

CAROLINE

“The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.” Thomas A. Edison

“God; this sucks!” Michael couldn’t help but to whisper aloud to himself as the muddy heel of the combat boot formed another indentation along his ribcage. Rain had been coming down in buckets resulting in the six inch deep mud hole that he, was pretty sure, would be drowning in within the next few minutes. As usual, he wasn’t sure how he ended up in this shitty situation again; but, to no avail, here he was.

There is fine line between genius and insanity. Michael walked this line every day of his life. All it takes is a step to one side or the other to completely change the conditions of any situation. He lived with a rage inside him that can only be described as a Hulk-like fury, without the size and the greenness. Many a night, he had awoken in cold sweats from future visions of damage that he would cause from his fury. It was only one possible future, to be sure; but, the dreams had been more frequent over the past six months. This was not a good sign for Michael. Most people would not even be able to comprehend the energy it took him to control this rage on a daily basis. He really had no choice, due to being the empath that he was. His rage could actually exceed his ability to control it, and the results would be devastating. In his heart, he knew, ‘The Controllers’ would actually have to cut his head off to stop his devastation if Michael ever gave in to his rage.

That day on the mountain in Montana, some years ago, had changed him and created the powerful spiritual warrior that he was now; but it did not alter the basis of what he was as an empath. Michael could not intentionally kill a human being. The only exception was that if a death resulted from an act of defense of himself or another. He knew that was the case; since this had already occurred, and Michael still had all his powers. It had happened about a year and a half ago in a small town in Oregon, during an altercation with a preacher who was abusing children. His actions saved the life of a child, and that was forgiven. There was always a catch to everything. If Michael were ever to kill in judgment, his powers would be lost forever; and, perish the thought, he would have to reincarnate. There was no way he was about to let that happen, so he remained vigilant at all costs; but, if his empathetic powers ever were to combine with that rage, Checkmate!

Caroline was lying unconscious in the drainage ditch about twenty feet away from him, and he could deeply feel her presence. Michael was still in a little shock after having finally found her after all these years. Now, it looked as if their reunion would be on the brief side. Where had she been all these years? He hadn't had much of a free moment to put it all together, since running into her two days ago. At least she wasn't dead; Michael could definitely feel that much, even in his near death state.

Michael forced his way up onto his hand and knees in the mud hole. At least his wasn't sucking in the muddy water anymore. His long straggly hair hung down hiding the sides of his grimacing face. Brown lines of muddy water were streaming down his head dropping back down to join their buddies in the hole. He coughed and tried to get a few quick deep breaths in, just long enough to feel the steel-toed end of a boot slam into the underside of his abdomen knocking all the wind clear. That was quite enough for Michael.

One of the things he had learned to control over the years was the partial use of the rage inside him that was so dangerous, and Michael was done with this shit. He reached deep within to sense the movement all around him. No longer could he sense any pain, and he could feel his rage in waiting. It was like a big red ball of fire in his mind. Michael could hear the crackling of electrical sparks emanating from the glow. It almost spoke to him as if to say, "I'm here for you, but be careful." He reached out in his mind to touch this ball of fire and siphon energy from it. Michael just had to be careful not to immerse his soul all the way into it. As he visualizes the energy field around him, Michael could see the movement of the boot making another pass towards his abdomen. He reached out immediately to intercept the boot in mid-air.

He clamped his hand on the heel of the incoming boot and launched it back in the other direction taking the body that was attached to it through the air about fifteen feet. Michael stood up tall, letting all the muddy water run off his long leather coat. He took a long deep breath and finally spoke. "What is it about you evil sons-of-bitches that always want to inflict pain rather than just kill someone? Well, you picked the wrong one today."

Michael looked around the area, through the sheets of rain as he wiped what was left of the mud away from his eyes. It was pitch black with no ambient light in the sky, just ominously dark. He could make out a car, about thirty feet away on the road in front of him, with doors open and headlights still on; shining off in the direction to his left. From what light was

available from the headlights, Michael could see that he was in some sort of clearing in a forest of pine trees. He could smell the overwhelming scent of wet spruce. He had so relied on his super human senses that were gifted to him in the Continental Divide. They had proven quite handy over the years.

