

The Women of Mannington

An original novel by Dana Carlisle

Mercedes...

Mercedes Chancellor possessed a youthful beauty so powerful that she was often regarded as ethereal and untouchable. Her sheath of golden hair always shone, and the designer clothes she always wore accented her luscious curves and tall frame.

But an indefinable sadness lurked beneath her jade green eyes. She had been hurt deeply in the past, but she did not reveal how or why. She kept the pain locked inside of her heart, never allowing it to escape for fear it would consume her. The only clue she gave to the source of her hurt came when one spoke of love, trust, honesty, or promises. Her eyes darkened, her face hardened, and her normally melodic voice became cold and clipped. "Such things do not exist."

One knew instantly that her heart had been shattered so completely that it had never healed. Instead, it had frozen to stone and only the burning flame of a passion so great it could not be ignored, would melt it.

Jacy...

Jacy Spencer faced her mirror, staring at reflected image objectively. Cascading raven black curls framed the ivory skin off her face. The stunning blue eyes showed no emotion at all; they never had. Perfectly chiseled features were always devoid of any emotion.

Jacy was the young and beautiful, but only an empty shell. She cursed her beauty; it only enhanced her loneliness. When one noticed from a distance, they were breathless from her beauty, but up close, with a chill, they realized that she was cold. Her black hair, ice blue eyes, and porcelain skin only emphasized the complete lack of emotion that she exuded.

One felt sorry for her. It was obvious that she was unhappy and bitter, not because she had gambled with her love and lost, but because she had never been given love, nor given it herself. It was doubtful that anything would be allowed to invade the icy exterior and melt the Ice Maiden's crystal heart.

Faith...

Faith Wyndham was alive with youthful and vibrant color. Her flame red mane of thick curls flowed down her back, matching the rosy glow her cheeks always exhibited. Her azure eyes were as inviting as the ocean, and a smile never left her full red lips. She was unusually tall, but that never bothered Faith. She took it in stride, as she gracefully accepted everything life gave her with a quiet strength. One could see she possessed life, happiness, and love. Her beauty was warm, friendly, and drew one to her with its exuberance. To those who knew her she was a breath of fresh air, a refreshing swim in the ocean, or a picnic on a spring day.

One could tell that when she became involved with a man it would be a love affair so consuming, so full of love and passion, that it would ignite and burn with an intensity equal only to that of her flaming hair.

Chapter One

Mercedes Chancellor took off her Ralph Lauren reading glasses and rubbed her eyes. A glance at her Daniel Mink watch told her it was nearly ten, and the law library would be closing soon. She wasn't nearly done with her research, so she mentally made a note to return the next morning at eight when the library re-opened. This, her third year of law school, was the toughest yet.

Mercedes was very dedicated and driven. She had graduated at the top of her class at Vassar and gone on to receive a scholarship at Harvard Law. Her parents had been proud; Mercedes had just smiled and become even more driven during her first year at Harvard.

Joshua and Nicollette Chancellor were ecstatic to have such a determined and successful daughter, but they worried about her, too. She had always been a good student at her exclusive girls' school near Boston, where she grew up, but she was light-hearted as well as studious. Her freshman year at Vassar brought good grades and a well-rounded daughter. It was sophomore year that had brought about the change in Mercedes. Suddenly, she concentrated only on her schoolwork and becoming the most successful lawyer on the planet. She had no social life and virtually never smiled.

After nearly six years of this behavior, Josh and Nikki had grown accustomed to it. They wondered what had happened to their normally happy-go-lucky daughter to bring about such a change, but mostly they just worried if she was *happy*.

Mercedes gathered up her books and Coach handbag and headed out to the parking lot. Tomorrow night a few of the students from her classes were going to get together to exchange notes for an upcoming exam. The professor for this class was particularly tough and they wanted to make sure they had not missed anything. Mercedes knew that the two girls in the study group did not like her and had only agreed to meet because they knew she was at the top of the class and they could get a lot from her. Similarly, she knew that the two guys were using this as an excuse to try to make it with her. Not one of the group would ever get to know her as a person. She wondered if anyone ever would again.

She knew what people thought of her at Harvard. The faculty thought she was a hard-working, determined young woman. The other students, blinded by her beauty, had never bothered to get past that and try to get to know her. But Mercedes knew that she was equally to blame – she never encouraged friendships. The other students had accepted her aloofness at face value and labeled her stuck-up and arrogant. Mercedes didn't care. She didn't need anybody to survive; on the contrary, people were never to be trusted and could only drag you down.

She knew she was cynical for a twenty-four year old, but it didn't matter. Mercedes was the number one student at Harvard Law. Education, now that could get you something, but people never could.

Mercedes sighed and opened the door to her car. She still had to read all of the material that she had copied tonight before she went to bed. But the grade she would get would make it all worthwhile.



Jacy Spencer stared out the window of her three-story Tudor style manor on Long Island. Her cold blue-grey eyes noticed a million stars twinkling above her and a pale moon that seemed

sad to her. Maybe it was sad because she didn't know any other emotion. But then, Jacy wasn't really in touch with that emotion either. She was only familiar with the vague emptiness and longing that accompanied everything she did.

She was twenty-four and stuck in a loveless marriage that did not promise to end soon. Jacy Sabrina Katharine Winston had married Phillip Edward Spencer III because her father had decided that the union would benefit the two families, and companies, that would merge. Phillip's father agreed. Phillip was not happy to find himself engaged at twenty-one to an eighteen-year-old just out of high school, but Jacy was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen and he would gain not only the Spencer family fortune, but the Winston family fortune as well.

The young Winston girl watched other girls around her head off to Radcliff or Wellesley or Vassar, sine even defying all tradition and heading out to Berkeley or UCLA. She thought she might have liked that too, but the day after she returned to New York from her boarding school in Boston, her father had sealed her fate: marriage. With her engagement arranged, she was not a true deb, but she would still come out to the Long Island socials because her mother had always dreamed of a debutante ball for her only daughter. Alexandra Winston decided that her daughter would come out at the height of the summer season in Southampton in late July. The engagement to Phillip would be announced at Thanksgiving at a lavish party and the wedding would be the following May. Jacy's whole future was mapped out by two people who did not even know her.

Jacy would have hated her father for locking her into a marriage based on business, but she had turned off her emotions long ago. She learned at an early age not to express, or feel, emotions or she would be sorely disappointed. It was easier to survive that way. Sometimes though, late at night, she let regret creep into her thoughts. Regret that she had not gone to college, regret that she was the perfect wife, who could throw the perfect dinner party for perfect guests and play the charade of the perfect couple with Phillip, the husband she barely knew. When she let these thoughts in, Jacy wondered if there was more to life than that.

She glanced at the grandfather clock and realized that it was almost ten. Phillip had not returned from the office, nor had he called. This was not unusual, as Jacy knew Phillip was consumed by work at the office until about eight every night. Then he would spend the evening with any one of his many mistresses. She did not wonder which one tonight, only if he would reek of her cologne when he finally came home. Jacy sighed and slipped beneath the cool, satin sheets of her enormous antique bed.



