

# ~ Triumphant Love ~

by Alex Tryst

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**Disclaimer:** This is a story like none other posted on this site, so please thoroughly read this disclaimer before beginning. This book contains original characters and is about one couple's struggle with their demons as they venture through their relationship. As with real life, there are gay, lesbian, and straight people even though the focus is primarily on the heterosexual couple. Derogatory, racist, and homophobic language is used. Additionally, sensitive subjects matters are addressed such as but not limited to: teen pregnancy, abortion, racism, rape, child abuse (verbal, physical, and sexual), hate crimes, sexual dysfunction, infidelity, and anger management problems. Please be aware that this story is not for everyone and may not be appropriate for all readers. If you are under age 18, you probably should not be reading this material. I tried to write of these subjects with delicacy and discretion, but it may still be offensive to some, so please understand what you are becoming involved in as you begin to read. As always constructive criticism and comments are welcome at alextryst@hotmail.com.

**Dedication:** To my wife, you are my fondest wish, and to the woman that was the inspiration for this story... I hope I captured your essence as a strong and enduring spirit in the character of the lovely Brittany Saxton.

Now on with the show...

## Part I

### Chapter 1

Daniel McKnight was in his first year of teaching right out of college. This twenty-three year old brunette with green eyes stood six foot, and his body had the admiration of most of the female student population. He was supposed to be the varsity track coach in the spring as well as a junior English teacher. He thought he had successfully managed his first semester until just after the organized track meeting in late November. As part of training for the season until the weather improved, he wanted everyone lifting weights and working on their strength.

One afternoon he had gone down to the weight room to do some lifting himself and found it to be rather quiet. He went about his workout trying to block everyone else out until he heard a female voice call out his name. He turned around to see a brunette with a tall, slender but toned body.

"Yes?" he asked.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Coach McKnight, but I was wondering if you wanted the sprinters to do any special lifting?"

“Oh yeah. You’re the sprinter everyone keeps telling me about. Kristen, isn’t it?” She nodded. “Well,” Dan stated inadvertently looking over her 5'8" frame. “You all ready seem like you’re in pretty good shape. A bit of distance running never hurt anybody, though, to work on your endurance. Why don’t you run on the treadmill for awhile?” She nodded leaving him to his workout.

A little while later she sensed she was being watched, so she turned to look over her shoulder to see Dan’s eyes glued to her legs. “What?” she asked.

Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, Dan answered, “Oh, I was just watching your stride.”

Kristen stepped off the treadmill. “This is so boring. I’d much rather run outside.”

“Me too.” Dan agreed unconsciously raising the hem of his t-shirt to wipe his brow. Kristen’s eyes immediately fell to his cut abs and took a ragged breath in awe. When Dan dropped his shirt tail, he noticed her eyes on his sweaty chest. Feeling awkward at the way she was gapping at him, he folded his arms across his chest. “Well, I should be going. I’ll see you later, Kristen. Soon it’ll be warm enough to run outside and then the real fun begins.”

She smiled responding, “I can hardly wait, Coach McKnight.”

“Call me Dan or just Coach. Coach McKnight makes me sound like an old man.” he stated.

“Well, how old are you?”

“Twenty-three. What about you? Seventeen, eighteen?”

“Eighteen.”

Eighteen and so gorgeous he thought to himself as he watched her pull back her light brown, dark blonde hair. His green eyes met her hazel ones, locking for a moment too long. “Well, I’ll see you later.” he said abruptly surprised that he had allowed himself to let his guard down.

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The following day Dan had cafeteria duty at lunch time. He was chatting with some other coaches as he ate a sandwich and oversaw the lunch crowd when he spotted Kristen sitting with some friends. He found himself just watching her for a few moments until she suddenly looked up, meeting his eyes. Dan smiled nonchalantly at her before shifting his gaze. After a moment he looked back. She was still looking at him. Slowly Kristen raised her cup to her lips to drink as Dan gazed on never breaking their eye lock. Pulling her drink away she licked her lips. Dan didn’t even realize the heavy exhale he gave until the coach standing next to him asked if he was all right. Dan answered that he was and quickly turned away.

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A few weeks after the students returned from winter holiday, official track practice began after school. Dan was already at the track when he saw Kristen with some friends walking toward him. He said nothing to them at first, but when he noticed them just standing around, he suggested that they stretch while they waited for the others. Everyone but Kristen complied with the request. Dan noted her half-hearted attempt before assigning running assignments to everybody.

He spent the first part of practice with the distance runners before working with the sprinters. He had them line up four at a time for a one hundred yard dash just to get a feel for everyone's running style and speed. Kristen lined up in the first group. Although she was rumored to be the fastest on the team, she came in last, wincing in pain as she crossed the finish line. She collapsed on the track holding her calf.

Dan rushed over to her, falling to his knees. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Cramp." she whined.

Dan stretched her leg out and massaged the calf until her pain subsided. "You know, if you would just stretch like I asked you to, this wouldn't happen. Now, anything else cramping?"

Dan watched one of Kristen's hand drop between her thighs and touch the back of her leg. "My hamstring."

"Where?"

Rolling onto her hip, Kristen pointed to the highest part of her leg. "Here." she whispered.

Dan's jaw flexed tightly, knowing he shouldn't touch her but surprised that he was actually thinking about it. "I better let the trainer look at that one." he mentioned.

"No." she protested grabbing his hand. "Just rub right here."

He rubbed momentarily looking for a spasming muscle but finding none he pulled away. "You're just going to have to go to the trainer for that one." he stated nervously.

Kristen smiled sensing their mutual attraction. "Okay. I'll do that." she replied.

The next day Dan noticed Kristen stretching with everyone else. He watched her for a few minutes, eyeing the curves of her legs and hips. He knew he wanted her, but he also knew he couldn't have her. Suddenly his eyes met hers, and she motioned him over. Lying on the ground, she lifted her leg at him, resting it high on his inner thigh. "Will you help me stretch out my leg, please? I can't seem to get it fully stretched."

Dan took her legs and began to stretch them out for her. He noticed the way her loose fitting shorts fell open. She made no attempt to cover herself, so Dan's eyes caught a glimpse of her fantasized treasure. Quickly Dan averted his eyes, but he had seen enough. Desperately he

willed his body to stop but to no avail. His sexual arousal was too ardent to hide. Meeting Kristen's eyes again, he knew she was tempting him on purpose with her wicked grin. He shifted uncomfortably. "I think you're fully stretched now." he said dropping her legs.

Putting her feet flat on the ground, Kristen's legs were bent out slightly around his. "Not completely. I think I could still use a little stretching." she whispered so only he could hear, as her hand dropped between her legs to finger hem of her shorts.

Dan quickly snapped his mouth closed. Stepping out of her leg lock, he commanded, "Start running. We've got to work on starting out of the blocks today."

Later as he worked with her on starting blocks, they both were having difficulty concentrating. After she had set up properly, she looked down toward the finish line trying to focus. However, Dan was standing directly in front of her only a few feet away. She noticed that her earlier playing had transformed the way his shorts hung off his body. Kristen felt her body go limp as she dropped to her knees again, lowering her head. She took a deep breath trying to regain her own composure.

Dan knelt in front of her. "You all right?" he inquired. She shook her head. "You have to focus, Kristen. Every time you step in these blocks, you must focus. No distractions are allowed. How fast you get out of these blocks determines how you finish. It takes absolute concentration." Kristen was finding it difficult to even breathe, he was leaning so close now. "You have to want it, Kristen. Desire it. Yearn for it. You want it, don't you?" he softly growled.

"Yes." she whimpered breathlessly.

As their eyes met again, they both allowed their emotions to be reveal. Dan jumped to his feet as they both took calming breaths. It was ridiculous to even think about her as an option.

Over the next few days Dan ignored Kristen to the best of his ability. He barely spoke to her unless it was absolutely necessary. Then one day Dan was running late for practice. Noting that the runners had started without their routines without him, he ducked into the men's restroom under the bleachers to change out of his suit and tie. Not even noting the person in one of the stalls, he ripped off his clothes and slipped on a pair of shorts. He heard the flush and the stall door open. He turned nonchalantly but jumped when he saw Kristen. Her eyes were glued to his bare chest.

Quickly holding his shirt up to cover himself, he asked, "What are you doing in here?"

"Going to the bathroom. The girls was locked, and you weren't here to unlock it. I didn't want to go all the way back to the main building, and I couldn't wait."

"You've got to get out of here. This looks really bad, especially since I'm standing here only half dressed. Go on. I'll see you out at the track." he said shooing her out the door.

Their first track meet of the season was away. It had been overcast most of the day but held off

long enough for the competition. However on the way home in the bus, the down pour began. When the bus arrived back at school everyone raced into the building or to their cars. Dan went up to his classroom to pick up his things before going to leave. As he walked out to the faculty parking lot, he passed the locker rooms and saw Kristen hovering at the glass door, looking out at the weather.

Walking up to her, he asked, “Waiting on a ride?”

“Yeah, but they said they couldn’t get here for another half an hour.” she mumbled. Dan couldn’t keep his eyes off her wet, white, track shirt and how it clung to her curves. Sensing his eyes on her body, she turned to look at him directly. “What?” she softly asked.

Looking away, Dan mentioned, “Well, I was just thinking that I could give you a ride if you wanted. Would save some else a trip.”

“You wouldn’t mind?”

“Not at all. It would be my pleasure.” he responded giving her a sexy grin.

When she agreed he slipped his trench coat around her shoulders before opening his umbrella and heading out into the storm. Walking across the parking lot, he curved his arm around her shoulders so they could both fit under the umbrella. He opened the car door for her before going to his own side. It was an obvious discomfort to them both as they rode silently with the exception of Kristen’s directions. When Dan pulled to a stop in front of her house, they turned to each other. Neither spoke at first.

“May I ask you a question, Coach? Would you date a younger woman?”

“Why would you ask me that?”

“Well, hypothetically speaking, if there was an eighteen year old woman interested in you and you in her, would you?”

“Eighteen isn’t too young, but if she’s a student, I can’t. I’m not supposed to date students. It wouldn’t matter that I thought she was incredibly sexy or interesting. I just can’t.” Their eyes locked. “That doesn’t mean I wouldn’t want to. I would just have to wait until she graduates.”

“Two and a half months is a long time.”

“It’s the only way.” Dan replied.

Before Kristen realized she had said it, she whispered, “What if we can’t wait that long?”

Dan sighed. She had finally named their tension, and Dan tried desperately to hold to his conviction as he replied, “This isn’t easy for me either, Kristen. Don’t you think I’ve noticed what’s been going on between us as well? The fact of the matter is that we can’t do this

regardless of how we feel. The most we can be is friends.”

“Friends, huh? Does that mean we can hang out if we’re just friends?”

“That’s what friends do, isn’t it?” She nodded. “Then why should it be any different with us?” he asked instinctively knowing it was probably a bad idea.

She smiled before hugging his neck. “Good night, Dan.”

“Night.”

At track practice that next afternoon Kristen approached him after she’d finished her workout. “Hey, listen. I have an idea. Being that we have a long weekend and we’re supposed to be friends, maybe we could get together.” she suggested feeling him out.

“That’s fine, as long as we’re alone, though. I wouldn’t want rumors to start or anything. We’ll do something.”

“Great.” Kristen answered with a smile.

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On Monday Dan went over to Kristen’s house, because she invited him to go swimming in her heated pool. It was early afternoon when he arrived. Kristen answered the door in a blue and green bikini. She smiled brightly as she watched Dan’s eyes trail down her body and then back up to her face. Pulling him inside, she offered him a drink, but he declined. Giving him a tour of the house, they ended up in her bedroom.

“You have a nice room, but won’t your parents get upset if they find me in here?”

“Oh, they’re away. They went away for the weekend and won’t be back until tomorrow. It’s just my little brother and me, but he’s at a friend’s house. No one knows you here, so we can relax. You want to sit down?” she asked patting the bed next to her.

“No. I think I’ll just change into my suit.”

“Well, the bathroom’s right through there.” she said pointing. “I’ll just wait.”

When Dan came out of the bathroom in only his shorts, he could tell she was now checking him out as he had done to her earlier. Going to the bedside, he stood just within her reach. Kristen wanted to touch him desperately, but she didn’t want to be rejected, so she just stood up letting her breasts rub up on to his chest. They stood a moment looking at each other, both knowing this was a dangerous game, neither wanting to stop.

They went for a long swim together most of the time which was spent trying to outdo each other on the diving board. However once Dan conceded to defeat, they got out and began to dry off as

they walked inside. They both plopped down onto the couch and began to talk when Kristen shivered.

“You cold?” he asked briskly rubbing her arms. “Come here. I’ll keep you warm.” Dan brought her closer, wrapping one arm around her shoulder.

“You’re cold too.” she mentioned seeing the goose bumps on his legs.

“Yeah, well, that’s because I’m sitting here in wet shorts.”

“Then take them off, or are you too shy?”

“Me shy? Never. I’m just trying to keep you respectable.”

“I don’t believe you. Prove it. I’ll even hold your towel up in front to you in case you’re modest.” she patronized.

“Oh, please. I’ll do it without your help. Thank you very much.” Dan laid his towel across his lap before discreetly pulling his shorts off. He threw them at Kristen, hitting her in the face as he wrapped the towel more securely around his hips.

Placing her hand on his bare leg under the towel, Kristen saw Dan straighten up anxiously. She wondered if Dan would try to stop her if her hand wandered further up his leg. They were silent as Kristen lay nuzzled into his bare chest. She could feel his heart pounding wildly, at least telling her that his body wanted to continue. She knew she was falling in love with him, but she wondered if he felt the same. He had only admitted to the physical attraction.

Dan knew he wanted this girl, but he also knew a relationship at this point was out of the question. There were too many complications to try to make it work. However there was no denying how her touch drove his body wild.

Neither spoke as Kristen’s hand slid up his thigh to touch him more intimately. He groaned deeply. “Kristen,” he mumbled breathing rapidly. Kristen kissed across his chest and then met his mouth. Dan’s hips rocked intently as their mouths met purposefully. Slowly Kristen pulled the towel away and knelt on the floor between his knees. Dan caught her eyes again, knowing that they were about to cross a line that could never be undone.

“Kristen, wait. You don’t have to do this. I wouldn’t want you to think you did.” Dan stated calmly, even though his insides churned with anticipation.

“Daniel, I want to.” softly she answered.

Closing his eyes, Dan allowed his several month fantasy to unfolded into reality. Suddenly he heard male voices and the slamming of the front door. He snapped his head up in time to catch the eyes of two, young, teen boys.

“Kris!” one of them yelled.

Kristen scrambled back onto the couch as Dan quickly recovered himself with his towel. “Get lost, Jason!” she screamed in annoyance.

“What’s going on, sis?”

“None of your business! Now get out of here!”

“Who is he?” her brother asked pointing to Dan.

“Dan, why don’t we go into my room?” Kristen suggested.

“Actually, I think I better go for now, Kristen. May I take you to dinner tonight?”

“Yeah, sounds great.”

“All right. I’m just going to go change and get out of your way for awhile.”

When Dan returned that evening he was dressed in khaki pants, a blue dress shirt and a tie. “Oh my, don’t you look handsome.” she mentioned taking in his attire.

“Well, thanks. You look good too. I figured I haven’t been out on a date in over six months, so I should put some effort into it.”

“A date, huh? Is that what this is? What happened to just being friends?” she teased.

“I think we both know we blew that this afternoon, but if you would prefer for this not to be a date, just say so. I just figured that you’ve only got less than a semester left. What could possibly happen?”

Kristen smiled answering, “Lots.”

Over dinner Dan and Kristen mainly talked about track, but as the meal came to a close, Dan inquired, “So what would you like to do now? We have to be careful of where we go. We don’t want to run into people.”

“Well, we could always go back to my house.” Kristen mentioned.

“Or mine. I don’t have a little brother to bother us.”

“Even better. I’d love to see where you live.”

“It’s not much, but it works.” When they got back to his apartment, they sat on the couch. “Well, here we are. What would you like to do?”



Kristen smiled, reaching for Dan's tie. "You know, you can drop this passive, good guy routine. I think I know you too well after this afternoon."

"About that, Kristen, I just want to make sure you're okay with everything that happened. You don't regret it, do you?" Kristen shook her head. "Good. I just wanted to make sure."

Kristen's hand fell into his lap. "I just wish we hadn't been interrupted."

Dan smiled as he contemplated a response. "Well, I think we might've jumped the gun on that. That was quite a lot for us. Maybe we should try to start at the beginning again."

"Well, what if I don't want to? What if I told you that I wanted you? What would you say to that?"

Dan groaned as Kristen's hand pressed into the crotch of his khakis. Kissing her deeply he worked into her neck as he pushed her onto her back. Her hand had worked open his zipper and slid inside his boxers. "Are you sure about this?" he asked.

"Of course. Why are you asking me that?" she inquired nervously.

He sensed her apprehension. "I was just trying to be polite. Are you okay? You seem nervous."

"I'm fine." she stammered.

Dan sat up and took a deep breath. "Something's wrong. Whatever it is, we'll work it out. I don't want to make you uncomfortable. We can stop if you want. It won't change the way I feel about you." he tried to assure her.

"I don't want to stop." she stated firmly.

"All right. Then how can I make you more comfortable? You want a drink or something?"

She shook her head. "Can we take a shower together? I want to see you naked and wet." she whispered seductively.

Having never heard that as a first time request, he answered with amusement, "All right. Whatever you want is fine."

Dan escorted her back into the bedroom as he began to undress himself. Kristen rubbed his bare chest lightly. "You are such a sexy man." she moaned clinging to his neck.

Dan laughed slightly. "You're not half bad yourself, Kristen. In fact you're one of the most attractive women I've seen in a long time."

"Really?" she asked with a blush.

Dan nodded as his hands worked opening the buttons of her shirt. "I'd like to see a lot more of you, if you'll let me." he whispered leaning into her neck. Kristen held onto his neck tighter as she nodded in consent. Dan slowly began to disrobe her until they were both naked. "Would you like to lie down?" he whispered as his hands caressed her small but firm breasts.

"Okay." she said unsure of herself now, but Dan didn't seem to notice as he pushed her down into the mattress.

Dan wedged his naked body between her thighs as he kissed her deeply, their tongues exploring each others mouths fervently. Kissing her ear, he asked if she was all right. She nodded slightly. He then asked if she was ready. When she nodded a second time, he entered the place over which he'd been fantasizing.

She cried out as her tight muscles gave way. Instantly Dan knew what he'd just done and pulled out quickly. "Oh my God, Kristen. Are you okay? Why didn't you tell me you were a virgin?" he inquired seeing her tears. She didn't answer him at first. "Kristen, are you all right?" he asked again with concern.

"I think so." Her voice wavered with pain.

"What can I do for you?"

"Just lie here and hold me." she sobbed. After awhile, Kristen quietly asked, "May I have a drink? I'm thirsty."

"Sure. What do you want?"

"Water's fine."

"All right. I'll go get it." he said slipping off the bed.

When he returned Kristen was lying curled up in a ball under his comforter. Dan handed her the beverage and then climbed in beside her to hold her. There was silence for a long time before Dan started to gently reassure her with kisses. Kristen allowed him to slowly explore her body with his mouth. Making his way up her body, he kissed her gently.

She laughed feeling his hips grinding against hers. "Are you ever unaroused?" she joked lightly.

"Sorry. I tend to get excited easily."

"We should take care of your discomfort." she mentioned, playing serious for a moment.

"Do you have any ideas?" he asked hopefully.

Kristen pushed him on his back and climbed on top of his body. "Well, I'd like to try this again." she responded.

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The following Monday Dan was walking into the teacher's lounge on his lunch break when suddenly the door came flying at him. Stopping it reflexively with his hand, he said, "Careful there."

A petite blonde poked her head around the corner. "Oh, I'm sorry." Dan just looked down with an open mouth at this beauty hiding behind her glasses. When he didn't say anything, she asked, "Are you all right?"

"Oh, yes. I'm fine." he answered realizing he was just staring at her.

"You must be Coach McKnight."

"And how did you come to that assumption?" he inquired grinning.

"I overhear the girls talking about you sometimes. They're just wild about you."

"Well, I am Daniel McKnight. Who might you be?"

"Brittany. Brittany Saxton." she stated extending her hand. Dan shook it. "I'm sorry about hitting you with the door. I'm so late to class."

"What class is that?" he asked not realizing he had started to walk with her.

"Physics."

"Oh, a science nerd." She laughed at his joke slightly. "You don't look like a science nerd."

"Well, thank you, I guess."

"I've never seen you around. You subbing?"

"No. Actually, I'm student teaching." Coming to a stop outside her classroom, she turned to him. "Well, it was very nice meeting you, Daniel."

"You too, Brittany. I'll see you around hopefully."

That afternoon Dan had his runners in the weight room lifting when he saw Brittany walk in. Dan smiled and waved before turning his attentions back to his runners. A few moments passed before Brittany came up to him. "Well, hello, four eyes." he joked.

"Hi, muscle head." she replied pushing her glasses back up the bridge of her nose.

Dan smiled at her banter. "So, what are you doing in here?" he inquired.

“Well, I was going to run on the treadmill, but it’s so crowded in here. I think I’ll go out to the track instead. That is if it’s okay with you. I wouldn’t want to disturb your practice.”

“No, it wouldn’t at all. The outside lane is always open. Go ahead.”

“Great. I’ll see you later then.”

After Brittany left, Kristen approached him. “I didn’t know you were friends with Ms. Saxton.” she stated.

“I’m not. I just met her today.”

“I’ll tell you. All the girls around here sure do hate her.”

“Why? What’s wrong with her?”

“Let’s just say we hate her for the same reason that the guys love her.”

“What? You girls jealous because she’s pretty?”

“You think she’s pretty too?”

Dan shrugged realizing her was on thin ice. “It’s a matter of opinion, I guess. She’s attractive, but I’m not interested or anything.”

“Good.” Kristen mumbled walking away. Dan just playfully smiled.

A little while later the team went out to the track. Brittany was still jogging. The male distance runners began their workout trying to fall in behind her to get a better view. Dan didn’t think much of it as he supervised the sprinters. He was just watching Kristen and thinking back to the night they had shared when he heard pounding steps slow behind him. Turning he saw Brittany, and his male runners reluctantly passed them.

“You should teach them some manners, Daniel.” she said trying to catch her breath.

“I know. They lack social grace, but they’re harmless.”

“Well, it’s not like I wouldn’t notice a pack of boys running behind me. Do they think I’m stupid? It’s kind of hard not to feel six pairs of eyes watching my backside. They do that in class too.”

“Well, Brittany, they are just hormonally imbalanced. I know it’s rude for them to do, but to be quite honest, I can’t say I blame them. You’re an attractive woman only a few years older than them. In their warped world they actually think they have a shot at you. I’ll talk to them if you want me to.”

“No, that’s okay. I can take care of them on my own. I’ll see you later.”

“You planning on running tomorrow?” he asked.

“Maybe. Why?”

“Well we have a meet tomorrow, so the track’s going to be closed.”

“Oh, well maybe I’ll stop by.”

Smiling Daniel said, “I hope so.”

She smiled. “Bye, Daniel.”

Daniel was just lounging on his couch after dinner that night when there was a knock on his door. Not bothering with his shirt, he opened it. Kristen smiled up at him.

“Hey. What are you doing here?” he asked pulling her inside.

“I just wanted to see you.”

“Come on in. Sit down. I was just watching tv.”

Sliding a hand up his chest and around his neck, she whispered playfully, “I’d rather lie down.”

“Really?” he asked with interest. “I think we might be able to arrange that.” he stated leading her to the bedroom.

The next afternoon Dan was out at the track preparing for the meet when he saw Brittany watching him from a distance. She was wearing a tiny yellow and black spandex workout suit. Her shorts barely went to mid thigh and the top zipped in front. Her hair was pulled half up into a ponytail. He gave a unknowingly large, lustful grin. Coming up to her, he said, “Hey there. How are you today?”

“You seem to be in a good mood. What’s the smile for?”

“Oh, nothing. I just feel great.”

“Did you get laid or something?” she joked. Daniel didn’t answer, but his blush revealed him. “You did, didn’t you? Who’s the lucky girl?”

“No one in particular.”

“You lie.” she teased.

Changing the subject off of himself, he mentioned with a sweeping gesture of his hand, “You wonder why the guys gawk at you. What kind of outfit is this?”

“Hey, I can wear whatever I want after hours. What about you? You’re one to talk. Do you think this shirt is tight enough? Do the girls really need to see every inch of definition?” she inquired pinching a piece of the material that covered his chest between her fingers.

Dan laughed. “Brittany, may I ask you a personal question?” She nodded. “Is there any sort of companion in your life? You know, boyfriend, girlfriend, whatever?”

Brittany nodded. “There is a guy I’ve been seeing for awhile. Why do you ask? You didn’t think I was a lesbian, did you?”

“I had hoped not. It would’ve been a great loss for mankind. Seriously though, I was just thinking that you’re pretty cool. I was just wondering if we could hang out. Maybe go to a club or dinner or something. I just didn’t want the invitation to get misconstrued. That’s all.”

“Yeah. That would be great. I don’t know a lot of people in this area. My boyfriend is back at school with most of my friends. It kind of sucks to be teaching my last semester so far away from them.” Dan just nodded in understanding remembering what it was like for him. “Hey, maybe you could go down to school with me sometime. My friends would love you. There are always great parties on the weekend.”

“Sounds cool.”

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On Friday evening a few weeks later, Dan was getting ready to take Brittany out to dinner when there was a knock on his door. Expecting it to be her, he opened it with his biggest smile. However it faltered a moment when he saw Kristen standing there. “Hey, what are you doing here?”