The last thing that he remembered was seeing Caroline, out of the blue in this small Idaho hick town, after she left without a trace so long ago. Michael had been so stunned that he was not aware of a presence behind him. He felt a stinging pressure on the back of his head, his vision went dark, and he woke up in a mud puddle here; wherever 'here' was. He quickly glanced around the area to assess what 'lifeforms' were present. Michael scanned for auras as usual. He was able to do this very quickly, which was good because he needed to know where everyone was before one of the bastards sucker-kicked him again.

To no big surprise, there were no auras except the faint blue one coming from the ditch off to his right. This was where Caroline was lying unconscious. His Blue Dove. At least she was still alive, albeit very faint. Her aura was holding though. This could mean only one thing, all the other auras were black and blended into the ambient background. 'The Controllers' were here. Michael had never come face to face with actual members of this evil society until now, but he was ready for them. All he could think to himself was, 'It was time for a little punishment'. Since he could not see their auras, Michael closed his eyes and was able to zero in on their life force itself. "Ahh", he spoke aloud, "Now, I can see you bastards."

"You know", Michael continued talking as he casually walked out of the mud hole up onto a more level playing field on the road, "I have never actually come across any of you satanic baby-raping vermin on my journey yet." He stopped on the road and could now lock into a separation between their black auras and the night. Other than Caroline in the ditch, there were two men outside the car walking slowly and silently in his direction, the man on the ground that he had tossed who was having trouble trying to get up, and a woman who was still in the car. She was probably the handler for the three men. 'The Controllers' typically use women as their mind-control handlers. Nonetheless, they were all evil. He could definitely feel that.

Michael directed his voice to the two that were approaching him. "So, who are you guys? Elected Officials? Clergy? Corporate CEOs? Maybe some of our valiant heroes in law

enforcement; or, should I say, elite cover-up squad?" He couldn't help but giggle at his own cynicism, even though it was all true. He always told people that cynicism is simply a way for the intelligent to deal with reality without going insane.

The two men continued to approach very quietly. No one would speak. Michael had a smile on his face in dark comedy, since these two had no idea what they were, quite literally, walking into. The two slowed down as they approached him, and stopped about six feet away; which was a comfortable distance. They seemed to move and stop in unison just like robots almost. Considering what Michael knew about the mind control that 'The Controllers' use to program their evil forces, it really made sense. Now, he could somewhat make out their faces. Typical wealthy white psychopaths. Michael giggled at a thought. They both looked almost like evil clones of 'HW' during his middle age years. He glanced each one of them over to assess the threat level; which was none considering the power he had, that they were not be aware of or they would not be this close to him. Then he finally spoke. "Now, noble sirs, what is it that you think I can do for you? I am not in a good mood, and that will definitely not prove advantageous for either of you." Confidence, was one thing Michael did not have a problem with.

"We need to talk to you." The vermin on the right finally spoke. "It is our understanding that you know Caroline from the past, and that she might have told you some things about our organization. We finally found her after decades of searching, and then you come strolling into our town completely by accident. I don't know how we got so lucky." He laughed in a sinister dark tone and then continued on. "She mentioned that she might have told you some things several years ago. We must know what those things were, and who else might know about them or our plans."

Michael remained quiet for a few moments as he searched each one of their heads for information. It had been quite a while since he needed to touch someone to read their minds. He always had trouble reading the minds of the brainwashed, though. It is very difficult because there is no actual thought process. All the thoughts are pre-programmed, so there was no way to read the intent or agenda behind it. It would be all speculation, but Michael's intuition was rarely wrong. He finally spoke up. "I think you are going to find that rather difficult, but I have a better idea. You are going to tell me what you are doing here; and then I

am going to take Caroline out of here, never to return. How does that sound?" Michael gleamed in his sarcasm.