Faith sank back into her blue plaid flannel pillows and sighed. She laid the Shakespearean play-text she had just finished reading on her nightstand and glanced at her bedside clock. The large numerals told her it was almost ten. She realized that she had better shut off the light and go to sleep or she would never be able to get up the next morning for her early class, but she did love romances and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had always been one of her favorites. Besides, she reasoned to herself, it wasn't completely for pleasure. Faith was completing her Master's Degree in English Literature from Harvard.

Faith Wyndham had excelled at everything when she had been a sunny California girl. Her parents had been proud of her throughout high school, where she had earned varsity letters in tennis and cheerleading, made Dean's list every semester, and was Vice President of her

school's chapter of the National Honor Society. Ashley and Matthew Wyndham had always known that their Homecoming Queen was destined for greatness.

Faith's active life included a social one, but it was more friendly than romantic. She was so energetic, friendly, and beautiful that people, boys and girls alike, naturally gravitated to her. She had many boy friends, but never any one serious boyfriend. She was far too busy and she loved the fun times she had when the whole gang went out. Faith had escaped both high school and college without a burning love and a broken heart – one of the lucky ones.

Her scholarships to several colleges and universities did not surprise her parents. Faith accepted the partial scholarship from Berkeley and headed north, graduating with highest honors in Literature. Faith had been heavily influenced her senior year of high school by her English teacher, a charismatic man who had pushed his students to their limits. He expected greatness from each and every one of them, and usually got it. He opened doors to a whole new world for Faith. She had always known that she would spend her life in the world of arts; her teacher had shown her the way. Faith Wyndham was determined to influence bright and articulate young men and women, just as her teacher had influenced and inspired her.

Before taking a teaching job at a university, Faith wanted to learn everything she possibly could about literature. It was off to Harvard, where she threw herself into her studies with little time for anything else. Sure, she had friends, people naturally gravitated toward the effervescent redhead, but she kept her studies first. Everything else, including romance, was a distant second.

Faith thought briefly of the love of Hermia and Lysander from the play-text she had just read before she fell into a deep, untroubled sleep.

Chapter Two

One week later, Mercedes was staring at her graded law exam with a smile that was unmistakably, and deservedly, victorious. The only four point in the class – with a note of congratulation from her professor. The young law student finally felt confident that she could stay on top now. Mercedes Victoria Chancellor would be at the top of the Harvard Law School Class of 1964. It was now November, if she could keep up the pace for six more months, her utmost dream and goal in life would be obtained.

A commotion in the hallway brought Mercedes out of her reverie. She and the rest of the class turned toward the source of the noise just in time to see a frantic young man burst into the lecture hall. Before the startled professor could reprimand, the man blurted out, "The President's been shot! President Kennedy has been shot!" He left as quickly as he had come, his footsteps thundering down the hall the only proof that he had been there.

The class sat in stunned and shocked silence, unable to comprehend, unwilling to believe. Was this an obscene joke? One student took out a small transistor radio and turned it on with the tacit permission of the professor. The whole class gathered silently, wordlessly, around the student with the radio. Walter Cronkite's voice was somber as he confirmed everybody's worst fears – this was no joke. An unknown assassin had tried to take the life of President John F. Kennedy.

"The President has been shot in Dallas. There are no confirmed reports, but it is believed that the injury is to the head. I repeat, the injury is unconfirmed but believed to be to the head. Two priests are said to be administering the last rites, but this is also unconfirmed. It is unknown if the assassination attempt has been successful. It is unknown if the President is alive." There was a collective sharp intake of breath. Of course the President was alive! He had to be...

Mercedes looked at the ghastly faces of her classmates frozen in various stages of fright, disbelief, horror, shock, and grief. Tears rolled down the girls' cheeks and not an eye in the room was dry. With a start, Mercedes realized that she, too, was crying.

When no new news could be produced, the professor dismissed the class. "Leave for the rest of the day as a matter of fact. If any of your professors have a problem, they can speak to me personally."

The class, as if in a trance, gathered their belongings and filed out of the classroom. Of course classes would be cancelled – the world had turned upside down. Why would there be classes? No one except the professor had spoken a word since the young man had entered their classroom and shattered that autumn afternoon. Hushed whispers could be heard throughout the classroom, but not one student seemed able to speak out loud.

The streets were strangely quiet. People gathered in the doorway of shops and bars and restaurants that had television sets. As she passed one bar, Mercedes heard a roomful of people murmur in disbelief and one woman's grievous wail, and she knew. Her leaden legs carried her into the bar to hear a CBS newsman confirm that President Kennedy had died at one pm Central Standard Time, thirty-eight minutes before. Camelot was dead.

David Brinkley somberly stared at the crowd from behind his desk at CBS. "Bulletin: Associated Press, Dateline: Dallas. Two priests with President Kennedy say the President is dead from bullet wounds. This is not official confirmation, but it is said that two priests emerged from the hospital with the news that President Kennedy is dead. Here, we have Bob McNeal from CBS Dallas on the line. Bob, is there any news?"

Mercedes listened as McNeal's voice took over. "At one pm Dallas time, twenty-five minutes after an attack by an unknown assassin, President Kennedy died. The President was taken to Parkland Memorial Hospital for a blood transfusion. Two priests had given President Kennedy the last rites. Minutes before the President's death was announced by the two priests, Vice President Johnson emerged, grim faced, to assume the constitutional duties of the President of the United States."

Mercedes had heard enough. She turned and headed back to her apartment, saddened to her core. Human beings were certainly the coldest, most heartless species on the planet, and she reaffirmed her vow never to trust a single human being, save for her parents, for as long as she lived.

In the subways, some women cried, some men wept, everyone was in a state of shock. Finally, Mercedes reached her stop and trudged up the steps of the subway, across the street, and then up two flights of steps to her studio apartment. The phone was ringing when she entered.

"Mercedes?"

"Yes, Mom. Have you heard?"

Nicollette did not ask what. "Yes. Please don't be alarmed, but your father was in Dallas with the president."

Joshua Chancellor was one of Kennedy's top aides. In her grief over the president, it had not even occurred to Mercedes that her father might be in Dallas with Kennedy; that her father might be injured...or worse. Nicollette went on through her daughter's disconcerted exclamation. "He's okay, darling. I've spoken to him. He didn't go with the motorcade. President Kennedy had some business he wanted your father to take care of with Washington. He was on the phone trying to call the White House when it happened, but the phones were down here in Washington for an hour."

Mercedes closed her eyes and sank into a nearby chair. Thank God, her father was all right. “Is he going to stay on with the Johnson administration?” Even in her grief, Mercedes was practical. Her father had a choice to make: stay with Johnson, whose politics he did not agree with, or cut himself loose from the job he’d had since Kennedy’s senator days. For a while he would have to stay with the Johnson administration; he had a family to support.

“I hardly think that a few hours after the president’s death is the time to be thinking about that,” Nicollette sounded shocked.