“I just wanted to see you.”

“Well, I’m on my way out to dinner with a friend. I was just waiting on them. We can hang out until they get here.” he said soothingly seeing her pouting face as he closed the door behind her.

“That’s okay. I know we shouldn’t be seen together.”

“Well, I’ll call you tomorrow, and we can do something.” They kissed softly only to break away at the sound of a knock. “Oh, shit. She’s already here. This isn’t going to look good.”

“She?”

“Brittany Saxton. I’ll think of something. Go sit on the couch, and follow my lead.”

Opening the door he greeted her. She looked adorable in her tight jeans and white dress shirt. Dan tried to introduce them, but it was obvious that they already knew each other.

“Kristen, how are you?” Brittany asked with some suspicion.

“Good. How are you, Ms. Saxton?”

“Just fine.”

“Well, Kristen, it looks like our time is up. Can we take up this conversation later?” he asked trying to cue her.

“Oh yeah. I have to be going anyway. Shelby is having a party, and I wouldn’t want to miss any of it.”

“I don’t want to know about it.” Dan warned opening the door for her.

“I know. I just like getting you worked up.”

Dan shook his head slightly. “Good night, Kristen.”

“Good night, Coach, Ms. Saxton.”

“Bye.” Brittany replied before Dan closed the door.

“Sorry. We had a little track issue to discuss.” Dan said trying to cover for himself.

“That’s a girl who has obvious feelings for you, Daniel.”

Dan shrugged uncomfortably. “I try not to notice stuff like that. You ready to go?” abruptly he asked.

When they got to the restaurant the wait was over an hour, but they occupied themselves by studying the novelty items hanging on the wall. After finally being seated, they both ordered beers while looking over the menu. Brittany ended up ordering a baked potato and salad while Dan indulged in a steak.

Once the waiter was gone, Dan inquired, “Is there a reason you aren’t eating steak? It is a steakhouse after all. ”

“I’m a vegetarian, Daniel.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know that. I shouldn’t have suggested we come here. How thoughtless of me. Would you rather go somewhere else?”

“No. It’s fine. I don’t mind, but it’s sweet of you to ask. My boyfriend has never even asked me

that.”

Dan sensed sadness in her voice, but decided not to address it. Instead he asked, “What do you think of this band?”

“They’re pretty good, for a country band that is.” she mentioned.

“I’m not particularly into country music either, but I like to two-step, so I put up with it. You want to dance? It’ll be awhile before we get our food.”

“Sure. Sounds like fun.”

Standing Dan extended a hand to her. Without thought she took it, letting him escort her to the dance floor. When they found a space, he turned to her. Dan slid an arm around her petite waist and her hand found his shoulder as their bodies brushed into each other. After half an hour, they went back to the table where Brittany guzzled her beer.

“It’s hot in here.”

“Well, maybe you’re just not used to dancing.” Dan mentioned.

“No, I am. I used to be a dancer. Next weekend I’m going back to school, and we’re going to my favorite club. Come with me, and I’ll prove that I have stamina.”

Dan’s mind raced with possibilities. “That’s a tempting offer. I might just have to take you up on it.” he answered giving a sly grin.

“Great. My friends are going to jump all over you. They’ll have to draw straws or something.”

Dan blushed. “You’re going to give me a big head if you keep talking like that.”

“Daniel, you’re hot, and you know it.” Brittany mentioned with a wicked smile.

“Okay. You can stop now.” sheepishly he mumbled with a deepened blush.

“Come on, Daniel. You know that girls swoon whenever you pass.”

“I could say something similar about you, Brittany. You have the senior guys in a constant state of frenzied arousal. You act so sweet and innocent, but you dress to kill. You work all your assets.”

“You think I do that to get guys?”

“No, not necessarily. I think it just shows that you have a wild streak in you.”

Smiling coyly she answered, “Maybe I do.”



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The following Friday Brittany met Dan at his apartment after track practice. “Just give me a few minutes to shower, and I’ll be ready. I already packed.” He emerged a little later wearing khaki shorts and a knit polo shirt that defined his upper body nicely. Running a hand through his dark wet hair, he slipped on his ball cap. “Ready when you are.” he said returning the smile she was giving.

When they arrived at Brittany’s best friend’s apartment, she smiled brightly seeing Dan. “So these are the kind of men hanging out in Dallas? Absolutely scrumptious.” Jen flirted giving Dan the eye, causing Dan to flush the color of his ball cap.

“Jen, this is Daniel McKnight. Daniel, my best friend, Jen.”

“Nice to meet you, Daniel. Brittany hasn’t mentioned you before. She must be hiding you from the rest of us.”

Brittany led Dan inside where she introduced everyone leaving her boyfriend for last. As the two men stood face to face, Dan tried to be polite, but he felt his heart twinge when he saw Brittany kiss her boyfriend deeply. “Honey, this is Daniel. Daniel, John, my boyfriend.”

It was obvious to Dan that John was intimidated by his presence as he clung tighter to Brittany’s waist, but John tried to cover it by offering him a beer. An hour went by as Dan sat on the couch trying to gently fend off Jen and watch Brittany cuddling with John in the far corner. One of the guys suggested they play drinking games to lighten the party, so everyone sat in a circle.

“Since Dan’s our guest, why don’t we let him pick the game.” John suggested.

“All right. Let’s play ‘I Never’ and just to clarify, you must drink if you have done it.” Everyone agreed, so Dan began. “Let’s go easy. I’ve never kissed anyone in this room.”

The majority of people drank, and then it was Jen’s turn. “I’ve never had sex with someone in this room.” Dan noticed that Brittany didn’t drink.

When it came to John, he said, “I’ve never given oral sex.” Everyone but Brittany drank.

Moving to Brittany she stated, “I’ve never had a threesome.”

Dan lifted his beer to drink when he realized that he and Jen’s were the only ones.

“Oh, Dan the Man.” Jen teased squeezing his thigh.

It came around to Dan for a second time, and he was determined to make Brittany drink. “I’ve never had sex, period.” When everyone but Brittany drank, he said, “We have someone too innocent to play with us.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that. I’m going to fix that problem.” John growled possessively wrapping his arms around her.

Dan could see her roll her eyes before pushing him off and walking out to the porch. John went after her, and the game continued, but Dan was too preoccupied to concentrate. Instead he watched the fight occurring outside. After a few minutes, John trampled through slamming the door behind him, and Brittany sulked up the staircase.

“Well, that’s one way to ruin a party. Excuse me.” Jen stated going upstairs.

People began to fizzle out leaving Dan alone on the couch. However Brittany and Jen both returned after a few minutes and plopped down on either side of him.

“I’m sorry for causing problems.” he apologized.

“It’s not your fault.” Brittany assured him. “How about we just stay here and hang out? I’m not much in the mood for a party anymore.”

“That’s fine. Whatever you want.”

“Well, I’m going to go. See you two later. Have fun.” Jen said leaving them alone.

Once they were alone, Dan joked, “I sure do know how to clear a room.”

“Don’t worry about it. No one blames you. John was the one who started acting like an asshole.” Brittany turned on the tv and began flipping channels. “You want to watch a movie? Jen has lots.” she suggested.

“Sure. That’s fine. You pick it.”

Standing she asked, “You want a another beer or something?”

“Only if you’re getting yourself one.”

Once the movie started Brittany folded her legs under her as she sat closer to him. A moment passed in silence before Dan said, “I really am sorry about the game. I was just trying to get you involved. I never would’ve guessed you were a virgin.”

“Well, I never would’ve guessed you would’ve had a threesome.”

“It wasn’t that great really. It was more like my best friend and I sharing this girl. Not the smartest thing I’ve ever done. We were drunk and careless.”

“You mean unprotected?” she asked. He nodded slowly. “Daniel, that’s not smart.”

“I know. I try to be better, but protection is not a man’s best friend. That’s for sure.”

“That’s so stupid! You wonder why I’m a virgin? It’s because of guys like you!”

“Hey, I’m clean! I get tested once a year, which is more than most guys can say!” he yelled defensively. “Just because you’re mad at John doesn’t give you the right to be snippy with me!” Huffing Brittany didn’t answer but turned her attentions to the movie. “I’m sorry, Brittany. Come here.” Dan whispered sliding an arm around her shoulders.

She leaned into his chest. “Why don’t we pull out the bed for you? That way when you get tired you can just fall asleep.” Brittany suggested. They pulled out the couch and made his bed before lying down together. As Dan wrapped his arms around her, he could feel his heart beginning to race. Her tiny body felt warm against his wherever they touched. Dan tried to remain calm, knowing that he couldn’t flirt with another guy’s woman even if he was a jerk. It didn’t help his hormones that Brittany was relaxing further into his embrace, but he decided to just enjoy the feel of what he could never have.

The next morning Brittany awoke to noise coming from the kitchen. Opening her eyes, she saw Dan asleep next to her with his head nuzzled into her shoulder. He was shirtless and had an arm around her waist. As Brittany climbed from the bed, he mumbled Kristen’s name.

Brittany saw Jen in the kitchen. “Why didn’t you wake me when you got home last night? John would kill me if he knew I spent the night with Dan.”

“You were so cute together wrapped in each other’s arms. I wanted you to enjoy it. Thought you had a chance at getting lucky there.” Brittany smiled. Jen grinned also. “Who’s Kristen?” she asked.

“I’m not sure. I know a Kristen, but it’s one of his runners. I don’t see why he’d be calling her name.” mumbled Brittany.

“You like him, don’t you?”

Brittany shrugged. “Maybe a little, but he’s interested in someone else. Besides I have John.”

“That’s why you spent the night in Dan’s bed. Makes sense to me.” sarcastically Jen stated.

Brittany playfully hit Jen in the arm. “I’m going upstairs to shower. You be good.”

Jen just gave a mischievous smile as she started for his bed as Brittany went upstairs. Lying next to him, she stroked his back lightly. “Kristen.” he mumbled turning over and opening his eyes.

“Jen, good morning.” he said confused. “Where’s Brittany?”

“In the shower. She left you all alone with defenseless little me.” she teased running a hand along the contours of his chest. “May I ask you a personal question, Dan?” she asked hooking

her leg around his and pulling herself on top of him. He nodded wondering where this conversation was headed. "Are you seeing anyone?"

"Well, that's kind of hard to answer. I'm not really dating, but there is someone that I frequently- how should I say this?"

"Fuck?" Jen supplied.

"I wouldn't put it that way, but essentially we do go to bed together a lot. However we're not really dating."

"Why not?"

"She's too young for me. She's a great girl, but she's young and inexperienced."

"How old is too young? 20?"

"Try 18."

"Dan, she's a child!"

"She's a legal adult. What should I have done? She threw herself at me, and I do find her attractive."

"What's she look like?"

"Actually, a lot like Brittany. Same sandy blonde hair, greenish hazel eyes. They're about the same build too. Brittany's just shorter."

"Do you think Brittany's cute?" Jen inquired.

"I don't know if I should answer that. You're her best friend. You'll tell her what I say."

"No, I won't. It'll stay between us. I'm just curious, because you said this girl looks a lot like her."

"Well, I'll admit this much. Under different circumstances, Brittany is someone I'd pursue, but we're both involved."

"You didn't answer my question, Dan. Do you think she's hot?"

"You swear you won't tell her?" Jen nodded. "Brittany is so hot she sizzles. Touching her is like touching a live wire. I get such an electric shock that my heart actually skips a beat." He sighed before continuing, "But regardless of that, we're just friends. She has John, and I have someone as well."

“By the way, what’s her name?”

“I can’t tell you. I don’t want Brittany to know.”

“It wouldn’t happen to be Kristen, would it?”

Giving her a quizzical stare, he asked, “How did you know that?”

“You called her name several times in your sleep, Dan.”

“Don’t tell, Brittany, please.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want her to think less of me.”

“Why would she?”

“I’m in a position of authority over Kristen. I don’t want Brittany to think I’m taking advantage of her. She’s one of Brittany’s students and one of my runners.”

Just then they heard Brittany start down the stairs, so Jen rolled off of him. “Why don’t you take a shower next, Dan?” she suggested. Once he had gone upstairs, Jen looked at Brittany. “He’d date you in a heartbeat, Britt.”

“What makes you say that? He’s involved with someone.”

“That doesn’t matter. She’s too young for him.”

“It’s Kristen, isn’t it?” Brittany inquired with disappointment. “Please tell me it’s not.”

“You came to that conclusion on your own. I didn’t say anything. I swore I wouldn’t. Why does it really matter anyway?”

“Kristen is a senior in high school. Dan is her track coach. I can’t believe he’d do this.”

“He says she came on to him.”

“Well, I’m sure that’s probably true. I’ve seen her be quite the little vixen to gain his attention! Regardless he could be fired for that! There he goes acting like every other male I’ve ever known! I swear, men can’t keep their flies zipped up and in control! Is that all they ever truly want?” Her voice was low and serious.

“Britt, I think you’re more upset that it’s not you. You’re attracted to him. Just admit it. Most men have to be taught how to behave like a good man. He’s a good, teachable one, and with a little direction, he’d be a great one. Dan is a kind and caring man, not to mention sexy, and he

wants you.”

“Yeah, he just wants to get me in bed, like every other man.”

“I don’t think so. He never said anything about sex. I think he genuinely likes you. I also think he knows Kristen was a mistake. Give the guy a break.” Brittany just shrugged not believing Jen entirely.

That morning the three of them got together with John. He was still being rude, so Brittany was glad he didn’t go dancing with the group that night. At the club Dan spent the first part of the evening hovering around the bar drinking and talking with any girl that happened to be around him.

“I wonder what’s wrong with Daniel.” Brittany stated as she danced with some of her girl friends.

“Well, you could go ask him, or I will.” Jen mentioned.

“Why don’t you go?” suggested Brittany.

Dan saw Jen coming toward him. She was being extremely direct and held his gaze until she got to him. Without a word, she held out her hand. Dan excused himself from his company and let Jen lead him into a separate room of the club. It had black lighting and smelled of sweat and sex. Dan took a seat in a vacant chair, and Jen straddled his legs facing him. “So, what’s wrong?” she asked.

“Nothing.”

“Oh, come on. Something’s on your mind.”

“Well, if you must know, I’d really like to get laid, but I’d feel bad about doing it with Kristen at home doting on me.”

“A guy with a conscience, what a novelty. Look Dan, I think you know Kristen was a mistake. That’s why you feel bad. Why don’t you just make up your mind to end it with her when you get back? That way you can get laid without the guilt.” Dan gave a half-hearted nod. “Now, tell me. Do you have any prospects for tonight?”

“A few.” he answered wrapping his arms around her waist. “But none as appealing as what I have in my lap.”

Smirking Jen answered, “Oh really? I thought you’d never come to your senses.” Leaning into each other, their mouths met lustfully. “Of course, we can’t tell Brittany.” Jen mentioned.

“Why not? She brought me along so I could hook up with one of her friends.”

“Well, I just don’t want her to know. Okay?”

“All right. I won’t say anything.”

“Good. Then tonight after she goes to bed, we can have a little fun.”

When they got home that evening, Dan crashed on the couch without even bothering to pull it out while Jen and Brittany went upstairs. As Dan laid there, he wondered if Jen would sneak back down like she had promised. He was just about to give up and fall asleep when he heard movement on the staircase. “Dan, you still awake?” Jen asked.

“Yeah.” he whispered.

“Sorry. I wanted to make sure she was really asleep.” she explained crawling on top of him and kissing him deeply.

Dan awoke the next morning to a small shriek. He saw Brittany standing there with a crimson face. “What’s wrong?” he asked disoriented.

Pointing to the ground, she said, “There’s a used condom on the floor. That’s disgusting, Daniel. Do I even want to know why that’s there?”

“Probably not.” he answered picking it up. He started to stand but remembering that he was naked, he wrapped the sheet around his waist. Walking into the kitchen, he disposed of the condom and its wrapper. Going back to the couch he sat pulling Brittany down next to him.

Putting her head on his shoulder, she mentioned, “You need a shower. You smell like the club with all that smoke and sweat. You have quite the facial hair too.”

“What do you expect? Friday morning was the last time I shaved. It’s Sunday.”

“I like you better without your stubble.” she stated touching his jaw.

“I’ll remember that.” he answered wrapping an arm around her and beginning to doze off again. After a few minutes though, he opened his eyes. “Is Jen still asleep?” he asked. Brittany nodded. “I’m going to wake her up.” Dan said standing.

Going up to her room, Dan dropped his sheet and climbed into bed with her, and started kissing her neck lightly. She giggled before opening her eyes. “Morning, sexy.” she whispered as their mouths met. They kissed intently for a few minutes before Dan rolled on top of her.

“Oh my. Someone is aroused this morning.” she whispered. He nodded beginning to enter her. “Oh, we shouldn’t do this. Brittany’s awake.” breathlessly Jen mentioned as he began to gently thrust.

“Then we’ll make it quick. She’ll never know.” he whispered kissing her neck. After a few

minutes Jen's body began responding to him as she started moaning loudly.

He could feel her contracting around him, but just then she screamed, "Shit!"

"What's wrong? Am I hurting you?" Dan asked having not heard the door open. He saw Jen's eyes looking past his shoulder, so he turned. He saw the shocked, embarrassed look on Brittany's face, so he withdrew without a word. "I'm going to go take a shower." he feebly stated wrapping his sheet around him and walking into the bathroom.

"Well, that was quite a show." Brittany stated feeling tears threaten, but she held them back knowing she had no right to the hurt she felt.

"Britt, you have John. I was just trying to have a little excitement. Dan wanted some action so did I. I even convinced him to break things off with Kristen I think. That would leave him available if you ever did want him."

Brittany shook her head. "I don't know. I wouldn't stand a chance with Daniel. He needs a woman to cater to his desires, and I wouldn't. He can't seem to keep his pants on."

Jen nodded. "Well, you're missing out. He's incredible." Jen mentioned. Brittany pretended not to be interested. "Brittany, if you don't get wet looking at that man, I'm worried about you. It either means you're a lesbian or you're dead, and I know you're not a lesbian."

Brittany laughed at Jen's joke. "Okay, I'll admit that I'm curious about him."

Grinning Jen asked, "What do you want to know?"

The ride home that afternoon was silent. Dan's mind was racing. He was regretting sleeping with Jen, but he didn't feel as guilty as he thought he should for cheating on Kristen. He felt bad because of the look on Brittany's face when she walked in on them.

Meanwhile Brittany was thinking about him. Her growing attraction was only surpassed by her disappointment she felt over his sexual escapades, especially with Kristen. When they got to his apartment, he invited her in. She declined saying, "You have someone else who you should be spending some time with. I'm sure you have some explaining to do to her."

Dan dropped his head. "Yes, I suppose I do. I'll see you at school tomorrow."

Two weeks later Dan was just overlooking the lunch crowd when Shelby approached him. "Coach, can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Yeah, sure. What's up?"

"I kind of meant in private."

They walked out into the empty hallway. "What's going on, Shelby? Something wrong?"



“I’ve been asked by one of the runners to ask you for advice. She doesn’t want you to know who she is, though.”

“Why not?”

“She doesn’t want to be kicked off the team.”

“Why would I kick her off the team?”

“Well, she thinks she might be pregnant, and she doesn’t know what to do.”

“And she wants my advice? Why?”

“Because it’s an older guy. He’s not in high school. She wants an older male perspective.”

Dan took a deep breath. “I really can’t give advice, Shelby. I can tell you my opinion, but by no means is it advice. You understand?” She nodded. “Has she told the father?”

“She doesn’t know if she wants to.”

“Does she want to go to college?” Shelby nodded. “Okay, then it’s my opinion, not my advice, that she shouldn’t keep it.”

“Do you mean have an abortion?”

“Shelby, I didn’t say that. Listen, if she has that baby and keeps it, her future is going to be mighty difficult. Her child will be a burden instead of a pleasure as children should be. It is my opinion that she is too young to be a parent. That’s all I’m going to say, Shelby. I’ve already said too much. Just remember I didn’t give you advice. Okay?”

The rest of the day Dan wondered who Shelby could be talking about. He was just watching practice that day when he heard Brittany’s voice call his name. He turned. She was pale and shaking slightly. Instantly embracing her, he asked, “Honey, what’s wrong?”

“I need to talk to you right now. Can we go sit somewhere?”

Dan escorted her to the bleachers. Taking her hands, Dan said, “You can tell me anything, Brittany. What’s wrong? Did John hurt you?”

“No, I’m fine. It’s you I’m worried about.”

“Why?”

“Daniel, I care about you a lot, and that’s why I’m telling you this. Today I confiscated a note during Shelby and Kristen’s physics class. I don’t normally read notes I take up, but today I did.”

“Let me guess. Shelby’s pregnant and was telling Kristen about the conversation she and I had.”

“Well, not exactly. Actually, it’s Kristen who is pregnant, and Shelby said you told her to have an abortion. You didn’t say that, did you?”

Dan’s face matched Brittany’s. “Oh, God. What have I done?” he mumbled.

“Daniel, tell me the truth. Is it really possible for you to be the father?” Dan nodded slowly. Brittany showed obvious disappointment, but pulled him into a hug. “What are you going to do?” she asked.

“I don’t know. I have to talk to her. I still haven’t told her about Jen. This is not going to be easy.”

“I’m here if you need me.” Brittany whispered combing through his hair gently.

Dan looked at her. His feelings hit him all at once. “Thank you for being here, Brittany.” he said touching her cheek. He wanted to kiss her, but knowing it was neither the time nor place, he kissed her forehead before standing.

She stood taking his hands. “You going to be all right?”

“I’ve gotten myself into a real jam this time.”

“Yes, you have, but I’m not going to lecture you. You don’t need that.”

“I appreciate it. I know I deserve one. I know you disapprove of my sexual escapades.”

“Yes, I do, but maybe now you’ll keep your pants on more often from this experience. However, I wish you didn’t have to learn that this way. I hope to God Kristen isn’t pregnant.”

“So do I.” he mumbled embracing her.

On Friday evening Dan invited Kristen over to his place. When she arrived it was obvious she wasn’t in a good mood. “Thank you for coming over. I needed to talk to you.”

“I’m not staying long! I’ve had about enough of your shit, Daniel! I just want to hear you admit it! You’re cheating on me! If that wasn’t bad enough, you actually told Shelby I should have an abortion!”

“First of all, I never told Shelby you should have an abortion.”

“I want an honest opinion, not what you think I want to hear! Do you think I should have an abortion? Is that how you really feel?”

“I don’t know how I feel about this. I’m fully prepared to accept responsibility for this child, but as far as how I feel about it, I don’t know.”

“Not that I really care about your feelings! You sure as hell don’t care about mine!” she screamed.

“That’s not true! I care about your feelings, Kristen!”

“Then why are you cheating on me with Brittany Saxton?”

“Brittany and I are friends. I’m not seeing her. However since we’re on this subject, I do have a confession to make about the weekend I went away with her. I made a mistake, Kristen. I had sex with a woman I met down there.”

“I knew it! I can’t believe I trusted you, Daniel!” she yelled in tears. Opening the door she began to bound down the cement stairs.

“Kristen, wait!” Dan called going after her. He saw her miss a stair and crash onto the landing. “Kristen, are you okay?” he asked concerned coming to her and kneeling. She was curled up in a ball holding her ankle. “Let me see it.” Dan said.

It was sprained badly. Scooping her up, Dan took her back to his apartment. He sat her on the couch. She was holding her mid section and wincing. “Dan,” she breathlessly said. “I think I need to go to the hospital. Something’s wrong.”

Dan thought the worst but said, “Okay, I’ll take you. Just try to relax.”

“Call Shelby. I want her to meet us there.”

Dan anxiously waited while Kristen was in with the doctor with Shelby. Finally Shelby appeared and stared at him.

“How is she?” tentatively he asked.

“She has a sprained ankle.” she stated.

“Anything else?”

“She was pregnant, but due to the fall, she miscarried.”

“Oh, God. I need to see her.”

“She doesn’t want to see you, Dan. She asked me to come out here and send you away. She doesn’t want to be anywhere around you. I’m going to take her home.”

Dan drove home feeling with an all-consuming emptiness. Later that night he got a call from

Brittany. "What's wrong? You sound terrible." she stated.

"Kristen miscarried." he mumbled.

"Oh, Daniel. You want me to come over?"

"Please. She refuses to see me, and I don't want to be alone."

"All right. I'll be right there." When Brittany arrived she could tell he had been crying. She sat him on the couch. "You want to tell me what happened?"

Dan related the events to Brittany. "I feel as if I've lost a part of myself."

"I'm sorry you feel that way. Is there anything I can do?"

Dan leaned into her, so she would embrace him. "Thank you for being here."

"No problem. What are friends for?"

"You want to go get some dinner and go to a movie or something?"

"Okay. I'm not really dressed, though."

Dan surveyed her outfit of white tank top, jeans, and tennis shoes. "You look great, but you can borrow a shirt or something if you want."

Standing Dan took Brittany into his bedroom. She began to look through his shirts, pulling out a blue button down. Dan watched her slip it on and simply tie it around her waist instead of buttoning it. She pulled her blonde hair from under the collar fluffing it slightly. Dan extended a hand to her, smiling. "Ready?" Brittany took his hand, and their fingers interlocked.

Over dinner Brittany watched Dan consume a cheeseburger while she picked at her pasta. "You not hungry?" he asked between bites.

"I was just thinking about Kristen."

"What about her?"

"I feel sorry for her. She's eighteen. She shouldn't have to be going through this. She's in love with you, even gave herself to you. It's got to be difficult to have the one you love cheat on you, especially being pregnant with their child."

"Not exactly my finest moment." Dan mumbled.

"I'd say not. Did you even care about her?"

