

**The Organ Grinder**

**By**

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## Prologue

### *Asia – North Bundhara border*

The young British UN soldier watched an unidentified truck rumble along the broken pot holed track they called No Man's land. A suicide mission? The question rattled loud and fierce in his mind. He stepped out onto the road amidst the steady stream of refugees making their weary way to the precarious safety of North Bundhara. Part of his job was to assist their evacuation, the other to protect them with force if needed. The truck was swerving, scattering the rag tag band of people in its way to either side. The soldier aimed his standard issue SA80 rifle. He felt a strange cocktail mix of fear and excitement swirl noisily inside his stomach. At last he was about to see some action.

The truck stopped dead in front of him but was still some distance away. He shouted at the frightened people to take cover and move away. Shrieks and wails of fear echoed all around him dispelling the quiet of the surrounding forest. Small, tattered clothed children were lifted from carts leaving bewildered horses wondering where their human loads had disappeared to. Everyone scuttled down the banks of the road to take cover. The soldier glanced to his side noticing that a North Bundenese soldier was now standing near, providing support.

The doors of the truck opened and two men got out. He couldn't make their faces out in the dimming light. The South Bundenese didn't take too kindly to people deserting their country for their decadent immoral neighbour. This could have been one of those army missions to round refugees up and execute them for treason. He shouted halt but his command was ignored.

The soldier felt his palms begin to sweat as the figures moved around to the back of the truck. He

stretched his fingers along his rifle feeling them begin to tighten with tension. He repeated his command, this time with the intention to shoot if they did not obey him but his threat appeared idle. He knew that he had to make a decision.

It was so damn hot. He could smell the heat all over his wet body under his fatigues. Fixing his fingers more firmly on the rifle he took a couple of steps forward repeating his threat once more. He had to play it cool, firing was the last option. They were his orders. A trickle of moisture ran under his helmet, down his neck and onto his chest. It irritated his skin making him desperate to rub it away. The two men lifted something heavy out of the back of the truck and brought it around to the front. 'Make your mind up, make a decision. Shoot to kill or be killed. But what if I am wrong? What if it is the wrong call?' he muttered to himself under his breath.

The soldier's finger jumped on the trigger as they carried the bag between them and threw it on the ground not far from him. Only the realisation that it was a body bag stopped him firing. He guessed it was the same for the North Bundenese soldier who stood at his side. He tried asking them about the bag, but there was no reply. One of the men returned to the truck and brought out a round object in another bag. It was the shape of a football. The soldier's heart started to thud inside his chest louder than it had ever done. He had a bad feeling about this object.

His gut twisted painfully. His finger jumped once more on the rifle as the man took the object out of the bag and rolled it along the ground towards him. He froze. As it tapped against the toe of his boot he closed his eyes waiting for the anticipated explosion. It had to be a bomb. He hadn't expected his new career to end so abruptly and so soon. He looked down deciding to face his fate and found his football bomb was a bloody, jagged, decapitated head.

## Chapter One

*London – Docklands – Three days later*

Dominic Kane sat in Anna Harker's penthouse office overlooking the Thames. He studied Harker as she leant against the front of her large ornate desk next to his chair, watching the news on the middle of three LCD TVs on the wall ahead of her. She was now in her late sixties and was one of the most powerful noises in the British and global media. She was a strong ruthless businesswoman who didn't suffer fools. At twenty seven she had run the small press Dolls House Publishing and later bought it from its owner when he was financially ruined. By the age of forty she owned a string of successful newspapers and publishing companies and turned her attention to cable networks. This was the woman who fought off a massive takeover bid of her holding company Turnstile Communications from her hospital bed when the vultures smelt death last October.

She was also the woman famous for being attacked one night in Central Park and successfully fighting off her assailant, armed only with an umbrella, at the age of sixty-three. A fierce supporter of human rights and the abolition of violence against women, Harker wasn't afraid to speak out and cause a stir. She was a powerful woman and needed to be handled with great respect.

She was still a good looking woman. Her appearance was immaculate, crisp and clean in her black suit. Her blonde hair was cropped in a no nonsense short bob and her attractive hazel eyes told Kane that she knew more about him than he was comfortable with.

He turned to watch the screen once more. ATM's newsreader Monty Turner was serving up the latest on their missing star correspondent. She had been found at the North Bundenese border less than twenty-four hours ago.

She had been making headlines all around the world since her disappearance in South Bundhara three days ago, straining the tense relations between Britain and the US who were threatening air strikes and retaliation if South Bundhara decided to make good on its threat and invade North Bundhara.

Another glance at Harker's face told him of her concern for Rebecca. Kane had done his research. Rebecca wasn't just another employee of her channel, ATM, she was one of Harker's friends. Harker was almost a replacement mother figure and like him she had been listening to the harrowing rumours of torture, rape and other physical crimes forced on Rebecca's body. The woman looked ill with worry. He turned his attention to the screen once more, back to the interview with the UN soldier who had found Rebecca. It was the sixth time he had seen the report.

'She was just walking along the road behind some of the refugees. She looked out of it. I didn't recognise her at first. When I ran up to her she backed off. She tried to make a run for it down the bank into the trees. I am sure it was my uniform that made her frightened. I took off after her and brought her back. She was so dazed she didn't even know her own name.'

'And what condition was Rebecca in? I mean, was she injured? I am sure you realise how concerned we are at ATM,' one of the correspondents crowding around him jostling for position asked. Kane watched the soldier smile and nod, clearly loving the limelight.

'Yes of course I do. She was exhausted, dehydrated, I guess. She had obviously been beaten and she was clutching at a wound on her left side that was bleeding. She collapsed in my arms. She has been taken to hospital now.'

The interview continued to play but Harker talked over it. She spoke suddenly, the emotional strain clearly audible in her voice this time. ‘I want you out there.’

Kane simply nodded. Inside he was elated. ‘I take it the rumours are true then?’ he said carefully.

There was a pause from Harker. She turned to face him directly and he could clearly see tears brimming in her eyes. ‘Yes, they are. She’s been beaten, tortured, raped, starved...’ Another pause. Kane noticed she took in a breath before she started again.

‘And that’s not even the worst. She’s been cut open, and operated on. One of her kidneys has been removed, stolen. She was butchered. It wasn’t a neat job and from what the doctors can gather there were some intra-operative complications.’ Harker raised her eyes to the ceiling and took another breath as she composed herself once more.

She continued, ‘That’s where the mystery comes in. Those complications appear to have been dealt with well, as though someone skilled intervened in the operation to tidy it up. But her surgical wound has become infected and the doctors are worried that she might develop pneumonia. She can’t remember anything that has happened to her. She can’t remember her own name or her past. Not even her family or friends.’