Mercedes disagreed, but changed the subject. “Is he staying in Dallas or are they sending him back to D.C.?”

“I don’t know yet, but I’ll be sure to call you as soon as I hear from him or the staff. Will you be able to take a few days from classes to fly to Washington for the funeral?”

“Yes, Mother. Of course, I’ll fly down.”

“I thought you would. Talk to you soon, honey, I want to keep the line free in case your father calls.”

“I understand, Mom.” Mercedes hung up the phone and sank down into the nearest chair. Mercedes herself wanted to go into politics: was this what all of her hard work would get her? A bullet in the head?

A picture on the nearby table caught her eye. Two young men from Massachusetts laughing, their eyes bright with the future, their smiles carefree: her father and her President. Kennedy was only 26, her father, 27. Both of their futures, both of their promise, cut short Dallas.

The president was dead. The days of Camelot were shattered by assassin’s bullet. Where was her country headed?

Chapter Three

Jacy was nodding politely as Jessica Spaulding bored her to tears with her talk of her husband’s company. Jacy allowed her eyes to stay briefly from Jessica and looked around the room full of the wives of important man. Phillip had suggested that she host tea for the wives of some of his businesses associates. Jacy obliged his wish. Most of the women seemed to be enjoying the company of the other wives. As Jacy’s eyes roved the room, she noticed that her guests were chatting and laughing happily. She herself was the only one not enjoying the occasion.

When her maid approached her, she prayed she did not look as relieved as she was for the interruption. “Yes, Amanda?”

At first Amanda did not speak, and when Jacy looked closer she saw that her maid was upset and shaking. “Amanda? What’s wrong?”

Every woman in the room turned to the trembling and teary-eyed young woman. “The president, ma’am...”

“Yes, dear, go on.”

“He’s been shot Dallas,” Amanda started to openly cry again. “They don’t know if he’ll live.”

Jacy felt as though she’d had the wind knocked out of her. John Kennedy possibly dead? Assassinated? It was not possible. Tears rolled down her face and she knew that her face mirrored the shock and grief present on everyone’s face. She knew that many of the women in the room knew the Kennedys. Her own mother was in Jackie’s tight circle of friends. Poor

Jackie! How would she take this? Her heart went out to little Caroline and John-John. How could they possibly lose their father?

Jacy stood and crossed the room to the radio. She turned it on just in time to hear McNeal's report of the priests' words. John Fitzgerald Kennedy was dead. For the first time in her life Jacy allowed herself to fill with emotion. Grief and fear, heartache and sorrow, loss and pain washed over her like nothing she ever known - like nothing she had ever allowed herself to know. All of this emotion for men she barely knew; the charismatic man whom she had only met on a few occasions. She never knew such emotions were possible.

Her stunned and shaken guests listened to the radio for a while longer, and then excused themselves. Jacy stood sedately at the door and watched them go. Phillip was hurrying up the driveway as the last guest departed. He grabbed her and held her tight when he reached her at the door. There were tears in his eyes and she was openly crying as they held on as for dear life. This was the most intimate moment they had spent in a long time and Jacy felt as if she were seeing, truly seeing, her husband for the first time. The strange emotions still had a vise-like grip on her and she was reacting like she had always been taught not to react.

"I love you," the words slipped out of her mouth effortlessly and she was shocked to hear herself say them. Phillip drew back and stared at her in wonder, then pulled her close for a passionate kiss. They stood like that for a long time, until Amanda announced that Jacy had a phone call.

Reluctantly, Jacy drew back, afraid that the moment would end and that she and Phillip might never again regain it. Phillip sighed with regret, which gave Jacy the hope that he, too, would want to recapture the feeling. Jacy picked up the hall extension while Phillip put his arms around her and rested his head against hers.

"Hello."

"Jacy," her mother's voice was wracked with sobs.

"Yes, Mother."

"Jacy, Jack is dead."

"I know, Mother, I've heard."

"I want to be with Jackie. She just lost the baby a few months ago and now this. Your father and I are flying out of Idlewild tonight. Would you and Phillip like to fly out tomorrow or Sunday and meet us there for the funeral?"

Jacy turned to her husband. "Mother would like to know if we would like to go to the funeral. She wants to be there for Jackie."

When Phillip nodded his descent, she told her mother yes.

"Okay, dear, I'm going to go now, but I'll ring you with more details when I get settled in Washington. Pray for the Kennedys, dear, especially Caroline and John Jr."

"I will, mother. Goodbye."



Later that night, Jacy lay in her husband's arms and tried to comprehend all that had happened that day. The country had been turned upside down and yet, suddenly, she and Phillip felt like a real couple. She finally felt as though she might someday be able to come to know this man.

They had not been spoken about anything deep, but they had spent the entire evening together. Jacy had even gained the courage to snuggle up next to Phillip while he looked over

some papers from work. She had felt an unfamiliar fluttering of the heart when he put his arm around her shoulders and kissed the top of her head. The affection she had never before in her life received was satisfying, Jacy found. It almost made her want to let go of her carefully trained composure and embrace all of the emotions she could, but twenty-four years of habit was hard to break.

Phillip stirred just then and looked at his newly discovered wife with wonder. Could this be Jacy he was with? Jacy who was always so composed, so cool, so distant? She was always icy that he hated making love to her - but tonight had been different. Tonight his ice maiden had responded to his touch and come alive with a fiery passion. Her reticence had slipped away and Phillip found himself capable of falling in love with this girl.

“Can’t you sleep, Jacy?”

She smiled at him. “No, I was just thinking about what a strange day it’s been.”

Phillip smiled and kissed her. “Some good, some bad. It’s a shame that the president had to die in order for me to get to know my wife.”

Jacy sobered. “The president’s death affected me very much...”

Phillip interrupted. “I know, I know. I didn’t mean for it to sound that insensitive.”

Husband and wife stared into each other’s eyes, perhaps for the first time, and lost themselves in their thoughts. Phillip was the first to break the silence. “Why?”

Jacy thought for a moment. “I don’t know. When I heard that Jack was dead, all of these emotions took me by surprise. I had never allowed myself to feel anything my whole life, and all of a sudden, I was filled with a million different feelings. It was overwhelming and frightening.”

“Why did you never allow yourself to feel, Jacy?”

“Oh, Phillip! There’s so much you don’t know about me or the way I grew up...”

“You never told me, honey. Tell me now,” Phillip begged as he ran a finger through the loose curls on her forehead. “You have always been a puzzle. A beautiful, fragile puzzle that I could never piece together no matter how hard I tried. I always assumed you that you would snap out of it after a while. I thought that you needed time to adjust to being married; you weren’t quite nineteen when you married me, and you barely knew me. But when nothing changed, I got frustrated and stopped trying.”

Jacy felt tears flowing down her cheeks. I know I was awful to you, I didn’t know how else to be. My father never expressed any emotions, nor did he particularly want any expressed in front of him. Emotions were for the weak. Everything is business to my father; even marriage, as you know. My mother married for love, but she soon found out that Joseph Winston was capable of romance, but nothing deeper - certainly not love. And after they had been married a few months, he was never again even capable of the romance. My mother grew bitter, and Joseph’s child was certainly only reminder of the love she would never know, so she never wanted to know the child. Children bored her, especially one that was only a painful reminder of all of her broken dreams.