The two were obviously not open to the changes in conditions that Michael was proposing; and, without any verbal negotiations, began to approach him to try to change his mind. He shook his head a bit because he was really wanting to get over to Caroline in the ditch to see if she was alright, but he had to get through these two trivial obstacles first. Oh, well. He needed the exercise due to recent unhealthy trends in his eating habits. Rikki had been enjoying the leftovers, but he had a little cushion around his mid-section growing. It wouldn't last too long though. Michael had pretty much been the same six-foot-two, two-hundred-pound, muscular, middle-aged man for the past several years now. He never placed too much emphasis on appearance because it really was what was inside that counts. These two were about to find out just how much he did have inside.

They advanced almost formally and in unison, but not rushing in. Michael extended both arms with palms out. A surge of energy shot from both palms into the swelled chests of each one of the goons. Both were launched back through the air into the side of the car and plopped down on the ground in a limp human ball. Comically, one in front of each tire. From his perspective, it looked to Michael that the car was running on balled up bodies rather than tires. He laughed out loud at that one. In fact, he was having so much fun that he had completely forgotten the man behind him, who was out of his field of vision while he was turned facing the car. The first goon had regained his footing.

The balled up fist struck Michael square in the right kidney, and down on his back he went; back in that damn mud puddle. The dark figure looming above him quickly raised a boot to stomp on his throat, but he managed to catch the sole with both hands and launch the creep airborne, a lot harder this time. The body landed by the car between the other two guys. All three were unconscious, but Michael was hurting now. He let out a groan and rolled over onto his belly, immersing his face in the puddle, once again. Michael was right back where he started.

He took every bit of his strength to push himself up onto his knees. His kidney was on fire; probably going to be pissing blood on this one, Michael thought. He looked up and could see the three men were still unconscious, but the lady was no longer in the car. A shimmer of movement caught his eye. It was Caroline coming to consciousness in the ditch. He could hear

her groaning, as she was waking up. Michael took to crawling on his hands and knees over to her with all the ability he had left.

Within about five minutes, he was able to make it to Caroline's side. She had her eyes wide open now and was looking up at Michael with concern. He wasted no time in asking her, "Where the hell have you been?" Rain was running off his chin into her mouth causing her to choke slightly, turn away, and force herself to sit up.

She wiped her face from forehead to chin and spoke a sound that he had missed for a very long time. The sound of her beautiful voice. His long lost Blue Dove. "Michael, I know there is a lot that we need to talk about; but, for now, we do not have the time. These people are expert killers and trackers. They have technology that you cannot imagine. We must get out of here quickly. Are you alright?"

Michael grimaced as he placed his hand over the lower right side of his back and leaned up fully balancing on his knees. "No, I'm not. They got a pretty good shot in that time, Caroline. I'll give them that one. We can catch up later, then. I am going to need help getting out of here though. I can't heal this one as quickly as some others, plus I have no goddamn idea where we are."

Caroline had not seen him since the transformation in Montana, so she was not aware of the powers that he was now in possession of. "What do you mean, heal?"

Michael smiled as he finally made his way to his feet and helped Caroline to hers as well. Chivalry was not dead for Michael, even in intense pain. "Well, sweetheart, we can add that to the list of things to discuss when we get time to catch up. Now", he paused for a quick breath, "there was a woman in that car, and she is gone now. We also need to tie those dudes up." He pointed toward the car, as a burst of pain hit him causing him to slightly buckle over.

Caroline headed immediately over to the car, as Michael slowly brought up the rear. Not really appearing to be injured, she went to rummaging for anything to tie the goons up with and managed to come across some duct tape in the trunk. That was a score for sure as duct tape makes for the best wrist and ankle binding there is, but why was duct tape the only thing that

was in the trunk? There was still no sign of the lady that had been in the car. She started to bind up the goons as Michael scanned around the area.

