, and it sure helped with the laundry.

“They say that babies with disposable diapers have less chaff and irritation,” said Uma, watching me pick out some clothes to wear. I had not really left the property except for a brief ride with Gabriel, so I wasn’t even sure what would fit. My body was feeling pretty good, and Uma had given me stretches and yoga to tighten the uterus muscles as well as the belly. I knew it would be awhile before I wore those jeans from Paris, but that was a lifetime ago. For now, lots of leggings and cool tops worked, and the little dresses I loved.

My daughter had a lot of beautiful things to wear, with many gifts from Ginger and Dr. Sandy Bond, along with Gabriel and John Soaring Meadow and all the women of the Esalen family. I picked out some pastel onesies, light enough for the heat in So Cal but protecting her skin, and even a little cap that Slow Dove had fashioned from the softest green cashmere and beautiful white hummingbird feathers.

I knew this man had a strong connection to Hawk, so I had welcomed him into the nursery to see Lily Jade. He stood at the cradle enchanted by the little seducer, and then shyly handed me a package wrapped in handmade paper. I studied the tall lanky boy/man, who was such a dreamy quiet person. He had these huge eyes and the long slender hands of an artist. Hawk had taken him under his wing and Slow Dove was helping to plan the Ceremony of Life.

Now Hawk stood in the doorway watching us, holding on to his little girl as if he would never see her again. “Are you sure you’re up to this,” he asked, for the tenth time. I smiled at him and held up the cutest little red booties made from soft leather. They had come from John Soaring Meadow, of course.

“I’m fine, and Uma will be there. It will be good for Lily Jade to see the world at such an early stage.”

“I smell Jacob Walnut in all of this,” said Hawk, playing thumbs with his daughter.

“Why would you say that, Stephen?” Uma approached her brother and stared into his eyes. “Jacob has not been in the mix for months. He has kept his distance.”

“Just a feeling. He is waiting to pounce. He has a big movie to make, and my wife is making him wait.”

"They told me to take my time. And I will. But I think It's good for me to get out there in the world, Hawk. I've been cooped up here for months."

"I didn't hear any complaints." Lily Jade came out with quite a howl just then, and we all laughed. She was the peacemaker.



Big Ted had always known that Belinda would not be in his care forever. He had wished for her recovery, and fought tooth and nail to keep her alive at Genoa during the first year. Now she was escaping to the wilds of Big Sur, and God knows what else. He hated being manipulated by other people without the ability to alter things. One day that would change. He told himself these things while packing the new suitcases Belinda had picked out yesterday. She seemed to be on top of the world, which hurt his feelings even more. Now that the time had come to let her go, he was feeling very much left out in the cold.

Living in the Walnut household would be a life changing experience for most everyone, but especially a man who had never had his own room until now. His feelings about wanting more from life had sprung from his mind without warning, and he didn't know what to do. He would talk to Uma and perhaps Dyanna when they arrived. He would tell them he wanted to go to Big Sur! Surely someone could use a strong wonderful man with a good knowledge of medicine and self defense. They were all kind of heathens up there anyway, or so he was told by Jacob Walnut. Big Ted was not really afraid of anything after Genoa and his Los Angeles experience, but he dearly wanted to be a free man.

Suddenly, Jacob Walnut had turned very toxic, a condition that was common with the patients he served in Utah. The Genoa inmates were the most difficult types in the country, and sponsored by the Jacob Walnuts of the world. He thought Jacob had been his kind of guy, with his kindness in the first few weeks. Now he had really gone sour, and with him went the idea of permanent employment. He knew Ty was feeling the same way, after years of loyal service.

Belinda stood in the bathroom, carefully eyeing herself in the mirror. He had given her the task of packing up the toiletries in a lovely duffle bag that had belonged to Jacob's mother. All her belongings were stashed in the White Bedroom, along with the memories of some wild trysts, according to Ty. Big Ted was relieved that Belinda would be leaving the house now, since he knew Ty was after the young flesh of Kevin Stone's daughter.

How LA was that? Everyone here was fucking their nannies and maids anyway.

He emptied a drawer of shorts and t-shirts, scrambled around and disorganized by Belinda. She had no sense of neatness or order, so that was up to Ted as well. Maybe now was the time to get away from this drama after all. He had always wanted to be a bodyguard!



Hawk had gone into Monterey with Slow Dove soon after our discussion, and Uma decided it would be a good time for a massage before the trip. It was the first official bodywork since the birth of Lily Jade, and just for fun. I fed my girl and put her down in the cradle so we could watch over her.

Uma prepared the massage table in the corner of my bath designed by Gabriel to fold out from the wall. It had a swivel underneath and a shelf for the goods Uma liked to have at hand. A skylight glowed from above, showering warmth and light both mystical and unforgiving. Truthfully, I had not examined myself in the full length mirror as was my habit from days of old. This was partly because I was too tired most of the time to think of such things, and maybe also a reluctance to face the facts. The last time I saw my belly before the birth, it was stretched beyond comprehension and gleaming with special oils to prevent scarring.

I had carried her fairly high, in the tradition of girls, but not so bad that I couldn't breathe or eat properly. Uma told me many tales of such things in jest as I grew larger, thanking God for my new stature and lanky build. She was more worried about my pelvis stretching enough to accommodate a natural birth. Both of us had our minds set on that idea, since the complications of breech and emergency cesarean sections would require a visit to the hospital.

Uma did not want to share this birth, and I had trusted her implicitly. Now I would get the low down on how I was recovering.

I disrobed and slipped onto the redwood panel which was covered by a soft pad with a thick white towel. The scent of Uma's oils always seemed to linger on those towels, despite the laundry and hanging outside in the sunshine. It was a game changing moment to rejoin my life, where I had confessed so many things to this woman, and she to me. I closed my eyes with content as she approached.

"This is the cool setup, Moana! I was amazed at Gabriel's design when he showed me the plans. Do you know that the table is adjustable for height as well?"

"That would be fairly obvious, Uma! Not everyone is my size, and you will surely open Uma's Therapy Studio one day."

She burst out laughing and rolled my body over to face down. "Well, you are in rare form. Ready for the City of Angels, huh?"

"I must say I am looking forward to this trip. It will be something to remember the rest of our lives."

With Jacob Walnut at the other end, and then your Dog park, it will be very exciting."

"I don't plan to see Jacob, Uma. I want to be in the Palisades with Lily Jade. I've already talked to the woman who handled Louise's condo and she has a place for us to stay."

"You don't want to mix it up with Belinda and Jacob, huh? Can't say that I blame you. Your peace of mind should be foremost. Is there a bed for me as well?"

"I thought you would stay at the Walnut estate."



"Don't you want me around, little mama? I have to keep an eye on you two." "There are two bedrooms, Uma. I'm way ahead of you."

Hawk and Slow Dove went directly to [Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey](#), to pick up some special leather wrappings and various unfinished gemstones from the old General Store. Downstairs in

the basement there was a bin full of these chunks of rose quartz and copper and tiger's eye, along with small pieces of jade and rubies. The owner of the original store had been a rock hound and made the place famous in the 1950's by catering to the artisans in the community. Tourists flocked to the store on weekends to watch the local craftsmen work out on the back deck overlooking the Monterey Harbor, where Bill Hyler allowed them to work on their wares. He acquired many sacred bags of the gems by word of mouth, and the old hands on Cannery Row.

When the Row began to develop as a tourist attraction and business center, many of the old canneries on the ocean side were vacated, while the upper side of the street converted the storehouses into office buildings and tourist stores. There were a lot of late nights when Bill and his friends shared a bottle of red wine and played cards in those canneries, telling stories of the Steinbeck era from the horse's mouth.

Slow Dove heard the tales of the old Cannery Row characters as a child, and often traveled to the General Store with his mother to collect the stones and beads and leather for her costumes. By now Hyler had retired and turned the store over to his daughter, and she kept the goods under lock and key.

Hawk parked on the street by the Wharf, slipping into the last space next to Heritage Harbor. Everyone in Monterey knows that a local will never pay for parking, it is just against the rules. You might walk six blocks in the rain, but so what. That's what hoods are for!

Today they had a final chore to accomplish before the assemblage of a headpiece for Lily Jade, and the wedding gift for her mother. All this had been kept secret from everyone, for they had made a pact. Slow Dove was becoming adept at his passion for Indigenous Art, and protected his sources. He would probably not have revealed them to Hawk, if not for the job he was given to produce the Jade Chain for the Ceremony of Life.

They carried two large canvas duffle bags with sturdy handles made of leather, and entered the store from the back. As they walked around the side from the entrance to the wharf, the boats were coming in from scouting for salmon. It would soon be time for the catch that supported a shrinking industry of Monterey fisherman. Several of them passed and waved at the two Big Sur Indian dudes, as they were called in familiar jest. It was still a family and always would be, with the locals. Inside the back door was a stairway that led directly to the lower storage area, making it possible to go undetected and bypass the curious eyes of the tourists. Hawk followed Slow Dove down the old wooden stairs, worn and sodden with many years of moisture and use, and watched him flip on the light switch at the bottom. In the shadowy room, Hawk was surprised to see a large set of bins and many shelves filled with goods. It was very well organized for the old purveyor and his special guests.

Slow Dove extracted a slender long flashlight and switched it on before approaching the left wall. The blue light revealed the mixture of stones as they surveyed several huge pouches on the floor. There were no markings, for a good reason: this was a secret stash.

He opened the first pouch to reveal the pink and white sparkle of rose quartz, in deep shades to very pale.

"Please open your bag, Hawk." He took a large scoop from the wall and dug into the stones, surveying them with his fingers before carefully laying them into the bottom of the duffle.

Hawk picked one and looked at the shape and color. "This warm color should be for Dyanna's piece. It reminds me of her skin tone. It's beautiful."

"I have studied both your wife and daughter in the noon light. I have the colors set in my mind." He moved to the next pouch, which contained pieces of cut jade, in a variety of colors. Some were polished and some raw, but the markings remained unscathed.

For the jade, Slow Dove used his fingers instead of the scoop, taking hands full of the mixed green stones and placing them in his bag. Hawk held the light while the next pouch was opened, revealing mixed colored stones buffed to a polished rounded form.

After all the pouches were sourced and carefully closed with ties of leather, they returned up the stairs and out the door. Hawk flipped open the luggage cart waiting outside, and they rolled the goods around to the front of the wharf. With their shades and leather gloves, the two men melted into the fishermen and tourists of the late afternoon, as they hauled the heavy bags to the trunk of Hawk's car. Soon they were on Highway 1, heading south to Big Sur.



Uma and I had a quiet early dinner in the kitchen of the cottage, with cold salmon and a fresh salad from her gardens at the ranch. She packed up some supplies to take in the morning, and I finished up the task of nursing Lily Jade.

We planned to leave early the next morning, so I snuggled into bed after giving her a bath. I tucked that sweet girl in the cradle and she closed her eyes right away. It was as if she knew about the trip.

I smiled as I lay there with the stars beginning to rise, wishing for this picture to take with me to LaLa land.



Hawk and Slow Dove decided to stop at Rocky Point for dinner, and enjoyed the sunset with their fresh crab and huge baked potatoes. Hawk dipped the meat into his butter melted with lemon, and savored the taste. He watched Slow Dove remove his crab from the shell and cut the pieces precisely before covering them with ground pepper. He did not use the butter but a small dish of cocktail sauce instead. The waiter was an old hand and bantered with Hawk while he took their drink orders, suggesting a smooth Hahn Riesling. There was a special little cheese plate on the house with the wine, which was perfect to whet their appetites.

Slow Dove tasted his wine several times with small sips, leading Hawk to believe it was his first adventure with the Hahns. By the end of the meal, they were both laughing and sharing a chocolate torte with ice cream inside.

It was the first time Hawk had completely relaxed since before Lily Jade was born. He sat back in his chair and watched the sunset while Slow Dove explained his plan for the gifts. By the time they had reached the ranch and unloaded the bags in

the third carriage house, they were laughing and planning the surprise. Only John Soaring Meadow saw them arrive, but he was busy watching Homeland, and paid no attention. It was their secret.



Lily Jade awakened me at midnight from a deep slumber, and I was surprised to find the bed empty beside me. Hawk should have been home hours ago, but he would have let me know if something was wrong. I checked my phone and there was no message, but my daughter was a restless devil for awhile. She seemed anxious and stopped nursing several times to just stare at me.

I held her tight and waited as I had been advised, and soon she found the nipple again. We both drifted off to sleep like that a couple of times, in the quiet balmy night.

I was awakened by Hawk at 4:30 am, climbing into bed with us completely naked. He gave me a boozy kiss on the cheek and passed out beside the open window. I climbed out of bed to change the baby, and he never moved. When she was settled in the cradle, I sat down to pee in the bathroom, and giggled as I heard him snoring. When I crawled into bed and kissed him goodnight, I knew he was a goner.

Good thing we were leaving early.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

We departed a little after dawn, with Uma at the wheel of the pearly white Lexus SUV and her niece in my lap, bundled warmly in the sling. LJ was still asleep, and had been that way since Uma came in to awaken us. I had ended up snuggled into a big pillow in the great room, since Hawk was so noisy. I knew Uma would be sleeping in the cottage bed and rising very early. It was a sisterhood thing, our love for rising early on travel days.

She made me some tea with cinnamon and nutmeg and I jumped into the tub, waiting for my mothering duties to begin. I had suddenly mastered the skills of doing everything much faster than usual, which many of you will understand. No lounging around with a new baby, there is always something to do.

I met Uma in the cottage kitchen and we shared a smoothie while she finished packing the ever-present basket for travel. She had all the supplements and fresh fruit, nuts, vegetables and home baked bread stashed, and now she added my favorite new item: [Romiano non-GMO cheese!](#) Perhaps my taste buds had changed along with my body, but this one particular brand was something I craved from the first time I tasted it. It was made by a family in Northern California since 1919. You might say they have perfected the subtle flavor! Uma was determined to learn how to create cheese up at the ranch, but for now we stocked up at Whole Foods.

When I returned to the cradle to feed Lily Jade, I found her peacefully snoozing, so we decided to take her out to the car. I bundled her into the sling while Uma grabbed a few more clean towels and diapers. I would be changing her in the back seat, or so we planned.

All the while, Hawk slept like a log and hardly moved when I kissed his neck and cheek. Uma put her arm around me and we walked to the car in the warm misty morning. When I slid into the seat and she closed the door, a shiver went up my spine, as a reminder of important adventures to come. It was like the days when I first drove off to the studio, always unsure of what awaited me.

Uma slid into the driver's seat and secured her belt, and turned to me. "Ready?"

I nodded and smiled at her, thinking that she had been so strong with me for some of the most important times of my life. She was always the soft core of steel, so I was not the least bit concerned about our journey.

Big Sur was still asleep with the exception of a few early morning walkers, and we cut across the back road to Gonzales ahead of the field workers in their big trucks and vans. There were some rough patches just before the paved driveway to the winery and Highway 101, and Lily Jade began to stir. I could feel my breasts full of milk, and soon she was enjoying a sunrise breakfast driving through Greenfield. I turned my back to the window so that we could be comfortable, while she hungrily sucked and smacked at my nipple. Uma was amused at the energy involved with my daughter's feeding, but remained silent while we rolled through King City and out onto the open road. She told me later that she had been trained by her Wiyama midwives to become invisible with a new mother and child. "You must not break the bond between them in those first few weeks, if at all possible."

I was comfortable with the sun rising over my shoulder, the soft leather seats and plenty of room to stretch my legs. Lily Jade fed from both breasts for a long time, closed her eyes and drifted off. Uma turned in to the rest stop before Paso Robles, and stepped outside to stretch and use the

restroom. I climbed into the back to change Lily Jade, while she stared at me with those dreamy green eyes. She was wide awake now and I was amazed at how tiny she looked on the leather bucket seats. All this made it easier to handle her, and we were ready to roll when Uma returned.

“Go stretch your legs for a minute,” she said. “The restrooms are clean and nice.” She slipped into the back and inspected my work, just to be sure we were ok. I laughed to myself as I entered the big new California stucco building that replaced the old rest stop of years ago. Uma was right, the Ladies Room was pristine and empty. I stretched and took my time.

Uma was in the back with Lily Jade when I returned. “Why don’t you two stay here and take a little cat nap? You didn’t get much sleep last night”



Belinda was restless and paced around the room while Big Ted checked her closets and drawers one more time. She had taken a shower earlier and her hair was curling softly around her face as it dried. She was turning out to be a rather pretty girl, thought Ted, as he sat down on her bed. Perhaps even in the lines of her father with that strong determined jaw. When she was angry, it jutted out a bit too far, but that was a giveaway to her prudent caregiver. He knew when to stay clear, especially now that the monthly cycle of her period had become predictable. Her face also broke out around the chin at that time, which was something he tried to handle.

His patients at Genoa had used a product called Proactive, which was non-prescription but great for young eruptive skin. He persuaded Belinda to use it every day, and most of the time it worked. Ted wanted her to be in tip top shape when she arrived in Big Sur!

Belinda’s body had also improved with her habit of walking (and crawling) around the grounds of the Walnut estate. She was rather nimble and lean, with the tiny belly of a teenage girl. The thick dark lashes and brows set off her brown eyes, and he could see why Ty had become rather enamored. He had not cared for the pathetic wounded child who first lay on the bed in front of Ted a couple of years ago. Nor had Ty seen her in the strait jacket with her mouth limp from drugs, and drooling on the sheet.

“When will Uma be here?” asked Belinda, breaking the silence between them.

“I have no idea, sweetie,” said Big Ted. He stood up and stretched. “I’ll go and check with Mr. Walnut.”

Belinda went to the Dutch door and peered out to the front yard. “Let’s get the show on the road,” she said, remembering her dad’s favorite expression. Uma would be easier to handle than a house full of men.



The next thing I knew, we were in the tunnel near Gaviota on Highway 101, and I blinked my eyes in the dark. Uma was listening to some kind of soft jazz in the front seat, while we slept away in the back. I would eventually learn that Lily Jade’s penchant for sleep would be worth millions to a weary new mother! I think she inherited this trait from me, and it is one of my best ways to cope with life.

As we exited the tunnel, I sat up, squinting at the bright summer sunlight. She glanced at me in the mirror and smiled. "Welcome to Neverland, Moana! Did you have a good nap?"

Lily Jade began to cry softly, and I feared I had awakened her. I opened the sling and kissed her forehead, which was damp with sweat. The poor thing was way too hot, and I put her on my lap right away. Uma opened the window and the breeze drifted back, cooling us off, but we were strapped in tight!

"I must have just zonked out," I said, opening my little dress to feed the baby. She handed me a cool bottle of water. We'll be at the rest stop in a minute."

I looked at the familiar structures where I had often stopped on the road to Los Angeles, and realized I really had to pee. Uma went first and by the time she was back, LJ was asleep again.

As I walked to the restroom, the smell of the ocean filled the air, and the breeze was blowing in from the Santa Barbara coast. It was relatively quiet, and before noon, so I was alone in ladies room. I stood in front of the mirror as I washed my hands, and noticed I had not put any flowers in my hair!

Uma was standing outside with Lily Jade in her arms as I hurried back. "I forgot my flowers! Omigod, I haven't done that for a long time!"

She laughed and peeked inside the cotton blanket. "I've got you covered, little mama." She handed me the baby and popped open the trunk. There, in the upper corner, was a plastic container filled with greens and blooms from her garden. She reached in and handed me a spray of my favorite pink Cecile Brunner roses.

I decided to sit in the front, after using my reflection to pin that lovely gift of flowers in my hair. In the mirror I could see the pink cheeks of sleep and the southern California heat, along with my bright blue eyes. Now I felt ready to step back into the world!

Soon I was strapped in and Lily Jade was settled into the sling. We pulled back onto the road headed for Santa Barbara and the Malibu shortcut. This was sacred ground for us, and we were ready to roll!



Slow Dove approached the back door to the nursery and found it open. He entered the room where the scent of fresh redwood and baby powder were a strange perfume, but it was something he liked. New life had been in that room very recently, the vibe was evident to him. As a young boy, he had enjoyed watching the animals of the forests and streams giving birth. It seemed so effortless, and unlike the fuss that human beings made upon each other for such a natural thing.

Of course, the slender young man had barely laid his hands on a full blown woman, and the thought of it made him shudder. Women were so different from men, and it was obvious from the start to a very shy boy raised in the countryside of Big Sur. His mother had been a silent person who was constantly overshadowed and surrounded by men. He rarely saw her except at meals and bedtime, after the first few years. When she disappeared several years ago, little mention was made of it. He did not ask his father or aunts, for now Slow Dove was on his own path. He learned as he went down the road to the artistry of man.

"There you are," said the voice behind him, and he turned to see Hawk wrapped in a towel, with his long hair wet and dripping. "I am ready."

Slow Dove removed his shoulder bag and placed it on the changing table. He took the hand and arm extended by the leader of his people and made a strong grip. Hawk reached out and hugged him, with a scent of clean skin and water. "Let's step outside," said Slow Dove, grabbing a fresh towel from the sideboard.

They stood on the stone patio where pink roses cascaded down from three sides and the mother bench sat in the sunlight. Gabriel West's touch was also highly apparent in this mix thought Slow Dove, noting Hawk's strong thighs and buttocks under the towel. He knew he must not judge, but the man was such a perfect specimen. It would be hard to instruct him in the proper way.

"I did as you asked me, I played possum with Dyanna" said Hawk, laughing and shaking his head to dry in the sunlight. "I don't think she liked it, she is not used to being ignored. Not for a minute."

"If you want the gift to be perfect, you must follow the rules of the tribe. Are you uncomfortable with that?"

"No, no! I want this piece to be the most amazing thing she will own, and she must know the story of its history. You will write that down for me, after we take my part of the gift. I want it on parchment paper, very finely written. Can you do that?"

"Of course. But your hair must be a bit drier before we take it, so that it will not be stretched or weak in the chain."

"Ok, let's get some coffee. Come with me."

Slow Dove followed Hawk through the amazing redwood building that held his bath and office, the bedrooms for his woman and child, and the huge birthing room where the enormous jade stones lay around ancient redwoods. It was breathtaking, with the windows open to a breeze.

Outside the great room and galley was a hallway that connected the old cottage with the new, and Hawk led the way to the kitchen. A large pot of black coffee was on the stove, warming on a metal plate. He found two red mugs in the cupboard and placed them next to the dark brew. When it began to bubble, he turned it off, and poured each cup two thirds full. "What do you want with this" said Hawk, opening the refrigerator for milk. "We've got honey, sugar, milk and spices."

"Plain is fine" said Slow Dove. "I like it black."

"A man after my own heart," said Hawk. He topped each cup with more coffee and handed one to his new brother. The room was bright yellow and featured a large round table with old fashioned chairs. A vase in the center held fresh flowers, delicately scented and beautiful. It was obvious that this room had many memories, with the worn wooden floor planks and freshly scrubbed walls.

"This is where I found my love and passion for Dyanna," said Hawk. "She lived here for a long time before I met her. My sister was her friend and savior, after she fell over that cliff outside. Did you know that?"

"I know the story, but not the details. It was very hush hush in Big Sur, and still is in a way."

"Nobody knows that I brought a special van down from Stanford to deduce Dyanna's condition that night. Only the family, and her close relatives. When I first saw her, I didn't think she would survive the night. She was so beautiful and broken, her body was like a ragdoll." Tears formed in Hawk's eyes as he took a sip of his coffee. "I always tell her that I fell in love with her that night, but it took a long time to happen."

"How did you experience that?"

"You mean, how did I fall in love with her? After her long recovery in the cave at Jade Beach, she returned to this cottage. Dyanna had inherited the big ranch above here from a film star she was seeing. He was killed in a helicopter crash over Christmas, a few years ago."

"Kevin Stone. I know the story. I have seen every movie he ever made."

"A fan, huh? Apparently he was quite a guy, and wanted to marry her, but the Gods have their ways, don't they?" Hawk poured more coffee into his cup and sipped the brew.

"So you never saw her or spoke to her during that time?"

"John was involved with Dyanna as a friend, a protector. He met her by chance and they became very close after Kevin Stone died. He helped to shield her from the media and lookie loos."

"I heard that she was in Europe with some big film guy, after she came back from the dead. Everyone was talking about it."

"That is Jacob Walnut, a very successful film producer and businessman. He was close to Kevin, and helped Dyanna out after his death. He took her to France after she recovered, to see the premier of a film based on her book."

"I hate to interrupt, but your hair is just right now for the ceremony. Let us go back to the flowered patio".

Jacob Walnut entered the long hallway and strode quickly to Belinda's room. He stood in the doorway and watched while she hung over the bottom of the Dutch door, head first, laughing hysterically. It was quite a sight, little white shorts and her tanned legs, and the loud cackling laughter. Big Ted sat quietly on the bed, with his head down.

"Good morning," said Jacob as he entered the room.

Ted awakened from his trance and stood up. "Good morning, Mr. Walnut. How are you today, sir?"

"Much better than the last time you saw me. I apologize for yelling at you, I was very angry and jetlagged."

"I understand. No problem."

"How is she doing with this whole move thing? Is she upset?"

"Why don't you ask her yourself, sir?"

"Are you talking about me like I can't hear you" said Belinda, sliding down from the doorway.

She turned defiantly and crossed her arms over a white shirt covered with wild eyes. It said PHANTOGRAM across the chest.

Jacob walked slowly toward her, staring down the steadfast girl. When he came close enough, he stepped forward and slapped her face. Belinda's eyes grew large and filled with tears, but she stood her ground.

"Do not ever speak to me again in that tone, Belinda. Ever. Do you understand me?" She stared at her feet for a minute, as her cheek turned a bright red.

"I have saved your life and brought you back to the world, because I loved your father, and I wanted to be sure your mother would not interfere. I will not tolerate your disrespect."

Belinda slowly raised her eyes to Jacob and the tears rolled down her face. "I'm sorry Uncle Jacob. I loved my dad too."

Big Ted was on his feet, standing behind them. He could see Belinda trembling and knew she had experienced a breakthrough in her recovery. Silence filled the room as Jacob put his arms around the daughter of his beloved friend.

"Get yourself ready to fly to Big Sur, Belinda. It will be your new home."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

We managed to hit the noon hour around Santa Barbara, and sailed through the busy center with of town with light traffic. Now it was time to think of L.A. and the Palisades waiting for us. Past Ventura, we turned off at Oxnard where the fog began to drift in. The soup continued on Pacific Coast Highway to Malibu, and Uma had to use the wipers with the dense misty weather.

I covered Lily Jade against the chill and closed the window, while Uma slowed down for the winding coastal roads. Cars zoomed past us on the last bridge and then we rolled around a curve and into the sun.

Lily Jade was squirming around and I peered into the sling at those inquisitive eyes. "Well, this is fine welcome, isn't it?" I wondered about the day when she would answer back to me. I loved her so much.

Uma started to laugh and so did I, watching the gulls swirling around the beach at Malibu. The shopping centers and fancy cars began to appear, and the final stretch was in sight. Sunset Boulevard, here we come.

It was a very strange feeling to be driving up the winding hill where I had spent so many years before, and now my tiny daughter was watching the lights dance on the windows. I don't think I ever imagined I would deliver a child to the steps of Louise's door, or nearby for that matter.

I thought of Louise as we climbed the hill up to Palisades Highlands, passing the familiar buildings where we had dined and taken Sam for her special doggy treats. It was surreal to see the Secret Café at the top, and finally turning on to Michael Lane. We looked for the numbers on the curb, and Uma slowly turned in at the second driveway. Behind a vast Camilla bush was a condo with a fence around the yard. We parked in front of the little porch with 1105 on the door.

"Ellen said she would put the key in the mailbox," I said, as Uma climbed out of the car.

I stepped out onto the thick green grass and looked around. I had walked in the neighborhood many times with Louise, and barely noticed this first grouping of dwellings. They were different from the others, with free standing units sprinkled between the larger buildings. The landscape was so lush and mature that you were lulled into a sense of peace and quiet, with the pale adobe décor and tile roofs.

Uma found the key and opened the door to a lovely polished wooden entryway with a desk in the hallway. The living room opened onto a small back patio planted with grass and several rose bushes. There was a table and chairs on the patio, with a vase full of pink roses and a note. "Welcome back, Dyanna. Enjoy and relax. Love, Ellen."

We walked around the small kitchen and master bedroom, which had a nice tub and pink sink to match. Uma took Lily Jade while I cleaned up a bit, and they found the perfect place for nursing and changing the baby. I could feel the heaviness of my breasts and knew it would be time for feeding very soon.

We walked outside from the second bedroom, which was tiny but suitable for Uma and her early morning yoga.

"This will be a perfect place for your meeting, Moana! It is so close to the property for the dog

park, you won't really need a car!"

At that moment, Lily Jade began to squirm around in her arms, and let out a cry. *"First things, first,"* said my daughter!



Slow Dove prepared the bench on the terrace with his instruments and a large wooden bowl. Hawk was instructed to remove his watch and phone, and went off to empty his bladder as well. The noonday sun was hot and bright, bearing down directly on the terrace. The blade of the sharp knife was brilliant in the reflection, and glowed on Slow Dove's face. It was an eerie sight with both of them shirtless and barely covered below when Hawk emerged, and he raised his face to the golden light.

Slow Dove carefully gathered the thick dark hair that hung beneath Hawk's shoulders and bound it with a soft cord into a ponytail. It was important to have the strands at the end as even as possible. He spoke quietly as he worked, and cautioned Hawk to remain silent and listen carefully. Now that the time had come to perform this simple task, it was vital that both men be in the same tune and harmony.

"Raise your face to the sun and be very still. I will say the prayers for your daughter and wife and we will ask for their blessings. Listen carefully."

Hawk did as he was told, and Slow Dove quietly recited names of Lily Jade and me as he sang a soft melody. He lifted his hands with the knife held between them, grasped the thick sheaf of hair from Hawk's back and held it out in the sun. Then he placed the blade on the leather cord, with a steady hand and a pounding heart.

"Make your silent prayer for this moment and raise your hand when you are finished," said Slow Dove. He held the blade firm and waited.

Hawk's hand slowly raised to the sky, and the knife cut silently through his hair. He could feel the free ends fall around his ears while Slow Dove held the shining brown locks.

He raised them above his head and came around in front of Hawk. Ever so quietly, he murmured the last prayer, and jumped high into the air.

Hawk opened his eyes and watched the exuberant young man leap again and again. He stood up and they embraced, while Hawk looked at his crowning glory in wonder. It did not appear to belong to him anymore.

"You must not touch anything now, until the ceremony. I will take your offering and begin the preparation for the weaving and the chain."

Slow Dove carefully returned the knife and the long ponytail to his bag. He kissed Hawk on both cheeks, and disappeared through trellises of pink roses.

It was very quiet standing there alone, but Hawk was ready for some peace and quiet.



Uma drove across the city on Sunset Boulevard, anxious to check in with Belinda and Jacob Walnut. She left LJ and me on the large bed, drifting away after a good feeding and promised to keep in touch. We would walk down to the Secret Café for dinner, or bring something home. The refrigerator was filled with the food she brought with us, and my phone was charging.

The traffic on Sunset was still light at 3pm, and she turned onto Beverly Drive with a sigh of relief. Part of Uma loved the adventure of Los Angeles, while she also dreaded the strange vibe that fed the City of Angels. As she climbed the winding road on Coldwater Canyon, the familiar houses and palm trees settled her mind. The ever present gardeners were blowing and mowing, the cars moved past her going into town at breakneck speed, and the sun was as bright as usual.

As she turned onto Mullholland Drive, the expanse of the city below exposed some low fog, but mostly the [tall buildings of Beverly Hills and Century City](#). The gates for the Walnut estate were open, with several cars in the circular drive. She recognized one of the chocolate Mercedes that Jacob favored, and Teddy's bright yellow Lamborghini. She parked back a little bit, and took a breath, admiring the new pink rhododendrons that had joined Jacob's favorite hedges.

The front door opened and Jacob Walnut appeared wearing wraparound sunglasses, waving at her with a glass of wine in his hand. "Hello, my dear woman," said Jacob, embracing her with the glass of wine held out to the side. "We are so very happy to see you."

Uma kissed his cheek which was covered with stubble, and gave him a good hug. "Hi, Jacob. I'm glad to be here." She stood back as he looked at her usual uniform of white shirt and khaki shorts, and watched him smile.

"You are a sight for sore eyes," he said. "Let me get your bags."

"I don't have any luggage, Jacob. We are not staying here. I have Dyanna and the baby with me. She is all settled up in the Palisades."

"No, no no," said Jacob, taking a large swig of wine from his goblet. "Ty is preparing a fabulous meal and we have the White Bedroom all ready."

"Jacob, I must tell you right away that Dyanna is a new mother and chooses not to share her tiny baby with strangers including Belinda right now. Especially Belinda."

"Well, we could lock the little wench in her room for another night, no problem."

"I have come to see Belinda and Big Ted, as you asked me to. Dyanna is here on some business for her cousin Louise, and will stay in Pacific Palisades for a meeting."

"Okay, Okay!! Just come inside now, and we'll settle all this later." Jacob grabbed Uma's handle and marched ahead. "Come on, woman! Everyone is waiting!"



John Soaring Meadow rose at dawn, and made his coffee as usual. He was having a hard time sleeping, wondering about the whereabouts of Ginger and her work at the ranch. *Such foolishness, he thought, that girl has no interest in you, old man.* The bottle of Jack Daniels beckoned, begging to mix it up with his strong Arabica brew.

The sun rose across the meadow while John settled down to his window, feeling a warming in his stomach from the potent mix of brew. The gardens were empty, and Uma was on her way to the land of movies and crazies. He knew the crew was waiting for the green light to begin construction on the new ranch house, and wondered at his hesitation. There was no time to spare, and today must be the one to gather the troops.

Truth be told, he had hoped for one more week of dallying around with the tasty Texas peach, and went to bed each night thinking about her. They had a lot of fun working on the gardens, but it was the rest of the time with Ginger that he craved. She had spent several evenings with him, cooking and drinking bourbon and coke, telling tall tales about their vastly different lives.

John knew that Evan Galbraith was on the road with a long tour, and hoped Ginger would continue to help out at the ranch. She made his blood boil, with just the thought of her winsome smile and that amazing luscious body. No wonder the world of rock and roll welcomed her. Who wouldn't?

He poured another shot of JD into his cup and topped it off with steaming black java. This whole thing was an awakening in him, something he could not deny. With all the women in his life, none had given rise to the sentiments flowing through his veins.

He was on his third cup and shot when Gabriel West's truck wheeled around the corner and roared to a stop beneath the window. Probably wants some special tools, or a look at the newly cleaned site, thought John.

He rose and took a big swig of coffee as he heard the door open downstairs. Then suddenly there she was, standing breathlessly at the top of the stairs. Her long auburn hair was loose and windblown, and her cheeks were pink from driving with the open windows of an early morning in Big Sur. "Good morning, John Soaring Meadow!"

"Hey, girl. What are you doing here? I thought you had scuttled away for good, with the tour or something."

"Evan has been around for a few days, and I just delivered him to the River Inn to meet the band. They are going to play a gig here. Isn't that great?"

John just stared at her, unable to speak. He was afraid he would say something stupid and reveal himself.

"Are you mad at me?" said Ginger. "I brought you some cookies and bread and corn stew." "Of course not, I am just surprised to see you again. I thought you had left town."

"Without saying goodbye? Not a chance." She came straight to his face and kissed him on the lips.



The phone buzzed next to me, as Lily Jade and I dozed off on the bed. I grabbed it and saw that we had conked out for an hour. The second ring revealed Jack Walters number and name, so I answered with one hand and Lily Jade in the other arm.

"Hi, Dyanna" said Jack, sounding rather far away. "Are you all settled in?"

"That's an understatement, Jack! We are two lazy Big Sur girls, lying on this big old bed. How are you?"

"I'm just fine and looking forward to seeing you tomorrow. Will you bring the baby with you?"

"Most likely. Uma is dealing with Jacob Walnut, and bringing home Belinda Stone to Big Sur."

"Well, we have had quite a time with Anthony Bravano, Jr, as he insists upon being called." Jack chuckled and I pictured him dealing with a big fat old ruffian from the City of Commerce.

"Is he a bully or something?" I had to giggle to myself, because Lily Jade was now fully awake and rolling her eyes around.

"No, actually he is a very clever man who is determined to rule the world. It took us months to reach him, and even then, he is very slippery. He won't commit to anything until he knows every detail. *The Godfather, Part Eight.*"

"What's the plan? I am nursing Lily Jade and she is my first priority, so I will want to take care of her first."

"Bravano wants to meet at 9:30 am at the property. Is that doable?" "Sure, I can squeeze him in, between my mothering duties."

"Honestly, Dyanna, I can hardly wait to see you. I never in a million years thought of you with a child."

"That makes two of us, Jack! But I have to say it is the most challenging and magical thing I have ever done."

"Is your man with you as well? I want to be sure I have everything covered with Bravano. He has a lot of security."

"Hawk is in Big Sur, so no worries. He has taken some time off from Stanford for the baby, but I have a feeling he is getting antsy. You know that drill, don't you?"

"We've got four of them, my dear. The first one is the toughest, but after that, you learn quickly."

"Ok, I am staying right up the hill from the property, Number 1105, in case I don't show. My daughter already has a mind of her own."

"See you at 9:30 down the hill, Dyanna. Brian is anxious to meet the new addition as well."

We rang off and I laid back into the pillows. It was difficult to imagine being back on a schedule with other people, after the past month. I was spoiled and hated to break the spell. But Louise beckoned, and I knew she would be thrilled to see us walk the property in the morning. There was no doubt in my mind that her presence was a given. The Angel of the Palisades, as I used to call her, wouldn't miss this for the world.

I bent down to kiss my daughter and she grabbed my finger tight. What a girl!

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Uma was feeling crowded and out of sorts when she sneaked away to call us from Walnut Land, and I reminded her that compromises were always at stake around there. It's part of the power game.

"They have a big feast all planned, and Jacob wants me to stay for dinner. Ty is cooking and Teddy will be here as well."

"Sounds like fun, Uma. We'll be fine. I have been nibbling on the food from home, and feeding Lily Jade. Maybe I'll walk down to the Secret Café for one of their Caesar salads. They will love to see the baby."

"I'll be home later. I don't want to stay here, but things must be planned for Belinda's trip to Big Sur. I think Big Ted will fly with her to Monterey."

"Listen, you deserve a great meal and some laughs. Jacob will behave himself, he loves you."  
"You know, he is very unhappy that you are not here. I don't want him to upset things."

"I just talked to Jack and we will be meeting down at the property at 9:30 in the morning. That will be perfect. I can get Lily Jade ready and feed her before we go."

"Are you taking her with you? Oh, Moana, I don't know if that's a good idea, this gangster guy and his lawyers..."

"We'll talk about it later, Uma. Go and have a glass of fine wine and banter with Jacob. Give them all my love, ok?"

I realized I was hungry after we hung up, and that visit to the Secret Café sounded pretty good. Besides, I wanted a closer look at the property before we gathered in the morning.

I went into the bathroom and splashed my face with cool water, and brushed my hair upside down. The beautiful roses from Big Sur were joined with a couple of snips from the greens out in front, and I pinned them into my hair.

I changed Lily Jade's diaper and dressed her in an adorable yellow Onesie. She was drowsy, and fell asleep as I put her in the sling. I think it was the feeling of being next to me that comforted her, the warmth of my body. She could feel my love, and there was so much emotion in our connection.

Soon we were strolling down the hill toward the empty lot on the corner where Louise's dog park would reside. As we approached, the condition of the property came into view, surrounded by the grimy chain link fence. It was full of papers and junk scattered in the corners, and covered with weeds. Drink cups rolled in the breeze, and it was obvious that people had slipped in from the back, just like we had done last year.

As I stood at the corner with the cars whipping past us, I thought of Louise and her pristine ways. She would never walk Samantha in a place like that, and I was not inclined to take my tiny daughter in there either.

We strolled around the building next door and entered the parking lot. The fenced area near

the cars was much cleaner, and the yard waste can was full. It was almost like they thought you might not notice the rest.

HA! I had become Louise in a few seconds, and her voice rumbled through my mind. *"I want a place for people to walk their dogs that is safe and beautiful,"* she had stated clearly, catching me by surprise.

We turned away and found the entrance of the patio for the Secret Café. Lily Jade opened her eyes when we stepped inside, where the scent of fresh bread filled the air, and Mario was polishing the case that featured the take out food. I waited for him to turn around, smiling in anticipation.

"Dyanna!! Well, look at you! How are you, sweetheart?" He crossed the floor, wiping his hands, and stopped when he saw the sling.

"This is my daughter, Mario. Come and meet Lily Jade."

I opened the sling and he peeked inside, while the original ham of all time began her performance. It was laughable how she opened her eyes when he arrived, and reached out with her curled little fist.

"This beautiful thing is yours? How did that happen? I just saw you a few months ago..." "I was pregnant then, but I didn't know it!"

"Oh, honey, she is just wonderful. And you look even more amazing than ever." "I doubt that, Mario, but you are a sweetheart to say so."

"Come, come," he said, leading the way to my favorite table behind the fish tank. He pulled out a chair for me, and knelt down. "Let me see your girl."

I opened the sling and lifted her onto my lap. "Her name is Lily Jade Falconer- Hawk, and she is about two months old, Mario!"

"Such a time for the family! I remember when my first son was born, it was a madhouse. We never slept for months." He reached over and held out his pinky. "Can I hold her, just for a minute?"

"Sure."

He grabbed a clean napkin from the table and put it over his shirt. I placed LJ in his arms, and he did a little dance around the room. Several people entered the restaurant and watched as he hummed and twirled. His daughter Melanie stood at the kitchen door, shaking her head. "Be careful, Dad," she said, "that's precious cargo."

Mario returned to me and watched as I placed her back in the sling. "It makes me feel so alive to see this," he said, with tears in his eyes.

Now the spell was broken and Lily Jade started to cry. "Let me take her outside for a minute. We'll be right back."

We finally settled down at a table on the terrace, and Mario joined me while they prepared my favorite Caesar Salad with grilled shrimp. "She is such a good baby," he said, as I rocked her back and forth.

"We just drove down from Big Sur this morning. I am meeting with Louise's legal team tomorrow. You'll never guess what she wants to do."

"You mentioned something about a dog park when you were here with Uma. Now there's a woman!"

"Uma delivered the baby. I had her at home, with the family around me."

"That is a good way, if the men can stand it. I personally prefer the hospital, it makes me feel safer. What if something happens, you know?"



Uma and Belinda entered the dining room, carrying arms full of flowers for the table. Ty had outdone himself, with a brilliant white cloth and the burgundy Walnut napkins and china. Two large silver containers were placed in the center, spaced perfectly for the guests. On the sideboard were some floral shears and a large pitcher of water.

"Looks like Ty is ready for us," said Uma, as she placed the garden bounty next to the pitcher. "I guess we are in charge of the décor, Belinda." She smiled broadly and put her arm around the shoulders of the girl. She could feel the slight quiver of resistance that betrays someone who is not used to being touched. All the clues were there, and Uma was glad to be taking Belinda home. Under the bravado was fear, and who could blame her?

"Let's do the flowers first and then add the water." Belinda handed over several huge blooms of pink hydrangea, and went back for more. It was clear that she had once arranged flowers, and Uma wondered if her mother was involved. It was hard to imagine the dark cruel Marianne Stone doing such a thing, but she had been young and in love once upon a time. Uma wanted to build a mental profile of Belinda, to help with the adjustment to Big Sur life. But Belinda was clever and had been through the wringer of mental deficiency. Now with the return to a normal life, she was wary.

Soon they had a routine going, and the centerpieces began to take shape. They placed the smaller buds and fluffy green stems amongst the outrageous huge rhododendrons that overshadowed everything else. Jacob would be pleased, and that went a long way toward making an evening with him!

They stood back admiring their work when Big Ted entered the room, fresh from his shower and decked out in a classic Hawaiian shirt from Tommy Bahama. "Wow! The table looks amazing."

Belinda went over and buttoned up his shirt, hiding the chest hair. Big Ted stood at attention while she inspected his khakis and sandals. "I picked this out," she said, turning to Uma. "If Big Ted is coming to Big Sur, then he better look pretty damn good."

"Hear Hear!" said Jacob Walnut, also freshly showered and changed. "Are you ladies prepared for a feast?"

On schedule, Ty sailed through the door with two platters of appetizers and set them on the table. "We are ready to serve, Mr. Walnut. Do you want to wait for Teddy as well?"

"Go and rattle his cage and I will open the wine. Do you ladies want to wash your hands after

the garden, and freshen up?”

Uma and Belinda disappeared down the hall, and Jacob surveyed the beautiful hors `d oeuvres. “Come on, Ted. Let’s have a sample.”

Ted approached the tray and picked the piece that looked the most familiar. It was a reddish cheese with a tiny tomato on top, and a dollop of mustard.

“Caviar for me,” said Jacob. He popped two small bites into his mouth, and poured the chilled Pouilly Fuisse.



Hawk and Gabriel sat on the lawn watching the Giants beat the Dodgers, while the sun began to set. They were on their fourth beer, but who was counting? The breeze blew in from the ocean while they ate a large pepperoni pizza with extra cheese, all stretched out on the grass.

“Glad you’re here, Gabe,” said Hawk, taking a long drink from his bottle. “Like old times.” The Giants scored a run and they cheered.

“Well, really, we’ve never hung out together here. In fact, it’s been quite awhile since you were even home that long.”

“Yeah, well that might just be changing very soon.” He took another slice of pizza and folded over the end. It was a habit that Gabriel recognized from their days in high school, and he laughed.

“Is that so? Well, you are a father now, and a husband. Are you going to become a real parent?”

“I am already a real parent. I have changed diapers in the middle of the night.” “That hardly qualifies you, my bro!” Gabriel looked at the laptop they had set up on the bench, and took a long drink of his Bud. “Wait until she is in school, and smarter than you.”

“You know, it’s funny you would say that, because I have been thinking the same thing. Everyone says they grow up so fast, and I can already see her changing each day. It’s quite amazing.”

“You should be accustomed to watching the human body grow and heal. You see all the miracles in your work, don’t you?”

“That’s different. First of all, the patient is not related to you in most cases. We were taught to divorce ourselves from that drama in med school. It is the first big mistake that a physician makes. But watching a human being that was born before your eyes and created with your genes is a whole nother thing.”

“*Whole Nother*, huh? No more beers for you.”

“Come on, you know what I mean. It is the most amazing sight in the world to see that baby. Particularly when you are so crazy about her mother.”

“I can’t say that I blame you about that, Stephen. Dyanna is one of a kind. She is perfect for you. She doesn’t fall for the guff, and neither do you. You are a lucky man.”

"I think you are a little jealous, my friend. Maybe it's time for you to let someone into your life as well. How's that sweet little Ginger been treating you around the house?"

"Well, actually, she has taken a shine to John. Uma invited her to help with the gardens, and they have become friends."

"You mean John Soaring Meadow? And Ginger Malone? That will never happen. I saw her with Evan while he was recovering. She is practically married to him. They have been together for years, since they were kids."

"She and Evan are best friends, with benefits. That's it. She loves it here and decided to stick around when he went back on tour. I am happy to have her staying at the house. She's great company."

The Giants pinch hitter made a play to steal second base, and the crowd roared. Gabriel watched closely as the cleanup batter Buster Posey stepped up to the plate.

Hawk took the empty bottles inside, and hit the fabulous redwood bathroom designed for him by his best friend, Gabriel West. The guy out there now, who thought he knew all about love, and Dyanna, and his daughter Lily Jade. He stood there taking a leak, and decided that it was time to make some real changes. He went into the bedroom and looked at the empty bed, and beyond it, the cradle where his daughter slept. We

had become his life. All of a sudden, he was engulfed with a pride and love beyond his wildest dreams.

He had not thought about Stanford or his work for days, maybe weeks. It was upsetting and uncomfortable at first, but each time he held Lily Jade in his arms, he could not wait to see her again. She had been gone less than a day, and he was lonely without us.

Stephen Hawk had not been lonely for anyone since the day his Mother died. He steeled himself against those kind of emotions, they were too expensive to keep.

He would find a way to put all that love to work, and Gabriel would help him. As he walked back outside, the sun bounced off Gabe's face and golden hair. What a prince. He loved that guy too!



Lily Jade was tucked in next to me, in her little wicker box that Uma had provided for us. It was a spare little place to sleep, but there were new studies that confirmed the Wiyama theory for newborns. It had recently been proven that the syndrome of Sudden Infant Death had much to do with two things: the position of the baby, and the materials around them. The Wiyama practitioners had been teaching their mothers this for years, and took a great deal of argument from other sources. Regardless, Uma had a small room full of the wicker boxes that were lined with a light pad fit into the bottom. She used them for all her birthing mothers.

"Babies like to feel cozy and warm," said Uma, when she gently laid her niece in the box after a few days of life. By then, I was tired and sleeping when I could, and Hawk was out cold at night. I knew that he had perfected the art of resting to accommodate his surgery schedule, and envied his ability to master the human mind. Since Lily Jade's birth, I was sleeping with one eye open, which every mother experiences before the reality of life settles in.

Uma waited for the right moment, which was her trademark.

She had called around 9 pm, sounding a bit tipsy and giggly, and I scolded her for thinking about driving back to the Palisades. "There's no way I want you on Coldwater Canyon tonite, Uma. I won't sleep a wink and I need my rest. Please listen and jump into the white bed. You can come early in the morning."

"Moana, they have just outdone themselves tonite. I have never seen such food, and four different wines. Bittersweet chocolate cake, fresh raspberries, and the most wonderful filets of beef."

I had to laugh at that, since the normal diet at home had very little red meat. I had never seen Uma eat a steak before, but there's a time for everything. Surely Ty had provided some special dishes for this occasion, and they had all enjoyed it to the hilt.

"Promise me you will stay there, ok? We are going to sleep now, and I don't want to worry."

"I promise. Good night, Moana." In the background, there were various shouts from the other guests, who sounded very merry and happy. Glasses clinked as she hung up.

I made a final check of the doors and windows while LJ sighed in her box and slept like a baby. Sweet dreams, my little girl.

I lay down beside her and watched the lights from the street reflect on the ceiling. It reminded me of Louise's house up the hill, and my promise to make her Dog park a dream come true.

Down the hill and through the fence, there was another kind of dream going on. Two men slipped through the back gate under the chain and hurried over to the outside corner. They placed a small round metal ball next to the chain link, and proceeded to the next spot. Halfway to the front corner, they put another metal ball, and continued. All in all there were six tiny remote cameras in place within five minutes.

They stood in the center and pressed a button on the phone. Little red lights blinked in unison.

Perfect. Anthony would be happy.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

John Soaring Meadow opened his eyes at dawn, as was his habit since childhood. He never slept any later, unless there was a good reason. Things had to get done, life was out there happening already. He blinked his eyes and took a deep breath of the heavenly scent that wafted into his nostrils and poked his manhood. He was almost

afraid to turn his eyes to the side, for fear it was a dream. But no, there she was, freckles and all, sound asleep on her back. The long strawberry blond hair was tangled around her shoulders, and covered the side of her face.

**Ginger Malone was right beside him, and she was not a dream.** He felt the hard on between his legs and turned on his side to watch her. She stirred and rubbed her eyes, but continued to sleep. It was the best sex he had ever had, no doubt about it. She was so natural and kind, easing him into the feelings of lovemaking with her smile and gentle hands. She took his big paws and filled them with her large full breasts, and reached down to touch him where no woman had gone for a long time. She sighed as he grew hard in her hands, and kissed his lips over and over. He was so entranced that he allowed her to lead him into the bedroom and seduce him. No words between them were spoken until much later, and none were necessary. The silken firm legs that wrapped around him guided them together, and then she was on top.

