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*Deep Blue*

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Excerpt from “There Is a Reason” by Ron Block © 1999 by Moonlight Canyon Publishing/Bug Music, BMI. Performed on Rounder Records by Alison Krauss + Union Station.

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# PROLOGUE

AUGUST 7, 1865  
NORTH FLORIDA

Pale and leaden in the predawn light, the spring looked like nothing special, like a pond of rainwater standing in the tan limestone basin. It was only when a body got close that you saw what made it different: the surface of the water all dancing and rippling from the flow surging up from the depths, a small run draining the overflow into the tea-brown waters of the Itchetucknee.

Jonah Winslow paused, gazing at the rippling headpool, and dragged his threadbare sleeve across his forehead. The spring looked as it had when he'd first seen it, a full four decades earlier.

He shifted his burden, a Confederate Army foraging bag, thick canvas sagging with the weight of what it carried. Then he turned and looked back at the slender young woman who was picking her way among the tree roots, planting her slippered feet with care. She came to a halt beside him and her face was white in the half-light, a striking contrast to the blackness of Jonah's own, white and finely featured, like the china dolls the old slave had watched her play with as a child.

"Oh, Uncle." She shook her head and looked up at him, blue eyes wide. "Let us go home. This is far too dangerous."

"Now, child." He kept his voice low, the voice he'd used to calm her through all the hard years. "If I've done this once, I've done it a hundred times. Wasn't I just in there yesterday, getting things ready?"

Cecilia Donohue blinked and said nothing.

"Besides," Jonah said, "after tomorrow morning, we won't have a home. Carpetbagger's coming. Time to do this chore."

He set the bag at his feet and stripped off his faded chambray shirt, his chest still damp from the walk. Next, he untied the rope that he wore as a belt and stepped out of his patched cotton trousers.



Jonah Winslow made no pretense at modesty. Nor did the young woman avert her eyes. Jonah knew that Cecilia Donohue loved him like family, yet it no more upset her to see him naked than it would have to see any of her father's cattle or horses just as nature had created them. Jonah didn't blame her for this. It was how she'd been raised, who she was.

Cecilia glanced down at the forage bag.

"It will be safe here?" It wasn't the first time she'd asked.

"Yes, ma'am." Jonah Winslow turned and met her gaze, careful not to glance away as he spoke. "I wrapped it in cheesecloth. Crimped a sheet of lead foil 'round it—last sheet we had. Then I coated the whole thing with beeswax. It can lay there for years if it has to. But it won't have to."

He turned and walked down into the spring, wading deeper and gasping just a bit as he stepped off a ledge and the cool water rose to his waist. He kept going until he was shoulder deep, and then he turned and looked back at Miss Cecilia, standing there with the sky growing gray behind her.

"Hurry back, Uncle Jonah," she whispered.

"Two minutes." Jonah's throat felt thick, his words gravelly. "Won't take no longer than that, Miss Cecilia."

He turned back to face the boil of the spring and the two dark openings that gaped at the bottom of the pool. Slowly, deeply, he began to pull in great, long draughts of air.

One breath . . . two . . . three . . .

Jonah's shoulder ached from the forage-bag strap, and he thought about the first time he'd done this, the summer of his fifteenth year, when even the work of loading an entire wagon with water barrels could do little to tire him. He and young Master Cameron, the boy who would one day be Cecilia's father, had come here in the midst of a drought to fetch water. Afterward, they'd gone swimming to escape the heat, and the young master had dared Jonah to dive down into the dark opening that yawned beneath their bare feet.

Jonah had known what the other boy must have been thinking. Most of the plantation's slaves were deathly afraid of the springs, of the "haints" said to live there, waiting to draw swimmers to their doom.

But while Jonah had listened carefully to every circuit preacher who had ever come through and knew there was a devil and evil within the world, he also knew talk of haints was foolishness. Even so, when he'd first dived down, he no sooner touched the rim of the cave than his lungs were burning for a breath. He'd gone gasping to the surface, and the other boy's laughter had so angered him that, on the next try, he had not only gone into the cave—he had swum far back in it, found the junction that led to the other spring opening, and come rocketing out the other side.

It had been a clever trick, one that had sparked an idea with young Master Cameron. The very next Sunday, the plantation owner's son had enticed twenty neighbors to pay a nickel apiece to watch "Donohue's buck"—that was what they'd called him—perform his daredevil feat. And once they'd figured out how to prolong the excitement, Jonah and the young master had been able to coax as much as two nickels apiece from the pockets of their audience.

Four breaths . . .

The eastern sky was getting some color now, the fairest shade of pink, the sailor's color of warning. Jonah squeezed his eyes shut and resisted the urge to shake his head. *Fifty-three summers—too old for this foolishness.* He glanced back at Miss Cecilia, standing there at the spring's edge. *Known her all her life, raised her after her momma passed. I'm her only hope.*

It was a simple proposition. If the men from up North found what was in the forage bag, they'd take it. Take it and its secret and doom Miss Cecilia to a life of poverty. *Got to do it; got to hide this thing.*

Five breaths . . .

