

## Chapter 1

### A Taxing Day

Being tipped off by caller ID that it was his only sibling, Buck Cheyne smiled as he pressed the green “Accept” button. The person calling was one of his favorite people on earth. “Hey Sis.”

“Hi Buck. I didn’t expect to get you in person. What part of the globe are you traversing right now?”

“You were almost right,” Buck said. “If you’d called ten minutes earlier, you’d have gotten voicemail. I just wrapped up my final meeting, thank goodness. We’re headed to the airport.”

“We? Who’s with you?”

“The security guy. He’s driving.”

“Oh, okay. So, where did you say you were?”

“I didn’t yet,” Buck said with a snicker, “but I am delighted with your sudden interest in my whereabouts. I’m in Palo Alto, been here all week. I can tell you it’s been frustrating as hell, Sarah Margaret. I don’t know why I agreed to do yet another annual consult with the company I sold my computer game business to a decade ago. What are you up to? Everything okay?”

“I’m okay. Thornton and the kids are, too.” Buck detected a downward spiral in her tone. “I know it’s Friday afternoon and all, and you’ve probably got big weekend plans, but we need to talk. I’d prefer sooner than later. Can you call me Monday morning?”

“Sure I can. But aren’t you going to at least give me a hint at what’s bothering you? I can hear it in your voice. And you know I don’t like the suspense of not knowing details when I’m aware something’s up. Besides, where are you?”

“I’m at the office in Houston.”

“Still?”

“Yes. Thornton and I talked earlier. We agreed that I needed to let you know what is going on here at Cheyne Energy.”

“Our board meeting is next month...”

Sarah Margaret was exasperated and interrupted in a huff, “It can’t wait until next month, Buck. The IRS audit that has been going on for the last two weeks has taken an unforeseen direction. And it’s not good.”

“It rarely is with the IRS. I’m sure everything will be just fine,” Buck said.

Feeling somewhat patronized, Sarah Margaret snapped back, “You haven’t even heard what I need to say, Buck, and you’re being all Mister Optimistic. Call me first thing Monday, and I’ll fill you in.”

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to set you off. No, you’ve got my attention now, Sis. Tell me what’s going on.”

“They’re extending the audit further back, Buck. It’s something about how Mom and Dad set up the trust. One of the agents conducting the audit expressed concerns about it not being properly established, not allowed, and maybe even illegal.”

“Well, we know that’s bullshit,” Buck’s dander now up. “Mom and Dad always had the best lawyers.”

“I know... or I think I know that. Listening to our lawyers causes to me question if I know much of anything anymore though. They’re acting very defensive, Buck, vowing to fight this with everything they’ve got. Only problem with that is, it’s our money that pays their bills.”

“What have you heard from the Cheyne Energy lawyers that has you so concerned, Sarah Margarett?”

“That if the IRS goes forward and can prove their assertions, it could assess 40% of the value of the company at the time of Mom’s and Dad’s death, plus penalties and interest.”

“Dear god. That could amount to half the company’s total worth, maybe more.”

“Uh huh, and I’m not sure we could survive the cash flow hit either, Buck. Now you see why I’m so upset and can’t even sleep some nights.”

“I’m sorry, Sis.”

“Buck, they’re asking questions about the ranch, too.”

“Mom and Dad put Celtic Oaks Ranch under a separate trust, Sarah Margarett. I wonder what that has to do with anything related to Cheyne Energy.”

“I don’t know. But the IRS is probing. Our lawyers want to get Raul involved since he was the trustee. They want to find out exactly what he knows because he was directly involved with our parents at the time.”

“That makes sense. Have you talked with him yet?”

“No. I wanted to talk with you first. This company is half yours, Buck. I’m not comfortable authorizing the kind of money being bantered around that might be required to defend this thing. You have to be in the loop. I need you on this, Buck.” She dissolved into muffled sobs.

“I don’t want you to be so upset, Sis. We’ll get through this. You go on home, be with your family, and try to have a decent weekend. I’ll call Raul. Okay?”

“Okay. Thank you, Buck. I’m sorry to dump a mess on you like this.”

“Don’t you worry about me. We’ll talk later.”