She made a move that finished him off, twisting around while pinching his nipples. It was like a firecracker exploded in the room. He screamed bloody murder. Tears rolled down John's face, while she held him very close. The release of everything within him was at hand.

Perhaps this was the reward of the warrior inside him, the man who clawed his way out of Paragoh Creek and fought the devil of fire to reach the ranch. God knows he had suffered enough from the agony of his injured leg and the torture of Hawk's surgical knife repeating the pain.

He had thought he was going to die that last morning in jail, when his leg was so bad that he could not move. It was the first time John Soaring Meadow could remember that he had no fight left in him.

Now, as he watched her chest rise and fall as the sun brushed those pale eyelashes with light, there was a meaning to all of that suffering. He had walked through the walls of hell to return. At last, the feeling of real pleasure encompassed his body.

Nothing like getting laid to change your paradigm and heal your soul. He wanted to get up and empty his throbbing bladder, but could not bring himself to move. He just wanted to watch her forever.



The sounds of the garbage trucks on Michael Lane were my alarm on the day of the dog park. I always think of it that way, since everything changed from then on. Actually, I had heard the sound many times at Louise's house, along with the newspapers being distributed in the dark of night. I always slept with one ear open in the Palisades, like the eagles that soared over the canyons on the hunt. It was the only time there was silence in Topanga Canyon, butting up against the range that separated the Palisades from the ocean.

I checked my daughter on the way to the toilet, and sat down to pee and awaken my senses. I wanted to take her along to meet Jack and Brian before our meeting, and pondered the wisdom of that move. What if she was fussy and interrupted us. How would Louise feel about that?

I laughed out loud as I flushed the toilet and splashed my face with cool water. "You know what, Lulu," I said to her heavenly presence, "I don't care what people think. This little human being is my child and she comes first. Get used to it."

I turned on the water and jumped in the tub, relishing the time to myself. When I stretched out my legs, I felt very powerful and strong, and ready to face the day. It was the right thing to do, coming down here now.

My breasts were full and ready for Lily Jade, and she did not disappoint. I lifted her out of the wicker box with a smile and a big kiss, and laid her out to change the diaper. Soon we were serving breakfast in Mommaland, my little secret name for the new job. She was hungry and emptied my breasts in short order. That meant more to come, with some time for breakfast before we walked down the hill.

While she dozed off to sleep, I found the hot pink flowered dress with open shoulders, and slipped into a soft white camisole designed for breast feeding mothers. Uma had clued me in during the weeks before the birth, and I had ordered lots of cool nursing clothes. Since many women take their babies to work these days, the designers have jumped on it. The inside of all the undergarments are lined to keep the moisture inside with some kind of magic fabric, so the days of embarrassing leaks and spots during public outings are pretty much under control.

I didn't mind the curious stares of people when we were out in public, and considered feeding my daughter a wonderful thing. Mother nature has a sensible yen for convenience, and most of the time, the baby loves it.

My nipples were enlarged and darker in color, but I had begun to use the Almond Dulcis Oil Uma prescribed months before. It was clear and unscented, moisturizing the skin without making it greasy. All of this seems mundane to those who have not experienced this phenomenon, but trust me when I say that something as all consuming as breast feeding is overwhelming.

There were several brilliant rose buds on the patio bushes, and some lovely jasmine with foliage that was soft and fragrant. I placed them in a large kitchen cup for hydrating, and slathered my face with a creamy sunscreen. I would be able to protect Lily Jade with her own baby version in a couple of weeks, so she had to be covered from head to toe.

Soon I was dressed and in the kitchen, making a smoothie with Pom and bananas and yogurt and tofu. Uma had brought a small blender from home, and all the ingredients.

She had called last night just as we were drifting off to sleep, with the sounds of merry making in the background. "Can you hear me, Moana? I am in Belinda's bathroom."

I heard a door close, and then she continued. "Sorry to be so late, dinner has been going on for hours."

"No worries, we are snuggled into our beds, and lights out."

"Oh, good. Listen, I will be there probably mid morning. Jacob wants to go over some business

details for Belinda before they leave for the airport.”

“Take your time. I don’t know how long we will be with the owner of the property. I will have Lily Jade with me, so I can leave any time if she gets fussy. Jack and Brian can join me here if need be.”

“I am anxious to hear about this man who owns the lot. It is such a mess, and I’m surprised they allow that in the neighborhood.”

“I will tell you all about it when we make our escape. I’m thinking we will probably leave around noon, or 1 pm.”

“That’s perfect. How is my little girl?”

“She is sleeping now, and I will feed her again before we go down the hill. I’ve got it covered, Uma!”

She laughed, and sent us both a kiss.

Thinking about it, I was happy to be on my own again, and caring for my daughter. I drank my smoothie and took the vitamins, munching on the banana. It was going to be a great day, and I looked forward to starting the process of Louise’s last wish. It was a long time coming.



Jacob Walnut had also risen at dawn, with his mind racing over the details of Belinda’s move to Big Sur. He had planned to have a private consultation concerning the financial aspects, but my absence had not allowed for that. Uma spent the night with Belinda, trying to calm her down after quite a dinner party, and Jacob did not want to rock the boat. It was absolutely necessary to move both Big Ted and the girl as planned, and get the Walnut business back on schedule.

Unbeknownst to the others, Teddy had flipped out with the girl there all the time, spying on him and freaking out his lady friends. He refused to work under those circumstances, and laid down the law to his brother. “Kevin Stone or not, we are poorly equipped to manage his daughter,” railed Teddy, losing his famous cool after a ruined night of sexual delight. “Send Belinda back to Big Sur and let Uma have her. She will teach that girl how to live in this world, if anyone can.”

He took a long hot shower while Ty brewed a pot of strong coffee, beating his chest with the stream of water. Kevin’s face filled his mind as he stepped out of the steamy glass cube and toweled off. What would he think of this plan, moving his beloved daughter to Big Sur with Uma and the wild John Soaring Meadow? Those two were bitter enemies, but John had saved the day and become Jacob’s man up there, when Dyanna disappeared. His sorrow over her loss was shared by John, and the Esalen Warrior had managed the properties for months. Now that Dyanna was alive and a mother, they would rebuild the old Ranch House where John ran the operation.

Ty knocked twice and set the hot java on the dresser outside the door. “Coffee,” he said, leaving Jacob to his plans. He opened the door and poured his first cup into a white imperial mug with the Walnut logo covering the side. The first light of day poured through the sheer curtains, and Jacob opened the terrace doors.

His room was on the end of the building, next to the suite of offices that contained the Walnut Brothers empire. It was rarely seen by anyone but Ty or Teddy, who occasionally dropped in before he went to sleep after a night of pleasure. Jacob liked it that way, and kept a spare black and white décor with an enormous bed covered in black raw silk. The thick black carpets made his feet feel wonderful after a long flight and hours of heavy meetings. He was a modern man with special needs, and things he liked to keep private. The safe room installed behind his sauna was a genius idea suggested by their architect, for nobody would think to look there. They planned double insulation and pipes wrapped in silicone, to insure the temperature and safety of the room. It was Jacob's haven.

He carried his mug into the walk-in closet where heavy steel hangers were arranged with full outfits, ready to wear at a moment's notice. The usual khakis, a European designed pullover shirt, and jacket coordinated hung endlessly down one side, and today he chose a bright blue shirt. He liked the detail on the belt that threaded through his pants, which was given to him by John Soaring Meadow. It was a blue eagle, and very Big Sur. If he was to see Dyanna today, he wanted to be ready.

It was time to find Uma and have a chat about the day ahead. He knew she would be awake, and ready for him.



At 9:15 am, Lily Jade was bundled into the sling, gurgling with a full belly, and I put on my shades. We passed the mirrored wall in the entryway, and stopped for a look to be sure everything was buttoned up and ready. It's a habit you fall into with a little one very quickly, and I enjoyed it. The sling I used was the alternate, knitted in a heavy corded fabric of green and natural hemp. It looked good with my dress and matched Lily Jade's eyes, which peered out at me as I closed the door behind us.

I was excited to walk down the driveway and on to the sidewalk, kind of bouncing along with my precious cargo. "We are going to meet two great guys, sweetie," I said, while smiling at the gardeners at the end of the drive. We headed down the hill along the empty sidewalk, on a beautiful sunny morning. I could see the corner more clearly as we approached, and was sure that Jack and Brian would be there. By the time we reached the cross street, I waved at the pair standing inside and Brian came over to the fence. "Good morning, Dyanna," he said, grinning from ear to ear.

"Good morning! We will come around the other side and meet you there." He nodded and walked directly across the lot, where Jack Walters stood talking on the phone. He waved as we passed him, and went around the building to the side entrance in the parking lot. Jack's burgundy Mercedes was parked next to the fence, but the rest of the lot was empty.

Brian emerged from the gate and stood there smiling while we approached. "Wow, what do we have here?"

"I have my new baby daughter, Brian. This is Lily Jade." I held the sling open and he peered down at those big green eyes.

"My God, Dyanna. She is something else. I can't believe it." "Believe what?" said Jack, coming up behind him.

"Hi Jack! I have brought a visitor to the party today. This is my daughter Lily Jade Falconer-Hawk." He joined Brian as the baby turned her head a little, and raised a fist.

"My God, you really did it, Dyanna! She is just beautiful. Why don't you take her out for a minute, before Mr. Bravano arrives. He opened the back door of his car and took my little shoulder bag.

"Hey, sweet pie," I said, sitting down. I carefully lifted her out and on to my lap, while they stood watching us. She looked very tiny and fragile in the bright Palisades sun, but every bit as lovely as ever."

Jack knelt down and touched her foot tucked inside the yellow bottoms. "What a thrill to see this lovely little creature today. I didn't know if you would bring her."

"Well, she insisted, since I am breastfeeding her. We don't want her to starve." They both laughed as a huge black pickup truck roared into the parking lot and pulled up next to us.

Jack stood up and waved to the driver, while the back door of the enormous two-seater opened. Anthony Bravano, Jr. stepped out onto the ground and jumped to attention. He was a sturdy man with balding light hair and thick tinted glasses. His huge arms bulged out of a short sleeved plaid shirt, which was tucked neatly into tight jeans. Natty silver and red sneakers poked out from under his pants, featuring red laces.

"Hello, all," he said, staring at me. It was as if Jack and Brian were not even there.

"Mr. Bravano," said Jack, holding out his hand. "I am Jack Walters. We have talked on the phone. This is Brian Shoupe, my associate."

"And this must be Dyanna Falconer, and her newborn child," said Bravano. He walked over to the car and stood above me. "Let me see your little one, Mrs. Falconer."

I rose up with Lily Jade in my arms, shielding her face from the sun. He reached over and tweaked her leg, grinning at me. "Love kids. Got three of them myself."

"We are pleased to finally meet you, Mr. Bravano. Thank you for joining us."

Jack moved in next to me and stood up to his full height. Anthony was fairly short, and had such broad shoulders that he appeared to be top heavy. His head was also bigger than usual, something I always noted as a writer. "Shall we take a walk around the property, while it's still nice and cool?"

"Sure," said Bravano. He turned to me and smiled. "You gonna stay here with the kid?"

"Dyanna is the buyer and manger of this project, Mr. Bravano. She will be walking with us every step of the way."

"OK, Blondie! Lead on." Brian opened his tablet and typed a few words while we trailed past him into the center of the lot.

LJ was back in her sling and I pulled the shade cover over her. The sun was bright and getting hotter by the minute, and I could feel it on my back as Brian ran through the dimensions of the lot. It was half of a city block, and had been split off when the office building and Secret Café were built.

"It says that your family purchased the parcel from the original owner, Adam Barner, some fourteen years ago. Is that correct, Mr. Bravano?"

"As far as I know. My Dad was in charge of the real estate. I remember the guy who built the offices, he used to come over for dinner at my Dad's house. He was a developer around here, built a lot of these condos."

"Do you know why he didn't keep this lot, or build it out?"

"Nope. All I know is that we ended up with it in the family trust. My mother wanted to build a house up here, but my dad would have no part of it."

"Why was that?" I asked, standing next to him. "This is prime property, above the smog line and protected by the Topanga Land Trust fire department as well."

"Is that so? Well, Missy, my mother was born and raised in Naples, Italy. She didn't know Jack about the Pacific Palisades. She wanted the ocean. The big blue, at her doorstep."

"Do you live on the ocean now?"

"Naw, our holdings are deep in the heart of Commerce. That fine city where things are made and shipped all over the world."

"Where exactly is Commerce, Mr. Bravano? I'm not sure, except that it's inland somewhere." I stood closer to him and moved the sling to my right side.

"Right there by the interchange, good old I-5 and the 710. Great place for manufacturing and rolling things out to the Long Beach Harbor."

"If I may, sir," said Brian, "can you tell me what the plans were for this particular parcel of land? It would seem rather out of your sphere of influence, so to speak."

"I have no fucking idea, my brothers decided it would be great to own a bunch of property, and here we are. They say real estate is a good investment, don't they?"

At this moment, Lily Jade chose to make a strange little howl, more like a burp gone bad, and we all laughed.

"Whoops," I said. "Sorry to interrupt. Please continue."

"Well, there ain't much more to say, Ma'am. We own a few parcels of land around the state, and quite a few here in L.A. It's my Dad's legacy. And now that he's gone, I guess it's my legacy."

"Mr. Bravano, I believe you are aware that Miss Falconer is interested in purchasing this particular piece of property for a special use. Isn't that correct?" Jack Walters had stepped up beside Bravano and put on his RayBan Aviators. He resembled an ad for the *Wall Street Journal Magazine*, next to the compact, tanned man from Commerce, California.

I turned and looked at the truck they arrived in, and the driver was polishing the wheels with two large cloths. The big black beauty beamed in the sun, ready for action.

"Yeah, we talked about that. I told you we are not interested, but you insisted on this meeting. I

guess maybe you want to impress the little mama here, huh?"

"Mr. Bravano, let me make something clear. Maybe if you understood more about what my interest is, you might feel differently." I stood in front of him, holding my daughter close to me and smiled broadly.

"OK" he said, "Have at it".

"My cousin Louise lived right up the street for years, and this was her favorite place in all of Southern California. She loved the beach and lived down below for a long time, but finally bought her condo up here to get away from the noise and the smog."

"Can't say as I blame her," said Bravano.

"She and her beautiful dog Samantha loved to walk in the canyons of Topanga, and around the neighborhood. There are a lot of others who do the same thing, and many of them were her friends. When she became very ill with cancer, she could no longer care for Sam, and hired a woman to take her out to walk every day. They ended up going down into the Sunset area to a dog park, so Sam and the other dogs could run and play.

It made Louise feel much better knowing this, as you can imagine."

"Well, sure. We've got Great Danes at the compound. Everybody loves dogs. What's not to like?"

"Just before Louise died, she brought me down here and showed me this parcel of land. She wanted to make a dog park here, so that all the people around here could run and play with their pets without having to drive away so far. It was her dying wish, you might say."

Bravano turned away, and looked toward his truck. The driver had disappeared, leaving the doors open and the motor running. "Where the hell is Ronny?"

Brian stepped up and said "Let me go and check on your man, Mr. Bravano. I'm sure you and Ms. Falconer wants to finish your conversation." He turned and walked quickly to the gate and into the lot, while I stood gritting my teeth. I knew it was time to be cool, and this guy really was a challenge. He didn't give a damn about me or Louise, or anything else at that point.

I calmly moved into his line of sight and smiled. "You know, my daughter is getting awfully warm, and I think we could all use a cool drink and some shade. I am staying right up the hill, just a few steps away. Will you join me?"

To his credit, Anthony Bravano stood up straight and nodded. "Sure, I'll walk you home and let you finish about your cousin. I could use a drink."

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Uma looked at her watch and found that Belinda had managed to stay in the shower for thirty minutes. It was almost noon, and the bags were stashed in the van outside, waiting for Big Ted and Belinda to depart. Jacob was on a call to Paris, and she was ready to leave. The long morning had become a nightmare of negotiations, and this was something for which she was not prepared. Leave it to Jacob to make everything complicated.

Out in the entry hall, Big Ted was reading a magazine, sitting patiently on the flowered sofa. He stood up immediately. "Are we ready?"

"Belinda is dawdling in the shower, Ted. I have to get back to the Palisades, I am late now and Dyanna is waiting."

He had never seen the queen of cool so flustered, and recognized the signs of the Walnut lifestyle on Uma. Everything ran on Jacob Time, or Teddy Time, and the rest of the world got used to it. Uma was used to running her own ship, and an efficient one at that.

He put his arm around her. "Why don't you just go ahead? We will be fine. I'm used to Belinda, and Mr. Walnut for that matter. I will call you when we are in the air. Mas is flying with us, so things will be great."

Uma smiled and hoisted up her shoulder bag. "OK, you convinced me. I'm not waiting for any more of Jacob's guff today, I have to drive back to Big Sur this afternoon. We must get ready for Belinda, and you."

"Happy trails, my dear woman." He opened the door and walked outside with Uma for a final hug. "Belinda will be fine, she is just acting up. She hates it here. Don't be mad at her, it will spoil our arrival."

"You're right," said Uma. "Thank you, Ted. We'll see you soon, at the ranch."

He watched as she walked quickly to the freshly washed white Lexus and opened the driver's seat door. "Be safe, Ted. Take good care." She got inside and started the engine, pulling the seat belt into place.

Ted stood in the driveway and waved goodbye. When she reached his side, Uma opened the window. "I'm not mad, I promise." She blew him a kiss and blasted out of the driveway before he could speak.

He met Jacob in the kitchen, still talking on the phone while poking through some leftover cheese balls. As he moved away, Big Ted retrieved the backpack that held Belinda's meds and vitamins, and his beloved cherry yoghurt. Ty had stocked up for him, thinking perhaps they didn't have such a thing where he was going.

As he entered the bedroom, Belinda sat on the end of the bed, dressed and ready to go. It was a miracle. Now, if he could manage to find the driver, they would be on their way.



John and Ginger spent most of the morning cleaning out the second Carriage House. She insisted on staying and helping, after a bit of a rough start.

John had been ashamed to face her after the wild night they spent together, for some reason he could not figure out. He ducked into the shower before she awakened, standing there for a long time. His body felt different as he scrubbed with Uma's peppermint soap. Everything tingled, or was that just his imagination? What the hell was wrong with him?

He raised himself up to full height as the water ran through his hair. He applied shampoo twice, forgetting he had already done so, and slipped while retrieving the soap. He just felt so foolish. When he finally emerged and towed off, the smell of fresh coffee filled his nostrils. She was up and making breakfast. Time to face the music.

He found a clean white t-shirt on the bed, and pulled it over his head. His jeans were still sitting in a heap on the floor, and his phone had started buzzing. It was Uma and she had called several times during the night.

He put his jeans on one leg at a time, tucked the long white shirt inside and pushed the button to call back. She answered on the first ring.

"Good morning, John," said Uma. "I was afraid you had died or something."

"Sorry about that," he said, not wanting to lie. "Good morning to you. How's the land of the devil?"

"I'll tell you when I get home. Right now I'm trying to get Belinda out of bed so we can put them on the plane to Big Sur. She is so ornery."

"Come on, Uma. She's a teenage girl. What's new about that?"

"OK, here's the deal. Big Ted is coming too. I'm not sure about this, or what he will do, but he has to accompany her on the plane. I wouldn't have it any other way. She is too sly a character to travel alone, and Mas doesn't need that kind of problem."

"So, when are you coming?"

"I'm driving home with Dyanna later today. They are flying to Monterey around noon, maybe sooner. I think Jacob has a driver waiting for them. But where are we going to put them? I thought I would have Belinda with me down at the cottage at first, but she is too snarky to be around the baby. So they have to stay up at the ranch."

"Don't worry. I'll take care of it. [We'll clean up one of the carriage houses.](#)"

He sat on the edge of the bed and looked for his boots. One of them was under the corner of the spread.

"That will be perfect. Is Slow Dove working down at the third house?"

"Sometimes. The one next door is perfect. It's in pretty good shape. We'll get started right now. Let me know when you leave with Dyanna and the baby."

He put the phone down and searched under the bed for the other boot. Somehow it had

landed in the middle, and he had to shimmy underneath to grab it. Ginger was standing over him with a steaming cup of coffee when he emerged, and he looked up to see her chuckle and shake her head.

“Well, Big John, you are quite a sight this morning. Lose something?”

“My boot was stuck under the bed.” He sat down on the bed and lined the boots up in front of him.

“I think you might need some clean socks,” said Ginger, handing him the fragrant cup of java. He looked up to see her beautiful fresh face and melted into the moment.

“Good Morning,” said John. He felt the blood rush to his face.

“Good Morning, yourself,” said Ginger, kissing him on the cheek. He watched her open the top drawer of his dresser and grab a wadded pair of white socks. He was obviously not much of a laundry guy. She tossed them across the bed and he caught them with his free hand.

“I was just talking to Uma. They are still in L.A. and getting ready to send Belinda and Big Ted home on the Walnut Jet. She is driving back with Dyanna and little Lilly Jade later this afternoon.”

“Where are they going to stay?” She looked thoughtfully at the underwear drawer before closing it.

“That’s the thing. I have to get one of the carriage houses ready. Big Ted was not expected, and Uma doesn’t want Belinda down there with the baby.”

“Well, we’d better get some breakfast for that kind of work. I’ll help you.” She was dressed in her little shorts and t-shirt, with one of his big shirts over it. Come down when you’re ready.”

John pulled the thick white socks on, and slipped into his boots. He reached into his jacket and found a small flask meant for just such an occasion. He gulped down some coffee and poured a strong shot in the cup. Then he went into the bathroom and pulled his long hair tightly back into a pony tail. It was time to get started.



I often wonder (when I think of it) what caused me to invite a rude thug from Commerce into my little condo, but I knew that something had to be done. Thank God Jack Walters insisted upon accompanying us, without any discussion. Anthony Bravano seemed to care less either way, and Jack trailed behind us checking his messages. We left Brian at the corner property to round up Bravano’s man and keep an eye on things.

It would soon be time to feed my daughter, and I was becoming weary out there in the heat. But most of all, the feeling of losing control had come over me, and I didn’t like it one bit. What would Louise think of this breezy callous guy who seemed to believe everything revolved around him? I asked myself these things while settling Lily Jade in her wicker box. She was sleepy so I decided to let her rest. I used the bathroom and patted my face with cool water, in order to compose myself.

In the dining room, Jack and Anthony Bravano were enjoying a glass of ice water. I joined them by filling a tall plastic cup with cubes from the icemaker, and a squeeze of lemon in my water.

They both stood there without saying a word, so I jumped in. "Well, this was a good idea," I said, as a brilliant introduction. They nodded.

"How's the little one" asked Bravano.

"She seems fine and is asleep. So we have some good time to talk. I just wanted you to understand how much this project means to me, Mr. Bravano..."

"Anthony," said he.

"Ok, Anthony. Louise and I grew up together and she was like a sister. She was fortunate to have parents who were well off, and always shared her life with me. She passed on angora sweaters and beautiful books, and later took me to Europe to introduce me to the places where the masters painted. We shared a lot of things, and were very close when she became ill. I didn't know she had cancer until I returned from the dead, so to speak."

"Wow, what's that all about?" Bravano emptied his glass and set it on the table.

"I was presumed dead after a fall over the cliff at my house in Big Sur. Nobody knew I was rescued for a long time. Louise was the first person to see me after I returned."

"So you want to pay her back, is that it? Well, how about this? Find a better spot to make this dream come true. There must be another lot on this mountain top. Mine is not for sale."

"Actually, Mr. Bravano, there are no undeveloped parcels in this area at all," said Jack. "We checked that early on, in case of a problem. Brian has all the reports at the office."

"Here is what I don't understand, Anthony." My voice was shaking a bit and my hands were damp. "Why are you so adverse to this idea? Do you have something to hide? There is absolutely no reason to keep that piece of land in such bad condition, when we can pay you a fine price for it, and put it to use."

Now the look of sheer danger appeared in his eyes, a steely stare that told me how far over the line I had gone.

Jack stepped in between us and raised his hands. "OK, let's back up here for a moment. There is no need for detrimental language or accosting each other. I believe that Dyanna has expressed herself in an emotional way because of her love for her cousin.

"I'm sure you can understand that?" Bravano continued to stare straight ahead.

"We have all come a long way to have this conversation. Dyanna has her tiny daughter out for the first time. This means a lot to her. She wants to help you understand how much Louise loved her dog, and planned this at the end of her life on this earth. She wanted nothing more, no service, no grave, and had her ashes scattered over the Pacific Ocean."

Bravano nodded and looked down at his fancy sneakers. And then from the bedroom, Lily Jade started to cry. A divine intervention, to be sure. I went to take care of her, and closed the door behind me.

I could hear the voices muffled by the sounds of the traffic on the street, and my daughter sucking contentedly at my breast. She was not even wet, but very hungry, and she saved the day.

I leaned back into the pillows while Lily Jade had lunch, and felt a calm come over me. All that discussion in the other room seemed so unimportant, as I watched her blink her eyes. Her little hand grasped my finger and held on tight. I loved her so much that nothing else mattered.

When she was finished, I burped her gently and changed the diaper. She was in my arms when I opened the door and saw the empty room. Jack Walters sat quietly out on the patio, looking over some papers with Brian. There was no sign of Anthony Bravano.



Ginger had a knack for arranging furniture, which was honed in the hotel rooms she shared with Evan Galbraith during his first years on the road. She knew how to make things comfortable and useful, with whatever was at hand.

When John opened the door to the second Carriage House, the light streamed in the side windows. The ground floor had been used for resting by the crew during the wrecking and salvage of the old Phelps Ranch house the year before. There was a daybed in the corner with a couple of pillows and two chairs next to it. A square table sat in the middle of the room, under the ancient hanging paper lantern. There was also an old chest of drawers and a floor lamp.

"We should find something to cover the floors," said Ginger. "But basically all you need upstairs is a bed for Belinda, and a closet. Let's take a look."

John led the way upstairs, happy to see the clean room with several large windows. There was a double mattress and box spring standing against the wall, covered by a plastic sheet. The bathroom had an old stand alone sink and a big tub, with a toilet that had a pull chain.

"Wow, I haven't seen one of these since my Grandma's house in Odessa," said Ginger.

John turned the spigot and water flowed into the dusty sink. Then he pulled the chain, and they watched the toilet flush and fill up.

"So far, so good. We can make her a stand later, but the mattress and box springs look fine. She might want to design it herself." John stood in the large room, getting a feel for what could be done in a short time.

"Don't you have a beautiful old Armoire downstairs? She could use that for her clothes until there is a closet. Would you mind?" Ginger opened the medicine cabinet over the sink, and ran her finger over the dusty shelves.

"Yeah, but that thing is heavy. And we need a dolly to get up the stairs."

"I can help you, John," said Slow Dove. He was standing in the doorway of the bathroom, and surprised them with his smile.

"Well, we didn't know you were around, son. Good to see you." John embraced the slender brown man with a big hug. "This is Ginger. She has been helping out with the gardens."

"I've seen you with Uma," said Slow Dove. "Welcome to the ranch."

"We have guests coming today," said John. "One of them is a young girl, and we need to get her

set up.”

“What can I do to help?”

“Find a dolly and help us move the armoire from John’s house,” said Ginger. “That’s a start.”

“Sure,” said Slow Dove. “Happy to assist. I’ll get the big dolly from my studio, and meet you over there.” He turned and slipped back down the stairs in a light footed way.

“Wow,” said Ginger. “He is amazing. He looks like the little prince from Pocahontas.”

“He is preparing a tribal gift for Dyanna. It’s a secret, so don’t mention it to anyone. He will not speak about it unless you ask.”

Ginger stood on her tiptoes and reached around John’s neck. “You will find that I am good with secrets, John.” She was so close that he had to kiss her.



Slow Dove returned to his studio in the fourth Carriage House and looked around. It would be necessary to cover some things, with this new woman around. She seemed to be with John, there was that vibe, but he could be wrong. Regardless, he was in the final process of soaking the long silky strands of hair from Hawk, and it could not be disturbed with any foreign matter or spills.

He carefully placed a large clean linen sheet over the table where the final design materials lay. The jade piece was carved and ready for weaving, so he placed it in a wooden box with a hinged top. As he held the oblong image in his hand, it felt warm from the sunshine that lit his table. That was a very good sign.

Then he poured the remaining watery liquid from a jar that Uma had given him. It was a pale pink color and had splashes of red. That would have been the blood from the birth, in some way. He held the empty jar up to the light, and sniffed the inside. It was the scent of new life, pure and organic embryonic fluid from the birth of Lily Jade.

The secret was good with him, as well. The job was almost done and it would ensure his place in the family of Hawk and his daughter. And his beautiful wife, Dyanna.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Walnut jet landed at Monterey Airport at 3:05 pm, rolling smoothly onto runway 10R/28L. Belinda had dozed off after a feast of chocolate cookies and her favorite milkshake, but Big Ted was all eyes. He had read everything he could find about the famous Central Coast city, which was the original capitol of California. They arrived at a time of day when the tarmac was fairly clear, with most scheduled flights in the early morning and later in the evening.

Mas sat down beside him during the flight after making a fresh pot of coffee for the pilot. He brewed himself some Parisian Marco Polo Tea and sipped the fragrant brew while they talked. Ted was impressed with the savoir faire of this man who was a key part of

the Walnut Group. It told him that the Walnut Brothers kept the best people working with them, and took good care of them.

"Alexio will be meeting us at the gate," said Mas. "You will enjoy him immensely. He is a local, born and raised in Monterey. Third or fourth generation."

Belinda stirred as they touched down and hit a slight bump, and slowly opened her eyes. She looked so different that Mas caught himself staring at the fresh face with plump cupid bow lips. Her skin was clear and pale, which was rare for anyone who had been in Southern California for months. But the gouges of unsightly acne and red streaks from her continual treatments had disappeared. He smiled at her big drowsy eyes and reached over to pat her knee. "We have arrived in Monterey, Ms. Stone. You may release your seatbelt."

She giggled, since this was a bone of contention during previous encounters on the Walnut flights. As a small girl, she was obedient and worshipped her father. Kevin Stone would carry her on his shoulders up the boarding stairs and duck under the entry. She squealed with delight when he lifted her over his head and down to the floor. In those days she was chubby and happy, with no evidence of what was to come.

"Oh, Mas," said Belinda. "You always say that. I know we landed, I was playing possum." "You might want to use the lavatory before we open the doors. It's a long way to Big Sur."

Surprisingly, she disconnected her belt and stood up, stretching like a cat. As she headed up the aisle, Big Ted shook his head. "Wow. You've got the magic touch with Belinda. I've never seen her like this."

"We have been friends for a long time, Mr. Ted. When she still had her father, and her mother was not a murderer. Before he met Dyanna."

"What kind of man was Kevin Stone? I've seen all his films, he was a great actor. And what a body, so strong and virile."

"You are not so bad yourself, Big Ted. Just another darker version." Mas smiled at him and laughed to himself. "There is another small Lav behind my station, if you want to freshen up."



On the tarmac, Alexio stood watching the Walnut Jet. It always gave him a thrill to see it glide

down out of the sky, so huge and sleek and beautiful. He was excited to meet Belinda, knowing the story of her fall into mental anguish and the years of treatment. This guy Big Ted was supposedly her hero. Jacob Walnut had removed Belinda from a fancy nut house in Utah, after Big Ted snuck her out one night, or so the story went. He wondered what Dyanna would think about all this, and his heart jumped like it always did at the thought. He had always wanted to work for her or the Walnuts, or both, and now that dream was back on track.

He straightened his Ray Ban Aviators and waited for the jet to roll into place. Show time.



Mas opened the door as soon as the ground crew secured the boarding stairs, and stepped outside. He spotted Alexio across the asphalt, in a white Polo shirt and snug khakis. His hair was pulled back in the tight ponytail as usual, with dark sunglasses covering his eyes. Alexio was actually unaware of the impact that he made from the first glance, but that was all part of Jacob Walnut's plan. Knock them off their feet at the get go, the rest will fall into place.

He waved at Mas and strode quickly across the tarmac with a broad smile. Mas held out his arms as Alexio climbed the stairs two at a time. They embraced with fervor, and stepped inside the cabin. It was a standard Walnut rule that no business was conducted outside the jet for public consumption.

Ted stood behind Mas, and stepped forward with his hand out. "This is Big Ted," said Mas, "so named for obvious reasons."

Alexio removed his shades slowly, undaunted by the enormous black man, and nodded as they shook hands. "Pleased to meet you, sir."

"This is Alexio, our man in Monterey. He will be driving you down to Big Sur," said Mas.

Belinda strolled down the aisle watching them, and stopped next to Mas. She looked up into Alexio's eyes while he smiled at her. "Hello, Belinda. I have been looking forward to meeting you."

"I'll bet."

"Welcome back to Monterey. Are you ready for a beautiful ride down the coast? We've got good weather today."

Pilot Jim opened the door to the cockpit, and waved at his friend. "Hey, you rotten Mexican gangster! How are you?"

"Great, as always. Nice landing, Jim. Smooth as silk." He turned to Belinda who was looking out the window. "Ok, Miss Stone. Do you have any luggage I can take for you?"

"I will grab our bags," said Ted. "You two go on ahead. Mas will help."

Belinda stepped up and Alexio offered his arm. They disappeared down the stairs, and Mas picked up a package for Uma. "Ok, so far so good. Let's roll."

The chocolate Walnut Mercedes Benz was parked near the gate, and Alexio unlocked the car as they approached. "Here we go, Belinda." He opened the back door and watched her turn

around, waiting for Mas and Big Ted. They were strolling along, taking their time, and Belinda approached them. "Are you coming down with us, Mas?"

"No, sweet girl. We are returning to Burbank shortly. Teddy Walnut is flying to Puerto Vallarta tonite."

"I wish you would stay."

He put his arms around her as Big Ted stashed the suitcases in the trunk. "You will be just fine, you've got two good men for company. And Uma is going to be there in Big Sur."

She hugged him tightly and walked over to the car, sliding into the back seat. Big Ted climbed into the front seat. "Do you mind if I sit up here?"

Alexio smiled and closed the door. "Of course not. Whatever works for you both." He gave Mas a final hug, slid into the driver's seat and turned the key. He could see Mas in the rear view, and honked as they departed.

Slow Dove and John Soaring Meadow sat on the grass near the gardens, drinking a cold beer. They had worked like dogs to fix the rooms up for Belinda, and were now enjoying some huge sandwiches for lunch. Ginger had gone back to Gabriel's house for bedding, and left them to relax a bit, before they finished up.

"That woman is something else, John," said Slow Dove. "Where did she come from?"

John took a bite of his turkey and lettuce with Swiss, and chewed thoughtfully. "Umm. Well Uma has her working on the gardens, and we've gotten to be friends".

"Never seen her around here before. She's lovely, and a great worker."

"Ginger is the lady friend of Evan Galbraith. He is a rock and roll star that Hawk worked on last year. He saved Evan's hand from a terrible injury during a show they were doing in the City."

"I've heard of that man, he is a top notch musician. Great guitar player. Where is he now?"

"He's on tour with his band, now that he has recovered. Ginger is staying at Gabriel's house. She has fallen in love with Big Sur." John emptied his beer and leaned back with his face to the sun.

"I'd say she has fallen in love with you as well," said Slow Dove. He laughed shyly, at his bravado to say such a thing. John Soaring Meadow was a big deal around here, and known to be a tough character.

John heard the sound of the truck approaching and said nothing.

Ginger roared up the hill in Gabriel's big pick up, careful to keep the pile of linens next to her on the seat. She was familiar with the large closet next to the master bedroom in the West home, having rearranged the contents and laundered the sheets in recent weeks. Gabriel's mother had the most beautiful things she had ever seen, divine comforters and rich cashmere blankets, and the softest bed sheets ever.

Gabriel slept on one set all the time, plain pale blue with two enormous pillows and the rest were just there for the taking. She knew he wouldn't mind loaning some things to the *Belinda Project*, as she had named it in her well organized domestic brain. There would be plenty of time for the

girl to redo things, but for now it needed to be warm and comfortable and safe.

She also had a large grocery bag full of girly things, like bubble bath, scented bar soap, a nice splash cologne from Evan's goodie bag and a tissue holder made of pink shells. She had no idea what to expect from Belinda, but it never hurt to make the girl feel welcome.

As a last minute thought, she found herself in the pale yellow bathroom of Meredith West, opening the door of the medicine cabinet. Inside were a few of her things, like a toothbrush, floss, yummy apricot moisturizer and her pills. She had been on birth control for seven years, and never missed a night, no matter how late.

It was mid afternoon, the next day, and she had still not popped her daily protection. How could she forget? Of course, she had not planned to be in John's bed so soon, but one never knows. He was ripe for the taking and she wanted him in the worst way. She reached for the round disc and put it in her pocket. She would just take two tonight.

When she closed the mirrored door and looked at herself, Ginger could not help but smile. This was the best day she could remember.



Uma and I made good time on the road to Big Sur, and she pushed the pedal to 90 mph along the roads of Monterey County. It was the perfect lull between commuters and tourists, and a few cars on the road with the same idea. We passed Gaviota without a stop, and sped out onto the open space. By mid-afternoon, we had reached the back road by Gonzales, and embarked upon the last stretch of our journey.

She had some good music on the radio coming from Nashville, and Lily Jade slept like a baby! I believe she could sense the camaraderie with her Auntie and me, like young innocent things often do. I opened a large bottle of water for Uma, handed her some dried fruit to power the energy, and she just kept go-going! This left me with time to ponder some racing thoughts, and I realized that I had a few of these issues stashed in the waiting room of my mind.

As I looked at my daughter snuggled into my lap and belted in, I realized that she would most likely have this kind of life forever. She would do well to adjust to happenstance now, perhaps unaware but flexible regardless. Who besides me would imagine a baby that might cooperate? Well, I can dream, and dream I did. I looked out the window at the burned out houses from the big fire and the people on bicycles heading for the coast. When we reached the coast and Highway 1, I imagined Lily Jade with other children, mixing it up. I saw her with all the characters who inhabited my life, and the Hawk's and Uma's. I knew that it was upon me to give her the gift of love and flexibility, and an open curious mind.

As we crossed the bridge at Sensory Creek, Uma turned off the radio. She looked at me and said "What are you thinking, Moana? You haven't said a word for miles."

"I have decided that I want my daughter to be socialized, and open to the world. I want her to see everything she can, forever."

"Ok, that sounds good."

"I want to start pumping my milk, so that we are able to accommodate anything that comes

down the road. At first I thought it was too harsh, but really, it is just the opposite. It gives us both the freedom to live our lives with other people.”

“This is true. I’m happy to hear you speak of it. I have been waiting for a good time to help you, and we can begin now. I have all the equipment ready, I just wanted you to ask for it.”

“You know, Uma, this experience taught me a lot about the future. As much as I love holding her and being hands on, I realize that life cannot always be perfect, especially with a new baby! There will be other people in her life very soon, as we reach out into the world. And I have begun to think about my work, and my promise to Jacob and Teddy Walnut. They have graciously waited for me to write this script, and I am itching to start.”

“I can understand that, Moana. You have been a good soldier about something that you did not plan for at all. Against the odds, the child born to you and Hawk is just perfect. She is a miracle from many angles, you must admit.”

As we drove along Highway 1 entering the southern end of Big Sur, I was once again astounded by how completely primitive much of the land looked, how fresh and beautiful. “I am always thankful to come back to this place, Uma, and bringing Lily Jade up here will change all of our lives. I want her to remember this family of people who love her, from a very young age.”

“I have worked with Ampalia before when she helped out new mothers. She is wonderful with children, and already knows the routine. I hope you will allow her to continue on there, with you and Hawk.”

Tears filled my eyes as we passed the Henry Miller Library and up the hill to Nepenthe. Lily Jade would grow up with this legend as her family. It was the best gift I could possibly bestow, the family of her father all gathered around.

Uma’s phone buzzed and stirred me from my reverie. I looked down at Lily Jade and reached inside to touch her little fist. I could swear she had heard and understood every thought and word, which was something that would remain with us through the years. Those first days and weeks are often forgotten as the child grows, overshadowed by bigger things. For my money, the days we had together in the Palisades were the beginning of a new chapter. I had grasped the theory of putting someone else first, which is not an easy thing for a perpetual independent woman.

Say what you will, God works in strange ways, and gives you what you need. The miracle of Hawk was reason enough to blow my life out of the water, and now this. A beautiful little girl born from the miracle of saving my life, as a part of this family!

“Belinda and Big Ted are on their way to the Ranch now. They have just left Rocky Point, with Alexio at the wheel.”

I laughed at the thought of that lovely man driving the pubescent Belinda and Big Ted, windows open, music playing, rushing past the ocean’s breaking waves. He was a born charmer and host, and I put money on Belinda’s first crush. It had to be Alexio.

“I was just remembering him the first time we met. He drove me down to my cottage from the Walnut jet, and charmed the socks off me. He is a perfect choice to handle Belinda. Just watch.”

“Who knows, my sister. Stranger things have happened.”

Lily Jade picked that moment to kick me in the stomach, and made a loud rumbling sound. Now we were really home.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Alexio was well aware of the task in front of him, weaving through the traffic on Carmel Hill. Monterey had become much more crowded in the past few years and the cars began to pile up heading north earlier and earlier. The mix of laborers and maids, office workers and students jumped into their cars at varied times from early afternoon to evening. He was thankful for his experience driving Jacob and Teddy Walnut in Southern California, which blew any good man's mind when it came to traffic. Piece of cake, this stop and go.

Beside him, Big Ted scanned the forested areas that drew cars up into the hills and down to the sea, often clogged with commuters from the fine stores of Carmel. *Nobody who works there lives there*, thought Alexio, smiling to himself. *They can't afford it.*

He glanced in the rear view and watched Belinda playing with her phone. She could be in Afghanistan for all she knew. Was she going to be a little twit, or an easy sell? He had a feeling they would soon find out.

Now the open road was before them, driving past Monastery Beach and around the curves of Carmel Highlands. Big Ted looked up at the Highlands Inn, towering above the highway and shook his head. "This place is something else," he said, "something for everyone." He laughed at his little joke and Alexio nodded, while Belinda continued her phone games. It was only when they broke out of the Highlands and around the curves of the blue Pacific that Belinda glanced up at the waves crashing below.

As they rounded the fourth sweeping bay of whitecaps, Alexio realized how to play his favorite card. He watched carefully as they climbed again heading for Palo Colorado, until the sign appeared. And then, before they knew it, Belinda and Big Ted were at Rocky Point.

"What is this place?" Big Ted leaned forward and looked at the lush greenery surrounding the building.

**"Welcome to Rocky Point!"** This is Belinda's favorite place!" He waited and looked in the rear view.

"I've never been here!" said the girl, looking back at her phone.

"Come on, you two. Rocky Point is the bomb. Time for a pit stop, and some onion rings."

They entered the patio from a wooden gate, and found the entire area empty. A sweeping view of the coast lay below them, with terraced stairs down to tables set on sandstone tiles. Several had umbrellas, but Belinda tripped down the walkway to the end, where one table was alone on a cliff over the ocean. She sat down and immediately looked at the menu.

Alexio turned to Big Ted and winked, as they followed the path to Belinda's perch. She was studying the selections when a hearty waitress joined them, wearing sunglasses and a scooped neck white shirt. Her ample breasts were on display, with freckles across the chest, as she stood in front of them. "Hi there! My name is Laura and I will be your slave today." She laughed heartily, while Belinda stared at her.

"Hi, Laura. Bring us a double batch of onion rings for starters, and iced tea for me, please," said Alexio.

She looked him up and down, legs stretched out across the grassy rocks, and raised her eyebrows. "Yes Sir! And what would you like to drink, young lady?"

Belinda seemed to be fascinated with their server, and shrugged her shoulders. "Please bring us two lemonades," said Big Ted. "Or some kind of juice."

"I want a coke," said Belinda. "And a hamburger." "Make that three cheeseburgers," said Alexio. "My treat."

Laura was used to serving tourists, and swept up the menus with a smile. "Comin' up."

"Do you know how to shoot photos with your camera, Belinda?" Alexio scooted his chair over next to her. "This is a great place to start." He took her iPhone and turned it over to reveal the front. "Just tap the camera icon here, and push this button at the bottom." He held up the screen for both of them to see a bright shot of the ocean.

"Wow, I wondered about that," said Belinda. "Here, give it to me." "One more thing," said Alexio. "Tap the camera again for a selfie."

Belinda squealed as her face came into view, and jumped back. "Wow! Do I just push the button again?"

"Yup," said Alexio, winking again at Big Ted. They had her for at least a little while.

Laura returned with drinks and a huge basket of onion rings, ketchup and extra napkins. "Welcome to the Central Coast! We've got the best food from Monterey to Big Sur."

By the time she returned with the burgers, they were taking photos of each other and dipping the rings in special sauce. Even the girl was happy, thought Laura. Good tip time.



We pulled into the driveway before 5 pm, and rumbled across the gravel to the gate. Lily Jade opened her eyes and clenched her fists as I opened the door and stepped out into the fresh breeze.

Ampalia emerged from the cottage with her apron tied around a sundress. "You're back," she said joyfully. "How is the little one?"

"Take a look," I said. "Now she is a true Angelino."

I handed the baby to her, while Uma opened the trunk. "What are you making in there?"

"I have been baking all day for these guys. They wanted cinnamon rolls and Uma's bread, and now brownies."

Hawk appeared outside our bedroom door with Gabriel behind him, and ran up the path. "Hooray, you're back". He took me in his arms and swung me around. He held me very tight and breast milk began to leak through my dress. "Ummm, dinner time." He kissed me three times and took Lily Jade from Ampalia. "I'm so glad to see you all in one piece."

Uma came around the car with two bags as Gabriel stepped forward. He looked sunburned and happy as well. These two were like kids out of school. "Welcome home, ladies!"

"We didn't expect you for a couple more hours," said Hawk, gazing at his daughter. She stretched out while he kissed her little belly, speaking in a soft teasing whisper. "Don't forget your daddy loves you."

"Ok, Daddy. Bring her inside and let me clean her up."

Gabriel carried my bag and fell in behind us, and Uma went into the kitchen to survey the baking bonanza. Ampalia had created a corner full of lovely cookies, cinnamon rolls and bread. The brownies were still in the oven. The whole house smelled so good, even down the long hallway to our rooms.

"I'm going to feed LJ and give both of us a bath," I said, sitting down on the bed. There were fresh sheets and pillows plumped up for me, which was kind of like heaven after Anthony Bravano and the drive home. Hawk jumped in the shower, and I was alone with Gabriel. He stood by the door watching Lily Jade nurse, smiling like a fat cat. It was so good to see him, the same person, day after day, all this time while we were planning the house. I told him so.

"I have never seen a baby do that," he said. "Only the wildlife. Are you sure you don't mind?"

"You are family, Gabriel. If you are really good, I will teach you how to feed her yourself one of these days."

"Well now, that would be a miracle of nature." He laughed and blushed just a tiny bit.

"I am going to start pumping my milk, so that her father can feed her as well. And Ampalia, and Uma and maybe even John Soaring Meadow."

"What's this about John?" said Hawk. He had a towel wrapped around his waist, fresh from the shower.

"I'm going to have him feed Lily Jade one of these days. I want all of you to get close to her that way."

"Dyanna is going into the dairy business," said Gabriel, with a laugh. "Are you tired of being tied down to motherhood already?"

"Actually, just the opposite. I want some time to start working on my script, but also share this beautiful child with my family. I think it's healthy for her and for us to begin that way. You will be first, Hawk."

He actually looked kind of shy for a moment, before bravado took over. "I will be happy to participate, my love. There will be plenty of time to share my daughter." He dropped the towel and opened his drawer for some underwear. When he pulled on the boxers with red hearts, you had to laugh. God, it was good to be home.

Uma had checked in with John as soon as we arrived, standing on the porch with a warm cinnamon roll. It was akin to nectar, all this open air living, after a couple of days in the Walnut House or even the Palisades. She would be glad when everything settled down, and told John as much between bites. "Have you heard from Mas yet," she asked listening to the sound of furniture

moving and doors slamming. John had explained the process he and Slow Dove were following to put Belinda's rooms together.

"They left Monterey a little after three," said John. He stepped outside and walked over to the gardens as Gabriel's black pickup roared around the corner with Ginger at the wheel. She waved merrily, and he smiled back, trying to concentrate on Uma's queries. It was hard to do both, and Ginger had his eye.

"They should be here by now," said Uma. "I told Jacob I wanted a call before they arrived. I want Belinda to go directly up there."

"Hang loose, Uma. The second carriage house is ready for her to sleep here tonite. We are just finishing up her bed upstairs. Ginger is helping with the linens and bath towels." He watched as Ginger climbed out of the truck and fetched a large stack of folded sheets and blankets. She walked past him with a wink, setting up some dust on the road with her bare feet.

"That's great. I had her up there to work on the gardens, but she seems to be just what the doctor ordered."

"Why don't you call Alexio and find out where they are? Do you have his cell number?" "Good idea. I will be up there soon, ok?"

John rang off and crossed the road to the open door where Ginger had entered. He could hear voices and bounded up the stairs to the bedroom. They had placed Belinda's bed under the large windows facing the sea, in the corner. This gave the room extra space and extended a cozy feel to the upper nook of a room. The drawstring for the curtains was next to the bed, so she could sit up in the morning and open them. He stood watching Ginger smooth the bottom sheet and tuck it in with a perfect army fold. Slow Dove shook out the matching flowered top sheet, laying it over the bottom while Ginger pulled it into place. The girl had some training at this, thought John. He remembered that she came from a large family of children, and had probably helped her mother with their chores.

"Why don't you pick out a nice blanket, since you're just standing there" she said. John felt his face flush as he crossed the room to the pile of freshly laundered bed clothes. The rose colored quilt with white flowers looked kind of nice, and he handed it to Ginger.

Slow Dove stood watching them, doing the dance of love, still shy and unsteady. She looked up at John and softly asked for a "real blanket" to put underneath. Slow Dove handed it over to Ginger, while John just stood there. He seemed to be tongue tied, or perhaps deep in thought.

"Uma just called and she says the plane landed around three, so they will be here soon. Maybe Alexio took them to Carmel or something." His phone saved any further conversation for later, buzzing loudly in the high ceillinged room full of ancient wood. He wandered out the door and down the stairs, in a conversation.

"You have him in a trance girl," said Slow Dove. They stood at corners, smoothing the rosy quilt over the blanket. He handed over two matching pillowslips, and threw the pillows at her. They started laughing and Ginger came after Slow Dove with a large puffy pillow. She chased him into the corner while he faked a shriek, and held up his hands.

Boom, she bounced the soft stuffing at his head and chest, and he ran to retrieve the other pillow. John returned to find them batting away at each other, having a great time. He stood in the

middle while Slow Dove stepped back and left Ginger to one last whooping hit. She got John in the face and he stumbled into the rocking chair, tipping it backward.

The sight of those long legs and heavy boots in the air was fuel to the fire, and soon Ginger and Slow Dove were laughing uncontrollably, tears rolling down their faces. John lay back staring at the ceiling, and joined them.

Ginger finally reached over and pulled John up to standing position. "Boy, that was one well placed shot, huh? Sorry, John."

"It's a long time since I've been in a pillow fight. Probably younger than Slow Dove."

He stood up to his full height and Ginger put her arms around his neck. "You should try it more often, Big Daddy." She planted a kiss on his cheek and hugged him.

"Alexio is on his way down here with Belinda. They are leaving Rocky Point now, so probably less than an hour."

"What are they doing there?"

"Eating and drinking, and having fun," said Slow Dove. "It's about time for us to do the same. I'm going to my studio and clean up, take a shower. I think it would be nice for all of us to be here when this new girl arrives." He gave a salute and disappeared down the stairs.