It wasn't that Jonah Winslow was afraid to die. He knew by heart the Scriptures that promised him heaven, and if heaven was better than this world for white folk, it was even more so for a man raised a slave. Master Cameron and his family had been as good to Jonah as the times would allow, but they had still treated him as property. Jonah had seen his brothers grow stooped and bent from long hours in the fields, seen his only sister sold away up to Georgia.

Six breaths . . .

Jonah loved the young woman at the spring's edge like his own blood, more than that, if such a thing was possible.

Seven . . .

He took this one as deeply as he could, held it, and dove for the bottom of the spring.

Springflow pushed and tugged at the fringe of Jonah's hair, the water feeling heavy around him, the weight of the forage bag pulling him down like an anchor. Shifting the bag around to the small of his back, Jonah crawled along the boulders on the bottom of the spring basin, snaking across the flats and into the dark, gaping mouth of the cave.

Pig bladders. That was the trick that had allowed Jonah to stay down so long on those two-nickel Sundays: pig bladders, like what they'd blown up to use as kick-balls when he was a boy. He and Master Cameron had pumped the bladders full with a bellows, pumped them close to bursting because the water would shrink them at depth. Then they'd tied them to window sash weights and hidden them in the caves on the morning before a dive. That gave Jonah air to breath. It let him bide his time underwater, exploring the darkness while he breathed down first one bladder and then the next.

Now, groping in the flooded blackness some forty years after he had learned that trick, Jonah found the four bladders he'd brought into the cave the evening before. He wasted no time as he untied the first one and sucked down a deep draught of air, wel-

come even with the biting taste of the bladder on it. He gathered the rawhide thongs that held the other three bladders and struggled back into the darkness, the haversack trying to slide off his back, the sash weights bumping on the bottom, and the bladders tugging in the current like invisible, runaway kites.

It was on one of those long-ago dives, biding his time down in the underwater darkness while all the white folk waited up above in their Sunday-best, that Jonah had first found the side passage. Its entrance was low and overhung, easy to miss for a body finding his way by feel, but wide enough that he'd felt comfortable about going in. And there, ten feet back in that passage, his hands had fallen upon a flake of rock that pulled away easily, revealing a shallow, natural limestone shelf—the perfect hiding place for something small and valuable.

It was the first place he'd thought of when Miss Cecilia had come to him with her secret.

Jonah's lungs burned again for air. He let his breath go in a single whoosh, untied another bladder, and breathed it down in two deep breaths. This time, he was still hurting afterward. He thought through what he had to do, how the current would help push him back to the surface. *One breath's all I'll need . . . all it'll take to get me back to the light.* He gulped down the air from the third bladder, as well.

The last bladder in tow, Jonah found the side passage, dipped under the overhang, found the slab, and moved it away from the wall. His hand landed on the ledge, and he pulled the forage bag over his head and placed it in the hiding place. Checking to make sure it stayed, he pivoted the slab back and rested his hand there for a moment. *Please, Lord, keep this safe.*

*Done.* That was done. Now it was time for Jonah to get himself out; he was the only man in North Florida—maybe the only man in the world—who could come back and retrieve this thing for Miss Cecilia.

Jonah kicked his way back, one hand up to find the overhang and guide himself beneath it in the dark. He felt the tug of a stronger flow—the main passage. Time to breathe the last of his air.

Jonah exhaled through his mouth and nose, feeling the bubbles whisking across his stubbled face in the darkness. He reached up to the bladder, found a rawhide thong, and pulled it down.

The bit of leather went slack in his hand.

*No.* His heart plummeted. *No!* He must have left the tag end long when he'd tied the slip knot to secure the bladder—and now he'd grabbed the wrong end in the blackness, pulling the knot free.

Arms flailing, Jonah groped with both hands in the jet-black water, but he knew it was useless. The current would have the bladder thirty feet down the passage by now.

Fighting panic, empty lungs screaming for a breath, he kicked out into the flow and swam for all he was worth—kicking and clawing for the cave entrance and the sweet summer air just beyond.

*Oh, Lord. Oh, please. Please, sweet Jesus. Just get me there . . . the entrance.*

With nothing in his lungs, Jonah's lean body sank, bumping the stone and clay bottom of the passage. He scrabbled, floated up, and then sank again.

*Keep going. Can make it.* He urged himself forward. Heavy as he felt, the current had the power to flush him from the cave mouth and back to the surface. Red dots, flaming blossoms of color, swarmed before his eyes.

His lungs screamed for air.

*Little bit more . . . not far . . . not far at all . . .*

He saw traces of light now, tinges of purple and rose on the rough, scalloped wall of the passage. *Gettin' there. Close.* He gritted his teeth, stifled the urge to breathe. He could already picture himself crawling out of the headpool like a half-drowned muskrat, Miss Cecilia *tsk*-ing over him, and weeping; telling him he shouldn't have tried, both of them weeping and happy.