“Yes, I care about her, but I’m not in love with her. This whole thing gives me a new prospective.”

“How so?”

“I have to be more careful and use my brain a little more often instead of other anatomy.”

“I’d have to agree with that.”

Dan heard the lecturing tone in her voice. Becoming defensive Dan folded his arms across his chest. “Look Brittany, I know you probably think less of me for this disaster, but I’d appreciate it if you’d let me off the hook here. I was wrong. I admit it, and that’s all I can do at this point. Please, can we not dwell on the biggest mistake of my life?”

Brittany nodded slowly looking out the window. As the meal came to a close, Dan inquired, “Would you mind if we just rented a movie? I’m feeling tired.”

Once back at the apartment Dan convinced her to watch the movies in his bedroom. As Brittany sat on his bed, she looked at the closed bathroom door and wondered what he was doing in there. When he opened it, he was only in a grey t-shirt and green striped boxers. He saw her eyes widen.

“You don’t mind that I put my pajamas on do you?” She shook her head. “Do you want to change into something more comfortable? I’ve got shirts and shorts. You’re more than welcome.”

Brittany’s mind told her not to, but her emotions said otherwise. Knowing she could trust him, she said, “Thanks. What can I wear?”

“Anything you want.”

Dan lounged on his bed as he watched her rummage through his dresser. She pulled out a pair of plaid flannel boxers before excusing herself to the bathroom. Dan got under the covers as he waited for her. She stood in the doorway of the bathroom for a moment after changing. Her heart raced at the thought of what she was about to do. She knew John would be angry if he knew she was about to get in bed with another man. Coming to the bed she climbed in next to him nonchalantly. Dan wanted to make a move, but decided against it as he turned toward the movie. They watched the first in silence, but during the second, they both were getting tired. Burrowing further into the covers, they both ended up lying next to each other in the darkness.

“You tired of the movie?” Dan asked. Brittany mumbled. Sensing she was asleep, Dan turned it off. He touched his bare foot to hers to see if she really was sleeping. She didn’t respond. Putting a hand on her shoulder, he whispered her name. She mumbled again incoherently pulling his hand from her shoulder and wrapping it around her waist.

The next morning Brittany awoke to a ringing phone and answered it without thought.

“May I speak with my son please?” a female voice asked with annoyed surprise.

“Excuse me?” Brittany inquired beginning to wake fully.

“May I speak with Daniel? This is his mother.”

Nudging him Brittany whispered, “Daniel, it’s your mom. Wake up.” Dan took the phone from her.

“Daniel Ethan McKnight, who was that?”

“A friend of mine.” he mumbled.

“A friend, Daniel? A female friend sleeping in your bed?” sarcastically his mother said.

“Mother, I’m twenty-three years old. I’m on my own. I can decide who sleeps in my bed. Now I said she was a friend, so just let it lie.”

“Fine. Your father’s 50th birthday is on Saturday, and we’re having a party. Can you make it out here next weekend?”

“Yeah, I can make it.”

“Great. Why don’t you bring your friend? I want to meet her.”

“We’ll see. If that’s all I’m going back to sleep now.”

“Fine. We’ll see you Saturday.”

Dan could tell by his mother’s voice that she didn’t believe him. Hanging up the phone, he asked, “You want to go to my dad’s birthday party with me? It’s all their friends, and I’m going to be bored out of my mind if you don’t.”

“Well, we can’t have that now, can we? I guess I have no choice. When is it?”

## **Part II**

The next Saturday Dan arrived at Brittany’s apartment around 10:00. Taking her bag he said, “Thanks for coming. Now I won’t be stuck with my uptight mother the whole time.” They arrived at his parents house just before noon.

Coming to a stop in the driveway, Brittany put her sunglasses on top of her head to hold her hair back. “Wow. This is some place.”

“Yeah. It’s pretty cool, I guess. They just moved in a year ago.”

“What’s your dad do?”

“Well, he used to play football for the Dallas Cowboys, but when it got injured he started doing their marketing.”

Going into the house, they saw a guy that looked just like Dan with the exception that he had dyed red hair. “Hey, Joe.” Dan said.

“Dan, hey. How are you brother?” he asked hugging him. “Who’s your friend?”

“This is Brittany Saxton. Brittany, this is my little brother, Joseph.”

“Not that little, only by 12 minutes.” he mentioned grinning at Brittany as they shook hands.

“Where’s sis? She coming?” Daniel inquired as they continued into the family room.

They saw an older gentleman in a wheelchair. He smiled brightly. “Daniel.”

Dan leaned down and hugged him. “Hey, Pop. Happy birthday.”

“So nice of you to make it, and this time you have a beautiful companion.”

Dan introduced them before hearing his mother’s voice say, “Daniel Ethan.”

They turned to see a tall, thin frosted blonde. “Hello, mother.” he said hugging her half heartedly. “Let me introduce you to my friend, Brittany Saxton. This is my mother, Laura.”

“You’re just in time for lunch. We’re having it in the sunroom, so the cook can prepare for dinner tonight.”

“When’s Becca getting in?” Daniel asked as they proceeded into the sunroom.

“She’ll be here at 2:00. There was some party she just had to go to last night.” his mother mentioned.

“Who’s Becca?” Brittany asked.

“My baby sister, Rebecca. She’s a sophomore at Texas Tech.”

After lunch Dan went out to the car to get their bags. Coming into the house he asked where Brittany was staying. “Well, I had planned for her to stay with Becca in the green room. That is unless...”

“Unless what?” Dan asked sensing where this was heading.

“Unless you two would prefer to continue your sinful habit of sleeping together.”

“Mother, Brittany and I are just friends.”

“Sure, Daniel. I just can’t believe you’d bring another black woman into this house after Victoria. You know I disapprove.”

“Excuse me? Brittany is my friend, and the color of her skin shouldn’t matter.”

Ignoring his statement she continued, “Well, at least you’re getting into half breeds now. She’s not as black as Victoria was, thank God.”

Slamming the bags down, Dan tensed his jaw. “I swear to God, if you say another word about Victoria I will walk out of this house right now and never return!”

“I just worry about you, Daniel. Black woman are trouble. I remember the scandal Victoria caused, saying you were the father of that baby. It took a lot of time and money to prove that you weren’t. I’m concerned about your name.”

“No, you’re concerned about your name!” Dan screamed storming off. Going into his room, he opened his old desk drawer taking out a picture he had of he and Victoria. Gazing at it as he thought about her fondly.

“Daniel,” he heard Brittany’s voice and turned. She saw his troubled face. “You okay? I heard yelling.”

He nodded. “My mother and I were just fighting again. We don’t really get along.”

“May I ask why?” Dan handed her the picture. “Is that you? Who’s that with you? She’s beautiful.”

Dan nodded. “That was my high school sweetheart, Victoria.”

“She looks pregnant in this picture.”

“Four months actually.”

“Is there a story there?”

“Yes, but I really don’t want to talk about it right now.”

“Okay, we don’t have to.”

“Let’s go for a swim. The pool’s heated.” he stated changing the subject.

Joe joined them for a swim, and the guys took turns flirting with Brittany a bit, but Joe was definitely coming on stronger than Dan. Dan could see Brittany’s uneasiness, so he said, “Sorry Joe, she’s spoken for. Lay off there, buddy.”



“I might be spoken for, but not by you, Daniel. I can handle myself.” she snipped. Turning to Joe she said, “You’re a nice guy, but I’m currently involved with someone.”

“Hey, no hard feelings. If only Dan and I could be so lucky to be with a gorgeous girl like you. Neither of us have been, with maybe the exception of Victoria.”

“You’ve never even been with a girl.” smirked Dan splashing Joe.

Splashing back he answered, “Details, just don’t tell Mom that.”

Brittany looked at him with confusion. “I don’t understand.”

“Actually, Brittany, it’s very simple. I have a straight image to keep up around my mother. She couldn’t handle it if she knew I was a flaming fag. I have to at least pretend I’m interested in girls.”

Brittany smiled as she leaned into his mouth. Kissing him softly she asked, “That really does nothing for you?”

“Hey, if that is what it takes to get a kiss around here, I’ll be gay.” Dan joked.

“Yeah, right, Mr. Quarterback, captain of the football team, state champion in three sports jock. The day you mount a man is the day I’ll willingly sleep with a woman.”

“Gross! Don’t say things like that. I don’t like that image.” Dan cringed.

“The only thing you did more of in high school than screw was play sports.”

“Do you mind?” Dan inquired.

“Oh, I’m sure Brittany doesn’t care. Actually, Brittany, it was mainly Victoria. The two of them were going at it day and night. Dan was a faithful guy to her. Victoria was all he ever talked about. I really think they’d be married by now with little ones if things hadn’t turned out so tragically.”

“I don’t really want to discuss this.” Dan mentioned getting out of the pool.

“Then we won’t.” Brittany assured him.

Dan went into the house and showered. Victoria was all he was thinking about. Coming back to face his mother brought up the feelings had long wanted to forget. Going back out to the pool dressed, he said, “I have somewhere to go. You can come with me or stay here. It’s up to you. I’ll be gone awhile.”

“I’ll come with you. Just let me change.” Brittany stated sensing that he needed her company.

Brittany didn't ask where they were going as they drove silently. She only gave him a quizzical glance as they turned into an old cemetery. She followed him through the headstones until he came to a stop dropping to his knees. Brittany stood behind touching his shoulders. She read the name of Victoria and the one next to her of an infant named Ethan. "Do you want me to leave you alone?" she asked quietly. Dan shook his head. "Do you want to tell me what happened?"

"It's a complicated story."

"Well, we have all day. Obviously she means a lot to you. She was your girlfriend, and I'm guessing by Ethan's name that he was named after you. Is he your son?"

"I wish he was, and so did Victoria, but he's not. He actually belongs to someone else. Someone who didn't give a damn about Victoria or her feelings for me."

"How's that? I thought you two were in love and all."

"I should start from the beginning. Victoria and I started seeing each other when we were juniors, and we started quite a controversy. No one liked the quarterback dating a black girl. It didn't matter that she was brilliant or beautiful. To them she was just black and therefore wrong for me. Friends, coaches, teachers, and even my own mother kept trying to convince me not to date her, but I guess that's rural Texas for you. Anyway, we started sleeping together at the beginning of our senior year, and we were just more affectionate in general in public, which stirred more hatred toward her. I remember one time she came onto the field after a football game, and we kissed in front of everyone. I think that was the last straw with the community. Victoria began being harassed. Of course no one ever said anything to me except that I shouldn't date her. Victoria never even told me until a much later date. Well, over Christmas break that year, I went to see colleges, so I wasn't around much. In late February I started noticing that she was putting on weight, and I tried to subtly ask about it. Our sex life had deteriorated into nothing since I came back from Christmas, and she seemed really depressed, so I thought she was unhappy with me. Well, she just broke down in tears. She started telling me things that I never knew. It turned out that during Christmas break things were at their worst. A group of guys from the baseball team thought it would be fun to burn a cross on her lawn. Well, Victoria snapped. She actually went outside and began yelling at them. What she didn't know was that they were drunk and one of them had a gun. They grabbed her and threw her into the car." Dan stopped and took several long breaths. Brittany knelt down beside him sensing the worst yet to come. "They took her out into the middle of nowhere, beat her and then took turns raping her. Then they just left her there to die. She could've been killed, but being the rock of strength that my baby was, she survived but never told me until February. She confided in me that the baby wasn't mine, and I was crushed. I tried to convince her to press charges, but they got off. Anyway, it was my idea to tell people the baby was mine. I didn't want them to have the satisfaction of knowing they had done that."

"That was a very honorable thing to do, Daniel."

"Well, it upset my mother greatly. She and Victoria began to have fights. Underneath it all, my

mother is just as racist as the guys who had done this horrible thing. Well, Ethan was born in late August right before I went off to college. Victoria legally claimed that I was the father, because that's what I wanted. My mother found out though that Ethan really wasn't mine and told Victoria off. She had brought Ethan over to visit, and my mother yelled at her, called her all sorts of rude things and insinuated things about Victoria that weren't true. Then she threw her out of the house. That was the last time I saw them. A few hours later I got the call from her mother. She and Ethan had died in a car accident on the way home from my house."

"Oh, that's so sad." Brittany whispered blotting her wet eyes. "You blame your mother, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. If she had just had a little compassion, Victoria never would've run off. Even more if she had just thought about my happiness instead of the family name, Victoria and Ethan would be alive. Even today if I date a girl with skin a little too dark, she gets all worked up."

"Well, I guess it's a good thing you're not dating me then."

"You know, I suspected you were part black. Either that or you faked baked year round."

"Actually, I'm only a quarter. My father's mother is Jamaican. I actually have darker skin my father, though."

"I'm sure my mother just thinks you're a faked baked Barbie." he lied. "That's what she wants me to date. She doesn't believe we're just friends."

"I guess it's a good thing she doesn't know about Kristen or the miscarriage."

"Yeah, she wouldn't really be happy, but Kristen is about as Barbie as they come."

"I'm glad you said it and not me." Brittany stated with a smile.

"Come on. I want to visit Victoria's parents on the way home."

They got back to the house just before the 6:00 to dress for the party. Guests began arriving around 7:00, and Dan was busy playing a gracious host and son when he spotted Brittany making her entrance. He stopped in mid-sentence and just stared at her. When their eyes met, he smiled. She came to him taking his extended hand. He leaned in kissing her cheek. "You look fabulous." he complimented.

"Yes, that dress is very flattering, Brittany. Where did you get it?" Joe asked.

Later that evening Brittany found herself talking with Becca. "So, are you as interested in my brother as he is in you?" she bluntly inquired.

"Excuse me? Daniel's not interested in me."

“Oh but he is. I can tell. It’s not just wanting to get you in bed interest either. The only other woman I’ve ever seen him be like this with is Victoria. I guess you know all about her.”

Brittany nodded. “But he’s never even hinted at it. Trust me. I’ve been looking.”

“Really? Well, I’ll tell you why you’re not seeing anything. You’re involved with someone else. When Dan is truly into a girl, he respects her position completely. He’ll never make a move on you as long as you’re with this other guy. He’ll just be your friend and adore you from afar.”

“How do you know all this?”

“Because I saw him do it with Victoria. He loved her long before they ever started dating. If you want something to happen, you have to make yourself available.”

“I don’t know. I guess I’m a little scared of what he’d expect from me. He has quite a reputation.”

“Well, he does bed a lot of women. That is true, but I know my brother. All he truly expects is that a woman be honest with him and herself. All Daniel wants out of life is to be able to love a woman the way he loved Victoria.”

“That’s an awfully big expectation.”

“I don’t think so. All Victoria ever did was open his heart up to his softer side. He’s not all sports and brawn. He’s actually sensitive and caring, but he’s afraid to let that show. He stopped showing it when Victoria died. He turned into what he is now, a man that doesn’t really care about much at all. I haven’t seen him give another human as much genuine interest as I’ve seen him give you.”

“Well, maybe I can open up his heart again.” Brittany stated with hope.

“I hope so. I miss that Daniel.”

When the party was over that night, Brittany and Dan found themselves talking in his room. She kept thinking about her conversation with Becca. Moving to the bed, Brittany laid next to him taking his hand. They just looked in each others eyes in silence. She could feel herself drowning in his dark green eyes. Reaching out she stroked his hair above his ear before caressing his jaw. “You’re a caring man, Daniel. I’m sorry you’ve been through so much pain. You don’t deserve it.”

“Thank you for being here and listening.” he whispered.

“Thank you for opening up to me. That means a lot.”

“We should probably go to sleep. It’s late.” he mentioned feeling nervous.

“Daniel, I’d like to stay here if you don’t mind.” Brittany heard herself say. As soon as it was out there, she feared she had said too much, but his shy smiled assured her.

“I don’t mind.” he answered.

They both changed before turning out the lights. Being unusually bold, Brittany brushed up against him. “Hold me.” she whispered. Dan wrapped his arm around her, and she put her head on his bare chest. She could feel his heart beating rapidly, but he never did a thing except stroke her hair lightly.

The following morning they awoke to Joe jumping in bed with them, squeezing Brittany in the middle. “So, Brittany, I bet you never thought you’d be in bed with two sexy men at once, did you?” Joe asked wrapping his arm around her waist next to Dan’s.

Brittany blushed and laughed. “No, I didn’t. John would be so pissed if he knew about this.”

“Who’s John?” Joe inquired.

“My boyfriend but not for much longer.”

“You going to break up with him?”

“Yes, I am. It’s past time. I’ve wanted to do it for awhile now.”

“I knew it. I knew once I charmed my way into your bed you’d break up with him. Face it. You’re in love with me.” Joe teased.

“That’s right I am. I can’t live without you, Joseph.” Brittany and Joe both laughed.

Just then their mother walked passed the open door. “What’s going on in here?” she asked sternly.

“Oh, Brittany is just giving Dan and me our morning workout.”

“Joseph Erwin, that is not funny or proper! Everyone out of that bed now!”

“I was just kidding, Mom. Lighten up.”

## Chapter 2

The next Friday morning there was a pep rally for the spring sports teams. Being the track coach, Dan had to introduce his team. When he took the microphone and walked to center court, there was a thunder of shrills from the female students.

“In case some of you don’t know, I’m Coach McKnight, the track coach. I know I’m supposed to introduce the team, but before I do that I have something to say. The Valentine’s Day sady

hawkins dance is coming up next weekend, and I'm here to tell you that I don't have a date. I was hoping that I would be asked, but since I haven't been, I'd like to drop a hint right now. How many of you know Ms. Saxton the physics teacher?" There was male dominated hollering. "All right. I hear all of you. All I can say is forget it guys. She's too old for you. Anyway, I was just dropping her a little hint that I'm still available." There was more hollering, but Dan realized it wasn't for him as the crowd's attention moved to something coming up behind him. He turned to see Brittany. "Well, Ms. Saxton, what a surprise. I was just talking about you."

"Oh really. Well, Coach McKnight, I was just thinking about you. I heard a rumor that you were still free for the dance, so I thought I'd come see if you'd like to go with me."

"Why I'd love to. I thought you'd never ask." he said smiling before they hugged. The crowd started chanting for them to kiss. An awkward glance passed between them before Dan smiled. Turning to the crowd, he said, "This is a G rated show guys and gals. No hanky panky here." Brittany sighed in obvious relief. Waving to the crowd, she began to walk away. "There she goes, the oh so lovely Ms. Saxton. Now shall I introduce the team?"

Dan saw her at lunch that day. "Thanks for playing along with me this morning." he said.

"It was fun. I enjoyed it. Of course there will be rumors now about us dating."

"I know, but it's a lot better than rumors about Kristen and me."

"This is true. She was not happy with today's performance. She was obviously upset by it, Daniel."

"She'll get over it. She's just a kid. So, did you break up with John yet?" he asked changing the subject.

"No. He's coming up this weekend. I wanted to do it in person. After a year I think he deserves that much."

Dan nodded. "I understand. If you need anything, call me."

"I will, but everything will be fine. I think he suspects this is coming, so I'm sure we'll talk about it as soon as he gets here, and then he'll leave."

"All right, but if you need me, you can just call."

"I'll probably call you tomorrow after he leaves."

Late Saturday evening Dan was just grading papers when there was a knock at his door. Opening it he saw Brittany with tears streaming down her face. Dan couldn't help but notice how sexy she looked though, even in tears. She was wearing a white cotton shirt with a grey sweater and black skirt. Her hair was done in two braids. The first thing that came to Dan's mind was Catholic school girl uniform. Instead of smiling though, he embraced her asking with concern, "Did you

have a rough time with John?" She nodded. "Well, come sit down. It'll be all right. Why don't you tell me about it?"

"It's over. I'm glad about it, but I've never seen him like that. He was throwing things in my apartment and screaming. I was frightened, because he was being so unpredictable."

"Why didn't you call me? I would've come over."

"I know, and that's why I didn't. I might only be a twenty-two year old woman, but I'm a strong woman. I can hold me own."

Dan nodded with a smile. Kissing her forehead, he stated, "That you are." She smiled up at him as he brushed her tears off her cheeks. "Dry those pretty eyes." he said touching her under the chin. "Let me make you feel better. Why don't I make you a nice dinner and then we can go for a walk or something?"

"That sounds nice. Thank you."

"Great. Then you just relax here on the couch while I make dinner."

Once dinner was over Dan took her to a park close to his place where they walked around the lake slowly. A full moon was casting long shadows across the water. As they walked Brittany took hold of his hand. She slowed her pace until they came to a stop. They looked at each other quietly for a moment. Deciding to be brave, Brittany stepped closer to him and put a hand on his chest. She slid the other around his back.

"Daniel, I just want to thank you for this wonderful night. You always know how to make me feel special. You're a caring man."

"You are a special woman, Brittany, and one of the most caring I've ever known. You've helped me through some difficult things and listened with an open heart. This is the least I could do for you. You deserve so much more. You deserve a man that can make you happy."

Brittany wanted him to kiss her desperately, but it didn't appear that he would, so swallowing her nerves, she leaned up to his mouth as she pulled his head down into her. As their lips met, Dan felt a jolt pass through his body. When she pulled away, she saw his mouth fall open. "Daniel, I'm sorry. I've never done that before. I don't know what came over me."

"I, uh, I, I didn't, I didn't mind." he fumbled, but then he smiled. "May I make a confession? I've actually wanted that for weeks."

"So did I. I thank you for respecting me and my relationship with John, especially since you knew I was unhappy. Not all men would have that patience."

"Brittany, I care about you deeply. I haven't felt like this in years. I enjoy being your friend, but I guess I've always wanted something more. Is that too much to ask for right now?"

Brittany shook her head. "I'd like that. I don't have to tell you that I'm inexperienced with these things. I have boundaries, but I also have confidence that you will respect them. I'll admit that I enjoy sleeping with you. Your arms are so safe. I would hate to lose that now that things are out in the open. Is that too much to ask for from you?"

"No, it's not. Brittany, you don't have to worry. I would never do anything that you didn't want me to. Your comfort is of upmost importance to me. I find great pleasure in holding you. I would never want to jeopardize that."

"I believe you." she said resting her head against his chest.

"Come on. Let's go home." he suggested taking her hand. As they began to walk back to the apartment he asked, "May I comment on your outfit tonight?" She nodded. "You own a lot of sensual clothes, but by far this is the sexiest thing I've seen you in."

"Why's that?"

"Call it a Catholic school girl fantasy with cute little braids included." he stated flipping one of her braids off her shoulder.

"Well, you like, huh? Actually this is a little more conservative than I usually wear it. Most of the time I just tie the shirt, but it's too cold for that."

Dan groaned at the image. "Do you even know how incredibly sexy you are? You wonder why men stare. You don't just show your stuff. You flaunt it."

"Is that a bad thing?"

"No. I just think it's ironic. I mean men think sex when they see you."

"Is that what you think of?"

"I'd be lying if I said no. However most of the time it's just more of how incredible you are in every way. Hands down you're the hottest woman I know, but what makes you a real gem is your heart."

"Oh, what a sweet thing to say."

When they got back to the apartment, Dan looked at his watch. "It's getting late. You want to do something or just call it an evening?"

Brittany knew what she wanted to spend the rest of the night wrapped in his embrace, but she didn't want to give Dan the wrong idea. However being that she had never felt this way, and had already put herself out there, she decided to say what was on her mind. "Daniel, I'm not usually this forward with men. I'm quiet and shy and never really tell them what I want. However I have



this need to just put everything out on the table with you.”

“Okay. Why don’t we sit down, and you can tell me what’s on your mind.” he said gesturing to the couch. Dan sat reclining against the arm as Brittany laid her head against his shoulder and sighed. “Daniel, I’ve never been as attracted to a man as I am to you. I find myself wanting you in ways I never have wanted anyone else. My emotions are telling me things I’ve never thought they would. You are the first man I’ve ever wanted this way. I’m a twenty-two year old virgin, and at this very moment I’m wondering if it really means that much to me any more.”

“Whoa. Let me interject right there and tell you that it means a lot. I’d hardly be a man if I didn’t want you, but for once in my life, sex isn’t what it’s all about. As appealing as sex is with someone you’re attracted to, it’s really so much more when you’re in love with them. As far as you’re concerned, I see you as pure and perfect, and I love you that way.”

“Do you really?”

Dan nodded. “Brittany, I know those feelings of which you speak, because I have them too. I just think that waiting is always the best thing if you want a relationship. I want to give us time to really know one another. I haven’t been in love for a long time, but I remember those distinct feelings. I admit that I feel them for you. I don’t want to lose that.”

Brittany sighed in contentment. They just sat silently for awhile holding each other. Finally though, Brittany said, “I should be going.” Dan gave her a playful pout. “Oh, don’t make that face. I thought you said you’d respect me.”

“I said I’d respect you. I didn’t say I’d like it.” he mentioned.

She smiled. “Trust me. I want to stay, and that’s why I think I should go.”

Dan nodded standing. He walked her to the door and smiled down at her brightly. Pulling her into an embrace, he leaned down to her mouth. He kissed her softly at first but then slowly opened her mouth touching his tongue to hers. She groaned pulling his head in deeper.

Suddenly they found themselves on the couch again kissing methodically. Dan worked his hand into her shirt to her bare side as his mouth found her neck. “Brittany.” he whispered feeling her chest rise and fall faster. He looked into her eyes and smiled.

“As nice as this is, I really should go.” she stated touching his cheek. Once again Dan walked her to the door. She kissed him lightly whispering, “Sweet dreams.”

Back at home, Brittany called Jen. Hearing the excitement in her voice, Jen asked, “What’s up, Britt? You sound like a different person.”

“I just had the most spontaneously romantic evening with Daniel. I broke up with John, so I went over to Daniel’s, and he was so sweet. He made me dinner, and we went for a moonlight walk. It was perfect.”

