

CHAPTER ONE

The gunshots came down from the top of the hill into the pit, making it sound like a war zone. Shelby tried to look up to see what was happening, but the dust was thick from the spray of bullets that were hitting everything in sight. “STOP THE DAMN SHOOTING!” she yelled as she covered her head with her hands and put her face in the ground. *Just how did I get here?* she wondered.

“Ouch, dammit that hurt!” Shelby put the injured finger into her mouth and then quickly removed it. She looked at the nicely-painted, half-broken artificial nail. “I just had these nails done last week.” As she reached down toward her stuck high-heel, which had caused the incident in the first place, her purse slid from her shoulder, hitting her leg. “Stupid shoe.” She pulled at the lodged heel stuck in a crack of cement, near the rubber mat that lead into the grocery store.

Shelby hobbled into the store and used the handle of a shopping cart to balance as she replaced her shoe. Then she placed her handbag in the child seat. “What else can go wrong today?” she mumbled.

Just as she was about to push the cart forward toward the produce section, a hand gently tapped her shoulder. “Shelby? Shelby Mathews? I knew that was you.”

Shelby turned, catching her blonde hair in her old college friend’s ring. She pulled her hair away and the two women embraced each other. “Jayne Edwards, wow, it’s been like forever since we’ve seen each other. How are you?”

Jayne let Shelby go and smiled at her old friend. “Oh, it’s been too long. Funny, I’ve been thinking about you lately, which must be why we crossed paths today. I’m doing well. How about yourself?”

Shelby lifted up her finger for her old friend to inspect. “Just hanging in there really, and this little mishap is the icing on the cake for me, I think. My father always told me I was a magnet for mishaps and mischief.” The two women laughed. Shelby was glad to see her friend, but with everything that had happened over the last few weeks, all she really wanted to do was burst into tears. “Trying to keep my chin up and move forward.”

Jayne could tell that her college chum needed to talk. “Hey, why don’t we find a seat over at the coffee bar and chat?”

“That sounds wonderful, I would love to catch up. Steven, my son is home with Jack, so I’m sure he won’t need me for anything for a while.”

The two women ordered their coffee and took their cups to an empty table. When they were settled, Jayne began, “Last thing I remember was you marrying Jack Mathews, and I think you sent me a couple of email announcements, about the birth of some children.”

“Yes, I married Jack, and we have three boys—all grown up. She paused, “Jack just came home from the hospital a few weeks ago—heart attack.”

“Oh, no. How is he? How are you?”

“We’re coping...trying to keep things running smooth. I’m a teacher, and Jack—well, Jack used to be an executive in his company. He’s been with them since we got married, but right now he’s on long-term disability. Believe me, that isn’t

easy financially either. I had to take a job at a local convenience store to help supplement, so we can at least pay most of our bills.”

“That’s terrible. It’s a shame that teaching just doesn’t pay like it should. I remember when I got divorced it was nearly impossible to keep up on just one check. That’s why I changed careers.”

Jayne and Shelby sipped at their coffee.

“Tell me about those boys,” Jayne said.

Well, we have three now. Jack Jr. the oldest looks and acts just like Jack. He has two children. Can you believe it? Me, a grandma.”

“Congratulations!”

“Mark, the middle boy is a Marine. He’s more like me. He got leave when he learned of Jack’s heart attack; we just sent him back to North Carolina.” Shelby sipped her coffee again, holding back the tears she wanted to shed. “We’re very proud of him. It’s amazing how much being a soldier has changed him. He’s so grown up, yet so young.”

“Wow, has he seen combat?”

“Yes, he was in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

“At least he’s safe on American soil now, right?” Jayne took another sip of her coffee. “So, what’s the youngest boy like?”

“Steven. He’s in college, and he still lives at home. He’s my quiet man.”

“Sounds like you’ve been busy,” said Jayne. “I’m sorry to hear about Jack—”

“We’re taking it one day at a time.”

Jayne put her hand on Shelby’s. “He’ll be okay. One day at a time is all you need to be doing right now. Have faith, Shelby.”

“Thanks...so what have you been up to all this time? I feel really bad I haven’t kept in touch.”

“Well, I got married...but it wasn’t a good marriage. Like I said, I got a divorce, but I have a great son out of it, and I’m glad I’m on my own. I drive a truck for a living now, so I get to see a lot of the states and make a good living at the same time. Life’s been good to me health-wise, and I enjoy every day that I’m given.”

“You’re a truck driver?” Shelby said, shocked. “Are you telling me that you drive one of those great big things all over the country?” She gaped at the smart, pretty woman who sat in front of her.

Jayne grinned. “Yep, I’m a big eighteen wheel truck driver. I drive all over the country, and I love it. Besides getting to see a lot of great things, I meet nice people and get paid really well for just delivering stuff from one side of the country to the other.”

“Wow!”

“Don’t be so shocked,” Jayne said. “A lot of us women are driving rigs now, especially single women who have to take care of their families. Truck driving is a good way to make a living, even for those of us with college educations.”

Shelby sat back and studied her old friend. Before her was a happy, healthy, educated, put together woman. “I hope I haven’t offended you. I guess I’m just a little confused. Hell, I know women work in almost every industry these days; you just don’t seem the type.”

Jayne laughed. “Well, I am. After my divorce, I had to find something that paid well if I was going to raise my boy and send him to college. My job as a college professor just wasn’t cutting it financially.”

“You make more driving a truck than you did teaching at that community college?”

“You bet. At least twice as much.”

Shelby wanted to know more. She looked at her watch. *Time to get back to Jack.* “Jayne, I would love to continue this conversation with you. May I have your number so we can talk? Or maybe you can come by my house sometime and we can have coffee again?”

Jayne reached in her purse and pulled out a business card. “Here. I own my own trucking company, and although I’m gone a lot, I’d love to talk with you again. Call me any time. I’ve always had a special place in my heart for you.”

Shelby took the card and got up from the table. Jayne got up too and gave Shelby a hug. “I’ll be in touch soon, I promise.”

Shelby grabbed her shopping cart and disappeared into the store.

Continue Reading Mother Trucker