"Well, what do you think" asked Ginger. She cracked open a window near the bed, and a breeze filled the room.

"Well, you never know with Belinda, but I hope she will appreciate all the work we have done today. I want to warn you that she might be rude, Honey. Don't be put off by her mouth. She's been through a lot, so walk carefully."

"Well, I'm going down to pick up Gabriel now, so he can have his wheels for work tomorrow."

She started for the stairs, and he grabbed her arm. "Will you come back and meet Belinda, maybe in the morning?"

"I will come back before that, the more the merrier. I will show her a few things she might enjoy." She kissed his cheek and disappeared down the stairs. He watched at the front windows as the truck rolled past and she waved up at him.



That night, after Uma left the house to welcome Belinda, and Gabriel rode off with Ginger, bouncing in the truck while she sped away, after Ampalia left us to our little family, we made love.

It was the first time since I had discovered my pregnancy that neither of us thought about the future or the past. We were completely in the present, primed to explore the bodies which were busy elsewhere for so many months. We were clean and unadorned, with our daughter sleeping soundly nearby, apparently fine with the sounds of passion and fire. Hawk explored my body in the most loving way, and made me feel as though I was his first woman. I touched him and smelled the fresh scent of his sun kissed body, while the heat of the moment overcame us.

It was the second celebration of our first time since Lily Jade, and we were fully aware that we had passed a marker in our relationship. We took it slow and reacquainted, so very happy to be in the moment and able to passionately speak without words.

It was still there, all the amazing JuJu that brought us together. I thought of the first time I saw him, and the beating of his heart in the innocent moments of discovery.

I remembered how I longed for him, and thought he was unaware.

In the early light of dawn, I rose to look at my daughter, to be sure she was still alive. She had allowed us this interlude without a sound, and slept on while I kissed her cheek.

Now I knew we were good for the long run. It was meant to be.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Gabriel noticed something different about Ginger immediately. He allowed her to drive, having had a few beers with Hawk in the afternoon. Besides, it was always fun to watch that girl in action. Today, she simply glowed with vigor, unadorned and covered with the remnants of feathers? He studied the exquisite little bronzed body reaching for the pedals as she maneuvered the pickup on the winding road to his house.

"You need a pillow behind you, Miss Ginger," he said, as she pulled into the driveway and killed the engine.

"You think? Did I do something wrong?" Her smile crinkled up the freckles on her nose a tiny bit, and gave the impression of levity.

"Nope, not at all. But it's quite a reach between my legs and yours." A bee flew into the cab and buzzed around, and Ginger quickly jumped out.

He had to laugh at her fear of such a mild creature. The honeybees in Big Sur rarely stung a human being, they were too sated with the luscious pollen available during the season. "You are sweet, Ginger, but not as good as a rose or a gardenia to those soldiers."

They walked to the back door where she found the key under the crawling bougainvillea. She opened the door and handed the key back to him, strolling into the kitchen. "Okay, Gabriel West. What's on your mind?"

He opened the refrigerator and handed her a cold beer. "What makes you think that?"

"I know you pretty well by now, and you've been watching me like a hawk for the last 20 minutes. Did I do something wrong?"

"I don't know, did you?" He teased her with a hug, retrieving a cold Bud for himself. She continued to stare at him.

"OK, you look like something's up. You're so happy and bubbly. Cool is gone."

She leaned against the counter and laughed out loud. "Right on, lovely man. I've been hanging out with John, up at the ranch."

"John Soaring Meadow?" His eyes opened wide as he stared at her. "That's the one." She took a long drink of beer. "He is amazing."

"He is old enough to be your father."

"Not really. He just looks so scary at first. He's only forty something." "What about Evan?"

"We have our code between us, Gabriel. We've been friends for a very long time. It was never intended to be a marriage, or a long term thing. We just love each other, and grew up together. John is something else. He is a man."

"Oh, sweetie, you have no idea. He is a tough character, born and raised here. You should have seen him before he met Dyanna."

"Well, I can see him now, and I like what I see. He is funny and handsome and very powerful."

"I don't mean John is not a great guy, I've known him most of my life. He is Hawk's brother in the Esalen Nation. He is the sheriff."

"Well, if you don't mind, I am going to take a long shower and wash my hair. We've been fixing up the carriage house for Belinda Stone. She will be here shortly, and I'm going back to meet her."

Gabriel saluted to her sassy little butt as she left the room. Things were getting pretty complicated here with the baby, and Hawk coming back. And [the beautiful Dyanna](#) seducing him as a mother. Now the picture of the grizzly John Soaring Meadow as a lover entered his mind. What next?



Belinda giggled as they drove over the cattle guards, winding up the hill to the ranch. She could barely take her eyes off Alexio, with his buff arms and long ponytail. He looked like an actor friend of her father who used to visit when she was a little girl. She curled her toes up inside the new flip flops and put her elbow on the open window. She could see Big Ted's reflection in the back seat, staring at the rolling fields of the ranch which was named for her father and Dyanna: the Stone/Falconer Ranch. The enormous gate with wrought iron posts had the name right on the front. It had been a long time since she was there, just barely a memory. They came with that awful real estate lady and Dyanna, after her dad died. It was a painful thought and she squeezed her eyes closed to shut out the images.

"Over there is the big ranch barn, where they breed and house the animals" said Alexio.

They were coming around the last curve to reveal the ranch house buildings, or what was left of them. It was going to be quite a spread when the new main house was finished. Now, as they pulled onto the level road, the large bare lot at the end stood ready for work.

Alexio spotted John Soaring Meadow standing by the gardens with Uma, and honked at them. They waved him over to the second building of the Carriage houses, so he pulled up in front. Belinda stared at the rough hewn barnwood building, where the door was open and there were wildflowers in the planting boxes.

Big Ted stepped out of the car, stretching his muscles after the long drive. He opened the door for Belinda, and held out his hand. "Come on, my girl. This is your new place in Big Sur." His voice quivered a little as she stood up. "You're going to love it."

"How do you know, BT? You've never been here."

Alexio got out of the car and came around just as Uma reached them. She embraced him with fervor, and Belinda felt a pang inside. She wanted to touch him, but that would take some doing.

"I thought maybe you got lost," said Uma.

"We stopped at Rocky Point," said Big Ted, stepping up. "Have you been there?"

"Of course they have," said Belinda. "They grew up here, Ted. Get with the program." She didn't mean to be harsh, but the black giant stepped back, feeling the sting.

"Now, now," said Uma. "Ted is our guest and our friend. He saved your life Belinda, don't ever forget that." She held out her arm to him. "Come with me, you two. Let's take a look at the new digs".

Belinda followed them with Alexio, who put his arm around her. "This is one of the famous Carriage Houses of the old Phelps Ranch. In the early days, they were all used for the ranch hands."

They entered the spacious room with a stairway to the right. Three large windows faced the west, displaying the rolling hills and pastures.

"If you look carefully, you will see the ocean down there," said John, entering the room behind them. He took Belinda over to the sparkling glass and pointed to the coastal property. "See, there between the trees is Dyanna's cottage. It was once the lookout house for the ranch."

Belinda felt the eyes of everyone behind her, and stepped up to look. "I can see the top of the roof, and the chimney."

"That's right. They used smoke signals in those days to warn the residents of the British invaders. They sailed along the coast to pilfer and steal the goods."

"Really? Are you just teasing?"

"No, Belinda," said Alexio. "Big Sur was known for pirates and gangsters who landed on the shores and stole the goods. They were especially after the gypsum and granite in the hills."

Belinda was bored with this type of thing and turned to the stairway. "What's up there?"

"Come on," said Uma. "Let's take a look." She put her arm around the fragile shoulders and they climbed the stairs. At the top there was a small entry area and the door to the bedroom. There was a clean rag rug on the floor and a little etching that Uma recognized from John's house. The walls were the same old barnwood, but the door to the bedroom had been whitewashed. It was still damp.

Belinda walked ahead into the bedroom and let out a shriek. Uma followed her and spotted a body on the freshly made bed. He was fast asleep.

"Oh, Belinda! That's Slow Dove. He's an artist and lives next door. He must have drifted off waiting for us."

Belinda marched over and poked the lean belly with her finger. "Hey, wake up."

Slow Dove opened his eyes and sat up very fast. "Gotcha!" He poked Belinda back in the belly and swung his legs off the bed. "Where have you people been? I thought you might have gone off a cliff somewhere."

"We stopped at Rocky Point," said Alexio, laughing at the sight of his friend. "Hey, guy. How's the art biz?"

"Well, actually, I have loaned this lovely lady a fresh painting." He slid off the bed and walked to the center of the side wall. A multicolored painting of flowers on white leather hung from a small branch.

Belinda walked over to look, studying the blossoms carefully. "It's beautiful," she remarked, touching the soft leather. "Did you do all this work yourself?"

"Yes Miss Belinda. It's from my Spring collection."

Uma put her arms around Slow Dove. "You are such a talented boy, always were." "I'm nineteen, Ms. Uma. Not a boy anymore."

"Whoops, sorry. Well, I hope you and Belinda can be friends. She could use a good guide around the ranch."

Belinda stepped forward. "Alexio has offered to show me around."

John stood watching the edgy conversation, and started to laugh. He strode into the room and gave Belinda a hug. "Hey little girl, it's been a long time. You look wonderful."

The ice broke with his jovial welcome, and they all looked around the room as Slow Dove described the décor. "We wanted you to be happy here, so Ginger did the bed and the bathroom."

He led Belinda into the large room that held a claw foot tub, an old sink and a toilet with a chain handle. "This is really the bomb." He grabbed the chain and flushed the toilet, while Belinda stared at him. She had never seen such a thing, being raised in the finery of Beverly Hills.

Uma laughed and turned on the water to the tub. It had been scrubbed clean and there was a small bottle of bath salts on the ledge near the window. "I would kill for a tub like this. You and Dyanna got the best ones."

The sound of someone on the stairs cued them to turn and see Ginger Malone. She was dressed in a white cotton dress with strappy sandals and a white gardenia in her long shiny hair. "Hey, my favorite room. You must be Belinda! I'm Ginger and I put some special stuff in here for you."

She opened the ancient medicine cabinet to reveal a new toothbrush, a tube of Crest's whitest toothpaste and some mouthwash. There was a bottle of jasmine body splash, and some sunscreen. "I didn't know what you like, so I shared my stash."

Her ebullient energy filled the room as she put her arm around Belinda. "I hope you like the room, we didn't have a lot of time. I can help you fix it up if you want."

"Thanks for being so nice," said Belinda.

"And if you happen to find some feathers under the bed," said Slow Dove, "we had a pillow fight. I won."

"Did not," said Ginger.

Everyone laughed, including John Soaring Meadow. He put his arm around Ginger and kissed her on the cheek. "This lady worked her tail off, all of us did. We wanted to give you a good welcome home, Belinda."

"Is anyone hungry" said Uma. "I brought cinnamon rolls and brownies, and some great Clementine's from LA. I think John might like a steak?"



We sat outside watching the sunset, with Hawk holding his daughter. I was still wrapped in his big terrycloth robe after more sex in the shower. He was ravenous, and it was contagious.

“Would you like something to drink?”

He shook his head and turned to me. “No, but I want you to know that I am going to take some time off from Stanford. I tried to tell you earlier, but we got in the way.” He smiled with those big eyes staring at me, and I knew more was coming.

“How long?”

“A year or two. Maybe more.”

“I’m amazed to hear that. You never take time away from your work. It’s your life, Hawk.”

“No, not any more. You and this little girl are my life, and it’s time to live together like a real family. She will grow up so fast, and it will never come again. I don’t want her to forget that I was there. Or you either.”

“Well, actually I have been yearning to write, my fingers are getting itchy for the creative bloom. You know I really put the new film aside during the last few months. Now it’s time to keep my word to the Walnut Brothers. They have been more than patient with me.”

“How will you manage that now? She’s with you 24/7. It’s a full time job.”

“Women do it every day, baby! Some with three or four little ones. They sleep, they grow and learn to amuse themselves. And now, if you are going to be here, she can spend some time with her dad.”

“Here’s the plan, Dyanna. Gabriel and I are going to build a real clinic over near the school. The property belongs to his father’s estate, left in trust for the neighborhood. He wanted a library or a playground, so we will move the clinic I started last year to that spot. He has a design all fixed in his head, you know how he is.”

“Yes, I do. We poured over the plans for this house for months before construction began. You were always up at Stanford, so I made a lot of choices with Gabriel’s help. He is very green in his selection of materials, and loves to repurpose wood and hardware.”

“Speaking of which, I will be asking Stanford to donate some gently used materials as well. They never keep examining tools or furniture over a year or so, it gets a little beat up. Nobody here will care if there is a scratch on the exam table.” His voice rose to a higher pitch and Lily Jade made her own little gurgle in concert.

“See, even Lily Jade is excited.”

“Have you told anyone else about this? I think Uma would be a wonderful partner for you two. She is so incredible with natural healing and body work.”

“My sister is always a partner in any endeavor, Dyanna. And I am the same with her. Don’t forget

that you came to be alive again through our efforts. If she had not called me when she first saw you, we would not be having this conversation.”

“Or holding our daughter. Yes, I know. And she is busy now with getting Belinda settled. But Uma loves a challenge, and now that I have given birth, she will be free to help other Big Sur mothers.”

The cool evening was upon us, with the last specks of light fading behind the horizon. I felt a strong sense of excitement ramp through my veins as we stood up under the night sky. Hawk carried the baby to her cradle, and I lingered outside.

Now was the time when Spooky and Little Mama would be ready to join me for bed, rubbing their warm fur against my legs. I missed them terribly, but Uma had promised their return on the three-month mark.

Lily Jade would grow up with them as her guides, playing in the front grass. Maybe even Runner the rabbit would return to have more babies herself, although we had not seen her since before the construction.

It occurred to me that things were beginning to synchronize, and our life was falling into place. I was amazed at Hawk and his decision, and wondered how long it would last. The stars began to twinkle as I stood on the very cliff where my life had almost ended, barely three years ago. We were all such different people then.

The magnificence of the Big Sur sky overwhelmed me with the beauty and power of God, and I stood there drinking in the moment.

I felt his hand on my shoulder and turned around to look at my Esalen prince as he led me inside.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

Jacob Walnut was feeling very alone, wandering around his home with a glass of good Bordeaux and no one to talk to. Normally that would be a good thing, but tonight Ty was off to dance on the Sunset Strip, Teddy was in Mexico and Belinda was spending her first night in Big Sur.

This should be a celebration thought Jacob, standing at the window of his office. *Belinda and Big Ted are gone, FINALLY!* Why then was he unsettled, pacing around in his bare feet and a short white terry robe. He might as well be naked, there was no one to see him. Even Uma had departed days ago. What was he missing?

The phone rang softly at his desk, and he turned to read the caller ID. He pushed the speaker button and chuckled his greeting. "Hello, Jack, what are you doing working at this hour?"

"Ah, Mr. Walnut, it is the norm around here lately. We are very busy and I have no time for my private clients during the day. Are you busy right now?"

"Actually, I was thinking about going out for a bite. There's nobody home, and I am left to my own devices."

"I am just heading out myself," said Jack. "Can I buy you a drink at the Sportsman's Lodge? You're right up there on Mullholland, aren't you?"

"Sounds good," said Jacob. He put down the phone and went into his closet, wondering what Jack Walters had on his mind beside a cold shaken martini.



Slow Dove and Belinda hit it off very well, after the initial shock of each other wore off. Uma wanted to be sure the girl was comfortable and tucked in, but found herself in dire need of some sleep herself. It had been a long day to be sure, and she was pleased with the happy return to Big Sur with Lily Jade and me. She had planned to sleep at John's house, but it didn't take long to see that he and Ginger had eyes for each other. She had been unaware of this development, with everything else going on, and it was unsettling to her. Obviously she had put the two of them together, in an offhanded way, but she had underestimated Ginger's allure. Or perhaps the fact that John Soaring Meadow was still a man with the fire of romance in his soul. They were quite in tune with each other, and retired to John's lair shortly after Belinda's arrival.

She had planned for a nice meal together, but Alexio had taken them to Rocky Point and everyone was sated and happy. There was not much left to do except show Belinda and Big Ted their beds and head home.

Slow Dove gave Belinda a tour of the rooms with a narrative about how they had picked out the sheets and blankets and art, but she was obviously more interested in him than his story. Alexio slipped away in the chocolate Mercedes without much adieu, returning to Monterey in the early evening. He promised to return soon and take Belinda down to the cottage and the beach. She nodded and gave him a hug, as Slow Dove described the three etchings he had hung above her bed.

Uma stayed for a few minutes, feeling like a third wheel, while Big Ted settled in downstairs in

the small sleeping space. Finally, she checked the bathroom to be sure everything was in good working order, and gave each of them a hug. Belinda was quiet as usual, accepting the affection without comment, but Slow Dove returned her love with a good strong squeeze. "Don't worry," he whispered, "she will be fine."

She walked over to John's house where Ginger was standing by the kitchen window. She waved as Uma opened the door, where the room was warm from a pot cooking on the stove. John sat comfy at the kitchen table, and smiled at her. "How's it going over there?"

"You know, they seem to be hitting it off very well. I've never heard Slow Dove speak more than ten words at a time, but he has the key to her brain."

"Well, they are about the same age," said Ginger, as she opened the oven. There was a loaf of French Bread inside, warming for dinner.

"I'm going to let them figure things out, and go home to sleep. May I take your Jeep, John?"

"Sure thing. You've had quite a day, my dear."

"Nothing like traveling with a new mother and her first baby, especially in the wilds of Los Angeles."

"Get some sleep, Uma. We'll check in on Belinda after dinner."



[The lounge at the Sportsman's Lodge](#) had not changed in fifty years, and was as dark and cozy as ever. Jacob entered the room and spotted Jack sitting at the bar. It was late for the cocktail crowd, and they had the place to themselves. He strolled over and slid onto the stool next to Jack, without a word. There was a straight up martini in a stem glass with two olives in front of Jack as he stared at his phone.

"Hello there," said Jacob, as the bartender arrived. He pointed at the untouched drink and said "on the rocks, three olives."

Jack Walters grinned and slid his phone into a pocket. "Hello, Jacob. Good to see you."

"You know, I'm a little confused as to why you are here, when your offices are in downtown LA. Don't you have a place close to the office?"

"Not all of us can afford such a luxury, my friend." The bartender arrived with an iced martini and three olives and slid a napkin under the glass.

"Ah," said Jacob. He lifted the glass and toasted, before savoring a taste of his drink. "I thought you guys were richer than hell."

"We do well enough, but I have three kids in college. Do you have any idea what that costs?"

"Depends on the school, doesn't it?" "Two USC and one Stanford."

"At least they're smart." Jacob ate one of his olives and washed it down with a smile. "So, tell me.

What have we come to discuss here, besides our growing friendship?"

"Dyanna Falconer was here yesterday, with her newborn daughter. She came down to talk to the owner of the property in Pacific Palisades."

"I am aware. Uma spent the night at my house."

"Well, I am just reviewing. Normally I would not dispense that kind of information, but given your relationship to Dyanna and the family, I figured we could be off the record."

"Why, has something changed with the dog park project? I was surprised that they would travel so soon after the baby, but it has been more than a month."

"We met with the owner, the man we discussed in the office that first day. His name is Anthony Bravano, Jr."

"Yes, I recall. He sounds like a mafia guy."

They both took a long drink of gin. "Well, I'm afraid he is going to be trouble, Jacob. And I am concerned for Dyanna. I thought it best to share this with you, knowing your feelings on that matter."

Jacob signaled for two more drinks and emptied his glass. "I'm afraid my feelings for Dyanna are best left buried some place like that awful empty lot up there. I think I have made that clear. You are partly my shrink, Jack Walters, since I am protected by law from you saying a word." They both laughed as the fresh martinis arrived. The bartender slid a menu toward them as well. "You think he's worried that we are going to tie one on?"

"It wouldn't be the first time" said Jack.

"I'm hungry, and you have to drive." He nodded at the bartender and waved him over. "I'd like one of your famous Caesar Salads, and a very rare filet Mignon. Can you wrap that in bacon?"

"Of course, sir. Would you two like to eat right here at the bar, or take a table?"

"Aw, let's stay here," said Jack. "And make that two." The man nodded and retreated into the back area.

"Well, that leaves us alone, doesn't it?" said Jacob. "Always a good thing when you are discussing woman and crime."

Jack laughed and took another hearty sip of his drink. "I'm not so sure of the crime angle, but we met with Mr. Bravano, first at the property and then up at the condo where Dyanna was staying."

"Bad idea. She should never reveal her nest to a stranger. She knows better."

"Well, I was with her all the time. And Dyanna invited him up there, partially because it was hot and the baby was fussy."

"You know that all this just upsets me more, right? I made one huge mistake with that woman, and she does not forget."

"I am more concerned with the trust you have created for Lily Jade, and your decision to tell Dyanna. Now most mothers would be protective anyway, but Dyanna is obviously very involved with this child."

"Well, I would hope so. She waited long enough."

The bartender arrived with two large plates of fresh salad and put them on the counter in front of them. He pulled out place mats and silver, and slid them in front of the men. "May I interest you in ground pepper?"

"Lightly, please," said Jacob. "And can you bring us a good deep red Napa Valley Bordeaux?"

Jack munched on a crouton, and placed his napkin in his lap. "The baby was a complete surprise, Jacob. Dyanna had no idea she could ever conceive, from an earlier condition. She was as shocked as the rest of us."

"You know, I've heard that line from Uma, and I don't believe it. Stephen Hawk and Uma had this in mind all along, regardless of their halos and tributes from the world."

Jack laughed deeply and shook his head. "I hate to ruin your night, but she is very happy with Steven Hawk and over the moon with her daughter."

Jacob dug into the iconic Sportsman Caesar and chewed thoughtfully. "Things change. But why are you telling me all this?"

"Because of your position in the entertainment industry and the international connections, I believe you could be of help to Brian and me if we run into trouble with Bravano and his family. I know you want to protect Dyanna as much as we do, but without her knowledge. For now, anyway."

The waiter arrived with a bottle of Fairgate Valley Farms Bordeaux, and poured a taste for Jacob. It was perfect for the meal, and decanted into fresh glasses immediately. Jacob tore a piece of fresh French bread and slathered it with butter. Jack watched him savor the first bite, and ponder his words. He knew how close to the bone they were, and did not want to push his new friend over the line.

"I want to make one thing clear, Jack. I will do anything in my power to protect Dyanna Falconer. And her daughter. Anything. Teddy too. She is like family to us, and we will all soon be working together on a new film. We have waited months to have her on board to write the script, and now she is finally ready to roll. I talked to her earlier today, and she has been making plans for a schedule to care for her work as well as her little girl. It is typical Dyanna. She never wants to give up anything she loves."

"I take it you would be grateful to be included in that list?"

"She is the one thing that I have failed with in my life that I really want. We are meant for each other, we understand each other. We are great lovers and better fighters."

"Well, hold that thought," said Jack. "Maybe in another lifetime."



Hawk departed around noon for Stanford, after taking some time to spend at breakfast with Uma. He missed her company and the wonderful meals she cooked for him. He went for a run early in the morning, and I fed my daughter in quiet repose. I was anxious to begin my work on the new film, and was almost finished with the second full reading of ENDLESS LOVE. My notes from the first round were a little fuzzy, and I realized how much the perilous episode with Hawk in the Jasmine Cave had shaken my world.

As I watched Lily Jade stop feeding for a minute, I wondered about that day and the lessons learned. Dr. Sandy Bond had saved our lives in more ways than one. I had to see her very soon, just to touch base.

I stretched out my legs and lay back a little, and the movement started the baby again at my breast. In a way I hated to give up this time, but learning to pump my milk and allow others to feed her was definitely the right move. Nobody really coached me on that, it just came to me as we traveled that she was so very sheltered and attached to me. And likewise, of course.

At first you live in this bubble where it's all safe and quiet and natural, and then life comes roaring back. I realized when we were in Pacific Palisades that I needed to be more protective and proactive in my parenting. There had to be other people introduced to LJ, and she to them.

I was never afraid to let her share those green eyes, because I knew we would always be together, as long as I was alive. It was also my intention to introduce my daughter to the ways of a working mother. It would give her a reason to be independent as well, something all women must know. My mother left me to my own devices at a young age, allowing me to play for hours by myself, amusing the growing inquisitive brain set securely between my ears. She encouraged me to dress myself, and tie my shoes. I could think back and remember how hard that was to learn.

We finished up as Hawk returned from his run, and he opened the door in a rush. He stood there watching us, catching his breath, covered with sweat. "Whooo, it's chilly out there this morning."

"You might try wearing a shirt," I said, wiping Lily Jade's milky drool.

"Yeah, and what would you know about it?" He came over and hugged both of us, before I pushed him away.

"Get out of here," I shouted, laughing despite myself. He was giddy, with all his plans running through that brain. "Go take a shower."

He passed Uma in the doorway, as I swung my legs onto the floor. "Good morning, sister," he sang, "Huevos Rancheros for breakfast?"

"Well, guess who's in a good mood today," said Uma. She was freshly showered herself, in clean white shorts and shirt, with damp hair. "Here, let me take the baby."

She carried her sweet little wet niece to the changing table, and I took a welcome bathroom break. I splashed my face with cold water and rubbed some lovely grapeseed oil into my skin. I had started using this while I was pregnant, and become addicted to the smooth texture and light touch. Uma swore that many of the natural oils from plants and seeds were the best healing potions for human skin, and used them on my body to prevent stretch marks. Now, I applied a tiny bit of apricot oil on my nipples for good stimulation.

Standing there naked, I looked at my reflection in the small mirror above the sink and wondered how I looked full length. We had not installed the big closet mirrors Gabriel ordered yet, because it was too intrusive the first weeks of Lily Jade's life. The workmen had to be in the room and on the patio, so we waited.

I had really not thought of an inspection, but now I was curious. I pulled on my terry cloth robe and brushed my hair upside down, thinking I might sneak into the old closet room later.

Uma stood at the door with Lily Jade, all cleaned up and dressed in a pink onesie, watching my long hair touch the floor.

"You will have to be careful soon, Moana. She will grab your hair and yank it hard, just as soon as she can." She laughed and kissed the baby on each cheek. "You are so beautiful, my little Jade girl."

"I would like to start the process of pumping today, Uma. Hawk is going up to Stanford to meet with his staff and the management."

"Yes, I know," said Uma, rocking the baby in her arms. "He is anxious to figure out his new schedule down here. Gabriel is already drawing up some ideas for the clinic."

"I think it's wonderful that they work together on this," I said. I finished brushing my teeth and rinsed my mouth with Hawk's favorite Blue Moon mouthwash.

"Were you surprised to learn that he wanted to stay here with you two?"

"I have to admit that I was. I have never expected him to change his life for me, when it comes to his work. He does such extraordinary surgery, and helps so many people."

The man in question appeared behind Uma, and put his arms around her. "OK, girls, no more talk about me behind my back. That includes you, Lily Jade Falconer Hawk." He took his daughter and went out to the patio, while Uma shook her head. "I've never seen him so happy, Dyanna. In all these years of work, and school and awards, nothing like this."

"We got together at a good time. It was meant to be."

She looked at me with tears in her eyes. "I think of you and that first night I saw you, torn apart and limp as a dead fish. You were bloody from that fall and barely breathing. John was crying when they brought you into the cave. He thought they had lost you, carrying you all that way on the beach. And look at you now, my sister. You have given us the next generation of life."

A shiver went down my spine and I was exquisitely aware of the past. Hawk opened the patio door and brought in a perfect little branch of Cecile Brunner roses. They were tucked in next to the baby, as if she had picked them. He didn't see the tears in our eyes, he was too happy to notice.

"Here's something for her mama," he said, handing me the fragrant blooms. "Now, how about some breakfast?"

## CHAPTER TWENTY

Slow Dove awoke at dawn and went outside to find some wildflowers. He was besotted at the idea of the wild young girl next door, and wanted to surprise her. Belinda was the first woman in his life, and she came as a bit of a shock. Frankly, the bodies of men had always been more to his liking, and he was infatuated with every inch of Steven Hawk. He longed to see more of that body, and had pictured it many times while soaking the coarse dark hair before making the tribal braid. He didn't know what it was that drove his passion, being a virgin man of nineteen. This fact was known only to him, being a very private soul.

Now, in the first light of morning, his loins were on fire at the thought of Belinda. Her eyes drew him in, and nailed his emotions down so easily. She had perfect white teeth that appeared in her half smile. If Slow Dove had been a movie fan, he might have recognized some of her resemblance to Kevin Stone, but that was not in the cards.

Perhaps it was her disdain of common things, while making her own decisions that attracted him. He had no idea of the level of pain that Belinda had endured. It was erased from her face, at least for the moment. She rejected the idea that she must sleep in her bed all night, winking at him while Big Ted pulled back the covers and fluffed her pillow. She was the midnight rambler, and a new location would have no influence on that matter.

None of this was known to the slight handsome pure-blooded young Esalen man who slipped out the door with his shears. He acted only on immediate emotions, allowing the mind to gauge the depth of his motive. The family stopped all instructions early in his life, after realizing that he danced to his own song. They could not be bothered with the feathers and crawling around in the forest. They thought he was insane. Poor Slow Dove, no wonder he had that name.

They didn't realize the powerful sanctions they had lifted on his spirit allowed him to run naked in the woods and bathe in a stream of his own choosing. He raised himself, with a little help from some special people.

Uma was his first mentor. He had come down into the meadow one morning after the terrible fire, curious to see what had happened to the big fancy house on the ranch. The stench from the burned out building blew into his nostrils and he knew someone was dead inside. The animals tried to cover the carcass of their prey at times, but that odor was undeniable.

At the top of the hill, he saw the Fire Woman standing near her plants. She poked around in the soil, unaware of his approach until it was too late. He had planned to run, but her black eyes nailed him in the smoky dawn. She had that same thing as Belinda, an allure of the female gender worth exploring.

Uma stood up and smiled, waving him on as he climbed up the hill. "Hello there, little warrior." she said. "What brings you to this sad place so early?"

"I saw you tending to the plants. Did your flowers make it through the fire?"

She dug into the ground and removed a bulb. "Most of them are still in this stage, which is a miracle."

"So they will live and bloom again?"

"Yes. Most everything here is fine, except the house. I say good riddance on that account."

"Why is that?" He inched closer, shivering a bit in the cool air.

"Come here, boy. You're cold." She reached into the shed and handed him a soft leather jacket.

"Thank you, Fire Woman," said Slow Dove. He slipped his slender torso into the old blue suede and the lining warmed his arms.

"Where did you get that name for me? Don't you know who I am?"

"You are the Fire Woman to me, and always have been. You are strong and mighty, standing up here all the time. I have watched you since I was little."

"My name is Uma. And I have seen you peeking out of the trees many times. I wondered how long it would take you to come forward. Do you have a message?"

Slow Dove laughed at this. No one ever asked him what he thought. Everything he knew was from the books he read, and the occasional newspaper found on the road. His father had a large library of native American literature and history, inherited from his father. He doubted that the man had read a single sentence.

"You amuse me, Uma. Nobody speaks to me out here, I am invisible. They have turned their backs because I am different. I was blue when I was born and they thought I was dead. And then suddenly I awoke with a cry and my mother almost had a heart attack".

"That is more common than you think. I have delivered many babies. A good smack on the bottom brings them around."

Slow Dove just stared, boring into her with his steady gaze. "Well, here I am now."

"Why don't you come with me and have a cup of hot sweet tea? I'd like to hear more."

Now Slow Dove slipped outside and glanced at the gardens in full bloom. Uma had opened the door to his life, and now she had brought him a friend his age. Someone just as peculiar and precise as he, and very spoiled to boot. Belinda was the princess of the ranch in his mind. He would show her some things that would keep her forever in his sight.

He walked down the road to the end and looked back at the carriage houses all in a row. John's window was still dark, so nobody was around yet. A perfect time to find his gifts.



For some reason, Lily Jade had a bad morning. A seasoned mother will laugh at this comment, as there are many unexplained actions with newly born babies. In this case, her father raced around getting ready to travel to Stanford, and the energy in the room was contagious. Hawk did not realize how disruptive the little tap dances and rushing through his messages could be. We tried to hang in there, but she started whimpering early on, and it was a tough time for awhile. I drank my smoothie sitting in the rocker, when she finally fell asleep, thankful for some quiet moments.

As I closed my eyes and imagined the future, it occurred to me that writing the most important

piece of work of my life might not be the wisest use of my time right now. I was very sleep deprived, brain scattered and tired, but still the idea of starting the script tugged at me. It was a challenge that I had never faced, having written my book and my screenplay for SENSUAL INDIGO in perfect peace and quiet.

Now I knew that my life would never be the same, and if I were to carry the gauntlet for this film, it was going to be tough. The woman who lived inside me had always showed up for things, and now my romantic dalliance with Stephen Hawk had changed life as I knew it. I could not allow that to steal away the joy of writing, and my mind raced as I heard Hawk coming down the hallway.

"I bid you farewell," said Hawk as I opened my eyes. He was dressed in a bright yellow t-shirt and old jeans with leather flip flops. The newly cut hair was curling around his face, much like the man I was entranced with from the start. I thought of his eyes in the circle of the family, when we met. Amazingly enough, a shiver went down my spine once more at the sight of Hawk. It was all real, much like the warm wet tiny girl in my arms.

["You look wonderful," I said. "I could eat you up."](#)

"Well, that might be in the cards. Shall I postpone my trip?"

"Seriously, just have a good one. I know you are anxious to get your plan going. I was just dreaming of the new screenplay for ENDLESS LOVE."

"See, I'm not even out the door and you are already at work again. Jacob Walnut will be proud." He knelt in front of us and Lily Jade began to cry. "I may stay overnight to get things done. I'll let you know." He kissed us, and waved goodbye.

I stood up slowly and walked the baby over to her changing table. She was very warm and covered with sweat. I was suddenly worried that she might be sick, but a cool cloth and a clean diaper did the job. She was probably just as wiped out as the rest of us. I put her in the cradle and rocked it, thinking of David Belford. He ran a studio, had a thousand affairs and produced the finest films in the world. I could certainly put my imagination to work in this beautiful place. I had help. I was not alone. I was a mother, but I was also a writer and I had a job to do.

Uma stood at the door, watching me. She waited until I stopped rocking the cradle, and entered the room. "The King has left the building," she said. "Are you still ready to start the pumping today?"



Ginger and John snuggled in together and pulled the covers over their heads. It was almost 9 am and they were still in bed. He kissed her cheek and turned to stare at that brilliant smile. "Do you know how long it has been since I slept in this late?"

"Maybe a hundred years?"

He laughed and tickled her mercilessly until she begged him to stop. "You think I'm a hundred years old anyway, don't you?"

"Maybe ninety eight," she giggled.

John pulled down the covers and propped himself on his elbow. "I want you to tell me something, right now. And promise to be honest."

"Ok."

"What the hell are you doing here with me? I am old enough to have a teenage daughter, I have a bum leg and a terrible temper. And no real money to speak of."

Ginger laughed in spite of her efforts to remain solemn. "Oh, John Soaring Meadow. You kill me. Don't you know what a great man you are? I am totally in love with you. Can't you see that?"

He lay back on the pillows and stared at the ceiling, dumbstruck.

"Well, you asked," she said. "You will learn that I never lie. It's a bad habit and gets me into trouble at times. I can't help it."

"Well, we can't do this. I have a job here, and a house to build. I have a crew to supervise and Uma and her projects. I have not done a stick of work since you came around. I am useless."

"I wouldn't say that." Her hand found his willing penis and felt it begin to come alive.

"Stop that. You're going to kill me." He started to laugh and rolled over on top of her. "You know I am crazy about you. I can't think straight when we are together. I wonder when I will wake up and you'll be gone."

"Is that what you want?" She stared up at him, and ran her finger over his chest. She touched his nipple and pinched a little.



He closed his eyes and buried his face in her breasts. "I give up. What do you want?"

"Well, maybe I'll get on top this time"...

When Uma brought the pump and bottle into the room, I was dreaming of the world of movie mogul David Belford, while rocking Lily Jade with a soothing lullaby. For some reason these two things meshed very well in the scheme of things, and I was jolted beyond belief at the hardware on a nice rolling cart that appeared in front of me. I had never seen a breast pump, and slightly recalled my only experience with such a thing was the noise in a bathroom stall at Pebble Beach where I was attending a fancy wedding. The woman in the stall next to me was pumping her breasts while everyone else was dancing and drinking champagne. I was curious enough to listen and then watch for a minute when she emerged from the toilet area to get a paper towel. She had simply attached a hand pump to her breast over the fancy lace dress. I remember that I was both shocked and in awe of this, thinking of how the other women on the planet lived. I knew I would never have that experience, so I washed my hands, checked the stunning array of hibiscus blooms in my hair, and smiled as I departed.

"Have you ever seen one of these, Moana?" I rocked back and forth as Lily Jade continued her sleep and shook my head. "It is a very simple device, with a hand pump, and a suction cup called a flange. They come in sizes, and I think one of these will be perfect"

She handed me a circular cup with hole in the middle. It was stiff and unlike the soft mouth that fed from my nipples. "We will use some sweet oils to massage your nipples, but the fit is the most important. Think of a special bra, for a special occasion."

"I haven't worn a bra since high school," I said. I was already weary.

"Things change. It helps you to funnel the milk into the container, without damaging the sensitivity of the nipple. You want to be able to feed her from your breasts, don't you?"

"Of course. I would miss that contact right now, we are so in sync. And I think it helps both of us relax. I don't worry about her when she is nursing."

"Once you get the hang of it, you can work the pumping into a schedule. It is best to do it at the same time each day, and give your brain the triggers to help."

"My normal writing schedule is from the middle of the day to late afternoon. That always gave me time for other business, and painting "

"Well, now you must make that schedule work with Lily Jade. She will adjust to your life just like you have adjusted to hers. Children are supposed to be mentored into a lifestyle that is best for them."

I rose and gently laid my daughter in the cradle, watching her for a moment. I prayed for her to sleep long enough for me to get a handle on this thing, so I could do it myself.

Uma chuckled as I returned to her side, and put her arm around me. "It's really a handful at first, Dyanna. I know that, and I admire you for being ready to learn something new.

You probably just want to take a nap." "Yeah, kind of..."

"I have some spicy green tea right here, and those wonderful ginger cookies. Sit down and let me show you how this works."

Now I realized she wasn't going to rush me through anything, and I had time to learn the next steps of breast feeding. I recalled seeing a video of a beautiful Brazilian model named Giselle feeding her baby while they were making her up for a shoot. If she could do it, so could I!

As I look back on this day, I see that it was a turning point for all of us. Hawk was on his way to make his new plans with Stanford, and Uma was beginning her program to restore the ranch house and make Belinda feel at home. And I was silently prodding myself to climb another mountain, just because I could.

At this stage of the game, you rarely think more than a few minutes ahead, and never much about the future. There is only so much that the human brain will absorb at once, and we are wired to prioritize. But some of us have to get on with life, and do things because we want to. As I watched Uma assemble the pump and flange, I rubbed my nipples with some oil she had given me in a small warm cup. She instructed me to just dip a little finger in and rub it on. Get comfortable with the idea of what was coming, and look forward to it.

Finally, we were ready for me to try it out, and I went in to pee first. I looked at Lily Jade all sound asleep, as if to say, "I'm on it, baby!"

The oil helped to make the flange comfy and I squeezed the ball with caution. I could barely feel it.

Uma reached over and squeezed hard a couple of times, and I felt the suction. Wow! A tiny bit of liquid appeared in the container. She looked at me and laughed.

‘Oh, Moana, if you could just see your face! You look like Christmas has arrived!’

We both started to laugh, and she hugged me from behind, careful not to move the setup. It was a very cool day!

## CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Hawk rolled into the parking garage in the early afternoon, outsmarting the rush hour traffic after years of practice. His old spot was there in the corner of the building, first level. *Dr. Stephen Hawk* it said, in stoic black letters. He smiled to think of the many years he had followed this pattern, arriving from Belvedere most of the time. His home there was a gift to begin with, a trade for medical services that saved the life of a wealthy patient. A bit out of the ordinary, but he was able to persuade the powers that be to allow him to accept. Years of small condos and trips from Big Sur were in the mix as well, before his life had settled down.

This time of day, there were few people in the staff garage area, but he saw Elena's little Honda Fit parked at the end of the row, next to the elevator. He had texted her this morning about his plans, as they kept in close contact during his sabbatical. When Lily Jade was born, he actually had a running conversation going with Elena, standing outside with his heart pounding like a drum. He was anxious to see her smile and give her a hug.

He took the elevator up to the main floor of the hospital, and entered the vast open space that served as reception and patient business. Up the stairs was a rounded corridor open to the first floor where all the big shots had offices. *THE MEZ* as it was called, was the first place you went for all interviews and final decisions. Oddly enough, there was no elevator to that area, save the back medical transport that conveyed emergency patients to surgery. You had to walk up the stairs from the entrance, which made the first interview nerves even worse.

It was a balm to his soul to traverse this light airy room and climb those stairs, for this was where all the main decisions of his life were made. He had asked for a special operating room after walking up these stairs, to see Dr. Martin Bearman. He needed a room that was laid out for the delicate surgeries that he performed, away from any kind of distraction and tension. After a sleepless night of consternation, Dr. Stephen Hawk had made his pitch to Dr. Bearman over some excellent Jamaican coffee, freshly brewed in the office. He was ready for an argument, and he got none.

Dr. Martin Bearman and his associate Jules Frank had seen every possible type of human being walk through their office gateways, with an open door policy for new doctors. They had agreed to take on the dual leadership of the surgical specialty residents, and management of the physicians they became during their tenure at Stanford Medical Center.

Today, Hawk scheduled an appointment with Bearman, knowing that his mentor and friend would be happy to see him. He bounded up the slate covered stairs and smiled at a couple of cute nurses who came his way. Bearman had requested the first suite on the circle of mezzanine offices, having remembered his early days in medicine, and today the door was open.

Myrtle Shelton sat at the perfectly arranged desk of black teak sorting folders, with her painted red nails and crisp white suit. She looked up at him from beneath long dark lashes, pausing to take inventory. Hawk knew her well, and stood in the doorway for a moment, waiting.

"Oh, my, Dr. Hawk," she said in perfect London English. "You're back."

He approached the desk as she stood up, arms extended. "Congratulations on your beautiful daughter," she said, with tears in her eyes. "I cannot believe it has finally happened."

"Well, join the crowd," said Hawk, hugging her tight.

The door opened behind Myrtle and Martin Bearman stood there, smiling broadly. He shook his head as Hawk approached, and they embraced.

"Greetings from Big Sur, Sir," said Hawk.

"My god, you have finally cut off your hair. I was beginning to wonder, we had a swarm of those ponytails after you left."

"It is an Esalen tradition to grow your hair from the minute the child is conceived. It is cut off the day after the birth."

"Oh, Hawk, you look wonderful," said Myrtle. "Would you like a cool lemon water, or some of that black mud he drinks?"

They entered Bearman's office where the view of the campus was brilliant. The windows were so clean that one might expect to fall onto the grass below, and Hawk knew that he was in the right place. As close to perfection as possible was the mantra for both men, the silent vow of a dedicated physician. The bright light made Hawk's shirt glow, and Myrtle ran her hands over his back. "That little girl doesn't know what she's in for, does she?"

"She will be hell on wheels, you can bet on that. Between her mother and me, with Uma as her aunt, it's a slam dunk."

"You will never really know until much later," said Dr. Bearman. "They change from day to day." Myrtle stood next to the windows, watching the small city of medicine come and go.

"You know I will have my coffee," said Bearman. "Shall we give the new father a shot of something stronger?"

"Myrtle's cold lemon water is perfect." Hawk joined her at the windows, watching the afternoon unfold. Myrtle kissed him on the cheek and departed, closing the door.

"So tell me, Dr. Hawk. Do you have something special on your mind?"

"Something very special. I want to create a working clinic in Big Sur. There is a great need for it, and I have all the components in sight. I believe it will take about a year to be up and running. Maybe more."

"I see. Does this mean you will be working down there all the time?"

Hawk moved closer to his mentor and faced him squarely. "I have decided to spend the first year of my daughter's life in Big Sur, Martin. It is a chance that will never come again, and I want to be there.

Myrtle knocked politely and entered with a tray. She set it on the table in front of a well worn red leather sofa where many discussions had unfolded. This was obviously going to be one of them. She placed the cold sweating glass of water on a coaster, and carefully squeezed the lemon into it. The small coffee carafe was left on the tray with fresh cream and a pristine white cup.

"I'll be outside if you need me." She closed the door behind her.

Martin Bearman sat down in front of his coffee and eagerly poured the steaming brew into his

cup. He relished the perfect blend of potent black liquid and the smooth thick cream. Myrtle got it fresh each day from a secret place she would not reveal, and arrived with a small container in a paper bag.

"I have been working with my lifelong friend Gabriel West, who is an architect in Big Sur. He designed the new compound where we are living."

"You have spoken of him before. He is a student of the wonderful Mickey Muening."

"Yes. Now he has his own business, and is expressing the new Big Sur landscape in a wonderful way. He is very green, as you can imagine."

"How appropriate for a renaissance in that fabulous territory. The big fire down there devastated a lot of valuable homes, didn't it?"

"And Dyanna's ranch house was one of the homes that were completely destroyed."

"That was a dark time for you, Stephen. I was afraid we might lose you to a misguided incarceration. Thank God for Dandy Brown."

"Do you know Dandy? I was not aware of that."

"We go back a long way. He has defended several of our cases. But we digress. I am interested in the plan for the clinic."

"Gabriel has located a large old barn and schoolhouse that was once used by the early pioneers of Big Sur. It was owned by the Post family and they sold it to his parents years ago. He has secured the rights to develop these buildings into a clinic facility for the Big Sur residents."

"Then you two have been at this for some time."

"No, actually, he was finishing up the house before the baby was born. That was first priority. My sister delivered Lily Jade at the new house, in a huge extraordinary room filled with redwoods and slabs of Big Sur jade. It was a magical night. Dyanna gave birth in the early hours of the morning, surrounded by the most beautiful fire and music. I was blown away."

"I witnessed the birth of my children as well, although they were born in the City at St. Francis hospital. In those days, such things as a tribal birth were frowned on. Now with the infestation of superbugs and viruses, we know that you may have had the safest of all deliveries right there at home."

"While Dyanna was recovering in the first few weeks, Gabriel and I started running again. We swam in the ocean like we did as kids. And we came up with this plan together."

"I am all in favor of your leave of absence, Dr. Hawk. But you will be sorely missed by the staff and patients who might not fare as well without you."

"I have thought about that, Sir. But when I hold my daughter in my arms, I can't wait for the next day, to see how she is changing. I am needed there with my family, for the sake of all of us. The clinic is my way of justifying my absence to your board. I don't want any talk of releasing me."

"Oh, Hawk! You have no idea of how highly you are regarded in these hallowed halls, do you?"

He poured more cream and stirred the coffee gently. "You are one of a kind, and we want you back the minute you are ready."

"There is one more thing I would like to ask of you." Bearman nodded and sipped his coffee. "We would like to extend an invitation to some of the physicians here at Stanford to join us as associates in a volunteer manner. Gabriel has planned a helicopter pad at the clinic, for emergencies and transport. We would be very grateful for some of my colleagues who would like to volunteer to join us on occasion. I have not spoken to anyone of this, I wanted to ask you first."

"I would have to address that issue with the Board, since all of you have contracts here. But if it is strictly volunteer with no pay involved, then I believe the way is clear."

Hawk's eyes lit up the room along with his smile. "I am so grateful for your support, Dr. Bearman. It is beyond my wildest dreams."



Belinda awoke on her new bed, curled up under a quilt with the sun pouring in through the curtains. She had been determined to stay up as late as possible, on the first night of her new life. Big Ted had come up to say goodnight around 11 pm, barely able to keep his eyes open. She assured him that she was fine and ready to try out her new old fashioned bath tub. He smiled and gave her a hug, shuffling over the wooden floor in his pajamas. He was a good man, and she was aware that he had somehow saved her from the drastic circumstances of the White Sheet House. This was her name for Genoa, the drastic measures institution where they tortured her during the time of her mental incapacity, poking and prodding and filling her body with vile needles. Unknown to any human being, Belinda was aware of many things during that time, but it was like being an observer in a horror film. She was unable to save herself, or speak. There were long periods of darkness, but she remembered Ted leaning over her as they rolled along a corridor one night. The wheels squeaked a tiny bit in the silent halls, and he was terrified of discovery. He told her he was taking her out of hell, and into the light. She closed her weary eyes and surrendered once again.

She had awakened on the Walnut Jet, lying on the bed in a suite designed for a king. Mas was there as well as Big Ted, leaning over her. Mas looked into her eyes at close range and pronounced her aware of them, but she did not speak. She was not sure where they were or what was next, and silence had worked before. She allowed herself to be fed through the tube in her belly, barely aware of their actions.

During the months at Jacob Walnut's estate, she began to recognize things and have faint memories of her father. This place was where they went for movies. Jacob always gave her popcorn and those chocolate kisses wrapped in foil. But it was Uma that finally brought her around, with her herbs and potions and massages. She had been weaned off the drugs that were served up during the Genoa stay, slowly but surely. Uma explained this to her later, while walking with Belinda on the grounds in her wheelchair. She said nothing, but listened intently. There was one foot out the door into the world, and the other safely inside her soul. She knew she could always find safety there.

Now Belinda stared at the sun pouring into her room, with tiny flecks of lint and pollen floating about. It was a psychedelic experience and carried her away from the reality of the present day.

Slow Dove sat quietly on the bench next to her, under his art work. His meditation had ended a

few minutes ago, and he was glad he had arrived before Belinda awoke. He kept very still, not wanting to alarm her, waiting for the right moment.

The breeze began to blow in from the meadows and the curtains moved softly over Belinda's body. She felt something on her arm, and turned to find a spray of colored ribbons spread over the bed. They were wrapped around the most beautiful tiny flowers of all colors, and some delicate ferns.

"Hey, my friend," said Slow Dove, rising from his bench. "Good morning! Did you have a good sleep?"

He approached the bed and she noticed his long hair was braided down his back, with some of the flowers intertwined. He reached out with his long slim hand and handed her the bouquet. "Welcome to Big Sur."

She rubbed her eyes and sat up, covering herself with the blanket. "Wow, how long have you been here?"

"Just a few minutes. [I picked the flowers early, before my meditation.](#) Then I came over to see how you were doing."

"Do you live around here?"

"I have the carriage house next door. It's my studio and living quarters. Don't you remember? I told you last night."

"Not really. I'm good at ignoring most things they tell me. I've been a captive for a long time."

"I'm going downstairs and make you some tea. I'm sure you need to use the bathroom and wake up a little bit."

She watched him slide off the bed with that high beautiful tight little butt moving in his torn jeans. The flowers were fragrant but beginning to wilt a little, so it was time to get up. Maybe there was a cup or something in the bathroom.



Uma rocked Lily Jade in her arms while I took a wonderful bath. She had brought several branches of Cecile Brunner roses in from the patio and the room was full of the lovely scent. It was the first night I had slept for hours without interruption, and I felt almost human. She spoiled me with a pot of tea as well, and promised a massage later as I languished in the tub.

"I have been considering your new plans for work, Moana, and I think the first thing is to get you a Night Nurse. Do you remember Annoka, from the cave? She is an experienced Night Nurse, and I thought of her first."

"Of course I remember her. I remember all of you like it was yesterday. I was reborn in that cave at Jade Beach, at least in my mind."

"You were reborn for all of us, believe me. Annoka is a fine strong woman, and she bathed you and carried you around for months. You just don't recall it. We kept you as quiet as possible."

"I remember her showing me the little toilet behind the rocks, when I woke up. She didn't speak a word, just sat me down and handed me a baby wipe. Little did I know, huh?"