“I was raised by nannies and governesses who never bothered to get close to me to take the place of the mother and father I never had. My mother started to find me interesting when I was fifteen and old enough to start circulating socially. She loved the idea of me as deb, but by that time I was so remote that her feeble attempts at friendship were completely ineffective. By the time you got me, emotions were such a foreign thing that I had no clue how to react when you offered them to me. I felt so overwhelmed that I gave up before I even gave you a chance.” Jacy was openly crying now. “I’m so sorry, Phillip, so sorry.”

Phillip held his lovely wife “Jacy, I had no idea. I’m sorry I’ve been blaming you all these years. Please forgive me.”

“I’ve always forgiven you. I always knew it was my inadequacies. I never blamed you or taking comfort elsewhere.”

Phillip drew back and stared into Jacy’s crystal blue eyes. “You knew?”

“Of course I knew. Your girlfriends wear very distinctive perfume.” Jacy smiled slightly to show that she was not angry with him.

Phillip laughed self-consciously. “I can’t believe you’re being so understanding. Most women would be through the roof.”

“Most women would probably know how to please their husbands. I always understood. I was a little lonely at times, knowing your alibi of working late was just that - an alibi. But I also knew that marriage to frigid eighteen-year-old you barely knew was not exactly your idea.”

Phillip stared at this remarkable young woman he had been married to for over five years and was just finally getting to know that night. She spoke so frankly, a shocking thing for young woman, but he found that it did not displease him.

Chapter Four

Faith slipped into a troubled sleep that night. Assassins were everywhere: they were after her, her family, her friends. She tried to outrun them, tried to warn the others, but her feet stayed in one place no matter how hard she tried to move forward, the screams stuck in her throat. When she awoke at four the next morning, she didn’t even try to go back to sleep. Kennedy’s death by an assassin’s bullet was sitting everyone in the country hard, and Faith was no exception.

For someone like Faith, who had only known love and compassion, someone who would always been shielded from the bitterness and pain that accompanied life, this was exceptionally hard to swallow. A hardworking, decent man cut short in the prime of his life? Why anyone would want to see John Kennedy dead was beyond her, but somehow it had happened.

Lee Harvey Oswald had made it happen. He had shattered the hopes and dreams and promises of an entire nation, left a young woman widowed, and two children fatherless. *And for what?* Faith wondered. Had it been worth it? Was Lee Harvey Oswald this minute rejoicing? Faith felt ill at the thought.

Restless, Faith turned on the television to see if there had been any news. Tears slid down her cheeks as she watched the president’s casket being carried into the White House. So it really was over; it was hard to believe.

It was Saturday, a day to relax and to rest, a day to party and rejoice that the week was over, but this Saturday was different. This Saturday an entire nation was mourning. The numbness and shock had worn off and a sharp pain was settling in on both men and women, rich and poor, young and old. Faith watched television the entire day, not answering the phone when it rang. She wanted to speak to no one. She curled up and watched images of her fallen president on the networks, not knowing what else to do.

Sunday, she shut out all of her grief and threw herself into a paper that was due the following week. “Antagonists in Shakespeare’s Tragedies.” Faith was sure that would block all other thoughts in her mind. She and her friends had had tickets to the Harvard - Yale game, but that had been canceled, like so many other events that weekend. Faith was determined to numb her pain any way she could and homework seemed the most practical way to do it. So engrossed

was she in her paper all afternoon, she never turned on the television. She never saw Jack Ruby shoot Lee Harvey Oswald for the entire nation to see; she did not see yet another victim in the endless horror that was that weekend.

Faith Wyndham changed that weekend, however subtly. This was a happy go lucky girl who had never seen the darker side of human existence. She had never experienced the callousness and cruelty humans were capable of, even in something so simple as unrequited love, and certainly had never even imagined the sinister acts of humanity: the treatment of blacks in the South, organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, the impact of an assassin's bullet. And so, that weekend, a simple life's lesson was taught: no one was immune to wrong. It could sneak up so stealthily and so silently, strike horribly, and leave you breathless and shaken before you knew what hit you. Faith had learned her lesson well that weekend.



Sunday morning, Mercedes hurriedly threw some things into a duffel bag and went to catch her plane. She knew that anything appropriate that she had to wear to the funeral Monday would be at her parents' house in D.C. She had talked her father earlier that morning and she had been relieved to hear his voice. Nicollette had said that he was all right, but Mercedes hadn't realized how much she needed tangible confirmation until she had heard his somber voice. He had flown back on Air Force One with the president's widow and watched Judge Hughes administering the oath to Lyndon Johnson.

"Daddy," Mercedes had cried, "what if you'd been with him? You could have been killed like that secret service agent."

"Sadie," Joshua automatically used his pet name for his only daughter, "I'm fine. Let's not dwell on what could have happened." How ironic: an entire nation was doing just that.

"It's so scary, Dad. It could still happen to you, or to me one day. What if I do something to piss someone off and he decides take me down? How can I stop him? If the president isn't safe, who is?" Mercedes had been sobbing by then.

Joshua had felt sorry for all of the disillusionment he heard in his daughter's voice. And he knew that she wasn't the only one. Millions of people were experiencing it, himself included. John had been a favorite figure in Mercedes' life since she was a little girl, and he knew she was feeling the loss as if it had been a favorite uncle. What could he say to her?

"Listen, I've booked you a flight to one of the twin airports. It leaves Boston at 12:20 tomorrow afternoon. Can you make it? I plan on meeting you at the airport. There is a private Mass for Kennedy in East Room at 10:30, but I should be able to make it to the airport."

Mercedes had taken a deep breath, determined not to have any unfinished business before she stepped on the plane. "I'll be there, Daddy. I love you."

"I love you, too, Sadie." Her father had known the importance of saying those all-important words. Kennedy's death had taught him that much.

So now, Mercedes was half-heartedly getting ready for a trip that she did not want to make. Checking to make sure she had a toothbrush and a change of underwear seemed so trivial. When she decided she was ready she took one last look around her apartment, in case she never saw it again, and left for the airport. She did not have anyone to drive her there, so she would have to leave her car at the airport for the weekend, but she too distracted to really care.

Mercedes found a spot for her car in the extended parking lot and hurried into Logan International Airport. Her flight was scheduled to leave in half-an-hour and she still had to check in. She received her boarding pass from a tired and harassed looking girl and boarded the plane with ten minutes to spare.

She settled into her seat and closed her eyes, determined not to think of the pressures she was under; Mercedes had decided that she would try to relax by thinking of a time when she was happy, a time when she was just a girl and not a workaholic pumping out endless good grades. Mercedes refused to admit it, but over five years of relentlessly pushing herself to be the best was taking its toll. The disappointment and mistrust she felt for everyone was eating away at her and it was becoming increasingly harder for her to wake up in the morning and face her day.

