

# Southern by the Grace of God

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I don't really have a summary for it yet. Just know that it is a continuation of my short story "How Bout them Cowgirls" =]



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## Chapter 1: Southern by the grace of God

Her head snapped up and a seductive smile stretched across her youthful face. Her assumption had been proven correct. The soft thud that signified the dragging of boots did indeed belong to the sexy cowboy she had earlier set her sights on.

Straightening her body from the slight crouch she had taken on while impatiently waiting, she flicked her golden blonde hair back over her shoulder and widened her smile. Her tongue swept along her luscious, cherry red lips as she took in the sight of the tall boy striding towards her.

From what her vulture like stare could take in she concluded that he had that rugged, Brad Paisley look going on. Midnight black hair and an icy blue gaze that sent chills along her spine. His lean, muscled body was clad in a simple white t-shirt and a pair of wranglers that fit just right. A pair of dusty, worn out Justin boots completed his look.

She at first decided that he was in need of a shave, but after a longer look accepted the idea that he was one of the few that could pull off the unshaved look. His shirt and hands were streaked with grease and sweat beaded on his sun tanned forehead. Instead of being put off by his casual, dirty appearance, she became more set in her quest.

She was like a tiger on the prowl and as he was making the last few steps that would bring him to her, she adjusted her mini-skirt and placed her hands neatly on her slender hips.

Her heavily made up eyes swept over his body once more for good measure. "Heya cowboy, can I help ya with something?" she purred as he came to a stop in front of her.

His weight shifted from booted foot to booted foot and he smiled politely at her. "Yes'm I believe ya can," he answered.

Her well manicured hand floated up and a small finger slid along the collar of his shirt. "First off my name's Deidra, and anything you want I can get," she cooed as her body inched closer to his.

His smile became more forced now and his demeanor took on an air of impatience. "Very forward one huh?"

She nodded and a small giggle was heard. "It's the only way to be. So are ya goin to tell me your name or do I have to guess?"

"I'm lookin for my girlfriend Kaya, do you happen to know anyone around here with that name?" he asked, his politeness more forced now.

Her stance lost a little of it's confidence but still her plan was not lost. One lip popped out into a pout and her eyes fluttered and took on the puppy dog look. "Now don't be a spoil sport. You're ruining the fun by bringing your girlfriend into the conversation."

It happened then and he grimaced trying to keep the images from springing forth. But to no avail. He saw it once more. The silky blonde hair soaked with bright red blood. The once beautiful, smiling face now bruised and swollen. The once vibrant, energetic body now broken and lifeless.

Gritting his teeth he swallowed past the lump in his throat and did all he could to keep his voice from breaking. "It looks as if you can't help me. The name's Casen for future reference and I gotta get going now."

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He turned then and made his hasty retreat leaving the girl disappointed and very surprised with his behavior. How could her seductive charms not have worked?

## Chapter 2

I splashed the cold water onto my face and gasped as it made contact. I shook my head and rubbed my eyes trying desperately to ignore the images still floating through my head.

I looked up at my tired looking reflection in the mirror above the sink. Just moments before I had been happy and carefree, just set on finding Kaya and showing her just how much I had missed her.

But then I had been stopped by the girl, the beautiful, blonde girl that resembled *her* so much. I shook my head and tried not to think about *her*. I would only relapse if I did so. I hadn't worked so hard for it all to be messed up from one run in with one person who had similar looks.

I blinked rapidly and turned away from the mirror taking deep breaths. I willed myself to just stop and calm down. The three girls were becoming confused in my brain. I had to find Kaya, she would help get my mind back to the present.

Out of habit I popped my knuckles and shoved through the door emerging out into the hallway of the small community college. I looked around quickly hoping but not expecting to find Kaya here.

Not seeing her I set off down the hallway to the large windows at the end that would show the courtyard. She just might be outside relaxing, after all it was a beautiful day. Definitely not one to be spent cramped up inside.

I gazed out the smudged windows and let my blue eyes scan the crowded courtyard below. So many people there for such a small town college. It seemed that I searched forever before my gaze finally found what it was looking for.

Sitting there beneath an old Oak tree was my beautiful Kaya. Her long, slender, tanned legs stretched out comfortably in front of her. She had on a red sundress that laid just above her knee's and hugged her curves nicely. Her mouth was set in an easy smile that just stayed there naturally. Her gorgeous brown eyes were at the moment hidden by the sunglasses she was wearing and her dark brown hair sported curls down past her shoulders.

Her eyes were focused on a book that lay in her lap and as I watched her hands came up to pull her hair into a messy ponytail that only made her more adorable. To say the least I was once again, for the millionth time or so, struck speechless by her beauty.

I continued to stare at her not being able to pull my eyes away from the breathtaking sight. As my gaze lingered I saw her lift her head as if just becoming aware of something. Her head tilted and a smile stretched across her face showing off her pearly whites. She showed all the signs of having heard someone call her name. I swiftly swept my eyes around the surrounding area and found what had caught her attention.

Walking towards my Kaya was a tall boy, from the looks of it a tad taller than myself. A cap covered his head sporting a logo for the Dallas Cowboys. We atleast the guy had good taste in football teams. He had on a white wife beater and I could proudly say that my muscles were bigger and better looking than his. Hey it may sound arrogant to say that but this guy was heading towards my girl. My life.