Harker paused, watching the screen once more, ‘They call it dissociative fuge. It’s some form of amnesia that occurs after a traumatic experience. And you will already know that an attempt was made on her life when she was brought into the hospital.’

Kane gave her a confused look as he noticed her eyes suddenly look down at his hands on the chair and widen with surprise. He followed her gaze. He felt his mouth tense. He was gripping the arms of the chair so tightly as she talked of Rebecca’s injuries that his knuckles

had turned white. He had betrayed himself and given the whole game away.

‘I know you and Rebecca have a history,’ she said eyeing him closely. ‘Together. And I also know your parting wasn’t exactly on amicable terms. But I can see that you obviously still feel something for her. I hope this won’t be a problem and that you won’t let it affect the way you do your job. I want her to have the best security money can buy. You come highly recommended from the powers that be.’

He felt uncomfortable. He made a conscious effort to loosen his hold on the arms of the chair. She was waiting for his response. She would be judging as to whether or not he was telling the truth. He was going to have to be careful. She wouldn’t respect him for denying his feelings.

He spoke softly making sure he held eye contact with her. ‘I don’t allow my personal life to interfere with my work and I am not about to start now. I am flattered that you believe my company worthy of providing high calibre security, but I have to warn you I am not so sure this is the best for Rebecca. When her memory returns she is liable to be obstructive and distrustful of my presence.’

‘Yes, I can more than imagine.’ Her lips crinkled into a knowing smile. ‘But I am also aware that you won’t let that stop you. That is why you are sitting here now and why you got your stepfather’s influential friends to recommend your company to me. I know that you have been planning to go out there anyway whether I chose you or not. From all reports, Mr Kane, you were packed and ready to go with a team to get her out of South Bundhara the moment you heard she’d disappeared. Unfortunately for you that proposed mission was stopped because there was already a team out there looking for her.’

He felt uneasy when she talked about his stepfather. It was the one and only time Kane had asked for his help.

He hated the man who had wormed his way into his mother's life and taken it over. He had never needed anyone's help to get a contract for his company, Kane Security & Close Protection Services. But this was one job he didn't want to take his chances on. Rebecca's safety was worth the humiliation and condescension he'd had to take from the man. Still, Kane knew that his step father would do anything to get him on side for the sake of his mother and he had taken advantage.

He smiled and told Harker confidently, 'I will bring her home safely.' The smile on Harker's face widened and then receded quickly. She nodded. She appeared convinced. He watched her return to her throne behind the desk. She carried her small frame awkwardly, shuffling her walk, a cause of recent surgery on her feet, the removal of a toe he'd heard, another effect of her crippling diabetes. She had been in and out of hospital recently and the rumour was she was living on borrowed time once more. The woman had no kids, no family to speak of, and he couldn't help wondering who would inherit her fortune.

He got his mind back on the job at hand and started gathering as much information as he could. He wanted to be aware of all the facts so he could arrange effective protection for Rebecca, so he started questioning Harker. His first question was the one burning a hole in his head, the one that had kept him awake night after night whilst he'd waited for any news of Rebecca. 'Why did she cross South Bundhara's closed border? What was so important that she had to take a risk like that? Why was she sent out there?' He made every effort to hide his frustration but he could hear it slip past the polite tone he used as a barrier to disguise it.

Harker sounded irritated, 'No one sent her anywhere, Mr Kane. Her little trip was unauthorised.' He wasn't the only one who was frustrated at Rebecca's latest reckless stunt to bring in the news.

Harker continued. ‘No one knew apart from Jed, her cameraman.’

‘Does she know about his death? That his decapitated head and body were found at the border?’

Harker squirmed and shuddered in her chair before she answered. ‘No. I keep thinking that could have been her.’ Kane bowed his head, the very idea making him feel nauseous.

‘She and Jed made one hell of a team, Mr Kane, as I am sure you well know. She will take his loss very badly when she remembers. I believe they were once linked romantically. But Rebecca is a very private person, even with me. She likes to keep you guessing. Maybe you know more than me on that one?’ He smiled and remained silent. He did and, yes, she was right, but he wouldn’t betray Rebecca. There was obviously some reason why she hadn’t told the woman. ‘You are very loyal, Mr Kane.’

Harker sat forward, leaning her elbows on the desk and looking directly at him. She continued, ‘I don’t agree with the rest of the media that she was tortured by this Doctor Tasanee Somwan and her terrorist group, “The South Bundenese Liberation Army”. I have been told that Doctor Somwan asked Rebecca to go out there and interview her. She would only trust Rebecca to present her peaceful request to the British government for their help. She had something to offer them. Besides, Mr Kane, MI5 intercepted the e-mails Somwan was sending Rebecca. They encouraged her to go, asking her to carry a message from the British government.’ Harker shook her head with disbelief as she finished her last sentence.

‘They gave her no support?’ Kane asked.

‘They said she had to go it alone. If they were seen to be involved in negotiating with a terrorist there would be political hell to pay for the government.’

It was almost a black op. Harker broke into his thoughts. ‘I really believe it was the South Bundenese

government who were holding her. I also believe Somwan told Rebecca and Jed something that was going to provoke the British and Americans into action and stop them sitting on the fence on whether to authorise air strikes. Anyway, I don't know what is going on and I want you to find out. I want whoever is responsible for doing this to Rebecca held accountable. Whatever it is she knows, the information is enough for them to want to kill her.'

'I have a plane and a team ready and waiting at Heathrow.'

'Good. I need you there, Mr Kane, as soon as possible. Hospital security is practically non-existent and the police that are guarding her are inadequate, hence the attempt that was so easily made on her life. I will have you flown from here to Heathrow by helicopter.' She sat back in her chair suddenly grimacing with pain. She turned pale for a moment making Kane wonder whether or not he should get help. But she waved her hand at him when he politely expressed his concern.

'I'm fine. The North Bundenesse police don't exactly have the best reputation in the world. Apparently the custom is to offer a bribe if you want their co-operation – and they will be awkward in surrendering Rebecca's security to you. They will be loving all the attention from it. I am sending my personal assistant Charles with you. He will get you any funds you require. He will also handle the media.'

Kane wanted to object. He didn't want anyone else along for the ride. He was taking a large team of men out there, a bigger number than he would normally use, purely because he was unsure of what to expect. If a war did kick off he wanted to focus all of his attention on getting Rebecca out of the country not worry about another mark. But he nodded in agreement. The client was always King. He started to move from his chair to get on his way but she raised her hand making him sit back down again.

‘There is something else you should know. There are some Embassy officials out there hounding Rebecca for information about her interview with Somwan. I am pretty sure they are MI5 trying to keep their involvement under wraps. They have managed to get the doctors to stop her medication to keep her lucid so they can pump her for information. She can’t remember and she is in agony without pain relief.’

