

Twenty

The wind kicked up sometime in the middle of the night and woke Calla from a surprisingly deep sleep.

Where was she?

Disoriented, Calla sat up and looked around at unfamiliar surroundings. Her head felt odd, both heavy and weightless at the same time. She ran a hand through her hair and massaged her scalp. She felt tired and out of place, but not frightened. As if the memory of her whereabouts was just out of reach and she would soon grasp it.

In the dim light that filtered through the window above her, Calla studied the small, sparse bedroom. The furnishings consisted of a twin bed, a chest of drawers, and a desk with a computer that hailed from the 1980s.

She let her hands fall to her sides and gathered the pale comforter in her fingers. Soft. She raised the covers to her nose and inhaled the scent of laundry soap and sunshine. Clean.

She stood and peeked out the window to find moonlight sparkling over the marsh at high tide. Marsh grass waved as the wind swept across the surface of the water.

She remembered now. She was at Adam's house.

She looked around the tidy room.

Messy, grease-under-his-nails Adam kept his place immaculate.

She turned back to the window, wondering what had awoken her. The wind was brisk. Maybe the sound of it beating against the walls and roof had been enough to jostle her from slumber.

No, something was wrong.

She didn't know what or how she perceived it, but there was danger. Studies had shown

that people often perceive small threat cues in their environments that don't even register to their conscious minds.

That must be it. She must have heard or smelled something just out of her conscious.

Or she was paranoid.

A look out the front window should allay her fears. As Adam had said, there was only one easy route onto his property.

And only one route out.

Calla threw back the covers and padded across the cool laminate floor to the bedroom door. She stepped into Adam's living room, passed a large leather sofa a big-screen TV, and went to the front window. She used two fingers to make a gap in the blinds and looked into the yard.

It was darker on this side of the house, but the gloom was not impenetrable. She thought she could make out a car parked at the end of the street, but she couldn't be sure.

However, it was easy to spot the man standing outside the fence. He waved around what might be a candle or lighter. A tiny flame danced as the man paced by the locked gate, probably looking for an easier way in.

Climbing an eight-foot-tall chain link fence wouldn't be easy.

From that distance and in the shadows of the trees, Calla couldn't see many details about the figure with the light. But she knew he hadn't come to bring Adam a birthday cake.

She spun, trying to remember which of the other doors was the one to Adam's bedroom. She dashed past the sofa and tried the first door, which led to a small, neat bathroom. The next door down was his room.

Adam leapt from the bed when the door opened. He wore a pair of black boxer briefs and

already held his 1911 in his hand.

“What is it?” he demanded, voice rough from sleep.

“Someone’s outside,” Calla said, thinking that if a violent spirit wasn’t plotting against their lives, she might find Adam vaguely attractive.

Setting the gun safely aside, Adam began tugging on a pair of jeans.

“He hasn’t made it over the fence yet,” she informed him, turning away under the pretense of going to his window.

“Can you tell who it is?” Calla shook her head as she felt Adam join her at the window. He peered out a few slats above her. “If that’s Corbin, we need to try to take him alive.”

Adam shoved the blinds open farther and nearly pressed his nose to the glass to get a better view. Dimly, she registered his scent: warmth, sun, salt.

Adam swore. “Is that a flame?”

“I think so,” Calla said, following the little light stopped at the gate.

Then, the little flame flashed bright and burned bigger. The man’s face went from darkness to washed out in bright light. Suddenly, the flame arced toward the house. It soared gracefully toward one of Adam’s many outbuildings, landed against the wall with a crash that sounded like shattering glass, and then burst into a wild, bright blaze.

“Molotov cocktail,” Adam growled, letting the blinds fall shut. “He’s gonna burn down my damn house.”

Calla felt her eyes bulge. “What?” Calla asked. “He’s trying to burn us alive.”

“I’m going out the back,” he said, already heading in that direction. “Come around him from behind if I can.”

Calla followed after him, feeling like a lemming. She stood on the back porch for the

length of time it took Adam to sprint across the backyard, clamber awkwardly over the tall fence, land with a splat in the marsh, and start slogging through the shadowy muck around the fence line.

He wasn't going to make good time around the fence line, and Calla could hear the fire crackling hot and dangerous nearby, could smell the black acrid smoke.

She had to do something.

Maybe she couldn't tackle the firebomber, but she could do something to save Adam's property.

Barefoot, she padded down the wood stairs and stepped into the grass. He had to have a garden house around somewhere. She could at least get the fire under control.

Finally, she saw a hose, coiled like a snake on the back side of the outbuilding he'd parked the truck in. Keeping to the shadows, she ran toward it. Careful to keep herself out of the firebomber's sight, she searched for the nozzle. In the dark, she couldn't find the end immediately, so she just turned the water on full, hoping it would become obvious.

Another crash sounded, and fire roared to life somewhere in the front yard.

Calla yanked on a section of hose, hoping to dislodge the end. Then, she saw a metallic flash in the grass.

Some kind of nozzle.

She grabbed for it and tested the trigger.

A fat stream of water blasted out, taking sprigs of Adam's perfect lawn with it.

Calla stared at it. The thing must be used to wash circus elephants.

Calla dragged the hose as close to the corner of the shed as she dared, enabling her to peek out. Another fire had broken out, this one at the base of the house. She didn't want to

expose her position and make herself a target. She had to wait for Adam.

She squinted at the firebomber, who was lighting another bottle.

The wick blazed, and in that millisecond, she caught a glimpse of his face. Waylon Ellis.

The bastard who attacked Nia. Who attacked *her*.

A twig snapped somewhere in the wood line.

Adam.

Ellis spun. He would see Adam. And he was holding a molotov cocktail. Adam was still trying to take him alive. He wouldn't shoot, and he'd given up his position.

Without thinking, Calla charged forward.

"Hey, asshole!" she yelled at Ellis, not even cognizant of what she was saying, hardly recognizing her own voice.

He whirled, this time facing her.

She pointed the hose at him. "I'm going to kill you."

It was a stupid thing to say. She knew it. She was threatening a guy while armed with a water hose.

Ellis's arm rared back to fling the bomb at her, but in the new angle of light, she saw Adam approaching Ellis from behind.

Calla aimed the hose and fired at his face. It was the distraction Adam needed.

At that moment, Adam came at him, tackling him in one neat movement.

The fiery bottle broke on the ground beside them, and Calla kept the stream of water aimed at it while Adam grappled with Ellis.

Finally, she saw Adam rise on his knees and deliver a solid punch that had Ellis slumping to the ground.