Then there was the whisper of a touch, like a tentacle, at his ankle. It went tight, ensnaring him. Gripped fast, he stopped, the outflow rushing all around his naked body in the gloom. *No! Ain't no haint in this cave. Ain't no . . .*

Jonah tugged again and felt something thin cutting into the skin above his ankle. He stifled a scream, and water seeped past his clenched teeth. He probed along his leg for the snare that held him fast.

One of his discarded air bladders must have lodged in a rock or a crack, and a loop of floating rawhide thong had snagged him. He gripped it with both hands, yanked with the full strength of fear, and pulled free. His foot was still caught in the cord, but the bladder and its attached weight were moving with him now, drifting down the center of the passage. He reached down for the cord, then shook his head.

*Don't go messing with that now. Tend to it later. Got to get out.* Already his vision was darkening; dizziness was creeping in on him. The sash weights bumped along below him, the deflated bladder catching and rolling rocks on the passage floor. His chest muscles rippled as they tried vainly to draw in . . . something. *Anything.*

He turned a corner. Ahead, dimly, he could see the entrance to the cave, a purple sky gleaming through the darkness.

His throat throbbed now as he tried to gulp down air that simply wasn't there. He bit his lips and thick blood spread across his tongue. The entrance loomed before him, close—so close that one good kick would see him through.

Jonah pushed, and the surface of the headpool roiled not twenty feet above his head. Treetops beckoned through an oval window of clear water: treetops and clouds and a dawn-pink eastern sky.

He sprang for the light—and stopped short.

Jonah tried once more, but again his leg was tethered. He reached down and yanked with both hands, but all he did was pull his body down. A waterlogged tree limb and chunks of limestone

lay at the foot of the cave entrance, and one of the sash weights he was dragging had lodged there. It was stuck, wedged deep, down between two huge rocks. And it held him fast, like a man clapped in irons.

Jonah pulled again, but it was no good; he was weak as a kitten now. He reached down to free himself, but the outflow of the cave, strongest in the closeness of the entrance, blasted his arms up, high above his head. Then it kept him that way, like a man shouting “hallelujah” in a church.

Jonah’s clenched teeth slacked, and water coursed into his nose and mouth. He swallowed, and spring water, so sweet on the hot days of summer, burned like molten metal in his throat. He tried to scream, but nothing came out—only the tiniest of bubbles that wobbled up and around the little sunfish darting in the clear water above him.

The sun, big and bold and blood-red, had risen. A shaft of crimson sunlight speared through the water and reached Jonah Winslow’s face.

He was sad now. Sad that he had ever taken Cameron Donohue’s teenage dare. Sad that he had ever gotten up the nerve to explore the flooded cave and its darkness. Sad that he had come here, a weakened, old, work-broken man, to try and do something that would have tested a young man in his prime.

But mostly, Jonah was sad about Miss Cecilia, waiting up there, not fifty feet away. He had failed her, left her all alone in a world for which she had not been prepared.