My eyes shifted back to Kaya who was now on her feet watching the guy walk closer. Her book lay forgotten on the ground. My mouth went dry and my heart skipped a beat as he finally reached her and they hugged. I turned away from the window and took in a deep, shaky breath. I had only been gone a few months. I had

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talked to her almost everyday and she had assured me that she was still mine, that she still wanted me and loved me with all she had. I mean sure she hadn't known that I would be home so soon and it wasn't really fair for her to have to wait for me.

Before my thoughts could get to out of control I set into a sprint and headed for the stairs. I had to get out to Kaya and make sure that she was still mine.

I ran out into the courtyard and squinted against the fierce glare of the sun. My eyes focused quickly and spotted Kaya and the guy still talking. I urged my feet to move forward and walked as calmly as I could up to the two of them. The guys gaze fell upon me but as of now Kaya wasn't aware of my presence as her back was currently facing me. I thought I saw a spark of recognition flare in the guys eyes but I had no clue how he would possibly know me.

Kaya seemed to notice that the guys attention was caught by something else and turned slowly to see what had captured it so quickly. Her stance registered surprise as she saw me standing there and her eyes lit up like a child who had just received candy. She squealed and jumped at me wrapping her arms and legs tightly around me.

"Ohhh Casen I didn't know you was coming home? When did you get here? How long do you get to stay? What are you doing home so early? Why do you have grease all over you?"

She said this all in one breath and I feared she might choke on her words so I pressed my lips to hers to shut off the flow of words. After rendering her utterly breathless I pulled back and gazed at her seeing a small tear sparkle in the corner of her eye. I lifted my hand up and wiped the tear away with my thumb.

"Still just as beautiful as ever. No need to cry my dear Kaya."

A blush colored her cheeks and she loosened her grip on me and set her feet back on the ground. "I'm just so happy to see you Casen. It feels like it's been forever. I was worried about you."

Before I could respond I heard the clearing of a throat and looked up to see the guy shuffling his feet uneasily. I knew that he was probably very uncomfortable with the situation but I could care less right now. I was back with my love and I was going to let anyone keep me from showing her affection.

Kaya followed my gaze and gasped lightly. "Oh-oh how rude of me. Casen this is Sterling, Sterling this is my boyfriend Casen," she said motioning from one of us to the other as she said our names.

Sterling nodded his head and held out a hand that I took and shook firmly. "Nice to meet you Casen, I've heard alot about you."

"Nice to meet you too Sterling, I'm sorry to say that I don't believe I've heard anything about you."

Sterling looked to Kaya. "Oh well Kaya's my cousin and I just surprised her with a visit a couple days ago. We hadn't seen each other since we were toddlers," he explained. "But it looks as if you to have alot to catch up on so I'm gonna go find my friend now and see if he's ready for lunch."

He didn't leave any time for a reply on my part. He instead patted my shoulder a little roughly I might add, "Treat my cousin good or I might have to come after ya," he chuckled before walking off.

I shook my head and furrowed my brows as I turned back to face Kaya, but as soon as I saw her again a smile stretched across my features. "I missed you so much Kaya, that military training is hell, but it kept my mind

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off things."

She smiled and hugged me again this time not letting go and just staying there leaning against you. "I missed you to Casen, I'm glad your mind has been free of all that."

She looked up at me and I saw an amused expression cover her face. "What's so funny?" I questioned.

"Well I'm assumin that the grease means that Ole Delilah broke down on ya again," she said with a laugh.

I shrugged and couldn't help but laugh a little myself. "You know Delilah, she's gotta give me a challenge and it has been over a week so I reckon it was about time for another breakdown for the old gal."

She cracked up at this. "When are you gonna give up on Delilah and get ya a new, dependable vehicle?"

I feigned shock and hurt at this question and stepped away from her. "I will never give up on Delilah, she's my baby, and plus I don't have the money for a new vehicle. I'm just a broke down country boy doing all I can to survive."

She sighed knowing that it was true about money being tight. I stepped back up to her and hugged her tightly as I pressed my lips back against hers and let my tongue slide along hers and my hands slide down to her lower back. She ran her fingers through my hair as she returned the kiss eagerly.

"Kaya, Casen!" I suddenly heard a familiar voice shout out.

I decided to ignore it and instead stayed focused on the kiss but Kaya pulled away and turned to look at whoever had disturbed us. I groaned and followed Kaya's lead and turned to see who it was.

After a moment of thought I recognized it as Addison.

She ran up to us out of breath grabbing at her small waist trying to steady her breathing. Her dirty blonde hair was sticking out in all directions and her glasses sat crookedly on her nose.

"Addy what is it?" Kaya asked, concern filling her voice.

"I-I-It's Em-Emer-Emmerson," she gasped out.

I felt a small spark of hostility flare up like a fire waiting to rage out of control. *What had the idiot done this time?*

## Chapter 3

Kaya's P.O.V (Kie-ya)

I stared at the hard set of Casen's face in exasperation. I could not believe how hard-headed and un-sympathetic he was acting. Sure I could understand why he would not want to see Emmerson, but they had once been best friends and I could not figure out why he would turn his back so cruelly now.