“You know I would help you if I could.” Michael just wanted to let her know that he really was in too much pain to help with the taping. It did give him time to see if he could locate the woman’s life force somewhere. He was not having much luck. It was possible she had some sort of shield against it. She could have also ran off far enough to be out of his range. Michael remembered Caroline had just said something about superior technology a moment ago. “What was that shit you were saying about technology, and why are you not hurt?”

She looked up at him as she was finishing up with the final guy. “I’ll explain the technology later. They brought me out here to kill me; and you, as well, after they found out what they wanted to know from you. When you saw me in town and knew that I was alive, they took you too.” She paused for a minute and stood up, having completed the task at hand. She looked at Michael and smiled. “You saved my life. Thank you. I am truly sorry for the way I had to leave so long ago.” Caroline gently walked over and embraced the real Michael for the first time.

She pushed away and looked deep into Michael’s eyes. He connected to her in a brand new way, as he had never been around her with his heightened sense of intuition and psychic awareness before. Caroline was truly beautiful inside. He could see the pain that she carried for so long; but refrained from viewing too much of that, just yet. Michael had no interest in more pain today. There was something else that he was never able to see before. A fire lies dormant inside of her. He could feel it, see it, and almost touch it. It bared the resemblance of his own ball of fury, but much more powerful. He released his mental connection with her and gently broke the embrace. “I forgive you, now, do you know a way out of here. I’m healing up pretty quick now.” He held his hand up to her in a stopping gesture. “Don’t worry, I will explain that later.”

She started to look around in all directions. The headlights were still giving off ample brightness and their eyes had adjusted to the darkness better than most. “Yeah, I think so.” She didn’t sound very confident. “I grew up around here, but I don’t remember every road. Let’s just start driving down the road and play it by ear. I’ll drive since you aren’t up to par.” Michael went around and got in the passenger side as Caroline climbed in and started the car up. She quickly backed up, and they were on their way.

It seemed like they were way out in the middle of nowhere, but Caroline seemed to get her bearings a couple miles up the road. “Man, we are way out here.” She changed the subject in a hurry. “So, how did you find me? Were you tracking me?”

“No, not all.” Michael was just glad to have her back. “I just stumbled upon you. I had no idea this was where you grew up, but I don’t think it was an accident either.”

“You look different.” She glanced over at him scanning quickly from head to toe. “Your clothes and your hair.” She paused for a second with a grin. “You kind of look like a bum.”

Michael let out a laugh that didn’t agree with his damaged kidney. “Ow, yeah, you have no idea how different, and I clean up well.” He rubbed at his lower back while leaning forward in the seat. He noticed the dashboard had quite a bit of white powder on it. “It sure looks like someone has done enough cocaine on this dashboard to make Sigmund Freud jealous, or maybe Ike Turner.” They both got a good belly laugh from that one. “When we get settled somewhere and I get my strength back, I’ll tell you the whole story. In the meantime, it is just really good to see you again.”

“You too, Michael.” She smiled that loving smile that he remembered so well. “It will take us about half an hour to get back to town, so we have time to talk about other things.”

“Well, since we are back in your old stomping grounds; considering the company we just left, I do have a few questions.” Michael was feeling much better now. “I have never forgot what you told me about the place you grew up. It turned my stomach so much at the time that I had to block it out; and then absorb it in pieces over time. Do those goons have anything to do with all that?”

There was a silence for few seconds then a low volume “Yep”. She really didn’t want Michael messed up in this business. “Michael, I am so sorry you are involved in this now. These people are scary and very evil.”

Michael smiled and gently laughed a few times. “Trust me, sugar, I am exactly the person you want involved right now.” He laughed again a little more heartily.

Caroline started to giggle, and wasn't quite sure why. Then the lightbulb came on. "OH, YEAH! I've been meaning to ask you. How in the hell did you put those three goons to the ground, by yourself, and still be alive?"

He responded, still smiling from before. "I will also have to cover that one later. It is part of the same immensely long story. Oh, and, in case you forgot; I was almost killed. Speaking of killed, maybe you can drive a little faster. Some of my fillings are still in place." Michael turned and gave her a smart ass smile which she gladly returned in kind, as she slowed down a little bit. They always did get along so well. Friends and lovers, both.

