

*Twelve Months Earlier*

Abbie Grayson counted the tables on the deck and then turned to the ones in the yard. More than enough to accommodate the nearly seventy-five people they expected. “Hannah, those chair covers you picked are beautiful.”

“Thanks, Mom. Cassie and I had fun shopping for them.” Her daughter straightened a chair cover. “I can’t believe Sam’s graduated.”

Abbie shook her head. Where had his college years gone? It seemed like yesterday he graduated from high school and began his college career. Everything with Sam had moved fast since he’d only been part of their family for a few years.

“I can’t get over the fact he has his theology degree.” John sneaked up behind them.

“Were you eavesdropping on our conversation, dear?” Abbie asked her husband.

“Never.” John kissed her cheek and laughed. “You’ve done a great job with these decorations. Sam’s going to love this.”

“I hope so, Dad. I’m so proud of him. Once again, Sam has

exceeded the statistics for foster kids graduating from college. How amazing is that?" Hannah said.

John flashed a smile. He still looked younger than his almost sixty-years, even though his hair had completely grayed. He liked to say it came from raising another teenager in their fifties. Even though he joked, he adored Sam. Their whole family did. And after thirty-eight years of marriage, they were happy and still each other's best friend.

But John was right about raising a teen later in life. It hadn't been easy, and Sam hadn't had an easy time getting to this point. He'd come to them as a sixteen-year-old foster child, broken and scarred from trauma. They'd gone through a lot together since then. And they adopted Sam on his eighteenth birthday.

"Where do you want these extra chairs, Mom?" Kyle asked. His wife, Cassie, followed him onto the deck with another box of party favors.

"Let's put them around the fire pit in case Sam and his friends want to sit there after dark. It's supposed to be a chilly evening for early June."

"It's sure beautiful today." Cassie smiled.

"The perfect day for a party." Abbie gazed at the view from their expansive deck. Rolling farm fields, blooming with wild flowers, crops, and green foliage. She loved their life in Franklin, Tennessee. They had the best of both worlds. A small town with a rural setting, yet just a few miles outside of Nashville and the home of Tennessee University, where John was a two-time national championship basketball coach. Abbie was beyond thankful for her life and her family.

"How do you think Sam is doing right now?" John asked quietly. "He told me he went back to therapy, but he didn't tell me much more."

Abbie's stomach dropped. She didn't want to think about it or talk about it today, but how could they not? The issue was front and center. "Oh hon, I wish I knew. Graduation has taken his mind off it."

To think it'd been a little more than four years since Sam's biological father, Andy Quinn, kidnapped him and was charged with drug trafficking. Of course, there was more to the story. Much more.

"The nightmares about the two girls started again. I think that's why he's going back to therapy," Abbie said. "I know his father and the others involved have denied those girls were there, but Sam still believes they were." Abbie chuckled sadly. "Did you hear what I said? Sam's father. We both know good and well that man isn't his dad anymore. Not since he gave up his parental rights."

"He never was any type of father." John pulled a chair out and sat at a table, gazing out at their property.

"You're right about that." Tears rimmed Abbie's eyes. Quinn and his evil associates wanted to force Sam to help lure girls for their trafficking scheme, but Sam refused and almost died because of it.

He talked about two girls—Amanda and Ava. But the police found no sign of any girls being held with Sam and suggested he'd been hallucinating. Even his therapist said it could be the way his mind dealt with the trauma.

"Way to drag the pre-party down, guys." Hannah groaned.

Abbie laughed, but there was nothing funny. Sam had already endured a lifetime of trauma before they adopted him.

"Well," Abbie said. "Let's pray the investigators will get to the bottom of it one day. And Sam's father, I mean Andy Quinn, gets years added to his sentence, and Sam can handle it all."