"Kaya do you really think it would be good for me to see him after everything that has happened? Do you want to see me come undone and undo everything that the military has done for me?" Casen asked with a rather scornful touch to his husky voice.

As much as I wanted to tell him how sexy he looked when he was in controlled anger form I also couldn't help but roll my eyes and heave a heavy sigh.

"Case you're being stupid and pig headed. He was once your best friend and all Addy is doing is trying to look out for her brother. She says he is trying to get off the drugs. She's scared can't you see? You know how people look Case, they lay there and shake and are so pale and clammy. It would scare anyone in there right mind."

I watched as his eyes flickered in Addison's direction and almost instantly knew what he was thinking. Nobody that knew Addy thought that she was in her right mind. I for one didn't blame her for being a bit batty. She had lived and still lived an extremely hard and testing life.

For as close as I was watching it was no wonder that I seen the smallest movement of his mouth and knew he was urging forward speech. I held up a silencing hand and made my gaze level with his.

"Look if you don't want to go then that's all venus fly traps and daffodils, but I am going and you will not stop me," I mustered up all the authority I could find within me and made sure it came through in my small speech to him.

I could feel that his anger was simmering just below his control level and hoped against hope that he would calm down and choose to go with me for I didn't know what was up ahead.

I chanced a quick glance at Addy and saw that she was wringing her hands and shuffling her feet while her eyes flickered back and forth between the two of us. As my gaze settled back on Casen I saw the small sag of his shoulder's signaling defeat and exhaled a huge sigh of relief.

"Thanks baby," I muttered and he walked up to take my hand as the three of us headed to Ole Delilah.

\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

With a feeling of unease in the pit of my stomach I saw the ramshackle house come into view just over the small hill. An old rusted Volkswagon Beetle sat nestled in an overgrowth of vines and dead grass that looked to come up to a persons mid thigh atleast. Barely any paint still clung to the rotting boards of the small house and the porch would more accurately be called a hole. No screens covered the windows and most of the panes were terrorized by cracks if not completely gone.

It hit me so suddenly that had I not been sitting I would have been knocked over by the sudden mental blast. The images seared my brain and as I looked up at Casen I seen the creases appear in his forehead and the



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pained expression in his eyes and knew that he to was being attacked.

I squeezed Casen's leg in understanding as his hand's were busy gripping the steering wheel. Hot tears sprang to my eyes and I fiercely dabbed them away. I couldn't believe five months had passed since that horrible night. Five months since we had set sight on this house. Five months and still the pain was so fresh it felt as if it were yesterday or possibly even hours ago.

I jumped visibly as the engine sputtered to a stop and gave a low whine as the key was turned off. As soon as we had came to a stop Addy had sprang from the truck and ran to the shack she called a home. Casen and I more hesitantly made our way from the vehicle and still more unwillingly set off at a slow pace towards the "house".

I could sense the tension that filled Casen's body and noticed the sweat that layered his hand which was clamped tightly to mine. His movements were stiff and jerky. It was hitting him full force..I could tell. I feared looking into his eyes as I wasn't sure if I would find tears there or the many images that I was trying so hard to push from my own mind.

Suddenly a blood curdling scream issued from somewhere deep in the house and I felt that my heart had skipped a year's worth of beats and left me completely without the feeling of life. I felt dead, frozen in time as I felt Casen's body stiffen and halt in mid-step. For a moment I thought I had imagined the scream for it was the exact same one that had echoed the walls that night five months ago. But then I saw Addison hurtle out the front door, her foot catching one of the gaping holes of the front porch causing her to collide knee's first with the unforgiving wood that remained. Her body shook violently and I had the sudden impression that she was going to be sick.

Her frantic eye's sought us out and she mouthed words that I could not make out. She couldn't seem to find her voice and appeared angry that we did not understand the lightning speed at which her lips were forming words. The suddenly her voice was found again and she screamed two words.. "HE'S DEAD."

Casen finally sprung into action but it took me a little longer to make my shocked body move even the slightest bit. As if I was a walking corpse my body took it's own control and moved me towards the house that Casen had now disappeared through. I stooped to help Addy to her feet and together we made our way into the house and she pointed to where we should go next.

The musty smell of the house had me gagging and wishing for fresh air. A small path had been made but that was the only visible part of the floor. As we entered the next room my knee's buckled and sent me falling to the floor with a dull thud. I could not tear my gaze away from the sight in front of me and I could only hear the loud sobbing of Addison.

He was just hanging there, a thick rope pulled taut around his bloodless neck. A small trickle of blood stood out on his chin. His eyes were thankfully closed. A chair lay on it's side beneath him and Casen stood there in front of him frozen.

I couldn't move but somehow took in the movement of Casen's hand moving and snatching something from Emmerson's dangling, pale hand. A piece of paper it seemed to be and as I tuned in I could hear the faint murmur of his voice as he started reading.

To whomever may be reading this,

The battle became to much and I had to end it myself.