They continued on down the road in silence for a while. What was supposed to be a half an hour seemed like an eternity to Michael, whenever he started trailing off in deep thought. There was something he still couldn't put his finger on about Caroline. She had been away from him for years. He was guessing she was still on the run, but would wait for the full story later. It was no use asking too many questions right now. They still had a sticky situation to finish getting out of. What was it about her? Michael didn't want to mess with her head too much now that she was concentrating on their getaway.

He closed his eyes and concentrated on her thoughts for a moment, without getting too intrusive. Michael's ability to go into and out of deep meditative trances with ease had almost been perfected by now. There was that fire he saw again. It was very well contained and not just a fire of rage, like Michael's; this was much bigger and much more focused. There were many levels of defense before he would ever be able to get close enough to it. He figured that the years of abuse that she had endured had created many psychological barriers. These are routinely programmed in the victim's mind by 'The Controllers', to protect them from being exposed. Michael had the power to get to it; but, unfortunately, he didn't have the time right now.

Caroline was the one who finally broke the silence after about five minutes. "So, why don't you tell me a little bit about what happened to you? No need to cover it all, right now, but can you give me some ideas?"

“Sure, I guess.” Michael thought it over for a few moments. “Well, I don’t want you to feel responsible for anything as I tell you this.” She nodded in agreement. “When you left, it became part of a series of events that led to my suicide attempt; which, quite obviously, didn’t happen.” He held his right palm up at her making his favorite stop signal sign again. “Just hear me out.” He continued on. “My suicide attempt was interrupted by an old friend, who had been dead since I was eighteen. He instructed me to go off to Montana somewhere in the Continental Divide; where I went, and, literally, battled an inner demon from inside of me to the death. After which, I was gifted with powers you cannot possibly imagine. I then left society on a permanent journey to find and battle the very ‘Controllers’ that were involved with your horrible history, all with the hope of finding you again someday.” Michael paused for another moment for Caroline to catch her breath. “So, have you decided which color straight jacket will best match my eyes?”

She was really quiet for what seemed like forever. Just before he was about to speak again, she did. “Michael, do you have any idea as to how....”

“...Fantastic that sounds?” Michael finished her sentence. “Yes, absolutely. My best friend, Brad, said the same thing when I told him right after it all happened. I don’t expect you to believe any of it; but, eventually, you will have no choice.”

Caroline paused for a few moments more and then gave the all familiar, “Hmmm.” She looked over at him quite earnestly. “Well, Michael, you have never given me cause to doubt you in the past, and I know you don’t lie. I remember your issues with being the Empath that you are. So, I will accept that for now, but you are going to have to elaborate on that some more later. Deal?”

“Deal.” Michael returned without haste. “So, how much longer to town?”

“Another ten minutes or so. I’m not going directly into town, though. We’re heading to a safe spot that I know. It has never been compromised and there are plenty of supplies there. We should be able to hold up there for a while so we can figure out our next course of action.” She looked as though she was trying to recall how to get where she was going, but Michael had faith in her.

“Sounds good to me.” Michael gazed out the passenger window trying to find anything worth looking at. “Not too much to see in the pitch blackness. Oh, well.”

Maybe it was the sheer adrenaline pumping excitement of the fight he was just in or the complete sense of joy at seeing Caroline again, that made Michael make such a fatal error. When he was scanning the area they just left, for the missing woman, he forgot to take a closer look at the car. He completely missed the secret compartment located below the back seat.

The woman was very quiet when coming out of the compartment in the seat. She was very well trained. The compartment had been used for smuggling kidnapped children for the wealthy pederasts that make up the group that Michael called ‘The Controllers’. She held the stun gun rigidly in her right hand while stretching out her arm far enough to reach the passenger seat headrest. Michael barely had time to feel the gentle touch of the cold prongs of the stun gun at the base of his neck before the lights went out. It had been a long day; and, now, it was nighty night time for Michael once again.