We laughed and Lily Jade squealed a little. She had already begun to mimic the sounds in the room, in her desire to join us.

"You have reached a point where your instincts are coming forward, and this is a good time to make a schedule for the coming months."

"You mean my starting work on the script?"

"That as well as the fact that Stephen is planning to work with Gabriel on the new clinic and he will be here all the time. That in itself will be an adjustment. Trust me!"

I dunked my head under water and thought about her words as I rinsed my hair. When I emerged, she handed me a fluffy thick white towel to wrap around my head. She put Lily Jade down on the changing table and came over to wring out the long curly locks that had grown to my waist during pregnancy. My daughter kicked and gurgled as Uma gently massaged my scalp and piled the hair up to wrap.

When I pulled the plug and stood up, I was drawn to my baby with a strong magnetic pull. I had to pick her up for a minute, just to be sure she was happy. Aunt Uma waited patiently while I did noses with Lily Jade and then handed her over. I wrapped the towel into a turban and began my treasured habit of rubbing grape seed oil on the damp skin. It soaked in immediately, and then I used a special lotion Uma made from flowers and herbs. It smelled very fresh and lovely without a potent scent. It all felt so good, with a sip of tea here and there.

"Why don't you come outside with us and dry your hair, and we'll talk about your ideas for this first year."

"Gabriel is coming over around noon to help me set up the office WIFI and get my computers going. I can probably give Lily Jade some lunch before he comes."

"Perfect. You can get an idea of the clinic work and sync the schedule with your writing. Annoka can help with that as well."

"When does she sleep?" "Whenever she can."

## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Hawk found Elena sitting by the fountain where they always met, after his meeting with Dr. Bearman. It was close to 4 pm, and the breezes were coming up across the campus. She was immersed in her iPad, with the dark chestnut hair blowing around her face. She looked up as he crossed the walkway and smiled.

"Hey, stranger," said Hawk. "Remember me?"

"Barely," she said, rising up to full height. They were face to face, and Hawk noticed the pale circles under her eyes as he hugged her.

"It's so good to see you, Elena. I have missed your smile and company a lot." "I see you have cut your hair. I love it this length, Dr. Hawk."

"We slashed it after the baby was born. There is a big ceremony that goes with it, coming soon."

"How are you doing with all this tribal stuff? I don't imagine you are used to it, after so many years in medicine."

"Elena, you know I am a full blooded Esalen man. I was raised with these things."

"Come on, since when do you grow your hair down to your waist, and disappear for weeks at a time?" She pulled her sunglasses down from her head and shook out her hair defiantly.

"Well, maybe since I have fallen madly in love and made a beautiful baby. She is the light of my life, Elena. You know that." He took out his phone and switched into the photos. [Here is one I took just this morning.](#)

Elena picked up her shoulder bag and started to walk away. Hawk stared after her and put away his phone. He took off his flip flops and ran through the grass next to her.

"Hey, what's wrong with you, anyway? Are you mad at me?"

Elena picked up her speed and began to stride across the campus to the parking garage. Hawk pulled up in front of her and grabbed her shoulders. "Elena Melody Hensley, what's going on?"

She covered her eyes and turned away. He could see the tears rolling down her face. Experience had taught him to tread lightly with stressed patients, especially women. He waited while she stood there, and reached in his pocket for a packet of tissues he always carried.

"Come on, let's walk," he said, putting his arm around her. "You don't want people to see you like this. You are the queen of calm."

She nodded and dabbed at her eyes. "Has something happened that you haven't told me, Elena?"

"No," she said, sniffing as she shook her head. "It's just that I feel so strange. So left out of things. My job is gone, at least for now. You're down there in Neverland."

"I thought you were working for some of the other doctors for awhile. You said you enjoyed it." He

stopped and took off her sunglasses. "Has someone mistreated you or hurt you?"

"No, of course not. Everyone here is great, except they all have their own lives and routines. We had our whole program in place, and now I have no idea what will happen to me."

"I told you I will resume my practice some day, but the clinic is going to take some time. I just talked to Dr. Bearman and they are 100% behind me. He gave his blessing for the staff to volunteer at the clinic, if they like."

"Where does that leave me, Hawk? I will have to start all over."

"I had planned for you to be my control office up here, for all the things that have to be coordinated. I told you that the night Lily Jade was born."

"You actually remember? I didn't take anything you said seriously, you were over the moon." They were nearing the parking garage and Hawk found his keys. "Let's get out of here. Are you hungry?"

"Starving."

He walked to his car and opened the trunk. He handed her a thick gray hoodie that said "STANFORD MED" and grabbed another for himself. "Put this on, I'm taking the top down."



Gabriel knew more about my computer setup than I imagined, and had planned the area of my office so that the lighting would work well with the screen. My desk overlooked the cliffs and showed a tiny bit of the ocean, while being set back in trees. It was at the end of the long winding curves of the new compound, in what he called the "Snakes Head."

"It's a term used by builders and designers to describe a part of the project that is out of sight," he said, leaning over me as I sat in front of my new setup. "They always put generals and wise men in the 'Snakes Head' area, for protection and secrecy". He kissed me on the cheek and laughed. "I would think of you as a rather secretive person. You just meander around until you find the right way for things to be. I've watched you for a long time."

"Well, that's kind of strange. What else have you noticed?"

He laughed out loud and shook his head. "Not going there, Dyanna. I have to keep my wits about me."

"Seriously, you know I don't recall seeing this room on the plans. Did you add it on later?"

"Not really, it was just space at the end of the bedroom and nursery area. I knew you would be anxious to keep an eye on your daughter, as things move ahead."

"So you are among the believers that think I will actually do some work for this film?"

"Of course. I have seen you continue the reading and notes for months. You were working on that when I first brought the plans."

"Yes. And recovering from my tryst with Hawk down on near the Jasmine Cave."

"I have often wondered what provoked you two enough that day to take such a chance. You know the first three months of a pregnancy are dangerous, especially to an older mother."

"I never thought about that. Uma was filling my head with positive things and lots of massage. Hawk was dancing around, when he was here. But that day, we argued about our relationship, and the idea of marriage. He said I did not take him seriously, and I just kept playing with his body."

"Like you wanted sex more than the conversation?"

"Exactly. He got very angry with me and jumped my bones there on the beach. The big waves were up and we just ignored them. He nailed me down on the sand and went in from behind."

"He told me about it later," said Gabriel. "And I know it's none of my business. I only wanted to prove the point that I saw you needed a place to be yourself, and conduct your business. You will be glad to have this office when you really get going."

"I agree. And what is that door in the corner, by the way? I noticed it today while I was nursing Lily Jade."

"Come on, I'll show you." He approached the simple redwood door and revealed a keypad next to the lock. When the cover was in place, you could not see the security area at all.

"We will set the code today and you will be the only one who knows it. There is another pad on the outside, so either way, it's very safe. I thought of this when Lily Jade was about to be born. When she gets older, you will have to be sure this is locked, or she can escape into the wild."

I opened the door and stepped out onto a small wooden grate. It was handmade from the same redwood and set into the ground and flush to the path. I looked up and saw that the trees formed a canopy over this area, so that it was sheltered from weather and wind.

"I wanted you to be able to escape the house as you wish, through this space. When that door is closed behind you, it is almost invisible "

"Oh, Boy! Hawk and Uma will not like that. They will have a fit!"

"Don't worry about them. They won't think to look here. I know both of them pretty well, I've hidden from them before." He smiled broadly and put his arm around me. "Come on, let's set the keypads now!"



Hawk drove fast and well on Highway 280, with his hair blowing in the wind. Elena put her hood up as they came closer to the City and the cool windy breeze. When he turned onto 19th Street at the interchange, she knew they were headed through the back way of San Francisco. It was a district that both of them loved. When they pulled up to the first signal, two men dressed in top hats and knitted gloves walked in front of them and waved from the crosswalk.

The trolley tracks were in service and commuters lined up to travel in the City. The rows of brightly

painted houses stacked side by side stood out against the late afternoon sun, and Elena looked up into the windows. "Look," she said, "there's that old German Shepherd!"

"It's been a long time since I've driven this route," said Hawk. Each signal brought them closer to California Street and the huge greenery of Golden Gate Park. He looked over at his passenger, and noted her cheeks were pink under the hoodie.

Soon they were over the Golden Gate Bridge and speeding past Sausalito. The afternoon traffic had a good flow for late in the day, and soon they turned off at East Blithedale.

"I knew you were coming here," said Elena, pushing back her hood. "Hooray."

Hawk smiled at her and continued to follow the main artery into Tiburon. The Bay came into view between houses set on the water, and the sun cast shadows on the skyline of San Francisco.

"Where are we going, Hawk?" She pulled the sweatshirt closer to her face. "It's getting cold out here."

"You'll see." Now they reached the signal for Tiburon Boulevard and narrowed down to single lanes. The little town was bustling with commuters waiting for the ferry as they turned onto the waterfront drive.

Three men stood in front of Sam's, the famous bar and grill with outdoor dining upstairs. They waved and raised a glass, standing in the doorway.

Hawk continued down the narrow street and pulled into the parking lot next to a small stucco building. The sign that said "Don Antonios" hung over leaded glass windows.

He turned off the engine and opened the car door as a woman emerged in the doorway. She set down a menu board on the easel, and looked over at them. Hawk stood up and smiled, pulling off his hoodie. "Hello, Antonia."

"Oh, my! Is that Dr. Hawk?" She opened her arms as he approached, enveloping him tightly. "We thought you were dead. Or gone!"

"I know, It's been a long time. I've been spending a lot of time in Big Sur lately."

"Are you still at Stanford?" Antonia smiled and hugged him again. "We have missed you."

Her heavy dark hair blew in the breeze, and he brushed it aside. "I have fallen in love, and just had a beautiful new baby girl. Her name is Lily Jade."

Antonia looked over at the car, where Elena waited silently. "Is this your wife?"

Elena opened the door and pulled off her sweatshirt. "No, this is my associate Elena. She is my right hand at the hospital." He walked over and took Elena's hand.

"Welcome to Don Antonios. You two must be hungry. Come inside."

They followed her into the dining room, and Hawk spotted his favorite table in the corner. "Wow, can we sit here? I love this place."

"Of course. Please sit down." Hawk jumped over and led Elena to her seat.

"What can I bring you to drink? Your favorite Sonoma Red, or perhaps some tequila? We feature the Hahn Vineyards as well, they are from Monterey."

"How about the Hahn Pinot Noir," said Hawk, "and some kind of appetizers. We're hungry, my dear."

"I will have a shot of tequila on the rocks," said Elena. "Casamigos, if you have it." She stood up and grabbed her bag. "Where is the ladies room?"

Antonia pointed at the hallway and Elena disappeared without a word. "She does not look happy, Dr. Hawk. Did I say something wrong?"

"No worries, she's just tired. We'll feed her full of good food and wine." Antonia brought the menus as a plate arrived with warm bread and olives. She returned with the wine and opened the bottle, pouring a taste.

"You look as beautiful as ever, my sweet lady. And how is your father?" He tasted the wine and raised his glass.

"I will tell him you are here right now. He is making your favorite tonight, the Putanesca." She filled the goblet to half and placed the bottle on the table. "I'll be right back with your Casamigos."

Elena took her time in the ladies room, brushing her hair and applying some hot pink lip gloss. She smiled in the mirror and opened the door just as the waiter delivered a bottle of Casamigos to the table. Two shot glasses were set up as she made her way to the table.

"Well, this looks promising," she said, sliding into her seat opposite Hawk. The waiter returned with a plate of small bites, and opened the Tequila. "Would you prefer your drink on the rocks or straight up" he said, in a professional polite voice.

"Rocks with a twist would be great," said Elena. Soon she was raising her glass to a toast with Hawk, before swallowing a large gulp of the smooth liquor. Hawk watched her carefully as she nibbled the soft yellow cheese and poured another shot.

"I have ordered the Pasta Putanesca for us," he said, as the waiter approached. "Will that be good for you?"

"Perfect," she said, smiling wildly at him. Her eyes were a bit glazed, with a look of warm happiness. "Maybe a nice salad too?"

"Would you prefer the house greens and dressing, or a Caesar, Miss?"

"How about the Caesar? And a few more rocks?"

"You'd better slow down, Elena, or you won't make it to dinner," said Hawk. But he was smiling and she knew he was teasing her.

"It's been a long time since we celebrated anything," said Elena. "I never thought it would be your baby, but what the hell? It's all good, isn't it?"

"You saw the first photos of Lily Jade when she was born. And I thank you again for keeping me company during that long night."

"I was just on the phone, Dr. Hawk. Like I always am."

"I feel very lucky to have you as my right hand, Elena. Don't ever forget that. You are a huge part of my life and my practice of medicine." He reached across the table and took her hand. "You have a place with me as long as you want. We're a team."

The waiter arrived with their salads and a fresh goblet for Elena. "I presume you would like some of this wine with your meal, madam?"

"Absolutely."

## CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

Hawk and Elena left Don Antonio's at closing time, sated by good food and wine, in the company of the family who served them. After the last table was cleared, Hawk called for a check and Don Antonio himself appeared with a bottle of sweet port and some fresh cherries.

"I must come and toast to you, Dr. Hawk. I have been cooking all day, and feeding these hungry Marin appetites."

"This is my dear friend Elena, sir. We work together at Stanford and she is the glue that keeps my work in place."

"And lovely glue it is," said the slender tanned chef. He enjoyed his lunch outside facing the bay, dreaming of Sicily and his early life. It was his secret for lasting all day in the kitchen. The Sicilian way of taking several hours midday to rest was bred into his soul.

He pulled a chair over and sat down at the table, while Antonia brought small aperitif glasses. "You must tell me of your latest adventures, Dr. Hawk. What is the news with you?"

"Well, I have fallen madly in love and just become a father."

"Oh, my," said Don Antonio. "I didn't expect that! We must toast to your child and this woman."

"Oh, no," said Elena, feeling very tipsy after her wonderful meal. "I'm not the mother! Tell them, Hawk!"

She started to laugh, and they all joined her. Finally, Hawk rose and made a toast to his new family, and glasses were raised.

"What will become of your house here in Belvedere" asked Antonia. "You haven't been around here for a long time."

"Elena is the occupant. She has been there for a couple of years now. It's a nice place for her to come after working at Stanford. Of course, I have been going home to Big Sur."

Antonia stood next to her father and poured him another round. "No more for me," said Hawk. "I have to drive us home."

"Well, I'll have one," said Elena.



It was chilly and foggy outside when they finally left the restaurant, and Hawk put the top up on the car. Elena wrapped herself in the hoodie again, and they crept along the side road barely able to see. Luckily, a short cut to the Belvedere coast was well lit, and soon they pulled into the driveway. Elena got out and opened the garage door with the keypad, and Hawk pulled into the large double garage.

She stepped inside to turn on the lights. "Do you want some heat, Dr. Hawk? Or are you hot enough?" She laughed merrily and pulled off the hoodie.

"I'm fine, Elena. It's bedtime anyway."

"Well, let's see. I will have to make up the guest room, unless you want your old bed back."

"No worries, I'll just lay right down on the couch. I've spent many nights sleeping here, trust me."

She climbed the stairs to the second floor and opened the linen closet. He followed behind her, noticing how she stumbled against the wall. It was now that he realized how drunk she was, as he watched her reach in to find a blanket. She tossed a pillow at him, barely missing his head.

"Elena, it's clearly time for you to hit the bed. I'll be fine."

She turned and glared at him with a look he had never seen before. Then she walked across the hall to the bedroom and slammed the door.

He grabbed the pillow and found an old quilt that his mother gave him on the shelf. He was suddenly very tired, and confused.

Time for bed.



I had enjoyed my first day of work, which included an outline of the plot points for ENDLESS LOVE, settling Lily Jade into Annoka's arms for a practice feeding, and pumping several good bottles of breast milk.

Uma and Annoka moved some things into Lily Jade's room, and set up a daybed that was ready for use. We had picked out a sofa that was small enough for a young girl, and large enough for a caregiver. They also moved the cradle into the room, and placed it in a space under the patio windows so she could look at the sky. They kept LJ in with them during the day, to accustom her to the light, and Annoka's touch.

I was busy getting my groove with the script, and set up the big book of ENDLESS LOVE on the windowsill in front of me. The fine leather cover matched the redwood, and became a piece of art for creative writing. I noticed the weight of my breasts when I sat down too long in one position, and ended up changing chairs several times. A pillow behind my back helped and soon I was lining up the opening scenes.

I didn't realize how much the film had drifted back into my mind, and was relieved to find easy access to the characters. My visualization of David Belford was coming into focus. There would be scenes of him as a young man, in the heat of his climb to the studio king of Hollywood. I grabbed the book and opened it to the photos in the center. He had not worn his famous horn rimmed glasses in those days, but did have a noticeably bad complexion. His hair was slicked back with a curl here and there escaping, typical of the thirties. I wondered how much glamorization the Walnuts had in mind, being that David seemingly morphed into quite a lady's man by the force of his own will. We were dealing with a legend who left countless Hollywood relatives, so probably best to be a bit gentle with his looks?

I grabbed my phone and soon Jacob's line was buzzing. After several rings I was ready to bail, and then came the familiar gravel voice. "Dyanna, what a pleasure! How are you doing today, my dear?"

"I wanted to ask you a question about David Belford. I am starting the first pages of the script, and trying to picture him as a young man."

"That is music to my ears. Teddy is here, let me put you on speaker."

"Well, I have a lot of photos here of Belford, and he was not the best looking guy by any means. Yet he was later described as a lady killer."

"He had a big dick," said Teddy, laughing into the speaker. "Hey, Teddy! Greetings from Big Sur."

"Dyanna, I am so dying to see your baby. What is her name?" "Lily Jade. She is right next to me sleeping in the next room."

"Back to Belford, before we lose our point here," said Jacob. "What do you need for an angle? Are you wondering if he was always the Romeo, or just later?"

"Well, he was kind of greasy" I said. "Not so appealing."

"Honey, in those days, the ladies didn't care. The guys either. They just wanted to work. Belford was a fairly nice guy, to begin with."

"Listen to Teddy," said Jacob. "He knows about such things." They both cracked up and I had to laugh at them. God, I had missed their sense of humor.

"Ok, then just roll with my gut as usual, and imagine his strength of mind being partially physical?"

They both cracked up.

"Later, you guys." I hung up, buoyed by the companionship of the Walnuts. No wonder they were so successful!

I stood up and stretched, anxious to see what was doing with my daughter.



Hawk awoke with a start at 3:10 am. His mouth was dry and tasted terrible. He looked at his watch twice to be sure of the time, with his tired eyes watering. As the room came into focus, he recognized the shadows from the glass spans in the living room, and knew he was in Belvedere.

He sat up and shook his head, trying to think clearly. Now his heart was pounding as he thought of Lily Jade, and the time of night he would awaken to her cries. He had begun to sleep with one eye open, as they say, which helped Dyanna to rest. Besides, it was his favorite time with the baby, walking barefoot with her tiny warm body next to his chest. He stood at the window and listened to her breathe in concert with the waves below.

Now, a sudden and urgent need to get out of this house and on the road overcame him. What was he thinking? He would not miss one moment of that new life, unless something happened to separate him from Dyanna and their child.

He pulled the heavy Stanford hoodie over his head and found his keys in the pouch. A quick stop in the powder room emptied his bladder and he put his face under the faucet. As the water ran

down his neck, he licked the salty dry lips of sleep and turned off the light.

For a moment he forgot where the button was to open the garage door, but it came back as he walked around to his driver side. He had installed it himself, with the very idea of a quick escape during his early days as a surgeon. It was right next to the driver's seat on the wall.

He fired up the engine and turned on the lights, listening to the purring Beamer, and prayed that the fog had lifted.

As the garage door opened, he saw that a soft wind was blowing the trees and the fog was much lighter. He released the brake and slowly backed out of the driveway onto the silent street. One quick turn, and he was gone.

The first signal was turning green as he approached, and he began to relax a bit. His hands were wrapped very tightly around the steering wheel, like he might lose track of it. Stephen Hawk was feeling like a desperate man.

In his years of radical surgery, he had learned to calm himself into a state of peace, rising above the room to breathe. Now he knew he must calm his beating pulse by taking huge gulps of fresh air, slow and steady over the Golden Gate Bridge.

A mad man on the run.



I had fallen into a deep sleep after a long hot bath. Uma brought me some food upon discovering my deep immersion in the script notes, and I worked until evening. I could hear faint voices from the nursery, where they left the door ajar, and that settled my worries about Lily Jade. She seemed to be doing fine with her aunt and the wonderful new night nurse Annoka.

I thought about Annoka suffering through the long first night of a new baby while soaking in the tub, and realized that Lily Jade was almost three months old. She was adapting very well to the world and had plenty of love and attention. I must stick to my guns and move forward as well, if we were to live as mother and daughter.

I thought of Hawk as I climbed into bed, for he had been there every night since Lily Jade was born. I had not expected that, but he surprised me. He didn't want to miss a thing, but bolted out the door at sunrise to run, bless his wonderful heart.

Now, I wondered how his day had gone at Stanford, and why he had not checked in as promised. It was the last thing I remember before closing my eyes. I said a little prayer for his safety.



[The Golden Gate Bridge](#) was almost empty as Hawk crossed the span into San Francisco. He wanted to go down 19th Street again, for some kind of good luck, although it might take him a few minutes longer than the 101 Freeway. He longed for the open road and the fresh night air of the countryside. In the meantime, the vagrants and night riders of the City gave him a glance in his imagination, and he shuddered.

By the time he was on Highway 280 and passing San Jose, it finally occurred to him that he was on the way home, in his usual manner. Granted, the pounding pulse in his ears had quieted down but his cold hands were still sweating, and his mind had not given him a break. He refused to dwell on the panic in his soul, for fear he would not get home. For the first time in his life, he was in dire need of another human being. He thought of Lily Jade and me at home, and the pain of losing us was unbearable. He was full of unquenchable dark dread.

The landmarks sped by and the air became warmer, rushing through the cab to keep him awake and steady. He took long sips of water, and thought of some music, but was afraid to mess with the silence.

"Just let me get home in one piece," he thought, over and over again, as the landmarks of Gilroy and Morgan Hill came into view. Passing through the Castroville interchange, he was careful to slow down, and steadied himself. He looked in the rearview as a Highway Patrol car approached, and saw his bloodshot eyes in the mirror. The black and white passed without incidence.

Hawk was racing the clock to get home before sunrise, although perhaps he was unaware of that. Driving through Monterey, he began to feel his limbs again, and ran his hands through his hair on Carmel Hill.

He approached Monastery Beach and stopped to take a leak at the place where more deaths have occurred on the Central Coast than anywhere else. People ran into the water here and were gobbled up by the secretive strong surf and rip tides.

To test himself, Hawk walked to the water line and let the waves flow over his feet. As the water pulled back, he ran to the car and sped off.

The final lap of Pacific Coast Highway 1 is the most dangerous span in the state, but the BMW hugged the curves and he leaned in and turned on KRML radio. Bixby Bridge came into view as Eddie Vedder howled at the moon with "*Love Reign O'er Me*", a live version that lasted a long time and made the tears in Hawk's eyes continue for miles.

Who could have picked that song for him now? The gods were with him, at the break of dawn, watching Andrew Molera Park come into view. Diving under the forest dark as night turned, he made his way past the landmarks he had known all his life, and finally reached the gate to our cottage. It was the gate to my soul. He was home.



Uma was sound asleep in the front bedroom, where the windows were open wide. She enjoyed the chill of the night and snuggling into the down comforter she gave me years ago.

The sound of a car entering the compound tugged at her ears, ever vigilant and protective. She listened and recognized the hum of Hawk's little silver BMW crunching over the gravel past the room. It continued to the front gate and silently pushed against the dirt to a stop. She glanced at her phone and saw that it was almost 5:30 am. He must have worked late and decided to come home.

She turned on her side and buried her face in the soft down pillow. Just a few more winks would be nice, especially now with her brother home safe and sound.

Outside, Hawk sat in the car watching the first hints of light on the horizon. His mother always called this the *Magic Hour*, since you never really knew yet what was in store. Big Sur could change in a moment to blustery winds and rain. But this morning, everything appeared as he had pictured it, yearning for the sight of home.

He knew he would never be the same.

## CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

He silently opened the gate and walked past the cottage, heading for the private entrance to the bedroom suite. The damp grass felt good on his bare feet as he ambled slowly to the door, where the keypad awaited his entrance. Gabriel had planned for unlikely arrivals, knowing Hawk's penchant for homecoming after a long stretch of work. [He gave his friend a place to land quietly, and slip into the family life.](#)

Now Hawk entered his code and the silent green light blinked. He turned the knob and opened the heavy redwood door into his private office/bath area. Inside, the copper shower door and panels reflected his shadow from the rising sun. The computer bank blinked silently, where his laptop awaited, and he placed his phone next to it. He padded softly to the bedroom door and peeked inside. I was sound asleep in the middle of the bed, with my head between two pillows. He walked in and stood over me for a minute, and then headed to the room where Lily Jade was sleeping.

He opened the door very slowly, and saw Annoka sitting in a chair next to the cradle. Her eyes were closed, but he knew she was half awake.

He entered the room and stood over his daughter's cradle, breathing in the scent of new life. As he turned to leave, Annoka opened her eyes and he waved at her. She nodded and smiled.

He returned to the bathroom and stripped off his clothes, stepping into the shower. Soon the radiant hot spray was pouring over him, and he stood with his head under the water for a long time.

When his knees became weak, he lathered up and washed his body carefully before turning off the water.

The room was filled with steam as Hawk wrapped a towel around him and shook out his wet hair. He brushed his teeth vigorously and wiped off the mirror. Rivulets ran down the glass and the man staring back at him appeared to be in one piece.

He entered the bedroom and climbed in next to me. It took a minute before I felt his fingers on my skin, but when I opened my eyes, he was very close and breathing heavily. He pulled me into his arms and kissed my cheek.

"Welcome home," I said, touching his damp hair. His eyes were closed and I knew he was tired, so I just waited. I was so happy to see him, and soon we were joined in a deep sleep, entangled in the new morning.



High above us in the carriage house of Belinda, there were more silent gestures in play. Slow Dove eased out of bed and crept into the bathroom. His clothes hung neatly on the door, after taking a shower last night. It was a handy way to make his escape down the stairs and past Big Ted before dawn, but today he had slept later than usual. The sun was rising as he pulled on the leather jeans and soft white flannel shirt Belinda had picked out. He snapped the shirt as he padded down the stairs barefoot, hoping to have timed his escape well. He had heard the water go on below, and assumed Big Ted was taking his morning shower. The guy rose very early every

day, and Slow Dove did not want to mess with him. Things were going too well.

John had installed a new TV in Ted's small bedroom, and soon after dinner, he closed his door and enjoyed some privacy. Belinda knew the ways of Big Ted, having watched him watching her for years. She promised to call Slow Dove as soon as her guardian was tucked in. They giggled about this into the night, thankful that he slept soundly and the heavy barn wood walls and floors were solid barriers.

After the first morning, it became obvious that Big Ted was waiting for Uma to set a schedule, and Uma was apparently busy. The workers were beginning to gather at the new building site early in the day, and John was up at the crack of dawn with them. After Big Ted did his morning rituals of exercise and breakfast, he had some time to himself before Belinda awoke (or so he thought), and soon joined the men at the construction site.

Uma had warned Ted to keep a close eye on Belinda, but he found that there was really no need. She awoke around noon, got dressed and spent time with Slow Dove after breakfast. There was no way for them to get into much trouble, since they had no wheels. And there was plenty to explore at the ranch.

Slow Dove was privy to a couple of conversations between John and Big Ted, and reported his findings to his new friend. It seemed that they were being given the rest of the summer to hang out together.

"We've got to be careful to look innocent," said Belinda, laughing raucously as they explored the studio at his house. "I found that out when I was spying on Uncle Teddy and his women."

"You've got to tell me about that," said Slow Dove. He moved closer to the sacred table where the pieces for Hawk's ceremony lay. A light sheet of parchment lay over the chain of hair and precious stones, and the feathers were all arranged to be fit into a vest for his idol.

Slow Dove underestimated Belinda at first, but realized the depth of her cunning as the days went by. She was the most blatant liar he had ever met, fixing those big shining eyes in your face and filling your mind with blather. It was so effortless that he had to laugh at first. She was very good with her falsehoods.

He wondered how long it would be before they explored each other, and it was something he yearned for. He had always loved the bodies of men, believing they were superior in construction and strength. As he matured, his eyes turned to the rounded breasts of women, and the slight waist of a young girl. It was confusing, but exciting to dream of touching these things on a female body.

Belinda was slender but had small round breasts and a great high little rear end. She seemed unaware of her allure, finger combing the short dark hair after a shower, and wearing no makeup.

Uma had insisted on sunscreen while she was at the Walnut's estate, and the habit had moved to Big Sur. Every morning she slathered on the white SPF 50 Baby Neutrogena and waited impatiently for it to dry. It took a few minutes to soak in, but in the meantime she looked like a ghost. That part was amusing, and he found her making faces in the mirror looking quite pale. That was the first morning he taught her about selfies.

"The angle is everything," he said, holding her hand out and upward, so her huge black eyes started right into the lens. Soon he found picture after picture of her nose, ears, eyes and teeth.

Belinda did not really trust anyone completely, and she insisted that he hand over his phone when they got under the covers the first time. "Do you really think I want a picture of us like this" he giggled, as they lay under the thick blanket in the dark.

"Why not? Uncle Teddy took pictures of the insides of the women he had sex with." "What do you mean?"

"He made them spread their legs and then he took photos with his phone. He would open it up with his fingers and put the phone up close."

"Oh, you lie! Belinda, you are so bad. Come on. Who wants to see that anyway?"

"Are you a virgin? Look at your face. I knew it." She started to tickle his ribs and they scrambled under the weight of the covers.

"I will tell you anything you want to know, on one condition." "OK, what?"

"That you tell the truth. I know you lie about everything, mostly to manipulate the adults. You can't do that with me. I will leave you."

She went silent and rolled over onto her back. She pulled the covers down and stared at the ceiling. He waited.

"Ok. Come out. I promise to be truthful to you. But you have to keep me a promise too."

Slow Dove inched his way up to the pillow and turned to her. "You can never tell about anything we do. Ever."

"And if I do...Then what?"



"First I will kill you. And then I will leave you." "Deal."

Annoka brought the baby in at 8 am and stood next to the bed. We had agreed that she would awaken me in the morning, when Lily Jade was all cleaned up and ready for breakfast. This morning, she had on a green onesie and was gurgling loudly.

I sat up and put two pillows behind my back, while Hawk slept on. Annoka handed my daughter over, and put a fresh cloth beside us. Lily Jade was hungry for my breasts and eagerly grabbed on to my nipple. She was not a noisy feeder, but this morning she was making some kind of humming sound. I giggled a little and kissed her head.

Hawk opened his eyes and stretched out, listening to the sounds of home. I was unaware of his anguished journey, and did not notice any strange behavior. He told me later that he had not really slept that morning, but kept his eyes on me for hours. Pardon me for not being aware, but a new mother uses any chance to sleep as if it were gold. Having had a long night's rest was my pleasure that day, and I was happy to have him back. I expected the usual banter about the world of medicine at Stanford, but he was not forthcoming.

I switched breasts after about ten minutes, and Lily Jade was close to his head. I watched his

long lashes blinking in the sun that poured through the window. In the meantime, LJ had a good feed and Annoka came back to change her diaper. She was smiling broadly, with her first night behind her as our nurse.

I began to smooth the grape seed oil on my nipples, and noticed Hawk had turned on his side away from me. He was looking out the window at the sky filled with sea gulls in fine measure.

"Hey, Dr. Hawk," I said, rubbing in circular manner as usual. First one nipple and then the other, twice each feeding. Got it.

He turned over and smiled at me, but I could see his face was drawn with fatigue. It was a normal thing after hours of surgery, and I was used to his quiet mood.

"Hey, Mrs. Hawk," he said. "How's the nursing mother this morning? You two have really mastered that technique, haven't you?"

I pulled my little white gown into place and started to button it up. "Wait," he said. "I want to touch you."

"Sorry, nothing left right now," I laughed.

He pulled off the covers and climbed over me, straddling my body. "I missed you Dyanna. You are so much more than my life. You and Lily Jade."

"You'd better cover up, unless you want Annoka to see you."

"Let's close the door." He kissed me tenderly and the blood rushed to my head. This was dangerous territory.

"Hawk, we have to get used to this new schedule. We can't just shut them out now, we have it all planned."

He looked at me with those big sad eyes, and ran his hand over my breasts. "Let's go down to the beach, Dyanna. I need you."

It was more of a command than a plea, but I knew something was up. "Meet me outside and cover yourself up, ok?"



He was standing on the beach when I ran down the hill, wrapped in my white terry robe. He turned away from the sea and ran over to catch me as I jumped down on the sand.

"What's going on, Hawk? Are you alright?"

He grabbed me in his arms and whirled me around. "I am now," he said, kissing me for a long time. I felt the muscles in his arms tighten up as he pulled me closer.

"Hey, lighten up a little. You're squeezing me so tight I can't breathe."

He stepped back and smiled. "I'm sorry, I just had to jump your bones. I'm feeling desperate for

you.”

I took his hand and we started to walk down the beach. He was like an orphan child, needy and raw, in a way I had never seen before.

We reached the inlet where the Jasmine Cave lay ahead, and stopped for a minute. The water rushed over our feet, cool and powerful. It was a reminder of a day where we were in crisis. “Hawk, what’s wrong? Did you lose your job?”

He looked up at the sky and shook his head. “Nothing like that. I just spent an evening with Elena and some old friends. But something was missing, and that was you. I can’t explain to other people what you mean to me, but now I realize I’m in this over my head.”

“You are tired, baby. You haven’t slept. It’s been a crazy time. Nothing will ever be the same. We both knew that. Now it’s catching up with us.”

He walked on ahead of me, without a word. I stood there for a minute, wondering what I could do for him.

A wave drew back, preparing to crash into the shore as I caught up with him. “Listen, Hawk! You are the most amazing man I have ever known. Hands down. You are so smart and beautiful that I wonder what you see in me. I can ever get enough of you, and I will always love you.”

He stared at me as I took his hand and pulled him over to the sandy inlet where we landed on that fateful day at the Jasmine Cave. Now it was dry and sheltered by the green strands hanging from the cliff. I dropped my robe on the beach, and pulled him down beside me.

I kissed the tears from his eyes, and went softly down his neck and shoulders. Now my hand was between his legs, stroking his strong thighs. I pushed him down on his back and pulled off his shorts, while he lay there with his eyes closed.

The sounds of the ocean roared around us as wave after wave reached the mouth of the cave, but my mouth found his beautiful hard member easily. I licked him up and down, while my hair tickled his chest. I knew he was losing control, and used my tongue to finish the job.

He grabbed my hair as the electric shock ran through his body and released the hot sperm into my mouth, with a scream that rose over the ocean.

I slowly released him and swallowed the juice of life as he lay on the sand.

Now he opened his eyes and pulled me down. His hands took my breasts and kissed them gently. It was such a different feeling than my daughter, but he when he sucked on my nipples, a spark shot through me that reached the core of my body, and I was on fire.

Now the warrior in Hawk found himself and rose up to turn me over. He kissed my back and held my breasts again, as I felt a hunger I had not known in a long time.

We went over and over, lying in the damp sand, kissing mouths full of sand and human juices. He turned me over the last time and went up so far that I felt the pressure on my womb.

Finally, Mother Nature roused us with a strong gust of wind that blew the coils of Jasmine over our bodies. The waves were coming in strong now, and rushing up to our feet and the sun was high in

the sky.

I can remember each moment as if it was happening right now. The best of the best.

We were one.



Uma sat in the rocker with Lily Jade, watching her sleep. She had come in to check on Annoka, and see how the first day was going. The bedroom was empty and also my office, and Uma assumed that we had gone for a walk.

She sent Annoka to the front bedroom for a nap, and fed Lily Jade from a bottle of milk I had pumped the day before. She was not surprised by any of this, being a nurse of new parents as well as their young babies.

She knew her brother had returned very late, and surely fallen into bed with me.

Mostly she cherished the time with that tiny wonderful morsel of life with the deep green eyes. Uma knew that she had another job to tackle with Belinda and would have to make time for Lily Jade as well. It was very important that each of them receive some training in the Esalen Ways. She believed that Lily Jade would be a good and willing student as she grew older. It was in her genes to do so.

Belinda was another ball of wax, and a huge challenge.

She rocked slowly back and forth and closed her eyes, listening for the steps on the path as we returned.

She knew we were together again. Really together.

## CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

Jacob and Teddy Walnut hung around the curves of Sunset Boulevard on their way to Pacific Palisades, relishing [Teddy's orchid purple Tesla](#) convertible. They got a lot of sharp glances from their fellow travelers, particularly entering Brentwood and the Pali Village. The car was supposed to be a loaner for the new film they were producing in Vegas, but Teddy had fallen in love. They used this Model S for the desert scenes, but then it came home to Poppa! The neighbors on Mullholland Drive were quite astounded by the color alone, and waved as Teddy passed them coming home.

Today they were going to meet Jack Walters at the property in the Palisades where I was negotiating a purchase. The early forays with Anthony Bravano, Jr. had turned into a long tedious search for title and transfers. Bravano claimed that his father had won the property in a poker game years ago, from a well known criminal thug named Adam Barner. Barner's name was never found on the original deed, which referred to several different businesses as title holders over the years. Therefore, claimed the Bravano family, the title was "smeared" and could not be sold until the signatures were provided to the title company.

Jack Walters was flummoxed by this quaint low life type of folderol, which was so unprofessional and typical tough guy stuff. It reminded him of the old Cagney films that his grandfather collected, and the antics enacted.

Brian Shoupe took it upon himself to search endlessly for material on Barner and his regime, who were notable in the mid-section of Los Angeles in the 1950s. He was determined to find a loophole in the claims and save the day for me and my cousin Louise. He was also up for a Junior Partnership, which didn't hurt when it came to overtime.

The web of crime related families in the Commerce area of LA, and beyond was like a *Western Sopranos* story in real time. There seemed to be layer upon layer of families who were born and raised within the boundaries of Commerce, rarely venturing outside the city limits with their business. Barner was a thief who robbed several banks when he was young, and then knocked over the offices of shipping depots in Long Beach. He was a squirrely mean-looking fellow, according to the old photographs from the LA Times. In one shot, he revealed a mouth full of broken teeth, and what appeared to be a split lip. His main talent was the sheer audacity of his will, which was the little engine that could. When he met the senior Bravano at a poker game, he decided that this was to be his fortune. Hundreds of Bravano's roamed the streets, from the various families, and Adam was impressed by the way they took care of each other. He wanted some of that good stuff. He wanted in.

During the next few poker nights, Barner watched his mark carefully. He took the money he won and had his teeth fixed. He bought a suit, and two shirts, and shoes and socks. The one thing he never bought or wore was underwear, and became a ringer for his ability to remove his pants on a dime. This, of course, was known only to the ladies of his choosing.

As Adam Barner wormed his way into the Bravano Family, his sense of humor won them over. He was always willing to help at gatherings for the family which pleased the ladies. In return, they taught him some fine manners and a taste for good food.

All of this story was uncovered by Brian during a late night search fueled by espresso and persistence. When he showed his findings to Jack Walters, they rejoiced at the joys of the deepest internet.

The Walnut Brothers got an abbreviated advance copy of the DOGPARK TALE, as Shoup entitled it. Teddy read some of the material to his brother during a long poolside dinner, and they toasted with heavy Italian burgundy.

"You know, when this thing is done, the Barner tale is a great storyline for a new Godfather," said Teddy. They were rounding the last bend on Sunset before Palisades Highlands, where the traffic thins out a little, and Teddy stepped on the gas.

"Let's not go overboard here, my dear brother. First things first. Wait until you see this piece of shit lot."

Jack Walters was already on site with Brian Shoup when the Walnut Brothers zoomed into the parking lot next to the chain link fence. Brian had taken a lot of photos of the property, and sent them to me along with the story of Adam Barner. He wanted to be sure that Anthony Bravano, Jr. did not mistake my team for a bunch of fools. After our condo scene with the fetid angry little man, Brian had an inkling of the mindset with which we were dealing. He had studied hard at Harvard to become a Lawyer, and then doubled down at USC grad school. He knew how to build a case, but young attorneys are a dime a dozen in the potent LA world. So Brian found his place at Walters & Benson, and began the climb to partnership.

One big advantage was his inscrutable fascination with technology. The world had become a huge comic book dream for guys like him. He was among the first to have an iPhone, and from then on, it was a passion of riches. He read Steve Jobs' book, and studied the young geniuses who were learning to find, follow and explore every inch of the planet and its occupants.

Jack Walters was comfortable with Brian's genius in the field of tech wizardry, having several little wizards at home himself. He trusted his young associate after watching his behavior like a hawk for several years. They were a good team, and quite easy going to the casual observer, but deadly serious about their work.

Now the infamous Walnut Brothers were involved in a seemingly minor case to purchase piece of land in the pricey Palisades Highlands. As they got out of the brightly colored butterfly Tesla, shock waves went through Brian's body. It was his own well-developed antenna doing its job. He was going to learn something from them, after all.

Brian's distaste for Jacob Walnut had begun with his ridiculous appearance on the first day of our inspection over a year ago. He had no idea of what had taken place between Jacob and me, but his instincts told him to be on guard. Jacob was deeply hurt by his inability to manage our relationship and my personal life. He behaved badly, showing up with his blooming black eye under a Parisian fedora.

I was not about to tell either of them that I was responsible for that injury to Jacob, nor the circumstances involved. My reticence about our past gave me the upper hand with these two wonderful men who represented us. Now they were firing with both hands in a battle to help the Louise Guy Palisades Dog Park become a reality.

I am sure Lily Jade was the turning point in this strange case, because she arrived unexpectedly and captured our hearts. Even the cool Louise would have recognized the softness that surfaces when a tiny bit of young life is present. Brian loved to hold her, and I was happy to allow that during our later meetings. He would make a wonderful father some day.

That morning, Teddy jumped from the Lilac Tesla and stretched out his toned body. Months in St.

Tropez had tanned him to a golden French color, and he wore it well. It was one of the charms of the Walnut brothers that they each resided in a different world with equal gravitas, from different paths.

Jacob, on the other hand, stayed with his simple polo shirts and khakis from Todds in London. He kept that strong physique under wraps, and then sprung it on the ladies. When I think of him now, I can still feel his smooth pampered skin. He was probably a favorite of all his lovers, until some kind of discussion of where the power was held.

"Greetings, Gentlemen," said Jacob, extending his hand. "You remember Teddy, my dear brother and partner."

"Of course," said Jack. "Happy to see you two this fine day. This is my associate Brian Shoup."  
"That's quite a vehicle you are driving, Mr. Walnut. It's the new Blue-Purple collection, isn't it?"

"You bet. We have already filmed it in a production we're doing in Vegas." Teddy extended his hand, and then turned to Jack. "Been on that rooftop much lately? We had such a great dinner that night with Louise."

"Yes, I think of it often, now that she is gone."

"She was not well then; it was pretty obvious. But we did get her to see U2 at the Disney Center! She was so determined."

"And she was equally determined to make this property a wonderful place for the dogs to frolic and chase each other." Jack turned as he spoke and swept his hands over the sprawl of land.

"You have done some good detective work on the Bravanos", said Jacob. "We were discussing that on the way over here. Teddy thinks it is fodder for a new film series, the West Coast Sopranos."

"You know, Sir, those people are still deep in the business of crime in the City of Commerce. I would suggest a careful path into that project."

Teddy and Jacob both laughed heartily, and Jacob put his arm around Brian's shoulder. "See, Teddy! I told you it was a bad idea. They'll kill us all."

"Let's walk the property and I will fill you two in on the latest soil analysis and tests on the native plants. We have gone ahead with these things because Bravano, Jr. refuses to discuss anything with us."

"You know," said Teddy, "that is a sure sign that they are watching every move you make. I doubt that they have a lawyer in your league, but you can be sure there will be suit after suit about this."

Jacob looked around at the large lot which had added more trash in the corners since his last visit. The fence was bent on both outside corners, where someone had probably hung on there. It was a disgrace, and he shied away from thinking of Louise anywhere near the property.

"I wonder how hard it would be to do an infrared survey here. Teddy and I had one done on our land up on Mullholland. We found a lot of things buried for a long time."

"No bodies," said Teddy, laughing slyly. "Is that what you are intending, Jake?"

"I'm just saying there must be some reason these people are so desperate about something that means nothing to them. It doesn't make sense."



Elena had taken a week of vacation after her night with Hawk, desperately afraid of the consequences of her behavior. She was a refined, accomplished professional medical assistant, with three degrees from different schools. At Westlake School for Girls in Brentwood, she had learned how to be a cultured, well versed young woman. She read all the right books and rarely had a date outside of the school, which was all girls. She went on to Stanford for her degrees in medicine and philosophy, and then spent another year at MIT. They wanted a brainy well educated woman to round out a new class aimed at the New Medicine.

Why then was she so flummoxed by the results of a night she had dreamed of for years? Mainly because Elena Hensley could not remember a thing after they left the restaurant.

She had assumed that Dr. Hawk had become enamored of her in a new way, after being cooped up with the new baby and crabby mother and relatives. All of this was supposition, and had never been hinted by Hawk, but he was so loving and kind after his visit to Dr. Bearman. They went to his favorite restaurant and enjoyed the company of dear friends, with a lot to drink in between. The last toasts were a faint memory that turned her stomach after thinking of tequila.

She had awakened in her bed at noon the following day, naked as a jaybird. Her clothes were strewn across the floor and the sheets tangled. She assumed that Hawk had been there with her, although there was no sign of his presence in the room. She sniffed the pillows and inserted a finger into her vagina in search of evidence, which was laughable. She was so dizzy and sick to her stomach that she had to sit on the toilet to stop shaking.

She checked her phone and the landline at the house as well for messages, and there was nothing from Stephen Hawk. He rarely called anyway, preferring to text or send an email. After a long hot shower and some green tea, she searched her computer, and slammed it shut as the bright light of the San Francisco Bay filled the room.

She assumed she would have remembered having sex with a man she adored for all these years, but there was nothing in her head that would account for that.

He was probably embarrassed and had gone home to Big Sur while she was still sleeping. Maybe he was at the hospital.

She paced and sweated, gagging on some dry toast with honey. What would happen next? She loved living in his house here, and was happy to be at Hawk's side for his work until the end of time. Surely he knew that.

She would keep quiet about their affair, until things settled down and became more clear.

After all, he was the man of her dreams.



We spent the rest of the day together as a family, Hawk, Lily Jade and me. We were in that

dreamy hypersexual zone, and the baby just grooved on it. Uma had cooked some dinner for us while she cared for her niece, and the house was empty by late afternoon. Annoka went home to change and shower before her duties as our Nightingale (as we would come to call her). Uma waved a silent goodbye while I was bathing and Hawk sat in the grass with his daughter.

I had seaweed in my hair and some scratches from the sandy bed of passion, but nothing drastic. Hawk came in and washed my back, looking a little drugged himself. Mother nature provided a good time to nurse my daughter, and my breasts were full when she came to me that afternoon. I had missed my pumping time, but no worries. I was not going to break the spell with that noisy thing, when I could just relax and feed her. She settled down right afterward, and was still asleep when Annoka arrived at 9 pm. We gave her a little extra time to rest, and loved every minute of privacy and solitude.

Hawk handed LJ to her caregiver and quietly shut the door. He slid into bed and wrapped his warm self around me.

We slept.



The Walnut Brother's inspection of the dog park property ended in the Secret Café, on a hunch. They had walked around while Brian pointed out various blemishes that might spoil the potential for a beautiful park. Now it was early afternoon and they were ready for something to quench their thirst. Teddy found a booth inside that faced the entrance and settled in while Brian got some equipment from his car. Jacob and Jack visited the restroom with their respective phones, and soon they all converged to find a pitcher of Sun tea and four sweating glasses with ice and mint. The woman who joined them brought menus and a wonderful smile.

"Welcome to the Secret Café gentlemen," she said, pouring the glasses full of tea for them. "Hot out there, huh? This sun tea will do the trick. Three kinds of invigorating blends baked out there this morning. My name is Kiera and I run this joint, with my family."

Teddy looked at the toned arms and long legs with a big smile, and took his menu along with the others. "I want some kind of great sandwich, maybe turkey and swiss and tomato and onion. Can you do that?"

"Sure," said Kiera. "We have a lot of homemade deli food, with some special family dishes as well."

"That sounds good, maybe Jack cheese instead, on Rye," said Jacob. Brian and Jack wanted the Swiss with extra mustard.

"Coming up," said Kiera, collecting the menus. She walked away with a strong sexy gait that said she was the boss.

"This is a good place to start some discovery," said Teddy. He took a long drink of tea and nodded to himself. "I'll bet this place has been here a long time, from the looks of it. Mature landscape, fresh paint outside. It's a hotbed of stories from the neighborhood.

"What are you looking for, Mr. Walnut?" Brian was now recording the conversation. "Well, let's start with Teddy, since there are two of us here with that name, OK?" "Good idea, sir."

"This area is a middle to upper class community of people who like to be away from the crowd. Probably leaning toward older families, the kids are most likely bused to private schools or Pali High. There are lots of walkers and runners, with the gate to Topanga Canyon Park down the street. They notice a lot of things but don't question much that seems normal. I'll bet there is a neighborhood group that rides herd on the area."

"Where are you going with this, Teddy?" Jacob tapped his foot under the table, unable to relax.

"I'm thinking that this audacious unkempt piece of land must have created some curiosity over the years, and somebody knows about it."

Kiera arrived with a basket of fresh carrot strips and broccoli. "Just a little something to munch on, your sandwiches are coming up." She placed four little bowls of a green dip in front of them. This is the famous Green Goddess a la Mario for your veggies."

Jack dipped a carrot stick in the sauce and munched away.

"Why is the Green Goddess so famous, Kiera," asked Jacob. He artfully dipped a piece of broccoli into the sauce, and chewed thoughtfully.

"Well, my father invented the Green Goddess sauce way back in the 50's, when he had the first Secret Café."

"Was that somewhere else?" Jacob looked into her eyes.

"Just down the road a bit. He took over this place after they built the offices next door." The bell from the kitchen signaled her attention, and she excused herself to check on the food.

"Ha!" said Teddy. "I hope he is alive. That guy will know something about this mess outside."

"Let's drink to the king of Green Goddess," said Jack Walters.

## CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Uma's plan for Belinda was to begin a regimen of studies, exercise and work in the garden. She had allowed a week to pass for the purpose of settling in, unaware of the growing friendship with Slow Dove.

Big Ted was there to help her with whatever Belinda needed, so Uma was sure things were going well. She knew that John was starting construction on the new ranch house as soon as the crew was assembled. He and Gabriel spent several days in town selecting the *starting goods*, as they were called. The old lumber and many things inside the building had been saved, since the fire mainly burned the northern part of the house.

The new furnace and piping had been selected months ago with a crew from Colorado on the way to install it. She shuddered to think of the old furnace, and that dreadful day when Rex Phelps had blown it all away.

When she arrived at 9 am in the morning, she expected to find a sleepy-headed ornery girl, like before. She parked the blue Camaro in front of Belinda's carriage house, and walked over to the gardens.

The lush scent of damp soil and blooms opening to the sun was something she longed for, after weeks of settling the baby in, training Annoka, and counseling Hawk. She had been surprised at the intensity of his feelings for his tiny daughter, given the fact that he dealt with human beings in every shape and size as a doctor. *"I guess that all goes to the wind,"* she mused, *"when it's your flesh and blood."*

He seemed so restless on the one hand, and nervous the balance of the time. Now this decision to build a clinic in Big Sur had added to the jitters, since Gabriel was embedded in the ranch house first. She hoped the reunion of passion she had observed between Hawk and me would help both of us to adjust.