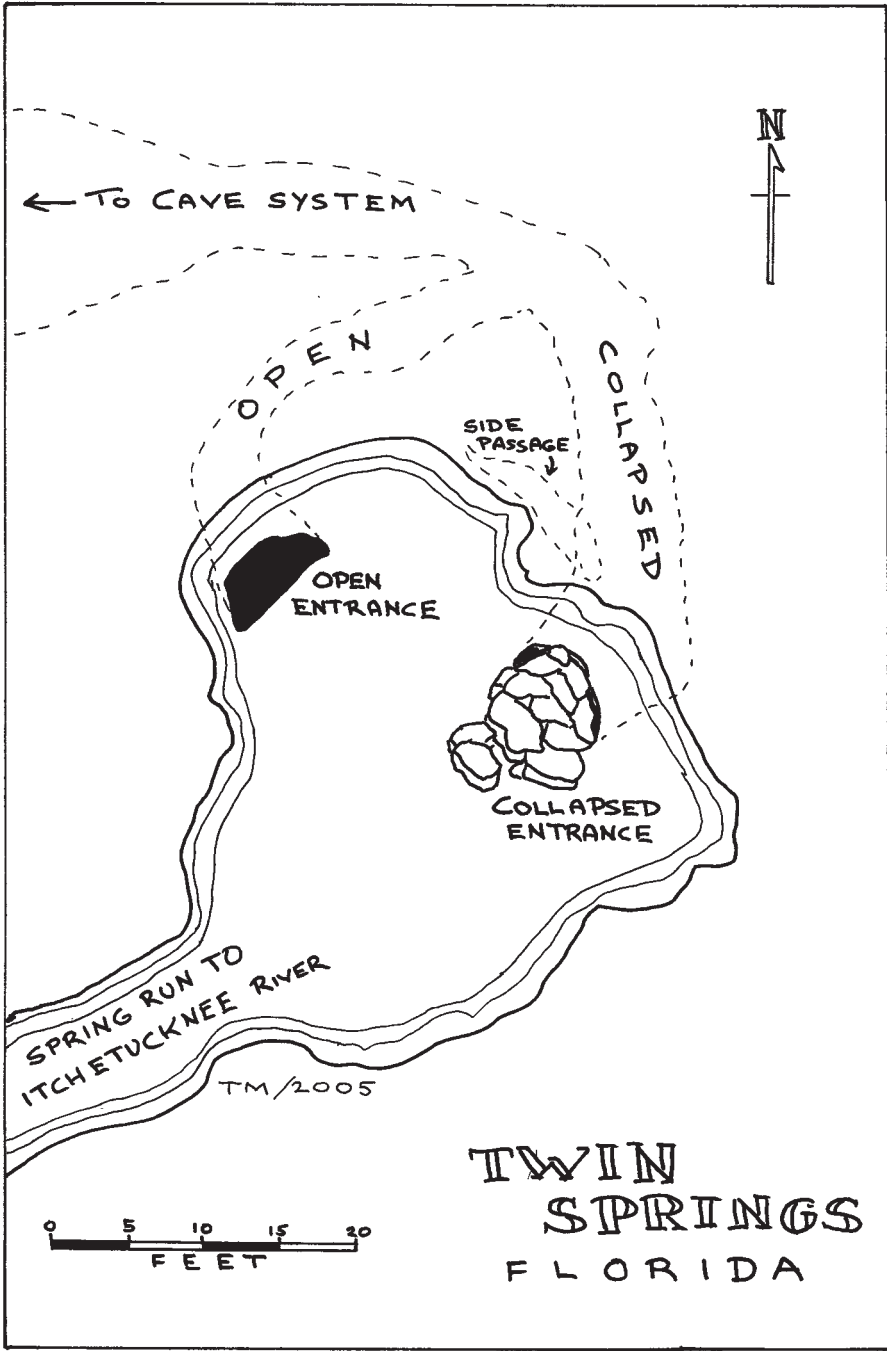
Tears flooded his eyes and melted into the cool, fresh flow of the spring. Then the first ribbons of water trickled into his lungs, and he felt the joy of release, the bright, expectant warmth of homecoming.

His eyes went wide as the sunlight flared yellow and the head-pool dissolved into blackness.

BOOK ONE

# TWIN SPRINGS





← TO CAVE SYSTEM



OPEN

COLLAPSED

SIDE PASSAGE

OPEN ENTRANCE

COLLAPSED ENTRANCE

SPRING RUN TO  
ITCHETUCKNEE RIVER

TM/2005



TWIN  
SPRINGS  
FLORIDA

# CHAPTER ONE

JULY 14, 2005

LURAVILLE, FLORIDA

The single-story house was plain and pale yellow, about as architecturally distant from a Miami-Beach art deco as one could imagine. The vegetation across the road was pulp pines, not palm trees, and there was no beach littered with bronzed bodies. In fact, there was no beach, and no body, at all.

Jennifer Cassidy had been to Florida before—she'd come here for spring break at the insistence of a persuasive college roommate. But this nondescript house, sitting alone on a minimally landscaped lot, didn't offer a hint of the glitz and glamour she'd come to associate with the Sunshine State. In fact, were it not for the Bermuda-grass lawn and the palmettos planted along the drive, it wouldn't have appeared Southern at all.

Jennifer slowly drove the fifty yards of concrete driveway and stopped the rental car in front of a detached garage. She moved the shifter to “park,” turned the rearview mirror her way, and took a quick glance.

She looked . . . efficient.

Her blonde hair was cut short, short and tufting every which way in a responsible sort of punked-out style. She twisted the mirror down, and her eyes, clear and vibrant blue—the kind of blue that made people ask if she wore colored contacts—peered back at her. The rest of her face had that no-makeup look, like the face of somebody who'd gotten up while it was still dark out, made the thirty-five-minute drive to Detroit Metro Airport in something more like twenty, and had still only barely caught her flight.

All of which was absolutely true.

This was no time for the full treatment. She dug the essentials out of her purse and made two quick passes with her blush and



just the barest hint of mascara. But that still looked too unfinished, so she got out her lipstick, squinted at the mirror, and applied two smooth, stay-between-the-lines strokes. Then she finished the job with a soft-chomp on a napkin fished from her Burger King bag.

The face in the mirror still looked efficient, younger than her twenty-four years, and vaguely boyish, mostly because of the hair—what there was of it. She turned the mirror back to where it was supposed to be and put her makeup away. On the journey to “beautiful,” “cute” was about as far as she’d ever gotten, and she’d learned to comfort herself with the sentiment that things could be worse. She turned the key, silencing the engine, and then rummaged in her bookbag for the webpage she’d printed out back in Ann Arbor; the address was the same as the number on the eave of the garage. This had to be the place.