After it had first happened, the pain, fear, and anger had almost paralyzed her, but she refused to be beaten. She allowed her anger to drive and motivate her. She finished out her sophomore year in the dorm at Vassar, and then transferred off campus to a tiny apartment in Poughkeepsie where she lived for her two remaining years. It had been straight to Harvard after that, back home to where she had been raised. She had accomplished a lot: valedictorian of her class at Vassar, star intern at the law firm in Boston where she worked, highly respected at Harvard law by students and faculty alike. Mercedes Chancellor was a star on the rise, shining brightly, but like all bright burning stars, she was going to burn out fast. She had the accolades, but no love or friendship.

Mercedes was beginning to think lately that it was time to try again. Time to let people into her life. She thought now of the good times she had had growing up in Boston with her friends at her private school and in New York her freshman year at Vassar. The laughter she had shared with beloved friends, the kisses she had shared with the boys from her brother school, movies, dinner dates, drive-ins with big groups of her friends. For the first time in years Mercedes longed for her old life back. But could she do it?

Kennedy's assassination had caused two opposing reactions in her emotional state: it had made her feel lonelier than she ever felt before, wanting to reach out to somebody, anybody. But it also strengthened her belief that you could never trust people, making her want to withdraw completely from the human race. Mercedes drifted off to sleep and did not hear the plane take off or land, as dreams of John Kennedy and Kyle Lockridge clouded her mind.

Mercedes jumped and then laughed at herself as a stewardess touched her shoulder. "We've landed. We're getting ready to disembark."

Mercedes smiled. "Thank you." She stood and grabbed her duffel bag from the overhead compartment and impatiently waited for her turn to leave the plane. She spotted her father as soon as she stepped into the airport and flew into his arms as if she were four and not twenty-four. Father and daughter held each other as if to assure themselves the other was truly standing there before them. Mercedes had not seen her father since the previous summer at Cape Cod, before the fall term had started at Harvard. She had been to D.C. to visit twice in the fall, but her father had been on the road with Kennedy both times and she had only seen her mother.

"It's OK, Sadie, I'm really here," Joshua laughed at her zealous hug.

"Thank goodness," Mercedes said she released him. "I keep thinking about what might have been if you had been with the motorcade."

Joshua grabbed her duffel bag and guided her through Dulles to the VIP parking section where his car waited. "The funeral is Monday," he informed his daughter as he loaded her bag into the trunk. "You were planning on coming home Wednesday for Thanksgiving anyway. Will you miss a lot at school Tuesday and Wednesday if you stay with us "

Mercedes shook her head. "It's pointless to fly in and out twice this week. I called my most demanding Prof and explained to him that I was going to the funeral and probably wouldn't be in next week. He understood perfectly and said it would be a light week anyway. He was thinking of canceling all of his classes. Besides, I think a week's break will do me good."

"Hectic?" Josh often worried about his driven daughter. The dark circles under her eyes were proof to him that she was pushing herself too hard.

Mercedes nodded. "Only six months left, though. I've pretty much sealed the number one spot." She looked out the window as her father maneuvered the car out of the airport and headed toward Alexandria.

Joshua looked at his only child fondly. "You've pretty much sealed that years ago just by being you. You always seem to come out on top. Your mother and I are very proud of you."

She smiled at the compliment, but a wistful look entered her eyes. "Not without sacrifices, though."

Neither said a word during the rest of the half-hour trip to the house in Alexandria, Virginia, each lost in their own thoughts. Her parents lived here, but Mercedes would never call it home. Home was Boston where she had been raised just west of Lexington. Her parents still owned their estate there, but after Kennedy's election to President, they had leased a house in Alexandria. When Kennedy was a Senator, Joshua had commuted back and forth from Boston and Washington. Her parents still opened the house up a couple weekends a year for maintenance, but when they vacationed in the summer, it was always at their sprawling cottage on Cape Cod, with frequent trips to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket to visit friends.

Mercedes recognized that they were almost to the house when her father turned on King Street in Old Town. She liked the atmosphere of Old Town, including all of the seventeenth and eighteenth century buildings and landmarks that marked Alexandria's long and distinguished history since before the Revolutionary War. The flounder houses fascinated her the most. Back when the colonists were taxed on the price of class, they built their houses with windows on one side to escape the costly taxes. The houses were so-called because of the fish with both of its eyes on one side of its head.

They pulled into the driveway of their house - unfortunately not a flounder house, much to Mercedes' regret - and the young girl realized how much she missed her mother and how excited she was to see her. Nicollette heard the car and rushed out the side door to greet her daughter. It was easy to see that the two women were related as Mercedes had inherited her mother's delicate features and large jade green eyes. Her golden hair was just a shade lighter than her father's and shade darker than her mother's: a perfect blend of both her parents.

Mercedes laughed as her mother hugged her as tight as she had hugged her father at the airport. "It hasn't been that long, Mom!"

Nicollette's musical laugh matched that of her daughter's. "I know it's only been a month since I've seen, but it's been over three months since I had my family together."

The Chancellors entered the nineteenth century house and Mercedes glanced around. The décor was nineteenth century also, but somehow the more modern additions such as the television and stereo didn't look out of place. She announced that she was going to take her bag up to her room and climbed the two flights of stairs to the room that was reserved for her when she visited. Her mother entered the room done in Wedgwood blue just behind her.

"Can you believe he's gone?" Nicollette asked softly.

Mercedes shook her head as tears welled up in her large green eyes.

“John Jr.’s birthday party is the day of the funeral,” her mother told her.

“Jackie’s not going to cancel it?” Mercedes was shocked.

Nicollette shook her head. “No, she feels that John Jr. has lost enough. She wants to give him his party just as planned and not disappoint him.”

“How is she going to manage it?” Mercedes’ voice was filled with awe at the strength of the First Lady.

“She plans to receive people at the White House downstairs after the funeral, and John John’s party will be upstairs,” Nikki explained.

“Jackie is remarkable woman! Can you imagine going through that? This has got to be the most horrible ordeal of her life and its public on top of that. Her husband has just been murdered, she had to sit there and witness it, her life as it is most *un-normal*, and she’s going to bend over backwards so her son can have a sense of normalcy. Amazing. I’m not sure that I could do that.”

Nicollette looked at her daughter. “You’re a strong person, I’m sure you could do it. It’s amazing what we can survive.” She was surprised to see a bitter look pass over her daughter’s face, briefly, but Nicollette knew that she had not imagined it. What had her daughter had to survive? She was sure that it was related to the change she had seen in her daughter the five years since.

Later that night, the family convened in the living room for a fire in the large stone fireplace. “The first of the season,” her father told her.

Mercedes and her mother chatted, but kept the television on in the background in case there were any new developments. Her father pored over books and documents. Mercedes wanted to ask her father how he felt about Johnson, but he looked far too busy, and she sensed it was a sore topic with her mother. She knew from comments that her father had made that the old staffers were wondering how Johnson would fit his personal staff of three into the present staff. She did not know that Johnson had pulled her father aside earlier at the White House, as he was doing with others in Kennedy’s personal staff, and pleaded with him for his loyalty and continuation.