“It sounds like it. John came by a little while ago pressing me for answers. He thinks you dumped him because you want Dan.”

“I do want him, Jen. He’s absolutely wonderful.”

“Did he kiss you?”

“Actually, I kissed him first. I couldn’t help myself. He makes me feel so empowered, like I can say and do anything around him. We talked about us so open and honestly that I just felt at ease.”

“Anything else good happen? No sex, huh?”

“No sex, but we did mess around a little. His touch is so incredible. It was so nice.”

“Sounds like you’re falling in love with the guy.” mentioned Jen.

“I know I am. That trip to his parents place sealed my fate. I totally understand him now. He’s kind, caring, and sensitive. He’s everything I’ve always wanted in a man.”

“It helps that he’s gorgeous.”

“Well, he’s that too.” Brittany giggled.

“It’s so good to hear you like this, Britt. You haven’t been this happy in ages. I’m glad things are working out.”

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On the evening of the Valentine’s dance, Brittany was just finishing getting dressed when there was a knock on her door. Preparing her best smile, she opened the door to see Dan standing there in a tuxedo holding a dozen red roses. She saw his mouth fall open as his eyes surveyed her red satin slip dress that came to just above her knees. Her blonde hair was pinned up framing her face elegantly.

“Damn.” he mumbled. “Every time I think you couldn’t get any more provocative, you blow me away. You look absolutely stunning. I’m the luckiest guy to have you for a date.”

Brittany blushed taking the flowers from him. Going into the kitchen, she began to arrange the roses in a vase. Dan came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her tiny waist. He nuzzled into the nape of her neck making them both moan. “We should get going.” she mentioned tilting her head back onto his shoulder and closing her eyes.

“I know. Our reservations are in forty-five minutes, and it takes thirty to get there.” he said kissing her ear before pulling away.

She turned and smiled up at him. “You look really nice.” she said playing with his bowtie.

“So do you, Miss Saxton.”

When they arrived at the dance, they were fortunate enough to be assigned to the dance floor. They were just watching over the kids when Brittany pointed to the floor saying, “Isn’t that Kristen? She’s all over that guy.”

“She’s drunk.” Dan stated with anger starting toward her. Going up to her, he cleared his throat.

The boy jumped when he saw Dan, but Kristen only slurred, “Well, if it isn’t Dan the Man.”

“Kristen, may I speak with you in private please?”

“Whatever you have to say, you can say here. I don’t want to go anywhere with you in private.”

“Kristen, as your coach, I’m asking to speak with you. Now, please come talk to me. It will only take a moment.”

“Fine!” she yelled storming off toward the courtyard. Dan followed her. When they were alone, she asked, “So tell me, Daniel. You getting enough action with Ms. Saxton?”

“I refuse to get into that conversation with you, Kristen.”

“Why? You not happy? She not blowing you enough?” Kristen’s words were malicious.

Dan was losing his temper but refused to give in to her taunts. “Kristen, you haven’t been to practice since the accident, and now you show up here drunk. Do you want to be kicked off the team?”

“Why do you even care? You don’t care about me, never did! You just wanted to get me into bed! I loved you, and you took advantage of that! I should turn you in! You should never be able to teach after what you did to me!” Dan stood silent not knowing how to respond. Kristen took several breaths trying to hold back her tears. “Daniel, I really hate what you did to me. I gave myself to you and we made another life together. I never wanted to get pregnant, and I was scared. When I needed you the most, you were off screwing someone else! You’re the father of what would’ve been our child, but I miscarried. Maybe that was a blessing in disguise. I don’t really know. I’ll never be able to put you out of my heart, Daniel, but I want you out of my life! I am not your runner or your student any more.”

“Kristen, you have a talent. It’s a shame to see you throw that away.”

“Well, some would say you have a talent coaching, but you threw that in the trash by trying to get me in bed. That was a mistake on your part, and you should pay for it.”

“I am paying for it, Kristen. You have no idea how much.”

“No, you’re not, but you will. I swear it!” Kristen yelled walking away from him.

Dan returned to where Brittany was standing. “How did it go?” she asked.

“I’m going to be fired. She’s threatened to take action against me, and I will be fired, no questions asked. She wants me to pay for hurting her.”

On Monday during lunch Dan was called into the principal’s office. When he came in, the principal was withdrawn. “Coach McKnight, we need to talk. Sit down.” she stated. He did as instructed. “A formal complaint has been lodged against you by a female student. The charge is sexual misconduct.”

“May I ask who it was?”

“I’m sorry I can’t give out that information. This is a very serious charge, Daniel. I have no other choice than to put you on a leave of absence without pay starting immediately while there is an investigation into these allegations.”

“What about the team? Who’s going to take over that responsibility?”

“I’ll make sure they are taken care of. Now the permanent sub will be here by the end of lunch. You need to be out of your room by then.”

“May I make a request? I would like to speak to the team this afternoon.”

“Normally I couldn’t allow that, Daniel, but I’ll make an exception for you. I must say you don’t seem at all surprised at these allegations.”

“Well, I knew they were coming. A student threatened me at the dance, so I thought she might follow through, and apparently she has. I can’t do anything, because my hands are tied. She knew what would happen. You’re just doing your job by siding with her, and I get shafted. That’s the way the system works. I’m angry about it, but I can’t do anything. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have some things to pack.”

Dan began packing his things as he was off in his thoughts. He didn’t know what he was going to do from there. All his dreams were crashing down around him. Suddenly he was brought back to reality by Brittany’s voice. “Daniel, what are you doing?”

“I’ve been put on unpaid leave. I could kill Kristen!”

“Oh, Daniel, I’m so sorry.” Brittany whispered coming to him. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know. I guess I’ll fight it the best I can, but as of now, I’m out of a job. I’ll think of something.” Dan mumbled dejected walking toward the door.

The following weekend Dan and Brittany went out to see his dad and the family attorney for legal advice. However when they arrived at lunch time, a couple of Cowboy football players and coach were there as well. All of them ate lunch before the players tried to entice him into a pick up game, which he only agreed to at Brittany's urging. Brittany stood next to Dan's dad and Coach Tucker as they watched the game with interest.

"Your boy still has that arm." Coach Tucker mentioned. "Do you think I have a chance at getting him on the practice field?"

"Tucker, I thought you were just going to put in a good word for him for a position. You thinking you might want him on the team?"

"David, you know I've always wanted your boy on my team. This is a good time to bring it up too. I just lost my quarterback for the season. Dan can throw better than most of the QBs in the league. We both know that."

"Well, I'm partial. Of course I want him to play, but it's up to him."

Coach Tucker turned to Brittany. "What do you think about it, little lady? Would you like to date a football player?"

"Mr. Tucker, I love Daniel for who he is not what he is. I think it would be exciting, but that's my opinion. Daniel enjoys teaching English and coaching track. I don't know how he'd feel about this. You'd have to ask him."

"Oh, but think about it, Miss Brittany. Think about what it would mean. Instead of coming home to that old apartment, you could be coming home to a mansion. You could do all the things you've dreamed of. You could go any where you desired. All you have to do is convince Dan to play football, and it's yours. You can make it happen. That boy would do anything for you. I've seen it in his eyes. You can get him to play."

"Daniel would not do anything he didn't want to do, and furthermore, I would never ask him. He makes his own decisions, and he'll make this one." she stated gruffly walking away from them.

She stood alone at the fence for a few moments before she heard David's voice say, "You know, whenever I need to be alone to think about things, I always come out here to the fence. It's so peaceful to look out over the plains." Brittany didn't respond. "I'm sorry about Tucker. He can be quite manipulative to get his way. I've never liked that about him."

"Do you think it's true? What he said about me?"

"Well, let me put it to you this way, Brittany. My son is deeply in love with you. I can easily see that. He would do anything you asked of him. That much is true, but what Tucker doesn't see that I do is that you love my son just as deeply, don't you?" Brittany nodded. "I thought so. Because you love him, you would not try to manipulate him the way Tucker just tried to do to you. You do have an advantage over my son, but I know for a fact that you'd never press that

advantage.”

Brittany took a deep breath. “Daniel’s in some serious trouble, Mr. McKnight.”

“Call me David, Brittany. I know he is. I can sense it coming from both of you. What did he do this time?”

“He had sex with one of his runners and got her pregnant.” David groaned in displeasure. “She miscarried, David, but she’s really angry with Daniel and reported it to the school.”

“Daniel has always had a way of getting himself into trouble where women were concerned. That boy needs to learn how to keep his pants zipped. How do you feel about all this?”

“Well, it happened when we were still friends, so I don’t hold it against him or anything. I think it was stupid, but I want to do whatever I can to help.”

“You’re such a caring woman, Brittany. I’m glad my son has found another decent woman. I believe there only so many out there, and after Victoria died, I worried about him. She was a gem, and I loved her like she was my own daughter. When she died, I saw him fall into a deep depression, and I, as a father, felt helpless. I wanted so much to take it away.”

“David, may I ask you a personal question? Please don’t tell me what you think I want to hear. I want to know the truth.”

“Okay. I’ll tell you anything you want to know, Brittany.”

“Your wife doesn’t like me, does she?”

David was quiet a moment. “Brittany, let me tell you something about the woman I’m married to. She is a witch. I’m only married to her, because I’m afraid of losing everything I have.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s a complicated story. I married Laura in my mid twenties, because I thought we loved each other. Soon after I realized that she only married me for my money, but instead of divorcing her like I should have, I did what most guys would do at that age. I found comfort in the arms of another woman. She traveled with me during football season while Laura stayed home. Well, she got pregnant and had Daniel and Joseph. Laura and I have raised them as ours though since birth. We stayed together, because I thought it would be best for the boys, but looking back I now know that it was a mistake. Laura resents them both. In fact I suspect that she abused them when I was away.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Joseph fears her, and Daniel deplores her. I don’t believe that Joseph’s being gay was a choice, but I do wonder if abuse helped him come to that conclusion.”

“I doubt it, David. I think it’s genetic. I thought you didn’t know about that, though. That’s what they told me.”

“Laura doesn’t know. I know. I suspected it for a long time, but it was confirmed one morning when I called Joseph’s apartment too early for company and had a strange man answer. When he called Joseph to the phone, he called him honey. I thought that was a pretty good indication. I asked Joseph, and he told me. I don’t really like the fact that he is gay, but then I don’t really like the fact that Daniel is a womanizer. They both have the same problem, except one likes men and one likes women. They are dysfunctional in their sex lives, and I can’t help but wonder if that was caused by Laura. I wish both of them would change. Joseph can be gay if he could just learn to be safe about it. The same holds true with Daniel. I’m scared for both of them.”

“And you still won’t divorce Laura?”

“Trust me, I’ve thought about it many times.”

Before the conversation could go any further, they heard footsteps approaching. Brittany turned to see Daniel smiling brightly at her. “What are you two talking about over here?” he asked.

“Oh, not much, just chatting.” David answered.

“Well, you’ll never believe this. Coach Tucker just asked me to lunch on Monday. What do you think he wants?” David and Brittany both shrugged.

On Monday evening Brittany got a visit from Dan at her apartment. He was smiling brighter than he had in days. “How was your day?” Brittany inquired kissing his cheek.

“It was good. I had lunch with Coach Tucker, and then I worked out with the Cowboys. It was actually a lot of fun. They asked me to come back tomorrow.” Dan said seriously.

“Oh, really? What did you say?” Brittany asked trying to hide her enthusiasm.

“I said I would since I had nothing else pressing to do. What do you make of that, Brittany?”

“I’m not sure. Sounds to me like they are trying you out. After all, they did lose their starting quarterback for the season.”

Dan looked at her quizzically. “They haven’t even announced that to the public yet. How did you know that? Did Coach Tucker say something to you that I should know about?”

“Well, he just said that he would like you to play for him.”

“He’s been saying that for years.”

“I think he’s serious, Daniel. He asked me to try to convince you to play.”

“But you haven’t said a word to me about it until now.”

“I know. I want you to do what you want to do, not what he wants you to do. I didn’t want any part in that. Out of curiosity though, why did quit playing football if you were that good?”

“I wanted to teach, but I’ve really screwed that up.”

Brittany touched his arm. “There’s always a chance you’ll be reinstated.”

“No, not by our school. Maybe another after some time has passed, but I’m out of a job for at least a year or two.” Dan mumbled walking into the kitchen.

Following Brittany asked, “Well what if Coach Tucker made you an offer? Would you consider it now?”

“I don’t know. Do you think I should?”

“I want you to do what makes you happy, Daniel.”

“That wasn’t the answer I was looking for, honey. Tell me what you honestly think I should do.”

Brittany took a deep breath furrowing her brow seriously. “I don’t think you’re going to like what I have to say.”

“Tell me anyway.” Dan pressed.

“All right. I think you should resign before they fire you. If you ever want to teach again, it would be easier to explain a resignation than termination. Outside of that I think you should do what you want. Playing football seems to be something you enjoy, and money certainly wouldn’t be an issue for you.”

Dan shook his head. “You’re right. I know you are. I just hate to let Kristen think she’s won by me resigning.”

“I know, but Daniel, she is in the right here. She has a case against you. You’re just lucky you’re only out of a job. Had she been seventeen, she would have you put in jail.”

“It’s settled then. I’ll put in my resignation tomorrow.”

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On Friday afternoon Dan dropped by school at the end of the day. Brittany was in her room giving a tutoring session when he arrived. “Hi. What brings you here? I thought you’d be in practice.”



“Well, there’s no practice for me today. I was busy with contract negotiations.”

“You mean they made you an offer? That’s great! Congratulations!” She hugged him tightly.

“Well, we’ll see how things work out. I got the best negotiator working on it, so I am sure to get my demands met.”

“Who’s that?”

“My father. He’ll make sure I get what I want. Here. I have a present for you.” he mentioned unfolding the jersey he had in his hand. He turned it so she could see his name across that back. “They decided to give me my dad’s old number. I thought it was a nice gesture. Try it on.” he said helping her get it over her head. Standing back he smiled. “It’s perfect on you. Well, I should go. I’ll see you later tonight.”

“Yeah. We should celebrate. Let’s go out to dinner.”

“All right. I’ll pick you up at 7:00.”

Walking back to his car, he ran into Kristen smoking a cigarette with some friends. Instantly everyone but Kristen threw theirs on the ground trying to play innocent, but Kristen came up to him blowing smoke into his face.

“You going to turn me in?” she taunted.

“Why should I? I don’t teach here anymore. Remember?”

“Oh yes. I did have the pleasure of getting you fired. What are you going to do now? Find another woman to take advantage of?”

“Kristen, as much as you hate yourself for accepting my advances, you did willingly accept them. That’s not taking advantage, and if I ever hear of you saying that it was, I will sue you for slander. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to go make the most of my new career.”

“What’s that?”

“None of your business. If you’re that curious, you can see me on tv in the fall. Now I really must go start my life free of you. Good bye, Kristen.”

When Dan went to pick Brittany up for dinner, she opened the door with a sly smile pulling him inside. The place was candle lit. Brittany was wearing his favorite outfit with her white shirt simply tied around her waist, her black skirt, and grey sweater. Kissing her lips softly, he whispered, “God, I love this outfit on you.”

She giggled. “I hope you don’t mind. I decided to make dinner for us instead.”

“That sounds wonderful.” he said following her into the kitchen.

“Why don’t you open the wine while I serve the plates?” she suggested handing him the corkscrew.

Dinner was quiet but content between them. Once it was over they washed the dishes together. “Dinner was wonderful.” he complimented embracing her.

“Glad you liked it.” she answered as they kissed.

Sliding a hand under the hem of her skirt and touching her upper bare outer thigh, Dan growled, “How about some dessert?”

Brittany laughed softly as he dove playfully into her neck. “Oh, you’re such a bad boy, Daniel. We’ve only been dating for three weeks. Get your hand out from under my skirt.” Reluctantly he withdrew and looked at her. She smiled touching his hand. “Thank you.” she whispered.

“For what?” “For respecting my wishes.”

“I will always respect your wishes, Brittany.”

Grinning she mentioned, “You can put it back now if you’d like.”

Dan put his hand back and continued to stroke her thigh lightly. Brittany could tell his mind was racing as was hers. She could feel his hand sliding around to the back of her leg before ascending up her backside. He smirked. “I never would’ve thought you would wear a g-string. How naughty of you, Brittany. You do have a wild side after all.”

“Why don’t we go into the living room?”

Dan let her lead him to the couch. Pulling him onto it, Brittany plummeted into his mouth making him groan. Her hands opened the buttons of his shirt and rubbed his chest. “God, who are you, and what have you done with Brittany?” he moaned breathing deeply.

“I don’t know. I’ve never acted this way, but I can’t help myself. I like it.”

“I like it too.” he whispered kissing her mouth as his hands untied her top. He sensed her nervousness, but she pulled it off of her own shoulders before doing the same to his. Her hand then moved down to the button of his khaki pants. Dan’s body was on overdrive. He wanted Brittany more than anyone else, and her touch was urging him further. His hands slid around her back and unclasp her bra as he kissed along her neck. They both groaned when Dan touched her breasts for the first time. Dan was lost in his own world. She was responding to everything he did, and it was propelling him to the point of no return. Sex would be inevitable, he figured, and remembering that it would be her first, he felt as if he should make her as comfortable as possible. Without a word, Dan stood and scooped her up. Her body went rigid in his arms.

“Where are we going?” she asked in concern.

“To the bedroom. I thought you’d be more comfortable there than on the futon. Would you prefer to stay here?” Dan inquired bewildered at her question.

She simply shook her head in answer, so Dan continued back to her bedroom. Once on the bed, they resumed their kissing as Dan worked off his pants. Making his way down to her breasts, Dan gently kissed one as his hand caressed the other. Brittany cried out softly as her back arched slightly to meet his eager mouth. Feeling her body moving up into his, Dan was encouraged. She found the back of his head and cradled it against her with trembling hands. Dan felt her shaking slightly, but since the rest of her body was giving him a stronger response, he didn’t give it any thought. Brittany closed her eyes trying to relax, but as she did she felt her mind drift back to another time and place. She fought the fear that was trying to overtake her as she felt Dan remove the rest of her clothes. Her eyes fluttered closed, and she saw him, his icy blue, hateful eyes and set jaw. She heard his heaving breaths as his hips ground into hers, violating her as she struggled against his weight.

She screamed out against him. “No! Stop it! Get off me, Stephen!” Her nails dug into Dan’s shoulders.

He rolled off of her yelping, “Ouch!”

Brittany opened her eyes and saw the confusion on Dan’s face and blood trickling down his shoulder. She was shaking violently as she began to cry.

“Brittany, are you okay?” Dan asked reaching out for her. She let him embrace her. He rocked her slowly as he reassured her. When her tears had slowed, he inquired again, “Are you all right?”

“I’m so sorry, Daniel.” she whispered kissing the wound she had inflicted.

“I’m okay, baby. I want to know if you’re all right. What was that all about? Tell me it wasn’t me that frightened you.”

“No, it wasn’t you. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. There’s nothing to be sorry for. I just want to know what that was about. Who’s Stephen?”

Brittany’s eyes swelled with the mention of the name. “He was a guy I dated in high school. He was a senior, and I was a junior. He had dark hair with blue eyes, and he was the quarterback of the football team. I was only sixteen, and he was eighteen.”

Dan shut his eyes and took a deep breath. He knew where this was going. His fear of having to live this moment over again was coming true. “Go on. You can tell me.” he said hearing her fall silent.

“It was the night of the state championship. We had lost, and he blamed himself, because he threw an interception in the fourth quarter that gave them the winning score. Well, he took his frustrations out on me. I had tried to console him, but he turned on me, was yelling and he hit me. I should’ve run, but instead I got into a screaming match with him. He was so drunk and out of control. Next thing I knew I found myself pinned on the bed and his was ripping into my clothes. No one heard me scream, or if they did, they ignored it.” she whispered beginning to choke on her words.

Dan held her closer. “Honey, I’m not Stephen. I would never hurt you. I love you, Brittany.”

“I know.”

“I now understand why you’re a twenty-two year old virgin. I had wondered if there was a story there.”

“But I’m not a virgin any more.” she sobbed.

“That doesn’t count to me. You’ve never willing had sexual relations with anyone, so to me that means you are a virgin if that’s what you want to be.”

“That’s what I wish I was.”

“Then that’s what you are to me.” he assured her kissing her forehead. “Why don’t we go to sleep? It’s been a rough night. Let me lie here and hold you. Okay?”

Brittany nodded curling up closer to him, their naked bodies intertwining. As they laid in silence Brittany began to think about the conversation with David from a few days ago. “Daniel, are you asleep?”

“No.”

“What was your childhood like?”

“Um, when my dad was around, it was great. He would take Joe, Becca, and me places, just the four of us, and we loved it. We had some of the best times. I hated it when he was away though. He was gone so much for football.”

“What was it like when he wasn’t around?”

“It wasn’t fun. My mother was a real bitch.”

“What would she do?”

Daniel shifted uncomfortably into Brittany. “I don’t really want to talk about it.”

“Daniel, you can tell me.”

“I know. I want to tell you, but I’ve never told anyone anything about my childhood.”

“Was it that horrible?”

“I hate her for what she did to Joe and me.”

“What did she do?”

“I’m not sure what happened between she and Joe, but it was a night I’ll never forget. Joe and I were twelve. My dad was out of town for some reason or another. It was the middle of the night, and Joe woke me. He was shaking. I’ve never such a look of fear on his face. I asked what was wrong, but he wouldn’t say anything. The rest of the night I just laid in bed holding him and watching him shake and sob uncontrollably. The next evening I saw her approach him and he cowered from her touch. She hurt him. I don’t know what happened exactly and maybe I’ll never know, but he’s never been the same.”

“Did she ever hurt you?”

“Not physically. She did touch me in ways that made me uncomfortable. I finally broke around age fifteen. One night she came up behind me and brushed her body up into my back. I felt her arms snake around my waist. One hand grabbed me by my belt buckle and the other by the crotch of my jeans. I completely froze as my eyes met Joe’s. I saw that same fear in his eyes, and I knew she had touched him like that. I was so angry at the unwelcome invasion that before I realized I had done it, I had turned and hit her full force and busted her lip. I knocked her out. It was a horrible moment in my life. I’ve never hit a woman, and even though I felt as if my personal space had been violated, I still hated the fact that I had hit her. To this day I regret my action. I could’ve handled it differently.”

“You were just a kid, Daniel. She never should’ve put you in that position. Mothers are supposed to protect their children, not hurt them. You were just defending yourself.”

“Well, I began being very violent until Victoria and I started dating. It took a long time, but she changed me. After she died, though, I went back to my old ways.” Daniel mentioned.

The next morning Dan awoke first. Wearing only his boxers, he went into the kitchen and started a pot of coffee. Sinking onto the couch he channel surfed for awhile until he heard a knock on the door. When he opened it, he saw Jen standing there with wide eyed surprise.

“Dan, what are you doing here? What happened to your shoulder?”

“Nothing.” he mumbled.

“That’s not nothing.” she pressed.

Dan ignored her though as he offered her some coffee. “What are you doing here anyway?” he inquired.

“Brittany and I are supposed to look at apartments today. I’m a little early.”

“Brittany’s still in bed. We both had a little too much to drink last night.”

About then Brittany stumbled sleepily into the room yawning. “Interesting outfit, Britt.” commented Jen seeing that Brittany had on only Dan’s jersey but was obviously naked underneath.

“I think that’s my new favorite outfit.” teased Dan coming to give Brittany a kiss. “I’m going to take a shower.”

Once Brittany and Jen were alone, Jen asked in interest, “You two had sex yet?” Brittany shook her head. “What happened to Dan’s shoulder? It looked painful.”

“I accidentally did that. We were in bed last night, and I got nervous. I clamped down on his shoulder too hard. I feel terrible about it.”

“He didn’t seem to care. I’m so glad you are happy. He’s so much better than John. He’ll go nuts if he finds out about you two. You know he’s still planning to move up here after graduation. Maybe we should get an unlisted number. He’s got an interview up here on Monday. I wouldn’t be surprised if he showed up on your doorstep.”

Monday evening Dan and Brittany were having a casual early dinner at her place, so they could attend the school’s choral concert that night. They had just finished eating and were cleaning up when there was a knock on the door. They looked at each other. “Do you think that could be John?” Dan asked.

“It’s possible.”

“You want me to answer it?”

“No. That’s okay. I can handle him.”

“All right. You want me to go into the bedroom, so you two can have it out in private?”

“That’s a good idea. I appreciate it. You’ll know if I need you.”

Brittany answered the door, and as expected it was John. He was standing in a dark business suit smiling slyly at her. “Hello, Brittany. How are you?”

“John, I heard you were up here.” she stated flatly. He brushed past her into the apartment. She rolled her eyes in annoyance. “Are you here for a reason?”

“I just wanted to see how you were doing. I haven’t heard from you in weeks. I was wondering if you forgot how to use a phone.”

“Why should I call you, John, especially after the way you acted last time you were here?”

“Oh, come on, Britt. Can’t you put that behind us? I was just upset.”

“You destroyed my place, John. You were screaming and out of control. You expect me to just forget about that?”

“Oh, honey, I am sorry.” he said touching her arm.

She pulled away saying, “Don’t call me that.”

“Come on now. I’m trying to make amends here. I don’t think we should go on like this without each other.” he mentioned embracing her.

Brittany pushed him off. Firmly she stated, “Don’t touch me.”

“What is going on with you, Brittany? Why are you acting this way toward your adoring boyfriend?”

Backing up a few steps, Brittany braced herself for an explosion as she said, “You’re not my boyfriend any more, John.”

