

Prologue

Selena sat on a small camp chair pulled up to a plastic foldable picnic table. A scattering of young Hispanic kids and dreadlocked vagrant hippies hunched over bunches of branches cutting small leaves with tiny, sharp scissors. Selena's best friend Alex had talked her into trimming to make some extra money. It wasn't going well. Day after day for hours at a stretch, Selena's back ached and her hands burned from the open blisters on her fingers. There were only a few weeks in October to mid-November when the work would be there, Alex had told her. But it was hard, meticulous work using tiny scissors to cut the leaves, exposing the flowering bud and crystals. Her fingers turned black and sticky, and the tips cracked from constant cleaning with rubbing alcohol. Whenever she was finished and had filled a plastic bag of green, fulsome and spicy smelling buds, Selena would reach for the drying rack where bunches of plants had been hung upside down for curing and grab another bunch to start trimming again. There were few breaks. There was no real toilet, only a trench dug in the woods from which a nasty smelling brew of urine and feces swilled and made Selena gag every time she had to visit the area to squat and do her business. Empty bottles of chemicals and trash were strewn around several rusting trailers. At night, she and the other workers collapsed in sleeping bags on the floor and bunks of fusty trailers until dawn roused them from fitful sleep to start all over again. Never again, Selena promised herself. She hadn't showered in days. A few hundred bucks could not possibly entice her to continue. She would have run away except she was slated to do this for at least a week during early October, and Otis Seaver loomed large and imposing in his blue work shirt and cowboy boots, rodeo buckle gleaming in the lamplight, holstered pistol at his side. Alex sensed her thoughts and desire to escape.

“He'll shoot you as soon as look at you and bury your body in the woods. Don't fuck with him, Selena. We'll be done in a

week, and once he pays you, you never have to see that cocksucker ever again.”

She had nodded understanding, too exhausted to argue. The other workers talked of going north and trimming for other growers, with Oregon and Washington being the holy grail for trimmers. They said they could make thousands of dollars in a season and then head off to Tahiti or Thailand or the Yucatan and spend the winter surfing. But this backwoods redneck grower was mean and cheap. Just a brief waystation along the secondary roads north. No one planned to stick around for long. It had gotten frosty at night, and Selena’s hands felt stiff and her fingers cramped up with the cold.

“Fuck, Alex. I can’t move my damned fingers.”

“I’ll get him to plug in the heater later,” Alex whispered in return, their voices muffled by the hum of the generator right outside their tent. “He’s okay once you get to know him.”

Otis hefted his bulk around the tables to glower at his workers so that they didn’t accidentally slip some buds in their jackets. She had been watching him for a few days. The night before, after the others had headed off to their trailers to eat gas station fried chicken, she had followed quietly in the dark as he climbed into his larger, more comfortable and well-appointed double-wide and opened a cabinet in which there was a locked metal box. He had pulled keys out of his jacket pocket opening the box, then quickly stuffed what looked like wads of cash inside then shut and lock the box. That’s where you keep the cash, you fat bastard, she thought to herself. The keys went back into Otis Seaver’s sagging jacket pocket. He moved away from the cabinet and hung the jacket up on a peg by the trailer door. Selena watched and waited. You never knew when a chance might present itself that might change your whole world.

