

Drama, risk, chaos and a fast-paced lifestyle present plenty of unexpected challenges for Rye Chandler, a handsome forty year old divorced race driver and race team manager while poised on the threshold of an intense season of professional sports car racing. Nothing in this business, he reasoned, could ever be left to chance then life happened.

It Was Never About The Race

by Laurie Burford

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It Was Never About The Race

A Sports Romance Novel by
Laurie Burford

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CHAPTER 1

“I’ll Give You Some Time To Process The News...
But We Need To Talk.”

February, 2017

On this particular morning Rye, a ruggedly handsome 34 year old with unkempt ash blonde hair, was seated in his office at his Spanish Colonial style home in Austin, Texas. Wearing distressed jeans, a vintage Offenhauser Indycar tee shirt, and Sperry Topsiders, he was watching the Bloomberg channel on his Notebook and scanning the Wall Street Journal when Olivia arrived. In less than two months, Olivia had become more of a personal assistant than a housekeeper although she performed both duties. She let herself in, stopped in the kitchen and made two cups of coffee then joined him in his office.

Olivia Vaughn, an attractive, middle-aged woman was introduced to Rye by his neighbor, an attorney and his wife who had hired her as a housekeeper. After just a few months of employment, Olivia found herself unemployed when they unexpectedly sold their house in order to move out of town to be closer to other family members.

They thought to ask Rye if he knew of anyone who might be interested in hiring the woman. In an impromptu interview with Olivia, Rye asked her why she would want such a job after noting on her résumé that she held a post graduate degree from the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University.

Her reply was that there were few job opportunities for middle-aged female pianists with arthritis.

Rye laughed at the notion and said, “First of all, I know not to try to guess your age — but you are probably on the younger side of Gen X and there are meds for aching joints.”

Olivia smiled and said, “I get my youthful appearance from my mother who was Indonesian and my aching fingers from my French father who had osteoarthritis. She wagged her fingers and said, “On the verge of sixty and these old digits do throb.” Rye made a decision on the spot to retain her services.

“Thanks for the coffee. How long have you been here?” Rye asked. She lied, “Long enough to see you emerge from the hot tub naked as a jaybird on this cold winter morning.” They sat in silence then he asked, “So what’s on your agenda for today?”

She shrugged and replied, “Aside from the usual chores, I need to hire a different maid service, one that shows up when they’re supposed to. Also, the water-heater guy is coming today, and I need to borrow your car that’s in the garage to get some fresh fruit and produce at Sprouts.”

Rye shrugged and asked, “Why there? Why not WalMart? So do whatever you think. Get my spare keys and my debit card from the top drawer in my desk and memorize my PIN number then take the VW Bug that’s in the garage. It may need gas. You’ll like it. It has an automatic. Also see what you can do about reserving a plane from Executive Air at Bergstrom...and insist on the Falcon rather than their old Citation. That would be nine a m on Thursday the fifteenth for a same-day turn-around to Atlanta. If he’s available, get Gary. Or Vince. And we don’t need a flight attendant.” Rye slowly rose to his feet. “I’m going to the shop — I should return around seven or eight so turn on a few lights and lock up when you leave. ”

Olivia stood and placed her hands on her hips and said, “Rye, I know it’s not my place to say anything, but after working here for nearly two months, I can’t help but think that you really need to amp up your social life. I mean, you work *all* the time. Maybe with a little effort on your part, you could find some hottie to put some gin in your tonic every once in awhile...”

Rye smiled and shook his head. “Point well taken, but I’m okay. Really. I actually talked with Ashley yesterday. As a matter of fact, I’m taking her to Belize for her birthday.”

Olivia narrowed her eyes and asked, “So when is her birthday?”

Rye slowly shook his head and said, “It’s sometime in...October. I think.”

Olivia laughed and said, “You are hopeless. It just so happens this is February!”

Rye nodded and said, “Well there’s that, plus she lives in New York City and whatever that’s all about, and I’m most definitely here.” He paused, then added, “I didn’t want to pry, but speaking of

social life, I can't help but notice that you seem to be in a major lock-down. I just assumed that you were recently divorced or something."

Olivia nodded and said, "Well... my first husband left me for one of his students and my second husband died as the result of a perscription drug overdose. That was four years, two months and a week ago."

Rye nodded and said, "Olivia, I am so sorry..." Olivia smiled and said, "Thank you, but I'm kind of getting over being sad and pissed off."

