

Lost Memories

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Prologue

Grant Thompson was really mad. He didn't think he'd ever been so mad in his whole life. He looked down at his seven-year-old sister. Alison's blue eyes were big, framed by her long blond hair.

"Grant, what are we going to do now?"

Grant didn't know what to do. Their mother was leaving. He swallowed hard and said, "Alison, you know Mom said she'd be back in two weeks. She's just going away with that guy Harry, then she said she'd come back to get us."

"I don't want her to leave." Big tears ran down her cheeks.

Grant wasn't mad at Alison, and he tried not to take his anger out on her. He may be only two years older than her, but somehow he knew he was going to have to take care of her.

"You'd better stop crying. I hear Mom coming."

Their mom came into the room that their Aunt Sybil had said would be Grant's bedroom while he and his sister stayed there. Even as angry as he was at his mother for leaving them, he got that special feeling he got sometimes when he looked at her. She had long blond hair and blue eyes just like Alison. And when she smiled at him the way she was right then, he felt like he was really someone special just because she gave him that special smile.

His mother reached out and tried to pull both of her children into a hug, but Grant pulled away enough that her hug was only a loose one. Grant tried not to let the hurt look his mother gave him bother him.

Sarah Thompson Newcomb turned back to Alison and said, "Don't cry Sweetie, I'll only be gone for two weeks. Just think of the fun you and Grant will have staying here with Aunt Sybil. You know you always do."

Alison looked up and tried to smile while Sarah wiped the tears off her daughter's cheeks with a tissue.

"You know that I love both of you more than anything else in the whole wide world, don't you?"

Alison looked up at her and said, "Even more than Harry?"

"Yes, dear, but I love you different than I do Harry. He's my husband, now, and you're my special little girl. I can love all three of you, just in different ways, okay?"

Grant turned back toward her and said, "Then why are you leaving?"

His mother tried to keep her smile, but it slipped a little. "Grant, you know we've talked about this over and over. Harry and I want to have a little time together before we all move to Germany." She turned back to Alison. "It's not like you'll never see me again. The next two weeks will go by so fast that it'll seem like tomorrow when we're all together again."

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Almost two weeks later, Grant was pushing Alison in the swing set that Aunt Sybil had bought for her backyard years before so they had it to play on when they visited. He was getting tired, but Alison kept asking for more and higher. That was when he heard his aunt cry out.

"No! It can't be. I would have known."

Grant stopped pushing Alison's swing and looked toward the house. Sybil stepped out onto the patio and just stood there with her arms at her side and a piece of paper in her left hand.

Grant helped Alison out of the swing and together they walked toward Sybil. He could tell that she was crying now, and her whole body seemed to be shaking. He didn't know what to do.

Sybil dropped heavily into a sofa sized patio chair and held the piece of paper up to her eyes. She dropped her arm on the table next to her chair.

Finally, Sybil looked at him and his sister.

"He says she's gone!"

Grant wanted to know who was gone, but he didn't want to upset his aunt any more than she already was. He looked down at Alison and saw that she was beginning to sniffle too even though she didn't know why Sybil was crying.

Grant reached out and placed his hand on Sybil's shoulder. She looked up at him and tried to stop her crying. She pulled some tissue from a pocket and wiped her eyes, then blew her nose.

"Grant! Alison! I want you both to sit down here, right next to me." She scooted to the center of the chair.

They obeyed and Alison sat on her left and Grant on her right.

She looked at Grant then down at Alison. "Harry sent us a telegram. He said that they were in a terrible car accident." She sniffled so hard she almost choked then continued. "He said that your mother died from her injuries."

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That evening, after they had all had time to absorb the news, Sybil sat the children around the kitchen table to talk.

"Grant, Alison, your home is here now. We will all three be a family now. No one will ever separate us."

Alison looked at Sybil, "Does that mean that the room I've been sleeping in will be my very own bedroom now?"

Sybil attempted a smile, "Yes, dear, it will be your very own special bedroom. You can decorate it any way you want to."

Grant didn't quite understand all that was going on, but he knew that he understood it all better than Alison. She didn't seem to realize that their mother was never coming back, no matter what she had told them before she left.

