

# Bad Blood of Rosewood

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## CHAPTER ONE

Detective Lance Rider stood beside my living room chair, straight as a pool cue with a G.I. Joe haircut. His black suit and skinny tie was so very *Men in Black*. He even wore his sunglasses inside.

Over the previous days, I'd been kidnapped, drugged, and beaten. Thanks to my captors, Larry and Smiley, bruises covered my face, and my legs were noodles from running full-out in the woods as I escaped. I was in darn good shape, but apparently being bound and gagged, then running in terror was a hard exercise to recover from. I could barely move.

But now I was home, hanging across my big comfy living room chair like an old dish towel. If it hadn't been for this Texas cop standing beside me, I don't know if I'd be here to complain about my aching body.

"How're you doing?" It was really nice of him to ask.

My voice came out raspy. "I need caffeine." I closed my eyes and forced a smile. Even my mouth hurt.

Ronnie called from the kitchen. "I'm making coffee. Give me five." He was in as much pain as I was. It didn't stop him from taking care of me, though. That was my Ronnie.

My attention returned to Rider. He'd taken his share of knocks in the process of rescuing me, yet he looked no worse for wear. It was hard to say what bruises lay beneath his dark suit and tie, though.

"I'm only here to drop off Doug and say my goodbyes." So stoic. His face barely moved when he talked. To me, he seemed indestructible. One tough guy. I barely knew him and he was about to walk out of my life. Who knew when, or even if, I'd ever see him again.

"I see that look in your eyes, Gloria. You think I'm your hero. You want to give me too much credit. Don't. Officer Connors did as much for you as anyone, and this town is lucky to have him. Hell, Ronnie did more to save your butt than I did. Even Doug." He pointed at my newly acquired brother who grinned with pride.

Rider straightened his back and a look of pride covered his cleanly shaven face. "And you, young lady, ran when you had the chance. It took guts to make a break for it like you did."

I blushed and waved his comment away. "Stay in touch, okay?" I barely knew him, yet he seemed like family. Or maybe I was still scared and wanted to keep him around for protection. It was a little of both, I supposed.

"Will do. Especially regarding Benny and Claudia. They'll stand trial for killing your mother." He nodded at me and Doug.

Doug winced. Benny and Claudia were the nurse and aid from Menninger's Psychiatric Hospital who finished off Naomi. Good old, Mom... *not*. Doug lived with the horrible childhood memories of being raised by the shrew. I, on the other hand, reminded myself her bad blood ran in my veins, too. Thank God Roger and Karen Larson adopted me. Too bad I snooped around to find out who my birth mother was. It was information I would have been better off not knowing.

My fingers curled around my coffee cup, but the warmth didn't comfort me. Worry rose into my throat. "Have they caught Benny and Claudia yet?"

"Fraid not. Don't worry. They will." Rider crossed his arms over his chest giving a formidable stance.

Benny and Claudia had dealt with Naomi's insanity on a daily basis at the mental hospital in Texas. They were responsible for Naomi's death, and also helped Larry and Smiley kidnap me. Larry and Smiley were safe and sound in jail, but unfortunately, Benny and Claudia got away.

I wasn't worried. Much. Detective Rider was on the job. He'd find them and make them pay for their crime. I needed to tell myself that. I couldn't walk around wondering when the next person was going to grab me and throw me in the trunk of a car.

After awkward hugs and terse goodbyes, Rider dusted the emotions off his black suit coat and headed out the door. Off to Texas where his real life waited for him.

Ronnie, Doug and I sat nursing coffee in my sun-washed living room. Quiet settled around us. My brain replayed parts of the last week. Maybe we were all thinking about how lucky we were to be alive. Doug was beat up. Ronnie's exhausted face showed me how much he'd worried. Brought together by trauma, we were all comfortable with each other. Not the ideal way to become fast friends and family, but it was what it was.

I studied Doug as he rested his head on the back of the couch with his eyes closed. *That guy is actually my brother.* I even thought of him that way now, not as a random guy I needed to accept. Change seemed to keep coming at me whether I liked it or not, and I did not. But Doug was a change I was willing to adapt to.

Finding out Naomi was my biological mother blew my mind, but I didn't have to alter my day-to-day life because of it. Finding out Naomi was murdered certainly put me on a bullet train to terror town, and yes, it was brutal. But the only long term effect it had on me was bad memories and some bruises.

Having a brother, in comparison, would be a major life change. It was up to me, as much as him, to make sure the change would be for the better. I'd adapt. Not that I had a lot of choice.

So, regarding change... my dance card was full. No more, thank you. This gal needed some *same old, same old.*

It was not to be the case. Within the hour, Ronnie got down on one knee and asked me to be his wife. Marriage. Talk about a major life change. But, who could resist a guy who was willing to die for you? Not this girl! We laughed, we cried, we cuddled. I was actually going to be a married woman.

But, for now, I could finally relax. What I needed was mindless television therapy and pizza with extra cheese.

We were all sitting in the living room watching a rerun of Seinfeld. I giggled every time I looked down at my ring and thought of my future name: Mrs. Gloria Camden. All seemed right with the world, then the doorbell interrupted our peace.

I grunted as I lurched my aching body into motion, wondering how many days it would take for my muscles to loosen up.

I opened the door to an elderly man. He stood with a slight bend, but straightened when I appeared. His expression was initially filled with open-eyed curiosity, but turned quickly to apprehension.

"Can I help you?"

He opened his mouth to talk, but seemed tongue tied, only able to stare at me.

Ronnie came up and laid his hand on my shoulder. He smiled at the man outside whose silver

hair blew softly in the breeze.

“Gloria Larson?” The man asked.

“Yes.” Something seemed familiar about him. What, I couldn’t identify.

He cleared his throat and put out his hand. “My name is Hank Meyer. Used to be an attorney here in Rosewood.” He paused, then took a deep breath, preparing to say what he’d come to tell me.

I was shaking his hand when realization hit. Hank Meyer—one of the men who’d had an affair with my mother. I let go of his hand—dropped it like it was leprous.

Ronnie tilted his head in question of my reaction. “What’s wrong?”

I swallowed hard. “I believe this man is about to tell me something important. Am I right, Mr. Meyer?” My brain put the puzzle pieces together rather quickly.

The man smiled and nodded. “You know who I am, young lady?”

I looked into his face and knew without a doubt exactly who he was. I had his eyes. “You’re my birth-father.”

He tipped his head and his eyes grew wary. My expression must have been ominous.

“Thanks anyway. I already have a father.” His smile faded before the door shut in his face. I turned and left Ronnie there, wondering what had just happened.

Slamming myself down into my big chair, I crossed my arms in defiance, then sat there stewing. *I can’t handle this. I can’t take anymore.* I already seemed to be a prisoner to the truth I’d learned about Naomi. I worried knowing about Hank might seal me in a dark place I could never escape.

Hank Meyer knocked again. Ronnie shook his head and gave me a scolding smile, then opened up the door to this new person in our life. This new change, whether I wanted it or not. I wasn’t sure I could handle it, but apparently, I had no other options. Unless maybe, I could stall until I wrapped my brain around the situation.