On the drive to work, Rye remembered that he had what could turn out to be an all-day meeting with someone who could help spike a sagging ledger for the company going into the second quarter. He looked forward to spending time with Sefan Engle, an American race driver with some fairly significant sponsorship money in his pocket. He thought about taking his guest to the country club for lunch, then he realized that he was dressed for working in the shop. No matter. He decided that a trendy barbeque joint would, in fact, be a better option. He reasoned that it was what many visitors to Austin expected. Rye drove his Audi A6 onto an expansive parking lot where there was a large Entegra motor home, a Freightliner tractor-trailer, an assortment of pickups, SUVs and sports cars. Behind a tall chain-link fence were two Porsche Cayman GT4 Clubsport MR racecars being loaded into a long covered trailer. There was a modest sign on a single story brick administrative building, that said "RIPLEY AUTOSPORTS" and three large industrial type steel buildings along with a long row of garages. On an adjacent compound, there was another building with a sign that said "RIPLEY MOTOR COMPANY".

When Rye entered the reception area of the admin building, the receptionist nodded toward a muscular young man who looked like he could be the leading man in an action movie. He wore a casually correct cognac worsted wool suit over an off-white shirt with a plum and sage polka dot silk tie. He approached Rye and held out his hand. "Stefan Engle...and you are Rye Chandler!"

Rye smiled and shook the man's hand. "Good to see you...always great to meet and chat with an A-list race driver. I'm sorry I wa tardy.

I trust that Brigitte offered you some refreshment..." Stefan nodded and said, "Yes, and we were discussing the possibility of a tour of Austin's famous 6th Street next time I'm in town..." The receptionist shook her head in denial.

Rye nodded and remarked, "Miss Anders is a 6th Street regular so you'd be in good hands." He glanced at the chronograph on his wrist and said, "Perhaps we should begin your visit with a peek at our modest but cabin-class facilities and I can introduce you to some of our people..."

At that moment, a large man with over-the-ears length gray hair and a neatly trimmed salt and pepper beard, peering over wire-rim reading glasses entered the room from an adjacent office and offered his hand to the young man. "Jack Ripley. Welcome to the original Ripley Traveling Shit Circus on Wheels!"

Rye nodded and said, "This poor chap acts like he owns and runs the place...so we try to humor him."

Jack smiled and said, "You two go on the VIP tour and I'll catch up with you later."

Along with his career as a successful sports car race driver, Rye had managed to earn an MBA from Brown University. Upon graduation, he joined a successful motorsports marketing firm headquartered in Manhattan that had clients in various pro open-wheel car and sports car racing series. As a result, when he joined Ripley Autosports as a marketing manager, he was also being compensated by sponsors as a driver.

Entering the race prep shop, Rye said, "This is our racecar man cave. There is another shop next door that is for servicing customer street and track sports cars. It's called Ripley Motor Company. The third building is mostly for inventory and storage. There is also a row of twelve individual garages that are rented out to club racers."

On the shop floor, engineers and technicians were huddled over computer monitors and mechanics were attending to a trio of Porsche 911 GT3Rs that were shoulder high on work stands. They had been stripped of wheels, some body parts and various mechanical components.

Rye said, "Those cars are brand new, built by the factory. These days, as you know, it's easier and cheaper to buy a factory racecar

than buy a new street car and strip it out and convert it into a racer. We actually have a buyer for these cars at the end of the season.”

“So you folks know how to clean up after yourselves!” said Stefan.

“Right. It will be a good deal for the club-racer buyer and great for us because we will take delivery on two and perhaps three of the new GT2 RS cars. The car with the Aquis Bottled Water graphics will be my car this season. The other car in primer white is available for a new sponsor. The third car with the Mondiale Tour Group graphics is for Eamon McKenna, an Irishman from the U.K. You may have met him last season. He will drive that car in just the first Pirelli World Challenge event at St. Petersburg due in part to his commitment to another team entered in both the Blancpain Sprint and World Endurance Cup Series. The other reason he is doing just one event this year is because he missed a race last year due to an injury suffered in a hang gliding accident in the Alps and we agreed to extend his sponsored ride to the first event of this season. The yellow car on the set-up tray with the colorful Dos Ochos Tequilla graphics is a new Ligier JS P217 Le Mans Prototype, an LMP 2 car being prepped for a Mexican customer. That car will see combat in the IMSA WeatherTech series, starting with Sebring. There are a couple of Porsche Caymen GT4 MRs in trailers from last season that we have sold and are about to be delivered, one to a Canadian and the other to a New York club racer...a retired orthodontist I think.”

“Where in hell would we be without them and recently divorced hedge fund managers?” said Stefan.

The staccato chatter of an impact wrench occasionally interrupted the rockabilly music that boomed from a radio. Stefan asked, “Are these the same people that crew at the races?”

Rye said, “Yes, plus some who work in the Ripley Motor Company garage on customer high-end street and track sports cars and of course we add ‘over-the-wall’ people when we need them. Two of our truck drivers are also tire changers and the wife of the motor home driver is in charge of catering and few people on the planet can prepare ribs as well as her husband. Somehow, we make it all happen and every now and then, we win a race.”