There was a fierce anger boiling through Harker’s speech, displaying a hardness in her eyes. ‘They are putting her at more risk of developing pneumonia. She could die, Mr Kane. It’s nothing short of torture.’

He told Harker quietly, firmly, ‘If I know Rebecca she will be giving them a hard time back. She is a fighter, she will hold up until I get there. They won’t be allowed near her after that. I will personally make sure of it.’

A brightness slowly returned to Harker’s eyes. ‘I don’t doubt it.’

The door opened making them both look up and turn towards it. A young man of Indian English descent came into the room. The man smiled at them both.

‘Charles, come in. This is Charles Beaumont, my personal assistant. One more thing before you both go. Michael Eaton, Rebecca’s brother is already out there. He left the moment she was reported missing. You never met him, I know... he may get in your way.’ She raised her eyebrows and smiled with sarcasm as she spoke about Michael.

Kane got the impression that Michael Eaton was not one of her favourite people. ‘He’s the tall dark and handsome type, an internationally renowned cardio thoracic surgeon, who really believes he is something. Just like most surgeons in my experience. But he is a notorious womaniser and a gambler. He’s arrogant and believes he always knows what is best for everyone, especially his sister when she is in trouble. He thinks he can look after

her and get her home on his own. He won't trust her safety with anyone. Rebecca and he are very close, very protective of each other. I suppose you can't blame them. They are all they have, there is no other family. Did she ever tell you about her parents and what happened to them?'

'No. I knew that she had a brother she doted on but she always clammed up when I mentioned her parents.' Kane watched Harker with interest, always eager to learn something new about Rebecca. She had never given much away.

'Their parents were murdered in front of them when she and Michael were children.'

Kane stared hard at her.

'They were journalists, well the wife, Janice. She was an award-winning photographic journalist. They did a piece together on a Mafia sex-slave ring in 1981 and made some dangerous enemies. When the gunmen finished with their parents they went looking for Michael and Rebecca. She was only eleven, Michael was eight. She hid Michael and faced them alone. Michael told me – she would never tell me anything. They hit her several times but she wouldn't give up Michael's whereabouts... they tore the place up looking for him. But the Eatons lived in a large old cottage and there was many a nook and cranny. He could have been anywhere. Turns out he was right under their noses and could see everything that went on. They put a gun to her forehead...'

Harker recounted the tale with disgust now but her hard tone was punctuated with bitter emotion. Kane just felt numb as he listened in horror.

'Michael, he wanted to go to her aid but she had locked him in this vent or whatever it was... I don't remember... not that he would have been able to do anything. He watched the man holding the gun to her head pull back the trigger. He really thought she was going to

die. He told me that he would never forget how courageous she was, how she faced her fate with dignity. Tears were rolling down her face but she didn't flinch with fear. To him, she was regal, serene, braver than he could ever be – he will never forget the way she protected him with her own life. I think he is in awe of her: it's the way he talks about her with such pride. If the police had been a second later in barging through the door she would have been dead. They shot the gunman dead and he fell on top of her. Michael said he remembers screaming with her and he is sure a part of him still is.' She paused for a moment before continuing, 'Michael will get in your way and try to control the situation. He won't trust anyone with her protection. He believes he owes her that much.'

Kane suddenly realised he was still staring at Harker. But he was looking through her. He was stuck in the scene she had described, watching Rebecca as a child facing death in the eye. He felt pain, loss, anxiety beginning to gain a strangle hold on him. It was the culmination of the fear he had experienced wondering if she was dead or alive. A reminder of how close she had come to death before he could make it right between them. He'd been wasting time. No more.

He was going to make her see that they belonged together before her job got her killed. He always said she had a death wish. Now he knew why. She had been repeating the same scenario over and over in her mind. She must have thought she should have died along with her parents. She'd been trying to get herself killed. She must have felt guilty about surviving. It explained so much about her. It was almost a textbook manoeuvre.

She was starting to make sense to him now. *You are more messed up than I thought Rebecca. Trouble is, you never counted on the part of yourself you showed me, the part that is damned if it is going to let you kill yourself*

*to prove a point. No more games. This is going to end. I am going to make you see sense whether you like it or not.*

‘Mr Kane, are you all right?’ He raised his head quickly, jumping to Harker’s attention. She gave him a sympathetic smile. ‘I am sorry, Mr Kane. I should have been more careful how I told you. I can see how much you still care for Rebecca. Now I am even more convinced that I have chosen the right man for the job. She doesn’t need some faceless security expert who will boss her around. She needs emotional support.’

Kane felt uneasy again. He shouldn’t really go. He was too involved with Rebecca, albeit their relationship was in the past. It was unethical. He shouldn’t be involved with the client, it stopped you doing an effective job. It made you careless. But then this wasn’t any ordinary assignment and he was too stubborn and, dare he say it, arrogant to let anyone else provide her security. He was the only one he trusted with her life. He stood up fastening his suit jacket and moved to shake Harker’s hand.

‘I will call you when I have seen her.’

‘Mr Kane, if Rebecca does not co-operate with you and fails to follow your instructions just tell her she is fired. When she gets her memory back that will help you to keep her under control and stop her from trying to sort this mess out on her own. We both know that is what she will try and do. It’s too dangerous. Tell her I want her safe or she is out of a job and I mean it.’

He grinned and followed Charles. *She’ll love that!*

## Chapter Two

Charles gave him the lowdown on the plane, filling in the blanks left out by Harker and a copy of the medical report on Rebecca's injuries. It made tough reading. Kane had meant to read it objectively, keep his distance from the anger. He wanted to pretend that he didn't know the woman it talked about. But his attempt at professional indifference failed. A number of things hit him. First, she had clearly been interrogated, and not by terrorists. There was too much evidence of systematic torture, techniques for getting information used by the Southern Bundenese Army: he'd done his homework.

The Bundenese Liberation Army, or BLA, were out and out terrorists who took their hostage's heads or limbs depending on the warning they wished to send out to the world. The punishment always fit the crime. The torture detailed in the report represented the government's army. It was methodical, clinical – they had even used condoms when they had raped her. Rape was a standard interrogation practice used on both women and men by the Southern Bundenese army and others around the world. The terrorists would have simply taken her head.

Rebecca had been beaten, and cut with a knife on her chest area and arms. It looked like the torture had lasted several hours. But it appeared she had held up well. *I don't expect anything else from you, Becca but I wish for your sake you had given it up, whatever it was you were hiding. What the hell was it that made you risk your life? Get beaten and raped for? Who the hell were you protecting? Can't be Somwan. Something that she told you that affects others? Has to be! You are always championing somebody's cause but your own. For once I wish you would think of yourself.*

He looked at the photograph of her face taken whilst she slept. He touched the image gently with his

fingers feeling anger knot inside him, tightening his whole frame rigid. There was bruising to her face, forehead and jaw and she sported one black eye. The only anomaly in the report was that her stomach and back area had been untouched. In fact all areas near her surgical wound were clear of injury.