John gave an irritated laugh. “You can’t be serious? No one dumps me.”

“I have, and I meant it when I did it.”

“You damn bitch!” he yelled grabbing her by the arm. “Do you really think I’m going to let you decide when our relationship is over?”

“John, let go of me now!” she screamed.

Hearing her Dan came out to the living room. “You heard her. She said let go.” gruffly he demanded yanking John back.

“Well, well, I suspected this. You cheat on me with this dumb brute. He doesn’t even have two brain cells, Brittany.”

“Look asshole, say whatever the hell you want about me, but you better leave Brittany alone!”

“Oh insult me! That is really intelligent!”

Dan pushed him up against the door. “You started it, jerk! Get it through your thick head! She doesn’t want anything to do with you! Leave her alone!”

“You just stay out of this, Dan! This is none of your business!”

“Oh, this is my business! Her happiness is my business! Whatever this woman wants is what this woman gets, and I’m here to make sure that happens! She wants you out of her life, and I will make sure you respect her wishes! Now I think you should leave!” Dan suggested seeing Brittany near tears of frustration.

“And I think you should go to hell, Dan! I’m not leaving!”

“You are going to leave or else I’m going to throw you out!” Dan threatened grabbing him by his shirt collar.

“Daniel, stop.” Brittany whispered pulling him off John. “John, please go. I don’t want to see you any more.”

“Fine! You’re making a big mistake though, Brittany! When you realize that, don’t come crawling back to me!” John yelled slamming the door behind him.

Dan turned to Brittany. “Are you okay?”

“I told you I could handle that! You didn’t have to come out here playing knight in shining armor! I’m capable of holding my own!”

Dan was taken back. “I’m sorry, honey.” he fumbled. “I was just trying to help. I didn’t realize it would upset you.”

“I know you were only trying to help. I just want you to know that I’m not fragile. I can do it myself. I don’t need someone to rescue me.”

Dan smiled. “I know. You’re a strong woman. That’s one of the reasons why I love you.”

“I love you too, Daniel.” she answered smiling back at him.

“So you’ll forgive me?” She nodded as they kissed.

**Continued Part 3**

**The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

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~ **Triumphant Love** ~

by Alex Tryst

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**Disclaimer:** This is a story like none other posted on this site, so please thoroughly read this disclaimer before beginning. This book contains original characters and is about one couple's struggle with their demons as they venture through their relationship. As with real life, there are gay, lesbian, and straight people even though the focus is primarily on the heterosexual couple. Derogatory, racist, and homophobic language is used. Additionally, sensitive subjects matters are addressed such as but not limited to: teen pregnancy, abortion, racism, rape, child abuse (verbal, physical, and sexual), hate crimes, sexual dysfunction, infidelity, and anger management problems. Please be aware that this story is not for everyone and may not be appropriate for all readers. If you are under age 18, you probably should not be reading this material. I tried to write of these subjects with delicacy and discretion, but it may still be offensive to some, so please understand what you are becoming involved in as you begin to read. As always constructive criticism and comments are welcome at alextryst@hotmail.com.

**Dedication:** To my wife, you are my fondest wish, and to the woman that was the inspiration for this story... I hope I captured your essence as a strong and enduring spirit in the character of the lovely Brittany Saxton.

Now on with the show...

### Part 3

#### Chapter 3

The weekend of Brittany's graduation was a busy one. Dan had driven her down on Friday afternoon, so they could catch a late dinner with her family. When they arrived at the hotel, Dan took their bags up to the room. As they went inside, Dan inquired, "Are you sure about this? Aren't your parents going to freak out when they learn that we are sharing a room?"

"Well, it was either this or stay with Jen, and if I stay with her, I might run into John. Plus all her family is there. My parents will deal. I'm a grown woman, and I'll do what I want."

"All right. I just don't want them to think poorly of me for this. I wouldn't want to be on your dad's bad side, because it looks like I'm having sex with you. Some fathers get weird about that."

"I'll take care of my parents. Would you just relax?"

"Okay. I want to take a quick shower before dinner. I need to shave and all that."

"All right. I want to go visit them for awhile, so we'll meet you in the lobby in about an hour."

When Brittany got to her parent's room, her dad opened the door. "Oh my. My little girl has become a woman. You are an absolutely stunning young lady." he said looking her over. Hugging her he continued, "I'm so proud of you, sweetie."

"Thanks, Dad, for everything. Where's Mom?"

"She's in the bathroom getting ready for dinner."

Brittany knocked on the bathroom door before opening it. "Brittany, hey. Congratulations!" her mother exclaimed throwing her arms around her daughter.

"Thanks."

"Look at this great dress! You look so beautiful! You're all aglow!" Brittany gave a blushing smile. Her mother gave her a contemplative stare for a moment. "Could it be that my daughter is aglow because she's in love?"

"How do you know that?"

"I'm a mother. I'm supposed to know these things. So it's true?" Brittany nodded. "Well, tell me who it is."

"Oh, he's so wonderful, Mom. His name's Daniel McKnight. You'll get to meet him downstairs. He wanted to get presentable before dinner. Mom, you're going to love him!"

"I'm sure I am. So what happened with John?"

"Well, I met Daniel, and he makes me feels so special and wonderful. I didn't realize I was missing that with John until Daniel came along. He's just too good for words."

Seeing her daughter's eyes alive, she smiled. "I'm glad you're happy, honey. So, where are you staying? Jen's?"

"No. Actually, Daniel and I have a room here." hesitantly Brittany stated.

Her mother dropped her curling iron. "Did I just hear you correctly? Did you just say that you and Daniel are staying together?" Brittany nodded. "Oh my. Well, I guess it was bound to happen sometime. Listen, Brittany, I'm not going to tell you that you shouldn't be having sex, because twenty-two year olds have sex whether their parents approve or not. You're old enough to make that decision. I just want you to be careful. I wouldn't want to see you get hurt."

"I know, Mom, but if it makes you feel any better, I haven't had sex with him."

"Well, let's not tell your father that you two are staying together. He'll think the worst of it."

About an hour later Brittany was down in the lobby with her family, when she overheard her father comment to another male relative, "Hey, doesn't that look like that new quarterback for the Cowboys? What's his name? Something McKnight?"

Brittany turned to look and saw Dan scanning the room. Getting up, she went to him. "Hey, beautiful." he greeted kissing her cheek.

"My family's figured you out already. My dad's a big Cowboys fan. I just hope he doesn't go overboard."

"It's okay. I'm sure he'll be fine. This is your moment, not mine. I'm sure he'll remember that."

Leading him over to her family, she introduced her parents first. "Mom, Dad, this is Daniel McKnight. Daniel, these are my parents, Brian and Mary Saxton."

Over the course of dinner Daniel mostly listened to Brittany's family chat until Brittany's father inquired, "So, Daniel, may I ask what you do for a living?"

"Well, I used to be an English teacher, but I gave that up to play football."

"I knew it. I thought you played for the Cowboys. How did you and Brittany meet then? She hates football."

"She was student teaching at the school where I taught. We just ran into each other one day in the teacher's lounge."

"Quite literally." added Brittany lightly, tuning into their conversation. "I ran into him with the door."

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On Saturday morning Dan went over to Jen's apartment to help her load her things into the rental truck. While he was there however, John appeared. "Well, well, look who's here." John snarled. Dan ignored him. "Brittany ready to come back to me yet?" he asked following Dan into the apartment.

Dan turned. "Look, John. I'm not going to discuss Brittany with you. She's not your concern any more."

"Just tell me one thing, Dan old boy. Is she still a frigid bitch, or have you straightened her out yet? I always thought she'd be a good fuck if you could just get her on her back."

Dan's temper flared. Just as John had finished his statement, Dan hit him in the jaw, sending him to the floor. Dan followed him down slamming him against the ground again. "Don't ever speak of Brittany that way! I will beat you unconscious if I ever hear you talk about her like that again!"

Dan continued to shake John violently until he heard Jen screaming "Dan, get off of him!" He did as requested, but he was still on fire. "You two just need to cut it out! Brittany wouldn't approve of this behavior on either of your parts!" Dan took several heaving breaths but said nothing. "Now, John, what do you want?" Jen asked.

"I came by to get your new address and number."

Jen looked at Dan and then back at John. "I'm sorry, John. I can't give you that. I promised Brittany I wouldn't."

"You've got to be kidding me!"

"Look, I'll give you my work number and cell number. You can contact me that way."

John glared at Dan. "You did this! This is all your fault! You've turned these girls against me!"

"You're psycho, John! You did this to yourself!" Dan yelled.

John lunged at him and before Dan could duck, John's fist caught his eye. In retaliation Dan let loose not stopping until John was lying on the ground only semi-conscious. Jen looked at both of them disgusted. "Daniel, I suggest you get out of here and go back to the hotel now. We can finish packing later." Jen demanded.

Back at the room Dan fell onto the bed as he applied ice to his eye. He didn't realize he had drifted to sleep until he heard Brittany's voice coming into the room. She and her mom were just talking until they saw him raise his head slightly. Brittany gasped. Rushing to him, she sat on the bed. "What happened to you?"

"I ran into John at Jen's. We got into it."

"Daniel, why did you stoop to his level? You know I hate it when you fight."

"I know. I lost my temper. He was saying horrible things about you. I had to do something."

"Promise me there will be no fighting tomorrow." Dan gave a small nod. "Just look at you. I sure hope we can fix that. I don't want you with a black eye in the pictures."

The following morning Dan spent in the bathroom having Brittany's mother try to cover his black eye with make up. "So, you and John don't get along." she mentioned.

"Never have."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I didn't care for him much myself. I always felt he was too possessive."

"Did you ever tell Brittany that?"

"Of course not. I didn't want to influence who Brittany dated. She's a grown woman and can take care of herself."

"Tell me something. What did you think about some of her other boyfriends?"

"None of them stand out as being horrible. I liked them well enough. Stephen was one of my favorites, though."

Dan gave her a confused stare. "Why's that?"

"He was always so polite and friendly. That was Brittany's first love I think. She was crushed for the longest time when they broke up." Dan just gave a nod. He couldn't believe Brittany hadn't told her mother. "You know, you remind me a lot of Stephen. You have the same look about you. Brittany has always loved those tall, dark, and handsome men."

Over the course of the next few weeks Dan and Brittany spent as much time together as possible. Brittany had managed to secure a job for the fall all ready, and since pre-season was fast approaching they knew soon their days together would be few and far between. Most of their days were spent searching for a place for Dan to build his new house and developing plans with the builder. They finally found plot just north of Dallas right before pre-season, so Dan put Brittany in charge overseeing the project much to her delight.

Once the season began however, they hardly saw each other even when Dan was in town. One particular evening he called her from the road sounding more lonely than usual. "I saw the game tonight." Brittany said. "Are you okay? That sprain looked pretty bad."

"Well, the trainer says I'll be out for three weeks." he mumbled.

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Well, at least I'll be spending a little more time at home. The team has a string of home games over the next two weeks."

"That's great! Finally we can spend some time together!"

"Yeah, well, a little time anyway. I have rehab and you have to work, but at least it'll be something. I miss you so much, Brittany."

"I miss you too, Daniel, desperately. I can't believe you are gone so much. I don't like that."

"Neither do I. I would much prefer being with you, my little wife."

"I'm not your wife, Daniel." Brittany mentioned jokingly.

"A man can dream, can't he?"

"You're just saying that to try to get me into bed. Well, it's not going to work, mister." she teased.

"Maybe someday it will. You've managed to keep me at bay for eight months, and I'm still interested. That's incredible. I've finally succumbed to a power greater than myself, and that power would be your feminine wiles."

Brittany laughed. "Oh, you're trying hard, aren't you?"

"You know what I would do if I were there right now, Brittany?"

"What?" she inquired hearing his voice becoming low and sensuous.

"I would stretch you out on the bed with all your clothes off, and I would give you a full body massage. I'd start at your head and work all the way down to your pretty little toes, making sure I missed nothing in between."

Brittany caught onto his game. "Then what would you do?" she asked playing along.

"I would kiss up your legs to those wonderfully shaped thighs, and when they parted at my very touch, I would let my mouth give you pleasure like you've never known." he groaned seductively.

Brittany whimpered as her body ached at the thought. This time apart was putting a strain on them like they couldn't have imagined. She missed the feeling of him desperately. "And when will you be home to do this?" she whispered in urgent need.

Dan heard the change in her voice. He had never heard her this way before, and it aroused him even further. "I'll be home tomorrow. You want to meet me at my place after school?"

"I'll be there. Now I must try to get some sleep. Good night, my sweet Daniel. I love you."

"I love you too. Sweet dreams."

The following day Dan arrived home around 5:00. Seeing Brittany's car, he hobbled up the stairs as fast as his sprained ankle would let him. However when he got into the apartment, Brittany wasn't inside, so he dropped his bag and fell onto the couch to sort through his mail. About ten minutes later he heard a key in the door. Brittany smiled brightly when she saw him. Closing the door she leaped onto the couch knocking him into a lying position.

"Wow, that was quite a tackle. Maybe we should recruit you to play for us." Dan teased as they kissed.

"I've missed you so much." she whispered frantically showering him with kisses. Once she slowed, Dan stroked her wet hair slightly. "You go out for a run?"

"Yeah. Had I known you'd be home early though, I wouldn't have. I wanted to look good when you came in."

"You look good to me." he growled kissing her ear.

She raised her eyebrow and tapped his chest as she mentioned, "You know, last night you

promised me a massage. You've had me dreaming about it all day. I think I should take a shower, and then you can fulfill that promise."

"Do I get to share that shower with you?"

Brittany didn't answer as she stood, but instead simply pulled him off the couch. Going into the bathroom, she started the water. She gave Dan little thought as she began to undress. Dan just watched her. He loved the way she moved. Seeing her strip off her t-shirt, his eyes widened in anticipation. He stepped behind her encircling her bare waist, as she took off her sports bra. He slowly began to kiss the nape of her neck after pushing her blonde hair aside. Her head fell back against his shoulder as his hands moved up her trim torso to her breasts. She moaned spinning around to greet his mouth eagerly. She ripped his shirt over his head, so their bare skin could touch. Sliding her shorts over her hips, Dan's hand traced her thighs. They quivered as his searching fingers found their way into her fine hair, damp with sweat and need. Feeling her legs beginning to buckle, he leaned her into the counter. Her hands were working into his shorts. He groaned feeling her caressing him tentatively. Turning his attentions back to her, his fingers found her entrance and slid in without resistance. He saw her brow furrow as she moaned deeply. Gently thrusting into her, Dan felt her responding. She was so tight and warm. It only took a few minutes for her to climax as she clung to him before going limp in his arms. A silent moment passed before Dan withdrew his hand. Brittany was trembling.

"I've got you, baby." Dan reassured her.

"Oh God, where did that come from?" she asked quietly giving him a loving smile. He returned it brushing back her hair. Brittany's smile faded though, once she realized that he hadn't gotten the same release that she had felt.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing." she mumbled playing it off.

"Are you sure? Did I hurt you or something?"

"No, I'm fine." she insisted gently pushing him off of her. Dan didn't believe her, but he didn't press.

Later that evening after dinner, they were watching a movie in bed. Brittany had been quiet since their shower, and Dan wondered if he had done something wrong. "Is something bothering you, Brittany? You've been quiet all night."

Sighing Brittany mumbled, "I just want to make you happy, Daniel, and I don't. I mean earlier you made me feel so wonderful. I just wish I could do the same for you."

"Honey, you allowing me to please you makes me happy."

"You say that, Daniel, but who are you trying to kid? I saw that look on your face. You needed

relief and didn't get it."

"All right, maybe that's true, but I wouldn't want you to do anything that makes you uncomfortable. I felt the uncertainty in your touch. I didn't want to push you."

"Well, I'd like to please you, Daniel." she whispered slipping a hand through the top of his running shorts.

Dan closed his eyes feeling her hand slowly caress him. Dan ached for release, but he didn't want to pressure her, so he just lied there letting her explore him until his body began to respond involuntarily. His hips began to rock urging her to continue. It didn't take long for him to reach climax, because her slightest touch brought him to the edge. They were quiet for awhile afterwards as Dan slowed his breathing. "Well now, that was unexpected. We both feeling better?"

"I do." she whispered nestling up onto him.

On Saturday they drove out to the new house to survey the progress. The builder was there when they arrived, so he guided them on a tour. "Things are coming along well, Mr. McKnight. I definitely think we'll be finished by early December." he said to Dan as Brittany wandered toward the kitchen. "I must admit my guys always hated working Saturdays until now. They love coming to work here."

"Oh yeah? Why's that?"

"I think it has a lot to do with that little girlfriend of yours. She's out here every Saturday. She's quite a catch, I must say."

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, she's absolutely brilliant, one of the smartest women I've ever met. Of course, she's not hard on the eyes either."

"She is brilliant. She's a physics teacher if you can believe that."

"Well, if I may put my two cents in, she's a keeper."

Dan smiled as he looked off in her direction. "Yeah, she is, and I'm hoping she'll have me."

Over dinner that evening Brittany inquired, "Have you thought about Thanksgiving any more?"

"Yeah. Since I have to play, I think you should go home and be with your family. I'm not going to have much of a Thanksgiving, because I'll be tied up most of the day. I don't want you to have to suffer too."

"Are you sure?"



"Yeah, I want you to have a pleasant vacation. You deserve it."

"What about Christmas then?"

"We play on the 26th, so we'll have to see. I'll probably stay in town, so I can be rested."

"Then I should stay with you." Brittany mentioned.

"We'll see." mumbled Dan dejected. He hated the thought of being apart from Brittany, especially during the holidays.

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As expected Dan's house was finished by the middle of December, but since he was busy with the season, he asked Brittany to oversee the move. On the evening of December 21st, Dan pulled up to his new house for the first time. In the driveway he saw Brittany's beat up old car, and the house was modestly aglow with Christmas decor. Coming through the front door, Dan just stood in the foyer surveying all the work Brittany had done. Just then she came around the corner. She was smiling warmly at him, and all of a sudden he realized this was all he ever wanted, this beautiful woman to come home to.

"Welcome home." she said giving him a tight embrace.

"Brittany, you have outdone yourself with this house. The place looks fabulous. I'm overwhelmed."

"I'm glad you like it. I had so much fun doing it. It's every woman's dream to be able to decorate a house without a budget. Come on. I'll show you around before dinner."

When they went into the master bedroom, Dan stopped in the doorway. "This is amazing. I love what you've done with the colors."

"I'm glad. This was the only room I went a little wild on."

"Could you come home to this room everyday for the rest of your life?" Dan asked.

Brittany flushed. "I think so."

"Then that's what matters."

Smiling again, she took his hand. "Come on. Dinner's ready."

As they sat down to a candle lit dinner, Dan complimented everything down to the flatware. "It's so wonderful to come home to you, Brittany. Every time I'm away I long to see you."

"I always miss you too, Daniel, more than you'll ever know."

Dan smiled. "So, when are your parents arriving?"

"On the 23rd. I really hope this will be a great Christmas. Are you sure it's going to be okay to have our parents together?"

"It's just Christmas Day. I'm sure it'll be fine. If my mother gets out of line, I'll straighten her out. I'm just glad to get to see your parents again. It's been awhile. Are you sure they are going to be all right staying here at our house even though we're not married?"

Brittany was taken back slightly. "Well, my father might have a problem with it, but my mom will keep him calm. Daniel, is something on your mind? You've insinuated things about marriage several times this evening. I didn't even know you thought about that kind of thing."

"Well, I can honestly say, that it's usually a fleeting thought, but tonight something happened. When I came in and you greeted me, I realized that's what I wanted. I wanted to be able to come home to you every night for the rest of my life."

Brittany gasped slightly. "I never would've thought you'd think something like that about me."

"Why not? I love you more than life itself. Why wouldn't I want to share every possible moment of it with you?"

Brittany's eyes grew misty. "You are always a charmer."

"Well, I mean it." he stated matter of factly. "I guess it's a matter of you deciding if you can put up with me for that long."

"I think I probably could. Although, I hate the fact that you are away all the time. As much as I love this freedom of being able to buy anything I want, it's costing me dearly, because you're not here."

Brittany's parents arrived early in the afternoon on the 23rd. Dan could see that Brittany's father was anxious about the arrangements between he and Brittany, so after they were settled and had a tour, Dan approached him. "Brian, I was wondering if we could have a talk. Would you mind going for a ride with me?"

He shrugged. "Sure. Let's go." Once they were out on the main road, he asked, "What did you want to talk to me about, Dan?"

"I really don't know a tactful way to approach this, so I'm just going to come right out and ask it. Would you have any objections to me marrying Brittany?"

"Wow, that's quite a question." Brian mentioned taken back.

"Well?"

"Dan, Brittany loves you, and I want her to be happy. If that is what makes her happy, then it pleases me also. You would be an excellent provider, so I would have to worry about her being taken care of. I think you love her as much as she loves you, so how could I object?"

Dan smiled. "Good. I was hoping you'd feel that way."

"Have you and Brittany discussed this much?"

"A little. I just wanted to know that I have the best of intentions with your daughter. I would never take advantage of her."

They rode together in silence a little longer before Brian asked, "May I ask where we are going?"

"We're going to get Brittany's Christmas present."

"What did you get her?"

"An Infiniti Q45."

"You serious? That's a \$50,000 car, Dan."

"I know. I want her to drive a safe, comfortable vehicle. It's a great car. We'll get to test drive it again before we take it to its hiding place."

"Does she know about this?"

"No. I thought I'd surprise her."

"She loves her old car."

"I know, but it's constantly breaking down. It's time she get another."

"So, no ring this year?"

"No. I'm not ready to propose yet. I haven't come up with a good way to do it. Besides, I want her to have a say in it. After all, she will be wearing it the rest of her life. I figure once season's over, we'll have lots of time to shop."

"You're going all the way to the Super Bowl this year. I can feel it." Brian mentioned.

"I sure do hope so, but I'd like to concentrate on winning the conference first."

"You're number one, and you have the best record. You're unstoppable."

"Well, I'm glad our biggest fan has such confidence in us. We'll try not to let you down." Dan joked.

That night after Brian and Mary had retired for the evening, Dan and Brittany went upstairs. "So what did you talk to my dad about today?" she asked beginning to undress.

Dan smiled appreciating the show she was unknowingly giving. He came to her wrapping his arms around her bare waist. Kissing her neck gently he mumbled, "I asked him if he had any objections to me proposing to you."

"You did not." she said in disbelief beginning to feel a tingle of arousal from his lips. His hands unzipped her jeans. She could sense immediately where this was going. His determined kiss revealed his intentions. It had been ten months since they'd been dating, and both of them of them ached for the release that could only come from love making. However as much as they yearned for that pleasure, something had kept them from fulfilling that desire. As Brittany felt Dan moving her towards the bed, she knew tonight would be no exception. "Daniel," she whispered. "As much as I would love to do this right now, my parents are downstairs. This makes me uncomfortable." Dan pulled away with a sigh and sat on the edge of the bed silently. "I just want it to be the right moment. I want us to both be comfortable. Don't you?" she continued feeling the need to explain herself.

"Of course I do." he mumbled walking away into the bathroom closing the discussion. Brittany watched him. She could feel his tension. It matched her own, but that insecurity was creeping in. Even though he wasn't deliberately trying to push her, his tone and body language made her uneasy. As they lay in bed that night, Brittany felt the awkwardness between them. Instead of pulling her to him, Dan laid on his side away from her. Brittany just stared at his bare, muscular back before turning away as well.

The next day Brittany and her mother prepared dinner for Christmas Day as Dan and her dad started on the turkey. Brittany and her mother worked for a long time in silence before her mother asked, "Honey, is something on your mind? You seem distraught."

"Oh, I don't know. It's Daniel. I'm not sure what's going on with him. He seems distant."

"How so?"

"Well, we've been talking about marriage, and he seems all for it."

"Is that a problem?"

"No. I love the idea of being married to him It's just that there are other issues going on. They are kind of hard to talk about with your own mother."

"Brittany, you know you can tell me anything, but if you'd rather not, I understand. I'm just concerned is all."

Brittany paused for a moment before stating, "He wants me to have sex with him."

"And you don't?"

"No, I do. I want to very much, but," Brittany's voice began to shake. "I've never willingly had sex with anyone."

Her mother put down the knife she'd been using to cut vegetables. The phrasing of Brittany's confession made her fear the worst for her daughter. "What are you trying to tell me, sweetheart?" she asked hesitantly. Brittany tried to remain calm, but she couldn't. Harboring this six year secret was more than she could bear. She began to sob uncontrollably as her mother embraced her. "It's all right. You can tell me." her mother assured her instinctively knowing what it was.

"Stephen," Brittany began. That was a name her mother hadn't heard Brittany utter in years. "He raped me." she wept. Instantly her mother began to cry as they clung to each other. "Don't tell Dad." Brittany begged.

"It'll be okay." her mother stated gently rocking her.

"I wasn't going to tell you." Brittany mentioned after she had calmed herself.

"I'm glad you did."

"It's just that I want to be with Daniel, but whenever we move in that direction, I get scared."

"Does he know about this?"

"Yes, and he's been understanding, but I can tell it's getting more difficult for him. He hasn't said it in words, but I sense it. I feel the immense pressure building between us. I just don't want it to explode. I don't know what to do, though."

Her mother held her at arms length. "You do what's comfortable for you, Brittany. If Daniel loves you as much as he says he does, he'll wait. If you're not ready, you should tell him. He should respect that." They were quiet a moment before her mother continued. "Brittany, I know it's none of my business, but I have to point it out anyway. You are sleeping with him, aren't you?" Brittany nodded. "Men are easily confused by women's actions. You are sharing a bed with this man, because you want to be close to him, but let me tell you what he's thinking. He's thinking that you're open for sex. My advice to you would be not to confuse him with your words and actions. Be very clear in what you want and don't want."

