

Chapter 1

The aftermath of the second that changed my life was chaos. Cries of pain and fear echoed through the elegantly decorated and lit chapel. The ringing in my ears and the pain in my body were nothing compared to the blood that covered my hands and my blue wedding dress. It was William's blood and as I held his body in my hands, my screams joined the cacophony of sounds. Pieces of wood were imbedded everywhere on him and blood was pouring from his wounds.

"Connie!" my grandfather hollered and ran to me.

My heart broken and with eyes rimmed with tears, I looked up, then back at William's limp body. My body shook, my emotions nearly strangling me as I wailed, "Help him!"

Grandpa's expression was serious, his eyes glancing between me and William, missing nothing.

As his eyes locked on the blood that covered me, I sobbed, "I'm fine, Grandpa. Help him."

William had come into my life when I was broken. He put me back together; loved me and then was giving me the future, I never thought I wanted. I could not, I would not lose him now. "Help him, Grandpa," I said again, my voice steady, hiding the anxiety, dread and disbelief that twisted my stomach into knots so tight, I feared they would never untangle again.

Grandpa nodded and yelled, "Doc Glenda!" My grandpa was an ex-military, ex-law enforcement man in his eighties with a body and attitude that could still kick serious ass if he wanted to.

"This is a fricken fracken mess," Doc Glenda growled as she tucked her willowy frame into a crouch, her blue eyes glancing between me and William.

"I think Doc would be okay with you cussing, Doc Glenda, in all this mess," Grandpa said.

"No, I promised Dan no swearing in the church but it's killing me." She leaned over and put her hand on my right arm.

"Help him, Doc Glenda," I whispered, looking down at William and noticing the blood had stopped flowing from his wounds and his skin looked pale and gray.

Grandpa looked at Doc Glenda and shook his head, slightly.

"No!" I shouted, finally finding my voice. "Help him!"

“Let’s get you help,” Doc Glenda smiled and yelled over her shoulder. “Bring me a stretcher.”

“No!” I shouted again. “Help him!”

“But,” she began.

“I will not move until you help him,” I interrupted her, my voice cracking on the last word.

Doc Glenda scowled, then placed her fingers on his neck. She looked up at Grandpa and said, “Damn, he has a pulse. It’s weak and thready, but it’s there. He’s top of the trauma list. Stretcher!” she bellowed.

“Who else is hurt?” Grandpa asked.

“Thank God both Dan and I were at the wedding. Two doctors are better than one. Dan’s dealing with multiple puncture cases. That damn chair exploded into a thousand projectiles that sprayed over the first two rows of chairs.”

“How bad?”

“Everybody in the front two rows is covered in lacerations from flying wood splinters. Bob took several larger pieces to his leg, but they didn’t hit any major arteries. William’s brother got speared in the shoulder with part of the chair’s arm and Asher took some to his back. He must have realized what was happening because he was holding the baby, grabbed Cindy and turned his entire body to the explosion.”

“It could have been worse,” Grandpa said.

“Yeah, thank God for Pastor Cummings’ bad back and the need for that chair. I think that heavy oak chair’s seat took the brunt of the metal in that bomb. It’s still pretty much intact. It was just the rest of the chair that caused all this damage.”

Two of my officers, the brothers Matt and Aaron, rushed up with a stretcher between them, carried awkwardly because of the fourteen-inch difference in their height. When they looked at William, Aaron turned green, while Matt grimaced. Both looked at me for directions but I was in no emotional state to take charge of anything.

“He’s alive, idiots, but barely.” Doc Glenda barked, bringing their attention to her. “Get a collar on his neck, put him on his stomach on the backboard and get him transported to the hospital. We must get him into surgery immediately.”

“Is he stable enough for surgery?” Matt asked, his over six-foot frame leaning down to William.

“No choice. Now, let’s get him gone from this place.” She turned to me, “While they load him, let me look at you?”

“No, I’m fine and I’m going with him.” I said, taking a deep breath to settle my racing pulse and emotions, neither would do William or anyone else any good.

“But,” Grandpa and Doc Glenda said together.

“No, I’m fine and I’m going.”

As they loaded William, I stood. When I stumbled, Grandpa reached out to steady me. “No, I’m fine.” I turned and followed Matt and Aaron as they carried my husband of less than ten minutes out of the church. Doc Glenda and Grandpa followed behind me. I never glanced to the right or left. I knew the bomb had hurt other people, but it was meant to kill either William, me or Larry Cummings who performed our ceremony. Since Larry was a pastor and both William and I worked in law enforcement, the chances are that he or I was the target. That was something to figure out later. Now, my only focus was William.