The report surmised that the beating had taken place before the surgery. That would mean that she had been considered as being a kidney donor before the interrogation. He'd heard the tales of kidney stealing and organ selling scare stories from around the world. *Don't they have to run tests to make sure it is worth taking the organ? Compatibility tests? Would they really just take it? Not likely. She's been ear marked as a donor. Maybe before she left the UK? Doesn't make any sense. Too many bloody questions to answer. I hope you get your memory back Becca.*

He loosened his tie and glanced once more at the report he held in his hand with distaste. He put it down on the table in front of him and found himself staring at it. The anger he had been trying to control and swat down for days was getting harder to control. He wasn't just angry at the bastards who had done this to her, but also at Rebecca for putting herself in that position in the first place.

If he had been anywhere else but on an aeroplane he would have punched the wall and let some of the frustration loose. He'd never felt like this before, not even when his ex-wife walked out of the door after only six months of marriage. He had just felt relieved. *I hate fucking flying. Aren't we there yet?*

He made a concerted effort to look around, not at the report. But it kept drawing his obsessive attention back. He kept focusing on key words on the front cover. They disturbed the order of his thoughts, triggering off his imagination – laceration, rape, violation. He ran his hand over his face in frustration and decided to order a drink

from the co-pilot who attended them. He hadn't allowed any unnecessary crew on the flight. He wanted to down the brandy in one go and order another one but he forced himself to be patient. Besides he needed to be alert the moment he stepped off the plane.

He looked out of the window wishing it was land he saw and not fluffy white clouds or the sun glinting off the wings blinding him. *36,000 feet. Jeez I am stuck in this tin can at 36,000 feet feeling like I am going to blow my top any moment. I need another drink. No. Hell Rebecca, I know more than anyone just how tough you are, but how are you going to pull through this one on your own?*

He took another gulp of his brandy, starting to worry about what mental state he would find her in when he got to Kamol, the closest city to the border with South Bundhara. The Rebecca Eaton who stole his heart almost two years ago when she came to Afghanistan to do a special programme on the Royal Marines fighting the Taliban was a tough class act. She had even left his own men in awe. She risked her life to get to the truth and make damn sure the whole world knew about it. The programme won her a BAFTA. Some of the men in the tank corps even named a tank after her, said it would bring them luck and, funny enough, so far it had done.

He put his glass down on the table only to see it jump in the air as the plane shuddered and dipped with unexpected turbulence. *I so wish I could get pissed. Get a grip. You are a decorated officer, an ex Royal Marine who has faced death countless bloody times and you are afraid of a stupid plane ride? Give me the enemy to fight any day. I don't want to die a pointless death in this metal coffin where I can't do anything to save my life. Relax, remember when you first met her.*

He discreetly checked his seatbelt and pulled it a little tighter. He sat back in his chair and stretched out his long legs in front of him and closed his eyes, trying to

ignore his obsessive need to be alert to every damn different noise the plane made. He sank back into the past. It was cliché but he remembered the day she walked into his life just like yesterday.

He was never any good at loving people. He always got it wrong. Someone always got hurt and in this case it was Rebecca. He had been moaning to his fellow officers in the tent that passed for a mess hall about being assigned to supervise a visiting journalist in Helmand Province, Camp Bastion. Yet everyone he'd moaned to was envious when they found out who the journalist was – Rebecca Eaton.

He'd heard of her, seen her on TV a few times. Yeah she was pretty, but reckless, dangerous. Every time he saw one of her reports she always seemed to be in the thick of it, bombs going off all around her. Everyone was starry eyed but he didn't trust journalists and it was dangerous having them on the front line. She might have proven too much of a distraction for his men. Still his CO overruled him.

'We need all the good press we can get, Kane. She is an army favourite. She was instrumental in getting the government to pay attention to the lack of kit the men had out in Iraq that was costing lives. She shouts loud and gets results. We need her to show the good old folks back home what a bloody good job we are doing out here on their behalf, show them their tax money is being well spent. Get used to it Kane.'

Kane would never forget the way the men around him reacted when she came to introduce herself. But it wasn't on the same scale as his own reaction. Thank God he was more practised at hiding his feelings than the rest of them. A destructive failed marriage tended to make it a far easier task. He wasn't going to let any woman get the better of him again. Still, he was pleasant, although non-committal and slightly aloof. As far as he was concerned

she would consider him a closed book. He made sure of that. But just like the rest of them he was hypnotised by those sparkling emerald eyes that shone mischievously at him. Those eyes that told him he was trapped, that she knew his game despite his rather cool subdued reception of her. He knew that was one of the things that gave his attraction to her away. She always liked a challenge she'd told him later. His eyes always communicated his feelings whether he liked it or not, she'd also said. They betrayed him every time.

She was quite small, 5'3 or 5'4? Funny, she'd looked taller on the screen. She was clearly trying to meld in, be one of the boys with her outfit in a large desert-coloured shirt and trousers. But there was no way she could hide those tantalising sumptuous curves. No, she had him hooked and she knew it. All of his attempts to avoid her net and keep her distant only seemed to make her more determined to reel him in. The more she tried, the more he wanted her and the more he slipped up. It was all leading to an inevitable conclusion. He hadn't expected it to kick off on the front line. Not on the day she was shot.

They were out on an operation to move the Taliban out of one of their strongholds. She was talking to the camera, crouched low behind a wall with him as they began shelling the enemy. He wondered how she could concentrate with all the noise going off all around her. It had to be distracting and frightening, even for her. But she remained coolly professional. She never failed to impress him. She was doing a damn good job of telling the public just what he and his men had to face every day on the front line. She'd done her research, knew their situation and the political situation inside out. She had got to know his men, capturing their thoughts and feelings on the war. He admired her for having the guts to come out there and put her life at risk.

The enemy was firing on both sides. She was down, squashed against the wall telling Jed and her director to do the same. Kane told her to follow him and crawl with the rest of his men along the ditch between the wall and a field full of maize that was providing them with flimsy cover on the other side. She'd kept up with him, only pausing to relate what was happening to the camera or to tell Jed to get down. The man was often a damn nuisance trying to catch every angle of the fighting.

She kept asking him questions about what was going on around them and his next intentions. She really was the original grace under pressure. The only indication he got of any fear was a slight tremor in her voice.

They headed towards a small shell of a building he knew wasn't far off. It should have been safe enough for them to take shelter there. They finally made it after being face down in the dirty, watery ditch, being under almost constant fire from the enemy. Miraculously, no one had been hurt, maimed or killed for a change.