Stefan nodded. "I'm aware of your record this last season. You must be doing something right. I trust you do get some factory support...is that true?"

Rye replied, "Yes...but any help we get is available to other private Porsche teams as well."

Rye took Stefan to a meeting room that featured large black and white photos of the race team along with a huge trophy case. Rye waved his hand at the impressive graphics and fixtures. "All that graffiti and Cheeze Whiz is for tourists, various girlfriends, potential sponsors and for those of us who admit to having an ego."

Stefan nodded and said, "Ditto on that." The two men sat down at a large conference table. "Jack will join us in a minute. I just want to be clear that you have expressed some interest in joining us as a funded driver for the coming season. Is that correct?" Stefan smiled and nodded in agreement, then he asked, "And your position here is that of a driver as well as a team manager?" Rye laughed and said, "I'm glad you asked. I do a little of both. I'm not sure why but I'd be hard pressed to find employment this cool elsewhere, so I do as I'm told." At that moment, Jack entered the conference room carrying a folder full of documents and a large binder. "I don't expect us to set anything in stone today — however here's a preliminary proposal and some blank contracts for your review and for your people and sponsors to look at. I have to say I'm surprised that you chose to meet with us without your agent or someone representing your sponsor."

Stefan shrugged and said, "Actually, they don't know I'm here. I wanted to explore my options on my own before I put them in the loop or before I signed anything..."

Jack smiled and said "Well, Mr. Engle, I know from experience that race drivers always tend to be in a hurry and I wouldn't want to miss an opportunity by being too tentative..."

Jack was interrupted when the receptionist appeared in the doorway. Jack said, "Brigitte, no calls unless it's my personal trainer." Stefan smiled and Jack, who was clearly forty pounds overweight, said, "Kidding..." She nodded and said, "It's an urgent call for Rye. I'm sorry..." Rye shook his head and apologized for the interruption. "If you'll excuse me, I'll take this call in my office."

Rye figured that it would be Olivia calling about her inability to book a plane or to approve replacing the water heater as suggested by the service repairman."

He sat down at his desk and said, "Okay, what's happening?"

A female voice he did not recognize said, "Rye? Is that you?"

Rye sat in silence for a few moments then said in a tentative voice, "Yes...who's this?"

"It's Jessica. Jessica from Dallas..."

"Jessica?"

"I didn't want to call you but I felt I had to..."

"Holy Christ! Jess!"

"I'm truly sorry to bother you...but I had to call..."

"Jessica. Dear God. How are you? Are you all right? Is everything okay?"

"Everything is fine. Really okay."

"I'm not believing this! How long has it been? Fourteen...fifteen years?"

"Eighteen."

"And are you in Dallas? Still?"

"Yes."

"And how are your folks? I'm not so sure they approved of me back in the day..."

The woman on the phone laughed. "You're right. And they're fine."

Rye stood up and started to pace around his office. "Look, I really want to talk to you and catch up — but I'm kind of in the middle of a meeting..."

"Sure. We can talk later, but there's something you should know..."

"Okay..."

"You...how do I say this...have a son." There was a long silence, then, "Rye...are you there?"

"What? I have a son? How can that be?" A pause, then, "Really? No?" A nervous laugh, then, "No way..."

"I got pregnant just before you left for Connecticut to go to school. I felt you'd never have gone if I had told you that I was expecting. So I didn't say anything."

“Oh, God...oh dear God.” There was silence while Rye collected his thoughts.

“You’re right. I would have stayed with you...you must know that I would have wanted that!” Rye perched on his desk and slouched over. “So, now you’re telling me that I have a son who is, what, seventeen? Wow! If you want child support or something, let’s talk! I can do that!”

“I don’t expect any money...my husband is pretty well off and my parents have been very generous but I do need your help in another way.”

“Dammit, Jessica! Why couldn’t you have said something? Can you tell me what my son’s name is? Can you at least tell me that?”

“Rye, if you’re going to be an ass about this, we can end this conversation right here and now!”

“His name. You were going to tell me his name...”

At that moment, Jack looked into Rye’s office and asked, “Rye...is everything okay? It’s not like you to leave an important meeting like this...I hope that it’s at least Roger Penske you’re talking to.” Rye held a hand over his phone and apologized. “I’ll be with you in just a moment. I’ll explain later.” Jack nodded and left.

“Jess...is the kid okay? I mean what the fuck!”

“God, you haven’t changed. Dawson is fine.”

“Dawson? Who is that? Are you married?”

“Yes.”

“What’s his first name? The kid’s...not his.”

“Dawson. His name is Dawson Sims. My husband’s last name is Sims.”

“Holy shit! My kid’s name is Dawson? Are you insane?”

“Look, I’ll give you some time to process the news. But we need to talk.”

“Does this Dawson person know about me?”

“Yes.”