Sunday was much the same as Saturday night, except that Mercedes’ father was absent. The family attended church together in the morning, and Joshua left to attend the funeral cortege from the White House to the Capitol. Mercedes said she did not feel up to attending and Nicollette agreed to stay with her. The two settled in front of the television. The televised cortege, scheduled to start at 12:30, would be starting soon. When Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald ten minutes before the procession began, for the entire nation to see, Mercedes stared disbelievingly at the screen. Yet another death in this grim melee. Was it just three short days ago that her country was still sane? Had the insanity just started that weekend? It seemed endless.

The nation was burying a president tomorrow.

Chapter Five

Jacy was neatly packing her belongings, as well as Phillip’s into her Laurent luggage set. She folded Phillip’s black Armani suit into garment bag and added her simple black Dior dress. Jacy went around the room, picking up certain items and adding them to the luggage; Jacy’s methodical style of packing was the exact opposite of Mercedes’ hurricane.

While she was packing what she and Philip would need for the trip to Washington, Jacy thought of her husband. After last night, she thought they could put their differences aside and enjoy a productive marriage. But the wall seemed to be back in place that morning. Jacy sighed. Of course, she could not expect miracles overnight, but she was glad that they had made the break through the night before. The young girl looked around the room and decided that she had everything that she would need, closed the cases, and went to look for her husband.

She finally found him in his den talking on the phone. She started into the room, but stopped as she heard his words. "Listen, Lisa, I'm sorry I couldn't meet you last night, but for God's sake, the president was assassinated!... I know... I left a message, but I guess you never got it... Yes, I spent the night at home, what's wrong with that?... Yes, my wife was with me... I can't believe your getting jealous just because I spent a peaceful night at home with my wife after Kennedy was shot... I know what I've said about Jacy before, but... I'm going away for a few days, but of course we can get together when I get back..."

Jacy turned and fled to the safety of her favorite room on the second floor: the library, which was her sanctum. She curled up in the circular seat in the alcove, which faced the clipped lawns behind the mansion, and stared out the windows into the bleak November sky. Jacy should know that this peace between the two of them could not last; he was already on the phone with one of his girlfriends making a date. And now that she had had a taste of affection, of what might have been if her father had not killed her emotions, his mistresses *did* bother her. She brushed tears away angrily and vowed never to care again. This hurt too much. She had been safer the other way; at least never allowing herself to feel meant that she did not have to feel the pain.

Phillip found her an hour later reading a book of poems. He wanted to find her earlier, to help her pack and get to know her better, but that damn Lisa had called on his private line. He had to promise that he would meet her when he got back to New York to get her off the phone, but he knew when he made the date that he would cancel. He had no desire to see her any more; his wife was so much more fascinating.

He smiled at Jacy and sat down next to her. When he leaned over to kiss her cheek she involuntarily stiffened and he looked at her in surprise. "What's wrong?"

Jacy tried to smile. "Nothing. Are you ready to leave for Idlewild? It must be getting late."

Phillip looked at his watch. "I guess we should be going. Our flight leaves pretty soon." He watched as Jacy stood up, placed her book on the shelf, and started to leave the room, her reticence thicker than ever. So it was only a brief thaw and back to winter. He should have known that it could not last – he wanted it too much.

Jacy and Phillip arrived at the Mayflower Hotel in D. C. later that evening and discovered that their suite was just down the hall from her parents. Jacy was so angry and withdrawn that she did not notice the elegance of the suite, from the plush mauve carpet and raspberry walls to the Lewis XV furniture and breathtaking view. After unpacking some of their clothes, Jacy decided to visit her mother. Phillip followed, not quite knowing how to act around his wife.

Her father answered her knock, politely said hello, as if to a stranger, and quickly retreated into the room. Phillip observed this and remembered how cool Jacy had described him as. Joseph Winston had not seen his daughter in months, the family was attending a funeral of a close family friend in two days, and he had barely greeted Jacy. Phillip could see all too clearly what a cold man his father-in-law truly was and wondered how he could have missed this fact before. He immediately forgave Jacy her distance that evening. Of course, she could not be

expected to just turn her emotions on and off with a simple switch, like a light bulb. It would take her time to learn how to deal with them, especially considering how she'd grown up.

As they enter the suite, even more luxuriously decorated than their own, Jacy saw that her mother was sitting, crying silently. When she saw her daughter, she rose to cross the room and give her a delicate hug. "How could this happen?"

Jacy shook her head. "I don't know, mother. Having spoken to Jackie yet?"

"Yes, briefly, to give her my support. She's planning the funeral arrangements herself, as well as John-John's birthday party, so she's very busy. We received an invitation to attend the services at St. Matthew's Cathedral. There will be a procession from the Capitol to the White House to St. Matthew's and then on to Arlington where he'll be buried. Your father and I are planning to attend the service, but we won't be joining the procession," Jacy's mother explained.

"That's fine, Mother, we'll do that," Jacy agreed, and then something occurred to her. "He's not going to be buried in the family plot in Brookline?" The Kennedy's had always been laid to rest in Massachusetts. John himself had been born in Brookline.

Alexandra shook her head. "Bobby thought that he should be buried in Arlington, so he and Jackie persuaded the rest of the family to bury him there."

The two continued to visit for another hour and Phillip was relieved when Jacy stood up and declared that was time for her mother to get some rest. Jacy's father had not said one word all evening and her mother had sobbed repeatedly about the president, the baby Jackie had lost three months before, and the unfairness of it all. Jacy had tried to comfort her mother, feeling bitter because her mother had never show her that much emotion, and Phillip sat uncomfortably in his chair, trying to make the appropriate comments.

When they were finally alone in their elegant suite, Phillip grabbed his wife and pulled her into his arms. When she struggled to pull away he held her tight. "Don't freeze up on! Dammit, we broke through last night and I don't want to lose it!"

Jacy was fighting mad, something completely new to her, but she had allowed her anger to build up inside of her since she first heard him on the phone that afternoon. The evening with her parents had added to her frustration and anger and now her husband had the audacity to pretend to care about her after making a date. Jacy could not take any more and something inside of her snapped. "You should have thought about that before you made a date with your mistress today," she spat at him as she wrenched herself free.

Phillip was startled. *So that was why she had been so cold all evening.*

"Jacy, *she called me.* I have no intention of meeting her, nor did I when I spoke to her. I just wanted to get off the phone with her and find you so I told her what she wanted to hear so that she would leave me alone."

Jacy rolled her eyes. "You didn't even bother to come find me for a whole hour after that. What the hell do you take me for?" She was shouting now. The anger coursing through her veins was strangely invigorating. Jacy felt more alive than she ever had.

"I looked all over for you! I even had the maids looking for you. It ever occurred to me that you'd be in the library. I thought nobody ever went in there!" Phillip was shouting now, too.