The small building wasn't much of a comfort. Four walls and a partial roof afforded little cover, but it would have to do until air support could arrive. He had instructed Sgt Major Slater to radio for it when there was a sudden lull in the gunfire. He remembered feeling suspicious. He looked all around. He'd known something was coming that day. He'd felt it all morning. Then it came, a shot, straight in Slater's arm, then another in his stomach, a third in his chest as he radioed for the air support. Shit. Snipers.

One of his men shouted, 'Incoming.' An explosion shook the ground nearby. Thankfully, it had missed its intended target, them. He turned quickly to find one of the enemy on top of what was left of the roof. One of his officers was leading Rebecca and the others under cover when he was shot and killed. They were surrounded. Kane killed the man on the roof before he could take anyone else out and ordered Rebecca and her crew to stay behind two

of his own men firing over one of the walls. He and Lance Corporal Adler cleared the covered part of the building killing two of the enemy.

He ordered Rebecca and co to the shelter of the wall. He remembered hearing the Taliban rustling through the maize towards them, ready to storm the building. His heart was pounding so hard that day. He had an extra responsibility: three civilians who were relying on him for protection, which he took very seriously. Slater was still alive – barely – groaning in pain. Two of his men moved to bring him under cover helped by Rebecca who was doing her best to be of assistance, even though he knew it was futile. He'd gotten good at predicting death by this point.

As they moved they came under more fire. They never made it under cover. He pushed Rebecca behind one of his men under the wall that surrounded the half demolished building. They were in real trouble – this was an ambush. The Intel had been crap, but then the Taliban were always relaying false info, knowing the allied forces were always tapping into their communications. One of his other men was radioing for air support, taking up where Slater left off, relaying their position. They were all pinned down behind the wall.

He sent three of his men to head off the enemy through the maize and concentrated on firing at those over the wall. Jed was still filming, the camera trained on Rebecca as she did her best to help Slater. She was wrapping the special bandage she had been given in her kit around one of his wounds. She also gave Slater the morphine injection she was instructed to carry, her fingers shaking as she did so. He wanted to tell her to save it. Slater would be dead in a minute. But by now he had learned that Rebecca would have chided him and never given up trying. It was what made her so strong and yet vulnerable all at the same time.

Kane glanced at Jed panning the camera around to himself and his men. The director was pinned against the wall, too terrified to move his backside and help with anything. Where the fuck was air support? The medic that Rebecca was assisting was shot in the shoulder and nicked in the top of his leg as two of his other men were also injured. That left only him protecting their position behind the wall. He couldn't see the enemy. There were too many men down. Everything was going pear shaped for the first time in his illustrious career in the Royal Marines. He looked at Rebecca, weighed her up and made a decision.

'Eaton,' he snapped, commanding her attention instantly above the noise of the gunfire. 'Get over here now, next to me. Looks like you get to be soldier for a day. You remember the compulsory training you were given before they would let you come out here? You remember how to fire a rifle?' He grimaced as he remembered the condescension in his voice.

She had nodded furiously, ducking her head to avoid a stray bullet.

He shouted to the badly injured medic, 'Corporal Tate, give Eaton your weapon.'

Kane watched her stare at it with fear before she crawled over to take it. He saw Tate give her a wary expression. Jed had the camera trained on her the whole time. Kane ignored it, this was a matter of life and death, no time to argue. Male manners, rightly or wrongly would have made him pick Jed to take the weapon because he was a man, keep Rebecca right out of it. He knew it was old fashioned to women but it was just the way he was wired. Not this time though. Instinct told him that Rebecca was the one he could trust to come through for him.

He kept returning fire, after hearing his two men he'd sent to flush the enemy out shout their positions to him. There were four of them. His men went to deal with two of them in the north east position, leaving Rebecca and

himself to deal with the two directly in front of them. He felt Rebecca brush his arm as she settled in beside him and positioned the rifle over the wall. He glanced at her, seeing the mental concentration tense her face as she remembered what to do. She was quiet, waiting patiently for his order. He hoped he was doing the right thing. She looked as white as a sheet and for a brief moment he thought she might balk out. He quickly told her where to aim. He checked once more.

‘Are you sure you remember what to do, Eaton?’

‘Y..yes. I was a good shot.’

‘Show me.’

The enemy had moved onto the roof of an opposing ruined building. Rebecca started to fire at them with him. At first her shots went all over the place, probably because her hands were shaking so much. He made short work of dispatching one of them. But the other made a direct shot that caught him in the top of his arm. *Sly bastards. They weren't a dumb enemy.* It passed out of his arm cleanly. It was a familiar pain. He'd been shot a couple of times before. He would survive.

He heard Rebecca swear low, unaware that he had been shot. She was frustrated at herself. He watched her take a breath and aim again. This time she proved she was a decent shot, catching the enemy in his shoulder. That was when he heard the fast roaring of the American jets come racing to give them air support. But they were still too far away to be of any use. He heard the medic shout, ‘Slater's dead sir, he's dead.’

He tried aiming again but it was difficult with his injury. The damn enemy was moving in on their position. Rebecca was staring at the dead man who had fallen from the roof after Kane had killed him. He would never forget her face under the large helmet that almost hid it. She wore an expression that haunted him to this day. It was a look of pain and futility that summed up the whole bloody war. He

worried she would falter when he really need her. He urged her on and tried to fire again as she stared. He remembered thinking she was losing it. But he knew now that Rebecca Eaton never disappointed anyone in a moment of crisis. She always came through.

His shots were going off target and his arm felt slightly numb. Rebecca started firing again and this time she was better but the sniper was moving, coming dangerously close and she couldn't hit him. Kane knew that the man would be carrying a grenade. He had seen this all before. Rebecca was their only hope or they were all dead.

He remembered hearing Rebecca cry out making him wonder if she had been shot. But she was still trying to aim at the enemy who was doing his best to evade her shots and succeeding with ease. She just wasn't up to it. It wasn't her fault, she'd done her best. He'd obviously given her some sort of hopeless look of desperation because she returned it with one hell of a glare that told him that she wouldn't let him down. She took a deep breath, took time to aim correctly as the enemy came towards them. She fired once, missed, twice and caught him in the stomach. *Brilliant.* But he was still coming and holding up that grenade to throw into the compound. He told her firmly, 'Take him out'.

There was brief hesitation. He knew she was finding the realisation of the meaning of his words difficult to accept. He wanted her to kill the man. But a shot slamming into the wall near them convinced her of the necessity of what she had to do. She aimed and caught the enemy in a shot to the head. He hit the deck like a ton of bricks, arm still outstretched to throw the grenade. Kane quickly pushed her head down behind the wall and leaned over her as he shouted a warning to the rest of the men.

