

The Inheritance

It was an odd day to remember, as the passing of his father was marked by a fonder memory of taking the old man's Mustang for his own. Cassidy opened the garage to the familiar visage of the vintage '67 coupe, her name, *Black Diamond*, printed inventively as **BLK DMND** on the custom tag on her front bumper. Cassidy smiled as he looked at her and admired the craftsmanship that made her what she was. *F O R D* embossed in chrome across the beveled hood just above her shiny grill, black on black coloring both inside and outside of her metallic flesh, and the round headlamps that appeared to be looking back into Cassidy's glassy eyes as if she were as in love with him as he was with her.

Cassidy had never felt this kind of joy in the presence of his father. He had instead always been burdened with mixed feelings of intemperate loathing and a coveting need for acceptance from the old bastard. Love was never reciprocated between them—it never even entered the equation. It was sad that this cold hunk of black metal brought forth more sentimentality and warm memories to Cassidy than his father ever had. But the truth be told, the old man never inspired nor invoked joy in anyone, including this son, his soul heir. So, Cassidy refused to entertain any sensation of guilt as he walked forward to claim the only remaining symbol of his father's affection; the immortally beautiful car he had swooned and doted over like a lover.

Cassidy glided his hand softly across the smooth black finish to the driver's side door and took no hesitation in opening her up and crawling inside. The embrace of the leather seat was soft and comforting and just as familiar as the heavy scent of leather cleaner clinging tightly to the interior. Only this time, there was no monster to fear coming along and pulling him out.

Cassidy gripped the steering wheel and sighed, “Hello, baby.” Something about being in the driver’s seat of this sleek black machine was soothing to Cassidy’s senses, as if she were holding him and reassuring him he would never be alone; as if she understood him. At last he turned the key, *ignition!* Now they were one and no one would ever rip them from each other’s embrace.

But that was a year ago. Shaking himself from the memory of last year’s acquisition, Cassidy was ready to leave this sepulture. It was now his mother’s death he was attending and that was a much harder pill to swallow. She had grieved herself into the afterlife over that dishonorable prick’s passing and there was no compensation for Cassidy at the end of that grim reality. Cassidy was inconsolable, the only thing easing his disappointment and anger was the comforting grip of the Black Diamond’s bucket seats as he once again turned to her for asylum. His breathy voice, low and growling; much like the honeyed sound of the supercharged 302 Windsor under the Mustang’s hood, was tempered with somberness and duplicity, “How could she leave me for *him?*”

And there it was—he was officially broken.

Suddenly Cassidy was on the road, burning out emissions at 100 mph on the interstate and chain smoking. He didn’t even remember starting the car but a sudden awareness reminded him he was running as far and long as he could from his pain; at least until he ran out of gas or cigarettes. His mother weighing heavy on his mind, Cassidy thought of all the times they had found sanctuary in the back seat. He reached out and stroked the dash, “Did I ever thank you, old girl?”

Cassidy’s father, in addition to being dead, had hitherto been an abusive drunk. He would often come home hammered and toss Cassidy and his mother around. The fact he was a

prizefighter by profession made these attacks even more frightening and potentially deadly, so escaping him was the usual plan. As soon as dad's back was turned, mom would take Cassidy by the hand and reassure him, "Don't worry honey, it will all be okay, I promise," and she would lead him to the safety of the garage where they would get in the Mustang and squat down quietly in the back seat until the smoke cleared. It made the perfect hiding place. Since the old tyrant forbade them from going near the car, he assumed they wouldn't dare, and so he never looked.

Cassidy could still remember how his mother looked then; her long, dark hair disheveled and her beautiful face swollen and tear-streaked, telling him to be quiet for just awhile longer, soon it would be okay. But it never was. It was not uncommon for them to spend most of the night out there waiting for that drunken terrorist to pass out; not sleeping for fear of being found in the car. *God, Cassidy hated him!* Even at twenty-four he still felt like an abused child.

Within an hour, the car demanded sustenance. The next exit was for a town that seemed promising —*NEW HOPE*. Rolling off the exit ramp Cassidy stopped at the nearest gas station. It looked abandoned except for a beautiful woman cleaning the dirty windows. The heavy automotive vapors from gas and exhaust, combined with the unseasonal balmy heat of this well-forested region of Montana had left the windows covered in a sooty film of clinging dirt and oily grime that she appeared to be wrestling with.

Cassidy lined the Mustang up with a gas pump, his eyes never leaving the beauty at work, and silenced the engine. Slowly stepping out he announced himself, "Hello, there."

Turning toward the voice behind her, the woman happily dismissed the grimy window task to greet the tall, handsome patron of the Zip-Go as it was after all, one of her assigned duties as gas station attendant. The pretty woman's body language made it clear his seductive good

looks had grabbed her attention. Italian complexion, dark hair and eyes which mirrored his mother's, a solid and muscular stature—a fighter's build, inherited from his father; Cassidy was an attractive man.

A habitual, slow-breaking smile began to spread across Cassidy's face as she approached, his grim thoughts temporarily derailed. She too was an exotic beauty—olive skin, slender frame, long wavy dark hair, bold green eyes, friendly smile. "You look lost." She said, her voice sweetly accented with an intonation Cassidy could not quite place.

"I guess I am. My mother died."

"Oh, I am so sorry," She kindly reassured him, her attraction exchanged for condolence, "but don't worry, it will all be okay."

"I feel better already." Cassidy flirted unapologetically, his lingering smile holding its position as he spoke. "Your accent is unusual to me, but beautiful."

"Romanian. I'm Rebecca Mathers, but most just call me Becca."

"I'm Cassidy Caine."

"Do you need some help, Cassidy?" Her timbre shifted slightly when she spoke his name, suggesting an interest in him. His roguish smile broadened. The Black Diamond's needs had so far gone unaddressed, but at least Cassidy's were resolving.

His eyes stayed with her as he began to pump the gas, "Maybe directions where I can grab something to eat nearby?"

Becca found him intriguing. Charmed, she smiled and pointed west, “There is a roadside burger shack about a mile down the road. They have the best milkshakes and fries in the county. You can’t miss it.”

“Sounds good. There’s only one problem, I hate eating alone.” His arbitrary smile lent Cassidy all the credit he needed to earn Becca’s interest.

“The station closes in two hours. I’ll tell my brother not to bother picking me up. Don’t leave me waiting.” Though her warning was playful, her tone suggested Cassidy take heed. To play it safe he stayed and helped with the windows.

Those few moments changed Cassidy’s gloomy perspective. It was as if he had been led to Rebecca by the gas needle, the Black Diamond once more saving his life, delivering him to just where he needed to be and he once again was grateful.

Three years later, Cassidy was living with Becca, the tragedy of his childhood now a distant memory and the pain over the devastating loss of his mother buried deep; echoes of the family curse distorted by the alcohol problem he had acquired over the same amount of time. He had not seen it coming. It snuck up on him; the same monster that had consumed his father, slowly and habitually possessing him. It would not be until after an argument with Becca, a petty squabble over spilling a drink on the hood of the Mustang, that he would see them again, his abusive father and his wounded mother. When Cassidy would catch his own reflection in the Black Diamond’s windows drawing back to strike and struggle to recall how he got there.