

CHAPTER ONE

"Watch what you're doing!" Shaneika snapped.

"Move then," I hissed back.

Shaneika and I were stuck like two peas in a pod falling over each other in a muddy trench.

Since Comanche had retired from horse racing and was now standing at stud, Shaneika had extra time and decided to try her hand at archaeology. As an enthusiastic amateur historian, archaeology was the next logical step for her. She joined the Daniel Boone Archaeological Society and assisted at digs. Shaneika decided her involvement meant that I was involved as well. The Society needed volunteers to dig an area to the west of Fort Boonesborough where freestanding cabins had stood, so Shaneika signed me up.

How could I refuse? As my attorney, Shaneika had saved my tush many times. Now I was pushing *her* tush out of the way. "You broke the string," I complained, glaring at the snapped filament lying limp on the ground. The university's archaeologists had carefully plotted out a grid of squares for us to excavate, and now one entire strand was on the ground.

"I'll put it back. No need to get your panties in a wad." Shaneika climbed out of our little ditch and pulled the string taut again. "There! Good as new, Miss Fussbucket."

I complained, "I don't understand why we are doing this."

"My ancestor, John Todd, came to Kentucky in 1775. His brothers, Levi and Robert Todd, followed."

"I know that, Shaneika. You crow about it often enough."

"I thought you were descended from Levi Todd," Heather said, putting dirt which needed to be sifted through a screen into a bucket.

"And John Todd didn't even come to Boonesborough. He went to Logan's Station," I reminded Shaneika.

"Todd came through here. He just didn't stay here. I bring him up because of his connection to Daniel Boone. Did you know that John Todd was appointed by the one and only 'give me liberty or give me death' Patrick Henry in 1778 as Lt. Commander of Illinois, and that he represented Kentucky in the General Assembly of Virginia in 1778? He introduced bills to emancipate slaves and set aside land for educational purposes."

"That's rich coming from a family of slave owners," I said.

Shaneika pursed her lips in irritation. She was proud of her heritage and connection to her namesake Mary Todd Lincoln and thus to Abraham Lincoln.

Shaneika, her cousin Heather, and I were at Fort Boonesborough trying to locate the fort's original garbage pit which meant their former outhouse location. Since Hunter was still away and I was trying to wean myself off pain medication, I thought it sounded like a fun adventure. Oh, how stupid can one person be?

It had drizzled the night before, and all the trenches the archaeologists had dug were muddy. It was chilly, the porta potty wasn't installed until late in the morning, and the food truck failed to arrive. I was wet, hungry, and aggravated.

Heather Warfield cackled. "You two fight like an old married couple."

I glanced over at Heather, who was thirty-nine and single, financially independent, lived with two rescue cats, and worked in an animal shelter. She was Rubenesque with ivory skin, long brown hair clipped up into a pony tail, large dark expressive eyes that were nearsighted, and a small mouth. Heather's vocabulary spoke of an extensive education, as she had graduated with degrees in political science and economics. So why was Heather working at an animal shelter and not in her fields of expertise? Was it because she was shy and unassuming? I didn't inquire as that would be uncouth, but that wouldn't stop me from asking Shaneika when we were alone. Yep, I'm a nosey cuss.

It was also evident Heather was a huge UK basketball fan from her UK sweatshirt and UK decals on her sunglasses and watch band. She was also a relative of Shaneika's. They were distant cousins.

The Warfields and the Todds were part of the first wave of European pioneers who lived in the Bluegrass and thus accumulated a fortune through land acquisition and hemp crops. Dr. Elisha Warfield dabbled in horse racing and bred the stallion, Lexington, or Big Lex as the locals called him. You see pictures all over the area of Big Lex, who is colored blue. It gives the tourists pause. Why is the horse portrayed as blue? Folklore has it that the ghost of a "blue" Big Lex can be seen grazing in pastures. The apparition acquired its hue from all the bluegrass he has consumed. Kentucky bluegrass has a bluish tint when allowed to grow to full height, which is why the area around Lexington is called the Bluegrass. Quaint story, huh!

