

Heart Of Wild Book Excerpt

PROLOGUE

"Dammit, why me?"

"You're the only one I could ask. The only one I would ask such a thing of."

"Hang on, John," Chayton shouted into the phone, then let it dangle as he stepped outside the confines of the small phone booth. He had to get some air. Put some distance between himself and that phone conversation.

Kidnapping...Lord, what had he gotten himself into? Chayton Amory paced the area, oblivious to the cold north wind that threatened an early winter in his Oregon mountains, as his mind ran rampant over John's last words. Finally, he jerked the door open and grabbed the receiver with a vengeance.

He hated being put in such a position, but there was only one answer, and he already knew it.

"Okay, John, you win. I'll do it."

"I knew I could count on you."

Amory rolled his eyes skyward, as he bit his tongue to keep from swearing. If it had been anyone but John Douglas III, he would have given a flat refusal and hung up. John was the only man big enough to ask such a thing of him. Chayton loved and respected him. John knew that, and used it. Still, when Chayton had lost his parents in a boating accident ten years ago, John had been there for him and Tanka. He couldn't refuse him. And John knew it.

"All I want you to do is go get Kasie before the wedding, and bring her back to the cabin so I can talk to her."

Chayton held his silence, as his long, hard body shrugged with the weight of his decision.

"Look, I know what I'm asking of you, but something tells me I've got to stop this." Emotion filled John's voice. Emotion and John didn't mix.

"John, Kasie's a big girl, now."

"You don't understand. He's a rock star, for crying out loud. Can you imagine our Kasie falling for a rock star?" John nearly shouted. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't be taking this out on you. I just feel so damned helpless. Okay, look, I'll level with you. I ran a check on this Rick Springer fella. And on the surface he looks okay, but I dug a little deeper and found out he has a violent temper. He's had a few fights, been arrested once. Of course, they covered that up from the press. I've got to find out if he's taken that temper out on Kasie. Until I know for sure, she's not marrying the son-of--"

"I can understand your concern, but..." Despite his resolve not to care, hairs on the back of Amory's neck raised at this news. Hitting a woman was about as low as they came in Chayton Amory's books. Rick Springer's name suddenly tasted like acid on his tongue.

"I've done my best to stay out of her life, since the day she walked out on us, but I'm still her father. I love her."

John's voice broke again. Chayton cleared his throat and adjusted his stance. The emotion in John's voice had Chayton feeling downright guilty for not wanting to do this for the man. The break in John's voice was real, and clarified his position.

"I'm sure Ava's taken advantage of the fact that she's controlling things. I expect she was the one that convinced Kasie to change her name to Moore, Ava's maiden name. I never thought Kasie would go that far to be rid of me. I mean, I raised that kid, not Ava."

"I know, John. And you did a good job. Don't berate yourself for that. But she's a grown woman, and sometimes we can't change things, even if they are for the better."

"Look, I don't care if you have to hog tie and drag her to get her up there, just do it." When Amory didn't respond, John continued. "I don't know if this is right or wrong, Chayton. She may never forgive me for it. I only know I can't stand by and do nothing."

His concern was genuine, Chayton knew that much. No one loved his kid like John. "She's my only daughter, just like you're the closest I've had to a son. I'd do the same for you if you were in a bad position."

"I appreciate that, but I don't think you realize what you're asking me to do."

"Aw, I know how it gets under your skin, but that was a long time ago. I know this puts you in a awkward position, but I'm concerned for her safety now."

"Look, maybe she'll walk out on him."

"I aim to see she does."