The grenade went off with a bang making her jump against him. Slowly, he lifted off her checking it was clear,

and let her sit up. She coughed hard in the cloud of dust settling around them. He remembered rubbing her back and smiling at her. Unfortunately she couldn't return the smile. She went a shade of green he hadn't seen in a long time and turned away from him and threw up violently.

He laid a hand on her shoulder and kept rubbing her back, urging her gently to get it all up. She cried quietly in between bouts of sickness. He could feel her body convulsing with the strength of her emotion. It wasn't easy killing for the first time. That first death of war seemed to stick with you. Jed was asking if she was all right but at the same time telling her how fantastic she was and how he'd filmed the whole thing. Kane felt irritated that Jed was crowding her and told him to give her some air and keep back. That hadn't gone down well with Jed. He got the guy's trademark scowl that would have put most people in their place. But Jed was messing with the wrong man. Jed obviously had feelings for Rebecca and he was treading on the man's toes. *Too bad.* It was a shame because they had got on well with each other until Kane got involved with Rebecca.

She went quiet after a while. She sat still with her back to him, vainly attempting to hide her emotion. He made no effort to remove his hand from her back. He kept rubbing it in a soothing circular motion. She needed comfort. She made no effort to stop him as he patiently waited for her to collect herself. The other two men he'd sent to look for the Taliban returned safe after extinguishing the threat. They started to help the injured men. They couldn't move yet, air support was still clearing the area. When it was safe they would meet transport back down the road and get the injured taken back to the Camp.

Kane leaned in close to Rebecca and quietly asked her, "How are you feeling? Are you ready to move? We need to get everyone out of here and I am going to need

your help again. You came through Rebecca, saved our asses.’

‘I killed a man. I actually killed someone.’

He told her softly, ‘Yes, you did but you saved a lot of people in doing so.’

‘I am not sure I can get my head around that right now.’

‘No you probably won’t. When we get back I am going to have the counsellor talk to you about this.’ She was silent. He noticed she kept her eyes from the body that was now in bits thanks to the grenade. He moved his arm to get a better look at his wound and asked one of his men to help him quickly tie a bandage around it. He asked her, ‘Did you get hurt? I heard you cry out?’

‘No... I... don’t know. I don’t think so.’

Kane checked her arms not convinced. He hadn’t seen any blood when he’d rubbed her back but she was holding one of them awkwardly. He gently took a closer look making her face him, carefully turning her right arm over. Sure enough she had been hit just above her elbow. She was obviously still numb from shock and adrenaline and couldn’t feel it yet. Without a second thought he began ripping the material of her shirt sleeve up the middle. She looked at him confused.

He rolled up the remnants of her sleeve and looked down at the wound. She was lucky it was like his own. It had gone clean through but her wound was a touch deeper than his. She looked down at it wearing a mask of both interest and horror on her face. Suddenly Jed was in Kane’s face trying to get a close-up on it. He bit his tongue realising this was part of Rebecca’s job. She remained silent, trying to give the camera a brief smile. She was in shock and even Jed got the message. ‘Jed I need your help, hold her arm, carefully. Keep it up while I get a bandage and some morphine.’

Thankfully Jed stopped filming and did as he was told. Kane searched for a bandage in his kit aware that Rebecca looked hot, pale and out of it. Now she knew the wound was there the pain was beginning to register in her brain. Her features pinched and she gasped with the sting. He wrapped the bandage around her wound tight and took care of her arm back from Jed telling him to help the others. He gave her the morphine injection and gently turned her arm back and forth checking his handiwork on the bandage.

She was still quiet. Only her tense features told him she was in a lot of pain. He moved his thumb along her wrist. It was absent minded, a comforting gesture as he watched her with concern for a moment. She raised her eyes and stared at him with warmth. Her features were soft and although tears brimmed once more, she was making every effort to rein in her emotion and her reaction to the pain. She didn't make one complaint and did not mention the man she had just killed again. She was a strong woman. She'd demonstrated that from day one. That made her all the more vulnerable to Kane when she showed any emotion. It meant she felt it deeply and it was a wound she would carry with her always. It made him feel powerfully protective of her. He hadn't felt that way about a woman in a long time.

He asked her, 'Do you think you can move?' She nodded and started to rise to her feet. He rose with her and reached out to hold her arms when she wobbled. He steadied her. He frowned. 'I don't think you should walk. I will carry you.'

She'd cut him dead quickly. Snapped back at him. 'Don't you dare. I am fine. You need me to help you get the injured back. I am walking wounded. I don't need carrying Major Kane. I don't see anyone offering to carry you and you have the same injury.'

Kane remembered putting his hands on his hips and staring straight at her with irritation out from under his helmet. ‘Okay. Point taken. But you have just had one hell of a shock. You had to kill someone and to be fair your injury is much worse than mine.’ He pointed at her injured arm. ‘It’s bleeding badly and needs treatment. You are not used to these conditions, neither are you a trained soldier and prepared for the effects. You will most likely collapse. You are not immune, Ms Eaton, just because you believe yourself some kind of action hero. First time I was shot in the arm somebody had to carry me because I had the same dumb attitude as you. I bled so much I passed out. I do not wish that to happen to you.’

He kept a tight hold on his temper. He made sure he stayed polite, quiet and calm to soothe her rising anger that was more than likely provoked by the shock. In a roundabout way she was accusing him of treating her differently because she was a woman. He’d be wrong if he said it didn’t influence him just a little but he knew the heat, the pain and the blood loss would all conspire to get her. It was simple. He was a lot stronger, fitter and more used to the terrain. It would affect her much more, like it or not.

‘I am more than capable of handling myself. I can help.’

‘I never said you weren’t,’ he said gently. ‘But you are wobbling all over the place. Let me help you.’

‘I said I can handle it,’ she raised her voice making everyone turn and look.

She flushed with embarrassment and looked at the ground obviously unable to bear the silence that settled over the compound. He maintained his stance watching her intently, sympathetically, undeterred by the silence.

Her voice was lower when she spoke again. ‘I don’t need you acting like Captain Caveman and rescuing me. I am needed here. I can help. Now let me do so.’ He

shook his head at her but let her go, watching her sway and hobble over to the injured medic that Jed was trying to help.

He stared at her, hands still pressed against his hips. *Captain Caveman? Isn't he the hairy guy with the club off that cartoon? Didn't he shout his name loudly every time he appeared? The one who always helped the female detectives he travelled with? Yeah, that was a great programme. Haven't seen that since I was a kid. Maybe I should get a shave.*

He played along with her need to prove herself as good as the next man but kept a close eye on her. She was supporting the weight of one of his men around her shoulder. Jed was supposedly helping her, holding the soldier's other arm. But Jed was too busy fiddling with his camera and letting Rebecca shoulder nearly all of the weight. The soldier was in a hell of a lot of pain with two shots to his leg and Rebecca was doing her best to get him along the road. Her legs were shaking and she was ready to drop. He'd seen enough. He shouted to Jed to come and help with the injured he was supervising down the back of the line and swept the soldier's arm around his neck pulling the majority of the weight from her. It was a job well done, no dent to her ego or so he'd thought. But her disapproving look told him otherwise.