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Life is hell and I wasn't strong enough for it. Especially not without my Claudia. She was my strength and everything I lived for. You all know that I watched her life being corrupted and ended right in front of my very eyes, for the stupid mistakes that I myself had made. I couldn't live with myself after that. I tried to quit the drugs, I really did. But the cravings always overcame me. Had I been a stronger man I would have found the demons that destroyed my Claudia and made them pay. But I was weak, even I myself know that. I can't make up for my mistakes, and I know I don't deserve my friends forgiveness. But to Casen, Addy, Kaya, and Claudia I do send my deepest apologies for ruining your lives. Think positive about this..atleast now you won't have to put up with me any longer. Me and my pitiful, pathetic ways have now been ended. Addy stay strong and remember bubba loves you. Casen you're a great man and I'm sorry your sister's life was ended so brutally because of my mistakes. Kaya you're beautiful and a great lady for my best friend. I'm sorry for taking your best friend from you. Claudia my love I know for my sin of suicide I will not come to reside in Heaven with you.. but please feel my apologies and know that I am truly sorry for what happened. I loved you with all of me and can't believe I let the drugs win. With my life,  
Emmerson

## Chapter 4

Casen's P.O.V

I felt a prickle as the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end. I had the feeling that I was being watched, but the feeling of my chest caving in and my heart being crushed was weighing on my mind much more than that.

Barely five months ago I had stood in this very same cemetery. I had watched my little sister being lowered into the ground where she now still rested. Body at least, I prayed all the time that her soul settled in Heaven with our Savior.

So young, so beautiful. She had had a great outlook on life and was growing up to be an amazing person that would definitely change the world one day.

I had that feeling again. The feeling that I was being watched. Like daggers piercing into my exposed flesh and it was becoming harder to ignore. I moved a little uncomfortably in my black slacks and black shirt. It was an extremely hot day. Trickle of sweat rolled along my back and caused my shirt to cling to it. But even with the almost unbearable heat I felt a shiver run along my spine and I could no longer just ignore it.

Turning to my left my gaze settled on my beautiful Kaya and I felt an ache stab at my heart seeing the pain etched on her gorgeous features. She had on a simple black dress that fell just below her knee's. Simple and casual. Perfect for the deathly occasion. A kleenex was clutched in her small hands and her body stood almost motionless. I looked down at the cross necklace adorning her neck and found a small comfort as I watched it rise and fall with her steady breaths.

Just to the left of Kaya stood Addy. Ghostly white in her long, tattered, black dress. Her bony fingers were clamped tightly across her mouth attempting but failing miserably to muffle the sobs that escaped as she gazed at the casket before her.

I tore my gaze away from the heartbreaking scene and gazed around at the small group of people that had cared enough to attend the funeral. Emmerson hadn't been a very popular person in his short lived life. Drugs tended to screw up people's lives and tear them away from the ones that loved them. Emmerson was a living example of just that. Now he was just another non breathing lesson learner that should teach more people to take a more responsible route in life.

Although Emmerson had been an idiot who had been the main cause of my sisters life being destroyed and lost. I couldn't help but feel a slight pang of pity for him. He had been my best friend and I couldn't say truthfully that I wasn't devastated by his death. Because truth be told, another piece of my heart was being ripped away as I thought. Maybe a minuscular piece compared to the piece that had been torn away when Claudia had left but still a piece none the less.

Not finding anyone who looked to be staring at me I gave Kaya's hand a small squeeze and turned to plant a soft kiss on her forehead. After doing this I took in a deep breath and stepped up next to Emmerson's casket and turned to face the small cluster of people gathered around.

I cleared my throat for attention, receiving it almost instantly. Every set of eyes was pulled to me and I shuffled my feet and tried to gain the confidence to speak and say what I needed to say. My palms were sweating and my temples pounded with unsaid thoughts. Finally I found the strength to begin.

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"As most of you here know, I've held a lot of hostility towards Emmerson over these past few months. And although I'm not ready nor probably never will be ready to forgive him for my sister's death, I feel that I can find it in my heart to atleast understand his struggles with life. We all find our own ways to deal with the hardships of life and Emmerson's way to do that just mistakingly happened to be drugs. His parents were never there for him and he had to pretty much raise his younger sister on his own. He tried his hardest to be a good guy that she would look up to. But then he was introduced to the world of drugs. A world that came so much easier to him than the real world. My sister and Addy, myself and my beautiful girlfriend Kaya all tried to talk him out of that way of life. Saying that only bad things would come out of it. But once in so far he found it impossible to pull away and start over fresh. He got in to deep. Owed to much money. Couldn't quit a deadly addiction. And because of this, his girlfriend, my sister, a beautiful young ladies life was torn away brutally and degradingly. After this Emmerson found it even harder to give up the drugs although he tried his darndest. My sister's life was lost and I had an extremely hard time with it and still do. That story won't be talked about now. But even though it was lost because of his mistakes. Not even I can deny the love he had for her. The love he had for his sister. Or the love he had for his best friends. And not even I can deny my love for the man he used to be."

I could hear sniffles and full broken out sobs as I finished my speech. My own voice had quivered and I had almost broken down a time or two but had forced myself to go on. I needed to, it was essential for me. I wouldn't have been able to move on had I not went through with that speech. And as I stood there before everyone and gazed upon their heartbroken features I felt the shiver run through my spine again and finally caught sight of who was doing the staring.