“Look, you’re right. I need some time. And I’m in the middle of a meeting. I’ve got to go... I’ll call you later today...I promise!”

“Okay. Please do. Carson and I will look forward to it.”

“Who in the hell is Carson?”

“My husband....”

“Your husband. Your husband Carson. Jessica! For sure...I will call you this evening...”

Rye took a few moments to redirect his thoughts to the meeting, then he rejoined Jack and Stefan in the conference room. Jack looked at Rye and raised his hands. In response to Jack’s inquisitive gesture, Rye nodded at Jack and said, “I’ll fill you in later.”

He turned to Stefan and apologized for the interruption. Rather than sitting at the table, he wandered around the room. Looking at Stefan, he said, “On most occasions, we provide a racecar, car preparation, crew, and a host of other amenities to a funded driver. Quite often, a driver comes to us with sponsorship money that is woefully inadequate to fund a season of racing at this level. There have been times when we have hired a driver because we have sponsorship funds available...but quite often that’s not the case. As I understand it, you would be racing under your sponsor’s banner but as a Ripley Autosports entry and that works for us.”

He reminded Stefan that the team intended to run the entire Pirelli World Challenge schedule with the first event in March at the Grand Prix of St. Petersburg, Florida — so if he decided to do something, it would have to happen quickly. Rye asked Jack if he had anything to add and he responded with a headshake. “Jack and I would like for you to spend as much time as possible today with Kasei Tamura, our chief engineer and fill-in crew chief for whenever I drive. He’s the guy you would be working with on car set-up and all that.” The three men shook hands and Jack led Stefan to Kasei’s office.

When Jack returned to his office, Rye was waiting for him. “I need you to do something for me,” said Rye. Jack shrugged and nodded. “Anything. You’re the man.....but first, didn’t you think it was strange that Engle would show up here without any of his people?”

Rye shook his head and said, “Not really. I think this pop in and pop out is just testing the water for him. He is fully aware that we’re not the only whore in the lumber camp. Not after the season he just had. There’s got to be other teams he’s talking to so I think at this point he probably didn’t feel he needed an agent or an attorney with him at eight hundred bucks an hour...”

Jack paused, then said. "I truly don't pay you enough. I'm glad I didn't make an ass out of myself and push a pen in front of him..."

Rye said "You realize he's interviewing us but at some point, we would have to check him out as well...after all, if he comes onboard, he needs to be a good fit for our team."

Jack sat down at his desk and said, "Okay...your turn. Do I need my checkbook?"

Rye grimaced and replied, "I'm afraid it's not that easy. That phone call I took during the meeting was a really big deal." Jack studied Rye's face and leaned forward. "Dammit Rye...it's that woman you hired! The one who makes your steel-cut oatmeal in the morning and who starches your shorts! I knew it! She has taken over your entire life! What's she want? A paid vacation? An annuity?"

Rye nodded, "I'm sure she wants all of that...but that's not what we're talking about here." He paused and continued. "I just found out that I'm a dad. I've got a son."

Jack leaned back in his chair and slapped his knees and chuckled, then he whispered, "Even at your age, you should've used protection...I'm just sayin'..."

Rye continued. "This happened eighteen years ago...I didn't know about it until now."

Jack grimaced. "Shit! Is she looking for back child support?"

Rye replied, "No. She's got money. Her parents own an entire high-rise in downtown Dallas and she says her husband...Carson, does all right. The thing is that the kid knows about me and wants to meet up." Rye paused. "I need a little quiet time to think about this, so I need a favor. Please take Stefan and Kasei to lunch at the club. I was going to do it but you'd be better company plus I'm not dressed properly."

Jack nodded and said, "Sure...Jesus, Rye... anything else?"

Rye headed for the door, then turned and said, "Yeah, one other thing. See if you can get Brigitte to join you guys." Jack asked, "Our Brigitte?" Rye replied, "Yeah. She and Stefan are both single and I know she is an avid birdwatcher and it's hard to believe but...it just so happens that our man Stefan is a member of the American Birding Association!" Rye started out the door and stopped then added with a

grin, “And...I’m not sure, but I believe I picked up on a bit of organic chemistry going on between the two.”

Rye returned to his office thinking about the call he would receive sometime after the lunch hour. It would be Jack all pissed off about the fact that the bird-watching thing was just complete bullshit that Rye made up. He would add that it should come as no surprise to Rye that he just learned from another co-worker that Brigitte is engaged.

Rye switched on his computer. He Googled the name Carson Sims. He muttered under his breath, “Okay, just who in the hell is this guy?” After a short search, he found Sims to be the founder and chief executive officer of Sims Capital Partners, a well known assets management and investment company. It occurred to Rye that such a company would possibly be in the thick of sourcing and providing funds for buyouts and startups, and perhaps a key-holder to an entire vault of potential sponsors for Ripley Autosports. Rye smiled at the thought of Carson Sims providing sponsorship funds for Ripley Autosports...then he dismissed the idea as being far too unlikely.