He ignored her. She was impossible but he had to admire her. She had both guts and staying power. Medics came running when they reached the transport and took the soldier away leaving them both free of their burden. He watched her move away and bend over putting her hands on her knees trying to catch her breath. He shouted for a medic. She started walking towards the truck refusing his offer of assistance.

She told him politely, 'Thanks but I can manage Major Kane.'

He let her walk past him. He shook his head at the pure concentration on her face at attempting an upright stance without the fatigue of pain. No way was she going to last on her feet. He remembered counting under his breath, one, two, three, four, five, as he picked up his pace following her. He was right behind her when her legs gave way. He heard her give a surprised cry as he bent and swept his arm around her legs on cue as she started falling. He hoisted her over his shoulder easily. His friend Tom ran past him carrying one of the injured men. ‘Looks like I get to be Captain Caveman for real after all Eaton. Even though it means I have to drop a rank to do it. There is no shame in getting help.’

‘Put me down. I can manage. You can’t carry me, you are injured.’ she told him drowsily.

‘Stop struggling and relax. I am fine. I’ve done this before. There is no way I am putting you down. Besides you can’t walk. Just enjoy the ride. Now I have got you to myself and you can’t escape, how about telling me you will come out for a drink with me.’

‘Are you asking me out on a date Captain Caveman?’ There was amusement in her weary voice.

‘I suppose I am.’

‘Okay. I would really like that. But first I need to ask something. Is it all right if I pass out now?’

‘I give you permission Eaton. You are safe with me. Get some rest I want you fit and well for our date.’

Before he finished his sentence he felt her body weight slump over his shoulders. She was out cold. He carried her to the transport vehicle quickly, really feeling the pain in his own arm now. She wasn’t the only one ready to drop.

## Chapter Three

He'd taken her to the coffee shop in Camp Bastion when they released her from the hospital. He was as nervous as hell. The loud cat calls and whistling from some of his men sitting near them didn't help either. She'd just done a special report for AHG News and had interviewed him for it. It was going out on the ten o'clock news back in the UK. She looked beautiful. There was a softness about her since the day she'd been shot. The hard edge she had treated himself and his men to was gone. His men had made a fuss about her bravery. She had been embarrassed but touched. She had obviously judged it safe to let her guard down and she wasn't objecting to him pulling out a chair for her.

'How are you feeling?' he asked her, gesturing with his eyes to her arm in the sling.

'Better. They say I can take the sling off in a couple of days time. How about you?' She smiled nervously at him. Her emerald eyes sparkled like jewels at him under her long dark lashes holding him spellbound.

'Yes, I am doing fine thanks. My injury wasn't as bad as yours. Have you spoken to the counsellor yet?'

She lowered her eyes immediately and stared at the table. 'No I haven't. I don't really think they help.'

'I want you to go,' he said firmly.

'Is that an order Major Kane?' There was a challenge in her voice.

'I am responsible for your safety and care while you are here. I want you to receive the help you need. I told you there is no shame in asking for help. The counsellor is here for everyone. I want you to go,' he spoke softly but made sure his voice lost none of its firmness, leaving her in no doubt it was an order. He was learning how to handle her fast.

She raised her head and nodded. 'I will go. I promise.'

They'd chatted about home, family life. He told her about his autistic sister and she talked of her brother. She'd never mentioned her parents once and when he tried to enquire about them she changed the subject. He'd guessed that there was a feud, some disagreement between them and had not mentioned them again. He hadn't wanted the evening to end but he was suddenly aware that she was looking tired and in pain. He quickly said, 'I should let you get some rest. Maybe we should go out again and continue our conversation.'

He'd stood up expecting her to follow but she stayed still in her chair and stared down at the table. Her eyes shifted to the sides. She didn't seem to want to make eye contact with him. 'I'm not tired. I don't want to go to bed yet. Let's have another coffee.'

He frowned down at her with concern. She looked uncomfortable, nervous, suddenly very edgy. Something was clearly wrong. She tapped her finger on the table. He said, 'No, let's do that tomorrow, you need to rest.'

'Okay you go, I will have one on my own.' He sat back down confused. She still refused to look at him.

'What's wrong?' he asked carefully. 'Why don't you want to go to sleep?'

He heard her give a sigh and then tell him with frustration, 'I can't sleep. I haven't slept properly in days. I keep seeing that man die, the man I killed. And the nightmares... I can't get any peace from them. I woke up screaming last night. That isn't me. I deal with things. I have seen pain and death before as a journalist but this... it's personal. I caused the death. I killed him.' He heard the emotion threaten to crack through her words but she held it back tight. 'I just want to be here... where there are people. I need company. I just don't want to be alone.'

He studied her for a moment. She was clearly distressed. He made a decision. He stretched out his arm and covered his hand over hers and stopped her finger tapping on the table. She looked up at him quickly. He picked up her small slender hand and curled it neatly under his own. He lowered his voice to a caressing whisper and gave her hand a gentle reassuring squeeze. 'You must get some rest but you don't have to be alone.'

Comprehension startled her eyes, widened her pupils. She paused and then nodded. He let go of her hand and stood up. This time she followed his lead and allowed him to guide her out of the coffee shop to her own private tented accommodation.

He zipped the tent up and turned to look at her sitting on the camp bed. She couldn't meet his eyes again. He sat down beside her and gently cupped the side of her face and lifted it up towards him. Her cheek was damp with one solitary tear. The pad of his thumb gently brushed it away halting its progress. She stared up at him as he caressed the side of her face with his thumb. She asked him, 'Are you sure you want...'

'Shhh, I wouldn't be here if I didn't want to,' he whispered before leaning in and brushing her lips with the soft inquisitive touch of his own. He paused judging that she was happy with the intimate contact and repeated the simple action. He brought her closer, sweeping his hands around her small waist, pulling her to him with need. Satisfied she wasn't able to retreat from the small enclosed space of his arms he kissed her again. This time he went deeper. She moaned against him.

He moved his hand up to the back of her neck. He splayed his fingers and supported her there for a moment, holding her in place. His free hand moved towards the small band that restrained her long deep chestnut hair. She never took it down and he'd imagined night after night what she would look like with it free and wild around her

shoulders in his bed, underneath him. He ached to thread his fingers through it, feeling it's seductive silky sheen.

Kane tugged the band away and felt her hair tumble onto his hand and weave delicately between his fingers as he steadied the back of her head. He wanted her closer. He began pulling her further towards him and then stopped abruptly, remembering her injury and the sling.