It seemed to Uma that everyone was trying to do too many things at once, shifting the landscape at the Stone/Falconer Ranch. John Soaring Meadow was barely able to concentrate on the plans at hand, with the lovely Ginger taking a lot of his time. Uma herself felt a little out of sorts about that, for John was her rock and best friend. She had not counted on him getting tangled up with a young vivacious woman half his age.

"Listen to you," she murmured to herself. "You sound like an old mean hag from the tribe. Get a grip." She knelt down and took a deep breath of the fresh yellow roses. It was good to be back to the earth.

When she crossed the road to the second carriage house, she found the door ajar. Inside, Big Ted's room was neat as a pin, and empty. She checked the kitchen and then climbed the stairs to Belinda's loft. The door was closed, so she tapped twice. After a long silence, she opened it and entered the room.

Bright light streamed through the windows, blinding Uma for a moment. She moved toward the bed, waiting for her eyes to adjust. There was no one there. Not even a trace of Belinda on the smooth covers and plumped pillow.

"Good Morning, Belinda," said Uma, in a soft cheerful voice. She approached the bathroom and

peeked inside. Empty too.

The hook where Belinda had placed her purse was empty as well, but the bathroom was spotless. There was a book next to the tub and a glass of water.

She went to the front window and looked out over the meadow. Not a soul was evident. Then she saw Ginger outside John's door, emptying the trash. She opened the window and waved. "Good morning, Ginger."

"Hi, Uma! Good morning to you as well. What are you doing up there?" "I was looking for Belinda. There is nobody here."

"Did you look at Slow Dove's studio? She spends a lot of time there."

"I had no idea. I've been pretty busy down at the cottage with the baby and all".

"Can I give you some coffee or breakfast? John has gone into town with Gabriel."

"No thanks. I've been up for hours. I want to find Belinda now."

She waved at Ginger and closed the window, which had no screen on it. What was Belinda doing at Slow Dove's place? Nobody had said a word. Where was Big Ted? What the hell?"

She stomped down the stairs and crossed the green area where Slow Dove had planted some grasses and flowers. She pounded on the door and opened it. As she stepped inside, her eyes adjusted once more to the dark studio and workspace of the main floor. There were large tables with all sorts of creations in the works, along with bottles and jars of potions and paints. A long curved knife lay at the bottom of one workbench, with leather gloves next to it.



"Hello," she shouted. "Belinda, are you here? Slow Dove?" No one was there.

Paragoh Creek wound around the meadow below the Ranch House, and melted into a little pond at the curve heading north. The path was crooked and hard to find, and once filled with poison oak. Alexio had spent weeks burning out the brush to lay back the toxic vines, during his last summer at the ranch. Slow Dove had watched from behind the brush, too shy to offer his help. He was fascinated by the strong handsome Hispanic man who longed to be a part of the new ranch family. Rumor had it that he was in love with Dyanna, who barely knew he existed. Of course, this became a breeze from the past when he broke his hand in a fight at Ventana, and was sent home to Monterey to heal.

He had played around with the wild Cassie in those days, breaking her heart. She drove to her death on the curves of Big Sur, still madly in love with Alexio.

Slow Dove was the rare romantic indigenous man, growing into his skin alone and untouched by his father's doctrine. When he appeared at the circle on the day that Hawk met Dyanna, he realized what the energy was like between two human beings who were meant to be.

He believed in this dream, that each person had a soul mate. Stephen Hawk became his idol for many reasons, mostly the beauty of his physical body and quiet presence. Slow Dove began to shadow Hawk when he returned to Big Sur for a counsel meeting, and watched him run on the beach at dawn. The slight agile young man was able to slip between the trees and bushes, admiring the speed of Hawk's body on the sand. His skin glistened in the light of the dawn, as he dove in and out of the waves. Perhaps it was fair to say that Stephen Hawk was his first love.

Now, with the baby taking center stage, Slow Dove played a part in the ceremony of her birth by replicating the ancient traditions of the Big Sur Esalen people.

He had experienced his first erection watching Hawk stand before him, with his long ponytail ready for the knife. Now Slow Dove knew he could have sex and put himself into another persona.

In his recent dreams, Belinda had been naked and pale blue, urging him to join her. She lay on the shores of Paragoh Creek, with long hair and delicate limbs, waiting.

Today, he led Belinda down the path to the shallow pond. She was fearless about the brush and would have scratched herself if he had not protected her. She laughingly told him about shimmying under the bushes at the Walnut estate, and watching Teddy play with his women.

"What part did you like the best" asked Slow Dove, when they reached the tiny inlet where the ground was covered with moss.

Belinda was fascinated by this person her age who was not buffaloed by encounters of sexual deviation. The adults seemed to think she was severely damaged, just because she wanted to watch. Who wouldn't?

"Probably when Teddy disappeared into the back rooms and the women were all laid out on this big chair with their legs spread apart," said Belinda, slyly watching from the corner of her eye for his reaction.

"What did they do? Couldn't they see you outside?"

"It was dark outside and I was behind the bushes. The lights were bright in there, anyway."

Slow Dove stretched out his legs and dipped them into the stream. He waited to be sure Belinda was paying attention, when he lay back and slipped down his shorts. It was an odd move, hedging his bet that she would bite.

"They always played with themselves," said Belinda, continuing her story. The sight of his body next to her was obviously not anything new. She bent down to the water and brought back a small splash that landed between his legs.

The surprise and chill of the liquid on his warm slender penis made him jump to his feet, and stumble with the shorts around his knees.

"Hahahahaha," laughed Belinda, staring straight ahead as if she could not see him. "Gotcha."

"You little bitch," said Slow Dove, pulling up the soft leather shorts. "I'll get you for that."

Belinda barely had time to open her mouth with a reply when she found herself waist deep in the

middle of Paragoh Creek. Water ran down her neck and shoulders, causing the little white T-shirt she wore to cling snugly.

For a minute she stood there, staring up at her friend, as he shook his head. "Don't ever touch my private parts like that," said Slow Dove.

Belinda smiled slowly and pulled off her wet shirt, exposing her erect nipples and rounded young breasts. "Now we're even."

Suddenly there was a loud cracking noise above them, and a body breaking through the brush. They looked up to see Uma rolling sideways down the steep hill, with dirt flying in the air. She rolled over several large bushes before coming to a stop ten feet above them. She was growling at the top of her lungs while Slow Dove scrambled up the crumbling bank of bramble bushes and succulent new poison oak.

"Oh, my god," said Uma, covered with dirt and scratches on her arms and legs.

"Are you all right" asked Slow Dove. He leaned over and helped her sit upright, while the peals of laughter began below.

"Uma, what are you doing here" asked Belinda, laughing merrily. She climbed up the path and stared at the sad sight in front of her.

"I was just walking and looking for you two, and I guess I tripped..."

Now Slow Dove began to laugh as well, and Uma stared at the two howling wild teenagers, barely dressed and merry making. They were very tickled to see her in such despair, with tears running down Belinda's face.

Uma watched them for a moment and caught the giggles, looking at her scratched knees and dirty white shorts. There were dirt clods in her hair, and when she moved, more debris came tumbling down. "Shit," she said, attempting to stand up.

Soon the three of them were in the pond, cleaning the offending brush and dirt from Uma's body. Her white shirt was torn in the front, exposing the thick undershirt she wore beneath. Slow Dove gently removed the shirt and used it to wash her face and neck.

"Go up to your house and get some towels," he said to Belinda, whose eyes were wide with amazement. She had just witnessed the delicate humanity of the incredible strong Uma, warrior woman of the world! Now she just watched both of them, until Slow Dove grabbed her arm. "Belinda!! Go and get some towels and see if Ginger is around. Uma may be hurt."

Belinda scrambled up the path without a word, looking back at the first turn, to be sure she was really seeing this happen. It reminded her of the days in Genoa when they gave her all those pills and strapped her down.

The trees began to swirl around Uma as she tried to move toward the safety of the shore, but Slow Dove kept her still. She was dizzy and feeling faint, but he continued to gently clean her arms and face, murmuring quiet sounds to comfort and calm.

Belinda reached the top of the hill and ran as fast as she could to John's house. "Ginger!! Ginger!" she shouted, opening the front door. "Help!"

The long strawberry hair flew about Ginger's face as she appeared at the top of the stairs. "What's wrong, honey? Are you ok?"

"Uma fell down the hill, by the creek. Slow Dove is there, taking care of her. He wants some towels."

Ginger ran down the stairs and hugged the frail, frightened girl. "Don't you worry. We'll take care of it."



John Soaring Meadow and Gabriel West were almost home in the big Ranch truck when Ginger called. She was on her way down the hill to Paragoh creek, where Uma had taken a bad fall. Ginger knew the truck had a large emergency first aid kit, and decided they would be better than the Sheriff. Gabriel turned down the country music and answered John's phone, knowing it must be important.

"Belinda came to get me, scared to death. Uma fell down the hill by Paragoh Creek, and Slow Dove is with her now. We are on our way back there with towels and some water, to see how bad it is."

"What were they doing down there anyway," said John, listening to the conversation. "It's full of bramble bushes and poison oak. Uma knows that."

"She came looking for us," said Belinda, walking along beside Ginger. "You kids should know better. Is Uma ok?"

"We're at the top now, and heading down the path. I'll stay on the phone." "We'll be there in a few minutes, honey. Take care of them, ok?"

Ginger had put long sweat pants on Belinda, and a hoodie for protection. She was covered as well, with overalls and shirt for gardening. "Come on, girl. Can you show me the right path?"

They began the descent at the edge of the brush, where Belinda was certain she had come out. She had marked it with a rock, and sure enough, they headed down the narrow path.

"The brush is thick down below, so be careful" said John. "We're just into town, so hang in there."

Belinda led the way, with Ginger carrying the towels close to her body. Belinda held the water bottle inside her shirt, to keep the poisonous venom away from their limbs. Halfway down, a large hole had opened up where the bushes pulled away. They walked slowly together; kicking the dirt aside.

"Slow Dove," shouted Ginger, "where are you?"

Below, Slow Dove had moved Uma to the shallow water and held her back against his body. She seemed to be dizzy and muttered about the rose bushes having thorns this year. He heard the voices coming closer, and leaned his head back. "Here we are, Belinda! Come down further."

Ginger cut over a few feet and found a smooth pathway that led downhill. "This is it," said Belinda. She moved to the front and began to climb down the path. "They're over near the bank, in the

water.”

Ginger jumped the last few feet and hurried over to the creek. The water had begun to flow to the sea, and Slow Dove was holding on to his patient with both arms. She jumped into the water and waded in front of Uma.

“Uma, my dear. Are you OK?” Ginger reached over and touched the muddy forehead. “I think so,” said Uma, in a whisper. “I tumbled all the way down here, honey.”

“Are you in pain?”

“I don’t know. I can’t feel anything. I’m so dizzy.”

Ginger looked at Slow Dove, and saw that his eyes were full of tears. “John is on his way, with Gabriel. They will be here any minute, Uma.”

“Hawk. I want Hawk to look at me.”

Belinda was holding the phone behind them, but the sound of the water rushing was overwhelming.

She handed the phone to Ginger. “John, can you hear me?”



Gabriel West had called Hawk before they turned onto the Falconer/Stone ranch, using his own phone. He left a message that tried to sound calm, but it said *Urgent!! Please call me. There has been an accident at the ranch!*

## CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

Hawk reached the gate of the ranch just as it swung shut, so he knew John was ahead of him. His heart pounded as he drove the little Beamer over the cattle gates, trying to calm down. He had his bag in the trunk, as always, and was prepared for anything. He thought of Lily Jade and me first, and then wondered who was up there today.

He had been planning the layout of the new Big Sur clinic in a beautiful grove of redwoods near the Cooper School. The land was donated by the family of Gabriel West, along with a tidy sum to kick start the project. The MedVac Van from Stanford was due to arrive within a week, and it would be the center of operations for the surrounding buildings. Dr. Bearman had insisted on sharing the newly revamped vehicle, and would be visiting the site himself.

All this streamed through the mind of Stephen Hawk as he reached the last curve and rolled onto the upper road that ran the length of the Stone/Falconer Ranch. John was waving from the left end of the road, where his truck was parked near the brush that covered Paragoh Creek.

Hawk pulled into the narrow area and jumped from the car. "It's Uma," said John as he rushed over. "She had a bad fall down the hill." Hawk grabbed his bag from the trunk and jumped onto the path in front of John.

Ginger was standing off to the right, waving when he reached the first curve. "This way, Dr. Hawk. She's down by the creek."

Hawk zipped up his hoodie and put on the gloves in the pockets, which were meant to protect and sterilize the patient. His light Adidas running shoes hugged the path and kept him from slipping, as he rounded the last curve. He stopped at the clearing, unable to see because of the bright glare coming from the water.

"Over here," said Gabriel, "under the trees." Hawk shaded his eyes and saw his friend standing knee deep in the rushing current, with Uma held like a ragdoll in his arms. Her face was black with dirt and they were both soaking wet.

Hawk stopped short of the bank and opened his case. Inside was an emergency pack with insulin and a small defibrillator. "Is she breathing?"

"Yes, she's just exhausted," said Gabriel. "They didn't want to move her,"

Hawk waded into the water and put his hands on Uma's shoulders. She jumped with pain, as her eyes opened wide. "Hawk! My God! Help me!"

He took her hand and held it near his heart. "I'm here, Uma. Can you feel me? You are safe now."

She closed her eyes again and went limp in Gabriel's arms. "Help me, Hawk. Help me."

"Uma, listen to me. We are going to get you out of this water, but I don't want to injure you. Tell me what is wrong. Can you tell me what hurts?"

She opened her eyes again and looked to the left. "My left side, I can't move it. Terrible pain." "OK, Gabriel and I are going to lift you up. Do you need a stick?"

She nodded and Hawk reached out to a low hanging branch on the shore. He pulled it down and broke off a small piece, stripping the bark with his teeth. "Here, open your mouth."

Uma's jaw dropped open and Hawk placed the stick so she could clamp down with her teeth. "Now stay with us, Uma."

He backed away until they were sideways next to the bank. Slow Dove stood waiting and reached out to help pull them ashore. Gabriel held Uma under her arms while Hawk grabbed her legs. She was dead weight, soaking wet and barely conscious.

"Uma! Uma," said Hawk, "bite down. Open your eyes for me. Do it now!"

With one smooth movement, they swung Uma's body onto the bank, where Ginger had placed several blankets and towels. She screamed as Hawk scrambled ashore and laid her out flat. Her head rolled to the side and the stick fell from her mouth in one piece.

"Good girl, Uma. Now we've got you. Ginger, cover her legs and feet with those towels."

Gabriel climbed up the slippery rocks and knelt beside her. "Do you want me to hold her head?"

Hawk nodded, and reached into his bag for a flashlight and stethoscope. He listened carefully as the water rushed by, muffling the vital signs.

Gabriel held Uma's head and leaned it back slightly while she moaned. Hawk opened her eyes one by one, and peered down her throat. Her large white teeth had remnants of the twig on them, and he carefully wiped them away.

He looked at Gabriel and shook his head. "Her vitals are fine, her heart is strong, beating like a drum. Her eyes are focusing. Let's get her out of here."

Gabriel held Uma securely under her arms, and Hawk had her legs from the knees down. They lifted carefully and began the treacherous climb up the hill. Ginger carried the remains of Uma's clothes and the blankets and towels. At the top of the trail, John had constructed an ambulance bed in the back of his truck, with a mattress and more blankets. He had several pillows to raise Uma's head, but Hawk refused to move her any more than necessary. They slid the limp body onto the mattress and covered her with layers of warmth. Poor Uma was freezing to death!

The short distance to John's house was a Godsend, for it provided all the comforts of home and a bed where Uma had spent many nights. It was Hawk's hope to have her awaken in a familiar place, while they spent the first crucial hours diagnosing the agony.



Slow Dove found Belinda huddled under a tree downstream. She was wide-eyed and shaking, when he came upon her and put his arms around her body. "She is up the hill, Belinda. Hawk is here, and they are taking care of Uma. It's going to be all right."

"No it won't. They will never forgive me."

"Don't be silly. It wasn't our fault that she lost her footing. We were just enjoying a nice summer day. Don't go off the deep end here. We need to be strong together."

"I'm hungry, and I just started my period."

"Come on, Miss Stone. Let's get you back up to your house. Things will be all right. Hawk is a fine doctor, and he knows what he's doing."



"She's not going to die?" "No way."

I spent most the afternoon with Sherriff Clancy, figuring out the right way to place the [baby seat in my little red bomb](#). Uma was using the Lexus for some of her work, and I preferred my own car anyway. Because it was a one seat vehicle, I was pondering how to wedge the carrier in the front to be sure Lily Jade was safe. I knew I would be traveling for the film, and probably the dog park, and she was going with me.

Hawk had been gone since early morning, and Annoka stayed on so that I could pump the breast milk needed for freezing. She and LJ had bonded well, and they snoozed together in the rocking chair after the nightly feedings.

I finished several pages of notes on ENDLESS LOVE, and realized that Lily Jade was due for a feeding soon. My breasts had begun to swell, which was the natural reminder to check on her.

I wandered into her room and found my daughter staring up at me, kicking her tiny feet up a little bit. "Hello, my baby girl," I said, lifting her out, "it's lunch time". I was always amazed at the scent of her, the fresh baby smell that has been imitated for thousands of years, but never quite perfectly. I put her down on the changing pad, and tickled her belly button with my nose. The small stump that remained when Hawk cut the cord had fallen off and I could see the beginning of a lovely "Innie" button like mine.

Her hair was growing and filling in, curling around her face like her father's. "Nobody will know you are my daughter, will they Lily Jade?"

She smiled and gurgled, stretching out her legs. "You look like your Daddy, lucky girl."

While I sat outside nursing her, I looked at the shiny little red Mercedes Benz that I loved, sitting patiently under the trees waiting for me. It had been a long time since we had really rolled out on the road, since I could not get behind the wheel in the last few weeks of my pregnancy.

I had tried early one morning when I had a yen for a fresh apple tart from the Big Sur Bakery, and failed to fit my belly into the space! It was all I could do to lower myself down onto the seat, but when I tried to swing my legs around, no dice. Luckily, Gabriel and two of his men were sorting the finish lumber for the house, and they helped the mother whale get upright.

Gabriel laughed until tears ran down his face, and I was annoyed at first, but soon we were all hysterical looney tunes. It is an otherworldly feeling when you get to that stage. Whose body is this, anyway?

Now that little car called to me, and I knew I had to figure out a way to carry Lily Jade along. I found Annoka in the kitchen sampling some apricot bars, and asked her if she could stay for a bit longer with Lily Jade.

"I want to go over to see Sheriff Clancy and get some help with my little red car and the baby seat. I can't take Lily Jade in that car until I am sure the seat is properly secured."

She took my daughter with open arms, and I left them in the kitchen with Ampalia, where all that divine baking was going on.

I had changed into some black leggings and a long Guess Heart tank that held me in pretty good, and pinned some of Uma's huge daisies into my hair. As I walked down the hall, Ampalia handed me a package of cookies for the good sheriff and his men. "We want to be sure they take good care of you," she said, with a shy smile.

Soon I was on Highway 1, heading to the Sheriff's station with the windows open to a warm breeze. As I pulled into the parking lot, I noticed the trees were turning and small piles of leaves rustled on the pavement. Sheriff Clancy stood on the front step with his huge cup of coffee and waved at me. I pulled right up in front of him

"Looks like fall around here, Sheriff."

"Yup, it's that time of year. Weather for the locals."

I jumped out of the car and gave him a hug. "It's good to see you, under good conditions, sir!"

"You look mighty chipper, Dyanna Falconer. Motherhood agrees with you!"

"I have some questions about the car carrier for my daughter. I want to take her with me when I travel, and I'm not sure how to place it in the cab."

"OK, let's take a look."

I opened the trunk and lifted the lovely padded carrier with all its' straps and buckles. "Do you want me to put the top down?"

"That's right, this one has the convertible top. Sure, let's do that."

I got into the drivers seat, started the engine and pushed the black button on the center console. The windows all began to disappear and then the top unlocked from the windshield and slowly disappeared into the trunk.

"Well, that is some little machine, isn't it?"

"I couldn't resist it. The first one had the same thing, the one that Cassie drove off the cliff." Clancy shook his head. "You know, we never did get all of that car out of the Pacific. What a crying shame to lose such a beautiful girl like Cassie."

"Jacob Walnut gave me this one to replace it, as an apology gift. I'm glad I took it now, it's such a kick in the ass when I drive it."

"You'd better get used to the safety rules, Missy. With a tiny baby on board, there are things to consider."

"Why do you think I'm here? I know you're the best, and I want you to help me. Here's a little something from the kitchen of Ampalia for you." I handed him the plate of cookies and he

immediately popped one in his mouth. "I'd better take these inside to share, or the boys will be unhappy." He carried the plate and his mug inside while I picked up the carrier and opened the passenger door. It was heavier than I remembered, and wide as well. There were two layers of padding on the sides.

Clancy returned and brushed a few crumbs from his shirt. "OK, the first thing is to be sure the unit is securely set into the space. Normally you would use the seat belt, but with this deal, we will face your daughter toward the back. That way, if she is ejected or moved, the cushion of the front seat will save her."

"The seatbelt for that side is pretty long, do you want to attached it from the side?" I pulled it out and there was plenty of room to spare.

"Not a bad idea, let's try it." He wound the long belt in and out of the back slats on the carrier, and we pulled it into the latch next to the gear shift. It was a little off side, so he moved the feed for the seat belt until it reversed and locked. Now the carrier seat was in place, leaning slightly back but upright.

"Wow, that's great. It's really snug in there."

"Now," said Sherrif Clancy "we must determine how much more padding she will need if she is thrown forward. The chances of that are slim with these belts, they are the best in the business. Regardless, there should be a soft strong pad on the back of the seat as well."

"I have a baby mattress for traveling. How about that?"

"Sounds perfect. Did you bring it?"

"No, I didn't think of it. But I can bring her up to see you in the carrier now, and put it on the front seat." I stood with my hands on my hips, feeling quite accomplished, and he chuckled.

"It happens to the best of us, Ms. Falconer. We become parents and things are never the same. You have discovered that another person has taken the first place in your life, haven't you?"

"You know, that is so very true. I made a decision before she was born that I would take care of her, not just hand her off to a caregiver. I appreciate all the help I have, but when it comes to Lily Jade, I stand in first place."

"Just remember that this tiny person depends on you for her life blood. She is helpless and innocent now, but it won't be long before you are chasing her down the beach. They grow up so fast."

"Hawk is crazy about her, I've never seen him like that before."

"Except with you, and perhaps his dear sister Uma. That family is strong and closely knit. They will always stand behind you, Dyanna. I'll bet my life on it."

"Just talking like this reminds me that it's time to feed her, and she is waiting for me at home with the ladies who baked those cookies."

"I can't wait to see her. Bring that mattress up here, before you go anywhere else, ok? We want to be sure Lily Jade is safe."

I gave him a hug, and he stepped back a little. "We've come a long way, haven't we, Sherrif Clancy?"

I watched him in the rear view as I drove away in my little red bomb, with the top down and the shiny big baby carrier strapped in and ready. He waved as I reached the highway, and I waved back.

I felt safe and happy to have accomplished this all by myself, just because. No Hawk, no Uma, no Gabriel. Life was good!

## CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

Hawk did a complete check of Uma's body, with Big Ted at his side. Ginger brought a large pot of warm water and some Ivory soap, but Hawk decided upon the sterile cleanser he had in his bag. He considered the giant black man to be a perfect assistant, with his strong arms and gentle hands. He was soft spoken and very fond of Uma, so Hawk knew she was well supported in the carriage house of John Soaring Meadow.

Uma had been sleeping deeply since they brought her into the house, and she barely moved when they stripped off her torn shorts and the white cotton bodysuit she wore underneath. Hawk was surprised to see this type of garment on his sister, and surmised an influence of Dyanna involved. The label was from a lingerie shop in Pacific Palisades, which specialized in lovely underwear for ladies and girls called Annabelles.

They had to cut most of the garments to remove them, since any move to the left side of Uma's body created great pain and moaning. Hawk tried to speak to her, but was rewarded only by the silence of her heavy breathing.

As she lay naked on the white sheets, it was obvious that her strong lean body had been challenged. Several deep gashes cut across her thighs and knees, and many scratches appeared on her hands and arms. It was a perfect example of how a treacherous fall met with the perils of Mother Nature. Big Ted found several spots of poison oak that were still oily from the leaves, and scrubbed Uma's skin with strong laundry soap. It was an old remedy that really worked, when used early in the game.

Uma's body had been protected by the heavy muslin shorts and T-shirt, along with thick white socks and her Doc Marten's. She must have been in the garden thought Hawk, carefully removing the high laced shoes. The heavy hiking soles were indented with a crisscross pattern, and now full of brambles and mud.

When they finally reached the head and shoulder area, Uma began to moan loudly. She tried to turn on her side, but was unable to move without a bloodcurdling scream. The left shoulder area was swelling up from the elbow, and Hawk followed it to the juncture of the collar bone. When he touched the skin near her shoulder, she screamed again, and began to kick. Now Big Ted's experience came to use, and he grabbed her ankles, holding down the awesome strength of her legs.

"It looks like she has a broken collarbone, and probably a fractured shoulder. I don't want to give her anything for the pain until we can be sure," said Hawk, as Ted held fast to Uma's limbs.

"Will you wrap her in gauze to hold the arm in place," asked Ted. "Or perhaps we should just get her to a hospital for some scans. She 's in pretty bad shape, isn't she, Doc?"

"I have the MedVan from Stanford on the way down, Ted. I'm going to try and treat her here, she would never forgive me otherwise. She hates hospitals, along with John."

"Do you want to ice her, to slow the swelling?"

"Good idea. Go see if Ginger has any plastic bags and some ice up there."

Ted left the room and climbed the stairs above them, while Hawk sat down next to his sister. He

smoothed her hair back from the scratches on her face, and kissed her cheek. "Uma, can you hear me? I'm right here, trying to take care of you. I'm going to tell you what I'm doing, and hope you will one day remember this."

Uma's eyes fluttered and opened for a moment. "Hawk... I'm in bad shape."

"Well, you took quite a spill, but we are taking care of you. You're all cleaned up and Ted is bringing ice to help the pain. How about a drink of water?"

He lifted her head and poured a small bit of water in the corner of her mouth. "Just enough to wet your tongue, my beautiful sister."

Tears rolled down Uma's cheeks and she tried once more to roll over. Hawk climbed on top of her and held her arms still, as Ted returned with two bags of ice. "Uma, you must not move. Do what I say."

She continued to thrash about as Ted took over. Hawk reached into his bag and filled a syringe from a small vial. The injection was fast, and the relief was immediate. Within seconds, Uma went limp and her head rolled over to the side.

"Good," said Hawk, disposing of the needle. "Now we have to bind her up on the left side, and pray for the Van to arrive soon."



By the time I reached home, the kitchen had come alive with activity. Annoka had Lily Jade in her cradle in the living room, watching the light glance off the ceiling. The two women were kneading the dough for several loaves of bread, with more in the oven.

I stopped at the cradle and picked up my girl, who was soaking wet. We walked down the hall and changed her diaper, while I told her where I had been. "Wait 'till you see your riding spot, baby girl," I said, swinging her around.

There was Gabriel in the doorway, watching us. "Dyanna, there's been an accident up at the ranch. Uma is badly injured."

"Why didn't someone tell me?"

"I just did, sweetheart. I thought Hawk or John would have called you. Where have you been?" "I was at the sheriff's station with Clancy. He helped me to get the car carrier for LJ secured." "Good idea, little mama. I should have known you wouldn't go too far without the baby."

"What happened to Uma?"

She fell down the hill at Paragoh Creek. All through the bushes and poison oak and rocks. She looks to be in pretty bad shape. Hawk is up there with her now."

Lily Jade began to squirm and fuss, a reminder that it was time for dinner. "I have to take care of feeding her now. Can you stay for minute and fill me in?"

"Of course. I love to watch you two together. She's growing so fast." "I want to wash up a little, will

you hold her?"

"Absolutely," said Uncle Gabriel, grinning from ear to ear. I handed her into his arms, and he started talking right away. LJ was fascinated by him and quieted down while I went into the bathroom. After a good long pee, I washed my hands and arms and breasts, to be sure no foreign germs had encroached during my visit to Clancyland. I slipped on a soft white cotton dress and joined them.

Gabriel was standing at the window with my daughter in his arms, talking softly about something to do with the tides. He was so comfortable and loving with her, as if she was his daughter.

"**OK, sweet pie. Time for dinner.**" I sat down in the big soft chair facing the windows and he handed her over like a pro. I held her close for a minute, and then opened my dress. She took the nipple immediately and began to make a lot of noise. She was enjoying herself with the most basic thing in life.

"So, what was Uma doing down at Paragoh Creek anyway? She hates that place. She used to chase Cassie out of there, during the summer."

"Who knows, she hasn't spoken at all yet. Belinda and Slow Dove were down there sitting on the bank. I guess Uma was looking for them and lost her footing. It's easy to do in that soft loose dirt."

"Tell me about it. I hiked up across the road in the early days of my residence here. I learned to wear hiking boots after the first time. John was so mad at me. He and Rudy and all those guys were waiting when I came down."

"What were you doing up there alone?"

"Actually, I was supposed to meet Penelope Phelps at the oak tree. Do you remember her?"

"Of course. We never knew them too well. Everyone hated Rex and Rhea. But Mrs. Phelps was always nice. I guess she died in the fire at the ranch, for all intents and purposes."

"Oh, God, Gabriel! She was buried in the wall down there in the basement. You know that."

He chuckled. "I said, for all intents and purposes."

Lily Jade started to squirm and I realized she had moved away from my breast. I patted her back and she burped loudly. "Well, that's what we think, isn't it, LJ?"

"I guess I'm interrupting something here," said Gabriel.

"No, no, go on. Belinda and Slow Dove were messing around down there? That place is full of poison oak. He knows better."

"And Uma knows better than to venture into that rough bush, but I guess she was concerned. John and I were driving back from town when Ginger called us. We met up with Hawk at the Ranch."

"Did you see Uma? How badly is she hurt?"

"Hawk and I lifted her out of the water. The kids were afraid to move her, and I can't blame them."

She was covered in mud and scratches. Poor Uma, She was moaning something awful.”

“I should go up there now, and see if I can help.”

“The MedVan from Stanford is on its way here. Hawk called them right away. They were coming down for the clinic anyway. So I don’t think you want to be up there now. There’s a lot of mess to clean up and Uma is knocked out. I guess Hawk had to dose her down. He thinks she has broken some bones in her shoulder.”

Lily Jade was closing her eyes and finished with her feeding. I wiped her mouth and rose to change her diaper. Tears ran down my cheek at the thought of Uma, the brave warrior woman. She was the indestructible Uma and now she was down. Suddenly Gabriel was at my side and put his arm around me. “Hey, girl. She will be OK. You know Hawk. Big Ted is up there with them...”

“And we are taking Uma down to the MedVan now.” Hawk stood in the doorway, looking rather calm considering the events of the day. He came over and hugged all of us. We stood there for a moment, just holding each other. “I wanted to clean up before I go over there. It’s going to be a long night.”

He stripped off his filthy clothes and stepped into the shower, and I took the baby to change her diaper. “Will you bring the cradle back here, Gabriel?”

He headed down the hall, and Lily Jade began to cry. That made two of us.



Hawk was on his way to the clinic site in ten minutes. He grabbed a bag of food that Ampalia prepared, and escaped through the gate. Annoka cleaned the kitchen and went in to sleep before her Night Nurse duties.

Lily Jade fell sound asleep as soon as she hit the mattress, and I covered her halfway. I was suddenly exhausted, wiped out by my day and Uma’s accident. Gabriel had gone home to gather some tools for the MedVan hookups, and now I was alone. I lay down on the bed and curled around the pillows. It was almost dark.



Hawk turned on his headlights as he drove along the coast to the big fork where Cooper School stood among the trees. Closer to the ocean, the site for the clinic had been cleared, and a single power pole stood ready. Gabriel had called in some favors with PG&E, and they installed the necessary juice for the clinic and MedVan two days before.

The van had been the deciding factor to move ahead, after Hawk’s visit to Stanford and Dr. Bearman. It had recently been overhauled when two additional vehicles were added to serve the lower San Francisco Bay area. Willing donors stepped up from Stanford Med’s board and membership to finance the cause, and had saved many lives. Equipment was donated from major medical facilities, some barely used.

Hawk smiled as he turned onto the road and saw the lights shining from the Van. Hooray! It was a good sign for Uma and all of them that the forces converged tonight. He saw John’s truck parked

beside the Van, where John and another man were setting up the ramp to the entrance. Big Ted waved, as he stood near the bed of the truck. Hawk pulled in beside them and jumped out to find his sister sound asleep on the mattress, wrapped snugly in blankets and guarded by pillows. There was a bandage on her cheek where he had cleaned out a nasty gash, and her left arm was completely wrapped in gauze. Uma's hair was pulled neatly into a knot above her head, which Hawk attributed to the angel Ginger.

"How was the trip? Did she sleep through it all?"

"Yes, Dr. Hawk. She is completely out. I wrapped her left side carefully, but I don't think she could feel a thing."

"OK, we are going to get her inside. Let me see if there is a gurney ready."

He walked over to the ramp and checked the bottom for safety before jumping on with a loud crash. *Now things sound about right* thought Hawk, as he went from side to side, examining the sides. Everything looked to be safe and secure.

The light poured out the door as he reached the top, and he could hear the familiar sounds of the MRI machine in warm-up mode.

As he stepped inside, the young doctor at the desk jumped to his feet. "Hello, Dr. Hawk," said Timothy Grant. "We have been waiting for you."

Hawk extended his hand and nodded. "Do we have gurney ready? We'll need some help out here."

"All ready, Dr. Hawk," said a voice from behind the MRI. The gurney appeared, guided by a figure he recognized.

"Elena? What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to come and help with your sister, Dr. Hawk. We have all missed you at the hospital."

He stared at her beautiful smile and the deep hazel eyes he knew so well. She put her arms around him and hugged him tight. "Welcome back."

"All right then! Come on with me you two, and let's get the patient inside." He stood aside while Elena pushed the cushioned gurney down the ramp, and followed Dr. Timothy Grant to the bottom. John had moved the truck several feet closer while Big Ted stayed in the back with Uma. Now he knelt behind the mattress and waited for instructions. Hawk opened the back and climbed in, while Timothy and Elena readied the gurney alongside. "Let's push her to the edge and then lift to the wheels."

In a minute, they had Uma securely on the transit, and Hawk held his ear to her face. "She's breathing heavily, let's go."

Elena took the lead up the ramp, walking backward and guiding them. Timothy pushed the gurney with Hawk at the side, watching Uma's left shoulder. Elena lifted the wheels to reduce further injury, and soon they were inside next to the bed. "Let's do all four," said Hawk. "Elena, opposite me and you two on the lower body."

Hawk slid his hands under Uma's left arm with Elena on her right side. Dr. Grant stood next to Hawk, deftly holding the hip area. Big Ted slid his huge hands under Uma's right buttock and their eyes met. Hawk nodded and said "Go." In seconds, Uma's body was arranged on the hospital bed,

Ted wheeled the gurney to the entrance area, while Dr. Grant quickly cut away the gauze dressings. Elena laid a fresh gown to the side, while Hawk began his examination. He looked up to find Elena with her iPad, taking notes as usual. He was so happy to see her working again.

Soon the preparation for an MRI scan was completed, and Uma was pronounced ready for the machine. She was still sedated, so time was of the essence. They rolled the bed over to the mouth and quickly slid Uma into the center. Elena went to the top, to watch the patient, and Hawk waited for the green light. The loud hum of the huge imaging giant began and the wand above rolled slowly above Uma's body. She did not move, although strapped in at the waist.

Hawk watched Dr. Timothy Grant carefully surveying the scan, and walked slowly outside. He stood at the top of the ramp, listening to the machine that saved my life, praying that it would be the same for Uma.

John Soaring Meadow stood out on the bluff, watching the moon rise. His strong body was set against the light. Hawk approached his dear friend and put his hand on John's shoulder. "Full moon, John. Good sign for healing."

John shook his head. "I never thought I would see her in that kind of shape. She's a goddess. She's Uma. She takes care of us all."

"Well, now we will take good care of her. It's about time, don't you think?" Hawk put his arms around John and hugged him tight. "You should go home and get some sleep. You will need to have a good face in the morning, when you come to see her."

Big Ted had come out on the ramp, and was watching them standing in silhouette before the ocean. He felt the love and brotherhood of these people so strongly, and was determined to stay and become one of them.

Maybe even Belinda would open her heart. Now that would be a miracle.

## CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

Slow Dove ran the bath with some fragrant jasmine scented bubbles in the tub, thinking it might be nice for Belinda. She had slept on the bed since they returned from Paragoh Creek, curled up like a little child. He covered her with a quilt and sat down on the chair beside her. It had been a horrible day for Uma, and all the family, but he felt that it had brought Belinda closer to him. She had no one familiar except Big Ted, but with Uma all laid up, now was his chance to get under her skin.

Belinda stirred and rolled over, opening her eyes. He waited for her to focus and awaken, smiling all the while. She blinked and smiled back. Maybe she had forgotten everything that happened, he thought.

"Hey there," said Slow Dove. "Did you have a good nap?"

Belinda stared at the ceiling and then outside. "It's dark. What time is it?" "9:02 pm. How do you feel?"

"Lousy. I hate my period. I never know when it comes."

"Well, I think around every 30 days is about right. My mother used to call it "the monthly." He sat down on the bed, watching her innocent face. Nobody would ever suspect what went on in that brain. "Are you hungry? Ginger brought over some chicken and mashed potatoes."

"I want a bath. I feel sticky and dirty. That creek is full of nasty stuff." She swung her legs around and sat next to him. "Want to watch?"

"Actually, I have prepared your tub, my lady. It has bubbles and jasmine scent. Come on."

She entered the bathroom and sat on the toilet, urinating for a long time. Belinda was used to being cared for by Big Ted, so this was nothing out of the ordinary. She rubbed her eyes and wiped carefully.

Slow Dove was not sure how to handle her display, so he turned on the hot water and swished it around to warm up the tub. When he looked around, Belinda stood naked in front of him. Her small white body was slender and lovely, with dark nipples and pubic hair. "You're beautiful," he said.

**Belinda shrugged and climbed into the bath.** The huge clawfoot tub was at least six feet long, and quite deep, so she disappeared entirely from view at first. Only her hands were holding the sides, and Slow Dove cracked up. "I can't see you at all, Belinda. Just your hands, like a horror movie."

The sloshing sound of water came next and a handful of bubbles. "If you want to get in, you'd better hurry before it all turns pink." Belinda's eyes peeked above the rim, staring at him. "Come on, take off your clothes."

He locked the door from the inside and turned around. "Okay, what first?"

"The vest," said Belinda, laughing gaily. He slipped off his doeskin vest and the white T-shirt underneath, hanging them on a hook next to the door. When he turned around, Belinda was

staring at him with a strange look, and he knew they had entered another realm.

"The pants" she said. "Now."

The pale doeskin trousers unlaced slowly and fell to the floor, revealing his lean muscled torso. Small tufts of hair covered his belly button and followed down to his private parts. He didn't have to look to know he had a huge erection.

Belinda's eyes washed over his body, slowly taking it all in.

"You'd better turn off the water, or it will spill over," said Slow Dove.

Suddenly he was enamored and enticed by the idea of being with this girl. They were all alone, with no boundaries. Nobody to watch them or stop the flow of energy. He walked over and stepped into the warm water. His penis was even with her face for a moment, but he thought better of it.

"Make her want it," said a voice inside him. "Make her wait."

Belinda's hands reached out and traveled down his thighs as she wrapped herself around him. Suddenly her mouth was on him, licking and stroking his erection. She was murmuring something as her tongue moved about.

He closed his eyes and released the hot juices that traveled into her mouth. Then he slid down under the water, taking her with him.

At one point they opened their eyes below the surface, meeting face to face. It would always be the moment Slow Dove remembered, the one that changed his life.



I was awakened by the sound of my phone, buzzing next to me in the empty bed. It was still dark as I pushed the button and heard Jacob Walnut breathing softly on his end.

"Dyanna? Are you there?"

"Just barely. My god, Jacob. It's the middle of the night. Are you all right? Has something happened?"

"I was just about to ask you that. I heard about Uma a few minutes ago, Big Ted called me from the hospital van. I was worried about you."

"Oh, Jacob... I don't know any more than you do, probably less. Hawk is with her and a medical crew from the MedVan at Stanford. I guess Ted is helping out?"

"He has been a nurse since he was sixteen years old. They were wise to corral him." "What did he say?"

"That Uma was in the MRI machine, and probably has a broken left shoulder and clavicle."

"She fell down the hill to Paragoh Creek, Jacob. She was looking for Belinda and Slow Dove." "I

figured Belinda would be involved in some way. Who is Slow Dove?"

"The mirror image of Belinda in a male form." "What do you mean? Is he mentally unbalanced?"

For some reason, this struck me as funny, coming from Jacob who knew more crazy people than anyone. And he was on the first rung of the ladder, so to speak. "No, no, he is just a young wild Esalen man who is preparing the ceremony feast for Lily Jade's birth."

"Do you hear yourself, Dyanna? I think you wonder at times how you got yourself into all this. Shall we go back to Paris and start over again?"

I was silent as I lay on my back, rubbing my belly and breasts for comfort. "What do you really want at 4:06 am in the morning, Jacob?"

"I knew you would be alone because your friend is working on his sister. Shame on me, as Teddy would say. I just couldn't sleep after Big Ted's call. I wanted to hear your voice."

"Well, here I am. Sleeping in my big bed alone, waiting for my daughter to wake up so that I can feed her."

"Is she there with you?"

"No, we have a night nurse, so that I can get some rest. She is a woman whom I have known a long time."

"Then you must be working during the day. That is good news. I have been bitten by the bug of this film, Dyanna. The whole era of early Hollywood has permeated my brain."

"Easy to do with such a beautiful book in your hands. Bekker is a great writer."

"We went after him like gangbusters when we heard the family had finally gotten the rights to his work."

"I am going to say goodbye now, Jacob. Sleep is a precious commodity now, and today will probably be a killer."

"Good night, my love. Take care of yourself. We may be seeing you soon." "Why is that?"

"It's time to close the deal on Louise's fantasy dog park. You'll see."



Hawk studied the results of Uma's tests in detail, as was his habit. After her exit from the MRI machine, they transferred her to a movable bed. This procedure had worked well for John Soaring Meadow, whose abhorrence of modern medicine was second to none. Uma had been close behind until my fall and rescue was divined by the big machine from Stanford. It seemed like a lifetime ago that they stood over my broken body, and gently placed me on the rolling bed. Uma had done her miracles on my body, but only by the knowledge that was given to her from the MRI diagnosis.

Hawk considered this as he planned the treatment of his obstinate sister. He knew he must gain

control before she was strong enough to rebel, or the results could be deadly.

The left clavicle bone was cracked in the center, and hanging by a thread. That alone made Hawk smile, for he could repair such things. The fact that she had not punctured her aorta or lungs was a miracle.

He studied the left shoulder from different angles, and surmised that she had landed there first. It was rotated inward and crushed against her spine. No wonder she was in so much pain.

He loved deducing the angles of a difficult procedure, figuring out how to proceed in the fastest and most efficient way. Bones were strange things, they grew and moved and broke, but could also have a mind of their own. He was thankful that Elena was there to work with him, although something was kind of off with her. Under the smile and professional actions, the mood had changed between them.

He looked up to see her enter the van, after a break with Dr. Grant. There would be time later to deal with her. Now the only thing on his mind was Uma.

Elena approached the screen and looked at the images of Uma's body. "I've never seen anyone twisted around like that before. Have you?"

"I think she tumbled and rolled on that side. The dirt on those hills is hard as a rock, and the brambles are just vicious. I can't think of a more dangerous place to fall, other than the ocean."

"Do you have a plan? What do you want me to do?"

"Get her ready for surgery. Double check her upper body for any foreign matter. She must be pristine so that we don't infect her with more of that deathly hill."

"Are you going to gather the instruments?"

"I have most of them in my bag. I carry duplicates for these kind of things. Thank God for that. I'm going to send John and Ted home. They are exhausted and need to sleep. They're not prepared for the long haul, like we are."

Elena nodded, and went to the sink to scrub her hands. Hawk stopped on his way out the door. "I'm very grateful for your presence here tonight, Elena. It's beyond the call of duty."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world."



John Soaring Meadow was dead tired, and felt every bone in his body ache as he drove home in the darkness of Big Sur. With only a few lights left burning, it was impossible to find many places for those who were unfamiliar. He looked at Big Ted as they pulled onto Highway 1 and headed north to the ranch. The giant black man was calm and centered, despite the events of the day.

"Welcome to Big Sur, Ted," said John. "Life in the country is nothing like you are used to, I'm sure."

"Nope. We had some small towns in Utah, but no wild hills with trees and the huge mighty ocean on the other side. There is something very special about this place. It's kind of eerie. Full of ghosts,

I'd say."

Despite his sorrow and exhaustion, John burst out laughing. "Well, you got it right the first time, my friend. This place is no land for the weak of spirit or limb. Most of the people you know here are third, fourth generation Big Sur. You can always tell by the attitude. A bit of *"fuck you, if you don't believe me,"* in all of us. It's tough living here, even with money and land. Mother nature rules and always will."

"I see that you have an abhorrence for medical things in general. Is that part of Big Sur as well?"

"Abhorrence! Hmmmh! Where'd you get a word like that? I thought you were a poor orphan from Utah." John laughed again, and started to feel alive. He was secretly thinking of Ginger and her warm lovely body welcoming him home.

"I read the entire Webster's Dictionary while I was at Genoa. Mostly when Belinda was paralyzed and I had to be there 24/7."

"What made you attracted to such a bewildering little twit like that?"

"I guess you were not too fond of Belinda during her recovery. Nobody cared about her, maybe that was my impetus. I was fascinated by her secret life. Even when she was mute for days, she communicated with me. I understood her misery. Her mother was a terrible person."

"Never had the pleasure, but she sure went after Jacob Walnut up there at Genoa. He almost died."

"She had been drinking for days, sitting in a dark room with Belinda, smoking those awful cigarettes. And then Dyanna came, and everything changed."

"How so?" John turned off at the ranch road where it was pitch dark.

"Dyanna talked to the girl. She knelt down and spoke to Belinda about her father. It was a breakthrough. All that shock treatment and the drugs did nothing. It was the voice of kindness that broke the spell."

"I know that Jacob had told the mother he was going to divide Kevin's estate. I guess she was already spending the money. Too bad." They reached the gate where John entered the keypad code. The enormous wrought iron and redwood gate slowly swung open.

Ted turned to watch it close behind them. "I guess that was something for Dyanna to do, considering she almost died because of Belinda. I never did get that part of the story except the drunken blather from her mother. Mr. Walnut told me the whole thing on the way home in his airplane."

"I guess you know that Jacob and I are very close friends. He took over the property when Dyanna disappeared. He really mourned her, coming up here to wander around the cottage and the ranch. It was Jacob who made me the boss of this spread. I had to send him home a few times, he was beside himself. You know what it's like, when you discover your feelings about someone who is most likely dead?"

"That I do," said Big Ted. He opened the window and took a huge breath of the damp salty air. "Many of the families at Genoa were torn apart by their loved ones being stuck away behind the

gates. That's why I secretly took on Belinda. Nobody loved her. Nobody cared."

John nodded, and stepped on the gas. They rounded the hill and stopped in front of John's carriage house. There was a light on upstairs, left by Ginger as a beacon. She knew him so well.

Big Ted got out of the truck and shook John's hand as he came around the hood. "I want to thank you for taking me down there, John. I want to help around here as much as I can. Especially with Uma. I think she might respond well to me. We have a different kind of understanding of each other."

John nodded and gave the giant shoulders a hug. "Sleep well in your bed, and we will keep you posted. Try not to wake Belinda up".

Ted nodded, heading for the second carriage house. There was no light on there, and no noise. He crept up the stairs to check on Belinda and found her door locked. Maybe she was scared, up there all alone.

He was tired and shoved off his shoes as he sat on the bed. This place was as wild as Genoa, in a different way. All these people wound up in a big convoluted ball of Indian Legend and old love affairs. The only two he really understood were Belinda and me. He could deal with the rest tomorrow.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

Ginger had done a lot of thinking that night, lying in bed alone. She knew something had to be done about Belinda and Slow Dove, or all hell would break loose. They were playing with fire, it was obvious. Maybe her age was the factor that made it so clear. The rest were older and more inclined to put all kids in the same category: difficult.

She imagined that my daughter would be different, because she had studied me carefully during my pregnancy. She saw Uma managing everything smoothly, and caring for my every need during the last few weeks. It was a wonderful thing to have such a companion. But I had a mind of my own, and Lily Jade was bound to follow.

Ginger's mother had shared stories of her children's births, hoping to forewarn her daughter of carelessness with *private affairs*. She had to giggle thinking of mama's name for wonderful beautiful sex. Ginger had learned early on to keep decisions to herself, where matters of love and lust were concerned. Her parents were fighters who made so many babies because they had a lot of make-up sex. She considered this now, because babies seemed to be on her mind. She knew that Belinda was a virgin, but just barely so.

Uma had explained the rough road of Belinda's life with a big Hollywood star for a dad and a basket case for a mother. She believed that Belinda was terribly jealous of Kevin Stone's mad love affair with me, melting into fury when he was killed in the mountains of Big Sur. If he had not been up here with me, nothing bad would have happened to him.

Good luck with that.

Ginger had taken pity on the seemingly innocent and clueless pair after Uma was rushed off to the MedVan. They were both filthy from the fiasco of Uma's fall and being in the creek. She didn't want that kind of dirt on the beds or furniture, and directed them to the outdoor shower behind John's house. They disappeared wrapped in huge towels into Belinda's house.

She had been busy helping Dr. Hawk and big Ted tend to Uma, and paid little attention until they had all left the premises. Before the accident, Ginger had decided to make a [big fried chicken dinner](#) with mashed potatoes. It was the ultimate comfort food and John loved the juicy thighs basted in the spicy oil and ground pepper. She marinated the pieces with fresh herbs and a dash of ketchup, as well. This was her mother's secret recipe.

As the late afternoon approached, Ginger returned to her task and started the process of browning the bird. She used an old electric skillet she found in John's kitchen, tucked away on the back shelf. It was pretty dusty and grimy, but a little scrubbing revealed the square brushed aluminum pan and matching top. It was perfect for fitting an entire chicken inside, because she liked to pile the pieces up. The task normally took about an hour, with checks every fifteen minutes. Soon the scent of freshly fried chicken filled the house, and she went upstairs to change the bed. The bedroom window was placed on the opposite side of the rooms next door, allowing a full view of Belinda's bedroom. It had not occurred to her that anyone would be spying on the girl, or vice versa, but now she stood looking directly at Belinda and Slow Dove. She waved but they did not appear to see her. Slow Dove was dressed, but Belinda had climbed onto the bed naked and lay down. He sat next to her as Ginger watched, unable to look away.

It was time to turn the chicken pieces, and she entered the kitchen with smile. She was thinking of the early days with Evan Galbraith, when they were so young. The pure excitement of their match

was more than Ginger could bear. She remembered vibrating under the covers the first time she stayed with Evan. It was beyond ecstasy.

The crust had begun to form on the tender breast pieces, which required more browning than the thighs, and she carefully piled them on top once more, turning each piece with metal tongs.