"It happens to be my favorite room. Shows how much you know about me!"

"And whose fault is that?" Her husband shot back. The two stood glaring at each other. Jacy's ice blue eyes glittered with fury and Phillip thought she had never looked more beautiful standing there so defiantly. As the two stood there, locked in an impasse, smiles twitched at their lips, which gave way to a chuckle. Soon they were laughing together.

“Our first fight,” Phillips said in a nostalgic way.

“That felt good in an odd way. I was angry as hell with you, but I felt alive. I liked it,” Jacy smiled as her husband pulled her into his arms once again.

“I liked it, too,” Phillip kissed his wife. The fight had made him feel alive as well, his blood coursing through his veins, stirring a passion deep within him. His eyes darkened with desire and he was amazed at his body’s reaction to Jacy - never before had he felt this for a woman, certainly not his wife. But her eyes had flashed fire, her cheeks were flushed with anger bringing color to her ivory skin, and her petite frame was taut with defiance. Seeing her like that had inflamed his passion. He groaned as he remembered and crushed his lips down upon her full red ones.

The feel of his tongue plunged so ardently into her mouth sent a spiral of passion through Jacy’s body, right to the pit of her stomach. She returned his kiss fervently and they fell onto the bed together, bodies entwined, hands exploring. They made love for hours, reveling in the newfound feelings they shared with each other.

Sunday, instead of attending the cortege with Joseph and Alexandra, Jacy and Phillip went for a walk by the reflecting pool. Unlike Saturday, it was a beautiful day. The sky was cloudless and brilliantly clear. The air was brisk, but the couple was not uncomfortable as they passed through the Mall.

Jacy loved Washington: the traditions, the towering memorials to the honored men of her country, the quiet beauty of the Mall. There wasn’t anything about Washington she could think of that she didn’t like. Phillip motioned to a nearby bench where the two sat down. “How are you feeling today?” He remembered how warm she had been on Friday and how cold Saturday. He was afraid she’d be overwhelmed by her feelings and retreat again.

She thought a moment, her lovely black hair floating in the breeze. “Quiet, peaceful. Content really. “

“Are you scared?”

Jacy nodded. “Yes. For so long it was easy to shut everything out - you don’t miss what you never had. Now I’m entering onto an unfamiliar ground and it’s terrifying. Emotions are risks, and where there is risk, there is the chance for pain.”

“But, Jacy, you’ve missed out on so many wonderful, tender emotions. Think about those, not the pain,” Phillip urged.

“Easier said than done,” Jacy smiled ruefully. “Like yesterday, for example. I heard you talking to Lisa and suddenly I was consumed with jealousy and hurt. I wasn’t used to that and I didn’t know what to do.”

“I thought that didn’t bother you.”

“It never did before. That’s what was so overwhelming. Overnight I went from not giving a damn to being overwhelmed by these foreign, ugly feelings. I ran out of there right then and never to feel that way again. To never let myself get in a position where I might feel something like that again,” Jacy paused, tears glistening in her crystal eyes. “I became the Ice Maiden once again. To protect myself.”

Philip smiled tenderly at her as he ran a finger through her onyx hair. “Jacy, I find you a fascinating woman. Deep down I always have, but now that you’re opening up to me I feel as though I need to be near you all the time, like a moth to a flame. I don’t want to leave you, even for a moment. I’ve never known anyone like you.” He was staring ardently at the young woman with a flawless ivory skin and raven black hair, who was his wife, and yet a stranger. “I want no one else.”

Jacy blushed and looked down. “But, Phillip, how can you say that? It’s so fast. It’s really like you’ve only known me two days. Hell, I don’t even know who I am anymore, how could you?”

Philip laughed. “I like the person I’ve seen emerge. You’ve fascinated me for years, but you were so aloof that I never got a peek inside to see who you really were and what you were really all about. Now I’m finding out that I was right all along. It hasn’t been days, it’s been since the very first day I laid eyes on you six years ago.”

Jacy looked amazed. “You never let on. You were always so calm and collected before we were married.”

Philip shrugged. “The night I met you I thought that you were the most beautiful woman that I had ever laid eyes on. I still do. But I didn’t know how to act, you were always a distant, so I pretended that I was Joe Cool. I didn’t want you know how nervous I was, and how hard my heart was pounding every time I got to dance with you at your parents’ parties. It’s true that I wasn’t exactly thrilled to be engaged at the time, but you were so beautiful and fragile and vulnerable that suddenly I didn’t mind.”

Jacy laughed at the recollection. “I did think you were Joe cool. You were this incredibly handsome older man who always seemed so suave and sophisticated. I was eighteen and barely out of high school, totally out of my element, so I didn’t act like anything at all. I wanted to impress you, but since I had no idea how to go about it, I just acted like a princess in a tower. I didn’t treat you very well and I apologize.” Jacy stared into his warm brown eyes and was drawn deep within. How had she looked into those eyes a thousand times and failed to see the warmth and caring? She kissed him softly and then pulled back, smiling.

“You don’t have to apologize, Jace. There were a lot of misunderstandings going on between two kids who were thrown into a situation they had no idea how to deal with. We can’t tear ourselves up inside because we didn’t get this right long ago. We just have to make sure that we don’t mess up this second chance we’ve been given.” Philip held her close and stoked her hair.

Happiness flooded through Jacy. Never before in her life had she been happy and now she was nearly bursting with joy. And to think, the man she lived with for the past five years, whom she considered a stranger, was the man who brought it to her. Jacy Spencer felt complete.

Chapter Six

The morning of the funeral dawned clear and blue. Mercedes rolled out of bed and saw the dress her mother had chosen for hanging near her closet. It was a simple black silk dress from Halston with a matching pillbox hat. Mercedes sighed and tried to set her grief aside - she didn’t know how she was going to make it through this. Her father had said they needed to be at the Capitol by 10:30, but she was dreading this. How could she say goodbye to such a wonderful man? A man she had known since she was a child? So it had come to this.

The Chancellors arrived at the Capitol at exactly 10:30 looking solemn and dignified. The two women wore no makeup, their faces ravaged with grief. Tears rolled silently down Joshua’s cheeks; he was saying goodbye to more than just his President and his boss, John had been a close friend of his since their days at Harvard together. Cambridge – it was so long ago. Kennedy had been Class of ‘40, himself Class of ‘39. And now his friend was gone.

The Kennedy family arrived ten minutes later to bear the coffin away from the Rotunda. Mercedes watched the nine pallbearers carry the coffin, the American flag draped symbolically

over it, down the steps to where the caisson awaited, its six gray horses ready to carry it to the White House. The Chancellors climbed into their limousine and followed the long procession of solemn black limousines down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House, where they left the sleek black automobile to follow the coffin on foot the eight blocks to St. Matthew's.

As they trudged behind the Kennedy family, passing million or so people lining the streets of the procession, Mercedes knew that she would never forget this day as long as she lived. The sound of horses' hooves striking the pavement was forever etched into her brain, as well as the sound of the drums' cadence, 100 beats to the minute. It would stay with Mercedes forever.