Of course, the Warfields and the Todds intermarried with the other pioneer families as did most of the first European families in this area, so Heather and Shaneika have common ancestors. I studied both of them as I carefully trowelled away thin layers of dirt in our pit.

One of the cousins was pale as a Junco's white underbelly, and the other cousin had light copper-colored skin. Heather was shy and introverted while Shaneika was a lioness and, for my money, the best criminal lawyer in the state of Kentucky. Love, hate, devotion, cruelty, racism, classism, slavery, elitism, heartbreak, repression, and struggle had been bound together in a sacred dance throughout Kentucky history, culminating in Shaneika and Heather, polar opposites, but related by blood and history. They were two women who had come to terms with the sins and accomplishments of their ancestors, embracing their shared past.

That's why we were at Fort Boonesborough sifting through mud with a trowel and a paint brush. Shaneika knew her European ancestors' line of descent, but there were gaps with her African heritage. Shaneika wanted to close those gaps and pass the information on to her son, Lincoln.

In Shaneika's office is a letter from Abraham Lincoln to George Rogers Clark Todd (Mary Todd Lincoln's brother), a Confederate officer's sword, daguerreotypes of black women washing at Camp Nelson (a Union military post during the Civil War and now a military cemetery), and other various Civil War artifacts which she claims are family heirlooms. Though Shaneika won't tell me how exactly she is descended from the Todd family, I know I will drag it out of her one day. At the moment, however, moisture from the muck I knelt in was seeping through my jeans causing me to complain, "I'm going back to the van and change. My pants are getting soaked."

"Boo hoo," Shaneika said, sneering as she plucked a pottery shard from the dirt caked on her trowel. "If you change, you'll get those pants filthy as well." She motioned to the field photographer to photograph the find and then she cataloged it.

I grumbled, "This is crazy. We're not finding anything but broken clay pipe stems and animal bone fragments."

"Let's hope they're animals and not my ancestors," Heather teased. She and Shaneika grinned at each other. "You know the settlers at Jamestown, Virginia resorted to cannibalism."

"Lovely," I replied.

Shaneika said, "Did you know my ancestor John Todd commanded a group of 182 frontiersmen against the British and Shawnee in retaliation for an attack on Bryan Station?"

"Here we go again about John Todd," I murmured.

"What was that?" Shaneika asked.

I said in a louder voice, "We all know about the Battle of Blue Licks in 1782, which is considered the last battle of the Revolutionary War even though the war was officially over." I put another clay pipe stem into a bag and marked it on my grid paper. The information marked on the paper would later be put into a computer.

"I bring it up because Daniel Boone accompanied John Todd and wanted to wait for reinforcements before engaging the enemy."

Heather looked at Shaneika. "I'm not familiar with this story. Just bits and pieces. What happened then?"

"Some hothead named Hugh McGary accused the men of being cowards and got them riled up, so they attacked. Daniel Boone was remembered to have said, 'We are all slaughtered men now.'"

I said, "A bunch of testosterone driven men who got themselves and their kinfolk dead in my opinion. Of course, Hugh McGary survived. He just had everyone else killed."

Shaneika ignored me and continued regaling us with the Battle of Blue Licks. "Boone was right. It was a trap and they should have waited for reinforcements which were a day away. Not only was John Todd killed, but several members of the Boone family as well, including Daniel Boone's son, Israel. Daniel Boone caught a riderless horse and tried to give it to his son. The story goes that Israel was hesitant to leave his father and in those few seconds was shot to death. Boone then jumped on the horse and rode to safety. Boone had to come back days later to reclaim his son's body and take him to Boone's Station to be buried. There's a stone memorial to Israel Boone still standing. In a battle that lasted less than ten minutes, seventy-two frontiersmen were dead and eleven captured by the Shawnee and the British force."

"Israel's not buried here at Fort Boonesborough?" Heather asked, looking up from her digging.

