Prologue

He was going to die anyway. That's what the doctor in Denver had told him three weeks ago. So what if it was by hanging instead of consumption? Why did it matter how he died? He was dead anyway. "Wallace, food's here," came the curt, cold tone of the Deputy and Wallace watched as his plate was slammed onto the concrete ground just on the inside of his cell. The food looked downright revolting and Wallace sniffed and scowled as he sat up on his cot and rubbed at his aching bones. He never should have set foot in Colorado. He should have just kept on riding until he hit a new town, a town far away from Colorado Springs. But Wallace always got what he wanted. Or so he thought.

"Blasted female doctor," he muttered under his breath. He reached for his plate and began wolfing down his food. Food was food. He needed to eat. It was disgusting. It was garbage. Wallace cleaned his plate anyway and then he reared back and threw his plate as hard as he could out of the cell. It hit the Deputy, who was seated at his desk, on his shoulder with a resounding crack and Wallace grinned as the Deputy bellowed and staggered to his feet. Wallace let out a loud belch for good measure as the Deputy reached the bars of his cell. Red-faced, fuming, the Deputy snarled, "You are lucky you are hanging by the end of the week or so help me God I would kill you myself?" "I'm dying anyways," Wallace said with a shrug. "I would make it hurt more, last longer," The Deputy hissed, "I would make damn sure you suffered until you were begging me to end it. You are a lying, thieving, sorry excuse of a man and it gives me damn pleasure to put that rope around your neck in four days. I'm counting them down Wallace, I am counting them down!" "Why don't you try calming down instead of counting down?" Wallace drawled in a lazy tone. "What?" "Well, I reckon with the way you're breathing hard and with your face as red as a tomato you may be dead long before me. So you better calm down." The Deputy took a deep breath, his eyes still shooting daggers at Wallace and then he turned and walked away. Wallace made a rude gesture and then collapsed onto his cot and put his hands behind his head. "Stupid injun," he growled into the sudden silence, "Blasted female doc. Michaela, I hope you shed a tear for me when I hang. I still think about you," he whispered, "I dream about you. All the time. I'll dream about you tonight. I hope you dream about me." He let out a deep, raspy cough and rolled over onto his side. "Yessiree, I dream about you. You're so beautiful, Michaela," Wallace breathed out and then curled himself into a ball on his cot, closed his eyes and went to sleep.
"I'm going to get Sully." "No... " Michaela whispered, "I'm all right." She slowly sat up and groaned. Once again she was the center of attention as all of Grace's customers were watching her warily. Michaela let out a slow breath and began climbing to her feet. "I'm sending someone to get Sully," Grace said firmly. "No," Michaela replied. "Don't argue with me Dr Mike. You've been feeling poorly for a few days now, haven't you?" "I'm just tired," Michaela said, impatience creeping into her tone. "I'm going back to the clinic. I promise I will have Colleen send for Sully to come and take me home," She lied just to pacify Grace and the ears of the eavesdroppers in the café. Grace still looked worried but she finally nodded, her hands twisting a white dish cloth fretfully. Michaela gave a half-hearted wave and left. She headed back towards the clinic willing the dizziness and weakness to go away. This was the last thing she needed. She was a doctor. She had a family. She was too busy caring for her patients and for her husband and children. Besides, she could diagnose herself and she knew she was just tired. She had survived a horrible event a few weeks ago and she was emotionally and physically exhausted. It would pass. Colleen glanced up from the desk as Michaela let herself inside the clinic. "How is Mrs Gregory feeling?" Michaela asked, swallowing hard. "She's feeling much better. The medicine is helping," Colleen replied. "Good," Michaela said, "She can go home in a few days." Michaela put a hand to her forehead and leaned slightly back against the wall. Colleen frowned at her and then got to her feet. "Ma, are you all right?" "I'm fine," Michaela managed. "You don't look fine. You don't look well at all. I knew something was wrong," Colleen said worriedly. Michaela shook her head slightly and tried to force a smile. It didn't work. Nausea was now clawing at her stomach and she could not escape the inevitable. Barely suppressing a moan and clamping a hand over her mouth, Michaela staggered over to a basin that was sitting on the examining table, leaned over and was violently ill. "Ma!" Colleen hurried over to her and grabbed her hair, pulling it away from her face. She rubbed her back as Michaela heaved with each spasm. When she was finished, Michaela leaned back against Colleen who supported her weight and led her over to a chair. "Don't move," Colleen ordered softly. She went over to a pitcher and poured water onto a cloth and soaked it through, she brought it over to Michaela and began sponging her face and neck with it and Michaela moaned weakly. "I'm taking you upstairs and you are getting in bed to rest. No arguments," Colleen said sternly when Michaela made a sound of protest. "Come on. Let's get you to bed." Michaela gave a sigh of defeat and allowed herself to be cared for as Colleen helped her stand and forced her to lean against her as they headed for the stairs. Michaela really did feel awful and by the time they reached the second floor, she was desperate to crawl into bed and sleep. Colleen got her settled and then disappeared for a few minutes only to reappear with a fresh washcloth and now clean basin which she set next to her on the nightstand. "Ma, I'll be right downstairs. Please get some rest. I will come check on you soon." "Thank you Colleen," Michaela whispered. Colleen brushed her hand across her forehead and smiled before leaving the room and closing the door behind her. Michaela lay, there, her stomach churning, her fingers clutching the blanket in desperation. The dizziness was blinding and she squeezed her eyes shut and tried to force herself to relax. Finally, after what seemed like hours, she fell into a deep, troubled sleep. The smell was absolutely delicious. It was mouth-watering. And it was to relax. Finally, after what seemed like hours, she fell into a deep, troubled sleep. The smell was absolutely delicious. It was mouth-watering. And it was

