

STOP THE CLOCK by Cassie Swindon

EXCERPT

Kody swallowed hard and patted the side of his pants where he stored the engagement ring and pocket watch. When he had proposed to Raelyn for the seventh time, her face fogged over, and he wondered what was holding her back. Kody would still stand by her side if the baby was Phoenix's, so why was she so hesitant?

I know how much she loves me.

Kody walked to the back room and dug in the bottom of his emergency pack, a bag he kept full of supplies in case they needed to escape in a hurry. At the bottom, he felt the phone and pulled it out, pocketing the device before Raelyn or Liam spotted it.

“I need to go skin the deer.” He charged past them without meeting Raelyn’s eye. If she caught his gaze, she’d know in an instant that he had been hiding something from her for five months.

Usually, he thrived in the woods, yet tonight, the natural sounds under the brilliant, blue-mooned night turned unsettling. Squinting and shielding his eyes from the wind, Kody snuck through the frigid darkness. An owl hooted, and strong wings flapped, making him look up for the source, but he only saw stars freckling the night sky. Halfway down a hill, he tried to mask his footsteps but slipped and skidded to a spot he knew had cell reception. His body shivered, and muscles tightened together as if trying to cluster up into a ball.

The phone’s screen lit up. Kody rubbed his temple, then quickly dialed Dabbott’s number before changing his mind.

She picked up on the first ring. “Walsh?”

It was so good to hear someone from his team. “Yes. Are we clear to talk?”

“Roger, that. Are you safe?”

“Yes. I need info on Zohaib.”

“He’s two hours from your location.”

A giant knot formed in his throat. “Is he in custody?”

“No.” She paused. “We think Zohaib’s looking for Raelyn.”

Suddenly, visions swarmed the wintry scene like he was drowning in a drug of dreams. Agonizing memories jabbed his mind like the point of a spear. Raelyn laid in a pool of blood with a piece of metal sticking out of her stomach. The nightmare that had ripped him to pieces every single night for months returned, refusing to subside.

Kody shook his head.

It's not real. It's not real.

He clenched his jaw tightly. “That won’t happen. I won’t let Zohaib near Raelyn.”