"I thought Israel was buried at the battle site," I said.

Shaneika said, "No, he's buried at Boone's Station. There's nothing there anymore, but a stone memorial and a historical marker. John Todd is buried in a common grave at the battle site. There is a memorial to all the men who died."

"I find Daniel Boone a controversial figure," Heather said. "Wasn't he adopted by the Shawnee at one point and rumored to have had a Shawnee wife?"

"Some historians believe that he was adopted by the great Shawnee chief, Blackfish, himself. As for a Shawnee wife, who knows? Probably."

I looked at Heather. "I thought you knew all this."

Heather replied, "I know very little about the frontiersmen's period, except for my family. I like to concentrate on history from 1860 through the Reconstruction period."

"Oh," I said. "Well then you might not know that Daniel Boone was not the only one playing around. There is speculation that Edward Boone, Daniel's brother, got Rebecca Boone pregnant while Daniel was on a two year long hunt. Of course, I don't blame Rebecca. She thought Daniel was dead. It's just that Edward Boone was married to her sister Martha, and they were both pregnant around the same time."

"Yikes," Heather said, laughing. "Messy. I wonder what those family get-togethers were like. What did Daniel Boone say when he got back and found a wee babe in the crib?"

"Not much. It seemed Daniel Boone accepted some of the responsibility since he was away for so long and recognized the child as his own. In fact, Jemima was considered his favorite child."

Heather asked, "Is this the scandal that caused Boone to have a falling out with Boonesborough?"

"No, that was due to the aftermath of the Great Siege of Boonesborough. That story had to do with the need for salt from Blue Licks. Boone was considered a Tory and was later court-martialed for treason, but he was acquitted. The trial left Boone so bitter, he moved to his son's small community named Boone's Station near Athens. The Battle of Blue Licks happened four years later than the Great Siege."

"Sounds like Blue Licks was not a lucky place for the Boones," Heather commented.

"I believe I was speaking about my illustrious ancestor, John Todd when I was so rudely interrupted," Shaneika complained, bumping me with her elbow.

"Sorry," I said, looking sheepish. "I do have a tendency to go on."

Looking smug at my apology, Shaneika continued, "As I was saying, seventy-two frontiersmen were killed at the Battle of Blue Licks including John Todd. He was thirty-two years old."

"My gosh, that is young," I said. "And he was a colonel?"

Shaneika said, "Life expectancy was short, so they got on with the business of living. Daniel Boone's daughter, Susannah, was fourteen when she married. Many think she had the first white baby in Kentucky."

"You said 'white baby.' I guess that means something," I alleged.

"The first non-indigenous baby to be born in Kentucky is thought to have been Frederick, a baby born to Dolly, a slave, and her master Richard Callaway in 1775."

"That doesn't sound like a pleasant story," Heather said, looking at Shaneika in dismay. "Do you think they loved each other?"

Shaneika snorted, "For God's sake, get real, Heather. You know what that relationship was about."

I didn't comment because sex between slave owners and slaves was a touchy subject. I didn't like the thought of those poor women's plight or any woman in sexual jeopardy. As a female, it made me uncomfortable. Made me want to take a gun and shoot some man.

The three of us returned to our work, reflecting quietly on the hardships women endured in pioneer life—hardships women have always endured.

"A pipe bowl this time. Did these men do nothing but smoke? And where did they get the tobacco? I haven't read any accounts of tobacco being grown at Fort Boonesborough," I sputtered, sticking the bowl stem in another bag.

Shaneika said, "The women smoked as well. I think when they ran out of tobacco, they smoked other plants. Besides sex and eating, what pleasures did these people have? There was no TV. No restaurants. No spas. No sports. No movies. No theater. No concerts. Not even the simple pleasures of bathing. The women and children couldn't even go outside the fort for a walk. I read somewhere that a woman recounted for a historian that as a child,

her mother wouldn't let her leave the fort for over two years because it was too dangerous. Two years!"