"Why Sully, I didn't expect to see you over here." "You didn't?" "No. I thought you would be at the clinic. "Well, I'm on my there. I just wanted to get a piece of Michaela's favorite pie and take it to her." Grace's eyes widened slightly. "Grace, is something wrong?" Sully's smiled had faded and concern darkened his eyes. Grace cleared her throat. She began to furiously cut out two slices of pie and put them on a tin plate. "No, No I guess nothing's wrong. I just thought you might have seen Dr Mike before you came here." It was meant to be a statement and not a question but Sully took it that way. He folded his arms across his chest. "No I haven't seen her since she left this morning. Something I should know?" He asked. "It's not my place," Grace blurted out. She turned and handed him the plate with two pieces of fresh pie. "Grace... " "Now Sully, she told me she was going to have you come and take her home. I was just surprised to see you here. Besides, I'm sure she's fine now and-" "What?" Sully's sharp tone cut into her explanation and Grace broke off and stared at him wide-eyed. "Grace, what happened?" Sully demanded. "I don't think she will want any pie. She hasn't eaten any of my cooking during lunch in three days. I know she's been feeling poorly. I can tell. She promised me she was going to tell you... " Grace broke off again as Sully shoved the plate of pie back into her hands and without a word, turned and headed for the clinic leaving.
Grace staring after him. Colleen flipped the page on the medical book she was reading and then jumped and gave a cry of surprise as the clinic door was suddenly thrown open, causing her to knock her book to the floor. "Sully," Colleen gasped, her hand to her chest, "You scared me." "Where's your Ma?" Sully's voice was slightly curt and abrupt and Colleen retrieved her book and then looked up at him, her eyes narrowing. "She's upstairs sleeping." Sully headed for the door that led to second floor and Colleen followed closely behind him. He all but ran up the stairs and came to a stop outside her door. She was sound asleep with her hands clasped on the pillow, her breathing slow and even, her lips slightly parted. She looked like an angel. Sully felt some of the worry leave him as he let out the breath he didn't realize he was holding. She was here. She was okay. She wasn't hurt or missing. She was here. He turned to glance at Colleen who had walked over to lay a cool hand gently on Michaela's forehead. Colleen smiled with what was apparent relief. Sully gestured to the hallway and after a moment she followed. He shut the door quietly behind her and then turned and gave full focus towards his adopted daughter. "Colleen, what happened today?" He asked quietly. "I'm not sure. She had left for lunch at Grace's but when she got back it was clear that she wasn't feeling well. She looked pale and then she became ill. When her stomach calmed down I was able to get her upstairs and she went to sleep. That's all I know. But she isn't running a fever. That's a good sign." Sully glanced at the closed door, his eyes clouded with concern, worry sharpening his rugged features. Colleen placed her hand on his arm. "I'm sure she's fine," She said quietly, "I think she's just overdoing it. She just needs to rest. Why don't you go on over to Grace's and have a piece of pie? I'll come and get you when she wakes up." Sully glanced down at Colleen and had the grace to look slightly sheepish. "I was just at Grace's. She's the reason I came over here. She told me Michaela wasn't feeling well. I handed her the pie back and headed this way." Sully sighed. "I feel bad for walking out on Grace like that. I'll go back." He hesitated. "I hate to leave her," He confessed. "I promise she won't be alone," Colleen assured him. "Now go eat a piece of Grace's pie. You're going to hurt her feelings." Sully smiled. He hugged her briefly and then headed back downstairs. Colleen watched him go. She opened the door back up slowly to check on her Ma and was relieved to see she was still sleeping. She hoped her Ma only needed rest. She couldn't admit to Sully that her stomach was full of butterflies, uneasiness was beginning to claw at her and Colleen just kept on forcing it back down. Ma was fine. She just needed rest. She was over-worked, tired and still dealing with the aftermath of her kidnapping a few weeks ago. She needed to rest. Colleen began to close the door to head back downstairs but the uneasiness she was feeling was winning and surrendering, she finally walked inside the room and took the chair that was in the corner facing the bed so she could be close by her Ma in case she was needed.