As they went to bed that night, Brittany thought about her mother words. She knew her mother was right. The signals she was giving Daniel were confusing. However she knew there would be no time to discuss it with him. The season was almost over, and then they would have plenty of time to talk. However thoughts of her parents meeting Dan's for the first time invaded her mind. She had no fears about Joseph, Becca, and David, but Laura concerned her.

On Christmas Day Dan and Brian sneaked out early to get Brittany's present. However by the time they were back, Brittany and her mother were drinking coffee in the kitchen. Dan and Brian joined them before they went into the living room to open gifts.

Once they were open, Dan smiled at Brittany. "I have one more gift for you." he stated taking her hand and standing. He led her out into the circle drive to where her new car was waiting with a big red bow.

"It's beautiful, Daniel!" she exclaimed hugging him tightly.

Handing her the keys, he said, "Come on. Let's take her for a spin."

Dan got into the passenger's seat and her parents in the back as she slid behind the wheel. She sat for a moment just looking at everything. "This is the nicest car I've ever been in, Daniel." she mumbled caressing the champagne colored leather seat.

"Well, I'm glad you like it. If you want a different color, we can take it back."

"No, I love the color. It's just perfect."

"This really is an extraordinary present." Mary mentioned.

"For an extraordinary lady." Dan commented touching Brittany's face lightly.

Later that morning Dan's family arrived. Both Dan and Brittany were thankful that Laura was in a cordial mood. Most of the day was spent talking about football however, which was a topic that was beginning to bore Brittany. She graciously listened to Dan, her father, and his father, though.

When she couldn't take it any longer, she wondered off to find Joe. He was giving himself a tour of the house. "Did you decorate this?" he asked when he saw her. She nodded. "This is fabulous work, an interior design masterpiece if I may say so myself."

"Thank you." she mumbled.

"You tired of football yet?"

"How could you tell?"

"Dan goes a little nuts this time of year. Football becomes his obsession between now and the Super bowl, especially if he's playing. He's a completely different man, and not one I really care for I must admit. That testosterone of his kicks into overdrive, and he gets really aggressive. Just be aware of that."

"Daniel would never hurt me."

"No, he wouldn't, but I've seen him hurt himself and others. I hate all that manly bullshit. Sometimes I don't know why he feels the need to prove himself. Of course I will say he's mellowed out since meeting you."

## Chapter 4

The day of the Super Bowl had arrived, and as expected Dan's team was the favorite. Brittany's parents joined her and Dan's family in one of the suites for the game that day. As Joe had predicted, there had been a change in Dan over the last few weeks. He seemed to care more about football than anything else. During the first half Brittany tried to watch attentively, but Dan kept getting hit. She could tell that each time it happened he was a little slower in getting up. Nevertheless he was getting them the points they needed. Going into half time his team was up ten points. During the second half, Brittany was anxious. Dan was taking more of a beating, and the other team had tied the game. Going into the final two minutes, Dan tried desperately to rally the team. He had gotten them within twenty yards of a touchdown, and it was obvious he wanted to go for a score. The defense covered too well, though, giving him no other option but to run with it. Brittany watched him, her eyes growing wider as he sprinted toward the goal line, but at the five he was hit so hard, he fell lifeless to the ground as the ball slipped out of his hands. The other team recovered the ball, but Brittany didn't even notice as she just saw Dan lying on the ground not moving. Minutes passed like hours. He was not getting up. Suddenly she felt arms embrace her. She looked up at Joe with watery eyes.

"He'll be okay." he tried to reassure her, but the uncertainty was evident in his voice.

After what seemed an eternity, she saw him slightly move. A sigh of relief overcame her as she saw he was standing with assistance, but she saw the sheer look of pain across his face. Brittany watched him be carted off to the locker room not to return, and in the final moments the other team kicked the winning field goal.

Brittany went back to the hotel with the rest of the family. She wasn't sure what to expect from him when he returned, so Joe waited with her until close to 11:00. Seeing Joe yawning, she said, "You don't have to wait any more. I'm sure when he gets back, he'll just want to go to sleep."

"You sure you'll be all right?" She nodded. "Okay. Call me if you need anything, though."

Brittany changed into her night clothes and was just lying in bed when she heard the key in the door. Dan stumbled in without a word and plopped into a chair facing the window.

"Where have you been?"

"The hospital."

"What did the doctors say?"

"I had a concussion."

"It was a really hard hit, Daniel." Brittany mentioned coming and sitting on his lap. She kissed his pouting mouth. It reeked of alcohol. Dan buried his head into her neck. She could feel a wave of heat begin to pass through her as he kissed just the right places. Closing her eyes, she allowed his hands to roam under her clothes. For a moment she forgot about the game and the fact that Dan was drunk, but then she found herself on the bed underneath his heavy body. He was frantically disrobing her. "Daniel." she whispered anxiously. He didn't respond. Fear set in quickly as she thought history was about to repeat itself. She had to stop him. Pushing firmly on his shoulders she demanded, "Daniel, stop it! Now!"

Dan raised his head to look at her. Seeing the terror that filled her eyes, he leaped from the bed. Screaming he slammed his fist through the wall. Brittany screamed retreating to the far side of the bed. With trembling hands she picked up the phone to call Joe. In her hysterics Brittany forgot that she was naked when she answered the door, but Joe didn't seem to notice as he immediately went to Dan wrestling him to the floor to restrain him. Dan struggled briefly, but then fell helplessly flat on the floor as Joe laid over him. There was a tense moment between the three of them as Joe slowly sat back on his heels letting Dan up from his position. Dan feebly curled up into Joe's embrace and began to cry.

"I failed." Dan mumbled.

"You didn't fail, Daniel. It's not your fault."

"I was the leader, and I let my team down."

"Dan, you suffered a major head trauma. No one would've expected you to carry on."

"But I dropped the ball. It's my fault we lost."

"You were getting hammered all night. They weren't giving you the coverage you needed to do your job. It's not your fault." Dan sobbed some more before Joe said, "Let me see your hands. They must be hurting." Dan gingerly uncurled his fists. His knuckles were raw and swollen. "Man, Daniel, I don't see how you can do this to yourself." he mentioned examining Dan's hands closer. "Brittany," he said looking up for her. Beginning to look up, he eyes trailed up her bare legs. "Um, why don't you go get some ice?" he stuttered uneasily.

Brittany nodded then realizing what the flush across Joe's face was about. Quickly she threw on her robe. When she returned with the ice, Joe was helping Dan into bed. He wrapped Dan's hands and then sat by him waiting for him to pass out. Once he had, Joe said, "I know this isn't any of my business, but I don't think you should stay here tonight. Why don't you come back to my room?"

"I can't, Joseph. What if he needs something?"

"You're right. Then I'll stay with you. You shouldn't be alone with him right now. He's in bad shape, worse than I've ever seen him."



They both got into the king sized bed with Dan that night. As Brittany lay between them, she could feel Joe moving restlessly. She felt his hand touch her hip. "Joseph," she said turning over to him. "May I ask you something?" He nodded. She smirked. "Were you checking me out earlier?"

Joe blushed. "Well, I didn't realize you were naked at first. I've never seen a naked woman. I swear I didn't mean to stare."

It's okay. I just thought it was funny."

I would never do something to make you uncomfortable. I was just fascinated. I didn't mean anything by it." nervously he stated.

Brittany touched his jaw. "You're a good brother, Joseph, and a good man. There is a man out there that will be truly blessed when you find each other." Joe smiled. "You look so much like Daniel in this light." Brittany mentioned caressing his hair.

Joe began to feel uncomfortable. Taking her hand, he held it. "But I'm not Daniel, and I never could be."

"I know, but sometimes I wish he could be a little more like you. He used to be gentle. I don't know where that went."

"Get him away from football. Football will destroy what's good in him, because he's too competitive. If you want a soft, gentle Dan, you must get him away from this game."

The next morning Joe left early, leaving Brittany to face a somber, sober Dan alone. Brittany was anxiously sitting, looking out the window when he stirred. His mind was empty as he opened his eyes, but when he saw Brittany turn toward him, it all hit him at once.

"I made a complete ass out of myself, didn't I?" he asked sitting up.

Brittany didn't answer. She still wasn't sure which issue she wanted to address first. After a few minutes, she pointed to the hole in the wall. "What caused that?" she asked plainly. "Was it the game or me?"

"What do you mean?"

"Last night I had to get more forceful with you than I would've liked, Daniel. You got angry and did that. That's why I'm asking what caused that."

"It wasn't you, honey." Dan said coming to kneel at her chair. "I was angry and frustrated about the game. I just can't believe I lost it for us."

"You didn't lose it, Daniel!" Brittany snapped.

Taken back by her tone, Dan asked, "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" she repeated. "Daniel, you were out of control last night! I had to call Joseph in here, because you scared me so badly! Football is a game, Daniel! It might be what you do for a living now, but it's still just a game! It's not worth all this stress and pressure you put on yourself! After last night I'm all ready dreading next season!"

"I said I was sorry!" Dan yelled holding his aching head.

"Daniel, you were damn near violent with me last night."

"Brittany, I would never hurt you."

"Well, you almost did! How could you do that to me, knowing what I've been through? It was like living my nightmare with Stephen all over again, but instead of being physically violated, I had to go through emotional hell watching you hurt yourself!"

Dan dropped his head as his heart sank into his chest. "You have every reason to hate me." he mumbled.

"Damn right I do! But I don't! I love you, Daniel, even when you do get crazy! You need to control this anger of yours! Football shouldn't be everything!" Dan just nodded. "I'm serious, Daniel, about your anger. You need help."

"Whatever you say. I'll do anything. Just please don't leave me. I couldn't bear that." he begged in tears. "I can't make it without you."

Brittany sighed seeing the distress in his eyes. It pained her to think that he was so insecure about their relationship. She knew she could never leave this man. "I'm not going to leave you, Daniel. I love you. You haven't done anything irreparable. We'll get through this together. We just have to be patient with each other." She stroked his hair lightly. Her heart ached seeing him in such torment. She had never seen him in such a weak condition.

When Brittany got back to her apartment, Jen was reading on their couch. "I saw the game. How's Dan feeling? They hit him pretty hard."

"He had a concussion. This weekend was horrible."

"What happened besides them losing?"

"Daniel fell apart. He blames the whole thing on himself. I have never seen him in such emotional anguish. His rage was just consuming him."

"What happened?"

"He put a hole in the wall with his fists."

"He didn't hurt you, did he?"

Brittany thought back a moment. "No. Even in his anger he never raised a hand to me, but he did scare me half to death."

"Is he doing any better now?"

"A little. I want him to get out of Dallas for awhile. It would be good for him to get away."

"That's probably true. So why aren't you staying with him now that the season's over? I thought for sure you two would be joined at the hip, if not other places as well." Jen teased.

Brittany gave a fake smile. "I just can't move in with him. After what happened, I'm not ready to deal with that. We have so many things to work on first. It's going to be a long time before we're ready to take that next step."

Over the next two weeks Dan spent time with Joe in New York. They were having dinner alone one night in Joe's apartment when Joe asked, "So, how are things going with Brittany? You've hardly mentioned her since you've been here."

Dan shrugged. "Things are a little uneasy between us. She thinks I have an anger problem."

"Well, football brings out the worst in you, Dan. I would've thought you'd remember that."

"Yeah. I'm thinking I probably shouldn't play any more, but I have to at least play out my contract."

"How many season's is that?"

"Only one. I did it that way, so I could re-negotiate if I wanted. Now I'm thinking I shouldn't."

"I know you shouldn't. Listen to me, Dan. You make enough money in one season to last a lifetime. It's the only way you're going to keep Brittany. If you keep playing, you will lose the best thing that's ever happened to you."

"Why do you say that? Did she say something to you?"

"She doesn't like that side of you, Dan. She wants a softer Daniel, not one who's punching through walls. If you continue down this path, I know she'll leave you. I think you know I'm right about that."

"I don't want to lose her. She means the world to me." Dan stated starting to really listen to his brother.

"I know. That's why you must give up this game. It's not your passion that drives you. It's an

obsession. It's an obsession to prove to yourself that you're manly. Well, dammit, you are a man and a good one. Brittany knows that. She doesn't need to see all that physical violence to know that you're manly. You're just going to end up pushing her away."

"Where are you going with this, Joe? What are you trying to say?" Dan inquired becoming irritated at his brother's attack.

"Listen, I know we've never talked about this, but we should now. I think we both have daily repercussions from how Mom treated us as children. You have so much anger. I'm afraid you'll end up hurting yourself or someone you love very dearly. I don't want Brittany to be on the receiving end of your wrath. No one woman deserves that."

Dan gave a slow nod, knowing his brother had a point. "You're right, Joe. You and Brittany are both right. May I ask you a question? Do you remember that night when we were twelve that you came into my room scared to death?"

"I wish I could forget."

"What happened to you?"

Joe looked around the kitchen for a few minutes in silence. "Well, let me put it to you this way. It was the only time in my life I've ever experienced straight sex."

Dan's face turned pale. He had never expected to hear that response. "Why did you let her? Even at twelve, we were so much stronger than she was."

"She threatened me. She said she'd kill dad, and then she'd be able to have us when whenever she wanted. I was scared. What's a twelve year old to do when his own mother says that? I didn't want to do it."

"I know you didn't." Dan whispered trying to hold back tears as he put his hand on his brother's arm consolingly.

"What about you? What kind of things would she make you do?"

"Nothing to that extent, although she touched me sexually at times. More often though she'd slap the hell out of me and tell me how worthless I was. She would often say that I wasn't manly enough, because I wrote poetry and was into music. Guess she thought I was going to be the queer one."

Joe laughed at the bitter irony. "Well, she certainly was wrong on that."

"I think we should tell Dad." Dan mentioned.

"I don't know. He'd want to leave her, but I wouldn't want her to take him for everything he has."

"Well, we'll figure it out. She should pay for what she's done to this family. Personally I'd like nothing better than to see her kicked to the curb."

Joe nodded his agreement. They were silent a few more minutes before Joe asked, "So, do you think you're going to marry Brittany? I'd really like her for a sister-in-law. She's a good woman with huge heart. I just love her. She's good for you."

"Yeah, I hope to keep her. I'll tell you, Joe, that woman has denied me for eleven months. It's getting hard to take."

"Is that all you think about? Getting laid?"

"No. If it was, I could've gotten laid many times in the past eleven months, just not by Brittany. I care about her, so I keep holding out. I just wish I could make it happen faster. She's reserved and self-conscious, which I can understand given her situation, but I'd still like to get a piece of her."

"I'm sure you would. However, a little hand action should keep you out of trouble." Joe smirked.

"Nothing compares to the real thing, man. I can just imagine the feeling her of warm, soft body under mine and being inside of that tight, wet heat. Just thinking about her makes me horny."

Joe laughed. "Well, you're not getting any action here from my friends. That is unless you'd like to experiment with something new."

"Uh, no thanks. I'd rather not. Men are not my type. Although I will admit that I'm not as bothered by them hitting on me any more."

"Good, because as long as you're here, my cohorts will think you're all that and try to get into your pants. You know that, right?"

"Yeah, I've figured that out. After last night, I knew I wasn't safe too far away from you. Some of them are worse than many straight men I've seen. I couldn't tell you how many times my ass was grabbed."

Joe gave a hearty laugh. "Welcome to my life. So many men, so little time."

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In late March of that year Brittany and Dan went to the Bahamas for Brittany's Spring Break. When they arrived it was early evening. They settled into their secluded beachfront accommodations and headed into town for dinner. Then they laid in the hammock enjoying the night sky. That night as they went to bed, Dan was restless. He kept thinking about that ring he had tucked away in his bag. It was the one Brittany had loved the most on their numerous shopping trips for wedding bands. Tomorrow he decided would be the big day. He had waited a long time for this moment.

The next day Brittany wanted to spend shopping in town, so Dan obliged hoping to relieve some of his tension about the events of the evening. The more they shopped however the less interested he became as he started to watch Brittany with adoring eyes. Her golden hair was pinned gently up away from her face. Under her white tank top, he could see the alluring curvature of her breasts, and her wrap skirt was just translucent enough that he could make out the shape of her lovely legs.

She saw him smiling at her. "What?"

"You are a magnificent creature."

She blushed. "Why don't we have some lunch and then head back? I want to catch some sun today."

"Anything you want." he answered kissing her forehead.

All afternoon they laid on the beach, and then Dan made dinner for them. Brittany was just standing on the deck sipping her wine when the meal was over when Dan disappeared into their bedroom. Going through his bag, he found the ring, and tucked it into his pocket. Then picking up her sweater he returned to the deck.

"Would you like to go for a walk?" he inquired extending the sweater to her.

She knew it wasn't really a question. "Sure." she answered wrapping the sweater around her bare shoulders and taking the hand he had extended to her.

They walked in silence for a few minutes. "It's a beautiful evening." Brittany commented.

"Yes, it is, but nothing is as beautiful as you, my sweet Brittany." he stated coming to a stop and turning her to face him. "You know all my life I've yearned for a special woman to come to me, one with whom I could grown old and have children." he began kneeling on one knee. "Brittany, you're what I want for the rest of my life. It would bring me great pleasure to have us spend the rest of our lives together. I would consider it an honor to be your husband if you'll have me. Will you marry me, Brittany?" She gave a giddy smile as he pulled the ring out and slid it on her finger.

Pulling him to his feet, she replied, "I love you, Daniel. Yes, I will marry you. It would bring me great pleasure to spend eternity with you." They leaned in to kiss each other. "It's getting chilly. Let's go back." she suggested with a smile Dan had never seen.

Dan let her lead him back to their bedroom before they looked at each other again. The longer Brittany gazed into those green eyes, the more she was sure of what she wanted. Encircling his neck, she kissed him slowly. Dan responded by embracing her bare waist. They methodically kissed as Brittany stroked Dan's bare chest through his open shirt. Moving up his jaw, Brittany gently bit his earlobe sucking it into her mouth. "I want you to make love to me, Daniel. I want

to feel you inside of me." she growled. Dan pulled away slightly to gaze into her hazel eyes. They were wild with passion. Before he could respond, Brittany had pulled him onto the bed. He felt her body underneath his and groaned loudly, wanting to take her, but he had his reservations, so he let her be the aggressor. Her actions showed that she wanted to move slowly but the intent could not have been more obvious. It was the longest foreplay Daniel had ever experienced. Even once they both lay naked, they continued to leisurely explore each other in gentle intimacy. Finally pulling his body on top of hers, Brittany looked up at him expectantly, waiting for him to make the final move.

"Are you sure this is what you want?" he softly inquired, his eyes never leaving hers.

"Yes." breathlessly came the answer. Dan felt her hips thrust up into his, inviting him into the place he dreamed of for thirteen months. Dan gave her a loving smile as he slowly began his entrance. He could feel her muscles shuddering as they gave way to him.

"Let me know if it begins to hurt." he whispered seeing a twinge of pain pass over her face.

"I'm fine." quietly she assured him wrapping her arms around his neck and pulling his body into hers. They both groaned at the full body contact.

Dan began a gentle pace, but even his smallest movements made her moan in pleasure. Feeling her body arching into his and her begging for more, he began to push faster and harder until she was crying out to him, her voice frantic with need. She was approaching climax quicker than Daniel had expected her to. He loved the feeling of sending her over that edge, and feeling her sweet depths contracting around him sent him crashing over as well.

They both lay still, interlocked in silence, clinging to each other as their bodies trembled. Dan was the first to move as he lifted his head to look into her eyes. However he saw a tear trickle out of the corner of one of them. "Are you all right?" softly he asked with concern, his body growing tense.

She caressed his jaw and smiled. "I love you, Daniel Ethan McKnight. I love you so much."

"I love you too, Brittany." he answered as they kissed gently.

"You know, had I known it would be that good, I wouldn't have waited so long." she joked playing with his hair.

Dan's heart pounded. "I'm glad we did wait. It just made it all that much better."

"I hope that there's more where that came from." she whispered leaning in to his mouth, kissing him deeply.

"You mean you're not tired?" he inquired when their kiss broke.

"How could I ever be tired of that?" She smiled coyly.

"Uh oh. I've unleashed a monster."

"Well, if you're tired..."

"Trust me, I'll definitely never be too tired to please you. Anything you desire is yours."

Smiling she asked, "How about another kiss?"

The following morning Brittany awoke to the sounds of the ocean as a warm breeze swept over her bare skin. She heard Daniel humming in the kitchen nook. Her eyes fluttered closed again as she sighed in contentment. Dan paused in the doorway of their bedroom. Brittany looked so beautiful asleep. Setting their breakfast on the night stand, Dan leaned over her, kissing her softly in morning greeting. She giggled opening her eyes. "Good morning." he whispered.

"Morning, handsome."

"I brought you some breakfast." he mentioned picking up the plate of fresh fruit. Taking a piece of mango, he held it up in front of her mouth. Brittany smiled as her tongue began to lick the fruit suggestively before sucking it into her mouth. "God, you're sexy!" he groaned. "Do you even know how badly I want you?"

"You had me, Daniel." she teased.

"Well, I want you again, and I'll keep wanting you for the rest of my life."

She smiled mischievously. "Oh goody. I can hardly wait." She put the plate back on the night stand and tugged at his arm. "Come back to bed, Daniel."

After another blissful session of love making, they lay quietly. "You know as many times as I imagined last night, it was more incredible than my wildest fantasies." he confessed caressing her bare shoulder.

"Me too. I didn't know I could enjoy it that much. It was beyond my expectations. Thank you for giving me such tenderness."

"Thank you for allowing me to give you the ultimate pleasure, and thank you for saying yes. I am the luckiest man alive."

#### **Part 4**

The evening that Brittany returned home from vacation, she found Jen and John eating dinner at the apartment. It was the first time she'd seen John in months, but she didn't seem as concerned as Jen who stammered, "Brittany, I didn't expect you home so early. How was vacation?"



Brittany blushed profusely as she extended her left hand without a word. Jen screamed jumping from the table and throwing her arms around Brittany. They both were giddy with excitement. "I can't believe it! He actually asked you to marry him! This is so great! Let me see the ring!" Jen exclaimed. After a moment of inspection, Jen smiled. "It's so beautiful, Brittany. How did he ask you?"

"Walking on the beach at sunset." she answered her eyes straying to John, who just sat head hung low pretending to be more interested in his dinner than their conversation.

"Oh, that's so romantic! I'm so happy for you."

"Yeah congratulations." John mumbled unexpectedly not even looking up from his plate.

"Well, I'll let you two finish your dinner." Brittany mentioned heading off toward her room.

A few minutes later Jen knocked on the door. "He's gone. I'm sorry. I try to keep you two as separated as possible. I really didn't think you'd be home tonight."

"It's okay. It was bound to happen sometime."

"He's upset about the engagement. He still loves you, maybe now more than ever."

Brittany shrugged. "Not much I can do about that. It never would've worked in the long run anyway."

"No it wouldn't have. So tell me more about vacation. Anything else good happen?" Jen inquired. Brittany knew what Jen wanted to know, and her flaming blush answered the question. "You had sex with him, didn't you?" Brittany nodded with a giddy smile. "And?" Jen pressed for details.

"It was so incredible! Better than I ever imagined it could be! Oh, I just love him so much! He is so wonderful! I don't think I could ever tire of making love with him!" Brittany stated with a blushing grin.

"Yes, he is wonderful. I'm so happy for you. Have you started on any wedding plans yet?"

"We've picked a date, Valentine's Day, since it was our first real date. It's going to be a small wedding though, just family and close friends. We don't want to go overboard. We've got to get as much of this stuff decided as possible before season starts up again. Daniel wants to be involved in it as much as possible."

## Chapter 5

In early June of that year Dan and Brittany attended a party at his parents house being held for all the players and recruits. The afternoon seemed to be going well as Dan and Brittany lounged by the pool talking with the veterans and their wives and girlfriends. During the conversation, Dan

asked Brittany to get him another beer, so she left her position in his lap and waded through the recruits to the beer keg. Brittany paid little attention to anyone as she refilled Dan's cup until she heard a vaguely familiar voice question, "Brittany Saxton?"

Brittany felt her heart freeze at the voice. Turning she saw a man stepping toward her. "Stephen." she breathed in fear dropping Dan's beer, shattering the glass.

"Long time no see, stranger." he mentioned reaching for her, but she slapped his hands away.

"Don't touch me, you bastard!" she screamed shoving him roughly away.

Dan's attention was drawn away from conversation by Brittany's screaming. Instantly he came to her. "Honey, you okay?" he asked, eyeing the man suspiciously. Seeing Brittany shaking slightly, he turned to the man. "What the hell did you do to my fiancée?"

"Nothing. Brittany and I are old friends. My name's Stephen. Maybe she's mentioned me."

Dan felt his anger rising. "Yeah, she's mentioned you all right, you asshole!" Dan yelled pushing Stephen back a few steps. "You are going to fucking pay for what you did to her! I'm going to kill you!"

"No, Daniel." Brittany interrupted. "This is my fight. Let me handle it."

Grabbing Stephen by the arms, Dan struggled to keep him standing still. "Go ahead, honey. Have at him." Dan stated when he had Stephen in a helpless restraint.

A crowd had gathered to watch curiously as Brittany wailed on Stephen while Dan held him, but none dared interfere for fear of Dan's wrath. Finally Brittany grew tired as her crying became stronger. Dan whipped Stephen around to inspect the damage Brittany had done to Stephen's face. "Now, I suggest you get the hell out of my father's house before I change my mind about killing you!" Once Stephen had fled, Dan scooped Brittany up into his arms and took her inside. Going into one of the guest bedrooms, Dan laid her on the bed, curling up next to her until she fell into exhausted sleep.