That anger began to build up in him again. He went outside and picked up his baseball bat and began hitting the swing set with it. Sybil stopped him quickly and he ran into the house and into his bedroom closing the door behind him.

Thankfully, Sybil left him alone that night. But she didn't for very long. After that, he took it upon himself to be the man of the house and watch out for both Alison and Sybil. He thought he became quite good at it too.

Chapter One

Twenty years later. . . .

Grant Thompson leaned back in the driver's seat of his unmarked car and watched as his partner, Stan Becker, answered his cell phone. Grant could tell it was their sergeant and that Stan was getting more upset as the conversation continued. The expression on Stan's face clearly showed that what the sergeant was saying wasn't good.

When he turned off the phone, Stan looked over at Grant and said, "She wants us to stop everything we're doing and get in her office immediately." He said the last word with such vehemence that Grant was shocked that Stan would show such emotion.

Grant didn't say anything as he turned the car toward the station. Stan finally said, "Well, I don't think she's going to let us do that stakeout tonight. The way she sounded, we'll be doing good just to keep our badges."

Fifteen minutes later Grant knocked on Sergeant Nordstrom's office door and opened it when she shouted out. He followed Stan into the small room. When she didn't motion for them to take a seat, they were forced to stand facing her desk.

She was standing too, and Grant looked her in the eye, which wasn't difficult since she was at least as tall as him. She was one of those fair Swedes, with a pale complexion and long almost white blond hair which was now twisted into a knot on the back of her head. Right now, her face was almost red with anger.

Sonia Nordstrom wasted no time getting started. "You two have stirred up a hornet's nest over this so-called burglary suspect you've been chasing around town."

She paused and glared at each in turn as if she were hoping one of them would make the mistake of speaking just then.

“Well, you have succeeded in badgering the poor man until he complained to his lawyer, who complained to a councilmember, who complained to the mayor who complained to the chief, who of course then questioned **my** ability to control **my** detectives.” She almost spit out the word ‘my’ each time.

She stopped to glare at them again. “Did both of you follow that rather convoluted series of events which led to the three of us right now, in **my** office, to have this pleasant little chat.” Again she seemed to want them to know how much of an inconvenience it was for her.

When neither detective took the bait and spoke too soon, she continued. “As of right now, both of you are to stop all activity surrounding one Carlos Sanchez, period. You are not to have any contact with him. You are not to talk to him. You are not to approach him in any way. You are not to tail him, stake him out, or otherwise watch him, his vehicle, or his residence in any way. Do I make myself clear?”

Now, both men nodded and knowing now was the time to speak, said in unison, “Yes, ma’am.”

“There will be a notation made in each of your files regarding this incident, as per the chief’s direct order.” She paused, and her face almost gentled to its normally smooth attractive complexion. “You’re both lucky to keep your badges or at least not be suspended.” She motioned toward the door and said, “Get back to work.”

As they were walking out the door, Stan said, “I guess this means we won’t be getting a subpoena to search the guy’s house.”

A loud noise like that of a large book hitting the desk ushered them the rest of the way into the squad room. They went over to their adjoining desks and sat down.

Stan placed both elbows on his desk blotter and dropped his head into his hands. Only a grunt came from his direction. Grant knew Stan as well as anyone could. After all, they’d been best friends since Stan came to live with his grandparents two doors from Sybil’s house when they were both ten. Coming from a man who seldom showed his emotions and almost never expressed them, Grant knew that grunt was as much of a show of temper as would ever come from Stan.

Grant looked at his partner. Stan’s dark blond hair was almost hanging in his eyes, but as a detective, he could get away with it where other officers would not be able to.

Grant folded his arms across his chest, swiveled his chair toward Stan and said, “What does she expect us to do? If we can’t tail this guy or stake out his apartment, how does she expect us to catch him in the act?”

When Stan didn’t respond, Grant dropped his arms and leaned back in his chair. “I feel it right here.” He slammed his fist into his flat stomach. “He’s going to hit some place up in The Heights tonight.”