Jennifer opened the car door and grimaced at the heat. *Okay, maybe I am in Florida, after all.* But it sure wasn’t the Florida they put in the tourist brochures. The largest body of water she’d seen on the drive down from the airport was the Suwannee River. And the landscape had consisted mostly of stands of scrawny pine trees and open fields dotted with cattle—not the polled Herefords she’d grown up with on the farm in Ohio, but scrawny, humped and wattled creatures that looked as if they belonged in India.

The yard was quiet; no breeze. Just a few birds, probably asking one another for sunscreen. Slipping on her sunglasses, Jennifer took note of a sign that said “SHOP,” and followed the paved walk around the side of the house.

Then she stopped in midstep and wished she’d spent more time with her makeup.

Because there was a man seated at a table on the brick patio, and he wasn’t just any man.

This guy was a hunk: nice, strong profile, good jaw, and a head of brown hair that was just coming due for a cut and going light at the ends from the sun. He was wearing khaki shorts, aviator sunglasses, and a faded blue T-shirt that fit snugly enough to show

that he was in shape and then some. His arms, tanned and garnished with blonding hair, looked almost too muscular for the tiny, bent-nose pliers in his hand. He looked older than Jennifer, but not much. She guessed that he was in his thirties, early to mid.

Probably early.

He was working on something with black rubber hoses and shiny metal fittings. It looked like a piece of scuba gear, one of those things divers used to get air from a tank. Jennifer searched for the word . . . *regulator*. He was working on a scuba regulator.

"I'll be with you in a second," he said without looking up. "I'm at one of those points in this rebuild where you have to hold your tongue just right . . ." He tinkered with the device for the better part of a minute, and then he set it aside and stood, wiping his hands on a shop towel. "Sorry about that. I'm Beck Easton. Call me Beck."

"Jennifer. Uh, Cassidy."

They shook hands and Easton stepped back, giving Jennifer a long, slow look from head to toe—long enough to take her from flattered to mildly irritated.

"Let's see," he said. "Five-two?"

"And a half."

"And what? A hundred and fifteen pounds?"

Jennifer lifted her chin. "A hundred and fourteen, actually."

Easton nodded and walked around to her side. "Good tone. Do you run? Work out?"

"I bike a lot, swim when I can." Jennifer considered a quick sprint back to the car.

"That's great. Strong leg muscles help. We can put a 104 on you for the intro section and go to steel 72s, maybe even 95s for the Full-Cave."

"Huh?"

"Not that you have to do it all in one shot," Easton told her, hand up. "Take your time. Work your skills between courses. Do you have your C-card and logbook with you?"

“My what?”

“Your certification card and logbook.”

Jennifer removed her sunglasses and squinted. “My certification card certifying what?”

Easton cocked his head and looked at her. “Well, that you’re a trained diver, of course.”

“Oh. I’m not. You see . . . that’s why I’m here.”

He removed his own sunglasses. Green eyes—nice. “I’m sorry. You want open-water lessons, then? I can do that, but I’ve got to tell you, a group class down at Ginnie Springs will be a lot cheaper . . .”

“No.” Jennifer waved her hands and cut him off. “No—I’m not here to learn to dive. I’m here to hire you to do some diving for me.”

“Research diving?”

“Exactly.” In fact, that was all she wanted him to put on the credit-card receipt. One word: “Research.”

“Well, sure.” Easton nodded. “I do some of that. Although I’ve got to tell you, for hydrology, things like that, there’s better people. What sort of research do you have in mind?”

“I need you to find something.”

Easton rubbed his nose, crossed his arms. “Find what?”

“I . . . I don’t know.”

Easton looked at her in silence. When he spoke again, his voice was low. “Can I ask how you found me?”

“Well, I did a Google search on ‘cave diving’ and ‘Live Oak,’ and found an equipment company called Dive-Rite. When I called there, I talked to a man named Lamar, and told him I needed a good diver who won’t blab what I’m doing. He said I should come see you.”

“O-kay . . .” Easton smiled, just a bit, and glanced at the patio table. “Here, let me get this stuff out of our way. Can I get you something to drink?”

“Sure.” Jennifer grinned. *Man—is this guy good-looking.* “That’d be great. Would you have a beer?”

Easton shook his head. “Soaking suds and blowing bubbles doesn’t mix,” he told her, tapping on the regulator. “I’ve got Coke, Diet Pepsi, root beer, and I think maybe even some Dr Pepper—had some locals diving with me last week. Or I’ve got some iced tea that I just made up. But I’ve got to warn you—it’s sweet.”

She grinned even more. “Sweet tea’s fine.”

“Great. Grab a seat. Facilities are in the shop if you need ’em.”