It was also indelibly etched into Jacy's mind as she sat in St. Matthew's with her husband, her parents, and all of the others who had come by invitation. Off in the distance, Jacy heard muffled drums and the soft strains of slow, somber music. All of a sudden, Jacy could no longer hear the distant band as the chorus high in the Cathedral replaced it. Soon, even the sound of the chorus could not drown out the cadence as it drew closer and closer. Jacy watched the Cardinal go to the doors to wait for the processional, tears flowing down the creamy skin of her cheeks. As the band crossed the threshold, it took several moments for her to realize that the slow dirge they were playing was "Hail to the Chief."

Jackie entered next with Caroline and John Jr., their powder blue clothes and red shoes contrasting the somber colors surrounding them. Jacy eyes took in every detail during the five minutes it took to seat those who came in with the procession, recognizing many dignitaries of the world, and even a girl that she had known at her private school in Boston. Mercedes, she believed her name was. But Mercedes forgotten as Jacy saw the coffin brought in next and her grief was renewed.

For Faith, watching at home, this was a moment of high drama as the camera showed Jacqueline Kennedy's grief torn face, the poignant faces of the children, the great figures of the world seated together in this time of trial and mourning, their alliances and intrigues momentarily forgotten. She was entranced as she listened to Cardinal Cushing recite the Mass in an accented voice that Faith recognized as Bostonian. What spoke to Faith most were the images of the flag draped coffin, containing the body of her fallen hero.

Mercedes, Faith, and Jacy were each sobbing quietly at the end of the Mass. As Mercedes passed back through the Cathedral she recognized Jacy and gave a feeble smile of recognition, which Jacy returned. The plan was for the Chancellors to join the mile long line of limousines heading for Arlington behind the Kennedys, but Mercedes knew that she could not see John Kennedy buried - she had said her farewell in the Cathedral and she could not take any more. Sobbing, she explained this to her parents. Her mother offered to stay with her, but she urged Nicollette to accompany her father to Arlington. Her parents, with some trepidation at leaving their grief-stricken daughter alone, entered their limousine. Mercedes watched as the sleek black line of cars headed for Virginia.

Mercedes jumped as she felt a hand on her shoulder.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you." It was Jacy.

"That's okay, I wasn't paying attention to anything going on around me, so it's really my fault for not being more aware," Mercedes tried to pull herself together.

Jacy motioned in the direction of Arlington. "You're not going with your family to the cemetery?" She had watched tearful scene between Mercedes and her parents from the steps of St. Matthew's.

Mercedes shook her head. "I couldn't take it anymore," and then, not bragging, "He was like my uncle."

Jacy nodded, knowing how painful this was for everybody, especially those who knew him. "Mercedes, right?"

"Yes. Let me think, Jacy Winston, right?"

"It's Spencer now." She looked up at the tall, handsome man beside her. "This is my husband, Phillip Spencer."

Mercedes extended a delicate hand. "Mercedes Chancellor."

Jacy turned to her husband. "Mercedes and I went to Twyckingham together. I was a boarding student, but Mercedes was a day student if I recall." She looked back to the blond woman, who nodded her confirmation. "How do you know the Kennedys?"

"My father and John have been friends since their days at Cambridge together. My dad is – " she caught herself, "was one of his aides."

Jacy couldn't believe that she was standing in Washington talking to Mercedes Chancellor. She had always envied Mercedes' easygoing manner and had wanted to be popular like her back in high school. Phillip had given her the courage to approach her, and she was glad she had. Mercedes still looked beautiful, but her lovely face was ravished with grief and Jacy instinctively wanted to protect her. Mercedes' emerald green eyes expressed all the pain that she had been carrying with her for years.

"I may sound presumptuous, but you don't look like you should be alone. Would you like to join Phillip and me for some coffee or something?" Jacy asked impulsively.

Mercedes looked surprised and grateful. "I...I think I would like that. You don't mind? I don't want to intrude"

Phillip spoke up. "Of course not. Kennedy obviously meant a great deal to you, and Jacy's right, you shouldn't be alone." Like his wife, Phillip noticed that this girl had been through the ringer. She looked so fragile that he, too, wanted to reach out and protect her.

The three found a nearly deserted diner and drank coffee while talking quietly and solemnly. All three ignored the television behind the counter that displayed images from the funeral in Arlington.

Faith, however, was riveted to the screen at home in Boston. She watched as the six grey horses carried casket, followed by the lone, black, rider less horse. The camera showed the route down Connecticut Avenue, the long line of black limousines turning right on Constitution Avenue, slowly by the Lincoln Memorial, where they avoided a throng of people. Soon they had crossed the bridge into Virginia and entered Arlington National Cemetery.

Just before three o'clock, the Air Force launched fifty jets, one for each state in the Union. As the casket was lowered, Faith heard the 21-gun salute go on for an entire three minutes. She listened to Taps and then the Navy hymn, feeling desperately sorry for the young brunette standing near the casket as the flag was folded and handed to her, but the most touching moment of the ceremony for Faith came when Jacqueline bent down to light the eternal flame, her brothers-in-law following suit after she handed them the rod.

Faith continued to cry after the cameras showed Jackie being lead away by Robert Kennedy. The cameras lingered on such public figures as President Johnson, Adlai Stevenson, Hubert Humphrey, and Richard Nixon, all men Kennedy had defeated in becoming President, but who were all gathered today to show their respect for a man they revered. Former Presidents Truman and Eisenhower were also present, but Faith held no interest in these men. She turned off the television and fell into bed, thinking of the man that had been buried that day.

It wasn't quite five o'clock yet, but Faith dozed off immediately, the emotional exhaustion taking its toll on her fatigued body. She awoke at eight o'clock and thought she had overslept, before she realized it was still Monday evening. She went to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator, quickly realizing that she felt nauseous at the thought of food. She half-heartedly attempted to do some reading, then, admitting that it was a useless battle, she returned to bed to sleep, only one of millions feeling lost that evening.

Chapter Seven

Thanksgiving was somber at the Chancellor household, the loss still palpable to all. Mercedes was happy to see her aunts, uncles, and cousins that she was usually rarely able to spend time with, but it wasn't the glorious get together it usually was. Her Uncle David was talking about a CIA conspiracy that killed the President, but that was clearly angering her father, who finally said something to his brother-in-law. David was ready to retort when Mercedes Aunt Catherine had grabbed her husband's hand at the same time her sister, Mercedes' mom, grabbed Joshua's hand. Both women gave their husbands warning looks and the tense moment passed.

Later, as she lie awake in bed, Mercedes wondered about her uncle's theory. She knew that Kennedy had not approved of the police action in Vietnam, but certain members of the government were staunch believers in the domino effect and had disagreed with Kennedy's policies. But did they believe strongly enough to kill their President? A few years ago Mercedes knew that she would not even be entertaining the thought, but she had learned the hard way that humans were monsters capable of anything. She finally drifted off into a troubled sleep.

And that's all she wrote...