Stan lifted his head to turn toward Grant. “She said that Sanchez’s lawyer started all this.” He put his head back down and the rest of what he said was partially muffled. “I’m wondering what a supposedly squeaky clean, model citizen such as Sanchez is doing with a lawyer.”

“I know what you mean.” Grant hit his desk with his fist causing his phone to bounce. “That’s just perfect. It’s getting to where a cop can’t even do his job anymore without checking with every lawyer, judge, councilmember, and even the mayor, not to mention the chief and Sonia, to make sure we’re not violating someone’s rights.”

Stan shook his head and looked over at Grant. “I just know it all goes back to the two of you being the finalists for detective sergeant. She’s still gloating over the fact that she was picked and you weren’t. Not only that, but I’m sure she’s going to do whatever she can to make sure she looks good and you look bad, so she can prove to the brass that they made the right decision.”

Grant turned his chair around and leaned back against his desk. He fought against the anger that was quickly trying to take control of his emotions again. There’d been too much of that lately. He wanted desperately to catch this guy in the act. They’d been following his trail of burglaries for several months now, and Grant was sure they could catch him if they could just make him sweat a little more, cause him to finally make a mistake.

Suddenly, an overwhelming feeling of frustration came over him. It was almost like he’d stepped out of his body and taken a hard look at himself right then. Did he see what he’d sworn he’d never become, a cynical cop? Wasn’t a certain amount of cynicism okay? After all, he’d been a cop for seven years now. Didn’t that give him reason enough to become just a little bit cynical?

Stan leaped out of his chair and grabbed the backpack that he carried all his working files and other necessities in, and said, “Well, if we can’t do anything else today, I’m going home and cuddle up to a six-pack.”

Grant nodded his agreement, and they both began making their way out of the station.

When Grant got to his car, he didn't know what to do. He was so tired that all he wanted to do was to go home and crash. But he knew that was the very reason why he shouldn't go home. Sybil! That's where he'd go. His aunt always cheered him up and made him feel better, no matter what was going on in his life.

* * *

Kelly Newcomb leaned back in her desk chair and stretched just as her phone rang. She looked at the screen on her phone and smiled when she realized it was her grandfather's secretary on the intercom.

She picked up the phone and said, "Hi, Martha, what can I do for you?"

"He wants to see you and Wayne right now, and I do mean right now. He said to drop everything and get here immediately."

Martha's agitated voice made Kelly's thoughts jump all over the place, mostly centered on the welfare of her grandfather or even her grandmother.

"What is it Martha?"

"I don't know. Please, just come quickly. I haven't seen him this agitated in quite some time."

Kelly pulled her long black hair out of her face where it had fallen when she had dropped her head at Martha's tone. She pulled her purse out of a desk drawer and raced out the door, thinking she might have to leave the building without having time to come back for it.

When she turned down the corridor leading to the CEO's office, her brother, Wayne, fell in beside her. Kelly had always loved walking beside her older brother. He had always been there for her whenever she needed him. He tried to grin at her as they went through the outer office door together.

Martha simply pointed at the open door to their grandfather's office, and they both rushed in.

Harold W. Newcomb I was sitting on a sofa in his conversation pit, as he called it. It was an area to the side of his desk with four sofas arranged in a square facing each other with a low, square table in the middle.

Kelly let out the breath she'd been holding. At first glance, her beloved grandfather looked okay to her. She caught herself. Here at the office, she had to call her grandfather Harold. It had taken her quite a while to get used to doing so.

"Sit down please."

Harold gestured toward the sofa across from the one where he was sitting.

Before either could inquire, he took in Kelly's panicked look and said, "I'm fine, there's nothing wrong with me." When Kelly opened her mouth to speak, he said, "And your grandmother is fine too."

Kelly deflated into the cushions of the sofa as she let out another deep breath with an audible sigh.

She then watched Harold as he looked from one to the other of his grandchildren then dumped on them. "An Air Force general, by the name of Winstanley, called a few minutes ago."

Both Kelly and Wayne leaned forward as one and opened their mouths to speak. Harold held up both hands, and they leaned back without saying a word.