The tea was still a little warm, so Easton heaped two heavy glass tumblers full of ice, added a stout wedge of lemon to each one—he never had figured out what good it did to slide a wafer of lemon onto the rim of a glass—and poured the tea in, the ice crackling as he did it. A car door slammed out in the driveway as he did this, and when he slid open the door to return to the patio, he saw why: his visitor now had a large black-nylon catalog case next to her and was removing thick file folders from it.

“Looks like this is going to get involved.” He set a glass on a paper napkin in front of her and took a seat on the opposite side of the table.

“Well, it’s . . . complicated.” The young woman took a sip of tea and smiled her approval. “Where do you want me to start?”

Easton glanced at the sky. “Plenty of daylight left. Start at the beginning.”

“Okay.” Jennifer wiped a bead of condensation off her glass and then looked up at Easton. “I’m a graduate student at the University of Michigan, the School of Information Science.”

“Like IT—information technology?”

“That’s part of it.” She grimaced just a little as she said it. “But information science deals more with application than infrastructure. It’s about sleuthing out facts, finding where the information is hiding.”

“Like being a detective.”

“More like a librarian.” Jennifer laughed. “Sometimes both. Anyhow, I’m a second-year MS candidate, but this is my first year at U of M; I transferred in from Case Western. That put me low on the totem pole for any kind of assistantship work over the summer, but I was trying anyway—so I could keep my apartment and, you know—avoid going home and waiting tables in Wapakoneta.”

Easton nodded and wondered if she was going to ramble. True, female customers at a cave-diving operation were few and far between, and this one was cute as the proverbial button, but he preferred to deal with people who could get to the point.

“Anyhow, it was starting to look as if that was just what I was going to be doing. But then my department head called me in, and there was this attorney in his office, looking for research help.” She handed Easton a business card:

LOUIS F. SCARVANO

Attorney at Law

SCARVANO, MARTOIA AND WOODWARD, LLC.

1 Peachtree Centre—Ste. 3459, Atlanta, GA 30309

“I know the address.” Easton handed the card back. “High-rent. I’d expect that anyone who hangs a shingle there could afford to keep his own paralegals on staff.”

“He can and he does. But he didn’t need legal research. He needed a family history.”

“He traveled to Michigan to have you do his family tree?”

Jennifer shook her head. “Not *his* family history . . .” She pulled a glossy photograph out of an envelope and handed it across to Easton. “. . . Hers.”

Easton took a look and straightened up just a bit. The picture was obviously a copy of a much older image. Yet even rendered in shades of gray, and partly obscured by creases, the woman in the image was a stunning, raven-haired beauty with eyes that seemed to reach out and lock with his.

“Who am I looking at?”

“Cecilia Sinclair, although she was still Cecilia Donohue when that picture was taken. Daughter of Cameron Donohue, who owned a plantation near Branford. That’s near here, right?”

“About half an hour away.”

Jennifer returned the photo to its envelope. “That was shot the day they announced her engagement to Augustus Baxter—”

Easton shook his head. “You said her married name was ‘Sinclair.’”

“Henry John Sinclair was her second husband, originally from Baltimore, although he and Cecilia moved to Ann Arbor after the war. That’s why Mr. Scarvano came to U of M for his research; Cecilia Sinclair’s personal documents are kept in the archive library there, and you need a stack pass to access them.”

Easton nodded. This was making sense. “And you, being a grad student, have a pass.”

“Exactimundo. Cecilia’s first husband was originally from Georgia.”

“So that’s the Scarvano connection—his client is from Georgia, one of Baxter’s descendants?”

Jennifer’s face went to something that was halfway between a grimace and a scowl. “I asked him, and he wouldn’t say—attorney-client privilege.”

Easton nodded for her to go on.

“Anyhow, Augustus Baxter’s father was a plantation owner, like Cecilia’s, and apparently that’s how they met; their fathers knew one another; Baxter was invited to Cecilia’s cotillion—her coming-out ball—chemistry happened and they got engaged. Baxter even took a job at a bank in Jacksonville, to be nearer to Cecilia. They were only engaged three months, which would have been scandalous back then, except for the fact that this was 1861. Florida had already seceded from the Union, and Baxter had accepted a commission as a captain with the First Florida Cavalry. There were a lot of hurry-up weddings down here that year.”

“You seem to know a lot about the period.”

Jennifer smiled. “I was a dual-major undergrad—English and history. And I’ve always been interested in the Civil War. Not so much the battles, but the culture. How it affected people.”

She took a sip of her tea. “Cecilia was a diarist, and she wrote every day, even when paper got scarce during the war. I read her journal—pretty sad story. Her father was in the war as well, and he got injured, came home, lingered, and eventually died of his wounds. Then Augustus Baxter was killed outright in a skirmish in Virginia, and that left Cecilia alone to run a plantation that was drowning in debt and hadn’t cleared a dime in more than four years.”

“So she lost it to banks up North?”

Jennifer nodded. “You’ve got it. Northern banks bought up the loans from failing banks down here. Then the banks up north hired traveling agents who went around selling off estates, liquidating the assets. And that’s what happened with Cecilia. They swooped down and sold her home right out from under her.”