Chapter 3

Two days. Two days until his death and he could not summon the strength to care. His consumption had him bedridden since yesterday and he spent his time coughing up blood and dreaming of his beautiful doctor. She haunted his dreams, his thoughts and even now he was beginning to see her when he was awake. It had to be his illness. He was hallucinating. He didn't give a damn. Wallace leaned over the side of his cot and retched and spat fresh red blood into the basin the Deputy had finally provided for him. He fell back onto his pillow, his eyes bright with fever and his complexion gray and sweaty. "Two days," Came the gleeful voice on the other side of the jail. Wallace flicked his gaze to the bars and he saw the Deputy leaning against the wall, watching him. "Two days and you will be swinging from the end of a rope," The Deputy said. He was smiling. Wallace made a rude gesture. The Deputy's smile widened. He pushed away from the wall and walked away but not before letting out a bark of laughter. Wallace closed his eyes. His lungs felt like they were on fire as he struggled with each ragged breath. The desperate need to draw in fresh air was threatening to consume him. "Just breathe easy," A soft voice whispered. Wallace's eyes flew open. She was there! His doc was sitting in the corner staring at him. Her mesmerizing brown eyes were filled with sadness. Sadness for him. He turned over on to his side and gaped at her in amazement. "You're here," He croaked. "Of course I am," She crooned. Wallace blinked. She didn't move. He let out a chuckle that turned into a harsh, rumbling cough. He spat blood again and then looked up at her. He grinned a tobacco-juiced, toothless grin. "My doc," He whispered. "My Wally," She whispered back. Wallace puckered his lips and made a kissing noise towards her which she reciprocated. "Sleep now," She said quietly. Wallace nodded and closed his eyes, already feeling his breathing slowing and the pain in his lungs abating. He didn't give a damn that he was to hang in two days. He didn't give a damn that he was a loathsome pig to the folks
in Colorado Springs and even here in Denver. What mattered was that his doc was sharing his jail cell and hallucinations be damned... He would take her in any way he could get. Wallace opened his eyes and glanced over in the corner. The Doc blew him a kiss and he grinned and then closed his eyes again. He fell asleep to the sound of her humming. Hey guys, I know this is short but I couldn't write anymore of this chapter. It's meant to be an update on this scoundrel and nothing more. I hate that I had to write Michaela in there as a hallucination but at least she is not there in person... ...for now. I am working on the next chapter and will update soon!