"It seems that your father has been wounded in Afghanistan and is extremely critical. In fact, the general made it very clear that he might not live through the night."

They just stared at him in confusion so he continued, "They flew him to Washington, and your grandmother and I will be going out to the airport as soon as we can pack a few things. The general said there would be a special jet flying up from Luke Air Force Base to take us to Washington this afternoon. It should be waiting for us by the time we get there."

Wayne was the first to speak, "Why do you want to go see him? He has totally ignored all of us for twenty years."

"He's still my son, even if he hasn't acknowledged that fact for all these years. And, for that matter, he's still your father."

Kelly and Wayne looked at each other for a long time before turning their gazes back to Harold.

Wayne spoke again. "Well, I don't want to see him."

Harold looked at Kelly. "What about you, Kelly?"

Kelly didn't know what to say. She had painfully missed having a father while she was growing up. He had left when she was 6 years old. Her mother had died when she was twelve. She barely remembered her mother and didn't remember her father at all.

She suddenly felt tears threatening to form in her eyes. "I think that I would like to go with you if I may."

He smiled and nodded his head. "That's what I thought you would say, little one."

Kelly fought a grin in spite of the circumstances. Her grandfather had always called her "little one" even though she was now twenty-eight years old and stood five feet nine inches tall.

Harold continued, "You know your grandmother. She has never given up hope that her only child would come back someday."

Kelly knew the story well. Her parents had divorced when Kelly was six years old. Two years later, her father had been transferred to Germany and had never come home again. She had heard from various people that it was because her father and grandfather fought all the time. They said that her grandfather had wanted her father to leave the Air Force and eventually step into his father's position at the company. Her father, on the other hand, had only wanted to be a pilot.

Her brother was talking to her, and she struggled to pull her thoughts back to the present. He seemed to be waiting for her to answer him. "I'm sorry, Wayne, what did you say?"

Wayne shook his head, "Where were you, Kelly? I said that surely you're not going to say you want him to come back after all these years. Are you?"

Kelly thought about it for few more seconds and said, "Yes, I guess I'm just like grandmother. I do want him to come back. I always have." She gave her grandfather a pleading look. "I know you and our father argued a lot about the company, but could you please put all that aside now that he needs us?"

Harold laughed a booming laugh. "You're growing more like your grandmother every day little one. That's exactly what she said." He looked at Wayne and shrugged his shoulders. "Well, Wayne, I won't push you. If you don't want to go, then that's that."

Wayne stood and said, "I guess I'd better get back to work." With that he walked out of the office.

Kelly turned to her grandfather. "I'll go home and pack a few things and meet you at the estate."

On her way back to her office, Kelly stopped at her assistant's desk and told her that she'd be gone, possibly for a few days. Then she went into her office and began organizing her desk to be gone that long. She was also waiting. She knew it wouldn't take her brother long to show up in her office.

Wayne came in and sat down across from her. He didn't say anything as if he was waiting for her to speak first. When she finally swung her gaze around to him, he started talking in a loud voice.

"I don't like it, Kelly." He jumped up and walked around the room before returning to plop back down in the same chair. "It's like we're telling him that it's okay that he ignored us for the last twenty years." He ran his fingers through his thick hair. "Well, it's not okay with me, far from it."

Kelly rounded her desk to place a hand on her brother's shoulder. She leaned down to look into his eyes. "I agree with you on that one point, Wayne. But, I can't just turn my back on him." When Wayne started to interrupt, she said, "Even if that's exactly what he seems to have done to us. Didn't you hear what Grandfather said? Our father may be dying right this very minute. I can't ignore him now."

Neither said anything for a while. Then Wayne said, "I guess I'll just have to make the best of it. But whatever happens, I won't have anything to do with the man."

Kelly smiled at the fierceness of her brother's expression and the harshness of his tone. "You do what you feel you have to do Wayne, and I'll do what I feel I have to do. And for me, it's more than just wanting to have a father again. I just know that it's the right thing to do."

Wayne stood and looked down at Kelly, as if about say more, but only shook his head and left the office with a grim look on his face.

