

"No, I'm not." Chessa's words tumbled out in a rush. "I found out from Amy that Leif was going to give her a story on RA Technologies and their use of harvested eggs for stem cell research along with an allegation that what the company was doing constituted human egg trafficking. I knew that if the story broke, not only would it possibly damage your candidacy but could harm a lot of people if it stood in the way of the cure for diabetes. I wanted to catch him off guard, so I went down to see him in Kentucky unannounced. And I was successful. Leif agreed not to talk to Amy about—"

"Leif?!" Darren stood up and screeched the word at her. "You're calling him Leif? Like you're best buds or something? This is my enemy, and you went to see him?" As he hurled questions at her like poisonous darts, he strode toward her slowly, his voice lowering into a snide growl. "You went to talk to Governor Leif Mitchell—let me guess—at his horse ranch, I bet? Did he sing you a song? How could you betray me like this? How could you go behind my back and actually go see him? I bet he got quite a kick out of it. I bet he's still down there laughing at my expense. And you actually believed him, didn't you?"

Chessa stood up, her heart pounding. Her husband continued to walk slowly toward her, until his face was inches away, towering over her. He advanced, his big frame backing her against the living room wall, his red eyes bulging with rage.

She cowered backward until her back was against the wall and there was nowhere left for her to go. "I d-did. He's actually not so bad—"

"Why, you little..." Darren reached out and wrapped his beefy hand around Chessa's throat.

*He's going to strangle me...* Chessa closed her eyes and felt his fingers pressing into her neck—hurting her—and her airway start to constrict. She tried to fight back but flailed helplessly against him. She couldn't breathe and she started to gag. *I'm going to die*, she thought, starting to lose consciousness.

Then suddenly she felt his hands on her shoulders, and she had time to see him stumble back, his body doubling over, heaving for air, before he regained her balance and stopped.

"Darren!" She didn't recognize her own voice. Chessa reflexively reached out to grab him, but he fell to the floor, choking now himself.

After fully regaining her bearings, she picked up her cell phone, which she had left on the table. She dialed the person on the other end of the line, and she was having a heart attack.

The minutes spent waiting for the ambulance to arrive only left Darren's side to find a pool of blood on the neck so no one would see the marks. She had bruises that her husband's fingers had left on her neck.

Once the paramedics arrived, she was in a blur. After telling them what had happened, she was taken where he actually stumbled and fell. She was in the ambulance with her prosthetic leg, and her fear over the oxygen mask he wore was overwhelming. In spite of her own fear of the other emergency personnel, spite, malice.

The torrent of activity continued as she was taken to Presbyterian Hospital. Doctors were waiting, and Chessa was relegated to an onlooker's room in the waiting room.

She had called Darren's partner, and he had then phoned Pete Connor, asking for help. Then she sat and waited.