Next came the potatoes, cooked with skin on and mashed with fresh butter and a tad of the marinade oil. She cut them in quarters and set the pan to boil. There was just enough time for another check upstairs.

When she entered the room with fresh white linens, the sun had moved between the buildings, and a shadow hung over the roof. Now it was impossible to see inside the room next door, so she quickly made the bed and returned to the feast downstairs.

When the food was ready, Ginger carefully wrapped a separate foil package for Belinda and Slow Dove. She knew that John would be late now, after a call from the MedVan area. He was upset about Uma, having driven her down there with Big Ted. He would be hungry when they got home.

The sun was setting when Ginger walked over and knocked on Belinda's door. After a few minutes, she peeked in and saw Slow Dove sitting on the stairs, looking at his phone. He appeared to be totally immersed, so she made some noise entering with her package. "Hi there", said Ginger, in her warm Texas drawl. "I brought you two some fried chicken and mashed potatoes."

He looked up at her as if he had never seen her before, and shook his head. "I'm sorry, what did you say?"

"I have some dinner here for you and Belinda. Thought you might be hungry." "Belinda is asleep upstairs. She started her period."

"OK, well why don't I leave this in the kitchen. Would you like to take some home?"

"I'll be here until she wakes up." He returned to his phone, looking at some photos.

Ginger shrugged at the offhand behavior and figured this boy has no manners. He and Belinda would make a good pair. She placed the package at Slow Dove's feet and walked away without a word.

*"The smell alone will get him"* she thought, feeling a little huffy. Her stomach growled and soon she was enjoying a big plate of Texas Chicken and potatoes all by herself. She ate on the bed upstairs watching John's big TV, after pulling the curtains shut.



I was awake early the next morning, dozing off rather fitfully after Jacob's call. There was always something alluring about his growling voice and blunt intent that reached out to me. I loved the intelligence and swagger of the Walnut boys, it was a huge change from Big Sur passion.

Of course, each side disliked the other, but I was swirling in the middle and now my daughter would join the fray. I figured a year at least for the first draft of ENDLESS LOVE, and revisions.

Perhaps my subconscious was leading me more than usual by preparing my little red Mercedes Kompressor for travel, and installing her carrier. I was waiting to break out of domesticity, truth be told. This was the longest I had gone in years without a visit to the City of Angels, with the exception of the short meetings about Louise's dog park project.

I began to think of the ideal place to hang out down there, while drinking my second cup of tea with cinnamon and extra nutmeg. The house seemed so quiet with Uma missing, and Hawk as well. Lily Jade had awakened early, and we completed her feeding in record time. Annoka was doing laundry for her tiny clothes, with a few of my things thrown in. Meanwhile, she gurgled and squirmed on the bed while I performed my daily breast milk pumping. The noisy machine had become less invasive, with more good qualities than bad. I had begun to stock up the freezer with the containers, which gave me more confidence.

In the meantime, I found several blouses that were long enough to cover her if we were breastfeeding in public. She seemed to enjoy it in there, sucking vigorously, away from the sight of the world. I had often seen women nursing in shopping malls and restaurants, and wondered how they appeared so content and normal. Now I knew that the end result is a happy baby with a very close relationship to her mother. Another good trick was the zipper hoodie, when the sling was not available. It was becoming rather snug, and more difficult to just slide her in. Annoka assured me that she would find another one, or two.

Hawk called briefly around 10 am, sounding breathless and fatigued. They had set Uma's shoulder after a long surgery to repair the cracked clavicle. More wrapping was to be delivered by the afternoon from Stanford. "I will stay here with her until she is awake and on course" he said.

"Do you have a place to crash for a couple of hours?"

"Yeah, there's a bed area at the other end, and we will take turns. I've got to go, give my baby girl a kiss and one for you too."

Now I decided it was time to experiment a little, and take Lily Jade for a ride in the new carrier space. She had drifted off to sleep, so I put her in the cradle and jumped into the tub. I piled my hair up on top and splashed around, washing and scrubbing with some new scented ocean blue soap. Uma had not allowed any scented soap for months, for fear that Lily Jade might be allergic. Now things would be changing, with my beloved care giver and sister laid up down the coast. I needed to see her myself, and take her precious girl with me.

I put on a short loose black dress with flowers appliquéd on the right side, and brushed my hair upside down. It was still damp from the bath, and hung in waves, the perfect look for the pink Cecile Brunner roses and fern outside. I also found some daisies in a bed near the fence, and pinned them all in my hair.

Lily Jade was drowsy, but I changed her diaper and put her in a bright pink onesie with feet. Her hair had begun to grow out of the curly tufts from birth, and I used a soft baby brush to fluff it up. She seemed to like that and gave me a smile.

"Hey, baby girl: we're going to try out the new wheels. I want you to have a great time, ok? We'll go see Daddy and Aunt Uma." I began my conversations with my daughter the night she was born, assuming she would one day fall right in with me. Now it was time for some music as well.

Ampalia had prepared a package of food for the good doctor and his crew. She showed me the carefully sliced pumpkin bread which made Gabriel West weak in the knees. My God, had

it been a year since he sat on the bed with me, looking at the plans for the house? I popped a piece in my mouth as I carried the baby out to the car and opened the door. Ampalia followed, watching me carefully. She was not sure it was safe, and nobody else was around.

The carrier was right in place and secured by Sherrif Clancy himself. I placed a blanket over the seat and slipped Lily Jade into place. I have to say, it was kind of a thrill. She looked up at me with a grin and I tickled her with my nose. "Showtime, baby," I said, as I walked around the got into the driver's seat.

I fired up the engine and reached over to check my girl, to be sure the straps were tight against the console. She was riding backwards, and Ampalia looked on with curiosity. She clapped her hands as I fastened my seatbelt, and waved goodbye.

I took my time on the gravel road, but the crunch of the rocks under the tires seemed to agree with Lily Jade. She gazed at me and then turned toward the window. She was up high enough to see outside, but low enough to be protected by the heavy construction of her own little Mercedes Benz.

I pulled out onto Highway one, and noticed the leaves gathering along the highway. Soon it would be Thanksgiving again, and I wondered about Uma. She was always in charge of the food, and everything else. We would have to make some changes, but keep her involved. My heart ached to think of her rolling down that steep hill, and tumbling into the creek. It didn't seem possible that she would befall such an accident, she was so strong and sure.

Out of habit, I pushed the button for some music, and listened while Dave Matthews sang about love in the afternoon. I glanced at Lily Jade over and over, until I realized she was quite comfortable. You can never assume anything with a baby.

We reached the road for Cooper School and I turned onto the lane where more leaves were falling. I could see the MedVan on the right side, close to the ocean. At the end of the school fence, the road became bumpy, and I slowed down to a crawl with my precious cargo. She didn't seem to notice, being busy with her fingers and toes. The dust on the road signaled our arrival, but the place appeared to be empty except for Hawk's silver BMW, tucked nicely under a tree.

I pulled in beside him and shut off the engine. "Hey, Sweet Pie. We're here," I said, checking her diaper. She was dry! I went around to the passenger side and opened the door, unlatching the long seatbelt that locked her in. Suddenly, a pirate breeze swept around us and blew leaves over my head. We made a dash for the ramp, just as another blast of wind began, and I hurried to the door. A red haired man with freckles appeared and began to close the door. "Hey, wait," I said, pushing past him to get inside. I pulled the blanket away from Lily Jade, and shook my hair out. We were full of detritus from the great Mariah winds.

"Dyanna!" said Hawk, landing on us like a savior. "Omigod, you brought the baby. How did you do that?" He put his arms around the two of us, handing some shears over to the other man.

"I had the sheriff help me put the carrier in the red bomb! It fits perfectly and she seems to enjoy it. Today is our first trip."

Hawk hugged his daughter, and held her in the air. She looked so tiny in that room full of medical gear and huge machines. At the end of the room was Uma, covered in sheets on a bed with the side bars raised. She appeared to be asleep.

Hawk walked to the end of the bed and stood there with Lily Jade for a moment. I joined them quietly and watched Uma's fitful breathing. She seemed to have trouble getting enough air. "How's she doing?"

"Much better, now that we have her sewed up and dressed. The whole left side of her body is covered with a stiff gauze dressing. She cannot move it for forty eight hours."

"You'll have to keep her knocked out for all that time."

He kissed my cheek. "It is heaven to see you two right now. I can't even begin to tell you what we've been through here. She fought us tooth and nail up at the ranch, and I was afraid she would puncture her lung, or aorta." He looked into my eyes with a weariness that made my heart break.

"Hey, you've almost got a beard, Dr. Hawk. No baby kissing with that stubble."

"I'm not leaving until she is awake and aware. There's just the three of us now, and she is a handful."

"You and the red haired doc? Where's the other one?" "I'm right here, Mrs. Hawk."

I turned to look at the sleepy woman with long disheveled brown hair. She smiled and yawned.

"This is the famous Elena, my assistant at Stanford."

At this moment, Lily Jade began to squirm in her father's arms, and he handed her over to me. "I've heard so many wonderful things about you," I said, rocking LJ back and forth.

"Likewise. And you've brought the baby! What is her name?"

"Lily Jade Falconer Hawk." Now the fussing began to ramp up, and I headed to the back of the van. "I don't want to wake Uma up, even though she would love it." There was a bed and chair at the end of the room, so I sat down with my daughter. She continued to kick and cry, so I offered her my breast. The little dress I had chosen had a small front opening which did not fare well for nursing, but soon she was suckling and silent. Outside I could hear the wind continue to blow around the van, and the trees scraped against the metal roof. Maybe this had not been such a great idea.

Hawk walked toward us, leaving Elena to check the vitals and fluid levels. "Looks like you've got things under control here," He sat down next to us on the bed, "I am so tired that I'm afraid to lay down," He put his hand on my knee, listening to his daughter happily sucking away.

"Why don't you lay down and sleep here. You've got Uma covered, with two well trained medics here."

"I just can't let her go," said Hawk. He put his face in his hands, and I watched him agonize silently.

"Do you remember the night of Lily Jade's birth? At one point, I was pushing too hard and not breathing right. Uma held my hand and told me relax. Take a breath and let go for a minute. I was so mad at her, but I did what she told me, and the rest is history."

As if on cue, Lily Jade opened her eyes and moved away from my breast. "I'm going to pack

us up and head back before this wind gets any worse. I want you to promise me that you will lie down after we leave, and sleep for awhile. It will be better for all of you."

He nodded his weary head and I handed him the baby. "Give her a hug while I button up, and we'll see you at home, OK?"

I stood up and realized that I had not really spoken to Uma. "Is it ok to say goodbye to Uma, maybe hold her hand a minute?"

"Go the right side. Whisper in her ear. It will be noted by her brain, in the subconscious." I walked quietly toward the bed where Uma lay completely still with her eyes closed.

Her hair was smoothed out around the pillow, and she looked very pale. There were scratches on her nose and cheek, but I kissed her there anyway. I took her hand and held it between mine, rubbing until the warmth began to come. Tears came to my eyes, but I realized the importance of my voice, and took a deep breath.

"Good afternoon, Uma! We have come to visit you, Lily Jade and me, your Moana and niece. I want you to know how much we love you and can't wait to see you at home again. Be strong and brave, Uma. Do what the doctors tell you, just this once. Now it is your turn for a miracle, and Hawk is here. He will watch over you, with God at his shoulder."

I took her hand and kissed her goodbye. "I love you, my dear brave Uma."

Hawk stood at the end of the bed with Lily Jade, who was wide eyed and miraculous quiet. I put my arms around them and we stood there crying.

Elena approached the bed to check Uma's vitals and take her temperature. She nodded to Hawk, and he looked at the stats. "Her BP has dropped ten points."

I took the baby and grabbed her blanket and my bag. "I will pray for her now, at home with all the rest. You tell her that when she wakes up, ok?"

I kissed Hawk and held him close to us, listening to the sound of Uma breathing.

We walked down the ramp together and he opened the door while I placed Lily Jade in her seat. The strap rolled into place and she was secure. I climbed into the driver's seat and turned on the engine, anxious to get home.

It was very heavy there with Uma, and no place for a tiny little ball of light and love. It was my first act of real protection for Lily Jade, with surely many more to come.

## CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

John returned home after midnight, and took off his boots before climbing the stairs. He didn't want to wake Ginger, he just wanted to crawl into bed and close his eyes. His body ached with remorse about Uma and her condition, and his eyes were blinded by tears as he sat down on the bed. The room was dark, but the porch light set a glow

under the window.

"Hey, there," said Ginger. She opened her eyes and smiled at him. "Ready for bed? Don't you want a hot shower, or some food?"

"I just want to lie down, Ginger. I'm so tired."

"Okay, let me help you." She crawled over and raised his arms, pulling the white t-shirt over his head. "Better?"

"Much. I can't get the picture of Uma out of my head. I've never seen her so completely helpless."

Ginger pulled him back onto the bed and crawled over his hips. She loosened his belt and unbuttoned the old Levis, pulling them down gently. Then she picked up his feet and laid them on the bed, rubbing her warm hands over them. "There you go, John Soaring Meadow."

He lay back and closed his eyes while she folded his jeans and shirt. "This belongs in the washing machine, honey! I'll be right back." He could hear her footsteps on the stairs, as he closed his eyes.

Ginger turned on the light in the kitchen and made her way to the back where a huge washer and dryer stood ready. John had installed these machines for the men when they were cleaning up the ranch house rubble, so they would not be covered in the ashes and dirt of the fire and explosion. Gabriel had warned him about the toxic effects of such debris, and damage to the lungs and skin. Every Friday, they knocked off early, had a case of beer chilled in the cooler, and washed their clothes before returning home for the weekend. Now Ginger used the machines for blankets and quilts and bedding, as well as all Belinda's gear. They seemed to be growing as a family by leaps and bounds.

As she stood there in the empty room, she noticed a package on the counter where the laundry was folded. Inside was the special whitening soap her mother used for stains, purchased up in Monterey. The bag was open and inside was a smaller package that had gone forgotten in the excitement. It was a lovely pink and green drawstring bag from the Carmel baby shop in the Barnyard called The Latch Key. They specialized in items for infants from birth to three years, and Ginger found what she had wanted for Lily Jade on a rack in the front. There were the beautiful colored Latch pacifiers, designed especially for beginners. The bright hot pink and jade green caught Ginger's eye, and she showed them to Gabriel.

The woman in the store thought they were a couple, which totally cracked them up. It was completely understandable, given their easy way with each other, and soon she helped them pick out several of the lovely Latches. They also found a stunning cashmere blanket in Jade Green, which was in the bottom of the bag. Ginger removed the blanket and felt the heavenly soft material that was perfect for a newborn. She had insisted on buying the pricey piece, and

danced around the room with it.

Gabriel laughed and pulled out his card, but Ginger would have none of it. "I've got my own chips, Mr. West," she said, opening her leather pouch. "Please put any information you have in the bag," she said to the owner, "and wrap them up in some pretty paper."

Now, two weeks later, she was sorry to have waited so long to deliver her gift. It was time for Lily Jade to have both items, and Ginger took one last sniff of the soft blanket before folding it perfectly in the bag.

Now she was wide awake, and decided to make some fresh sour dough bread and cookies later. She added ingredients and water to the starter, and mixed it up before returning to bed. She was anxious to see Lily Jade and her mama in the morning.

Jack Walters had two messages when he returned from his morning run along the Palisades, and turned on the coffee machine immediately. It was 5:30 am and nobody called that early without a reason. He walked out on the porch to get the L.A. Times and punched in his iPhone code. Brian Shoupe answered on the second ring. "Good morning, sir," he said, a bit out of breath.

"Are you running today?" said Jack, pouring his first cup of muddy black brew.

"Sorry to bother you so early, but I just heard from the service. Bravano called twice during the night. He said it was urgent for you to call him."

"Hmm," said Jack. "We wait weeks for his decision on the property and now he calls in the middle of the night. Something's up."

"Do you want me to call him first," said Brian.

"No, I'll call him right now. Send me the number. And thanks, Brian." "No problem, Sir. I'm as curious as you are."

Jack carried his coffee into the office he kept at home. He always worked and showered in there on weekdays, to keep the rest of the family at rest.

The sun was breaking through the trees that lined his back yard, and he opened the door for a breath of the ocean air. His phone buzzed with the number for Anthony Bravano, and he saved it to his queue.

The brash gravelly voice that spoke to him was all too familiar, and he took a sip of coffee before answering. "Good morning, Mr. Bravano. This is Jack Walters, attorney at law."

"Geeze, its six in the morning," said Bravano. "I'm impressed".

"You called during the night. Normally that indicates importance. Now, what's on your mind?"

"I wanna meet with that Dyanna woman again, about the property up there."

"Is there something I can help you with, Mr. Bravano? Ms. Falconer lives in Big Sur and is not available at a moment's notice."

"Well, if she wants that land, she will get down here and talk to us. My people insist on it."

"Has something changed in the past few days? We have conversed back and forth several times here, to no avail. You said no deal."

"We know you have been poking around about other ways to steal it away from us. Some kind of government thing."

"Is that so? Well we have indeed made queries about alternatives. Dyanna is quite determined to fulfill her promise to her cousin Louise. You know they were very close, and it means a lot to her."

"You're messing with the wrong people, Mr. Walters. This goes back a long way. People are sensitive."

"When are you available, Mr. Bravano? I will check with Ms. Falconer this morning and get back to you."

"Any time. Sooner the better."

Jack went back to the kitchen for a second strong cup of Joe. He opened the papers, and glanced at the Wall Street Journal. The L.A. Times was wrapped inside, and had a headline about a plane crash on the 405 freeway. It was time to call Jacob Walnut.

I slept well after another long bath and some time with Lily Jade. When we returned from the MedVan, Annoka and Ampora were waiting to hear news of Uma and her condition. They had created some wonderful little pizzas for dinner and a big salad, knowing my passion for both. I sat down at the kitchen table and spoke to them, while nursing the baby. We were both a little dirty from the leaves and twigs in the wind, and sorely in need of a good washing. I decided to stay put and hold her while I ate the wonderful vegetable and mozzarella slices, garnished with olives and green pepper and onion. Uma had finally taken onions off the list of possible early food problems, so we were both enjoying them again. The salad had fresh basil and spinach greens from the gardens outside the cottage, which they had awakened during my pregnancy. Little tomato vines from the days of Kevin Stone were flourishing, with radishes and lettuce as well.

The ladies were anxious to hear all the details, but I had nothing new to add except Uma's deep sleep and left side being bound up.

"They said she might have punctured her lung," said Annoka. "That can be very painful. And bad."

"She is sedated for forty eight hours, while the surgery settles in and her vital signs stabilize. That is exactly what Hawk said."

"Is he going to stay down there with her for awhile" asked Ampalia. "I will bring more food and anything they need."

"There is another doctor with them, and Hawk's assistant Elena. They have worked together for a long time, and she is superb with him. He has told me many stories of their surgeries and the care afterward. He is in good hands, although he was so tired. I hope he got some sleep after we left."

"We will offer our services anyway, as long as you don't mind. Of course, we will be here with you and the little Lily girl," said Ampalia.

"I can take care of the baby. We have a good schedule now, and lots of milk in the freezer."

Annoka took Lily Jade from my arms and we walked down the hall to our rooms. She peeled off the clothes and diaper with expert hands, and prepared a bath in the nursery.

I pulled off my dress and nursing bodysuit, and climbed back into the bath. It was lovely to bathe in concert with the little squeals and laughter of my daughter, and I longed to have her in the tub with me soon.

It was quiet that night, with Hawk away, but I knew it was vital for him to be undisturbed in his care for Uma. I climbed into bed with *ENDLESS LOVE*, for a review of my new work on the script, and fell sound asleep.



Jacob paced the room after his conversation with Jack Walters. It was not unusual for him to get calls during the night when they had a deal in production, given the time schedules in other countries. He took great pride in overseeing the numerous details on a film project, and slept with one eye open during those times. This morning, Jack Walters was apologetic at 7am, which garnered a chuckle.

"No worries, Jack. I am up at all hours of the day when necessary. What do you have?"

"Bravano called the office during the night and the service called Brian. He is the first troubleshooter, since I am on the move a lot."

"He is a sharp cookie, Jack. He listens. I have taken note. So what does the little bully want now that is so important?"

"He insists on a meeting with Dyanna at the property, as soon as possible. He refuses to budge on this and I think pressure is being applied from his family."

"Did you tell him that she is far and away from here?"

"I did, but I told him I would speak to her this morning. She may want to face him again; she is determined to carry out the dog park."

"We could fly her down from Monterey in a couple of days. Teddy has both the jets in France right now."

"Let me call first and see what's convenient for her. She's got the baby and that is a priority."

"I'm well aware. But Dyanna has begun work on the script for our new film, and is making good progress, baby and all."

"I don't know anything more than Bravano's comments about us meddling in the government up there. He seems to be aware that there are other roads to the property now."

"Good," said Jacob. "He is a little weasel and should just step aside." "I'll keep you posted," said Jack. "Leave this to me for now, ok?"

Jacob rang off with a very strange feeling in his gut. It was fear and anger, mixed with helplessness. He was hogtied with the many deviations of a situation which was a thorn in his side.



I awoke early that morning as well, having zonked off and slept like a baby myself. I tiptoed into the room where Annoka was dozing and Lily Jade was sound asleep.

They were a picture of comfort to each other, so I headed for the bathroom to empty my bladder. The house had begun to take on a chill overnight the way Hawk liked it, but now I was ready to snuggle back in bed with a little heat. Perhaps Gabriel could program the system to a compromise.

I grabbed my phone and slipped back into bed, watching the sun flood the windows overlooking the sea. There were no messages from Hawk, so I assumed he was finally sleeping. It would be a vital part of his work schedule with Uma. The huge heavy copy of ENDLESS LOVE lay next to me in Hawk's place, open to a discussion of love affairs on the sets of films in the early days. I planned to harvest some of these tales as back stories for the characters.

I reached for the book and propped up my pillows as the phone rang. It was Jack Walters. "Good morning, Jack," I said, quite merrily and wide awake.

"Dyanna, I am glad you are up so early. I have forgotten that you are a new mother."

"Well, I actually have the wonderful luxury of a Night Nurse, Jack. But they are both still asleep. I was just studying my book about David Gilford, the greatest Hollywood mogul."

"I am familiar," said Jack. "My oldest daughter is majoring in film at USC".

"The project I am working on with Jacob and Teddy is about Gilford. What a life!" "Well, I have just spoken to Jacob and he sends his greetings. We got a phone call from Anthony Bravano last night, actually two. I called him this morning and he wants to meet with you."

"Wow, that's great. Progress! Maybe he has changed his mind."

"One would hope, but he won't discuss anything with us until you are here in front of him. I told him you lived in Big Sur and were not immediately available, and he said, I quote, "She better get down here and talk to us if she wants that land."

"OK, good for him. I will drive down there myself, probably tomorrow. Does that work for you?"

"What about your work, and your daughter? Is this something that will fit into your schedule? We can arrange it so that you are comfortable. Jacob said they can fly you down here in a couple of days. Both jets are in France right now."

"How very typically Jacob is that? I think I would prefer to drive. I have just taken my first run in the little red bomb that Jacob gave me, and I'm itching to stretch my legs."

"Why don't you decide on your schedule and let me know. I would say the sooner the better, since he is ripe for the meeting now. We may be able to close the deal right away."

"That would be wonderful, Jack. Let me get back to you later today. Are you available the next few days?"

"I will clear my schedule, and Brian's as well. I'm looking forward to seeing you, my dear."

I looked up to see Annoka standing in the doorway. Lily Jade was watching me with those big green eyes, and I held out my arms. My breasts were full and ready as Annoka sat on the side of the bed and handed over my girl. A rush of love ran through me as I held her close and tickled her neck. She kicked and wiggled around, ready for breakfast.

"Good morning, Dyanna. You are ahead of schedule. Is everything all right?"

"I fell asleep early, and slept like a log. Just knowing you are there with her is most comforting. I'm so glad you have joined in this adventure."

"I have never seen such a happy baby. You and Hawk are filling her up with all this love and attention. It will come back to you as she grows, mark my words. They hear and see much more than we realize." She leaned over and touched the dark curly hair that was growing fast these days. "I will go and make you a big pot of tea, and get some breakfast started."

Lily Jade latched onto my nipple with the primal hunger of a newborn. I had forgotten to use the oil before nursing, but my nipples were becoming very used to her.

I watched the gulls fly in and land in the oak tree outside as I fed my daughter, and planned the trip to see the rasty dour Anthony Bravano. I felt very secure with Jack and Brian, and of course Jacob would be watching over the whole thing. He made it very clear that he had a stake in my life, along with Teddy. After all, they had been there for Louise and her desperate flight over the Atlantic, providing the Walnut Jet and care in Sicily during the emergency. I thought of Louise as I switched the baby over to the right breast. What would she think of this? If you believe like I do, that our loved ones hover near after they depart, then you understand my eyes searching the room and speaking softly with my eyes closed. "Isn't this just amazing, Loulou? Here I am with a baby, and now I will go to the Palisades to buy your Dog park Land!"

The answer came with a big pot of tea and some ginger cookies, as Annoka threw open the shutters and revealed the morning. Somewhere out there Louise was watching over me.

There was no doubt in my mind.

## CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

Hawk awoke with a start, forgetting momentarily where he was. The sound of the machines in the MedVan hummed softly as he looked at the metal ceiling above him. Ah, yes. Uma.

He was so groggy that he must have slept awhile. He reached for his phone but it was nowhere to be found.

"Dr. Hawk, you're awake." Dr. Timothy Grant had been observing the patient, and now made his way to the back area. "I think Uma is doing better. Her breathing is less labored and the facial color is good. Come and look."

Hawk stood up and stretched, reaching for the ceiling. He focused on the face of his beloved sister as he walked to her side, glancing at the clock on the wall. It was 9am, so Uma was through the first night of recovery. He realized that he needed to take a huge leak and wash up before he came near her, and ducked into the lavatory. He splashed his face with cold water and rubbed the stubble on his chin. Time for some grooming before Uma woke up.

Dr. Grant was charting Uma's vital signs when he emerged. "There is a fresh pot of coffee, Sir, and those wonderful cakes from your house. The lady brought more this morning. She promised to make eggs for us, when we are ready."

Hawk stepped to the left side of the bed and looked closely at his sister. She had turned her head toward him, and was drooling a bit with her mouth open. Her breath was measured, but her pulse still seemed high to him. "Get me the charts please," he said, taking Uma's hand. It was cold as ice. He rubbed it between his palms for a minute, unable to warm her up.

Elena's notes described the night before, and the time while he was sleeping, so Hawk knew exactly how she had fared with the surgery. Something was preventing proper blood flow to the limbs. "I think we may need another scan, her hand is cold and the arm is slightly blue."

The sound of footsteps on the ramp signaled the arrival of Elena, looking windblown and refreshed by the Big Sur day. She came immediately to his side. "How is she doing?"

"I'm afraid she is bleeding inside or something is cutting off the circulation. Prepare the machine for a short MRI." He looked at her windblown hair and touched her pink cheek. "Looks like you went for a walk in the Big Sur morning."



Ginger arrived at the house shortly after Lily Jade's breakfast. I had slipped into a soft pair of blue sweats and was sitting at my desk when Ampalia knocked discreetly. "Ginger is here to see you. She has gifts for the baby."

I looked up to see Ginger peeking over her shoulder, and went to give her a hug. Her bright auburn hair was still damp and she looked amazing. What a lovely girl she was. "Good morning! This is a surprise."

"I wanted to come sooner but things have gotten crazy up there, with John and the work crew, and then Belinda arriving."

"I hear you were a big help with Uma's care after that awful fall. Thank you so much for that, Ginger. Hawk said you managed the whole scene until he arrived."

"Well, I wouldn't say that. Gabriel and John were there, but you know men. Most of them don't know how to handle a medical emergency."

"I guess you've had a lot of experience with such a big family? Gabriel told me a lot about you one day when we were working on the house."

"Yes, and that is why I am here." She handed over the gingham shopping bag with a big smile. "For Lily Jade. And you, of course."

I opened the bag to find the most beautiful green blanket, finished around the edges with lacy crochet. It was very soft and the perfect size for my daughter. "You know, she is growing very fast, and this is just a tiny bit larger than the early ones."

"I fell in love with it," said Ginger, running her smooth freckled hand over the corner. But there's more, keep looking."

I reached down and found a clear plastic zipped bag full of colorful wavy little pieces with nipples on the end.

"These are Latches, Dyanna. They are the only way to go with pacifiers. I don't know if you are using one yet, but my mother and sisters swear by them. They are designed to fit in the baby's mouth so the teeth will not be crooked when they come in."

"Seriously?" I pulled one of them out, a hot pink wavy piece of silicone attached to a small nipple.

"Babies love them. Sometimes they need comfort but not food, as you know by now. These will be Lily Jade's first best friend."

"Come on, let's go see how she likes it." We walked into the nursery where Annoka was drying the baby off after her bath. "You haven't seen her for awhile, have you?"

As if on cue, she opened her mouth and I slipped it in. Her eyes opened wide and she stared at us, moving the Latch around in her mouth. "Look at that," said Annoka. "It's a perfect fit. "You'll need those if you are traveling with her, especially in the car."

"Can I hold her," asked Ginger. She was obviously used to babies, so Annoka finished her diaper and carefully handed Lily Jade over. I watched as she looked up at Ginger's smile and warm brown eyes. It was love at first sight. We walked back into the office where the blanket was waiting. I held it open and Ginger expertly wrapped the baby inside. The color was a perfect match for her eyes, like something out of the movies.

"You know, I am making a quick trip to L.A for some business, and I will take that blanket for her. Does it need to be laundered?"

"I washed it by hand just to be sure there was no available dye. But the store where I got it is very careful about such things."

"You mean the Latch Key? I always wondered why they named it that way."

"The Latch pacifier is really a special piece of equipment for your child," said Ginger. "They are called an orthodontic pacifier, and really take care of the infant's mouth. I'm sure you know by now that caring for a baby is not as simple as advertised."



Anthony Bravano, Jr. watched his shiny black pickup being waxed as he waited for Chase to finish some business. His brother ran the hottest shop in Commerce for styling vehicles to order. In fact, the tough guys in downtown LA came to him as well, under cover. It was Chase and his bitchy wife Sally who had kept under his skin about the fucking Palisades deal. They had the finest house in the hood, to be sure, and Sally put on airs like you wouldn't believe. They pretended to be "unaware" of much of the past problems of the family, but this one issue stuck tight. Somewhere in Sally's past there was a very bad taste of Adam Barner, and she wanted his legacy wiped away. Completely.

In the family pecking order, Anthony was near the top, but the issues that were serious floated above his head. "He is dumb as a doornail," Sally liked to say, quoting her grandfather. It just burned the shit out of Anthony. Now he had to play ball with a woman from another world, and make her understand how important it was to make the dog park go away. Frankly, the consequences would be there for all to see otherwise, and he didn't want to die. Today he was here to talk about trade.

"So how is that meeting going," said Chase, breaking into his brother's narrow mind. "You call the attorney?"

"We are waiting for a reply from Big Sur. She will most likely come very soon, if she comes at all. She is afraid of me and wants this over."

"Hmmm. Why would that be? Did you act like a stupid little bowlegged pill?"

"I stood up for the family, Chase. And she stood up for her cousin Lilly, or Louise or something."

"What is she like, this woman?"

"Tall and blonde, and very beautiful. She has a tiny new baby." "Does she now? Do they travel together?"

"How else do you think I know?"

"Just asking. Let me know the minute you have some arrangements. We are going to play hardball. Get ready for it."

The truck swung around in front of them, shiny and ready for action. The detailer jumped out and bowed to them. "Take a look before I go to lunch," said Chase. "I got other work later."



Annoka was anxious about my traveling with Lily Jade, and offered to stay with her several times. She had become quite fond of her charge, and more cautious than usual with Uma out of commission. She delivered the clean clothes after lunch, and helped me to select a few things for

the trip to southern California. "You have plenty of milk in the freezer," she said, tucking little shirts and pajamas into the baby bag.

"I'm going to take a couple of bottles to be safe, so don't worry. She was fine the first time, and that was weeks ago. I've got to learn to take care of her when we are away from home, unless you want to follow us 24/7."

"I know you will be fine. I'm just upset about Uma and kind of scared that she will be sick for a long time. Look at John Soaring Meadow."

"That's different. He went kicking and screaming all the way and didn't follow Hawk's orders. Uma is different. She will want to get well, and she adores her brother."

"So you are not worried about her?"

"No, so go on now and get some sleep. You are tired and grumpy." I hugged her and sent her down the hall before I called Jack Walters.

"I have settled on a trip tomorrow, Jack. We will drive down mid morning, noon at the latest, after her first feeding. I have gotten the same little condo near Louise's old place. It will be ready for us."

"So I will set up a meeting with Bravano the day after tomorrow, at 9 am? Does that work for you?"

"Sure, let's get it over with. Have you heard anything more from them?"

"Not a word, but Jacob is investigating the property further, doing a deep title search and record report. He seems to think something happened there, years ago."

"Well, that's his business. He is a great storyteller, so bless his heart for wanting to help. I will call you when I arrive tomorrow afternoon, and check in."

"Have a safe journey, Dyanna. We will be waiting for you."

Ampalia had gone back to the MedVan with another load of food and drinks, so I had the house to myself. Annoka slept soundly in the massage room, and Lily Jade was napping as well. I made myself a smoothie and had a big piece of pumpkin bread toasted with butter. I would have a care package in the trunk tomorrow, for sure.

I was excited about our maiden voyage as I packed some comfortable clothes, and two pairs of sweats. The weather was changing, even in Los Angeles this time of year.

I thought of Uma and wondered how she was doing. I had tried Hawk's phone several times and it went to voicemail. I knew he would be home when he could, and keep us posted. She would be proud of me for taking this trip, and I knew she would love the new Latches for Lily Jade. It would be so good to see Uma smile when we got home.



Ginger returned to the ranch and drove up in front of Belinda's house. She wanted to catch them before they wandered off somewhere. This time she opened the front door and walked

inside. She could hear noise in the kitchen and poked her head inside. Belinda was sitting on the counter eating some yoghurt with a spoon. Slow Dove was tickling her while she tried to eat, and grabbed her wrists.

"Hello there, you guys," said Ginger. "How are you doing today?"

They both looked at her with despair, which was not unusual with people that age. Ginger was close enough to recall her own angst at having no privacy and too many rules.

"Pretty good, Ginger. How are you doing?" Belinda resumed eating her yoghurt with a smirk.

"Well, I just wanted to check in, and tell you that I'm going into Monterey tomorrow first thing. I thought you might like to ride along."

"What are you going to do there" said Belinda. "It's quite a ways from here."

"Well, you should get used to it, sweetie. You live in Big Sur now, and everything is quite a ways." Ginger looked around the kitchen and saw the empty plate from her kitchen. "Did you like the chicken?"

"I ate most of it," said Belinda. "He doesn't like to eat animals." She poked his side with her foot and jumped down from the counter. "Can we go shopping tomorrow? I want some food and things to drink."

"Why don't you make a list and we will stop at Whole Foods or Safeway."

"What are you going to do," said Slow Dove. "Just drive us around?" Belinda laughed and Ginger moved closer to him. "I'm going to show you some places you will want to know about, when you have your own wheels."

She could feel her temper rising and wanted to be cool and calm with these two. There was a lot at stake here and nobody to watch over them.

"Be ready around 10 am, OK? And bring a jacket, Belinda. It's always chilly some time during the day. I'm next door if you need me." Ginger turned and smiled her best beguiling roadie smile, knowing full well she was irresistible to strangers. They would come around.

Outside, John and Gabriel West were meeting with the small crew of framers who were sorting wood for the new ranch house. She walked over to them with her long thick auburn hair blowing in the breeze. "Howdy, guys! How's the house going?"

"We're going to start tomorrow early," said John. He put his arm around her and smiled. "That ok with you?"

"Well, actually, I wanted to borrow your truck for a ride into town."

"Sure, sweetheart. Are you going alone?"

"No, I'm taking Belinda and Slow Dove with me. We have some things to do."

"Good idea, Ginger," said Gabriel. "Glad you are keeping an eye on them. Uma had some great plans for Belinda, so maybe you can help there too."

"I'll be happy to do whatever I can. Now, I'm going to let you guys go back to work. Will you stay for dinner, Gabe?"

"Wouldn't miss it."

As she walked back to the carriage house, Belinda came outside and waved. "Do you have some paper? We're making a shopping list."

"Sure, honey. Come on inside and I'll fix you up."

Belinda followed Ginger into John's house and up the stairs to his office. There was a pile of new notebooks and several cups full of pens and markers. "Take your pick, Belinda. I'm sure John won't mind."

Belinda grabbed two of the spiral notebooks and a handful of pens. "Thanks, Ginger. We'll see you tomorrow, OK?"

"10 am, you hear?" said Ginger.

"10 am," said Belinda, as she skipped down the stairs.

## CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

I was up at the crack of dawn, and full of energy. I had gone to bed early and Lily Jade was asleep before me, so we would be on the same schedule. Ampalia had returned from the MedVan in time for dinner and fixed my favorite salad and fresh bread. She held Lily Jade and sat with me while I ate.

"Uma is still unconscious," she said, looking forlorn. "I don't think they know what is wrong. It is very intense down there."

"Hawk will do what is right, Ampalia. You must have faith in his skills, he is a masterful doctor."

"I know, I just miss her. Things are so different without Uma here. And now you are leaving. When will you return?" She nestled Lily Jade in her arms, and tickled her toes.

"As soon as possible. Probably day after tomorrow. I love to drive early in the morning, and escape LA before the masses appear."

Annoka took over after dinner and I packed my bag of toiletries, adding some apricot lotion and bath salts. I couldn't remember if there was a bathtub at the condo or not.

At 9:15 I was in bed, texting my husband. I knew he was buried in his work and would probably be there for a week. I would be back before then and Uma would be awake. "We miss you and love you," I said, at the end, hoping to hear from him before we left.

At 6 am the next morning, I heard Lily Jade's familiar noises and knew she was on my wave length. I went into the room and picked her up, before Annoka could move. "Good morning, Baby Girl," I said. "Are you ready for another trip to LaLa land?"

"She doesn't usually nurse this early," said Annoka. "Shall I get her ready before that, so you can be on your schedule?"

"Perfect."



Belinda had spent half the night dreaming of things to buy for the new house. At 11 pm, Slow Dove crawled into her bed and went to sleep. "Don't forget we have to be ready at 10 am," he said.

"Don't you worry about a thing," said Belinda. She waited until he was asleep and went downstairs to the kitchen. It would be up to them to fill the refrigerator and shelves with good things to eat, with Big Ted gone. The plan had been changed with Uma down at the hospital van and Ted helping out there. She knew he also felt uneasy with Slow Dove in the house all the time, not wanting to breach the boundaries of their friendship. Big Ted liked to work and be useful, and John had invited him to help with the new Ranch House. It was better that way for all of them.

Ginger was taking them to town in the morning and it was exciting to Belinda to begin her new life as an individual. That is the way she saw things, the emancipated woman finally freed from years of torture. She opened the refrigerator and looked at the empty shelves. There was milk and

cereal, and several flavored yoghurts. A loaf of wheat bread sat alone on the bottom shelf, next to some almond butter and strawberry jelly.

Ty had sharpened Belinda's taste buds to the level of her childhood, where the fresh food of Mexico and Los Angeles reigned at home. The lovely Zenia had cooked for the family as long as she could remember, making [special Mexican cookies](#) and fabulous guacamole. Maybe she could get someone to come and cook for them now.

In the meantime, avocados, tortilla chips and salsa went on the list. She also needed more of those pearly tampons. Uma was right on about them, and in her most private heart, Belinda kind of missed her. The stern strong woman who had brought her back from the brink was now in the deep waters herself.

Suddenly Belinda felt lonely and a little scared. It was a step backward to think of watching Uncle Teddy and those women. Now she had her own man to play with. Funny how things just happen, isn't it? She grabbed a banana and ran up the stairs, hungry for some warmth and comfort.



We were on the road at 10am, hugged and kissed by Ampalia and Annoka as if they would never see us again! I realized as I checked Lily Jade's belt that I was lucky to have such wonderful people at home, and looked in the rear view to see them waving goodbye. I honked as we pulled onto Highway 1 and headed south. It was a lovely Indian Summer morning, with a promise to be warm. I had packed for the mild temps of L.A., knowing we would only be there briefly. I hoped to see a couple of Louise's friends if time permitted, after the big Bravano meeting. They would be surprised to see how much the baby had grown.

I moved the visor over the window so that she would have no glare, and gazed for a second at her little face. We were behind a huge tractor turning into a construction site, inching along. "Hey, sweet pie," I said, "how about some music?" I reached over to push the music button and noticed her eyes were almost closed. Best to let her nap while she can.

We passed the turnoff for Cooper School and I thought of Hawk down that road, deep in despair about his sister. I had no reply from him this morning, and assumed he was in service to save her life. Living with a doctor changes your outlook on men and romance, since being on call is part of the deal. I had never been upset about Hawk's commitments, having many of my own. It made us a perfect couple in that respect. The tractor was gone and now we were coming closer to the back road. I had not driven this route for a long time, and it reminded me of Kevin Stone on this November morning. My trips to the studio and his home in Beverly Hills seemed a long time ago. Lily Jade turned in her seat and I reached over to touch her. I wondered if Kevin and I would have had a child, but it was unlikely given the condition of my body at that time. Only the horrendous fall and near death recovery had enabled me to carry a child. God works in strange ways, doesn't she? Besides, with Belinda in the mix at the time, a baby would have been sheer hell.

I found myself turning onto Highway 101 before I knew it, carefully navigating the bumpy dirt road from the coast. Lily Jade slept on as we powered up to speed and raced toward King City and south. I opened my window for some fresh air and realized it was already 70 degrees. Soon we would need the A/C to keep my daughter comfortable. She was bundled up in a light cotton blanket that would come off at the rest stop. All the familiar tall trees came into view before Greenfield appeared, and then we were into the southern stretch for a run over the hills to Paso

Robles.

Soon we reached the first rest stop and I pulled into the parking lot. Lily Jade was now awake, but drowsy, glancing around. I checked her belt and diaper, and realized we had only been gone an hour or so. So much for the experienced world traveler, huh? Better safe than sorry.



Uma came awake at noon, opening her eyes unexpectedly, with a loud sigh. Dr. Grant was standing watch while Hawk took a shower, and immediately interrupted him. "Excuse me, sir, the patient has regained consciousness. Her eyes are open."

Hawk pulled back the curtain and wiped the shampoo from his ears. "Is she breathing normally?"

"It appears so. Nothing has changed." "I'll be right there. Stay with her, Tim."

The young doctor returned to Uma's side and gently touched her right hand. "Good afternoon," he said with a smile. His reddish hair cast a warm light on his face, as Uma looked up to see him.

"Who are you," she asked.

"I am Doctor Timothy Grant. I am here with Dr. Hawk, helping to care for you."

Hawk appeared at his side, wrapped in a white towel. "Uma, my God! I'm so happy to see you awake."

"Were you sleeping?"

"No, just taking a shower. It's been a long couple of days since your accident." "I can move my side, Hawk. And it hurts something awful."

"We have you bound up with tape and gel pads for a short time, to be sure your shoulder is set in place. Sorry about that."

"Can I have some water? My mouth is so dry." She coughed a little and moaned with pain. Timothy wheeled over a tray with water and a straw. He held it to Uma's mouth as Hawk held her head.

"Drink slowly, Uma. You must awaken yourself gradually, in order to heal properly. We are watching you very closely."

She closed her eyes and sipped a little. "I'm going to get dressed, I'll be right back. Dr. Tim will take care of you." Hawk headed down to the end of the van where Elena was sleeping. His clean scrubs were hanging next to the bed, and he slipped into them quickly.

He found his shoes under the bed and put them on without socks. It was always good to be as sterile as possible with a patient in this condition, and he wanted to take no chances. A wily staph infection could mean the end and take his beloved sisters life.

"How are you feeling, Uma" he asked, returning to the right side of the bed next to his colleague. "Are you warm enough?"

"I don't feel much of anything, but my hands are cold."

"Ok, I am going to check up on your shoulder and clavicle. You have a broken shoulder bone and a crack in the clavicle. It was a long surgery to mend those injuries. I don't want to go in again, so you have to work with me. I'm giving you the straight story."

"So I'm not going to die?" She almost laughed, and gave a weak smile.

"Not today. But we will have to keep a careful watch on you for a few days. Do you understand me?"

"Of course."

"I have to ask you that, Uma. I want you to know why we are doing things a certain way. Promise to be patient with us, will you?"

"Can't I go home to do all this, now that I'm awake."

"Not for awhile. You are in serious condition. I put you in a deep sleep so that you would not move the left side for the first couple of days."

"Where are we, Hawk?" She looked up at the ceiling. "Oh, God! Are we in the hospital?"

"No, you are in the MedVan, near the ocean by Cooper School. It was already on the way when you had the accident."

"You know I will do anything to stay in Big Sur. I don't want to go up to the hospital. I'll never come out."

Hawk threw his head back and laughed out loud. "Now I know you will be fine, my lovely sister," he said, with tears in his eyes. "We are going to give you a full check up now, and get some nourishment in your body. Please sleep as much as you can these first few days. Meditate. Visualize the healing. Be your own miracle for a change."

We rolled into the Gaviota Rest Stop around 1pm, ready for a break. I put Lily Jade in the sling so I could manage to pee, and went into the handicapped stall. It was quite a trick to stand over the toilet with her hanging in front of me, but I'm sure many have done it before. I just could not leave her in the car, even for a minute or two. Things were going smoothly and I hoped for a fast arrival in the Palisades.

I washed my hands carefully and then took her outside to change her diaper. I opened the trunk where I had created a changing spot, and lay her down on the double blankets. I had parked away from the buildings under a tree, so it was a quick clean and change of her diaper, with those big eyes looking around at everything. We sat down at a table in the shade and I nursed her from both breasts.

In 30 minutes, we were back on the road to Santa Barbara, with me munching on almonds and carrots. I put the Latch next to Lily Jade, and when we came into some traffic, I rolled up the window and slipped it into her mouth. I couldn't watch to see the reaction, but the first glance told me that Ginger was right. What good timing, this gift!

In the stop and go mode, I was able to watch the baby moving the latch in her mouth and

grabbing for it with her hands. Ginger was such a lovely woman and she seemed to be madly in love with John. I had a secret pang of doubt when I first heard this from Uma, since John was my first real friend in Big Sur. He saved me from myself many times, laughed at my follies and hated my lovers. I wasn't going to settle for just any old chick where he was concerned, especially after he told me about his wife.

These things flowed through my mind as we broke out onto the ocean side highway and signs for Ventura. Soon I would turn off at Oxnard and take Highway 1 to Malibu and into Santa Monica. I was silently praying for this trip to succeed for both of us, because I was becoming a determined mother. I had not considered my life after the baby during my pregnancy, assuming it would all just come together. After all, we had this perfect life, me and Hawk, and the new house. Now I was working again on a fabulous film, and he was going to be practicing medicine in Big Sur for awhile. I looked at Lily Jade, who had fallen back to sleep, and felt tears of gratitude.

The road stretched out ahead of us with the County Line approaching and the ducks out there on the huge surf.

I was just so happy to be alive!



Ginger honked the horn at 9:50 am, after starting up John's Jeep. She figured it would take a few minutes to arouse the bodies of Belinda and Slow Dove, and this is how her father had done it. She smiled to think of him now, driving her into Houston the first time, just the two of them. She had found a clinic on the internet that would take underage girls as patients, and gone to him for her salvation. Watching her parents create their large family had taught Ginger several things at a very young age. Most importantly, that becoming pregnant is not hard to do, and often happens at the worst possible time. Her mother claimed three out of seven children were not planned, although she refused to name them.

The door opened and Slow Dove ambled over to the Jeep with a shy smile. "Good morning, Ginger. We still have seven minutes, so Belinda will be down very soon. We don't want to keep you waiting." He stepped back from the window like a child reporting to his mother, and Ginger understood right away that they respected her. Check that!

"No worries, sweetie. Just an old habit. I was thinking of my daddy who always started the car early and honked at us. But there were a lot of us to round up." She laughed and he nodded.

"OK, we will be right back." He disappeared into the carriage house and Ginger considered her plan for the day. They say that you must pay things forward that have been given you, so she was pretty sure things would work out. It would be wonderful to watch two young unusual people develop a good life together.

Belinda opened the door and strode to the car in a white shirt and shorts, with a black tank underneath. Her hair was damp and curling around her face, accentuating the heavy thick dark brows behind her shades. She smiled at Ginger and went around to the front passenger seat. "Good morning, Ginger," she said, in a rather hushed voice. "Thanks for taking us to town." She stared at her purse and removed a folded piece of paper. "I have a list of things to buy at the store."

"OK, that's a good start," said Ginger.

Slow Dove approached the back door and climbed in behind Ginger. He was decked out in skin tight soft buckskin pants that laced up the front, with a vest of feathers and shells. He wore no shirt.

“OK, are we ready,” said Ginger. It was really not a question, just a comment. She already was rolling toward the paved road to the gate and Highway 1. “Seatbelts, please.”



We sailed up the steep hill to Palisades Highlands around 4pm, and found the condo ready and waiting. The key was in the same place and there was a note from Ellen on the kitchen table. I left Lily Jade in her seat while I checked the space, to be sure everything was in order. When I went back to lift her out of the seat, she was damp from the warm air. We stood in the breeze for a few minutes, soaking up the scent of the well tended lawns and flowers. I would go in the morning in search of a fresh hibiscus!

Soon we were settled inside with the breast milk in the freezer, the food bag on the counter and Lily Jade set up in the bedroom. I had forgotten the sleeping basket, and figured it was fine. She would sleep beside me in that big bed, just the two of us. There were plenty of pillows to protect her from rolling away from me, and I was used to having her close at home.

We were both kind of lazy and tired, so I decided to have some of the food Ampalia packed for dinner. We could stop at the Secret Café tomorrow before the meeting.

I went out on the patio with Lily Jade in my arms, and called Jack Walters. He answered on the second ring, and I pictured his wonderful smiling eyes. “Hello, Dyanna! Are you here in LaLa Land?”

“Yes, we have just settled in at the condo. It was a good trip, and Lily Jade has become a fine traveler.”

“Glad to hear it. We are set for 9 am at the property. Does that work for you? “Sure. We will be awake long before then.”

“I will notify Mr. Bravano now, to confirm our meeting. Brian and I will be there a little early, as usual.”

“I am looking forward to seeing you, and getting something positive done,” I said. Lily Jade made a strange squeaking sound and I laughed. “I guess my daughter says goodbye too, Jack.”

“Have a wonderful night, Dyanna. See you soon.”

## CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

The road to Monterey was busy with traffic in both directions, but Ginger made good time in the little red Jeep. The windows were open and Belinda gazed out at the ocean and the cattle grazing nearby. Ginger had learned to drive in Texas, where there was a lot of open space, and took good care to be vigilant. Slow Dove had some music on in the back seat and Belinda took photos as they hugged the curves near the lighthouse and crossed Bixby Bridge.

When they passed the Rocky Point sign, Belinda was excited. "Can we stop there on the way back" she said, leaning over to Ginger. "I love that place."

"Sure, if there is time. I have to be home to cook dinner for John. He is always starving after they work on the construction site."

As they rolled into Carmel Highlands, it became overcast and a little foggy. Belinda closed her window and shivered.

"Did you bring a jacket, or a sweater," said Ginger. "You know the weather in this place can turn on a dime. Hot one minute, chilly the next."

"I've got a hoodie," said Slow Dove. He reached up between the seats and rubbed Belinda's arm. "You want it?"