"If you put it that way, I guess smoking was one of the few enjoyments they had to counteract the endless work and stress," I said, reaching back and feeling the back of my pants. "Oh, the moisture is soaking through to my panties now. Ugh."

"You sure it's not you losing control?" Shaneika teased.

"I'm not there yet, but give me a few years. As one gets older, all the orifices loosen. Just you wait. Your turn will come."

Heather asked, "If you don't like to excavate, Josiah, why did you come?"

"Josiah is detoxing from pain medication while Hunter is away," Shaneika shot back.

"Is Hunter your gentleman friend, Josiah?" Heather asked, grinning at me. "How serious is your relationship? Come on. Spill it."

"Gee, thanks, Shaneika. I don't think the people over in the next county heard you imply that I am a drug addict," I hissed back, resisting the urge to thump Shaneika on her newly shaved head or pull out one of her large hoop earrings, this being her current look. She was the only woman I knew who changed hairstyles like some women change purses.

"Are you really addicted to drugs?" Heather asked, her large eyes widening.

Wiggling her eyebrows, Shaneika added, "Pain medication."

I replied, "Let's say I'm trying to improve my health and leave it at that." Taking a breather, I looked around. "Boy, I'd really like a drink right now."

"True junkie talk. One drug substituting for another."

"You know, Shaneika, I'm gonna punch your self-righteous snout right in your nose."

Shaneika turned and stared at me. "That makes no sense, Josiah. A snout *is* a nose."

"You know what I mean."

"You better not be having a stroke, because I'm not gonna drag your white fanny out of this pit."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Make me."

"Girls! Ladies! Behave!" Heather insisted. "Decorum at all times when in public."

Shaneika and I both turned to Heather and yelled, "SHUT UP!"

Heather's face turned crimson.

Ashamed that we had hurt Heather's feelings, I said, "Don't worry, Heather. No one is looking at us. Everyone is staring at the twins." I was referring to the two fabulous women occupying the pit on the other side of the site. They were the Dane twins, both identical with pale skin, startlingly light blue eyes, athletic figures, and ebony hair with a shock of gray at their widow peaks. I couldn't tell if the gray shock was natural or artificial. As I stated before, they were identical. I could never tell them apart.

"What's their story again?" Shaneika asked.

I replied, "I know them well enough to say hello and that's it. I met them once through Lady Elsmere at one of her parties. I doubt they would remember me."

Heather eagerly glanced about to see if anyone was listening to our conversation. Seeing that everyone seemed intent upon their work, she spoke in a stage whisper, "The Dane twins are from Baltimore, and their father was an industrialist who worked for the Navy. Apparently, he supplied them with some type of screw they needed and made a fortune. Of course, that was years back. These girls are from his second marriage late in life."

"They are hardly girls," Shaneika commented, looking at them from the corner of her eye. "More like late thirties or early forties."

"They are thirty-five," Heather said.

I said, "Hmm. They look older."

"They partied very hard when young, and tragedy has followed them throughout their lives," Heather explained. "Haven't you heard of the Dane curse?"

"It's a novel by Dashiell Hammett."

"No, Josiah, this is for real," Heather insisted.

"Like how?" I asked, suddenly interested. Talk of curses always fascinated me.

"Both wives of Mr. Dane died from accidents. The first Mrs. Dane died in a skiing accident. She collided with a tree."

"Holy moly, that's harsh," Shaneika said.

"The second Mrs. Dane died in a car accident when her chauffeur drove off a cliff. There were rumors the two were involved, and the 'accident' was really a murder/suicide when she refused to leave old man Dane."

"Wow," I said.

"Double wow," Shaneika said, putting down her trowel and staring at the Dane women.

I slapped her foot. "You're ogling."

Shaneika countered, "I'm not ogling. I'm studying them."

"You're gawking."

"They might need a sharp lawyer for their legal team. I'm going over there and hand them my card."

Shaneika stared at my astonished face. "Well, you never know. Josiah, since you know them, you must introduce me to them."