Standing there with a cruel smile twisted into place on his scruffy face was one of the guys that I vowed I would end if I ever laid eyes on them again. An ugly hawiiian themed shirt draped over his thick frame, smoke escaping his mouth as he puffed on a cigarette. One arm draped across the shoulders of a beautiful blonde girl. In fact it was none other than the girl who had stopped me on the day I had came back to town. She wore a skin tight black dress that barely covered her backside. So much make up was caked onto her face that she looked to be the guinea pig for a kindergarten make up class.

The images started them. As much as I tried to keep them away. It never worked.

\*\*\*My beautiful little sister laid bleeding on the floor. Her naked body shivered uncontrollably as a group of guys stood around her laughing hysterically and jeering drunken words. Emmerson was tied to a chair right in viewing point of the whole scene. Horror and disgust etched into his features as he struggled to get loose and come to Claudia's aid. I saw her face, or what used to be her face. It was so badly beaten and bloody that it could barely be classified as a face any longer. Her blonde hair was dyed red with blood. I looked into her eyes. She looked so helpless. Her eyes pled with me to save her. They were filled with so much pain. To much pain to bear.\*\*\*\*

Silent tears fell from my eyes and my body shook with pent up anger. Without my consent a roar of rage ripped from deep within my throat and I launched myself forward.

## Chapter 5

Casen:

"Casen Daniel Carter if you ever pull a stunt like this again I'll let you rot in that jail cell. Do you understand me?"

I stared into my mothers face and felt like I was two years old again. Her frail little body shook with rage but I could also see the unshed tears that had pooled at the corners of her eyes. She had always been such a lively woman but ever since Claudia's death it was like she had aged twenty years. I usually wasn't one to argue with my momma. She knew best and I knew she knew best. But this time I couldn't help myself.

"But momma, that jackass is the reason that Claudia is gone. Why she will never be able to walk through those front doors again or hug you good morning. Was I supposed to just stand there and act like he had a reason for showing up at Emmerson's funeral after all he put us through? You can't say that you wouldn't have wanted to do the same thing had you seen his ugly face standing there in beating distance."

I watched and seen her lips quiver and seen her raise her small hand as if she were going to slap me for talking back. But then her hand fell to her side and her shoulders sagged as if in exhaustion.

"Casen we all want to see those son of a bitch's get what's coming to them, but we can't take it into our own hands. We gotta trust the law to take care of it. I lost my baby girl because of ignorant fools. I can't lose my baby boy to them."

I sighed in defeat and stepped forward embracing my mom in a gentle hug. "I love you momma."

\*\*\*\*\*

I stood at the edge of my yard and hesitated before taking the small step that would set me in Kaya's yard. I hadn't been able to see her for a week and she didn't know that my parents had bailed me out today. I just hoped she wasn't upset with me. I had missed her so much and couldn't wait to hold her in my arms again.

I watched as her ancient cow dog sauntered up to the back porch and gave a low whine as it settled on the worn out steps. I assumed that someone was on the porch for the dog to settle there. He was always were Kaya or her mom was. And as I settled my nerves and listened closely I could hear the light strum of guitar strings. I knew my beautiful girl was close by then. Just the thought of seeing her willed me forth and I stepped into her yard. Taking long strides I was soon right up against the screen covering her spacious back porch.

"Your on the phone with your girlfriend she's upset. Going on about something that you said. She doesn't get your humor like I doooo," she sang in her soft, sweet, country voice. I could feel myself falling in love all over again. She had that effect on me.

"I'm in my room it's a typical tuesday nightttt," I added in a high pitched girly voice that caused said cow dog to howl and perk up an ear.

I heard a gasp of suprise and the tell tell scrape of a chair being scooted across wooden floor. Then my beautiful Kaya pretty much flew off the back porch and skidded to a halt before whipping around and searching me with those gorgeous brown eyes.

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As many times as I had laid eyes on her I still felt dazed every time my sight found her again. I just couldn't believe that a goddess like that could ever love me the way that she did. She was wearing one of my old, worn out shirts that fit her like a nightgown. I was guessing she had a pair of shorts on. Or at least I hope they were there beneath that shirt. I didn't want anyone catching an accidentally peek at my baby's goodies. Her hair was thrown into a messy bun sitting on top of her head and she was make-up free from what I could tell. And telling the truth, I had never seen her look any more beautiful than she did now.

I smiled and took a step toward's her. "Mmm you sure look good in my shirt."

And then she ran into my arms and crushed her small body against me. I felt like I was in heaven as I took a deep breath and inhaled the scent of her shampoo. The soft skin of her cheek nuzzled against mine, and I could now smell the minty freshness of her breath as her lips brushed mine.

"I love you Casen Daniel Carter and I missed you so much," she whispered breathlessly against my lips. "Don't you ever pull a stunt like that again, I can't stand going without you," she scolded lightly.

I was beginning to think I should really think more about the women in my life, before I tried to avenge the death of one of the women in my life. Not pulling a "stunt" like that again seemed like a good idea.