She turned to him and smiled. As soon as the soft burgundy sweatshirt was in place, they emerged at [Monastery Beach](#) and the sun returned. Ginger laughed and smiled at Belinda. "See! It took me awhile to get used to these layers, but people on the central coast always have an umbrella and a sweater."

"Where are we going first," said Belinda, as Ginger turned off Highway 1 in Monterey. "I have some business to attend to. You'll see."

The jeep rolled down the hill into town on Pacific Street, winding around in the forest and soon Ginger turned into a parking lot next to an old adobe building. She turned off the engine and opened her purse. Inside was a card with an appointment. "This is the Planned Parenthood clinic, you guys. I have been coming to them for years to get my birth control. They have branches everywhere. Do you know about them?"

Slow Dove leaned forward. "They are advocates for underage kids who want assistance. You don't have to have parental consent."

"That's right. We are going in there now, and I will see my doctor. I want you to come with me."

"Why should we," said Belinda, moving into the corner of the seat. "We don't need a doctor."

Ginger reached over and took her hand. "Belinda, you two are very close to becoming intimate. You may already be having sex. I know that and you do too. You need protection against disease and pregnancy if you want to have the right to make decisions."

"I'm not going in there," said Slow Dove. "It's too weird."

"No, it's too weird when you find yourself knocked up at sixteen," said Ginger. My dad took me to

my first clinic when I was that age, because I wanted to make my own decisions. I wanted to be in charge of my life. My mother had seven children, probably way more than she planned. It is very easy to have unprotected sex when you are excited and hot for someone."



"I will go inside with you," said Belinda. "I want to control my life as much as I can." Ginger smiled and leaned over to kiss her cheek. "Good girl. That's a start."

They came in through the patio gate, and opened the slider. The two men who were sitting in the white truck had been watching the condo from the guest parking. They saw the lights go off inside when we crawled into bed around 10 pm. Then they waited an hour, to be sure the coast was clear before backing into the driveway behind my little red Mercedes.

They entered the bedroom where we were sound asleep under the covers. One man had a flashlight and the other some rope. They looked around the room before approaching the bed. One stood over me, and shined the flashlight into my face. Lily Jade began to cry immediately.

I opened my eyes to see two black-hooded men with gloves, and my daughter moving under her covers. "Get up! Get up now, lady. And shut that baby up."

I sat up and took Lily Jade in my arms. "What's going on," I said, in a voice I hardly recognized. "What are you doing here? Get away from my daughter."

The second man reached across the pillows and grabbed my hair. "You shut up, or we will kill you right now. Both of you. Understand?" Then I saw the gun in his hand.

I nodded and held the baby close to me. She was trembling, so I wrapped her up in the green blanket.

"We're going for a ride, lady. You'll have to leave that kid here."

"Oh, no," I said. "I will not move without her. You'll have to kill me first." "For Christ's sake, Geno! Bring the kid. Twice as much ransom."

"Is that what you want? Money?"

"Shut up and move, lady. Put on some clothes."

I had fallen asleep in my bodysuit, which was open at the top with my breasts spilling out. "Get away from me, don't touch my baby. I will do what you say if you leave her alone."

The taller one turned on the bathroom light, and I could see my sweats on the end of the bed. They both stood there, watching me. "Ok, move it," said Geno, who was a short squatty guy. He reminded me of Bravano, and now my brain swung into gear. Omigod! They were kidnapping me!

I lay Lily Jade on the bed and stood up, reaching for the clothes. My legs were shaking but my heart was determined to stay calm. I slipped on the sweatpants and soft gray hoodie that said Stanford. I always wore this when Hawk was away, and now I needed his strength. My flip flops were right there and I slipped my feet into them. "OK, now I have to change her. Please let me do

that. We need to take care of the baby or you will be very sorry.”

The tall one nodded and shined his flashlight while I carried Lily Jade to the bureau where I had set up a changing pad. I carefully removed her diaper and cleaned her with a baby wipe. We had a new package of diapers open, and she was ready in a flash.

“All right, let’s go. We are going to blindfold you now, don’t make a sound.”

“Please let me get her bottles from the freezer, and the food bag. I have to nurse her.” The tears began to roll down my bewildered cheeks, and I pushed my long hair away from my face.

Little Geno led the way into the kitchen where the food bag was on the counter. “You do it, go on,” he said. I reached into the freezer for the six bottles I had brought, and handed them over. He stuck them in the bag as the tall one pushed me forward. Now he stood behind me and covered my eyes. I had Lily Jade close to me, and held her tight.

He shoved me again as Geno opened the front door and looked around. The night was silent except for the crickets, as we made our way past my little red bomb. I could feel the gun pushing me along.

Now he threw the bag in the back of the truck. “Come on, get inside.” “I can’t see. Help me.”

Strong hands lifted us up and shoved us into the back seat of this huge vehicle. “Close the door, dummy,” said the other man. “She’s in.”

“Diapers! We need her diaper bag.” I sounded very weak, as if someone else was speaking, but I had to beg. “Please. She is so tiny and innocent.”

The other man got in the front seat, and Geno raced back into the house. I could hear his footsteps on the cement and soon he returned. He shoved the bag in next to me and closed the door. The driver started his engine, and shouted back at us. “Get down, and stay down. Not one move, you hear?”

Now I could see a tiny bit below the kerchief, and huddled into the floor area with my daughter. I closed my eyes and prayed.



Ginger and Belinda entered the clinic by the side door, and walked to the counter. A lovely young girl with long braids sat at the desk, and smiled as she saw Ginger. “Hello, Miss Malone. How are you today?”

“Hi, Trudy. I’m here for my checkup and I have brought a friend. I would like to introduce her to Doctor Lisbon.”

“OK, let’s check you in and have her fill out the form.” She handed a clipboard over to Ginger. “Trudy, this is Belinda.”

“Hi there. First time here?”

Belinda nodded, unable to speak. She took in the quaint setting of an old Post Adobe building,

the low ceilings and thick white plaster walls. It reminded her of the house in Beverly Hills where she grew up. Ginger led her to a quiet corner away from the others, and they sat down. "Now you are going to talk to my doctor, Belinda. They need to have the basic information about you to allow that. Have you ever done this before?"

"Never. My Mom always took me to the doctor before the divorce. Then he came to the house to see my Dad or me, when we were sick."

"OK, so now is your first step. Let's just fill out what you can, and we'll go from there." She handed Belinda the pen and moved in closer. "So let's fill in your full name first."

"Belinda Rose Stone," said Belinda.

"Write that in the space, right here." Belinda carefully printed her full name and date of birth. "Circle the F, for female," said Ginger.

Slow Dove appeared in front of them, and they looked up. He smiled and shrugged.

Ginger patted the chair next to Belinda, and he sat down. "Ok, the paperwork. Do I have to fill one out too?"

"I don't know, sweetie," said Ginger. "Why don't you go up and ask Trudy at the desk. She's very nice, and about your age."

He walked toward the counter and waited while Trudy helped others.

"I can't believe he is in here. He hates to take orders from anyone, except maybe Hawk and John Soaring Meadow."

"It's not like that here, Belinda. They are not giving orders. They are helping you with your wishes to be independent. He'll be fine."



I held Lily Jade close as we rolled down the hill and made a turn onto Sunset. I could tell by the time it took from Louise's house, and listened carefully to the men in the front seat. Lily Jade was very quiet, and the movement of the truck seemed to lull her to sleep. I didn't want to move enough to look at her face, for fear they would see us.

"We'll take PCH to the Santa Monica," said the other guy. Geno sat in front of us, and peered over a few times before he was satisfied we were in place.

"Gotta get on the 405 past Long Beach," said Geno. "It's a long way down from there. Moonie will show us."

"Why don't you call him now, let's see if he's on the way." We came to a stop and I could hear the ocean next to us. The windows were open in front and the cool air smelled like the sea.

"Hey, Donnie, what are you guys up to?" A big laugh followed, and then silence. "You stupid little prick, you know what's up. Are you on your way to meet us yet?" "Don't worry, I'll be there soon. Besides, you have to find me because you don't know where you're going." He laughed merrily

and silence filled the cab. We came to another

stop. "You got the goods?"

"Check that, Moonie. We are on our way. We will get back with you."

Now I was aware that they had a plan, and I needed to pay attention. Someone once told me that the best way to figure a trip is by the driving time. I looked at my wrist, and my watch was right there. The face glowed in the dark. It was 11:25 pm. This was my only lifeline now and I was thankful for some company.

The truck swung around a bumpy curve and then I began to hear the other vehicles on the road. We were on the freeway heading south, if they were on course. Suddenly a hand reached back and touched me, and I jumped. "Hey, Lady. Are you OK back there?" "My legs are getting numb. Can I sit up on the seat?"

"No way, honey," said Donnie. "We don't want nobody seeing you back there."

"Wouldn't hurt to let her up on the seat," said Geno. "Back to the window. I don't want to deliver damaged goods." The hand appeared again between the seats, and he peered through. I could see his fingernails, but pretended to be blind.

"You have to keep an eye on her, that's all," said the driver. "I don't want no shit going down here. You understand?"

Geno poked my knee with his hand. "Can you move up to the seat, lady?"

"I can't see anything." He reached over and lifted the kerchief over my nose. I stretched my legs out and grabbed the seatbelt. Lily Jade began to whimper as I twisted us around and lifted her up on the seat.

"Pull up the hood," said Geno. "Back to the window". A flood of relief filled my body as I crawled up next to the door and settled in. I put the hood up and pulled my blindfold down again, only this time I could see more. I stretched out my legs and opened my hoodie. Lily Jade's tiny mouth moved, and I realized there was a Latch in the side of the diaper bag.



Belinda and Slow Dove were asleep in the back seat when Ginger hit the road to Big Sur. They had quite a day, she mused, and smiled to herself. There were bags of groceries in the rear from a remarkable shopping spree that took two hours. She had never seen two people so completely clueless when it came to food. They bought toilet paper and toothpaste and strawberries. Belinda wanted the huge bananas at Safeway, so they waited until the return trip to shop.

Ginger had called John at 4pm and found that he was on his way to see Uma. Gabriel and Big Ted were with him, so she knew he was fine for dinner and company. "How is Uma" she asked, as they walked up and down the aisles of the huge supermarket.

"She is awake, and Hawk says she is in a lot of pain. She doesn't want to take anything except herbal potions. He will have to knock her out again," said John with a chuckle.

"It's good to hear you laugh, baby," said Ginger. "I know you have been worried about her."

"Ampalia is bringing some food for all of us, so we can sit around and keep her company. Hawk thinks this is the best medicine "

"That's right. Family and love are great healers." "And where are you, my lovely Ginger?"

"I am wandering around Safeway in Carmel with Belinda and Slow Dove. They are stocking up her kitchen."



"Don't be too late now. The fog comes in about sunset around the ranch. Besides, I miss you."

"Please give Uma our love, OK? Don't forget."

I put the bag of diapers behind my back after an hour, while my captors were merrily debating the factors of the Super Bowl. Occasionally Geno would look over the seat, and I pretended not to notice. I was waiting for my daughter to awaken, but she seemed to be deep asleep on my chest. My heart pounded as we drove along the empty 405, and I knew we were heading for Orange County. This was my old stomping ground, so at least I might have a chance at guessing the destination. My heart pounded when I thought of what was happening, and there was nothing I could do but wait. I took deep breaths and imagined Uma coaching me during the early stages of labor. I had survived that ordeal, and somehow, I would manage to live through this. It all seemed so silly, a fuss over a dog park, and these big rough guys playing *The Sopranos*.

My plan was to cooperate and observe. Somehow, some way, there would be a chance for us. I closed my eyes and listened to the tires on the road, over and over and over.

My captors had several conversations with their connection, and we were approaching a meeting place soon. I said another prayer for my daughter, and kissed her tiny cheek as we rode through the night.

## CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

Anthony Bravano had been following the progress of my captivity, and readied himself for the moment he had imagined. His family was asleep upstairs and he lay on the sofa in the family room, watching the clock. He tried to sleep, but it was hopeless. Better to just keep posted with Donnie and make sure the delivery was made.

Now there were other things to consider. His wife and kids had become sullen and unhappy with him in the past few weeks, as a result of family pressure. Chase had spread the word among the others that his "dippy dumb brother" had messed things up pretty good. The deal in the Pacific Palisades had become a nuisance and then a danger. He left it up to Anthony to fix things, as soon as possible or else. Now the time had come to pull off the coolest show of his life, and he wondered why he was so nervous. Soon it would all be over. He closed his eyes and dreamed of Sicily, where he spent his boyhood vacations. It was the only time in his life that Anthony had felt happy and sure of himself. The people were so nice.



Uma was propped up with several pillows behind her back, and a neck brace. She strongly objected to this device, but Hawk could see that she was going to push the boundaries to prove she would recover soon.

John and Big Ted entered the MedVan and walked directly to her bed. "Hello, my lovely Uma" said John, covering her with his upper body. "How are you doing?"

"Better, now that I see you. And who is with you?"

"I'm right here," said Big Ted. He took her hand and rubbed it between his huge fingers. "You look much better, my dear. Your color has returned."

"Thank God for that," said Uma, with a full smile. "They won't let me wash my hair yet, so I hope I don't scare anyone."

"Come on, Uma. You have no vanity. That's one of your best parts," said Hawk, emerging from the sterile area in the back. He put his arms around John and held him tight. "So glad you're here. We need some company."

Now the ramp outside began to reverberate, and Ampalia entered the room laden with a basket. Annoka was behind her, with two more packages. Uma struggled to sit up, and Hawk held her back. "Let them come to you, Uma. Remember my instructions. You have to be as quiet as possible. Otherwise I will evict everyone!"

John Soaring Meadow let out a huge howl, followed by a lot of giggles from the two women. "Good Luck with that," he said.

Elena approached them and took one of the baskets. "Why don't you let me find a cart for all this, so we can serve the feast." Dr. Tim had awakened from his sleep time, and helped Elena carry the food.

Uma looked around the bed at the group that had gathered, and shook her head. "Ok, where's

Moana? And my little baby girl.”

“Oh, she went to Los Angeles this morning,” said Annoka. “She took the baby with her.” “Whatever for,” said Uma.

“Wait a minute. Did you say Dyanna is gone with the Lily Jade?” Hawk stepped up to the bed. “Are you joking?”

“No, Dr. Hawk,” said Ampalia. “They drove down to meet with the lawyers on the Dog property.”

“Why didn’t she tell me about this,” said Hawk. His hands gripped the side of the bed, and Uma reached for him.

“She sent you some messages on the phone, and called you before they left. I saw her,” said Ampalia.

Hawk reached into his lab coat for his phone. “Where is my phone,” he said, turning around to face Elena. “My God, I have no idea where it is.”

“Don’t be upset, Uma,” said John. Everything is fine. You know Dyanna. She took the little red car and put the baby in the seat next to her. She would never do anything to put that child in danger.”

“Let’s get some dinner for you, Uma,” said Big Ted. He was familiar with the family dynamics and difficulties of discovery. Distraction was always a good move. Ampalia and Annoka had moved to the back, where the baskets yielded fresh bread and enchiladas, and a huge green salad.

Elena followed Hawk outside as he stood on the ramp, staring at the ocean. “I’m sorry, Stephen,” she said. “I have your phone. I found it on the floor by the bed, I just totally forgot.”

Hawk took the phone and stared at her. “How could she do that? She left with my daughter and didn’t tell me?”

“Check your messages. You’ve been out of touch for a couple of days.”

“My God, what’s next,” He walked down the ramp and headed toward the ocean path.



I knew immediately where we were when I saw the [MacArthur Boulevard sign](#) on the freeway exit. Donnie slowed down as the curved ramp came to a signal, and stopped the truck. I held Lily Jade in my arms, content with her Latch and the warmth of my body. I realized now that this was her normal sleeping pattern, and hoped we would be lucky in that respect. The light changed and we turned onto the wide highway next to John Wayne Airport heading west. There were few cars on the road, only the sounds of a late arrival landing on the runway next to us.

“OK, Moonie, we’re here, heading to the beach. What next?” Donnie was getting tired of this game, and wanted it done.

“Keep going to Pacific Coast Highway. You can’t miss it, the road ends there.” He laughed merrily. “Turn left, going down the Coast. You will be in Corona Del Mar for a few minutes. Then head out

on the highway past Crystal Cove.”

“OK, and where are you now?”

“Ground Zero. All parked and got the place ready. I will stand on the highway just past the old Shake Shack. Ocean side.”

“OK, just stay on the line with us. We’re passing the Fashion Island Mall now.” “Get in the left lane. There are a couple that turn south on PCH.”

I listened with a tiny smile, well aware of where Moonie was standing. It was right past Crystal Cove, where I had spent a lot of time. At least we would be near the ocean and the beach. I felt a comfort zone for the first time, and breathed easier.

“OK, Moonie,” said Geno, we are heading south on Pacific Coast Highway. Past the market and the Jolly Rodger.”

I didn’t dare turn around but I could see familiar stores on the upper side of the street as we passed. Then we were out on the highway, in the dark.

“Here’s Crystal Cove State Park,” said Donnie, slowing down.

“Keep going, past the park. The old Shake Shack is at the end. I am on the next road. I can see your lights.”

“There he is,” said Geno, as the truck slowed down and slid into the gravel. He rolled down the window as Moonie approached. I could hear his steps crunching toward us.

“Ok, guys. Follow me down the road. It’s tricky, so go slow. Turn off your lights. I have a flashlight.”

I pulled up the mask enough to watch, but kept still as we slowly descended on a dirt road to a space carved out of the hill. “Come on” said Moonie, waving the truck into a spot next to an old trailer. “Pull her way in.”

“Whew,” said Donnie. “That was fun.” He turned back to look at me, and saw I was still in place. “You OK, lady?”

“I think so.”

“Good, cuz we are here to stay.” He opened the door and jumped out on the sandy road. Geno followed him, leaving me blindfolded in the truck. They locked the doors on the way to the trailer, and I rolled down the window a little for some air. I held Lily Jade close to me, thankful for her comfort, and wondered what in the world they had planned for us.

At least I knew where we were. Well, almost.



The phone buzzed and woke Anthony Bravano from his restless dreams. “All done,” said Donnie.

“Is she inside the place?” “Settled in, baby and all.”

"OK, Donnie. I want you two to stay until I tell you otherwise. I have to make the call now, and it could take awhile."

"No worries, boss. Everything is going fine."

Anthony went to take a leak, and turned on the light in the bathroom. It was only 3:30 am, and too early to catch them in person. He would wait a little while, and deliver his message to Jack Walters as the sun rose. "Happy Day, Jack, you asshole." Now they would see what working with Anthony Bravano was like.



I thought of Hawk as they led me inside the old metal trailer. The steps were rickety and I almost lost my balance. Donnie ripped off the blindfold and helped me into the room.

There was a small light coming from the back, and I could see a long couch in front of me. There was a desk in the front corner, and what appeared to be a toilet room at the other end. The door was open and suddenly, I had to pee like a bandit. "Is that a bathroom," I said, holding my legs together.

"Yeah, Lady. Toilet and sink. Go ahead."

My legs were wobbly as I walked to the small lavatory and went inside. The toilet was very old with cracked paint on the seat, but I didn't care. I sat down and let all that water flow out of me. I had been holding it for a long time, and the relief was enormous. Lily Jade opened her eyes to the light as I struggled to reach the toilet paper, and then stand up again to flush. I looked down at her and zipped up the hoodie enough to hold her in so I could wash my hands. It was then I remembered the sling, folded in the bottom of the diaper bag. It would be a big help.

I held my damp hand to my face and shook my hair out, trying to make sense of it all. Moonie was outside the door, waiting for me.

"Feel better?"

I nodded and sat down on the long brown vinyl sofa. The diaper bag and food were on the floor next to me. The other two sat down at the end of the room at the desk, and Geno pulled out a pack of cigarettes. For a minute, I forgot where I was, and stood up. "Please don't smoke in here with my baby," I said. "Will you do that for us? It will make her sick."

Donnie grabbed the pack of smokes and pulled Geno to his feet. "Come on, Greasy. My wife is the same way." He opened the door and they went outside.

"You got a lot of nerve, Miss. You are in no position to bargain." Moonie spoke with a slight accent, somewhat European.

I nodded, hesitant to speak again. Now Lily Jade began to cry, and squirm around. It was time to change her, and give her some food. I took a clean pad from the bag and spread it out on the sofa. The diapers were in a large bag, so I decided to put the dirty ones in there for now. The less said the better. Moonie watched me for awhile, and then opened the door. "You guys still here," he said.

"Where else," said Donnie. They all laughed and lit up another smoke.



Jack Walters answered his phone on the first ring. He had been preparing some of the papers for their meeting, sitting at his desk at home. "Jack Walters" he said, watching the read out on the screen.

"We have her, Mr. Walters. And the baby too. It's time for us to talk."

"You have Dyanna and her daughter? Where are you? What are you trying to pull, Bravano." Jack had lost his cool and found himself standing up, staring at his desk.

"We're not trying to pull anything, Jack. We have them both in a secret spot out of town, and we will kill them if you do not stop this nonsense. Do you understand?"

"What do you want, Anthony? This is beyond the pale. Are you out of your mind? You will never get away with it. I strongly advise you to reconsider and release them immediately."

Bravano laughed for a good minute. "You kill me, you high paid lawyers. You are so full of bullshit. You have one day to make this deal or you will never see Dyanna Falconer again."

Jack Walters took a gulp of his coffee. He knew this was a key moment. The silence rang over the line between them. "Did you hear me," said Bravano. "You better think about it, right now."

"Take a breath, sir. I have others to consider before I can reply to you. Please answer me this. Are Dyanna and her baby OK? Can we talk to her and confirm that first?"

"Don't be ridiculous. That's so old school. I can send you a photo, if you are going to play ball. Otherwise, it's over."

"Exactly what do you want from us?"

"Kill the deal for the property in Pacific Palisades. Cancel the offer. Call off the dogs at City Hall where they are investigating the title. Get those creeps off our back."

"That may take some time, Mr. Bravano. You know these things are meticulous and complicated."

"Enough double talk. I will give you one hour to call me back. Talk to your people and let us know. No cops, no FBI. She will be dead before noon, otherwise."

The line went dead and Jack sat down in his chair. He dialed Brian Shoupe and waited for the connection. "Hello, Jack, said the voice slightly out of breath. What's up?"

"Are you home, Brian?" "Yes sir. On the treadmill."

"Dyanna has been kidnapped by Bravano and his men. They have the baby as well." "No way. Why would they do that?"

"They are holding her hostage until the offer is canceled on the property up there." "That is just crazy! Where is she?"

"I want you to get over to that condo right way and be sure this is not a ploy or some other nonsense. Can you do that?"

"Of course. I can leave in five minutes."

"I have an hour before I call him back. I have to talk to Jacob Walnut now. He will know what to do."

"I will call you as soon as I get there. It's only about 20 minutes from here."

Jack poured himself a fresh cup of java and went outside. The cool morning air invigorated him as he stepped into the garden. It took several deep breaths to regain himself, before he called Jacob Walnut. It was now that he realized how fond he was of Louise Guy, and her cousin. Louise was dead, and now this. It was a tragic development.



Anthony Bravano danced around a little before calling the boys. He was pleased with the response he got from the prissy Jack Walters. Finally some respect would be given to him and his family. He poured a small glass of whiskey from the decanter, and took a gulp.

Donnie answered on the first ring. "Hey boss, whazzup?"

"I have notified the people with Dyanna on this deal and they are connecting now to solve our problem. I gave them twenty four hours and then we will kill her. I want you to stay down there with Geno and be ready to do whatever it takes."

"That was not part of the deal," said Donnie. "I'm not ready to kill a kid and a woman over some stupid land."

"You will do what I tell you, or you will be in the grave with them. Do you understand?" "Yes."

"Tell Geno to get ready. I'll keep you posted."



I finished nursing Lily Jade as the sun rose on that first day of horror. She eagerly emptied my breasts and nodded off again soon afterward. They left us alone, standing outside the door with a big discussion. I could not hear what they said, but my eyes grew very heavy as I curled up beside the green blanket that held my daughter. I put my hand on her, and drifted off to sleep.

## CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

Brian Shoup made it up the hill to Palisades Highlands in record time, catching Sunset Boulevard at such an early hour. He turned in to the driveway where the condo was located, and saw my little red Mercedes in the driveway. His heart pounded as he approached the front door, and found it open.

The room was dark and he turned on a light to see some items scattered on the table. My cell phone lay on the counter, at the ready. There were several messages on the face. The keys to my car and my little purse were next to it.

"Dyanna? Are you here?" He stepped across the hall and saw the bedroom in disarray. The sheets were pulled aside and a wet diaper sat on the counter next to some towels. The bathroom was empty, and he checked outside in the back to be sure. He stood in the kitchen and called Jack Walters.



Jacob Walnut had a late dinner and finished off a bottle of superb Hahn SLH Pinot Noir before retiring. He was looking forward to the meeting at 9 am and smiled as he climbed into bed.

The phone rang at 7:30 am and roused him from a deep sleep. "Hello Jack" he said, yawning.

"Jacob, we have a problem. Dyanna and her daughter have been taken by the Bravano thugs, and they are holding her for 24 hours. Bravano just called me a few minutes ago."

"What the hell are you talking about? That stupid little Mini-Me creep. He doesn't have the balls to do such a thing."

"I had Brian check out the place where she was staying before I called you. She is gone, along with the baby. Her keys and purse are there, everything left behind."

"What exactly did Bravano say, Jack? What does he want?"

"They want the deal called off, and the proceedings for eminent domain stopped. The whole thing gone. They will kill Dyanna and the baby if we don't agree."

"That will not happen. I will pay whatever price they ask. Let me talk to him."

"There are other things to consider, Jacob. We must move carefully and be sure she is safe. And there is strong evidence that Anthony Bravano is in trouble with his tribe. Brian has done surveillance on several points of interest and found that he is in bad standing. The pressure to kill this deal is probably coming from there."

"He might want to get out of the country if that is the case. It's easy to make that happen."

"I am meeting with Dandy Brown in a few minutes. He is coming here to the house. Let's see what he has to say, OK? I want him to be here when I call Bravano back."

"I will be here waiting, if you want to conference call. Thanks for letting me know, Jack. It means

the world to me” .

“I know that, and I feel the same way.”



I awoke with a start, and stared at my daughter, kicking her tiny feet up and down. She was making a little humming sound that comes when there is business at hand. This is what Annoka calls the dirty diaper call, to put it delicately. I pulled the blanket away from her enough to kiss her cheek, and she looked over at me. For a blessed few seconds, I forgot our misfortune, and concentrated on my love for Lily Jade. The innocence of a new baby is something to behold, despite the accompanying gaffs in the learning curve. They are so completely unaware of danger and madness, leaving it all to us.

I sat up on the sticky brown sofa and saw Moonie sitting by the window at the end of the trailer. He appeared to be watching something, but now I realized he was kind of napping with his eyes open. It was time for a bathroom visit and I picked up my daughter. Suddenly the little square man shook his head and came awake, apparently alerted by his sense of motion. “You can leave her there,” he said. “Just put something next to her.”

In the bathroom, I considered this a tiny clue that perhaps he had a heart. I flushed the toilet and splashed my face before opening the door. Moonie was now sitting on the end of the sofa, quietly watching Lily Jade. He rose when I approached.

“Thank you for watching her,” I said. He nodded.

“Got two of my own.”

“Well, I have to change her now, so you might not want to be too close.” I opened the diaper bag and found the baby wipes. The dirty diaper was quickly folded into the trash sack, and I wiped her clean with care. He paced the room watching me, and Lily Jade was in a rambunctious mood. She was used to being walked and cuddled outside, with fresh air and the sound of the ocean. [I picked her up and raised her above me](#), pretending to be happy. Moonie held his phone up and took a picture.

The door opened and the two other men stepped inside. “Well, I see you are awake,” said Donnie. “How is your child?”

“She seems to be fine. But I need some water. I’m very thirsty, and I’m nursing.”

“I guess you can’t drink something from that bathroom. Bring in the water bottles from the truck, Geno.” Moonie watched silently as Donnie approached me. “We didn’t have much time to plan for this, lady. Do you know where you are?”

“No. Not really. I was blindfolded all the way here.”

“It’s best that way for everyone.” Geno returned with two six packs of bottled water and put them on the table. He brought one over to me, and handed one to Donnie. “So here’s the deal. Your people know we have you, and that we will kill you and the child if they do not obey Mr. Bravano’s wishes. Are you aware?”

"Well, I was supposed to meet him and my attorney this morning, to close a land deal."

"I don't know nothing about that, except he is on the line with his people. So please understand this is nothing personal."

Lily Jade chose this time to cry, softly at first and then a loud howl. I put her on my shoulder, and walked her around. Moonie and Geno headed for the door, and Donnie shook his head. "It will be over soon, lady. One way or another."

He followed his companions outside and slammed the door. Now LJ was really going at it, and then I remembered the Latch. I sat down next to the bag and reached inside. As soon as I put it in her mouth, she stopped. Her big green eyes blinked and I wiped the tears away. Then I opened the food bag and ate an apple. I had to eat, if we were to live.



Dandy Brown knocked on the door as Jack Walters made a fresh pot of coffee. He was dressed in tight pressed black jeans and a black turtleneck, immaculate as ever.

"Good morning, Jack," he said. "Nice place you have, here in Brentwood."

"We've lived here long before it was fashionable," said Jack. "Can I give you some fresh coffee?"

"Absolutely. And a little milk, if you have it." He looked at his watch. "Tell me everything you know again." He opened his iPad and sat at the kitchen table.

"Bravano has hijacked Dyanna and her baby from the place she was staying in the Palisades. They must have taken her during the night, and now she is somewhere "out of town" as he put it. He wants the deal cancelled, and the discussion of Eminent Domain tabled."

"Did he say anything else about Dyanna?"

"Just that they would kill her and the baby, if we don't comply within twenty four hours." "Did you ask him about proof of the abduction?"

"He said he would send a picture. I wanted to talk to her for proof, but he refused."

"Picture is better, if we can get it. How much time do we have before the deadline to call him?"

"About five minutes. I have called Jacob Walnut. He is very much involved with Dyanna and her child."

"I'm aware of his connection to the lovely Ms. Falconer. It goes back quite a long way." "So what do I tell Bravano?"

"That we will do everything he asks, as soon as he sends the photograph." "That's it?"

"Go ahead and call him. Be kind to him, and let him know how much you appreciate the chance to help."

Walters grabbed his phone and pushed the call button. Bravano answered on the first ring. "You

had one minute, Walters. That's cutting it pretty close."

"Sorry, Mr. Bravano. I have been trying to process your requests in the time allotted."

"And?"

"We will do as you ask, and cancel the real estate offer immediately. I'm not sure about the County Ordinance, they are not open until 9 am. That may take longer."

"OK, the twenty four hours starts now."

"Wait just a minute. You promised a picture of Dyanna Falconer and her daughter. We want to know that she is alive and well. No dice otherwise."

"Fair enough. I will send it very soon. You will call me to confirm?" "Yes sir. Then the ball starts rolling."

"Of course you know that any hint of the cops or the press will mean we kill her and the kid. Understand."

"We understand."



Brian Shoupe had gathered my things in the basket, careful not to touch the slider or front door. He had no idea of how many men abducted us, or what occurred beforehand. He left the diaper and ruffled bed, and turned off the bathroom light.

He put the basket in his trunk and drove to Jack Walter's house. The morning traffic on Sunset Boulevard was heavy now, so he turned off on the side streets that parallel and arrived shortly at the large white brick house at the end of the cul de sac on Kenwood Drive. There was a sleek black Maserati in the driveway, which had Dandy Brown written all over it. He cut through the side gate around the house to the kitchen, and tapped on the door.

Jack Walters answered immediately, with a worried look on his face. "Good timing, Brian. Dandy just arrived. We have called Bravano and he is sending a photo of Dyanna and the baby."

"Perfect," said Brian. "We will know a lot more when we read the photo mapping."

"Good morning, Brian," said Dandy, extending his hand. "Good to see you again. Wish it was better circumstances."

"This guy has been trouble from the start, Dandy. He is paranoid and nervous, in addition to being so dumb."

"Well, he has managed to get us all rolling today, hasn't he?" Dandy laughed and sat down at the table. "Jack tells me you have done some scouting around the City of Commerce."

Brian sat down and accepted the steaming cup of java. "I've been investigating Bravano since the first day we met him. Mostly on my own, out of curiosity. I wanted to protect Dyanna from the type of thing we are dealing with today. I just had a feeling about this guy."

"And what do you know about him now?" Dandy clicked away on the tablet, drinking his coffee.

"The Bravano family considers him a blowhard, wanna-be tough guy. He has ruined several family deals in the shipping of products off shore, and lost some clients who moved out of their warehouses. He is on the line right now about this deal, it is common knowledge around town. His family demoralizes him on Facebook, even his own wife."

Jack's phone made a soft ping, and Brian picked it up. "This should be your photo from Bravano. May I open it?"

"Please do," said Jack.

Brian opened the message to find a large photo that was a bit out of focus.

"There she is, Dyanna and Lily Jade. Whoever took this was standing close to her." He looked the diagnostics and smiled. "They are in Orange County, near Laguna Beach."

"How do you know that," said Jack. He leaned over as Brian revealed the time stamp and map of the location. "Oh, my God! There they are, my dear Dyanna and Lily Jade."

"She looks pretty happy for a captive woman," said Dandy. He studied the photo of me holding Lily Jade up in the air, taken minutes before. "She must know we will take care of her."

"I doubt that they have told her anything yet, except that she is hostage."

"It's early in the game," said Dandy. "They will wear her down if we don't move fast. It's got to be quick and dirty."

"Jacob thinks Bravano might want to leave the country. He has offered to help him in exchange for Dyanna's life."

"Well, Jack, we will just do everything we can to make this happen. I'm going to call my friend Sullivan at the Bureau. We can bring them in on the kidnapping charge alone, but it will be dangerous. One wrong move and guys like that panic. She could be dead a heartbeat."

"Let me call Bravano now. Shall I tell him about the Walnut Jet?"

"Wait until we have cancelled the deal. Always have something good to sweeten the news, Jack. This guy sounds pretty desperate."



Jacob stepped out of the shower and shook his head vigorously. He could not stop thinking of the abduction by Bravano and his men. How did they let this happen? It was like dealing with the new idiot president of the United States. You just never know who will have the upper hand.

Ty entered the dressing room with a pot of coffee and some fresh rolls. He poured a cup half full of cream and filled it with the dark brew. He knew exactly what Jacob wanted and silently handed it to his boss.

"Is Teddy up yet?"

"I doubt it. Do you want me to signal him?"

"Never mind. I'll take care of it. Thanks, Ty. This is perfect." Jacob sipped the tasty java and looked at himself in the mirror. Time to deal here. He put some cooling foam on his face and started to shave with the long handled razor he loved. It had belonged to his grandfather, and reminded him of savor faire and power. "Always look like a gentleman" his poppa had said, slapping him on the back. "It goes a long way."

By the time he had shaved and dressed, Jacob knew exactly what he would do. He had to clear the schedule for one of the jets, and find Mas. There would be no one better to handle a rat with kid gloves.

Dyanna and her little girl would be safe and well, if he had anything to do with it. Everyone would get what they wanted, including Anthony Bravano.

## CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

Anthony Bravano was in a state of shock. He couldn't believe what was happening, and all so fast. He hung up the phone after hearing from Jack Walters, and knew that his life was about to change. First, he needed to check in with the boys, to be sure the deal was under control. Donnie could be a hot head, and he wanted to be sure that things went smoothly. He went to the bar and took a gulp of whiskey to steady himself. "Hello, Boss," said Donnie on the first ring. "How's it going?"

"I should ask you that. Any problems with the captives?"

"She's taking care of her baby, and we're just hanging here. Moonie is inside with her all the time."

"I have talked to her people, and they will do what I have asked. No problem. They will be calling me back when the real estate deal is canceled. The other part may take some time."

"How much time? We gotta make some arrangements if this thing is going to last more than today. We are starving, and about to get something to eat. We also need some shuteye."

"Are you comfortable with Moonie watching over with them?"

"Aw, sure. He's been with us for years. This place was his idea."

"Are you well hidden?"

"[Way down a hill in a canyon by the beach. Not a soul in sight](#). I had to give her my water to drink, so we need to stock up on that too."

"If things go well, you won't be there long. Maybe one more night or two. Figure it out so everyone is taken care of. Give Moonie a break after you come back."

He rang off and turned around to find his wife standing in the den. "What the hell is going on here, Anthony? You been down here all night."

"Just some family business. Nothing important."

She walked over to the open bottle and sniffed the top. "Are you drinking at this hour of the morning? You are a fine example for your children."

"Get off my back, Melody. Just go do whatever you want and leave me alone."

"Oh, we'll leave you alone, all right. Today is the day we are going to Disneyland, the kids and me. I guess you've forgotten that?" She moved up under his nose and stuck her finger in his nostril.

"Ouch. Get the fuck away from me. You are such a bitch these days." He wiped a drop of blood from his nose with the back of his hand. "Beat it."

She turned and stomped away, holding her pink robe closed. Anthony took another long snort from the bottle, and stared at himself in the round family mirror. It was encircled with little photos of happy weddings and kids and Christmas. So much for that, he thought.



John Soaring Meadow was brushing his teeth when his phone buzzed, and Ginger brought it in to him. "You might want to take this, John. It's from Southern California."

"Probably Dyanna, checking in." He wiped his face and took the phone. "Good Morning."

"Same to you, John," said Jacob Walnut. "I'm afraid I have bad news. Dyanna has been kidnapped, with her daughter. They took her last night from the Palisades and are holding her captive."

"Oh, God! Why in the world would anyone do that?"

"The man involved is the one buying the property, except now they want it withdrawn. He means business, they have threatened to kill both Dyanna and the baby if his wishes are not met."

"That's ridiculous for some kind of land deal. There must be more to it."

"Of course there is, and I will fill you in soon. But we wanted you to inform Dr. Hawk and Uma right away."

"Uma is in bad shape, Jacob. She had a terrible fall and is in the MedVan here with her brother caring for her."

"I will leave it to you to decide what to say, but Hawk should know right away. His family is in danger."

"I understand. I will tell him now. Promise me that you will keep me posted about every move." "Of course. Talk soon."

John put the phone in his pocket and grabbed his flannel shirt. Ginger was making the bed, and looked up to see tears in his eyes. "What's wrong, honey? Are you OK?"

"They have kidnapped Dyanna and the baby and are holding her somewhere down there. It's something about the land deal she was making. I don't quite understand it, but that doesn't matter. I've got to tell Hawk now."

"I'll go with you," she said.

"No, you stay here and keep an eye on Belinda and Slow Dove. The crew will be arriving soon. Have them continue the lower rooms. Tomas will know what to do." He wiped his eyes and hugged her tight. "Pray for her, Ginger. Pray for Dyanna and Lily Jade."

He was out of the house and gone, tearing away and down the hill as the morning sun washed over the meadows. This could not be happening now, thought John. My poor beautiful Dyanna and her daughter.



I discovered how to open the small window at the end of the trailer, and held Lily Jade up to

the fresh air. I took deep breaths and peered at the sea. Moonie was outside talking to the men, while I walked feverishly around the trailer. It was late in the morning and my heart had begun to pound. The courage I had felt was wearing away, bound up in this tiny place. I could not hear their conversation and Moonie refused to give me any clues. He simply sat there by the door with his gun on the table.

The salty air blew a sweet dream into my mind, as we stood there. I could see my cottage, and the pathway down to the beach. I closed my eyes while Lily Jade wiggled in her sling. It was a tight fit after a couple of months, but the woven fabric moved with her body.

"Hey," said his voice. "What are you doing?"

I turned to find Donnie looming over me. "Get away from that window." He grabbed my arm and dragged me to the couch. "You stay put until I tell you. Got it?"

I nodded my head. "We're making a run for some supplies. Do you want something else to eat, besides that stuff in the basket?"

I shook my head. He was so harsh that I just wanted to block him out.

"OK, lady. Stay away from that window or you will be toast. I'll be the one who pulls the trigger."

I lay down on the couch facing the back, and put the sling beside me. Lily Jade had the Latch in her mouth, and was falling asleep. The sound of the truck on the road signaled their departure. The door slammed and I heard the chair scrape over the floor as Moonie resumed his post. I squeezed my eyes closed to stop from crying. In the distance, I heard the faint crashing of the waves, from the open window. It was 11 am.



John reached the MedVan in record time, and pulled his truck in next to the ramp. He took a deep breath and exhaled, trying to postpone the inevitable. Hawk appeared at the door and waved at him, moving down the noisy metal field to the dirt. He walked over to the truck as John emerged.

"Good Morning, John," said Hawk, with a smile. He hugged his blood brother warmly.

"Not so good, Hawk. Come and walk with me."

"What's wrong?" John put his arm around Hawk and guided him down the trail.

"Dyanna and the baby have been kidnapped down in Southern California."

"That can't be right. She is with her attorney. There must be a mistake."

"She was taken from the place she was staying, last night."

Hawk stopped in his tracks and looked up at the sky. "I have to tell you, John... my head has been full of nightmares and fear for weeks now. This feeling of dread. I thought it was Uma and her fall, but now I know the truth. I am so afraid of losing my girls."

John looked at the tortured eyes of his dear Esalen brother. "You know better than to ignore the spirit, Hawk. Why did you keep silent?"

"I thought it was just all this love, this devotion that was playing with my soul. The more you love, the more you fear loss."

"We will make a prayer to the great spirits, Hawk. It will be the first one we have done together. How soon can you leave this place?"

"What about Uma? I should tell her, but I hate to use her healing energy for such a fearful event."

"She is strong. She will rise to the occasion, trust me. We need her spirit to pray with us. We must all pray as one."

"I will tell her now, and come to the meadow in an hour. It will be high noon, so we can use the necklace for the ceremony of birth. Have Slow Dove bring it to you in the case. Tell him all that has happened. He is a special young man. We can use his fortitude and innocence to prevail." He hugged John's powerful body and walked toward the MedVan.

John watched Hawk disappear inside before he moved. His brain was frozen with the anticipation of what lay ahead. There was so much to do, and so little time.

Inside the MedVan, Uma was listening carefully to the sounds of the wind, and the footsteps that took her brother outside. She was beginning to feel the circulation in her left side, and rejoiced at the pain. Now she knew she was healing. This was something familiar to conquer. But there was something else going on that was a cause of uneasiness. The mood between Hawk and the woman who was working with him seemed strained. Maybe it was her imagination, which was entirely possible when one had to lie still for hours and days.

Now Hawk returned to the long medical room and made his way to her bed. His eyes were focused and strong as he reached for her hand and squeezed it. "My sister, I must ask for help. Do you have the energy to listen to my problem?"

"Of course. It will give me something else to think about besides myself."

"Dyanna and Lily Jade have been captured and held for ransom somewhere in Southern California. They have been threatened with death if the deal she was making is not revoked. This is all we know right now, Jacob Walnut called John a few minutes ago."

"My poor Dyanna," said Uma. "She will be tested beyond her breaking point unless she listens to her heart." Tears welled up in Uma's eyes, as she stared at Hawk. "She knows how to deal with hardship, and has been through a lot with you. I believe in her, Steven. You must believe in her too."

"We are going into the mountains for the ceremony. John and I will take the birth pieces Slow Dove has made from Dyanna's body and mine. We will make peace with the spirits and ask for life. Will you pray with us, Uma?"

"I am praying right now, as you speak. She is my charge and has been so for a long time. I gave her life when she was broken, and now I will ask for a second blessing. That beautiful child needs her mother, and so do we."

Hawk squeezed her hand again, and bent down to kiss her lips. "What would we do without you?"

"Let's hope that will not be your next prayer." Uma opened her eyes and smiled. Go and do your magic. They will live with us again, Hawk. I feel sure of it."



The doorbell rang as Anthony stepped from the shower, and he peered out of the bedroom window to see the FedEx truck in the driveway. He grabbed a towel and ran down the stairs as the bell rang again. "Sorry, I was upstairs," he said, as he faced the delivery man.

"Mr. Bravano?"

"Yes."

"I have a registered envelope for Melody Bravano. Is she here?"

"No, she took the kids to Disneyland today. Can I sign for it?"

The man handed over the pen and the document, and pointed to the bottom line. Anthony signed and took the large envelope, wondering what Melody was up to.

"Thank you, sir," said the man. "Have a nice day." He literally skipped down the driveway, as Anthony closed the door. He put the envelope on the kitchen table and grabbed

a handful of Doritos. It was lunchtime, and he was hungry. Soon he had piled several layers of lunchmeat on the whole wheat bread and doused it with mustard. He sat down to eat, and pulled the envelope over in front of him. The label said "Law Offices of Stevens and Sadowsky."

Anthony took a huge bite of his sandwich and the mustard oozed out onto the manila paper. It began to soak through as he finished the other half, wiping his fingers with a dishtowel. Melody would scream if her papers were ruined, so he stood up and found the scissors in the drawer to cut open the heavy tape. Inside was a sheaf of papers entitled "Bravano vs. Bravano, Divorce and Custody. He stared at the front page and read over and over the next line: Melody V. Bravano vs. Anthony Bravano, Jr.

His phone buzzed as he turned the pages and read the documents describing his home, vehicles and children. It was a number he did not recognize, but he answered anyway. "Yeah, Bravano here."

"Anthony Bravano?"

"That's me. Who's this?" He opened the refrigerator and popped a can of Budweiser, ready for anything.

"My name is Jacob Walnut and I am calling on behalf of Jack Walters. I am a good friend of Dyanna Falconer and Mr. Walters as well."

"So?"

"First of all, I am happy to tell you that the real estate contract offered for your property in Pacific Palisades has been canceled. Your realtor will be calling any time, I'm sure."

"How about the government investigation about the title?"

"That is another matter, Mr. Bravano. And none of my business. What is my business is to make you an offer. Will you hear me out?"

"Yes, yes."

"We happen to know that you have been suffering the consequences of family matters and are the target of threats from various people. Things are not going so well for you, are they Mr. Bravano?"

"That's putting it mildly."

"I own two large private jets, Mr. Bravano. I will fly you anywhere in the world today, if you want to get out the country. I have my people ready and waiting. All we ask in return is the release of Dyanna and her baby girl, no strings attached."

"Are you kidding? Where would I go?" He sat down on the kitchen chair, unable to stand.

"Anywhere you like, as long as we can land the plane. Do you have a place you dream of? Somewhere you love? It might be a good time for you to disappear, Anthony. Think about it. We will need a couple of hours to make the flight plan and get clearance."

"Let me think about it. I will call you in an hour." Anthony looked at mustard smeared papers scattered on the table, and the open package of bologna on the sink. He thought of Chase and his awful mean wife. He thought of losing his house and his wife and kids, after all these years. Maybe Sicily wasn't such a bad idea.

I awoke from my sleep feeling heavy and nauseated. The air in the trailer was rancid with heat and cigarette smoke. Moonie was slumped over the table, barely awake as I hobbled to the bathroom. I sat on the toilet wanting to throw up, but not quite. I had left Lily Jade out there on the sofa sound asleep, so I rushed to wash my face and open the tiny glass slats next to the sink. I took many deep breaths and slowly calmed down. It was the seeds of a panic attack in the making, one which I could not afford. In the diaper bag was a vial of peppermint for calming and sore gums, and I sat down on the couch with some on my tongue.

Moonie stood before me and asked what was wrong. He was clearly not in great shape himself. "I need some fresh air," I said. "Can't we just go outside for a few minutes? I promise to behave, Moonie. I promise."

Soon we were walking down the steep path to a deserted stretch of beach. The breeze was coming up and it blew my hair around, while Lily Jade peered out of her sling. Moonie lagged behind us, as I walked toward the ocean. When I reached the waterline, the surf rolled in over my bare feet, and I thought I had gone to heaven. I took the baby out of her sling and walked in a circle, with the waves around us. For a few minutes, I felt alive again. It was like coming home.

## CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

Hawk arrived at the ranch before noon, and found John outside with his men. They were pouring concrete for the foundation on the new house, business as usual. He looked out over the verdant meadow where we had met, and closed his eyes.

John tapped him on the shoulder and they went inside. Laid out on the kitchen table was a leather bound package from Slow Dove. Hawk opened it to reveal the finished ceremonial necklace for the mother of his child. The chain was created from the dark hair cut the day after Lily Jade was born. Hawk could barely remember it, except for the heat of the noonday sun.

They heard a knock on the door, and Slow Dove entered. "Good afternoon, Dr. Hawk. I see you have opened the package. I must remind you that the birth necklace must not be touched by human hands before the tribal ceremony." His face was solemn as he stood straight as an arrow.

"Yes, I am aware. But thank you for your concern. This is not something we had anticipated. Dyanna is in great danger, along with my daughter. It was the first thing that came to mind, to represent them both in the ceremony and prayers."

"And rightly so, Sir. I have studied these events many times before beginning my art. The purity of the items involved are of the utmost importance. And do you know, by the way, that you must drink a large glass of rainwater for each person in the prayer?"

John laughed, despite the mood of the room. "Well, I don't think we have any rainwater stored, but we have some in the stone jugs. Ginger keeps them in the back, where they stay cool for the men."

"Is there anything more I can do to help?"

"Find a quiet place and pray in silence for an hour, when we leave. And wait for our return at the top of the meadow. You will be the watchman," said John. He stepped forward and embraced the slender young man. "Go now."

Hawk looked out at the bright blue sky over the meadow. John brought two large glasses full of water, and they drank it in concert.

"I will carry the gifts," said Hawk. He folded the leather pouch and slipped it onto his back. They walked outside and across the gardens, disappearing down the slope to the meadows.

Slow Dove watched them, until they were out of sight.



Dandy Brown sat in his office as Brian Shoupe entered with Sgt. Dimitrius. They had been conferring in the conference room, while Dandy spoke to his connection at Crystal Cove. "I will be in touch, Laura. Thanks so much for your help, as always."

"Sit down, gentlemen. What have you got?"

"The drone will be a perfect way to locate the exact spot where they are holding Dyanna, if we

decide to use it," said Brian. "The only problem is the noise, according to the techs."

"In other words, you don't want to warn Dyanna's captors before you are ready?"

"Exactly" said Sgt. Dimitrius. "One false move at this point could tip the scales. We can't take a chance with the two hostages inside."

"Jacob Walnut has made his offer to Bravano, so we may get a break there. In the meantime, you will be welcome at one of the cottages at Crystal Cove to surveil and wait. It is less than a mile from the point of capture."

"What about the area above the road? Is there any place to watch them from there?" Dimitrius was scribbling on his ever-present small notebook.

"Laura says the road between the Cove and the walled Smith estate is wide open, with a small shoulder past the Shake Shack. It would be too obvious for anyone approaching. There is literally no place to hide." Dandy smiled and stood up. "Let's get some lunch, before you two head down there."



Anthony went out to the back yard, and sat on the tree swing. His son had loved to play there when he was young, and they spent a lot of time under that big Oak. He looked at his watch and saw that he must call Jacob Walnut back soon. He stood up and looked at the pool full of leaves, and wondered who would take care of all that.

Inside, he found his phone and placed the call. Jacob answered on the second ring. "Hello, Mr. Bravano. Do you have news for me?"

**"I want to go to Sicily, Taormina, or Corleone."**

"All right, then we can land you at Catania. My brother flies in there all the time. When are you able to leave?"

"How about now?"

"Have you made the decision to release Dyanna and her daughter?"

"How about this? I will call my men from the plane, after we leave the United States." "We want her safety guaranteed now."

"I can tell you that she and the baby are fine. They are being held in a safe place with three men. But I need to be sure about you, how do I know this is for real?"