"Like I told you, I've met them once for a brief introduction. I hardly call that knowing them. Not only can I not tell them apart, I don't remember their names."

"It's Magda and Maja," Heather offered, "but the story doesn't end with the second Mrs. Dane's death."

"There's more?" I asked.

"Quite a bit, I'm afraid," Heather said. "Before old man Dane died, he discovered one of his adult children from his first marriage was embezzling from the family firm, and he disinherited him. Ultimately the embezzler died from a drug overdose. Apparent suicide."

"How many children did Mr. Dane have in all?" Shaneika asked.

Looking smug, Heather replied, "Five. One died in infancy."

"Another whammy," Shaneika commented.

"How do you know all of this, Heather?" I asked, bagging more animal bones before marking their location on a grid survey. I motioned for a volunteer to carry the bones away for analysis.

"I read the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. The Dane family has been written about ad nauseam."

"I never heard of the family before meeting the twins," I said. "I don't know how I could have missed all this drama. It's right up my alley."

"I'm not finished," Heather said.

Shaneika exclaimed. "There's more?"

"Yeah, a real cliffhanger."

"Ugh, Heather, enough with the references to cliffs, please," I complained.

"Sorry, Josiah. I forget you fell off a cliff yourself."

I remarked, "My stomach is turning."

"You gotta hear this though. It turned out that old man Dane disinherited all of his children, except for Magda, the older of the twins."

Shaneika asked, "He did this why?"

"Magda has a real knack for business, and he felt she would preserve the family business and fortune. He was right. The Dane brand has expanded under her leadership—tech companies, facial recognition software, robotic firms—stuff to do with national security."

"Even though Magda expanded the company, it would still piss me off if I were Maja," Shaneika offered.

I asked, "What about the other Dane offspring?"

"The older sister from the first marriage keeps out of the limelight. She has a cottage on Martha's Vineyard."

"What's her name?" I asked.

"Margot, I think," Heather replied, staring at the twins.

Shaneika said, "Magda controls her siblings because she holds the family purse strings. That's what I would do to make them behave and keep them at arms length."

"And Maja?" I asked, amused that Heather seemed to be a crime buff.

"She lives in the guest house on the family estate in Baltimore, where the family firm is still located. I think they live on an island in the bay."

Shaneika asked, "Why not inside the family home?"

"Magda lives there with her husband, Gavin McCloud."

I clucked, "Imagine having your own island in Chesapeake Bay."

Shaneika turned to me. "Sounds similar to the Lee case you were involved in a few months back. By the way, is Hunter still working on that case?"

"He called the other night and said that Rudy Lee's partner in crime, Lettie Lemore pleaded guilty to illegal drug distribution and evidence tampering in a plea deal. The DA dropped the charge for conspiracy to commit murder in the death of Johnny Stompanato, but she still refused to talk about Lee. We might never know how Lee really died."

"What are you two talking about?" Heather asked.

"An acquaintance of Josiah's who died a month or so ago. That's all."

Heather looked confused. “You must tell me, Jo. I didn’t read about it in the paper.”

“There was a little article about the man’s death in the paper. The reporter has since quit Lexington and relocated to Las Vegas.”

“Was it murder?”

“Don’t know. Death was ruled inconclusive.”

Heather said, “I don’t know how you do it, Josiah. You keep your cool so. I would just fall apart seeing a dead body. I really would. And the confrontations you have had with murderers. I would freeze. I know I would. You know I keep up with you in the papers. You’ve got a reputation for solving murders. I confess I’m quite a fan.” She leaned over in a conspiratorial fashion. “What are the details of your friend’s death? Leave nothing out.”

“He wasn’t my friend, but I’ll tell you about it another time, Heather. I see the food truck has arrived. I’m going to get something.”

I needed to eat. I was getting the shakes from weaning myself off so much pain medication. Food helped with the withdrawal—mainly booze and chocolate, the important food groups. *Just breathe, Josiah, I told myself. Just breathe. You’ll be all right.*