Before I had time to say anything in response to her, she had pulled back and looked into my eyes with a sparkle of mischief. "Hey babe, What kind of bird doesn't fly?" she giggled.

I groaned at the over used joke for a jail bird and pulled her back against me. "Don't you pick on me my little angel."

"Kaya...Kaya are you out here?" came the voice of Ms. Jergens. I looked up as I seen her step off the back porch steps and smiled politely at her. She was like my second mom. Always looking out for me and making sure I treated her baby girl right.

"Hey Ms. Jergens."

"Oh hey Casen. I didn't know they had freed you already. Nice to see you back around," she smiled that motherly smile and turned to look at Kaya.

"Baby girl..are you and Casen gonna join me and Sterling for lunch?"

Kaya nodded and looked at me biting her bottom lip as if she were suddenly nervous. "Yeah momma. I gotta tell Casen something first then we will be right in."

Her mom nodded and smiled once again. "Don't take to long. Don't want the food to get cold." And with that she turned and walked back into the house.

I looked at Kaya feeling a little confused at her sudden change in mood. "Baby what do you need to tell me?" I questioned her. For the first time feeling a small amount of worry that I could lose her.

She bit her lip again and twirled a strand of hair around her finger. I looked deep into her eyes. If I really read into them I could see nervousness but looking even deeper. I could see what I thought might be a small amount of excitement.

She took my hand in hers and squeezed gently as she walked over and sat atop one of the square bales of hay. I followed suit and turned to her awaiting her response.

## Chapter 6

Kaya's P.O.V

*I'm pregnant.* The two words seemed to echo through my head, as if someone had yelled them down an empty hallway. Casen was staring at me expectantly and that only made me that much more nervous. His blue eyes seemed to caress my face as his gentle hands had done countless times. He gave my hand a small, reassuring squeeze. He seemed to know that I was gathering the courage and didn't interrupt my silence with any more questions.

My stomach was filled with butterflies. Violent ones at that. And as I looked into those deep, caring, blue eyes I couldn't help but feel like the preteen girl telling her crush she liked him for the first time. Only thing is, magnify that feeling times about one hundred. I swallowed and swiveled my body so that I was directly facing him.

He moved a big, gentle hand up and pushed a stray strand of hair from my face. Then he let his finger slowly trail along my jawline and come to rest beneath my chin. He lifted my chin slightly so my eyes moved back up since they had strayed away in my nervous state.

I took a deep shaky breath and suddenly wished I had the strength of Jennifer Hart. An up and coming female bronc rider that I had seen on tv the day before. I pictured her flawless ride in my mind and the confidence she possessed as she was interviewed. I also pictured deeper still the pain that seemed etched into her features. No matter how bad she seemed to hurt she still moved forward, and that someone gave me the strength now to just get on with my big news.

"Case baby," I started slowly. He inclined his head towards me slightly as if to tell me to go on. "Case...I'm...I'm pregnant," I finally spit out.

I seen the shock register on his features then his body froze. His mouth hanging open as if in mid speech.

I waited a few moments in hopes that he would say something reassuring. But nothing came. "Casen say something," I urged almost pleading with him.

He stood up and paced then, running a shaky hand through his hair. "Are...are you sure it's mine?" he croaked.

I felt as if I had been slapped and then anger fueled up in me. "What the hell is that supposed to mean Case? Are you trying to imply that I cheated on you? Of course it's your's."

He sat back down by me quickly, an apologetic look in his eyes. "Kaya sweetheart, I'm sorry. That's not what I meant." I felt some of my anger ebb away as I stared into his eyes. He was just as surprised and confused as I was.

*\*\*"Casen I don't want you to leave," I bawled as he held me tightly against his chest. "I can't live without you, it will be like torture for me," I choked out between sobs.*

*I heard him sigh as he pulled away from me just enough to look into my eyes. His baby blue shirt really set off his eyes and made it that much easier for me to become lost in them. He brushed his thumbs swiftly across my eyes disposing of the tears gathering there. "Kaya sweetie, I don't want to leave either. I never want to be away from you. But if I stay here I'll do something stupid and I don't want to jeopardize anyone. You know how bad my anger management has gotten since everything that happened."*

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*I knew that it was true. That it would be better for Casen if he went somewhere. Somewhere that he could get help controlling his anger. I hated that he had chosen military training.*

*Shifting slightly I groaned as a piece of hay stuck into the bare skin of my legs. It was only then that I became aware of Casen's curious gaze on me. I guess I had gotten a little to lost in my thoughts. When I looked at him, sitting there beside me, I couldn't help but fall in love all over again. He was perfect and he wanted only me. Who would have thought such a thing could be true?*

*"Kaya I love you so much," he whispered as his lips brushed lightly against my ear. I giggled girlishly and wiggled away from him. Fluttering my lashes I peeked up at him and couldn't help but smile.*

*"I love you to," I whispered back to him, "and I don't want you to leave," I couldn't help but add quickly.*

*He grinned, and for a moment all the sadness left his eyes as he leaned over and grabbed me by the waist pulling me back up against him and pressing his lips passionately against mine. "I know you dont," he uttered between kisses. And then there was nothing more said, only our actions spoke.\*\**

I blushed deep red as the memory ran through my mind. My heart pounded hard against my chest and I realized Casen was talking to me. "When did you find this out? How far along are you? Kaya are you even listening to me?"