"Well, when you reach Burbank Airport and go to the private runways, you will see two large jets with my name on them. You will park your car in the lot and board the Jet with my man in charge. You two will be alone except for the pilot. He will show you the route to Sicily, if you wish."

"I can call my men from the aircraft, is that right?"

"We have equipment for international phones and wifi on board. We will monitor your call and

if you do not follow through, we will simply dump you back in the middle of Texas, or some other God forsaken place. Perhaps we will push you out over the Atlantic. A nice way to die.”

“That would be murder,” said Bravano.

Jacob laughed out loud for what seemed like a long time. “You are quite a comedian, Mr. Bravano. What the hell do you expect, after your performance with Dyanna? You are lucky to get this chance.”

“I will leave in a few minutes. It shouldn’t take more than an hour to get to the airport, unless the traffic is bad.”

“Don’t forget your passport,” said Jacob.



Moonie was clearly exhausted, and nodded off at the table. His phone rang at regular intervals, so they kept track of him. The other two had checked into a motel in North Laguna, and filled their bellies with takeout food from Safeway. They would make food run for Moonie after sunset, like the clever bandits they were. I had visions of the ocean in my head, and walked from window to window, holding my daughter. She was not nursing as well as usual, but at least we were carrying on.

I had heard nothing at all from Moonie about my family, and I wondered what had happened when Jack and Brian showed up. Surely they were notified of my capture. It was too much to deal with. Now my job lay in front of me, on my knees, wiggling her tiny hands and watching me talk to her.

I thought of Hawk and how much he loved to play tickle and other games with LJ every chance he had. I wondered what he would think about my capture, and if they told Uma. Suddenly all my life appeared in scenes from the past. There had to be a way for me to get through this awful time. The last face I saw was John Soaring Meadow, as I lay down to rest. I went to sleep with a smile on my face, dreaming of Big Sur.



It was not a coincidence that the pathways of our minds connected that afternoon, for Uma was working her magic as well. She was unable to move but her powerful hands clenched as she prayed and chanted under her breath. Timothy Grant was afraid she was having some kind of mental issues, but he held himself in check. Elena was sleeping after a long watch the night before, so he was on his own. He monitored the tall strong woman in the bed as she clenched her eyes closed and breathed deeply. It was if she was under some kind of spell.

Miles away, Hawk and John Soaring Meadow stripped off their clothes and began the dip into the icy water of Paragoh Creek. John was completely paranoid to immerse himself, with memories of his tortuous escape from the fire on these ragged banks, but Hawk gently pulled him in. The spell would be broken by the two of them.

They reached the outer bank and climbed naked onto the rough terrain. It was much cooler with the trees shadowing the path, but they walked barefoot and body up the hill into the forest. In

the middle of a grove, they found the place of worship. It was sheltered on all sides and cast a shadow on the earth. John gathered the branches and acorns, and Hawk made the circle for a fire. The precious package of goods was laid safely under their clothes as they worked. Not a word was spoken, according to tradition.

When the center was ready, the leather stretched over a frame made of branches and the precious necklace lay on top. They opened the cover and a large piece of jade sparkled at the end of the chain. The carving on the face was a flower surrounded by the sea. It was exquisite and executed with skill.

They sat down opposite each other as the sun began to set in the hills. The air was cold and their naked bodies shivered. In the last ray of light, John lit the fire. He stood up and raised his hands across the coals, reaching over the flames to his brother. Hawk made a nick in his forearm and handed John the sharp stone. They united their hearts as blood brothers once again, and began the chant to save my life.

They sent their love and courage across the miles to bless Lily Jade and me as we lay sleeping. They prayed for us and anointed the gifts of life over the fire. Many secret words were spoken and tears were shed. It was an occasion of silent destiny.



Anthony Bravano arrived at Burbank Airport and drove into the fenced area for private aircraft. There were several small single engine planes at one end, but the area he was seeking was straight ahead. On the right side stood several large jets, each in front of a hangar. The last one said "WALNUT BROTHERS" in the familiar burgundy of their logo. It was a piece of cake. His stomach stopped churning as he pulled into a parking space next to the hangar. At last, he was here.

His forehead was full of sweat from the drive on a packed freeway, so he reached for a tissue and wiped it dry. As he looked at the sleek silver jet parked next to him, he saw the Walnut Brothers logo painted on the tail with burgundy markings. He was suddenly aware that his shirt was stuck to the leather seat of the truck, and stepped out of the cab. Now he felt better. Several cars passed while he gathered himself, and plunged ahead to the tarmac. His tan duffle bag was light and he swung it over his shoulder. As he approached the stairs to the jet, a man appeared in the doorway and waved. It was too late to change his mind.

He climbed the metal stairs to the top and found himself looking at a small Asian man with a big smile. "Greetings, Sir," he said. "Welcome to the Walnut Brothers #2. My name is Mas."

Anthony wiped his damp head and shook the hand offered to him. "Anthony Bravano."

"Yes, I know. We have been expecting you. I must ask you before you board if you have your credentials. Your passport mainly, wallet and mobile phone."

"Yes, they are all here with me. My truck is parked right over there. The black double cab."

"We recommend you surrender the keys now, and we will take care of the vehicle. It will be discovered in the public parking, on the other side of the airport."

Anthony felt his heart sink. His truck was probably the most favorite thing he owned, and now he probably would not see it again." He handed the keys to Mas, and looked into the luxurious

cabin.

"Please feel free to choose your seat anywhere on the airplane. Only the bedroom area is private." Mas stood aside and waited while Anthony wandered down the aisle. He finally sat down at a foursome area with a table in the middle for games or refreshments.

"May I bring you something to drink, Mr. Bravano? The pilot is finishing his flight plan and will see you shortly. I believe you are traveling to Cantagna, Sicily?" Bravano nodded and looked out the window.



"How about something cool, like a fresh iced tea? Or maybe something stronger?" "Bourbon and soda, lots of ice."

Jack Walters was in a meeting when Jacob called, and stepped outside for a moment. "We've got him on the plane" said Jacob, "and they are ready to depart in about twenty minutes. He has agreed to call his men as soon as they are over the Atlantic Ocean and out of US territory. As if that matters."

"Well, you called that one, Jacob. I guess you understand his type."

"He's one unhappy guy. It took him less than an hour to dump his entire life and drive up here to the airport. He's under a lot of pressure, so we need to handle him with care. Mas is the best in the world for that. He was raised with the Kennedy clan."

"Dandy has secured a place for Brian and Dimetrius to watch that end of the beach. They think it will be the best way to reach Dyanna."

"Bravano has promised to make that call and set her free. I am betting he will do that. We can listen to him on the mobile lines, and it will all be recorded. We also grab the mobile device numbers and locations at that time."

"Wow, pretty cool. Like Homeland," said Jack.

"I told him that if he failed to perform, we would dump him out in the ocean, and pull his toenails out, one by one."

"No, you didn't, Jacob! Seriously?"

"What do you think? Don't worry, he will get his, one way or another. Nobody takes Dyanna like that, and gets away with it."

"Please keep me posted."



The air at Crystal Cove was salty and cool when Brian drove into the parking lot below the highway. This area was reserved for the State Parks employees and select guests. They were given the key to the last house on the south end, with a view of the cove and the beach. The little gray

shingled place had a parking space next to it, which was completely out of view from the rest of the Cove.

Brian set up his camera and phone equipment, along with the box of tech supplies he carried with his drone. It was against the law to fly here under normal circumstances, but the State authorities had cleared them outside the park itself. Now Brian knew that there was a beach around the rocky marine life barrier, and then the last cove at the end. They knew the location of the trailer offhand, from the diagnostics. It was just a matter of figuring out how to come after us without any harm.

Dimitrius settled in upstairs in a room that was on the south corner, and had views of the next cove. He specialized in placing the right people at the right time, to free hostages without injury. The sun had begun to set and his night goggles sat on the table at the ready.

He stood up and stretched his long legs and arms as the sound of the surf crashed on the shores of Crystal Cove. It would be a good outcome if everything went as planned.



Hawk returned to the compound after the ceremony, and lay on our bed alone. He was completely spent, having used all the energy available during the hours with John. He could barely move as he lay face down on the pillow, arms stretched out full length. Ampalia had seen him arrive, but carefully stayed in her room. She knew his pain was unspeakable, and would be there for him when she was needed.

The rooms had been cleaned today, and she cried as they entered Lily Jade's nursery. It was the saddest thing she had ever seen, the absence of that beautiful little girl and her mother.

At the MedVan, Uma drank some warm soup with fresh bread on the side. Elena had been able to get her attention with a foot bath, and a promise of more in the morning. Dr. Timothy Grant took a long walk on his break, watching the sun set in Big Sur. This was really a strange place, he mused. Stanford Med was so simple, in comparison.

Geno chose the sunset as a time to deliver his friend's food, and scurried across the road a block away to hike in. They didn't dare drive close to that trailer now, and waited for news from the boss. He scooted down the sandy hill next to the walls of the famous Irvine Estate and walked in from the beach.

Moonie was sitting on the steps outside, barely visible in the twilight. He was drawing circles in the sand below, and smiled bleakly when he saw the vittles. Geno explained that the boss was going to call later in the evening, for the next directions.

They both desperately wanted to go home.

Inside the trailer, I took some baby wipes into the bathroom and cleaned my body as well as possible. Just tasting the salty ocean on my arm was such a thrill, and I licked away like a cat.

We were all a little bit crazy that night.

## CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

Anthony Bravano called Orange County, California USA at midnight, local time. He was feeling no pain, and assisted by Mas dialing the right number.

The clouds were thick outside the port window, and drops covered the glass. It would soon be dawn in Sicily.

The Atlantic Ocean rumbled below, and when they were flying over Iceland it was easy to see the waves tossing. Anthony had never been on an airplane this size, and certainly not this caliber. He soaked it all in like a sponge, and kept his whistle wet with good bourbon. Mas was careful to feed him rich cheeses and meats with dense bread, so that his passenger was able to function.

Donnie answered after several rings, grabbing his phone from the rickety nightstand. He was groggy from a snoring sleep and several tall Buds. He could hear the noise from some kind of engine as Anthony yelled into the phone. "Hey, there Don. How's it going?"

"OK, boss. We were wondering if you forgot us down here."

"Sorry, didn't get that. Say it again. I'm in a plane over the ocean."

"What are you doing there," said Donnie. "You're supposed to be taking care of this mess with the land." Geno rolled over and opened his eyes,

"Never you mind. Just do as I tell you. Let her go."

"What do you mean, the woman and her kid?"

"Who else would we be discussing?"

"Well, now, don't be short with me, Anthony. We've been here sweating this thing out for two days."

"I said let her go. It's all settled. Ok?"

"We're in a motel, miles away. It's the middle of the night. Can't we wait until morning? It's no biggie, Moonie is with her and the kid."

"Go as soon as it gets light. That is an order. You don't get paid if you screw this up. Understand?"

"Fine. We'll take care of it." The line went dead and he slammed the phone down on the mattress.

Geno came out of the bathroom. "What was that all about?"

"We have to go back there and release the lady and the baby. First thing in the morning," Gino slipped back into bed and covered his head with a pillow.

"Did you hear me, bean brain?" said Donnie.

"Go fuck yourself," came the muffled voice.

Donnie jumped over to the bed and ripped the pillow off. He put his hands on the sweaty neck and started to squeeze. "Don't you ever talk to me like that, you stupid pig. I'll kill you and all of them right now."

"Geeze, Donnie, lighten up. Go back to sleep."



I heard the first sounds just before dawn, as I nursed Lily Jade. We were way off any kind of schedule, and my breasts were very full. I had been drinking the water all day, and had lots of milk. As she suckled next to me on the sofa, I listened again. It sounded like something flying overhead, from far away. Then closer, and over the roof.

Moonie was asleep outside on the steps, where he had positioned himself after his double cheeseburger. He didn't even come inside for the toilet, so we were on our own. As I switched the baby to my left breast, the sounds came again. This time it was closer and I heard the roar. Could it be that someone was actually looking for us?

I took my time with Lily Jade, stroking her little head and humming over the noise. Now the sounds of the morning waves chimed in, and I carried her over to the window at the end of the room. The first light came slowly, and I watched the ocean between two slats of filthy glass. I wanted to get outside again in the worst way, so I decided to get Lily Jade ready for another little walk in the sand. It was something to look forward to, amongst all the dread.

Moonie came inside an hour later, stumbling around like a drunk. He was very tired and probably slept sitting up all night. He didn't speak to me as he went into the bathroom and closed the door.



Mas signaled Jacob on the mobile wires and typed in a message. "He has called Orange County and spoken to his men. The command was to release the captives. They agreed to do so early in the morning."

Jacob read the message in his bed, wondering why they were waiting instead of immediate release. That was the deal. Well, no worries now, it was 5am and time to go to plan B. He called Brian, who was already upstairs with Dimitrius. They were surveying with the drones.

"I don't know why they are screwing around," said Jacob. "Mas said the men agreed to go at dawn, so something should be happening. Can you see anything from the air yet?"

"It's a bit foggy down there," said Dimitrius, and just getting light. We were testing earlier, but the trailer was dark. There appeared to be one man on the steps by the door. He didn't move at all."

"I know we have to take this slow," said Jacob. "I'm just losing my patience. Should I delay the arrival of Bravano in Sicily?"

"What good will that do? He doesn't seem to have much clout with these men. Let's wait and see what the morning brings. There are two very special lives at stake."

"They are coming close to Catagna Airport" said Jacob. "Once Bravano steps off the plane, we are done with him."

"Sicily is a small country, Mr. Walnut. He will stick out like a sore thumb, if we need to find him." Dimitrius chuckled. "Brian is keeping watch with the binoculars as well, and they are having some kind of surf contest here today. An excellent distraction."

Jacob rang off, restless and impatient. There was only one thing he could think of to do that might move things along.



Moonie came out of the bathroom in a better mood, nodding to us as he sat down at the table and checked his phone. The service was sketchy inside at best, but at least he could charge it. Someone had left the juice on after they deserted this dump, so hooray for them.

I sat with Lily Jade and closed my eyes, listening to her breathe. I was a little concerned that she was congested from the dust and dirt of the room, and kept her swaddled in the green blanket. Now I tried to fit her into the sling and found that it was a tight squeeze. She sucked happily on the Latch, watching her crazy mother. I wondered if she would remember any of this in years to come, if there were to be any. Suddenly, the thought of losing her hit me like a brick, and I started to cry. Moonie looked over at me, and stood up. "What's wrong, lady?"

I just shook my head, unable to speak. He approached us and stood there watching for a long time. "How about another walk out to the ocean? It's pretty early and there's nobody around."

I looked up at him, with his bloodshot eyes and rumpled clothes. He was doing the best he could, having been left alone with us. I felt kind of sorry for him, in spite of myself. His phone rang just then, and he picked it up from the table. "Hello, Donnie," he said, wearily. "Where are you guys?"

"We are on our way soon, Moonie boy. Maybe a quick stop for some coffee, you want some?" "Or how about a big steak," said Geno, laughingly.

"Have you heard from the boss?"

"Yeah, we've got some business to discuss. We won't be long."

Moonie put the phone in his pocket and went outside. I stood up with Lily Jade and went to wipe my eyes. I splashed my face in the bathroom and made sure her diaper was dry, hoping for that walk.



Geno munched happily on a cinnamon roll and balanced his hot coffee as they left Jack in the Box. They pulled onto Pacific Coast Highway heading north, and drove past the small businesses and homes of yesteryear. At the first signal, Donnie took a gulp of coffee and turned to his friend. "I think maybe we better change our plans a little bit, Geno, my man. It's not a good idea to let this woman go, with what she knows."

"What do you mean, she don't know shit. All she's done is sit in that trailer with her kid." "I want her

dead. The kid too. Clean slate.”

“Awww, no! I’m not killing no baby, or that lady either.”

“She can finger us both, and Moonie too. We go down for idiot Bravano’s sake, while he flies off to some fucking place in the sun. We’ll make Moonie do it. He don’t care. He loves Bravano.”

“I don’t like this at all, not one bit. I don’t want nothing to do with it.”

“OK, then, shall I let you out now, here on the highway?” Donnie reached under the seat and pulled out a small revolver. The light changed and he drove forward, one hand in his lap with the gun. Soon they were out on the open road, passing several private estates and Emerald Bay. Geno rolled down the window letting the chilly air blow through the cab.

“Look, I don’t want this any more than you do. But we’re in a bind here. There are a lot of big people involved now. We gotta do this and get the hell away from here before

anybody knows what’s going on. Come on, Geno. We been together since fourth grade.”

“I won’t kill anyone. I refuse to do that. But you know what, we’re in this pretty deep, and not a penny do we have to show for it. Maybe we can get some ransom for her, huh?”

Now they were approaching the trailer site, and a spectacular sunrise appeared. Donnie shaded his eyes and slowed down, looking for the turnoff. When he skidded off the road into the gravel, the truck ground to a halt. “Ok, here’s what we’re gonna do. We’re driving the truck down there again and you will turn it around while I take care of things. That way, we have a fast getaway. This time we go north, just like we came.”

I wrapped the baby in the green blanket and tucked her into the sling while Moonie found an old jacket. It was still chilly outside, and he was in no mood to be cold. He just wanted this whole thing to be over. I was aware of his despair, and said nothing until we were [outside and making our way down to the beach](#).

“Thank you,” I said, turning back to face him. He nodded and just lagged behind, shuffling his old tennis shoes against the rocks. The path was damp and slippery, so I was careful in my bare feet.

At the foot of the hill, the sandy dunes had blown across the steps and I picked my way over the bumps to the shore. The water line was way back, with the tide out, so I just stepped slowly along, holding Lily Jade close. I assumed he was right behind me, but soon the wind had taken my attention. It was blowing from the south, scooping up the waves along the shore.

I stood for a moment looking to the north, and saw that a group of ducks were carrying their boards to the water. It was funny name for the wrangling surfers who populated the shores of Laguna Beach and south, but one that I had grown up with.

I continued to approach the sea, and looked again at the gathering of boards in the distance. Now the trailer was out of sight and in my peripheral vision, I could barely see Moonie. He was way back there. I didn’t want him to see me look, for fear he might come after me.

We reached the water and I hugged Lily Jade tight against me. This time, the waves were fierce and breaking further out as I walked along the wet sand. A strong gust of wind pushed us from behind, and it was then that I thought of my escape. I looked up the beach to see the men with

their arms in the air, the international symbol of the sport for help and safety. They were getting ready to launch into competition, pulling on gloves and hoods. I took a deep breath and turned around, to see how close my captor was. The wind hit me with another shot, and when I opened my eyes, I saw Moonie's back, heading toward the path. It was a sign from heaven, and I jumped at the chance.

I stepped forward, holding Lily Jade close to me, and started moving up the waterline. He was still walking away when I began to run for my life.



Above the beach, the big white truck made its way down to the trailer. The wind had picked up and sent small pebbles and sand across the windshield. Donnie waited until there was a break, and continued to the clearing. The trailer was dark and Moonie's truck remained next to it.

"OK, I'm going in there and check it out. You turn this baby around, and take it easy with the wind." He opened the door and stepped out. "Just leave the engine running." Geno nodded and slid over to the steering wheel.

Donnie entered the trailer and looked around. Moonie's phone was on the table, but he was nowhere in sight. And where was the lady and her baby? He opened the bathroom door and found it empty. Panic ran through his veins as he stepped outside again. Geno was inching the truck around to return and didn't see him.

At the end of the trailer was a path that led down to the ocean. Maybe Bravano had ordered the hit already. He followed the path down the hill, stopping several times for the wind to subside. It was blowing up a storm.

At the bottom of the hill, Donnie reached the beach and saw a lone figure walking toward him. Moonie had his head down and did not see him as he scrambled across the sand.

Finally Donnie was close enough to wave. He shouted out to Moonie as he approached. The man looked up at him with a face that was full of pain. "Hey, Moonie. Where's the lady? Where you been?" Moonie stood still and shrugged, staring at the sand. "Come on, there's nobody in the trailer. Where is she? Did you get rid them?"

Moonie just stared at him and shook his head.

"Oh My God, did you let them go? You stupid little man. You dumb fuck." Donnie reached into his jacket and pulled out the gun, firing three times. He watched as the Moonie fell to his knees, and collapsed.

Donnie looked around at the windy beach, barren and gray in the first light. He saw nothing and ran back to the path. When he reached the top, he put his gun in the back pocket and ran to the truck. Geno was sitting in the driver's seat as he opened the door. "Move over. Fast."

"Hey, what's going on. You're white as a sheet."

"Fasten your seatbelt, and shut up." Donnie threw the truck into gear and started up the hill.

"You'd better take it slow or we'll go off the side here," said Geno. "Where's Moonie? Is he coming

behind us?"

Donnie stopped the truck and looked behind them. "Moonie's dead. There's no sign of the lady and her kid. We've got to get out of here, pronto."

Suddenly, a small black object flew across the hill and swooped overhead. "What was that," said Geno. "Holy Shit!"

"I don't know but there comes another one." He released the brake and hit the gas, shooting the heavy truck up the hill with the tires squealing. As they reached the highway, Geno turned around to look. All he could see was the ocean, and those two little drones soaring up the coast.

Donnie peeled out heading south, back to Laguna. There had to be a way out from the coast down there.

## CHAPTER FORTY

I ran into the light with the roaring wind at my back. It was hard to move in the sand with Lily Jade hanging on my chest, so I held one arm against her and began to shout. "Help! Help!" I screamed as loud as I could, but we were just around the bend to the second beach. In the distance, [I could see the surfboards lined up](#) in front of Crystal Cove. I had to get their attention before Moonie came after me with a gun.

I raised my arm in distress and plunged ahead. Gusts of heavy winds pushed us forward and my legs took on a life of their own. There was no time to look back, and I shouted again for help. A surge of adrenaline shot through my body and my feet took wings. Now the wind was blocked behind us in the curve, and I could hear the sounds of motors in the air. "HELP! HELP! HELP!" I shouted, raising the other arm. The group of surfers turned to watch me running toward them, and I screamed again "HELP!"

All the while, Lily Jade was traveling along with me in a rhythm that we made, and it became easier to move. The rocks at the marine sanctuary appeared closer as two of the surfers raised their hands and ran toward me. Others paddled out to sea and stood up for a look. They waved as we ran past them. "HELP! HELP" I screamed, one last time. I met them at the end of Crystal Cove beach and they stretched out their arms.

I fell to my knees as more people arrived. One of them held me close and helped to lift Lily Jade over my head. He peered inside the sling as she screamed bloody murder. Hooray for you, my girl! Shout it out!



Above us, in the shingled house, Brian Shoupe watched the scene with his binoculars. As I came closer, he grabbed the phone and started the video. "Look at that," he shouted, "it's Dyanna! Look, Dimitrius!" The seasoned FBI expert shook his head, and continued to follow us with a drone. Below them, a pack of young men gathered around me as I lay on the sand. I could barely breathe and my heart was pounding wildly. One of them brought Lily Jade down to my side. I reached over to touch her, and she stopped crying. They all jumped up and shouted "hooray," while the group parted to allow the medic on duty to come through. He knelt next to me and looked into my eyes. His big brown hands held my wrist and counted the pulse as he whispered "Hello there, little Mama. Looks like you had quite a time." I opened my mouth to speak, but could only say "kidnapped."

Now Brian's smiling face appeared as he knelt down beside me. "Dyanna! We are so thankful to see you!" He leaned forward and kissed my cheek. "Are you all right?"

The medic cleared the way and a stretcher appeared through the crowd. They slid me on and placed Lily Jade next to me. I held her very tight as they carried us over the beach and into the ambulance parked nearby. She was still fussing, but I didn't worry. She was fine, and barely had a grain of sand on her.



Jacob Walnut pulled some strings to get into Crystal Cove that morning, the security was tight.

Dimitrius had to flag him in as they surveyed the scene on the beach. He noted the ambulance on the far corner of the parking lot, and the ruckus around it. His driver dropped him near the crowd and waited nearby. The stretcher that held us was surrounded by people, but Jacob saw my blond hair hanging over the side. "They've got her," he whispered to Dimitrius. He nodded. "She's got the baby with her. Why don't you come up to the house for a minute, while they check Dyanna out?"

There are some new developments."

They cut across the parking lot to the house where Brian stood with several men. He waved them over, holding his phone for more video. The crowd on the beach was milling around, many of them anxious to know the outcome of the blonde mother and her baby girl. They would soon be setting out on the waves, and planned an impromptu salute for later.

"Hello, Mr. Walnut," said Brian. "I just talked to Jack, and told him the good news. He and Dandy Brown are waiting for the medics to check her out."

"What about the captors," said Jacob. "What happened to them? They were supposed to release her hours ago."

"We have located a body on the beach, near the trailer. They are checking that out right now," said Dimitrius. "The thing is, we watched the other two peel out of here like hell on wheels, heading south towards Laguna. There is a team on them as well."

"Let me show you the video of Dyanna," said Brian. "You won't believe her racing down that beach, it was such a sight."

"And very surreal, considering the circumstances," murmured Dimitrius.

Brian held the phone up and played two minutes of video, with the sounds of the ocean and the drones flying above. Jacob watched as the figure came closer and he could see my long hair flying in the wind. "She has her arm up," he said. "Why is she running like that with the baby?"

"It's a signal to all water sports, especially surfing. Danger, or help, come now. They all watched again, and this time the close up focus was amazing. We have turned up the sound," said Dimitrius, "and you can hear Dyanna shout as the men run toward her."

"I have to go down there. I must see her now, and the baby. They tell me that you have her bag in your car, Brian. And the keys to her car?"

"Yes, sir. I'll go with you."



Inside the ambulance, they removed my hoodie and strapped on a monitor for my heart. The other medic changed Lily Jade's diaper and checked her vitals as well. She screamed bloody murder until they placed her next to me, and I could see her. "It's OK, Lily Jade. I'm right here." I stroked her with my right hand, as she lay close to my face.

"Have you been nursing the entire time of captivity," asked my brown savior James. His soft voice and careful hands were very gentle. Soon a tube was in my vein for hydration, to be sure I was

able to function and feed her. On top of everything else, someone had a lovely clean brush, and they ran it through my tangled hair. They wiped my face and Lily Jade's entire body with a light cleanser, and checked for injuries. They found not a scratch on either one of us.

I closed my eyes with my cheek next to the baby, and fell sound asleep.



Down the beach, FBI Agents swarmed the trailer and path up to the road. They took photos of the tire tracks and some trash left behind. Moonie had been located face down on the beach with three mortal wounds to his belly, heart and chest. His face was crusted in sand, as he lay across the rocky approach to the trailer. Two squad cars stood at the top of the hill, waiting for a crew to remove the body.

The drones had followed the big white truck for a mile, while they raced south to Laguna Beach. There was only one way through town and that was Pacific Coast Highway, so California Highway Patrol cars were stationed immediately at the junction of Laguna Canyon Road and main beach. They had picked up the truck at one point on mobile service, but it went dead as the truck neared city limits. They had no time for overhead surveillance, and relied on their well trained eyes for clues.

Donnie had panicked when he saw the drones swooping overhead, three of them, back and forth. "We've got to get off this highway," he shouted to Geno. "I'm going to turn off at the first side street and parallel towards town. We can hit the Canyon Road from there." They approached a signal in the north part of town, and swung over the oncoming lanes to a wide alley. This would take them around the town by the easiest route. Now Donnie could breathe, and felt sure they would make it out of town. Geno stuck his head out the window and vomited. "Don't you mess up my truck," laughed Donnie. "We're gonna be fine."



When I awoke, Jacob was sitting beside me, looking at Lily Jade. He smiled as I opened my eyes, which was a comforting thing. His strong hand held mine, and he leaned over to kiss my cheek. "Hello, Dyanna," he said, very softly. "Are you feeling better?"

"I guess so. Have I been asleep?"

"For about an hour. They want to be sure you are able to travel, and take care of Lily Jade."

"Oh, God, Jacob! I would give anything to go home now. This has been awful. And so scary. I was afraid they would hurt us, or kill us."

"None of that now, you need to stay calm," said James. He towered over me with a smile. "You are doing fine, Ms. Dyanna. And so is your daughter. You did a good job of caring for her, under the circumstances."

"How soon will you release her," asked Jacob. "I have a private jet waiting at John Wayne airport, at the ready."

"I believe the authorities want to speak to you briefly. Are you able do that?" "Can't it wait? She

has been through hell.”

“It’s all right, Jacob. If I can help, I will. Let’s do it now, before I go home.”

Soon Dimitrius entered the ambulance, and sat next to me. “Hello, Dyanna,” he said. “Like old times, huh?”

“Well, I’d take Provo, Utah over this any time,”

“I know and we will make this short. I will most likely follow up with you in Big Sur, if necessary. But for now, we just need a chain of events. Names and places as you remember. Anything that will help to catch your captors.”

“They broke into the condo in the Palisades while we were sleeping. They must have come in from the back slider. LJ was sleeping with me on the bed when they broke in. They covered my eyes and took us to their truck, and threw us in the back seat. I was blindfolded until we reached the trailer.”

“Did you hear anything that would identify them?”

“Their names were Donnie and Geno. Donnie was driving. They talked to a man on the road by the trailer, all the way down here.”

“Did you get his name?”

“Moonie. He was the one who really watched us. The other two were pigs. They left us there most of the time, and Moonie was alone the whole time.”

“I know you are breastfeeding your daughter. Were you able to take care of her during this time?”

“They brought my diaper bag. I begged them, and they wanted to get out of the condo, so they did it. They also brought a bag of food I had, which saved my life.”

“Ok, I am going to tell you what has happened. We have found a body on the beach with three bullet wounds. He was right below the trailer, on a path going to the beach.”

“Oh, no! They must have killed Moonie. That’s awful.”

“I think that’s plenty for today,” said Jacob. “She’s been through enough.”

“No, Jacob. I’m all right. I’d rather know it all from him.” I turned back to Dimitrius. “So where are the other two? And where is Anthony Bravano? He is the one who staged all this.”

“Bravano traded your life for his escape, and he is out of the country. The other two suspects are running for their lives as we speak. We are tracking them, and they will be apprehended.”

James stepped forward and checked the needle in my left arm. “We are going to check her vitals again, and then she is free to go. Is someone going to handle that, or do we need to make a call?”

“I will take care of Ms. Falconer, Sir” said Jacob. My car and driver are right outside.”

"God Bless you, Dyanna," said Dimitrius. "There were a lot of people working for you here. You are an amazing and lucky woman." He backed out of the area and James took over.



Donnie followed the curving alley behind a row of apartment buildings and houses, careful to keep his speed down. Geno kept the window open, and watched out to the streets when they came to an intersection. So far, so good. Finally, at the end of the alley was a steep hill heading into the town. They stopped at the signal and waited for the light. "I don't see the black and whites," said Geno, as he slumped down in the seat. "You think we ditched them?"

"Of course we did. Now, if this stupid light would change, we'll get back to the 405 and out of here." He looked in the rear view one last time, and turned left as the green light appeared. "Look up Laguna Canyon road on your phone, and see if it hits the freeway".

Geno started his search as they traveled east, passing the famous Art Festival grounds. Donnie had been a fan of the beach in his youth and knew this town better than most. He was sure of the shady country road that headed inland, toward the hills. They were on their way, no doubt about it. He smiled and honked the horn as they picked up speed.

Jacob walked with me to his car, which was waiting a few feet away from the ambulance. I carried Lily Jade in my arms, wrapped in her bright green blanket. We climbed into the back seat and Jacob closed the door. He nodded to the driver and opened the back door. "Mind if I join you girls?"

"Of course not. How can I thank you, Jacob? Are we really going to the airport?"

"Mas is waiting for us right now. They are refueling now, and then you will be on your way to Monterey."

"I love Mas. Wait until he sees Lily Jade."

"I have the keys to your car, and it will be delivered to Big Sur immediately. Brian put all your other things from the condo in your bag. They are in the trunk. Do you want them now, or shall we get out of here?"

"Let's go, Jacob." The driver turned around and headed out to the gate. I looked through the rear window in time to see the surfers waving goodbye.

I looked at the streets of Corona Del Mar as we approached McArthur Boulevard and swung into the right hand lane. It seemed like many days has passed since our night of arrival, and I shivered, holding my daughter close.

Soon we were at John Wayne Airport and on the tarmac. We drove up to the stairs of the big Walnut Jet, and Mas was waiting at the top. The driver came around to open my door, and Jacob joined us. I stepped out of the car and felt my knees go weak, so he took my arm as I carried the baby. Mas came down the stairs to meet us, and helped me up the stairs. As we reached the door, he stepped forward and ushered us inside.

"Hello, my wonderful Dyanna! You are so beautiful, as always! And who is this?"

"This is Lily Jade Falconer/Hawk," I said. "I'll bet you are surprised."

"Nothing about you would surprise me," said Mas. "Please, sit down and let me get you some lovely Marco Polo tea." He led me to a love seat next to the window, with a table in front. The other side had a full length sofa. The driver brought my bag up from the car, and Jacob went in to talk to the pilot.

"That would be just wonderful," I said. Do you have a clean white towel or two? I will be nursing her very soon, I hope."

"I will take good care of you both. You can count on that." His very presence brought my level of comfort to the top. I love that guy.



John Soaring Meadow entered the bedroom and found Hawk face down on the bed, sound asleep. He had not moved for hours, and John laughed as he shook his brother. "Hawk, wake up. Dyanna is coming home."

Hawk rolled over and opened his eyes. He was not sure he had heard John correctly. Was this a dream?

"Dyanna and the baby are safe, Hawk. They are on their way home in the Walnut Jet. Get dressed, man!"

"What happened? Why didn't you wake me up?"

"I just did. Now come on. I'm driving to Monterey to pick them up now!"



Jacob bid us farewell and we took off a few minutes later, fastening our seatbelts for the trip to Monterey Airport. When we were in the air, Mas made the tea, and led me into the bedroom with Lily Jade. He propped up the pillows so that I was comfortable and stripped off my clothes. "We will find something for you to wear in your bag. First a quick splash in the shower." He took my daughter in his arms and led me to the golden bathroom I know so well. He turned on the shower and handed me a towel. "We will wait in the bedroom, my dear. Take your time."

I stood in the luxury of the warm water and washed my body with jasmine soap. My hair was in a knot above my head, so I could scrub my face and neck. The water ran over me and I luxuriated in it.

When I toweled off, I joined Mas and Lily Jade in the bedroom. She was asleep, by some wondrous miracle, still wrapped her soft cashmere blanket. I found my favorite tank and leggings in the bag, and slipped into them. It was a very tight fit but I managed to lower the top when she stirred later.

Mas brought me the Marco Polo Tea with cucumber sandwiches, and I gobbled them down like a starving orphan. He laughed and brought a sliced apple and some cheese. We shared this while he gave me a foot massage with peppermint lotion. I laid my head back and relaxed for

the first time in days.



We arrived at Monterey Airport at 4:35pm, and taxied onto the private runway at Del Monte Aviation. Lily Jade and I sat at the window watching the familiar blue pacific and Naval Post Graduate School among tall lush trees. I held my daughter as we rolled up to the glass portals where the two most beautiful men in the world stood waiting for us.

I gasped at the sight of them, literally! John Soaring Meadow in his dirty work jeans and sheepskin vest, staring into the sun. Hawk was next to him in aviator shades and tight jeans. He wore the yellow T-shirt I loved, with those silver Adidas running shoes. "Look at them, sweetie. There's your dad, and Uncle John." Mas leaned over my shoulder and said "Which one is your husband?"

"The one running across the tarmac. You'd better put the stairs down."

It was such a sweet sight, those two men waiting for us. I thought I might never see them again, and now I felt the tears roll down my cheeks. Mas opened the door and Hawk jumped inside to greet us. John stood at the door looking around as we smothered each other with hugs and kisses.



"Welcome aboard, Sir. I am Mas, representing the Walnut Brothers, LTD." "And I am John Soaring Meadow, Dyanna's best man and friend, forever!"

The drive home was filled with excitement, while I told them my tale and Lily Jade slept on my breast. Hawk sat in the back with us, while John drove his Jeep down Highway One to Big Sur. "I still can't believe you are here," said John, as we crossed the Bixby Bridge. "I thought you were a goner."

"Really? You didn't think we would make it, huh? We did pretty good, didn't we, LJ?" Hawk reached over and kissed me for a long time, and woke his daughter up.

Soon we were into the lush green of Big Sur, shaded in the afternoon light. I opened the window and took a deep breath. Hawk just leaned back and watched us, as we rolled down the gravel road to the Cottage. I opened the door and stood up as Hawk grabbed my bag from the trunk. Ampalia ran from the kitchen and jumped up and down. We were home, sweet home.

## CHAPTER FORTY ONE

Jacob had his driver go directly to the condo in the Palisades, where my little red bomb was parked in the driveway. During the trip from Orange County, he mused about the best way to handle this matter, and decided to bring the car home with him.

He found the keys in his pocket and slipped into the driver's seat. The baby carrier was a surprise, sitting there all tied in to the dash. He laughed, and showed his man before starting up the engine. Then he followed the chocolate Mercedes Benz over Sunset Boulevard in peak traffic, with the radio on full blast. The little red Kompressor had a better sound system than his own, and was equipped with mobile data as well.

When they reached Mulholland Drive, he turned the car over to his detailer, and requested a special job done immediately. He wanted that car to look like a million bucks, if he was going to drive it.



Donnie drove miles over the speed limit on Laguna Canyon Road, and screeched to a stop several times. There was no use talking to him, so Geno tightened his seatbelt and grit his teeth.

As they reached the ramps for the freeway going South, two Black and Whites appeared behind them a block away. The right ramp went south and the left one went north, but straight ahead was Trabuco Canyon. He stepped on the gas and powered through a red light, barely missing oncoming traffic.

Now the drones were overhead again, and Donnie knew he had driven into a trap. The road narrowed down to two lanes, and he headed inland toward the signs for Coto de Caza Village. There had to be a way to lose these cops, and he was going for it.

At one point they came to a four way stop, and two hay trucks stood waiting. He ran between them and laughed while the horns honked in the distance. Trees loomed overhead as the road turned into hairpin curves and the truck hugged the berm.



Overhead, they could see a helicopter hovering, and the cops had to be close behind. There was only one way to go: out run those bitches and make a slam for Mexico.

John knew he had to see Uma, and share the good news. It was only right, they had waited until they saw the whites of my eyes before they told her. She was obsessed with the whole kidnapping now, and it had directed her energy forward to healing. Hawk was unaware of this position, having slept through the past twelve hours of the day. He was so wound up in the emotions of his woman and child that John was surprised. Never had he seen Stephen Hawk regard his personal life as primary over medicine. Now, as he approached the MedVan, John was ready to rally the forces to unite the tribe again. And most important, to bring Uma home to recover. She needed the life of her gardens and the fresh air. She would treat herself with magical potions, which made her mind well. She would believe again in her power as a healer.

Despite the anger and pain during his own recovery, John knew that he would be toast without this fabulous woman. She stood by him during Hawk's ordeal, and the false murder charges. She coddled and argued with him until he obeyed the measures to heal his bones. Now it was his turn.

He entered the MedVan and found Uma sitting up in bed while Elena brushed her thick black hair. Her color was normal and she appeared to be comfortable with the bulky apparatus covering her left shoulder. Her eyes lit up when she saw John, and held out her hand.

"Uma, Uma! I have good news. Dyanna and the baby are home safe! We just brought them back from Monterey!"

"I knew it," she said. "Thank God!"

"Are you not surprised, or do you have some special kind of connection to the angels," said John. He laughed out loud, and Elena left them to talk.

"You know I have been in prayer and concentration since they disappeared. I believe, John. I know when the forces are with me, and when they are not". She patted the bed next to her. "Sit and tell me."

"She managed to escape with the baby, running down the beach like a demon. There is film of her all over the internet. The surfers took a lot of pictures."

"Surfers? Where was she being held?"

"Orange County, near a place called Crystal Cove. This morning they had a contest, so a big crowd was there."

"Leave it to Dyanna to land in such a place," Uma took a long drink of water and rubbed her left wrist. "This thing is beginning to itch."

"Oh, I know all about that, my dear. Hawk will remove it when he can. Right now he is with his family at home. They are all exhausted."

"Did she come through the terror of these men with grit? I hope they didn't hurt either one of them. I have encouraged her to live in the brave manner."

"Here's the thing, Uma. We need you back in that house, healing and watching over them. The gardens need you and Belinda is there now. I want to move you out of here as soon as possible."

Elena stood at the door, listening to John's plea. She stepped outside and shook her head. These people were from another universe. Hawk was tending to his family instead of doing his job. She despised the idea of his wife making such a spectacle. It was time to get out of there.

We wanted some time alone, and vacated the house. Annoka was already gone and Hawk sent Ampalia home for the night. We were completely able to care for Lily Jade and ourselves, in the most intimate way. Hawk opened a bottle of chilled white wine and poured himself a glass. He made my favorite drink from pomegranate juice and sparkling water. There was even a sprig of mint from the garden. He brought the glasses to our bedroom suite, and we toasted silently. There was just no need for noise.

I wanted to cleanse Lily Jade, and filled her baby bath with warm water. I carried her to the table and stripped off her clothes. The diaper that Mas had assigned held her all the way home, and I smiled to think of him. Hawk watched us silently, running his fingers up my back, as he sipped his wine.

The sound of splashing filled the room while I washed her tiny body with my hands. I used a fresh cloth for her bottom, to be sure she had no irritation. As long as she could see me, she was fine.

While I was putting on her softest little pajamas, Hawk ran the bath for me. He went outside and picked the pink Cecile Brunner roses I love. Then he took his daughter and held her tight while I stepped into the tub. The beautiful copper bath that Gabriel had chosen for me began to glow in the last light of the day. His attention to detail was apparent as facets of the sun sparkled in the room.

I poured the oils of Jasmine and grapefruit into tub, and sunk down into the water. My hair floated around me as I held my breath, and blew bubbles. I thought of my mother, who first taught me about this trick. I would have to teach Lily Jade when she joined me.

"Where is Gabriel," I asked, finally surfacing. "He deserves the medal of honor for this bathroom."

"He is in Hawaii with a client. However, I'm sure he knows about your escape by now, it's all over the internet."

"What? Are you kidding?"

"They shot hundreds of videos of you running down the beach with this tiny thing in your arms. You just amaze me, Dyanna. How did you have the courage to do that?"

"You would have done the same thing, trust me." I lathered my hair and left the fragrant shampoo in to condition and cleanse. It seemed like ten years since I had done these things. "I saw a chance and I took it. I thought Moonie was going to kill me. Instead, he turned around and walked away."

Soon there was a fire in the great room, and I dried my hair in front of the warm cinders. We found fresh bread and peaches in the kitchen, and ate it with fresh Mozzarella cheese. I stretched out in front of the fire and Hawk covered me with Uma's oils. Then

I took Lily Jade and nursed her near the place she was born, while her father took a shower.

[We lay in bed with the baby between us](#), barely touching but conducting the heat of our bodies under the clean sheets.

Sometime in the night, Hawk awakened me with his warm chest covering mine. He kissed me awake and slowly entered my body like a red hot poker. I gasped as he traveled up inside and moved back and forth. I was very wet and responded quickly, shuddering as he came to his climax.

Lily Jade started to whimper, as we held each other tight. "She wants in," I said. He moved carefully over the tiny body and lay down beside her. I touched her gently with a kiss, and she stopped crying.

We slept.



Jacob Walnut rose early and had a good breakfast. Ty fed him favorite things, and packed a plentiful basket for the trip. The little red bomb was parked in front of the house in prime condition, shiny and clean. The wheels sparkled and the tires were immaculate. He put the basket in the trunk along with a small bag and climbed into the driver's seat.

"Give her my love," said Ty, as Jacob fired up the engine and fastened his seat belt. It was a rare sight for a man who never drove, and Ty snapped a photo as he pulled away.

He took the same route I used, following Sunset Boulevard across Beverly Hills to the Palisades, and on to Pacific Coast Highway going North. It was a small car with a roomy cab, allowing for a good stretch of the legs. The baby carrier reminded him of exactly where he was headed, and he smiled as he turned on my music. Jacob rarely listened on his own, but today Dave Matthews accompanied him to Oxnard. He cut through the small community to Highway 101 and headed north. He knew my path from many conversations over the years, but had his phone for confirmation.

It was a brisk cool day for driving, and the ocean was still misty around the shore. By Santa Barbara, traffic had become heavier with the morning commute, but then the green countryside came into play.

He actually stopped at Gaviota, just like I do, just for fun. He really didn't have to take a leak, but did anyway. Soon the road was populated by big trucks and a few other travelers, while the wide open spaces came sooner and lasted a long time.

He watched the waves at Pismo Beach, and sailed through Santa Maria, amazed to see how big it had gotten. You don't notice such things from the air, he thought. When he reached San Luis Obispo, he knew it would be fairly soon to turn off for the locals road. All the while, he drove as he thought I would, windows open with the radio on. The big mountain had eight lanes, taking students from Cal Poly home.

When he reached the large winery near Soledad, he was careful to move slowly, for the back road was easy to miss. Near the gates of the winery was a man tending to the roses. He stopped and asked about the locals road to Big Sur. Now he was *cookin' with gas*, as his dad used to say. The final lap to the Big Sur coast was a bumpy dirt path with huge potholes, to his chagrin. The dust rose as he drove slowly over the two lane road, passing trucks and older cars going the other way. When he came to Highway 1 with signs to Monterey, Jacob knew he had made it.

He wanted to soak up as much of my life as possible before he arrived, for a number of reasons. My event with Anthony Bravano and his men had put the fear of God into Jacob. He would never reveal the angst and trepidation to another human being during that first night, but it brought him to his knees. He realized some things he had been pushing aside.

He turned right and headed up the highway, counting the miles and familiar landmarks. My gate and fence were fairly simple, but now there was a sturdy post on either side of the driveway.

At noon, Jacob pulled into the driveway at the wheel of my car and drove up to the gate. I was alone with Lily Jade, as luck would have it, and came out when I saw the dust rise off the gravel.

There was my beautiful little red bomb, with the top down and Jacob sitting in the front seat. He

pulled up to a stop and waved. "Hello, my dear," he said.

I ran over to the driver's seat and hugged him, with Lily Jade in my arms. "What are you doing here, Jacob? You never drive! This is a miracle."

"No, you two being alive is a miracle. This ride was just a nice morning outing." He opened the door and stood up, stretching his legs. "You look lovely today, Dyanna!"

"A big improvement from yesterday, huh?" He nodded and looked out over the sea. "I wanted to bring your car back myself, for some odd reason. Actually, I just had to experience your very being again, in a normal setting. This awful event has unsettled me."

"Come inside. Nobody is here right now, just us."

Actually, I would like a walk on the beach. John will be here soon to pick me up, I have to catch my plane in Monterey."

We followed the path down the hill, past the new compound of redwood and copper. He looked at the buildings and nodded, following me to the beach. He jumped down and took the baby as I followed him. "You picked a good day to drive, Jacob. It gets pretty hairy up here in the winter."

"I wanted to tell you something now, before any more time passes. It's important you hear it from me, so you understand."

"Okay. What's going on? Are you going to fire me from the film?"

He laughed and hugged me. "Oh, no! Nothing like that. I have set up a trust for Lily Jade, with you as the only trustee. It is a considerable sum to begin with, and I will add to it as I see fit. Jack Walters is acting as my legal man."

"Why would you do that, Jacob? You have already given me half of Kevin's estate. She will be taken care of."

"You don't know what will come down the road, Dyanna. Life is strange and scary, as you have just seen yourself. You were near death at Jade Beach as well. Now this little miracle of a child is here, and I want to protect her. I want her to grow up with the security of solid investments. This way I know it will be done right."

"Why am I the only trustee? What about her father?"

"Dyanna, please listen to me. I don't trust anyone to protect you like I can. These people might do anything, you never know. I want you to be safe. If I can't have you with me, at least I can secure your daughter's life from peril. It's a hard world out there."

"Hawk won't like it. He will be angry if I agree to this."

"Then don't tell him. Just keep it to yourself for now. Jack has suggested that you act alone as the trustee as well, for legal reasons. You are not even married to this man. It could get sticky."

"I don't keep secrets from Uma, or Hawk. Or John. They are my family."

"Think of me as your family as well," said Jacob. "I love you and your daughter more than

anything. It's already done and in place. It's my secret gift to you, my dear."

We walked up the path to find John waiting in his jeep. He waved and jumped out of the car. "How are you this fine day," he said, grinning from ear to ear. "Both of you!"

"Well, Jacob delivered my car himself, what do you think of that?" I shook my head.

John ran his finger over the dusty trunk. "Must have come over the back road, huh? You about ready, Jacob? I've got men up there and a ranch house to build."

Jacob hugged me very tight and whispered something in my year. He grabbed a bag from the trunk and walked to the jeep.

John kissed us both goodbye and jumped into the driver's seat

"See Ya Later, Alligator," he said, as they roared off down the driveway, leaving us there alone.



"I guess it's just you and me, Lily Jade." I looked at my crazy beautiful daughter, and shook my head. We stood near the edge of the cliff, next to John's rock and watched the waves break below us.

We were one lucky pair of girls.

## EPILOGUE

Thanksgiving was a light hearted celebration with Uma coming home that morning. We consulted with her and cooked the turkey while she held court in the kitchen. Ampalia pampered her by doing everything "Uma's way" and the dinner was superb. She got her wish and Hawk removed the cast later in the day. We were all thankful for that.



Brian Shoupe was elected Junior Partner at Walters and Benson, based upon his superb handling of the Falconer Kidnap case. He assumed all responsibility for technical operations at the firm, and partnered with Dandy Brown on many occasions. His video of the beach run went viral on Twitter and he became a household name overnight.

[Donnie and Geno burned to death in a gulch below the road in Trabuco Canyon](#), California after a record breaking ten CHP and police vehicles pursued them for miles. The white truck was dragged up the embankment for display, after the famous chase. They were identified by dental records and small scraps of burned flesh. The chase was filmed from the air by three drones, and can be viewed on YouTube.

Anthony Bravano, Jr. was found dead in Corleone, Sicily with a knife in his throat. His belly was carved into a moon shape, as a message from Moonie's family. His wife sold the film rights to her husband's story, and arrived at the premier all smiles.



At Christmas, Ginger appeared in a loose knitted maternity blouse, and showed her lovely rounded belly to the family. John Soaring Meadow drank a toast to fatherhood. Hear! Hear!

Slow Dove and Belinda sat outside on the steps, watching the Big Sur Sunset. They kissed secretly in the glowing darkness.



[Lily Jade slept soundly in her cradle.](#)

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### ***About J.W. Winslow***

J.W. Winslow is a writer/artist/poet and Green Publisher who has produced six books under her imprint of FRESHART. All components for these volumes are made of recycled materials, printed and hand assembled in Monterey, California by Rapid Printers and distributed by Baker & Taylor to the international marketplace. All titles are available in enhanced e-book format & audio books.

The WINSLOWART TV show is broadcast live in Monterey from AMP Media on the Arts Channel, streaming live to the world's audience, and features a wide variety of artists, sculptors, musicians, architects, dance, photography and gifted young performers. You will also see samples of Winslow's art and photos each week from her life, along with the special guest.

J.W. Winslow's poems entitled WEBSONGS have been published monthly since 1998, going out into the world via the internet to fans and friends!

As an artist, there are many facets to J.W. Winslow including painting, sculpture, assemblage and painted glass. All work is based on recycled materials and non-toxic mediums. Her work as an abstract colorist is included in collections around the world.

Once again, in the Mystic Adventures in Big Sur series, the book cover of Lily-Jade has been painted by J.W. Winslow!

She is now developing a series for episodic television based on the adventures of Dyanna Falconer, with two more books planned! Stay tuned!

Welcome to FRESH ART! More information about J.W. Winslow is available at [www.jwwinslow.com](http://www.jwwinslow.com)