Kelly finished with her desk, grabbed her laptop case and purse then rushed out of her office. Her thoughts, as she stepped into the elevator, were that her ankle was hurting now, what would it be like by the time this day was over?

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When Grant pulled into Sybil's driveway, he let out a groan. His sister's car was there, and it was too late to pull back out and leave. The garage door was open, and the two most important women in his life, actually the only two women in his life, paused as they seemed to be entering the house. They both looked back at him, and Sybil smiled happily, but Alison didn't. She had probably wanted Sybil to herself just as Grant had.

Sybil met him in the garage and enveloped him in a tight hug. Grant always got a little emotional when she did that. Not only had Sybil been mother to him and Alison since they were little, but she was all either of them had in the world. They had no other relatives except a couple of their dad's brothers who hadn't been a part of their lives since their dad died when Grant was eight. Their uncles hadn't even surfaced when their mother died a year later. There had been no one to take care of Grant and Alison except for Sybil. But Sybil had never hesitated. They were her sister's kids, and that was all there was to it. She had simply moved them into her house, and it had been their home ever since. It was still home to both of them even though they had long since moved into their own places.

Sybil led Grant into the house through the utility room and kitchen out onto the deck. Alison had gone ahead and was already taking a seat at a round glass table with four chairs around it.

Sybil was their mother's older sister. Sybil always said that she got the brains in the family and Sarah got all the looks. Sybil was medium height and "filled out nicely" as she always described her not thin, not too heavy build.

After Sybil and Grant had taken seats at the table, Sybil said, "I have a feeling that neither of you came here just to see your sweet old aunt."

She looked from one to the other, looking them in the eye. "Alison, you seem to be the most troubled, what can I do to help?"

Alison looked at her older brother for a moment, and then turned back to Sybil, causing her long blond hair to fly from shoulder to shoulder. She took a deep breath and said, "It's Spencer. I don't know what to do about him."

She looked out into the backyard, then back at Sybil. "He's constantly pressuring me to deepen our relationship, as he calls it."

Sybil tried not to smile. "Exactly what does he mean by deepening your relationship?"

Alison snorted. "He said he wants to marry me, but not until we know each other a lot better. He said we need to get to know each other intimately first."

When neither Sybil nor Grant responded to that, she hit her open palm on the table top with a loud smack. "Do I have to spell it out? He wants me to sleep with him!"

If it had been anybody other than his little sister saying what she did, the way she did, Grant would have laughed. But, since it was his little sister, he reacted the way any big brother should react, with anger. He came up out of his chair with his fists clenched.

Before Grant could say anything, though, Sybil laid a hand on his chest and gently pushed him back into his chair. "That won't be necessary, Grant."

Grant struggled to unclench his fists and waited to see what Sybil would say. He knew he was overreacting, and it was probably, at least partly, due to the frustration he had brought with him.

Sybil turned to her niece and said, "Alison, I have one question, and I think you've already answered it, but you need to hear yourself say it. Are you saying that you don't want to go deeper in your relationship with Spencer, the way he wants?"

Alison stared at her aunt for a long time. When she only nodded her head, Sybil continued, "Well then, you need to decide if you want to continue with any kind of relationship with Spencer. He seems to be trying to force you into making a decision. If that's the case, what is your decision?"

No one spoke for a few minutes as Alison thought, and her brother and aunt waited for her answer. It was extremely difficult for Grant. After all, this was his little sister they were talking about.

"I know what you've taught me all of my life, Sybil." Tears began to stream down her cheeks. "And I know what I feel deep in my heart." She took a shuddering breath. "I don't honestly think that I could be happy married to Spencer. The more I think about it, the more I think that I could never marry any man for that matter."

Grant was sure that Sybil had been given more of an answer than she had expected. Her smile was really more of a frown, but she said, "Then there's your answer."

Alison took the tissue Sybil offered her. "Thanks Sybil. You always make things so easy to figure out. I know what I need to do now. I need to tell Spencer it's over, because I can't ever go where he wants me to go, not now, not ever."