Later in the afternoon, Rye dropped Stefan off at the airport and told him that he would love to send a plane for him and his agent and the key people from his personal sponsor, Sundial Bay Yachts, a large custom yacht builder headquartered in Portsmouth, Virginia. He added that along with the preliminary proposal and sample contract provided by Jack, he would follow up with a personal presentation if they expressed interest.

Rye decided he would not wait for a response from Stefan. He would call in two days and request that Stefan introduce he and Jack to his sponsor since they had plans to be on the east coast for an unrelated meeting (which was not entirely true.) With Stefan’s permission along with his unspoken but implied endorsement, Rye would make an appointment to meet with the management team at Sundial Bay.

Although it was a short drive from Austin’s Bergstrom Airport to Ripley Autosports, it was nearly five p.m. when Rye returned. He decided to work until around seven or eight before going home, thereby avoiding Austin’s notorious rush hour traffic snarls. There were letters to write, some invoices to okay and general office

housekeeping chores. He made some coffee and sat down at his desk. It was dark in his office, but he didn't turn on the lights. He sat in complete silence for a while. He wondered what Jessica would look like when he saw her after an eighteen year absence. He remembered her picture-book smile and how she usually wore her raven colored hair in a pony-tail. The first time he saw her, he marveled at her confident demeanor and classic beauty. He was sure that by now, she would have changed from a pretty girl into a beautiful woman. And now there was Dawson.

He wondered if the boy favored her features or his. He took a deep breath, and leaned back in his chair. It was quiet in his office but he could hear the faint buzz of traffic on the Interstate. He realized that he was probably not going to accomplish any significant amount of paperwork so he folded his notebook computer and stuffed it into a large backpack. He had memos to write as well as a team status report and update to several associate sponsors. It was all busywork he could do at home.

For some reason, he felt a need to walk to the storage building and look at his father's car...something he had avoided doing for over a year. He entered the dark building and switched on the main bank of overhead florescent lights. In the middle of the floor amid various crates, boxes and auto body parts was the shape of a car under large cloth tarp. Rye walked up to the car and pulled off the cover to reveal a dusty red '93 Porsche RS America coupe.

His father and mother perished late in the evening on March 5th of 1996 when their turboprop Piper Cheyenne aircraft went down in the Pike National Forest near Colorado Springs. They were attempting to return to Fort Worth from a skiing trip to Aspen when it happened. The cause of the crash is still a mystery. Rye was fourteen years old at the time and was not with his parents because he was a participant in some school activity, one that he could no longer recall. After the accident, he was sent to live with his Aunt who lived in Dallas.

He looked at the old Porsche and remembered riding with his dad when they would go for spirited drives south from Fort Worth into the Hill Country. He remembered the driving lessons and the first time he was allowed to drive at speed on an abandoned ranch road called "The Serpent." He thought about sitting in the car...but decided not

to. He remembered when strangers sold off his parent's estate and assets, he had made a tearful plea with them to not sell his dad's car, but they did anyway. Years later, Rye was able to track down the car and buy it when his trust fund was no longer handled by his father's attorney. Unfortunately, he found the Porsche to be in a state of negligent disrepair. Faced with paying much of the cost of an Ivy School education and the desire to rent formula car rides in Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) races, an acute shortage of funds caused him to put the car in storage in various locations until the car finally wound up in the storage building on Ripley Autosports property. Now, looking at the car, he decided that someday soon, he would write up a work order to have the technicians at Ripley Motor Company restore it to its former beauty.

In the refurbished Porsche, he would introduce Dawson to Track Days at Circuit Of The Americas (COTA) in Austin, and perhaps even The Serpent. He covered the car, switched off the overhead lights and left the building. He smiled and felt good about his decision. In fact, he felt very good...better, in fact than he had felt in months.

CHAPTER 2

Your Wife Is Welcome. Have You Told Her?

When Rye entered his living room, he was surprised to find Olivia seated at the kitchen table working a New York Times crossword puzzle. At first neither spoke then she motioned for him to join her at the table. “Mr. Ripley called me and thought it would be a good idea if I was here when you got home. He told me...”

Rye nodded and made them each a cup of coffee.

“Are you okay?” she asked. Rye nodded and said, “Yeah...thanks. You really didn’t have to stay...”

Olivia interrupted and said, “Give me a six letter word for courage ending in ‘e’....”

Rye said, “Mettle.”

Olivia said, “Thanks, smart ass...”

They sat together in silence for a while then Olivia said, “You’ll be just fine. Your son will come and visit and it will be lots of fun.” She reached over and patted his shoulder and stood up. “You must be famished,” she said. “I’ll bet you had no lunch and you probably didn’t stop at McDonald’s on the way home.”

