

Chapter 8

The Island County Juvenile Detention Center was just where Clayton Johnson-White needed to be. He considered it his college education.

There weren't many inmates in the twenty-four bed facility. He counted a maximum of fifteen other guys there. The girls were kept strictly segregated so he had no idea if there were even any female inmates.

The courts were soft, the judges a bunch of bleeding hearts. How had he managed to get the one hard ass judged on the bench? The do gooder judges wanted to rehabilitate the poor kids who had gotten in trouble. They set up all sorts of other programs to educate and counsel the losers who got caught. It was only the hardest of the hard that made it to juvie.

Clayton sat back on the school cafeteria-style folding table in the central area between the cells. The staff (that meant guards) called them "rooms." They were cells. Any place where you got locked up at night were cells.

The tables served as their dining hall, but also as their social meeting area. During the day when the guests (read: inmates) weren't occupied by other, prescribed, activities, they were free to congregate and practice their newly learned social skills. What bullshit.

Of course, at night, each of the guests (inmates, remember?) was locked in his room.

The facility was on the second and third floors of the annex next to the Island County Court House. On the lower floor were the probation officers, social workers and counselors' offices. Next door was the adult jail, all conveniently designed so that the inmates could move between the detention facility and the offices without having to be taken into the streets.

Clayton was a smart kid. He quickly caught on to the system and devised a plan to beat it. But first, he had some learning to do.

These were hard cases, the other guys here. He was big and strong and when challenged on his first day, he decked his tormenter with one blow. No one bothered him since. As a matter of fact, they accepted him, even the guy he had given the shiner to.

His crimes were piddie compared to those of his compatriots. They had robbed stores, been arrested for assault, one was a rapist and a couple were car thieves. He could learn from them. These were the cases that the bleeding hearts were too sissy-assed to refer to adult court.

He had no intention of getting rehabilitated and joining jerk-ass society. He was smarter than that. He didn't need to work. He was born to be a predator. He took what he needed, what he wanted. Let the weaker drones do the work. He strongly believed in the Darwinian principle of survival of the fittest. And he intended to be the fittest.

"I hear you're here for burglary," he said to the shaggy looking teen sitting next to him. Like everyone else, they wore gray jump suits and canvas tennis shoes.

"So . . ."

"How'd you get in? I mean, did you break down the doors or what?"

The pimply faced kid looked at him for a moment. "I picked the locks," he finally said. "My dad's a lock smith. He taught me how to pick any lock."

"Could you teach me?" Clayton asked.

And so it began, Clayton's graduate education in criminology. In his several weeks as a guest of the county he learned to pick locks, hot wire cars, how to disable alarm systems and where to look for hidden surveillance cameras. He was a smart kid. It didn't take long for him to learn what he needed.

He attended classes taught by Mr. Weston. The slight man with a bad comb over was dedicated to helping his charges. He wanted to keep them current in school so that when they got out, they could re-integrate with their schools. He met with his students' regular teachers weekly to synchronize his lessons plans with theirs.

His problem with Clayton was that Clayton didn't have a regular teacher. He'd been out of school for four years.

However, Mr. Weston was impressed with his knowledge and intelligence. Clayton had done a magnificent job of educating himself. Mr. Weston soon found himself creating college-level lesson plans for his new student.

What bull shit.

"We'll have you ready for the GED in no time," Mr. Weston told him.

Like he really cared. He didn't give a fat rat's ass about Mr. Weston or his frigging lesson plans. Clayton's good behavior was just part of his plan.

Clayton Johnson-White, model inmate. He found that his boyish grin could melt the coldest guard's heart. He was so tame (with the exception of his first night of incarceration), so good mannered, that the staff (guards, remember?) often left him at his counselor's appointment to return to the detention facility upstairs by himself. They were teaching him responsibility, rewarding his good behavior.

Sundays were visiting days. After bugging his mom for several visits, his sister Tammy finally showed up.

"Love your outfit, dufus," she told her twin brother.

Clayton had definitely won the draw on the gene pool. He was tall, strong and good looking. His sister wouldn't win any beauty contests. She was tiny, short and skinny, but her long brown hair and doe eyes did attract some boys.

"You still workin' at that coffee stand?" he asked.

"Yeah. Money's good. I can work pretty much my own hours."

"You making any money?"

“Hah!” she laughed. “I’ve found ways to make money that you wouldn’t ever dream off. Mr. Randall said it best when he told us ‘remember girls, whenever you’re down and out, you’re sitting on a gold mine.’”

Clayton didn’t want to think about what that meant. “You got a car yet?”

“No. I’m still saving.”

“Can you get a hold of one?” Clayton lowered his voice. No sense letting anyone over hear this.

“Yeah, I got a couple of boyfriends with wheels.”

“Be here Wednesday at 3 pm.”

She just stared at him.

“You got it?”

“Uh, yeah. 3 pm. What for?”

“Just be waiting outside. That’s all.”

The following Wednesday was his appointment with the school counselor. He sat through the interminable hour. He fidgeted and huffed. It was the longest hour of his life.

True to plan, the staff (guard) was lazy. Clayton was such a good boy. He could walk himself back to his room (cell) in the detention facility.

Instead, he left the counselor’s office, turned down the hallway and to the outside door. He looked at the wall clock (they wouldn’t let him wear a watch). It was 3 pm sharp.