Easton took a sip of his own tea, lemony and sweet and satisfying. He couldn’t believe he’d grown up drinking it plain. “So where does Sinclair come in?”

“I don’t know.” Jennifer frowned. “In the journals that I have, August of 1865 shows her destitute and scraping for a living. That’s how that volume ends. Yet when the next one starts, it’s later in the same year—1865—and she’s up in Michigan, happily married, comfortable and living on an apple farm. That’s one of the mysteries.”

“One?” Easton shifted in his chair. “There’s more?”

Jennifer nodded, eyebrows up.

“There’s a big one.” She opened a thick three-ring binder and leafed through photocopies of pages covered with a refined and feminine handwriting. She stopped, read a little, and tapped the page. “On the night before their wedding, Baxter is staying down here, at the Donohue plantation. He comes to Cecilia after dinner

and tells her something. In fact, she says that by the time they get done, it's midnight. She doesn't record exactly what it is that Baxter tells her, only that it is a secret important both to them and to their country—which was the Confederacy at the time—and that he is entrusting it to her in case something happens to him after the war.”

Easton looked at the binder. It had to be a good three inches thick. “And she doesn't say any more about it in all of that?”

“I think she was so concerned that she was afraid to even mention it in her own journals,” Jennifer told him. “In fact, she doesn't bring it up again until it's pretty clear that the South's goose is cooked.” She leafed to a section near the back of the binder. “When she gets the news of Lee's surrender at Appomattox, she wonders if ‘our Secret may yet save us.’ And a few months later, when the war officially ends, she wonders ‘what may become of our great Secret, for which so many lives were given, and if it has not yet saved our nation, may it perhaps save us?’ Meaning herself and a freed slave she calls ‘Uncle Jonah,’ who was the only other person left on the plantation at that point. And then she mentions it one more time.”

“Which is?”

Jennifer leafed to the last few photocopied pages. “August 6, 1865—Cecilia's just about at the end of her rope. The house has been all but emptied: furniture, paintings, even any clothes of value. And now she's two days away from having to leave the house itself. She's kept this secret, whatever it was, hidden throughout four years of war. Now she's about to be cast—well, she doesn't know where. And she doesn't see how she can keep the secret safe anymore, so she confides in the only friend she has left: the former slave, Jonah. And she adds in a postscript that Jonah has come up with a plan that gives her hope.”

Easton tapped the table. “But she doesn't say what it is. Am I right?”

Jennifer glanced up from her binder. “You are. Cecilia’s sick with worry. Too afraid to even confide in her diary, for fear that somebody might find it in the days to come. But the next day, she has no such worries. Jonah is dead, drowned in an underwater cave where he was hiding whatever it was. He was trying to breathe off these . . . like sacks of air that he took down with him. And something went wrong. He drowned. So now Cecilia’s last friend is dead, the secret is gone, and she has no way of getting to it. She closes with, ‘All is lost and I am alone.’”

Easton leaned forward and looked at the binder. “And that’s where it ends?”

“That’s where this volume ends.” Jennifer closed the binder. “As I said, when the next one starts, it’s Christmas of that same year, and she’s married and living on the farm in Michigan.”

“Poor farmers or rich?”

Jennifer frowned at the material on the table. “I’d have to say very rich. When Cecilia died in 1931, she left a lot of money to charity—half a million each to the drama departments at U of M and Eastern Michigan University, more than a million, all total, to various missions organizations. She even left eight hundred thousand dollars in trust to help restore Ford’s Theater. Pretty odd for a daughter of the Confederacy, but I guess she decided it was time to bury the hatchet. She didn’t have any heirs—she and Sinclair had a son, but he died in a streetcar accident in Chicago in 1893. And Sinclair himself had died years earlier, in a shipwreck on the Great Lakes in . . .” Jennifer checked her notes. “. . . 1868.”

“So Sinclair—did he come from money?”

“I don’t know. His Bible—not a family Bible, but the one he carried—is with the papers that were left with the university, and it has lots of marginal notes in it. Looks like he memorized verses, kept notes on what he was working on. But the only personal information I can find in that is their wedding date: October 14, 1865. And the first public record I’ve found of him is in the social

pages of the *Ann Arbor Beacon* in November, announcing that they've set up housekeeping and are receiving visitors."

She paused, her shoulders sagging a bit as she looked at Easton. "You think they came back and got it, don't you? Got the money, or jewels, or the deed or whatever it was, cashed it in and went up to start a farm in Michigan . . . a hundred and forty years ago."

"It's sounding like it." Easton reached over and tapped the binder. "Does it say in here what spring they used as their hiding place?"

Jennifer searched the binder and read for a moment. "Here it is. Cecilia only mentions the name one time: Twin Springs."

Easton sat back in his chair.

"What?"