Rye shrugged and said, “I’m really okay. I’ll just throw together some beef stroganoff or sous vide lamb rack or a grilled cheese sandwich. But what about you? You probably haven’t had dinner...am I right?” Olivia didn’t respond. Rye nodded and said, “Come on. We’re going to go to Groucho’s Grabit ‘n Growl Rib Shack for a bite then I’ll run you home. We’ll even have some of their famous pecan pie.”

Olivia smiled and nodded. “You don’t have to...”

“Oh yes I do!” exclaimed Rye. “If you drove, I guess you can follow me in your car.”

Olivia looked surprised. “Did you see a car in your driveway? No? Then you must know I didn’t drive here...I walked. I’m less than a mile down the road. It’s why I wanted to borrow your car to grocery shop...”

Rye looked surprised. "I thought that maybe somebody took you back and forth to work. So even when it rains...you walk from your place to mine?"

She nodded. "No big deal...I love to walk."

"Do you have a car?" asked Rye.

She replied, "Yes...well no. I actually share a car with Audrey, my seventeen year old roommate. We're pretty close. She just happens to have a Mini Cooper with a good 'ol manual transmission. It's really her dad's car. She drives it back and forth to high school, so during the day I walk."

Rye chuckled and shook his head. "I didn't know you had a roommate. A teenager with a Mini with a manual! You are full of surprises. Is she your child?" Olivia shook her head. Her parents are both good friends and they are on a Fulbright Lecture and Research Scholarship in Western Europe until this summer, so for now she's my kid.

As they walked to Rye's car, his expression darkened. He whispered "Thanks for caring about what happens around here."

It was nearly ten p.m. when Rye returned home. He slouched into an overstuffed chair that clearly did not fit the rest of the very chic designer décor of the room. He switched on the TV and started to watch an interview with a member of the House Intelligence Committee on a cable news channel. He started to fall asleep. He drank some coffee and decided he could not put it off any longer. He had to call Jess. Jessica Tyler...now Jessica Sims. Maybe Carson or even Dawson would answer. Dear God. Then what? He reasoned that the number he had was probably her own phone— so she would most likely answer.

He turned down the volume on the TV but left the image of talking heads. He picked up his phone and punched in the number. The phone buzzed three or four times.

Then her voice. "Honey, I think it's him...Hello?"

"Hello. You're right. It's me. I hope it's not too late..."

"Not at all. Thanks for calling...Rye, we were wondering if sometime soon and you were in Dallas...perhaps we could all meet. Your wife is welcome. Have you told her?"

"There is no longer a wife. Tiffany ran off with either her therapist or orthodontist, I can't remember which."

"Rye, I am so sorry..."

"Don't be. I should have offered to pay for their honeymoon... anyway that happened five or six or seven years ago. I don't have plans to be in Dallas, but I can pop on up whenever it's good for you, unless I'm away from Austin."

"Oh..." A pause...then, "A weekend would be best for us...so you choose."

"I'm looking at my calendar. Actually, this weekend would work. Is that okay?"

In her muffled voice, "Carson...this weekend...is that okay?" Silence, then, "Yes..."

"But I'd like to talk with Dawson now...unless you think he wouldn't want that..."

"Wait..." A long silence...then, "He's coming down from his room..."

Rye waited for a long time and nearly hung up, then there was the voice of a young male.

"Hello?"

"Dawson?"

"Yes." A pause, then Rye heard hushed voices. *"Mom. What do I call him? That's up to you, Dear. Call him Dad. Mister Chandler. Rye. Whatever..."*

Dawson returned to the phone and said, "Sorry...Mister Chandler?"

"Yes."

"I followed you on TV. I watched you win in your class last year at Watkins Glen...and the interview... and I saw those commercials where you were telling people not to text and drive."

"Some of my better moments...so I guess you're in high school...are you into sports?"

"Well, that's a tough one. Yes...but not at school."

"How are your grades?"

"The best except for Latin. I don't know why I'm even taking the class..."

"Can you drop it?"

“No. I graduate in three and a half months...so I’ll hang in there...”

“I’m looking forward to meeting you!”

“Me too!”

“Can I talk with your Mom?”

“Sure...”

“Hi...”

“I’ll call before I come to Dallas. I’ll need an address.”

“That will work. I’ll text I to you.”

“Can you tell me what prompted your getting in touch with me?”

“Well, your son is balking at attending college next Fall. He thinks he would rather become a race driver like his real dad instead of a businessman like Carson...his words.”

“Okay. That’s probably a really bad idea!”

“Exactly.”

“So, you want me to come up there and tell him to go to college and forget racing?”

“That’s pretty much it.”

“Why not convince him that he can do both? I did!”

“That would be okay, but Carson is dead set against auto racing on many levels and he won’t support it. He’s an avid golfer...”