He stepped outside into the daylight. A light mist was falling. He shuddered. He didn’t have a coat, only his jump suit.

Tammy was dependable. She sat there in the passenger seat of a red Kia Soul.

“Well, well, goin’ someplace big brother?”

“Let me in.” Clayton pulled open the door and squeezed his six foot one inch frame into the back seat of the little car. “Let’s get out of here.”

“Thought you might need a change,” Tammy said. “There’s some of your clothes on the back seat.”

And they were off. No one noticed, no one followed.

Clayton laughed to himself. It was too easy. How could these idiots just let him walk away?

It was a sunny Las Vegas afternoon. Karen Randall lay on the chaise lounge by the pool in her tiny red bikini with an iced tea in one hand and People magazine in the other.

She knew she still looked pretty good. How many women her age could still wear a bikini? Maybe Cheryl Tiegs or Christie Brinkley. She still had her show girl body. Long, thin legs and curves in all the right places. She slathered sun screen on her legs. Her tummy might not have been as tight as it once was, but she wasn’t too bad, considering . . .

She still got a little thrill, flaunting her curves. True, Dick’s grandson, Bobby, who lived with her and his friends were only teenagers, but the way they gawked at her reinforced her self-image.

Dick’s visit bothered her. What was he up to? Had he really missed payments on their house? Her house. How dare he?

The beauty of their relationship lay in the fact that they lived their own lives. He was off in Seattle doing God knows what, while she had her life here in Vegas. She still knew all of the casino owners, the show girls. She visited them occasionally, but she was retired. She spent most of her time here by the pool. Sure, from time to time she went to lunch with friends or spent a night on the town, but she didn’t need all that glamour anymore. She was happy where she was.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the door bell. Her two Chihuahuas went nuts. They ran to the front door and set up a racket.

Who could that be? She wasn't expecting anyone.

She put down her magazine and walked through the French doors and to the double oak front doors. She could see two police officers through the glass windows on the doors.

"Chico, Tina, down. No bark." The two tiny dogs howled and jumped against the door.

She realized that she wasn't dressed. What the hell, might as well give the nice officers a little thrill. She hadn't been a show girl for twelve years for nothing.

"Yes?" she said as she opened the door.

Her dogs tried to make a break for it. She held them back with her foot, then stepped outside, closing the door behind her.

"Mrs. Randall?" the older officer asked.

"Yes."

"Is Mr. Randall here, ma'am?"

"No, he just left for Seattle. What is this about?" Her radar was off the charts. Something was wrong.

"We're not really sure ma'am. We have a request from the San Bernardino Sherriff's office to check on Mr. Randall. Seems a truck registered to him was found burned out alongside the highway near Victorville."

She stepped back. "Oh my!" She put her hand to her mouth. "Dick left here in his truck yesterday afternoon."

"Have you heard from him ma'am?"

"Uh . . . no. But that's not unusual. You see, ah . . . he lives in Seattle. He has a house there, businesses there. I don't speak to him that often."

"Hmmm." The officer made a note in his book. "When is the last time you saw him?"

“Like I said, yesterday afternoon. It must have been around five or six when he left. He just flew in, picked up his truck and left.” She looked at the two officers. Their faces were stone cold. What had happened? “You don’t think that something happened to Dick, do you?”

“We don’t know ma’am. We’re just following up for the San Burdo Sherriff. We’ll report back to him and if he feels that any further investigation is necessary, he’ll follow up.”

“Victorville? San Bernardino?” she said. “That’s in California, isn’t it?”

“On the highway from Vegas to LA, ma’am,” the younger officer said.

“What would he be doing in California? LA?” she asked.

“We don’t know, ma’am.”

“He was headed for Seattle. He wouldn’t have been in California. He had no reason to go there.”

“We’ll pass that information along ma’am.”

“Would you like to come inside?” she asked. “I’m going to call Dick right now.”

She stepped through the door and fended off the tiny dogs while the officers entered.

Chico stood and growled at the policemen.

“Oh, don’t mind him, he doesn’t like men.”

“Yes, ma’am” the older officer said.

Karen picked up the cordless phone and speed dialed Dick’s cell phone. It rang several times, then a female voice came on the line.

“The cell phone you have dialed is not available. Please try again later.”

“Oh.” She put down the phone. “His phone isn’t on.”

“Can you think of any reason he would be out of touch this long?” the younger officer asked.

“Like I said, we don’t communicate every day. But it isn’t like him not to have his cell phone on. It’s his life-line. He has to stay connected to all of his businesses.”

“Just for the record, ma’am,” the older officer said. “Where were you last night? Say around ten pm?”

“Ah . . . I was here. At home.”

“Alone? Do you have anyone who can corroborate that story?”

“Story? What story? I was here. By myself. I didn’t see anyone. I didn’t talk to anyone.”

“All right, ma’am. Thank you. Please don’t leave town without informing us.”

The two police officers turned, passed through the door and walked back to their patrol car.

Chico got out and chased after the officers, nipping at their heels.

“Chico, come back here, you bad boy.” Karen chased after her miniature dog.

What had happened to Dick? Was he all right? Karen’s mind ran a thousand miles an hour. She knew he had some shady business dealings. Did they finally catch up to him?

That night Karen had the first of many sleepless nights.