Grant had keyed on something Alison said that rang bells in his head. And he wasn't going to let it go without questioning her on it. "Alison, you just said that you didn't think you'd ever be able to marry any man." He ignored Sybil who was obviously trying to get him to stop. "Why?"

Alison didn't hesitate to answer. "I know all men aren't like our father was, but if our mother couldn't tell what kind of a man he really was, I don't see how I can ever hope to tell the difference." She frowned at Sybil. "You've told me ever since I can remember, that I look exactly like her. I must be like her in other ways too."

Sybil shook her head as if she didn't want to answer, but Alison continued to glare at her until she did. "Yes, Alison, you're so much like her in almost every way. But that doesn't mean that you won't be able to tell a good man when you find one." She paused as if in thought and added, "Your mother married your father when she was barely out of high school and Grant came along less than a year later. She was never out in the world the way you've been. You have a college degree and you've lived on your own for nine years, if you count dorms at college."

"I'm not sure all that will help."

"Yes it will. You're nothing like your mother. Sure, you look just like she did, but your personality is vastly different from hers. I'm sure you'll find the right man someday. Just don't give up."

Grant suddenly had a horrible thought. "Sybil, you've never said anything about whether I'm like our father or not. Am I?"

Sybil didn't hesitate this time. "No, Grant, you are nothing like your father. He was a weak, harsh man who tried to make up for it by seeking his strength in the bottle and beating on your mother. You're a strong but also gentle person. That's why I know you've become such a fine policeman."

Grant leaned back in his chair and let out the breath he'd been holding. Alison, too, leaned back as they both began to digest all that had just been revealed. Sybil's answer comforted him, but the rest of what she said bothered him. Was he still that kind of a cop? Or had he lost that gentleness that Sybil had mentioned, the ability to be gentle when that was what was needed?

After a few minutes of silence, Sybil turned to Grant and said. "Okay, Grant, your turn. What brought you here today, or do I need to ask? You came in with that frustrated look on your face that only comes when things don't go your way."

Grant couldn't help but grin. She had just proven how well she knew both him and his sister. "Yes, Sybil. Sometimes I think you know both of us too well."

Sybil laughed from deep in her chest.

"It's my sergeant. She won't let us do our job the way we think we should, simply because the guy we're trying to nail complained and now our hands are tied. And you're right. All I really needed was to be here with you for a little while to bring everything back into perspective."

That statement led Grant and Alison to start reminiscing on their lives as they were growing up in Sybil's home.

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Kelly couldn't quite keep up with her grandparents as they rushed down the hospital corridor to the ICU where they were told that General Newcomb was.

Up ahead, she saw her grandfather open the door and step inside. Then she heard him almost shout, "Who are you?"

When Kelly was able to enter the room she saw the hospital bed and a big man lying in it with a sheet up to his chin. Then she turned her gaze to the left and saw her grandfather standing over a woman who was seated in a chair at the bedside.

As she stepped closer, Kelly could tell that the blond woman was in her late forties and she was extremely pale. Kelly couldn't tell whether she was normally that pale or if it was due to the fact that her grandfather was standing over her shouting at her.

The woman stood and thankfully Harold stepped back to give her room to do so. A sound from the other side of the room caused Kelly to look in that direction. A huge man was standing there in a blue Air Force uniform that had stripes all up and down the sleeve she could see. How had she missed seeing him when she

first entered the room? Now that he was standing, he seemed to take up most of the room. And he was glaring at Harold as if he were about to reach out and grab him.

The woman tried to smile at the giant who seemed to relax slightly. "My name is Jane Newcomb. I am Harry . . . General Newcomb's wife." She did achieve a small smile this time. "Are you Harry's father?"

When Harold only nodded, she said, "I guess that would make me your daughter-in-law."

"I have no daughter-in-law."

Kelly could see that Jane didn't know what to say now. Apparently, she knew nothing about any of them either.

Jane cleared her throat and said, "Harry and I have been married for twenty years."

"My son left his family twenty-two years ago. I'm not sure I even have a son anymore." He looked past her to Harry then back to her. "How do I know you're who you say you are?"