I blinked and refocused my gaze on him. "Of course I'm listening to you Case and I have every intention of explaining everything to you. I am four months along," I stopped there incase he wanted to question what I had told him and sure enough he did.

"Four months? How come I didn't know you were pregnant before now then?"

"Yes four months. It was the day before you left for military training that it happened. I...I didn't start my period for three months. I became worried after the first month passed and went to the doctor. He said he didn't see anything out of the ordinary and that sometimes girls could be irregular with their cycles. So I thought nothing about it when another month went by. Afterall the doctor said there was nothing to worry about. But then this past week while you were in jail I went in for my annual check-up and they told me then that I was pregnant. They said that the doctor should have been able to tell me that when I had first went in and they didn't understand why he didnt."

Casen looked bewildered. "Stupid quacks," he muttered. "I...I just can't believe that we are having a baby. I can't deal with this Kaya."

I felt my heart drop and I knew my face had fell. Was he saying that he was going to leave me now? Now of all times? I didn't understand. I thought he loved me. Then I looked at him closer and seen the smallest sparkle of amusement light up his eyes.

"CASEN DANIEL!" I screamed causing him to jump. "Don't you ever scare me like that again," I huffed.

He smiled that sweet, boyish smile that no girl could resist and cupped my face in his hands. "My beautiful Kaya, I would never leave you. My life is meant to be lived with yours. I will love this baby just as much as if it had been a planned baby. I would do anything in the world to keep you and our baby happy and healthy.

I smiled, sincerely happy with his response and leaned in pressing my lips lightly against his. Relishing in his touch my eyes fluttered closed, and I felt his hand snake down and come to rest on the smallest of baby bumps hidden beneath my shirt.



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A/N-The Jennifer Hart mentioned above is the main character in texasbroncrider's novel Gunpowder and Lead. So if you haven't checked it out you should cause it's an awesome novel =]

## Chapter 7

(FB)

"D-Daddy," I sniffled, holding back the tears that were threatening to fall. "Daddy I don't want to get back on Talula," I pouted as I stood up and dusted dirt off my blue jeans. My little legs wobbled and my hands shook as I walked over to my dad.

My dad jumped from the fence, stirring up a cloud of dust as his worn Justin boots hit ground. "Your a cowgirl, dust yourself off and show that horse who's boss, what have I always told ya Kaya?"

"If you fall off, dust yourself off and try again, don't ever let the horse get the better of you," I said, a small quiver in my voice as I stared in the hard set of my dad's face.

Giving a small smile, he bent down to my level and looked me in the eyes.

Cowgirls don't cry, ride baby, ride

Lessons in life are gonna show you in time

Soon enough you gonna know why

It's gonna hurt every now and then

If you fall get back on again

Cowgirls don't cry

A smile spread across my youthful face, and I stood up taller. Proud as my daddy sang me the words of that inspirational song. I couldn't let him down. He had never let me down. I wasn't going to let this horse get the better of me.

He grinned and kissed my forehead. Pushing himself back into a standing position he ruffled my hair, "That's my girl," he beamed.

(End of Fb)

Stretching my legs out in front of me, I shifted restlessly on the rock I was currently sitting on. Staring absentmindedly into the rippling water of the small creek, I smiled forlornly as the memory faded.

I missed my daddy so much. The man who made me stronger. He had always been there for me. He had made me want to be so much more than I ever thought I could amount to. He made me proud of myself, and proud of him.

But then with no warning. With no reasonable reasoning. He had walked out on me and momma. He had chickened out on the hardships of a relationship.

For the first part of his leaving he had called. Although the first couple weeks I wouldn't have anything to do with him. I wouldn't say a word to him. Instead I would tell momma to tell him I wasn't home. Or I was busy, anything at all to keep me from having to talk to him.

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Momma had eventually talked me into speaking to my father. I fell back into the role of being his beloved baby girl. I went to visit him every weekend. We would ride horses and camp out. Go to rodeo's or just have movie nights.

I was sixteen years old, waiting on the front porch, duffel bag in hand as I waited anxiously for my dad to show up. I was like a small child, giddy with excitement and restless with pent up energy.

(FB)

"Kaya sweetie, come into the house. You've been waiting out there for over an hour. It's getting cold and it doesn't look like he's going to show up."

I shuffled around slowly and looked at my mother through the screen door. "I'm fine momma. It's not all that cold and I have faith that he will be here soon," I grumbled.

She looked at me sympathetically and opened the door. Holding her hand out she gently pushed a light jacket into my arms. "Atleast put this on sweetheart," she sighed.

I took the jacket and slipped it on. If that made her happy then I would do it. "Thanks momma," I whispered."

(End of Fb)

I had waited for nearly three hours that day for my dad to show up, or atleast call. But he had never done either one. A week later he had finally called. Drunkenly slurring his words as he attempted to apologize. I had hung up on my dad that day and hadnt heard from him in nearly three years.

Tears where now welling up in my eyes. What do you think you are doing?, I scolded myself, Cowgirls don't cry.