When Dan was sure she was asleep, he slipped out to find his father. He was in the den with Coach Tucker and several owners. "Dan, what the hell was Brittany doing beating up one of the recruits, and why, more importantly, were you helping her?" Coach Tucker asked in annoyance. "That's our best recruit for second string quarterback!"

"You'd shut up if you knew what was best for you, Tucker!" Dan yelled.

"Dad, I really need to see you in private." Once they were in his father's office, Dan bluntly requested, "Please get Stephen cut from the team."

"Why? Tucker's right. He is our best recruit. You'll have to give me a reason."

“Dad, please. Listen to me. He’s the scum of the earth, and I will refuse to play out my contract if I have to play with him.”

“Why, Dan? Tell me. What’s so horrible about him?”

“Dad, he and Brittany went to high school together. He raped her when she was sixteen and got away with it. Please, Dad. She’s going to be your daughter-in-law. Do it for her. Give her a sense of justice.”

“Daniel, I love Brittany dearly. You know that. Anyone who hurts her should suffer, but I’m only one owner. I’ll have to convince the others, and I might be out voted, but I will try. I promise you that. Now why don’t you go attend to that precious woman? I’ve got a lot of work cut out for me, so I better get to it.”

Going back to Brittany, Dan just held her until she awoke. “How are you feeling?” he whispered.

“Okay. I’m sorry for going off in front of everybody like that.”

“Don’t be. I just hope you feel better.”

“I do. I just hope you don’t have to work with him.”

“I won’t. I all ready made that announcement to the owners. Your honor means more to me than anything else.”

Brittany gave him a tearful smile. “I love you, Daniel.”

“I love you, too. You want to go back outside now or stay in here a little longer?”

“Let’s stay here.” she answered mischievously.

Dan knew where she was going with things as she leaned up and kissed him intently. “Are you sure about this?” he asked as they slowly began to undress each other.

“Everyone’s outside. No one will know. I want you right now, Daniel Ethan McKnight.”  
Brittany growled pulling her naked body up onto his.

With that Dan gave himself over to the pleasure that awaited them. Neither realized how loud they were becoming being so into each other. Flinging herself onto Dan’s body, Brittany trembled as her climax shuddered through her. They laid silently for several minutes with their bodies interlocked just enjoying the feeling of each other until suddenly the door flung open. They both jumped, startled at the invasion.

“Well, I thought I heard you finish, Brittany. Guess I was mistaken.” Laura snarled. “This is just like you, Daniel! You always did have a way with black whores! Don’t see why you decided to marry this one!”

Dan pushed Brittany off of him and angrily leapt from bed. “Daniel!” Brittany screamed. He turned toward her. She gestured to his naked body.

“Oh, it’s not like she hasn’t seen it! Isn’t that right, Mother!” he yelled approaching his mother.

Laura struck him across the face. “How dare you speak to me like that!”

“How dare me? How dare you!” he screamed pushing her roughly. “How could you do that to Joseph and to me! We’re your sons! We were just kids!”

“You’re not my son, neither is Joseph, and neither of you ever will be! My son would not screw a whore in his mother’s house!” she spat seething with anger.

Dan raised his hand to strike her, but before he had a chance, he felt a hand on his arm. “Daniel, don’t.” Brittany softly pleaded.

Just then they heard David coming down the hall yelling, “What’s going on down there?” As he wheeled his chair closer, he saw Dan and Brittany naked and averted his eyes.

“Kids, put your clothes on.” Laura stated calmly. Daniel didn’t respond at first as he just shot daggers at her.

“Daniel, do as your mother told you!” gruffly David demanded. Dan started to protest, but David screamed, “Do it!” Turning to Laura David grabbed her by the arm. “And as for you, you better leave these two alone! If I ever hear you say derogatory things about any of my children again, you will pay dearly!” Laura stormed off down the hall, so David turned back to Dan. “Son, I think it would be best if you and Brittany went home. We’re having a party here, and you’ve been in two altercations. You’re not making a good impression with the other owners right now. You have asked me to help you with your problems, and I want to, but you need to do your part. Now go on home, and leave me to my work.”

Once Brittany and Dan were alone, Brittany embraced him. “You’re mother said some awful things to you. You were so angry. I can’t believe you almost hit her. Do you want to tell me what that was about?”

“Not now. Right now I just want to get out of here.”

Back at home Dan plopped down on the couch and began flipping through channels. Brittany just sat next to him waiting for him to open up, but he didn’t. “Daniel, are you going to talk to me about your mother or not?”

“I’m sorry she was so rude to you. She’s the most horrible woman I know.”

“What were you saying about you and Joseph?”

“Brittany, remember that night I told you about hitting my mother? I told you about a night when Joe and I were kids, and he woke me in the middle of the night sobbing. He finally told me what happened.” His voice wavered.

“It’s okay. Whatever it is, you can tell me.” Brittany gently pried.

Dan’s eyes began to glisten. “Joe and I were abused as children. I got mostly physical and verbal, but poor Joe got it all, including sexual. She did awful things to us, but my dad was never around to notice.”

Pulling him into her body, she reassured him saying, “It’ll be okay. She’ll get what she deserves, Daniel.”

“She’s just ruined so many lives, Joe’s, Victoria’s, little Ethan’s, mine, and if I allow her to continue, you’ll be next. I can’t let that happen.”

“It’ll be all right. I promise. We’ll make it right.”

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Over the next couple of months Brittany and Dan focused on wedding plans while Dan was in summer training. However one day his father requested his presence at the corporate office instead of at practice. Going into one of the conference rooms, his father was already waiting on him as was Brittany, immediately concerning him. “Sit down, Daniel. We need to talk.” He did as he was told, sitting next to Brittany. “Dan, a few months ago you asked me to try to get Stephen cut from the team, but I’m afraid that’s not going to be possible. I really tried and I had most of the owners on my side, but Coach Tucker dug his heels in, threatening to quit if we didn’t keep him. He felt your request was not practical regardless of the situation and basically accused me of compromising the team just to please you. I must admit it was a ugly discussion between us. Regardless though, the other owners folded under the pressure, and I was out voted. I told them of your intentions to resign if you didn’t have your way. I’ve been sent here to ask you to reconsider.”

“There’s no doubt in my mind, Dad. I refuse to play with him.”

“That’s what I thought you’d say. I guess I’ll leave you two alone to discuss things. I’ll just be outside.”

As soon as they were alone, Dan asked, “What are you doing here?”

“I can’t believe I actually agreed to this, but I’m here to convince you to play out your last year.”

“Are you nuts? You hate the fact that I’m playing in the first place. Now they want to force me to play with the man who raped you. I’m going to have to work closely with him.”

“I know, and I don’t like it.”

“Then why are you doing this?”

“I’m here because I love you, Daniel, and I know how much you want to win the Super Bowl. You know you have what it takes to win, and you can take the team all the way.”

“But what about your happiness? I’m willing to walk away from all that for you.”

“I know, but it would be wrong of me to ask you to do that. I don’t want to be the reason you feel this void for the rest of your life. I don’t want you to live with the regret of not trying one last time. It’s going to be hard for both of us, but it’s our jobs to support each other even when it’s not easy.”

“Are you sure about this?”

“Yes. It’s only six months. After that we can both walk away and never have to look back. You know you can win.”

“All right. If you’re sure about this, I’ll do it.”

“Good. Now I have a small confession to make. You might not like it, but I think in the long run you’ll forgive me for it. I told your dad what you told me about your mother’s abuse.”

“Why?”

“He’s suspected it. He and I have even spoken about it before. Daniel, I love you and Joseph. You two have suffered long enough. It’s time he knew the truth.”

Dan embraced her and took a deep breath. “Thank you.” he simply whispered. Walking out into the lobby where his dad was waiting, he stated, “All right. I’m going to play, but don’t think he and I are going to get along. He just better stay the hell out of my way.”

“Okay. I’ll be sure to pass that message along. Now I’m going to leave for New York tonight. I’ll be a Joe’s for awhile if you need me.” Turning to Brittany David kissed her hand. “Thank you for everything, Brittany. You really are an incredible woman, and I’m so glad my son was lucky enough to snag you.”

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Thanksgiving that year was held at Dan and Brittany’s house since Dan had a game that day. David had moved in with them at Dan’s urging, since he had filed for a divorce from Laura. Joe had come down with his boyfriend, and Brittany’s parents were also there. The Cowboys won that day putting everyone in celebratory moods. Brittany’s mother, Mary, had been gracious enough to make Thanksgiving dinner with the help of Joe’s boyfriend. As they sat down to dinner that evening, Dan was quiet but content as he watched his family. That night as Brittany and Dan retired for the evening, Dan started a fire in their bedroom fireplace.

“You’ve been quiet tonight. Everything all right?” Brittany asked pulling him into an embrace.

“Couldn’t be better. I’ve just been thinking about how wonderful it is to have everyone here. This is the family I’ve always wanted.”

“It is wonderful.” Brittany commented pulling him into a kiss. “I was wondering if you had any room for a calorie burning dessert before bed?” she asked opening her robe for him.

“Oh, I always have room for that.” he growled claiming her mouth as they made their way toward the bed.

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Three weeks later Brittany was having lunch with Jen and talking mostly about the wedding. “You decided on your dress yet?” Jen asked.

“No. I have yours and Becca’s picked out, but I’m still looking. I want something simple.” Brittany mumbled staring out the window.

“Hey, you all right? Something the matter?”

“No, just not feeling well. I think I have the flu.”

“Oh that sucks. So, tell me more about the honeymoon. Where are you going?”

“We’re going on a cruise in Greece.”

“That’s sounds like so much fun. I’m so happy for you. You really do have it all.”

“Yeah, I guess I do. I’m just worried about Daniel. He gets unbearable between now and the Super Bowl. They are going to go again, and I think they’ll win. I just can’t wait for it to be all over. The sooner Daniel gets out of football, the better off we both will be. It brings out a side of him I don’t like. He’s too aggressive.”

“What’s he going to do then?”

“I don’t know. We haven’t really discussed it. I really should go to the doctor. It’s not like me to be sick.”

“Well, maybe you’re not sick. Maybe you’re pregnant.” Brittany choked on a piece of bread. “You all right?” Jen asked after Brittany had regained her composure.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just never thought about that possibility. I don’t really know how I feel about that.”

“Well, is it possible?”

“Well, I am late, but I just passed it off as the stress of the holidays and football.”

“You better go find out. How does Dan feel about kids?”

“We both want them, but this really is soon to be having them. Oh boy, I just don’t know how this is going to go over.”

“Relax. Maybe it’s nothing. Just go get checked, and then you can worry after you know for sure.”

Brittany tried not to think about it much between Christmas and the Super Bowl. She was keeping busy between wedding plans and teaching, but her health wasn’t improving, so reluctantly she went to the doctor to confirm her suspicions. Armed with the knowledge that she was indeed carrying their child, Brittany wondered how it would affect Dan’s performance in the Super Bowl if she told him. By the day of the game, she still hadn’t said anything to him, and Dan began to wonder what was bothering her.

Just before leaving that morning for the field, he pulled her into his arms. “Honey, something’s been on your mind. I can tell. Why don’t you just tell me what it is? You’ll feel better. Whatever it is, I’m sure we can work it out.” he whispered into her ear as he brushed back her hair sweetly.

“I don’t want to burden you with this right before the game.”

“Why? Is it bad?” he asked in concern.

“I don’t think so.”

“Then why would I? Just tell me. I want to know now. I’m sure it’s not as big of a deal as you’re making it out to be.”

“Well, actually it is a big deal.”

“Tell me, Brittany. What’s going on?”

Brittany took a deep breath. “I’m pregnant, Daniel.”

“What? Are you serious? You’re sure?” he asked with joyful surprise. She nodded. “Oh this is so great! Oh, I’m so glad you told me, honey! I’m so happy! When did this happen?”

“Thanksgiving.” she answered grateful for his delighted response.

“Well, then it truly is a blessing, isn’t it? I can’t wait to tell everybody!”

“Me too, but for now, you have a game to win.”



“And you better believe I will. I’ll win it for the three of us.” he stated patting Brittany’s stomach.

Brittany smiled. “I love you, Daniel. Be careful out there today.”

When Joe came to pick Brittany up later, he noticed how radiant she looked. “This is the Brittany I know. You’re back to your beautiful self. Guess you got over your flu okay?”

“Well, actually, I’m still sick, but I feel much better.” Brittany giggled. Joe just looked at her quizzically. “If I let you in on a secret, you can’t tell anyone. Okay?”

“That good?” he asked.

“You’re going to be an uncle.” she whispered.

“Congratulations! Dan’s thrilled, isn’t he?” Brittany nodded enthusiastically.

The game that day was no contest. Dan played with talent never seen. “What did you say to my son? I’ve never seen him like this before.” David asked Brittany as they went into the fourth quarter. “He keeps this up and he’ll have the MVP award. Surely this was your influence.”

“Maybe it was, but I do have to keep some of my secrets.” Brittany mentioned with a blush.

Dan’s team did win that afternoon, and indeed Dan was named MVP for his efforts. He gave a brief acceptance speech but at the end he said, “Most importantly I’d like to thank my wonderful fiancée Brittany for all her support, and to my baby, daddy loves you.”

Brittany felt David’s eyes wide on her as her mother gasped. “Daddy?” David inquired.

“Surprise. I think Daniel got a little too excited. We weren’t going to tell people just yet.”

Mary came to her asking, “This is definite?” Brittany nodded. “Oh boy. This sure is a lot for a young couple.”

“We’re both excited about it, Mom, even as unexpected as it is. Dad, what do you think?”

“Well,” Brian began coming to her. “I think you will make a fabulous mother, sweetheart. We’re happy for you. We’re just shocked, because we didn’t think we’d become grandparents so soon.”

“Come on. We should get you down to the field, Brittany. This is a bittersweet moment for Daniel, and you should share in it.” David stated taking her hand.

## .Chapter 6

After Dan and Brittany returned from their honeymoon, Dan began to feel lost. Brittany was

teaching during the day, but he had no daily agenda to attend to, which bothered him. David was still staying with them, so he had some company, but he felt something missing. One morning over coffee, Dan was being unusually quiet as he and his father had breakfast.

“Daniel, I think I should get my own place. As nice as it is to be with you and Brittany, you two really need some time to yourselves. You were just married and should be preparing for the baby. I don’t want to be in the way of all that.”

“It’s nice to have you around, though, Pop. I’m not so lonely.”

“Well, you should find something to do with yourself, son. What do you want to do now?”

“I wish I could go back to teaching.”

“Then do it.”

“I don’t think anyone will hire me, especially after being forced to resign. Maybe it’s for the best if I don’t. I wouldn’t want to screw up again.”

“What are you saying, Daniel? Do you not trust yourself? Listen to me. You’re a married man now, and you’re going to be a father soon. You were still a young man when you made that poor decision. Sleeping with that student was a big mistake, but you’ve learned from it. You’re much more mature now. Not to mention you have a beautiful, intelligent, caring wife and baby on the way. You’re not going to screw up like that again. I won’t let you throw away the best thing that’s happened to you, and I’m sure neither will she. How could you even be tempted to look at another woman when you’ve all ready got the best?”

“She really is the best, Dad.”

“I know. She reminds me of your real mother, so caring and tender. I wish you and Joe could’ve met her.”

“What was she like?”

“Well, she was about Brittany’s height and build, a real beauty with dark hair and green eyes. You two look just like her. She was such a warm hearted woman. I really adored her.”

“Why didn’t you marry her?”

“Because I was a kid, not much older than you are now. Money mattered, and I knew Laura would try to take as much of it in the divorce as possible. Then when we found out that she had breast cancer, she just thought it would be better if I stayed with Laura. She gave me full custody of you and Joe, because she thought you two would be better off having Laura for a mother than none at all. I was with her until the very end, Dan. It was so painful to watch her waste away into nothing. Looking back on it, I wish I had made different choices. Staying with Laura turned out to be the worst mistake I ever made, and it’s one I will regret for the rest of my life. I’m so sorry

I wasn't around to stop your torment."

"It's not your fault, Dad. Joe and I don't blame you. Have you talked to Becca about this at all, though? She's bound to be curious as to why you're divorcing mother after all this time."

"No. It's difficult, because you're her brothers, but you were also the victims, and Laura is her mother. It's a fragile situation. This news will devastate her. There's no one fit for the task of informing your sister."

"I can think of someone. The same person who told you, the one I finally opened up to about it."

"I could never ask that of Brittany. That's too much for a daughter-in-law."

"Dad, she and Becca are friends, and she has the least to gain or lose. I think it would be easiest coming from her."

"I'll have to think about it, Daniel. It is a big responsibility."

That night Brittany noticed the strain in the household. Finally over dinner, she asked, "What's going on with you two? Why are you both so quiet tonight? Is something wrong?"

"Dad wants to talk to you about something important." Dan stated earning a glare from his father.

"Dan, let me do this my own way. This is not an easy conversation to have."

"Dad, whatever it is, I'm sure we can work it out." Brittany informed him putting a hand on his.

Taking a deep breath, David said, "All right, before I begin this proposition, I want you to know that you can decline to do it, and I won't hold it against you. What I'm about to ask of you is more than a daughter-in-law should have to bear, but you seem to have a way of approaching difficult things with tact and gentleness that is desperately required for the situation. Besides, Dan thinks you would be a good candidate for what I'm about to ask, so here it goes. You helped bring out a terrible family secret in a healing way with my two sons. Now it is time to tell my daughter the truth. Becca is the only child that Laura and I have together, and she and Laura have always been close. The last thing I'd ever want to do is hurt my children, but ignorance is not bliss in this case. It's going to be painful for her to find out the truth, and I'm even afraid she'll try to deny it. I need someone objective and fully aware of the sensitivity of the subject. You and Becca have gotten very close, and she trusts you. Would you please consider talking to her about this?"

Brittany took a moment to collect her thoughts. "Yes, Dad, I'll talk to her, but she won't believe me at first. I feel sure of that. All I can do is give her the facts. After that it's up to her to take action."

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A few weeks later Brittany went to see Becca. When Becca picked her up at the airport she stated, "I know you're not visiting me for the hell out of it. Don't think I bought that over the phone."

"I knew you wouldn't, but what I've come for has to be said in person, and it's not going to be easy for either one of us. Your father sent me here."

"Is something wrong? Is he all right?"

"He's fine. It's you he's worried about. Why don't we go back to your apartment? The baby was not happy with the flight."

Over dinner that night Becca inquired, "So, what's going on, Brittany? Why did my father send you here instead of coming himself?"

"I really don't know where to start, Becca. I guess first things first. How are you feeling about your parents getting a divorce?"

Becca shrugged. "I'm confused about it more than anything. They've been married for close to thirty years. They've always had problems, but suddenly my dad files for divorce out of nowhere. I don't understand. I feel like someone's not telling me the whole story."

"Well, you're right about that, and that's why I'm here, to tell you the whole story." Brittany took a sip of her water. "Oh boy, okay. Let's start with the facts. You know Laura is not Daniel and Joseph's real mother. In fact they were the product of an affair. You also know that they never got along with Laura growing up. Would you agree with that?"

"Completely. Dan had all this hostility toward her, and Joe was scared of her."

"Okay. Do you know why they felt that way toward her?"

Becca shook her head. "Neither one of them would talk about it with me."

"Well, I had a conversation with your father once about his theory on their behavior, and he felt strongly that they had been abused. Well, according to Daniel and Joseph that is true. Daniel admitted to me that he was abused in every sense, psychologically, physically, and sexually. He also got Joseph to confess to the fact that Laura had nonconsensual sex with Joseph when he was twelve."

"I can't believe that, Brittany." Becca quickly stated.

"I know you can't. I told your father you wouldn't, but he wanted you to know the truth whether you choose to believe it or not. He believes it, and I believe my husband. Daniel was very reluctant in telling me. I don't think they made this up, even though Daniel sure does have motive to. Listen, I have had only a handful of experiences with Laura, and they've all been

hurtful. She's said degrading things to me about my skin color and to Daniel for being with me. I see a lot of hate and bitterness directed at your brothers. I think she began this cycle of abuse and hate, and that's why they regard her as they do now. These are serious allegations, Becca, and no one has taken them lightly. No one expects you to either. You're going to wrestle with this, because this means someone you love and care about has deceived you, either your brothers or your mother. It hurts regardless."

Becca was in tears. "I don't want to believe you." she whispered.

"I know." Brittany answered.

"However what you've said makes sense. It explains a lot. I just don't know if I can accept it unless I hear it from them."

"I understand. My job was just to open the communication, because this is hard on everybody." Becca nodded. A few minutes passed in strained silence.

"Listen, Becca, I know this is hard, but can we at least try to have an enjoyable evening?"

Becca nodded with a smile. Changing the subject, she asked, "So, how is my niece or nephew?"

"Good. Daniel and I go for an ultrasound in two weeks, and we'll find out what we're having."

"What do you want?"

"A girl."

"What about Dan?"

"He hasn't said, but I think he might want a boy."

Becca shrugged. "He could surprise you. Dan's always had a soft heart for girls."

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The day of the ultrasound Dan was up early with anticipation. He went out for a jog and then decided to make breakfast for Brittany and his dad. David entered just a few minutes after he began. "Can't sleep?" he asked Dan wheeling his chair over to the window.

"No. I'm too excited. Today's the big day."

"It is exciting, isn't it? Then you can begin work on the nursery together. There are some fun times ahead for you two."

That afternoon Brittany and Dan found out that the baby was in good health, much to both their relief. "Would you like to know the baby's sex?" the doctor asked.

Dan and Brittany smiled at each other. "Yes, please." Brittany answered.

"It's a girl."

Dan gave a huge smile. Leaning down, he kissed Brittany's forehead. "I love you, Mrs. McKnight." he whispered.

"I love you too, Daniel."

When they arrived home that evening, they were greeted by David, Brian, and Mary. "Mom, Dad, what are you doing here?" Brittany inquired.

"We wanted to surprise you. How did the ultrasound go?" Mary asked hugging her daughter.

Brittany smiled looking up at Dan, who slid his arm around her. He gave her a reassuring nod. Turning to their parents, Brittany stated, "It's a girl."

"Oh, that's wonderful. Have you even started discussing names yet?" Mary inquired as Dan went to the bar to open a bottle of champagne for everyone.

"No, but I have a few ideas."

"Well, are you going to tell us?" Brian asked.

Brittany looked over at Daniel pouring glasses of champagne. "Well, my favorite right now is Victoria."

Dan dropped the bottle at the name, and it shattered against the marble floor. Dan just stared at his wife as tears came to his eyes. "Victoria's a beautiful name." he replied before leaning over to pick up the broken glass. It was obvious by Dan's trembling hands that he was in shock.

Brittany came to him, touching his shoulder lightly. "Come here, handsome. Let me talk to you alone for a minute." she said extending her hand. He took it, allowing her to lead him into the next room. "Daniel, I'm sorry I sprung that on you. Maybe I should've waited."

"Why Victoria, especially after all you know?"

"That's exactly why because of what I know. Daniel, listen to me. Victoria was a strong woman full of pride and conviction. She stood by her beliefs and withstood so much discrimination. She loved you with all that she had as I do. From all that you've told me, I know I would like to have known her, because she sounds extraordinary. She seems to be everything I'd want our daughter to be. I would like to honor her for her pride, strength, character, and her conviction. She was a strong black woman, and that's what I want our daughter to be."

Dan gave her a tearful smile. "You are amazing. I love you so much." he whispered.

After Dan had a chance to collect himself, they walked back into the family room. “Sorry I dropped the champagne. I guess it’s a good thing I have another bottle.” he stated, closing the incident for discussion.

It was only when Mary and Brittany were alone in the nursery that Mary asked, “Is Dan all right? He seemed shocked when you suggested the name Victoria.”

“Yeah. He’s okay. There is a Victoria from Daniel’s past that really meant a lot to him, which is why I suggested it. From what he’s told me, she was absolutely amazing, but her life as well as Daniel’s son’s life were cut short. She and little Ethan ended up dying tragically for her beliefs.”

“I didn’t know Daniel had another child.”

“Oh Mom, it’s the saddest story I’ve ever heard. It’s full of such hate and racism with Daniel and Victoria at the center of it, trying desperately to let their love conquer it all.”

“Tell me about it?” Mary asked.

“Victoria was Daniel’s high school sweetheart. She was black, so it caused community controversy in rural Texas. They harassed her unmercifully, burned crosses on her lawn. She was beaten and raped all because she loved him, and Daniel was powerless to stop the hatred. His own mother despised Victoria for the color of her skin. Victoria had a child, whom she named Ethan after Daniel, and Daniel wanted to be a good father for that boy. However, that chance never happened. Victoria got in a fight with Laura while she was visiting Daniel with Ethan, and she kicked Victoria out of the house. She and Ethan were killed in a car accident on their way home. It devastated Daniel to be robbed of something so precious. The thing that amazes me about the story is that Victoria never gave up on what she believed. I have great respect for her strength. The little I’ve been around Laura, I’ve been treated horribly for being part black. I can only imagine the terror and suffering Victoria went through. Our daughter will have black heritage, and for that reason I would like to name her after a woman who took a stand against prejudice, a woman who truly believed love could conquer all, a woman who exemplified courage.” Mary shook her head, smiling at her daughter in wonder. “What?” Brittany asked.