“Thanks for the heads up. Reaching your husband may be the real challenge.”

“I think you’re right”.

“And you...what do you think?”

“You did it all...I believe he can too...but I’m staying out of this battle.”

Rye laughed and said, “So game on...” There was silence then Rye continued, “Jess, I’m curious. How long has Dawson known about me? When did you tell him?”

Jessica replied, “I think he began to question his identity when he was around six or seven. Carson and I both have dark hair and Carson has sort of an olive skin tone. Dawson has fair complexion, blue eyes and blonde hair. At that time, Carson and I decided to tell Dawson that he was adopted. That worked until a few years ago when he got into some of my stuff and found pictures of you and I together at our senior prom. He also found my old diary. Then there was my High

School Annual. You two really look alike. About that time, he began to see you on TV. One day he shocked Carson and I when he came right out and asked us if you were his dad. We couldn't believe it."

"So did he want to meet me or anything after that?"

"Yes. He was aware that you did not know about him...so he had some reservations about meeting you. I guess he was afraid of how you would react...In any case, we knew the day would probably come when I'd have to tell you."

"And how is Carson taking this?"

"Dawson was almost two years old when Carson and I got married so he was always aware that you had no knowledge that you had a son. He and I agree that your meeting him is long overdue. And that's our fault. We know that."

Rye said, "It's not your fault. You both always had Dawson's best interest at heart."

Jessica said, "Thanks for understanding..."

Rye and Jessica did not speak for a long time...then Jessica said, "Ciao..."

"Wow! You used to say that back when..."

There was another long pause, then she whispered, "Take care, Rye..."

Rye turned up the volume on the TV if for no other reason than to prevent the room from seeming so empty. He wondered if Jessica and Dawson would be on Facebook. Although he was curious, he decided not to pursue an on-line search. He felt that seeing his son for the very first time on a computer monitor would not be a good thing.

CHAPTER 17

We Don't Have Any Social Behavior

It was after one in the morning when Rye gave up on trying to sleep. He got up and made some coffee then put on his 'Concert by the Sea' Erroll Garner album. Next he went into his office where he pulled a standard cover letter, proposal and contract from a file folder. He made copies of the documents, then started altering the copy with a pencil.

It was sometime after seven in the morning when Olivia knocked on Rye's bedroom door. "Either you got promoted to the front office so you get to sleep in, or you worked very, very late last night...Rye? Are you awake?"

"Olivia! Oh, man...this is not good! I've got to get into the office pronto! There are documents that have to be in Florida in a couple hours!"

He stepped into the bathroom and quickly brushed his teeth, then pulled on an Adidas warm-up suit and tennis shoes. As he went out the door, he blew a kiss to Olivia and said "I'll talk to you a little later...and thanks for Saturday night. It meant a lot. I love you...and thanks for saving my ass and getting me up!"

When Rye arrived at the office, he went into Erin's office and told her what was happening. She took his documents and pulled the files up on her computer. She looked at Rye and said, "Good morning. It's eight forty five in Florida. I've got this handled. And thank you for last night."

Rye said, "No. Thank you. Don't you ever even think about leaving here for California again unless you check with me. I mean I don't own you...or have any authority..."

Erin nodded and said, "Get out of my office. I've got work to do. Go get some coffee. And bring me some. One Sweet'n Low and a splash of creamer. You look like hell...and for you that's not easy. Now go..."

As he left Erin's office, Rye smiled and whispered, "Thank you God..."

After Rye delivered Erin's coffee, he returned to his office where he decided to make a rough draft of his plan to recruit a highly talented but unfunded driver to make the Mila program a reality.

It was shortly after nine when Erin appeared in Rye's doorway. She said, "I sent you a pdf of everything so you can review all of the documents. As soon as you say go — they'll be in Jack's hands. I checked...The Breakers hotel has facilities for guest printing or they have a customer service desk that will handle it. I'll call Jack and tell him as soon as you drop the green rag."

"Thanks, Erin. Sorry for the rush, but this is a big deal."

She said "I know," as she left his office.

In a few minutes, Rye called Erin and said "Thumbs up."

She replied, "Done."

Rye said, "We should take the rest of the day off. Go canoeing or birdwatching..."

Erin said, "I heard about your birdwatching scam with poor Brigitte. You're not to be trusted."

"I really hate to hear you say that. I'm as close to being a saint as you can imagine."

Erin said, "I'll tell you what I think about you. I called my mother yesterday and I don't know why, but I felt the need to tell her about you. I said that you were a good friend...and that we had one date. She said, I know you and I probably need to do a background check on this person. It's probably your co-worker with the strange name...Rye. I said yes. I told her that you had been married and had a teenage son. She didn't say anything then I told her that you were a race driver...and that didn't help at all. I said that you earned a post graduate degree from Brown, and she brightened up...at least on the phone. That's where she went to school. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything...because at this point, there's really not all that much to tell about us...right?"