I lightly ran my hand over my belly. Tears still jumped to the corners of my eyes, but I somehow managed to hold them back.

My fingers gently caressed the baby bump. "Oh sweet little angel what am I going to do?" I whispered. As if in response to my question, I felt a tiny bump against my hand.

I started in surprise and my eyes widened. If I had felt right, I was quite sure my baby had just kicked me. I moved my hand back to my stomach and sat very still. There it was again. The smallest of nudges against my hand.

I smiled widely and jumped up. It felt now as if all my worries had been lifted away. I gave a small skip of joy. "Oh sweet angel you have made mommy very happy," I cooed into the wind.

Suddenly feeling light as a feather I turned to exit the woods. I couldn't wait to find Casen and tell him the baby was starting to kick. Our baby was showing life already.

Smiling ear to ear I stepped from the protection of the tree's and out into open field. Looking out across the pasture I hoped to see Casen on the tractor somewhere near by. But instead I squealed in surprise as a figure stepped in front of me and wrapped his arms around me tightly.

"Babygirl," he beamed.

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(AN-Btw-Girl or Boy? What should Casen and Kaya's baby be?)

## Chapter 8

"What exactly is it that you are wanting me to do?" the man asked wearily as he rubbed his rough hands on the grease rag, and turned slightly to his left.

Deidra looked up from where she had been examining her well manicured nails. "How many times do I need to repeat myself? It's quite simple, a caveman could understand it."

The man grumbled unintelligibly and turned completely around. His eyes skimmed over Deidra and he gave a small grunt of approval. Her well endowed chestal region was barely covered by the skin tight, leather, crop top. Naturally, him being a man, this is where his gaze hovered. Hands suddenly appeared on the slender hips. This only succeeded in drawing his gaze to the barely there jean skirt.

With a hiss of disapproval Deidra managed to draw the mans gaze back to her face. Her brows were furrowed in what appeared to be disgust, but her mouth was playing on a satisfied smile.

"You're her dad right?" she questioned as she returned to examining her cuticles.

Shaking his head as if to rid it of impure thoughts, the man sighed and ducked his head back beneath the hood of the old, rusted truck. "Yeah, that's right," he mumbled.

Soon Deidra's head appeared beneath the hood, her blue eyes scanning the man's lined but extremely handsome face. "Well then 'daddy'," she emphasized the word daddy, making her voice go lower and running her tongue along her lips, "this shouldn't be a very hard mission for you."

He raised questioning eyes to her. She could suddenly sense pain in his gaze and when he spoke it was the voice of a tortured man. "How could you ask a father to hurt his baby girl that way?"

Seeing and hearing the pain issuing from this man almost made her back off, give up her task. Then the images flooded her mind as if her brain were on shuffle.

Her dad slapping around her mom, the screams she heard, the hurt of all the abuse, the blonde girl 'Casen's sister' laying in a pool of blood as the men surrounded her, the look on Casen and Kaya's face as they came upon the sight, Emmerson's funeral, the fight..and so on and so on.

She reeled backwards, just narrowly missing the hood of the truck. One hand clutched at her stomach, the other reached into the stylish bag slung over her shoulder. Her eyes showed fear and confusion. Sweat beaded on her forehead.

The man, Kaya's estranged father, stumbled back in confusion at the sight and stared on not knowing what to do.

Deidra fell to her knee's, yanking the bag from her shoulder. She turned it upside down and desperately dug through the contents littering the ground.

Finally, it seemed that she had found what she was searching for. She picked up a small flask, hurriedly opened it and turned it bottoms up, emptying it of all liquid.

Settling back on her heels she took deep breaths, waiting for the calm to take over. Soon enough, just as it did everytime, the calm broke over her body and the shaking subsided. She didn't know what they kept in the

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flasks but it never failed to calm her.

Pushing back up into a standing position Deidra flung her hair back over her shoulder and turned hate filled eyes upon the man.

Did she have a plausible reason to hate this man? None that she knew of. Did she have a reason to ask such a horrid thing of this father? Only that she was told by the other's to do so.

"W-what the hell was that?" the man choked out, "are you ok?"

Deidra held her hand up, silencing the man quickly. "Look dumbass, you will do as I say or you'll die," she advised maliciously.

"Now look here you little slut, I am a grown man and I won't be told what to do or when to do it," the man growled taking a menacing step forward. His stance showed confidence and authority, but his mind betrayed his fear of the word "killed".

She huffed indignantly and crossed over to the decaying, wooden door at the back of the building. Taking a stilletoed foot and slamming it into the frame she sent the door down. It slammed into the unforgiving ground, stirring up a cloud of dust.

Taking one small finger she motioned for him to come closer. He did so hesitantly. She nodded her head, indicating that he should look out. Once again he did as was wanted.

He took in the sight. Eyes growing slightly wider. A man, almost completely in black was standing there beside a tree. Nonchalantly, as he seen the people appear at the door, he lifted a hand brandishing a pistol.

A smile full of amusement adorned Deidra's face as she watched. The "guard" lifted the gun, pointing it so that it was targeting the man's chest.

"Do as we say.....or be killed," Deidra drawled out cruelly.

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