The ride to the hospital seemed to take forever, even though I knew it was only blocks. I heard the ambulance’s sirens, felt the tires over the holes in the roads, and ignored Grandpa and Doc Glenda talking in whispers but put my hand into William’s. He neither gripped my hand nor gave any response that would indicate that he knew that I was there.

At the hospital, a team of people rushed out and helped unload William. Jack’s daughter, Olivia, who had recently moved back to town after attending nursing school, stepped up to me. She once told me it had taken two years away from the pizza parlor to finally get the smell of garlic from her dad’s pizza sauce out of her system.

“Chief Davenport,” she began, extending her hand. “Let me get you...,”

“Where can I wait?” I cut her off before she could finish her sentence.

She frowned and glanced at Doc Glenda who said, “Stick her in a private waiting room.”

“But . . .,” Olivia began again.

“Just fucking do what I say, Olivia.”

“Yes, ma’am,” she said with her eyes wide, clearly unused to Doc Glenda’s truck-driver personality that didn’t match her fairy-like body.

I followed Olivia into a room with chairs on its exterior walls, scattered intermittently with square side tables, a small television in one corner and a table in the corner that held a coffee pot. I sat, clasped my hands together and stared at William’s blood that still covered my hands and wedding gown. People came in, trying to talk to me. I didn’t hear their words but just responded with, “I’m fine” as I waited to hear the news that would crush what was left of my shattered heart.

I had no sense of time or my location as I remembered each smile, each touch, and each word William ever spoke. In the beginning, I thought him arrogant and rolled my eyes at how women

always swooned over his muscular six-foot-frame, olive skin tone and angelic face. Now I saw those green eyes lined with long lashes in my mind. They had been at first confused, then shocked when he wrapped his arms around me at the church. He had turned me and taken the brunt of the explosion to his back to protect me. William's last words echoed in my mind, "I love you, Constance."

People tried to give me coffee, food and even a washcloth. My mom with her soft soothing voice, Grandpa with his rough, sharp tone and my ex-husband, Matthew, with guilt and sadness etched in his face, but I watched William's blood dry and crack, a little of me becoming as lifeless as his blood.

More time passed, more people gathered as the room filled with the people from the wedding and the town who loved William. Conversations swirled around me in hushed and hurried tones. The smell of coffee permeated the room.

My mind drifted away and back to William. Everyone in the town of Arroyo loved him. He brought joy to those around him with a smile or a fabulous meal. Who would have ever guessed that a highly regarded internationally acclaimed FBI profiler would want to cook and open a diner in a small town in the Sierra Foothills?

"Connie." I heard a voice I didn't expect. Someone who wasn't at the wedding or from the town, so I glanced up. Rick McBride's dark brown eyes were intense as he stared into mine.

"Rick?"

He smiled. "Hello, Connie."

"Hello, Rick. How are you?"

"I'm fine, Connie."

"How's Annie?" I'd only seen pictures of his little daughter, but she was lovely.

"She's good and looking forward to meeting her Auntie Connie."

I smiled. "Is she here with you?"

"No, she's at home."

"Are your parents watching her?"

"Yes."

"They had a Europe trip planned last time I talked to you. Did they enjoy Europe?"

"No, they aren't going until next month. That's if Mom goes."

"What's the matter?"

“There were a couple of workers killed at the airport and now she’s afraid to fly.”

“Drugs?”

“Probably, but Dad will straighten her out,” Rick chuckled.

I heard murmurs in the distance, but I was focused on Rick’s smile.

He frowned. “I heard about the explosion and came as quick as I could. I’m sorry about William, but he’s strong, Connie. He’ll be okay.”

I nodded.

“Can you do me a favor?”

“You need a place to stay?” I remembered when he came to town after his brother James was killed and then his ex-wife Eve. In the beginning of the investigation, the rumors had flown when he stayed at my house.

He chuckled. “Yeah, I do, but not that.”

“What do you need?”

“I need you to let the doctor take a look at you, please.”

“I’m fine, Rick.”

“Connie, look at your left arm and shoulder.”

I glanced at my arm, which was hanging at an odd angle, and sticking out of my shoulder was a piece of wood. The pain from the broken arm and shoulder suddenly ran through my body like fire in my veins, and I lost consciousness as Rick caught me in his arms.