Jane seemed to be thinking quickly, and then as if she suddenly remembered something, she said, "Harry has a birthmark on the left side of his lower back that looks like a fish."

There was another pause before Harold said, "Okay, whoever you really are, you at least know him well enough to know that. Step aside and let us see him?"

Kelly could see tears glistening in Jane's eyes. She took a deep breath and did as he demanded.

Harold went to one side of the bed and Kelly's grandmother, Beth, went to the other side. Kelly remained near the door, hesitant to get near the silent form with all sorts of tubes coming out of his body and the monitors hanging over him making so much noise.

"Has he regained consciousness at all?"

Jane looked back at Harold, and she shook her head. "No, he's been like this ever since they brought him here from Germany."

Beth sank into the chair that the giant had fortunately just vacated. She reached out, laid her hands on Harry's arm, and lowered her head onto her arms. She began to sob quietly. Kelly moved then. She walked to her grandmother's side and laid an arm across her shoulders.

Beth looked up and wiped her face with a delicate lace handkerchief. She then motioned for Jane to come to her.

When Jane did, Beth stood and pulled Jane into a tight hug.

"This must be simply terrible for you my dear. What did you say your name was?"

"Jane."

"Oh, that's right. Jane, you do know that Harry has stayed away from home and his family for twenty years, don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am. Harry told me very little about his family, just that he had parents in Arizona, that's all, I'm afraid."

"Oh, please don't call me ma'am. My name is Elizabeth, but all my friends and family call me Beth." She looked toward her husband and said, "And that gruff old man is my husband, and Harry's father, Harold."

Jane turned to look toward Kelly. Beth followed her gaze, sighed and said, "Oh, I'm sorry, dear. This is our granddaughter, Kelly." She paused for a second and finished, "Harry's daughter."

That revelation visibly startled Jane. She looked at Kelly with genuine shock showing on her face which had begun to regain some color.

Kelly stepped forward and held out her hand. Jane reached out to shake it and tried to smile at her. She turned to the giant and said, "And this is Sergeant Leo Cochran. Leo is Harry's orderly and much more."

Leo gave a slight nod of his head toward the others. Kelly didn't know quite how he managed it, but somehow the large man made his way past the three women and out the door. She couldn't blame him. It was getting a little crowded in there.

Kelly looked back to the bed and couldn't understand what Harold was saying with all the noise the various machines were making at the head of Harry's bed. Harold was looking at the door, so Kelly turned to see a doctor standing there. He surveyed the room as if checking off a list then closed the door behind him. Kelly wasn't sure she liked the look on his face. Her fleeting thought was that the look was like that of someone about to give out bad news.

The doctor walked to the foot of the bed and picked up Harry's chart. He cleared his throat and said, "I'm doctor Murphy. General Winstanley asked me to wait until you were all here to give you my report on General Newcomb's condition."

Beth stepped toward the doctor. "When will he wake up, doctor?"

Kelly's earlier thoughts became reality when the doctor only shook his head sadly. "I'm sorry, ma'am, but that's what I needed to tell you. He's not going to wake up."

Every person in the room made some sort of startled sound and took a step toward the doctor, even Leo, who must have followed the doctor into the room.

Harold was the first one to regain his voice. "Exactly what do you mean by that doctor?"

The doctor shook his head slowly, "I mean that all the tests we have run indicate that there is no brain activity."

When no one spoke, he said, "I'm afraid that his brain has died and the only thing keeping him alive right now is all of that." He gestured toward the machines. "That's why they sent him here from Germany so quickly. They ran all the same tests there. General Winstanley ordered them to bring General Newcomb here. Everyone agreed that it would better for all of you if the Air Force brought him to you."

No one spoke for a seemingly long time. Beth began sobbing into her lace handkerchief again. Kelly wrapped her arms around her grandmother. Then Harold said, "Are you suggesting that we must make the decision to turn off the machines?"

The doctor nodded his head sadly. "Yes sir that is exactly what I am advising." He looked around the room at each stricken face. "If there was any chance at all, I would be the first one to say that we should wait, but there isn't. There is nothing there at all and hasn't been for three days."