'Help me take it off,' she begged kissing him once more. 'I want to hold you.' He smiled and carefully undid the sling. She flung her arms around him and held on tight. He entwined his arms around her and pulled her up to sitting to face him on his lap. Although she didn't speak there was heavy emotion in the way she clung to him. She was trembling. He realised that she wanted him to make her feel safe. He responded instantly, protectively folding his arms around her tight. He stroked her hair as she pressed her cheek against his own and waited patiently for her to rouse from her emotion.

To hold a woman this close after so long was more than a treat. She smelled so good. The scent of soap and peach invaded his senses. She was so warm against his skin. This was heaven. He kissed her forehead as she moved her hands to his face. She cupped his chin in her hands and bent to kiss him long and hard. He took his cue and began undoing the buttons on her shirt.

He took his time undressing her. He wanted every part of her revealed to him slowly so he could savour the moment. Stuck out there in that bloody heap of rock and desert she was a Godsend. There hadn't been anyone for a while and he wanted to take his time. His fingers carefully slid the shirt from her shoulders, feeling the first touch of her soft smooth pale skin. They hadn't stopped kissing. His lips didn't want to leave her mouth. It was though her taste was some sort of drug he couldn't get enough of. He wanted more and more of her. But he made himself pause to look down at her body as he unveiled it.

He gently pulled her shirt down over her arms, careful of the bandage over her gunshot wound. He found himself holding his breath as he spread his fingers up her bare back to the catch on her bra. His gaze fell to her breasts and the full voluptuous cleavage as he undid the catch and pulled the bra from her arms. Their dark peaks thrust up towards him beckoning him to delay his touch no longer. Without further hesitation he curved his hands neatly around her breasts taking their weight, testing their heaviness. He curled his finger tips around one of the dark peaks and gently tugged it.

She threw her head back allowing him better access to her breasts. He squeezed, kissed and pinched the dark peaks with his teeth sending her into a frenzy. He couldn't help wondering how long it had been since she was last touched by a man in this way. The idea of any man touching her other than him created a spark of jealousy. He wanted her all to himself. It made him play harder and his hold on her breasts became a little harsh, possessive, almost cruel. His mouth was relentless, taking as much of the fleshy pink mounds in his mouth as he could, his teeth grazing her nipple sharply - pulling it taut. Her response was overwhelming. She gave a small pleasurable cry and pulled impatiently at his clothes.

He swept his hands around and up her back once more and lifted her up. She wrapped her legs around his waist not wanting to let go at first, pushing herself against his hardness. It was almost too much. He set her down firmly on her feet and tugged aggressively at the belt on her trousers. He just about ripped the buttons from them and pulled them down taking her underwear with them. His hands settled on her hips feeling the shape of her slim sumptuous curves with an intense pleasure. He pulled her to him roughly and caressed his fingertips over her full round buttocks surveying them with admiration.

One hand remained there whilst another slipped between her thighs. She was damp already when he stroked his finger between her lips. He rolled her clit between his fingers and pinched it. A flood of juicy liquid coated his fingers in response. Satisfied she was almost ready and prepared for him, he stroked his middle finger around her entrance in a tantalising teasing gesture. She grew softer, wetter, making her lips full and plump. Just the way he wanted her. To give her a taste of what was to come he stopped teasing her and thrust his fingers inside as deep as her body would allow. At the same time he probed her mouth, wrestling her tongue for dominance. He made sure the kiss was long and deep, as long and deep as his fingers moving inside her.

His wove his hand through her hair and grasped it as he deepened the simultaneous action further. He wanted her to feel consumed by him, to know that after tonight she was his and belonged to no one else. Her breath was coming in short eclectic gasps telling him of her pleasure and high arousal. Rebecca Eaton might have been a free independent spirit that allowed no man to control her in her day job but in bed it was a different story. She both needed and wanted to be firmly handled. He was more than happy with that paradox.

He withdrew his fingers but still covered her mouth and swept his palms over her bottom to cup each half. He squeezed her painfully tight and lifted her up into his arms once more. Again she wound her legs around him, impatiently pressing herself against him. He laid her down on the bed and tore at his clothes.

He considered that he was mounting a goddess as he lowered himself down on top of her. Her hair was lying tousled and curled around her shoulders. Those green eyes were satiated in glistening moisture and hooded. Her deep ruby lips highlighted against her pale skin were plump and full, mirroring those between her thighs. He took hold of

her waist and then ran his hands down to her hips gently squeezing his hold. It's effect made her tilt her pelvis and her back upwards, thrusting her breasts and body up towards him. She was inviting him inside. She was awe inspiring, a beautiful siren. He wanted her now.

His first thrust was hard and sharp. Her deep pleasurable gasp told him she was appreciative. Her hands reached up to smooth over his muscled arms and down his back as he made the same rhythmic hard strokes inside her. Her pelvis rode up to meet him. He reached deep as her breathing gave him every indication she was ready to explode. In a mad moment he pulled her up to sitting with him, still heavy inside her. He wanted to be deeper. She sat against him rocking her pelvis to his dictated rhythm. He lowered her back over his arm and took her mouth prisoner to muffle both of their cries as they came together.

Beads of moisture lined her forehead when he gave her one final kiss before allowing her mouth to be free. She smiled in pleasure at him, raising her eyes to mimic her glee. He grinned and lowered her back down on the small uncomfortable camp bed. It was difficult to lie next to her but he turned on his side and just about hung off the edge as he determined to master the task. He covered them both with the blanket on top of it and cradled her against him under his arm. She turned towards him pressing her lips to his chest. He looked down at her and pulled her just a touch closer feeling that urge to be protective of her well stronger inside him. She was flushed. She looked happy. There was more life in those eyes than normal. He was taking a risk just being there with her... if he was caught... but it was more than worth it.

'I love being here with you, even squashed on this small camp bed in the middle of this desert with a ferocious enemy all around us. It all adds to the excitement,' she joked.

He grinned, ‘Really, I hadn’t noticed you like danger Rebecca.’

‘Yes okay, but you make me feel safe,’ her voice turned serious. ‘I don’t ever really feel safe. I know it is an odd thing to say but I don’t. Whenever I am with you or even just knowing you’re nearby I feel warm and safe.’

He smiled down at her, bemused and delighted all at the same time. He stroked her hair and kissed her forehead. But she reached up and found his mouth again. She pressed her damp body against his thigh and wound her hand around his length and squeezed. He was hard once more and she wanted him inside her again. As he rolled on top of her he decided that making love this time would be slow, deliberate. It would be about coaxing her into submission and binding her to him. There was no way he was letting her just walk away from him. For some reason this small curvy journalist was giving him all the signals that she was the one he’d been searching for. No way was she escaping.

*Famous last words.*