"Well . . ." Easton put his hands atop his head, fingers knit. "It's sounding even more like it. There are springs down here that aren't often dived, but Twin's not one of them." He wondered why a researcher wouldn't have caught this, and then shook it away. The world of cave-diving was so closed that you'd almost have to be part of it to be privy to the information. "It's on private property, but even so, over the years there've probably been two, three hundred divers through that spring and the system behind it. If anything is down there to be found, I've got to think they would have found it by now."

Jennifer Cassidy looked as if someone had pulled the plug on her. She rubbed her forehead, reached for her tea, and looked absently at the empty glass.

"Here. Let me freshen that."

Easton picked up both glasses and headed back into the house. He glanced out the window at Jennifer, chin on her palm, the picture of defeat. All of his life, he'd thought of himself as a "ready, aim . . . fire" sort of person. But Jennifer Cassidy seemed like more of a "ready, fire . . . aim"—the sort he'd long since learned to avoid.

So why was it that he felt so badly for her and wanted to find some way to give her hope?

He wasn't sure. But as he was filling the second glass, he remembered something that might let him do just that.



When Easton reappeared from the house, a fresh glass of tea in each hand, he was smiling. Not just smiling—grinning.

Jennifer scowled just a bit. *The cave-diving business must do pretty well. Here this guy has just talked himself out of a job, and he looks happy as a clam.* Finally, her ire got the better of her. “So what’s got you so cheerful?”

“Twin Springs,” he said, still smiling as he handed Jennifer her glass. “It isn’t ‘twin springs.’ Not really. There’s only one aperture—one way into the cave system. There used to be another spring head; you can see where it was and still feel some flow coming out of it. But it’s collapsed—the entrance and a fair amount of passage behind it.”

“And that’s good because—?”

“Because the passage didn’t collapse until sometime in the 1890s.”

“Are you sure?” Jennifer straightened up a bit.

“Positive.” Beck sat down, ignoring the drink in front of him. “As I said, Twin Springs is on private property. And most times, you take what a landowner tells you with a grain of salt. I mean, people tell you they have a ‘spring’ on their land, and, half the time, you go out to see it and it’s not a spring at all. It’s usually a sinkhole, no water coming out. But the guy that owns Twin Springs? The land’s been in his family for more than a century; they probably picked it up from whatever bank it was that seized it from your Southern belle, there. And because Twin Springs was once obviously two springs, I once asked the owner if he knew what happened to the second one.”

“Did he?”

“He did.” Easton looked straight at her. “It was dynamited.”

Jennifer lifted her head a bit. “Why would somebody want to blow up a spring?”

“To relieve boredom, I guess. Back in the 1890s, there was even less to do around here than there is now. The locals’ idea of a good time on a Sunday afternoon was to head out to a spring with a picnic lunch and a barrel of beer. And then, for after-dinner entertainment, they’d chuck sticks of dynamite into the water, watch it geyser up. Only a matter of time before somebody made a lucky shot, landed their stick in the aperture, and the explosion collapsed the cave.”

“So there’s a fifty-percent chance that what I’m looking for is behind all that rock?”

“I wouldn’t go counting your chickens just yet.” Despite what he’d just said, Easton leaned forward, one arm on the table, obviously warming up to the idea. “But you can tell, even today, that the second aperture—the one that they blew—was once much larger than the first.”

Jennifer waited for a moment, then asked, “And that’s important because . . . ?”

“Because of something called Bernoulli’s Principle.” Easton held up both hands, the fingers of his left in a tight circle, the fingers of his right touching loosely. “If you figure that the same cave system is feeding both apertures, and one is smaller than the other, the water coming out of the smaller one will have to accelerate to balance the flow. It’s the same thing that happens when you turn a shower head from a coarse to a fine setting—it sprays harder, because the flow is coming through a smaller opening.”

“Okay.” Jennifer nodded slowly. “I follow that. But why would that mean that the larger opening is the one we want?”

“Because . . .” Easton’s grin grew larger “. . . if I were diving in that cave on a breath-hold, I’d want to go against the lowest resistance possible on the way in.”

Jennifer could actually feel her eyebrows rise. “The one that was collapsed.”

“In the 1890s.” Easton nodded twice. “They had diving suits back then, but I’ve never heard of anyone using one in a spring. Scuba wasn’t invented until the Second World War. And the exploration of these cave systems around here didn’t really get going until the sixties. Yeah, if your information is right—and if this secret, whatever it is, is waterproof—I’d say there’s a chance that whatever your man put in the cave is still in there.”

They sat back, looking at one another. In the distance, some bird asked another about sunscreen.

“Where are you staying?” Easton asked.

“I haven’t gotten around to finding a place yet.”

He laughed. “You really planned this out, didn’t you?” He stood up and reached for her catalog case. “I’ve got a bunkhouse built onto the other end of the shop for people taking lessons. Nobody’s in there right now. Let’s get you settled. We can dive in the morning.”