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TRUSTING
Love



CHAPTER ONE

Chloe Wilder shot up in bed. She rubbed her eyes with the back of her hands trying to adjust to the dim moonlight that filtered in through the closed blinds. Her heart raced as she took in the shadows that danced around the room. She swiped her hand across her face to wipe away the tears the nightmare left behind. Wrapping her arms around her knees, she hugged herself tight.

This same nightmare had become recurrent. Her arms wrapped around her waist, she whispered, "I won't let anything happen to you."

She pushed the covers off, jumped out of bed, and crossed to the window. It was dark except for the light of the moon. No street lights were lit. There was no better time than now.

She pulled on an old pair of sweat pants and a baggy sweater. She dragged an old tattered suitcase from the closet and started packing. A sense of urgency came upon her as she shoved in the last shirt and closed the suitcase. She glanced around the room and her eyes stopped on a picture of her parents. They held each other, smiling. It was obviously taken at a happy moment. She picked up the picture and looked closer. Sadness and shame overwhelmed her. Holding it close, Chloe closed her eyes and prayed for forgiveness for the mistakes she had made in her life. Putting the picture in her purse, she picked up the suitcase and slipped through the door into the night.

She threw the old suitcase in the backseat of her beloved Toyota. The vehicle was on its last leg, but somehow it kept running. Chloe prayed it would take her far away from this town, and even further from all the pain. She needed a fresh start for her and her baby she vowed to protect.

She drove with her lights on low, praying no one would see her. Turning onto a back road she blew out a sigh of relief as the road lead her out of town. Time was of the essence. She had a small window of opportunity to put distance between Tony and her. Chloe didn't know what had possessed her to get involved with him. He had been quite a charmer in the beginning. Now thoughts of Tony brought only regret and fear. She shuddered at the thought of what he would do when he found her gone.

The night seemed to get blacker as she drove further out of town. Tension knotted her neck and her arms ached from gripping the steering wheel. Chloe forced out a deep breath and turned the radio to a soft rock station. She allowed herself to relax just a fraction after driving for hours into the night.

Miles passed. The sky turned from black to a gray with a tinge of pink in the horizon. Chloe's eyes grew heavy. She found a rest area facing the ocean and pulled in. Locking her doors, she closed her eyes. *Just a few minutes of sleep, then I will keep moving.*

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The house was quiet when Tony slipped inside. He smirked in the dark.

Chloe was so predictable—always in bed before he got home hoping to avoid him. He could see through her, but she was easily influenced and good to have around. He made his way to the kitchen to grab a beer. Twisting off the cap, he slipped into living room and sat down. His legs sprawled in front of him he lounged back in the easy chair.

Chloe had been young when he had found her. She was eager for love and he gave it to her. Well, maybe not the love she had been looking for, but he didn't care what she needed. He did feel sorry when he saw her tears but now he's bored and ready to move on, but can't. She overheard too many conversations and knew too much.

He sighed and placed the empty bottle on the table next to him, stood and started upstairs. Something had to be done with her. He slipped into the bathroom off the bedroom and turned on the light. Tony expected to see Chloe huddled on the edge of the bed. He did a double take when he realized the bed was empty.

*What the hell.* He flipped on the bedroom light. She had been there. The covers were tossed aside. He pulled open a bureau drawer. Her clothes were gone. His fists clenched at his sides as he raced downstairs.

He pulled his cell phone from his pocket and punched in a number.

“She's gone... I don't know where, just find her and fast...” He disconnected, picked up the empty beer bottle and flung it against the wall. The glass shattered into tiny pieces that sprayed across the hard wood floor.

“Chloe, what have you done?”