"Oh, I don't know. There's a lot I could tell her about us. As a matter of fact, why don't you give me her number?"

Erin said, "You have got to be kidding! I've got to go."

Rye said, "Don't go. We need to talk."

Erin said, "And why would that be? We just did."

"I want to discuss a marketing plan with you and also a menu."

"A plan and a menu. You're going to open a restaurant."

"No. I'm thinking an early working lunch."

"People will talk."

"We could go in separate cars and meet up down the street behind the Walmart."

"Are you serious? I'll damned well go to lunch anytime with anyone of my choice."

"Well then. Would you see fit to march right out the front door in front of God and all his people and go to lunch with a co-worker such as myself?"

"I brought my lunch. If I leave it in the fridge, Brigitte will eat it. A little at a time. She does that. As an officer of this company, I think you should talk to her about it. And while we're on the subject of Brigitte, there's more to discuss. But not here. We should probably go to lunch."

"So. We'll do it. Think food truck and park picnic bench."

"Is that what this has all come down to? Now that we're, you know, an item? A food truck? Really?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I'm cool with that."

When they were eating lunch, Rye explained his idea for updating the promo video and for mining prospects from existing sports sponsorships along with patrons and collectors of contemporary art and classic cars. Erin told him that she fully understood how to use the many resources, instruments, and tools for drilling down into the financial health and the stability of companies, organizations and individuals. She said that he should provide her with a list of prospects and criteria and allow her to do the heavy lifting. She added that he could then concentrate on crafting a powerful message, and delivery strategy.

When Rye and Erin returned to work, they met in the conference room. "Aside from the fact that half my lunch in the refrigerator that I intended to save is missing...I enjoyed having lunch with you. Thank you. So...how much do we pay Brigitte anyway?"

Rye shrugged and said, "I have no idea."

Erin said, "When the guys in the shop got that recent pay increase, I doubt she got one...and I know I didn't."

Rye said, "I'm sure it was an oversight...I'll mention it to Jack and he'll take care of it."

The reason I mentioned Brigitte is because I know she has an Associates Degree of some sort and she just completed a course in English composition and business math at Austin Community College. She's a huge asset to Ripley and I think you and Jack should recognize that. And she doesn't need to be our rest room attendant."

"I agree. I didn't know about her taking classes..."

"She's trying..."

"I think a raise is in order for her and you and maybe a new company car for me..."

"You're a true friend. But I have something else in mind. I think she should become your administrative assistant and we should hire a new receptionist. I'll handle the H.R. on that if you want."

"Really?"

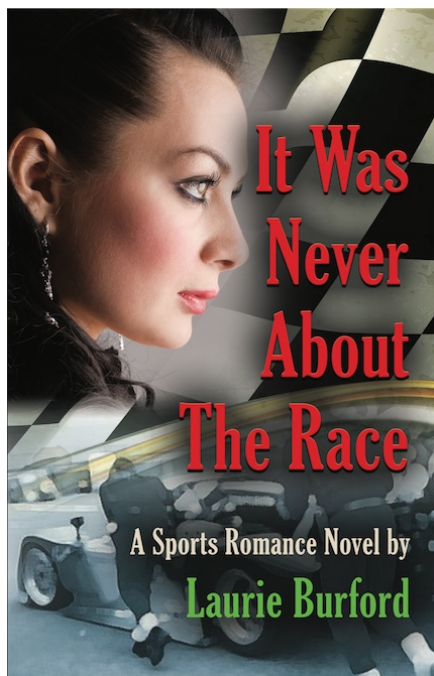
"Yes. Also I'll look over Brigitte's shoulder and I'll make sure you're happy with her work. I have a hunch that Jack is going to ramp up my work load...he's got a lot of irons in the fire. You need a full time assistant...and it probably shouldn't be me. It's very soon going to become obvious to everyone in the company that you and I are...you know...and we really shouldn't give the appearance that we are mixing our social behavior with work related activities."

"Erin. We don't have any social behavior. Are you telling me that's about to change?"

"Well, it could...I'm just saying...Think about it. I'm endorsing the idea that you have an ex Seattle Sea Gal hottie cheerleader as your very own personal assistant."

"You are just too good to be true."

"Well, she has been engaged for at least a year, and apparently she is living with her boyfriend who is in grad school at Texas...so I feel comfortable with the arrangement."



Drama, risk, chaos and a fast-paced lifestyle present plenty of unexpected challenges for Rye Chandler, a handsome forty year old divorced race driver and race team manager while poised on the threshold of an intense season of professional sports car racing. Nothing in this business, he reasoned, could ever be left to chance then life happened.

It Was Never About The Race

by Laurie Burford

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