“You have turned out to be quite a woman, Brittany, so loving and caring. You are also a pillar of strength even though you don’t recognize that. A mother couldn’t be prouder.” The women embraced, emotions overcoming them momentarily. “You know, when Daniel announced you were pregnant, I was very anxious for you both. Having a child is a life-altering experience, and I wasn’t sure you two were ready. However now I realize that you will both be fabulous parents. You are mature beyond your years, Brittany. You’re so loving and giving as is Daniel. He absolutely dotes on you, and family is extremely important to him. I’ll admit I am still a little concerned about his anger problem, though.”

Brittany nodded. “Well, we’ve been working on that. I think we’ve come to the root of the problem and are slowly working through it.”

“That’s good. I was scared for you for awhile. I was afraid you had gotten yourself into an abusive relationship. I’m glad I was wrong about that.”

Just then a voice called from the bottom of the stairs. “Brittany, Mary, I think you two better come down here quickly.”

Hearing the concern in her father’s voice, Brittany rushed downstairs with her mom following closely behind. They saw Daniel pacing back and forth angrily as he stared at the television. Brittany looked to the screen. “Oh my God, what’s Kristen doing on tv?” she inquired.

“She’s running my name through the mud!” Dan screamed.

“Calm down, Daniel. What has she said so far?”

“So far just that I fucked her while she was my student! What do you think she said?” he yelled.

“Daniel Ethan, don’t speak like that in front of my mother!” Brittany yelled back. “Now has she said anything about the baby?”

“Not yet, but I’m sure it’s coming.” David calmly informed her. “We should tape this, Daniel, if you want to sue.”

“Damn right I want to sue! That fucking whore’s going to pay!”

“Daniel, I’m not going to ask you again to refrain from using that language!” Brittany warned.

Dan didn’t respond but continued to pace. Brian put a tape in the VCR as they continued to watch. Brittany observed Dan closely, knowing that he was extremely close to losing all control. When Kristen mentioned the baby, she informed the reporter that Dan had thrown her down a flight of stairs, because she wouldn’t have an abortion, and she miscarried. “All right! I can’t stand it! That bitch is lying through her teeth! She’s going to pay! I’m going to kill that whore!” Dan screamed knocking everything off the mantle with a giant swing.

Mary and Brittany screamed as glass shattered everywhere. “Daniel, I’m calling your doctor. You’re out of control.” Brittany tried to state calmly.

“I didn’t throw her down the stairs! She fell! It was an accident!” Dan continued to rant.

Brittany came to him. “Honey, I believe you.” she softly said trying to defuse his anger.

“I never told her to have an abortion! I wanted that child just like I wanted Ethan!”

“Sweetheart, I know. Daniel, she’s trying to hurt you, because you brought her pain. She’s angry, and she wants you to suffer as well.”

“I am suffering! It’s because of that woman that I’ll never be able to teach again!” he yelled



although somewhat calmer.

Brittany nodded trying to affirm him as she encircled his waist. Instantly his rigid body collapsed into her. After a moment of them just holding each other, Brittany whispered, "Come on. I'm going to take you upstairs, and we'll call your doctor. You can talk to her for awhile, and you'll feel better."

Half an hour later Brittany returned to find only her dad in the living room. "Where did Mom and David go?"

"David went to call his attorney, and Mom retired for the evening." Brittany just nodded, slowly beginning to pick up the mess Dan had created when Brian said, "Honey, sit down. You look exhausted." Brittany plopped down next to him. "That was amazing what you did with Dan. I don't think I've ever seen such a display of real anger. I know you said he had a problem, but Brittany, he has the potential to be very dangerous. Are you sure you're safe with him?"

"He's trying, Dad. I actually haven't seen such an outburst like that since they lost the Super Bowl. I'm fine with him. He would never hurt me."

"I guess I don't know him as well as I thought. I had no idea this Kristen woman was why he stopped teaching."

"We've tried not to tell people. Daniel made a huge mistake, and I don't want him to have to keep reliving it. It was hard enough the first time."

Brian nodded. "Who's Ethan?"

"Daniel's first child."

"What? He has another child? How come we didn't know about that?"

"He did. Ethan and his mother Victoria both died in a car accident. I'll let Mom tell you about it. There's a long story there."

"Then Kristen was carrying his child but miscarried. Now you're pregnant. You're the third woman carry this man's child. Does he has some sort of sexual problem that I'm unaware of? The man can't keep his pants on or what?"

"Dad, don't be like that. Daniel is my husband, and I love him. Ethan was a few weeks old when he died, and Kristen was only a few weeks pregnant when she miscarried. He had his fair share of escapades before we met."

"Sounds like a damn womanizer to me. I wouldn't want you to end up on that list that he used and threw away, honey."

"Dad, Daniel loves me. Once we started dating, his whole outlook on women changed. He's

sensitive and caring, and he's never pressured me into anything. He's changed, and once we get this anger under control, he'll be an even better husband."

"I'm just frightened for you. You were scared tonight, weren't you?"

Brittany looked into her lap. She was ashamed to admit being afraid of her husband to her own father. "Yes," she finally mumbled.

"I was scared for you. No one will hurt my little girl and get away with it. I promise you that."

"I know that, Dad, but Daniel hasn't hurt me, and he never would. I know that for a fact."

Brian just nodded. "Well, I'm going to check on your mother. Good night. Take care of my granddaughter."

Brittany cleaned up from all the night's activities before locking up the house and going back upstairs. She found Daniel in their sitting area off in thought. Brittany came and sat in his lap. Dan gently stroked her stomach. "Hi, Victoria. My name's Daniel, and I'm your father. I just wanted you to know that I'm sorry for the way I yelled. I'm not that person, and I'm going to continue to try to control my temper in the future. I hope I didn't frighten you. I think I scared your mother, though. I didn't mean to, and I'm sorry for that. She's the best thing in my life, and she will be in yours too." Brittany could feel her eyes tearing as she softly lifted his chin to meet her gaze. "I'm sorry, baby," he whispered.

"I love you, Daniel. We're going to get through this together. I promise."

He nodded. "I'm glad you put up with me. I don't know what I would do without you," he said tightening his embrace around her waist.

Brittany smiled. "Come on, handsome," she began standing. "It's time for bed."

They both got ready for bed before settling in with their respective books, Brittany with one on pregnancy, and Dan's on investing for a child's higher education. Brittany kept looking over at Dan though, being distracted from her reading. Dan pretended not to notice her as he burrowed deeper into his. As she looked at him intently, she began to think over the last few months of their marriage. Although their honeymoon had been filled with the sexual frenzy they had come to expect from each other, it had waned now that the pregnancy was further along. Brittany's first thought was that Dan was no longer attracted to her now that she was beginning to show. Hoping that she was wrong, Brittany pulled off her glasses and closed her book. Placing them on her night stand, she turned onto her side to face Dan.

Dan glanced over at her and smiled. She was so adorable in one of his oversized sleep shirts. They said nothing as they just gazed at each other momentarily. Finally Brittany purposefully straddled his hips and pulled the book from his hand. Tucking his bookmark in place, she laid it on the bed side table. She smiled down at him as he placed his hands on her waist.

“So, do you want to have sex or what?” she joked.

Dan’s smiled faltered as he hesitated in his answer. “Oh, Brittany you know I’d love to, but do you? I wouldn’t want to hurt you or the baby.”

“You won’t.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.” she replied leaning in to kiss his neck.

Dan laughed. “All right. You don’t have to ask me twice.” he growled sliding her onto her back.

The following morning Brittany and Dan were up first having breakfast on their deck. “Daniel, I want to talk to you about Kristen.” she stated. Dan raised his brow but said nothing. “I’m not sure suing her is the best thing.”

“Why not? She said slanderous things about me on national tv. I don’t want the world to think I beat women. Do you?”

“Of course not, but by suing her, you give her what she wants, which is attention.”

“Look, I just don’t want her telling that story to anyone else. I’d like to give our family a little peace. Wouldn’t you?”

Brittany nodded. “Maybe we should try talking to her personally before getting the attorney involved.”

“I’m willing to try that, but I think we’ll have to have some legal agreement. I’d like to get this resolved as soon as possible. Will you have any time this week to meet with the attorney?”

“Well, I’ll leave school a little early if need be. We’ll work it out.”

“Okay. I’ll give Mike a call this morning then. Hopefully he’ll have some free time.”

### **Continued Part 5**

**The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

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## **~ Triumphant Love ~**

**by Alex Tryst**

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**Disclaimer:** This is a story like none other posted on this site, so please thoroughly read this disclaimer before beginning. This book contains original characters and is about one couple's struggle with their demons as they venture through their relationship. As with real life, there are gay, lesbian, and straight people even though the focus is primarily on the heterosexual couple. Derogatory, racist, and homophobic language is used. Additionally, sensitive subjects matters are addressed such as but not limited to: teen pregnancy, abortion, racism, rape, child abuse (verbal, physical, and sexual), hate crimes, sexual dysfunction, infidelity, and anger management problems. Please be aware that this story is not for everyone and may not be appropriate for all readers. If you are under age 18, you probably should not be reading this material. I tried to write of these subjects with delicacy and discretion, but it may still be offensive to some, so please understand what you are becoming involved in as you begin to read. As always constructive criticism and comments are welcome at alextryst@hotmail.com.

**Dedication:** To my wife, you are my fondest wish, and to the woman that was the inspiration for this story... I hope I captured your essence as a strong and enduring spirit in the character of the lovely Brittany Saxton.

Now on with the show...

## Part 5

That next Friday Daniel arrived at the attorney's office shortly before 4:00. "Greetings, Dan. How are you? How's Brittany doing?" Mike, long time family friend and attorney asked.

"Pretty well. Brittany should be here shortly. She had to come from school."

"How are things with the baby?"

"Good. She's healthy, so that's all we really care about."

"So it's definitely a girl then?"

Dan nodded. "Yep, found out last week."

"Well, that's great. Glad to know things are going well."

"How about this little problem I have on my hands, Mike? Have you felt it out yet?" Dan asked shoving his hands into his trouser pockets.

"Well, we'll see how this works out. She brought an attorney with her. They're waiting in the conference room right now. Quite a firecracker, isn't she? You sure know how to find trouble, my friend."

Dan smiled at Mike's attempt to lighten the mood but didn't respond to the statement. "Okay, when Brittany gets here, we'd like to talk to Kristen alone if we could."

“Sure. I’ll see if I can arrange that.”

Once Brittany arrived, she and Dan were escorted into the conference room. Kristen gasped when she saw Brittany but said nothing until the three of them were alone. She watched Dan pull out Brittany’s chair and help her sit before taking a seat between the two of them.

“All right, Kristen. I think you know why you’re here. That mud slinging interview you gave was full of lies, and you know it. I promised you that if you ever screwed with me again, I’d sue you, and you’ve chosen to test me on that.” Dan growled. Kristen just sat there staring at Brittany. “What do you want from me, Kristen? What was the purpose of slandering my name?”

Kristen finally looked at him directly for the first time. “So, you finally had your way with her. Aren’t you special? I knew you wanted Brittany all along. Do you enjoy robbing women of their innocence, Dan?”

Dan rolled his eyes. “Dammit, Kristen! Is that what this is about? You’re upset about Brittany?”

“No, this is not about Brittany. This is about you. This is about the world knowing what a slime you really are. You and I both know that squeaky clean football player, knight in shining armor shit doesn’t fly with you! You are not Mr. All American anymore!”

“But you said I physically abused you on national tv! That’s a lie, Kristen! You and I both know it is!”

“Maybe it is, and maybe it isn’t. That’s for the public to decide now.”

“It’s a lie!” Dan screamed hitting the table with his fist.

“Daniel, you promised to remain calm.” Brittany reminded him.

“You’re right. I’m sorry, honey.” he apologized before turning back to Kristen. “Kristen, what do you want from me?” he asked pointedly.

“Dan, you called this meeting. What do you want from me?”

“I never want you to discuss the relationship you and I had to anyone ever again, anywhere, in any context. I want you to keep your mouth shut. Secondly, I want an apology for intentionally trying to tarnish my reputation with lies.”

“Well, forget it. You won’t get an apology.”

“How about you apologize before I sue you for everything you have, you little extortionist tramp?” gruffly he suggested.

“Sue all you want. I have nothing, Dan.”

Brittany and Dan exchanged glances for a moment. “Kristen,” Brittany began. “What is it going to take for you to meet Daniel’s demands?”

Kristen shook her head. “Brittany, I can’t believe you actually married this jerk.”

“Well, I can’t believe we still have to deal with this issue again. It’s been two years, and you finally start talking now when it happens to coincide with Daniel’s fame. That’s what this is really about, isn’t it? Revenge now that it can be public? You knew it would hurt him the most now. Isn’t that right?”

“I’m not trying to hide that, Brittany.”

“Haven’t I paid enough? You’ve robbed me of something precious, Kristen.”

“As you did with me. You can never pay enough.”

“Is there something you want, Kristen? Money maybe?” Dan inquired trying to feel out his options.

“Why, Dan, are you trying to buy my silence?”

“Are you trying to extort me?” he yelled.

Kristen looked at Brittany for a moment in contemplative silence. “You know, Brittany, you’re not nearly as attractive now that you’re knocked up. It wouldn’t surprise me if old Dan has already gotten himself another just like you stashed away now that you’ve of no use to him.”

“All right, I’ve had it with you!” Dan screamed.

Brittany tried to let the comment go, but she let her anger get the better of her as she leaned over the table and grabbed Kristen’s arm hissing, “Kristen, if you’re trying to drive a wedge between my husband and me, I will make you suffer!”

Dan looked at his wife in surprise at the outburst. “Honey, stay calm.” he gently stated sitting her back in her chair. “Kristen, I’m not going to allow you to take shots at my wife any more. This discussion is over. You’ll be hearing from my attorney.” Dan stated before escorting Brittany out of the room. Going into Mike’s office, Dan yelled, “You make that piece of trash pay for what she said about Brittany just now and about me on tv! She deserves no pity! Sue her for everything she has! I don’t care if she doesn’t have anything! It’s not about the money anyway! I want a public apology!”

“Very well, Dan. I’ll see what I can do.”

As they left, Dan suggested that they go to dinner instead of waiting in traffic. Brittany quietly agreed. Over their meal Brittany continued to be silent. Finally Dan inquired, “Something bothering you?”

"I was just thinking about the meeting. Kristen was venomous. I couldn't believe some of the things she said."

"She was just being vindictive. You shouldn't let it bother you."

"I know." Brittany mumbled looking at the window.

"There's something else." Dan stated.

"Well, I know I'm all hormonally imbalanced right now, so I'm trying not to overreact." Dan nodded for her to proceed. "I know I've gained some weight, but do you still find me attractive?"

"Oh my God, is this about that cheap shot Kristen took at you?"

"No. It's been on my mind for awhile actually, ever since the wedding, since I've started to show."

"Honey, you are so beautiful, inside and out. The addition of that tummy of yours is just testament of how much we love each other. You're the most beautiful woman I've ever known, and I love you. How could you think otherwise?"

"You've stopped saying it, and you hardly ever want to make love." she softly answered as tears pooled in her eyes.

Dan put down his fork took her hand gently. "I'm so sorry. I didn't realize. I'm just really nervous about hurting the baby or you. I didn't realize this was an issue for you. I promise I will try to improve. I love you, Brittany. You are my life and so is this baby." he assured her.

"I know you will. I feel stupid for bringing it up. I just feel so emotionally out of whack. They just change so abruptly at times."

"It's understandable. Don't worry about it. You know you can talk to me about anything."

"I love you." she whispered.

"I love you too, sweetie." Over the rest of dinner Kristen was forgotten as they discussed other things. "Have you given any thought as to what you want to do once the baby is born?" Dan inquired.

"Yeah. I think I want to take a least a year off. There's no way I'd be ready to go back to teaching in September. I would really like to have some time with her."

"I think that's a good idea. I'll support you in whatever you want to do."

"What about you, Daniel? Football has been over for three months now. Have you given any

thought as to what you want to do with yourself?” Dan shrugged. “Well, I’ve thought about it. Why don’t you go back to school and get your Masters? It’ll give you something productive to do with your time, and you could work on your poetry.”

“That’s not a half bad idea, but I wanted to spend time with our little one too.”

“Then just take a few classes. You don’t have to go full time.”

“Why don’t we both go?” Dan suggested.

“Oh, I don’t know about that.”

“Oh come on. You’ll need a break from full time parenting, and I know you have ambitions of going back. Neither one of us will be working, so I’m sure Victoria will be getting plenty of attention from us. I think it’s a great idea. Even if it’s just one class, I think we both should.”

“What about the expense?”

“Honey, the money’s not going anywhere. A few years of school is not going to put us on the street.”

“I’ll think about it.” Brittany answered finalizing the discussion for a moment.

Changing the subject Dan asked, “When you talked to Becca last, did she say anything more about moving to Dallas after graduation?”

“Yeah. She said she and some friends were going to get a place. Speaking of moving, what’s going on with your dad? I know he mentioned getting his own place. Have you changed his mind yet?”

“No. He’s set on it. I think he wants to be out by the time the baby is born. I actually think it’ll do him some good to have his own place and start over. He still has his friends and social circle. It’s not like he’ll be alone.”

“I know, but I worry about him. I mean there’s always been someone to look after him.”

“Brittany, he’s in a wheelchair, not incapacitated. He’ll be fine. He has more than enough money for whatever he wants or needs. He still has his job with the Cowboys. He won’t be bored or lonely.”

## Chapter 7

Towards the end of July that year, Jen threw Brittany a baby shower, inviting all the female family members and Brittany’s friends. Becca had ended up being taken in by Jen temporarily as a favor to Brittany and Dan when her roommate plans fell through, but they had formed a fast friendship, and decided to keep their living arrangement.



As the ladies chatted over lunch, Jen asked, “So, Brittany, what’s that hunk of a husband doing this afternoon?”

“Actually, he’s finishing up the nursery. You should see him. He’s like a big kid up there. I don’t know when I’ve ever seen him like this. He’s happy all the time. Anything to do with the baby brings a smile to his face.”

“That’s so sweet. I always thought Dan would be a good father. It’s getting close now. You look like you’re about ready to pop.”

Brittany laughed. “I know. I’m more than ready to have this little one out of my body. I just hope I’ll be able to lose the weight quickly. I really want my old body back.”

“Oh please. You have a better body pregnant than most do normally. If it weren’t for the stomach, no one would even know you were pregnant.” Becca commented.

“Well, I just want to get back in shape. I wouldn’t want Daniel to think he married an overweight, lethargic woman.”

“Like he ever would? Daniel thinks you walk on water, Britt.” Jen stated.

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A couple of weeks later Brittany and Dan were just settling down for the evening. Dan was engrossed in one of his books for his class starting in two weeks while Brittany was catching the late news. Suddenly Brittany grabbed him forcefully on the arm. “Honey, what’s wrong? You okay?” Dan asked putting the book aside.

Brittany tried to take calming breaths. “I’m not sure.” she answered.

“What do you mean you’re not sure? Is it the baby?”

Brittany nodded. “Daniel, I think I’m going into labor, but I’m not sure.”

“But you’re not due for another week.” he said.

“Daniel, this is not an exact science! The baby’s going to come when she wants, and I think that time is now!” she yelled wincing.

“Okay. Okay. Just stay calm. I’ll call the doctor. Just try to relax.”

With one phone call they were on their way to the hospital. “Call my mother, Daniel. I want her to get here as soon as possible.” Brittany instructed with a growl.

“Okay, I will. You just try to stay calm and relax.” he gently replied.

“Don’t snap at me! I am calm!” she screamed.

“Sorry, sorry.” Dan apologized cowering away from the monster that was once his wife.

Once they were at the hospital, the doctor informed them that it would be awhile, leaving the two of them alone. Dan took a seat next to the bed and closed his eyes. However he was bolted awake when he heard Brittany yell, “Don’t you dare go to sleep on me! You did this to me! If I have to suffer through this so do you!”

Dan just gave a nod resigning himself to the fact that it would be a sleepless night for all. He really didn’t want to cross his wife right now, so he meekly answered, “Whatever you say, honey.”

Around four that morning the baby was finally delivered. Dan began to cry the first time he laid eyes on her. “Oh, Brittany, she’s so beautiful. She looks just like you.” he stated kissing Brittany’s wet forehead.

“She is beautiful.” Brittany mumbled in exhaustion as they cradled her into Brittany’s arms.

“I love you so much.” Dan whispered wrapping Brittany tightly in his arms. “And I love you too, little Victoria.” he stated kissing her fuzzy blonde head.

“I can’t believe we actually have her here with us. Go get the family. I want them to see her.” Brittany insisted.

By the time Dan returned, Brittany was already dozing. “Oh my, look at our beautiful granddaughter.” Mary whispered to Brian and David trying not to wake Brittany.

Dan curved his arms around Becca and Jen. “Well, it’s official. You’re both aunts.” he teased.

“I’m going to call Joe.” Becca stated.

Over the next two weeks Victoria kept an erratic schedule, making both Brittany and Dan long for the beginning of classes, so they’d have a moment to relax. Their schedules coincided well in that Brittany was gone two mornings a week while Dan’s classes were on opposite days.

On Dan’s first day of class, he arrived after a sleepless night. Holding onto his coffee like a life preserver, he made his way into the classroom, apparently being the last to arrive. The teacher gave him a friendly nod as he quickly took the nearest vacant seat. The professor continued with his introduction of the course as Dan quietly tried to settle himself. However he hadn’t even been there five minutes when his cell phone rang. The teacher glared at him but said nothing as Dan frantically turned it off. Lowering his head and turning away in embarrassment his eyes caught the shimmering gold locks of the woman sitting next to him. His green eyes met her greenish blue ones. Unknowingly he gave her his sexiest smile, but when she raised a suggestive brow his direction, he sat up straighter turning back toward the professor.

“Well, since we’re going to be spending a lot of time discussing our readings and our work, I want to take a few minutes for us to get to know each other. I know this may seem juvenile, but I happen to think this method works, so everyone’s going to pair up with the person next to them, and we’ll spend the next ten or fifteen minutes interviewing your partner.”

Dan turned back to the blonde who was smiling pleasantly. “Well, do you want me to go first or do you?” she asked.

“How about we just tell about ourselves and save the questions for later.” he suggested.

“Okay, I’ll go first. My name’s Melissa Harrison, and I’m twenty-two. I just recently moved to Dallas and don’t quite know my way around yet. I’m a full time student. What about you?”

“Ah, well, my name’s Daniel McKnight, and I’m twenty-four, going on twenty-five. I’ve lived in Texas all my life. I recently got married and had a baby two weeks ago.”

“Oh, that’s great. A girl or boy?”

“Girl. Her name’s Victoria, and she’s the reason I look like death warmed over. My wife and I are both trying to get our Masters and take care of her.”

“So, what do you do for a living?”

“Nothing really. I’m retired from my second occupation, and I’m kind of at a loss as to what I should be doing with my life.”

“Well, what does your wife do?”

“Right now, she’s a full time mother and part time student. She was a physics teacher, but took time off for the baby.”

Melissa gave a perplexed stare. “Okay. I don’t mean to pry too much, but neither of you work and you just had a baby. I guess you were successful enough in your last job?” Dan gave a modest nod. “Well, what was it?”

“Actually, I don’t really tell people if they don’t already know, but since you asked, I used to play for the Cowboys.”

“The football team? That’s cool. Why’d you quit?”

“Personal reasons.” vaguely Dan answered.

Melissa took the hint and move on to her next question. “Do you have any idea what you want to do now?”

"I'd like to go back to teaching and coaching, but I'm not sure if that's possible. What about you?" he inquired not giving any more information away.

"I'd like to be an author, and maybe teach on the college level. You said you used to teach. What?"

"English Literature on the high school level."

"Oh, so this class should be a breeze for you. I know where I'm coming for help." she joked.

Dan laughed. "Feel free. I'd be glad to spend some time talking about literature to anyone. My wife is a science nerd. English isn't her thing and physics definitely isn't mine." Melissa smiled again. "May I ask you a personal question, Melissa?" She nodded. "Are you single?"

"Yes. I just recently ended a relationship with my boyfriend of two years."

"Sorry to hear that."

"No, no. It was for the best. We didn't want the some things any more. Why do you ask? You want to set me up with one of your football buddies?"

"Well, most of my football friends are much older with wives and children. I do know some single guys though, but they're in their late twenties and football season is about to get underway. They don't really have time for that. My attorney is single, but he's almost forty and has teenagers."

"Well if you can think of anyone, you let me know." she teased.

"I'll do that. Someone as beautiful as you, who is obviously intelligent, deserves someone who will make you happy."

Melissa blushed. "You better stop. I wouldn't want your wife to think you were flirting with me."

"Never." he joked causing them both to chuckle again. "You know Melissa, I just realized you're the same age as my sister, Becca, and only a year younger than my wife and her best friend. I think you'd really like all of them. How about you come out to my place sometime and meet them?"

"That's really sweet of you, Daniel. I'd like that."

A month later Brittany wanted to take Victoria to visit her parents and asked if Dan wanted to go. He declined saying her had too much school work and household projects, but for them to go and have a good time. That Friday when Brittany and Victoria left, Dan began to erect a new swing set for Victoria in the back yard beyond the pool. However once that was complete he was left bored. Most of his friends were in the middle of football, so he called his father, who turned

out to be out of town as well.

Resigning to do some homework, he opened his notebook. There on the first page was Melissa's number. Deciding it wouldn't hurt to call, he gave her a ring. She answered the phone breathlessly. "Melissa, hi. It's Dan."

"Hey, Dan. How are you?"

"Fine. Did I catch you at a bad time?"

"Oh no. I just walked in from school. I had to run to grab the phone."

"Oh, okay. Listen. My wife has taken Victoria to her parent's house for the weekend, so I'm here by myself. I know I promised you I'd have you over to meet them, but what would you say to just hanging out with me instead?"

"Today? Right now?"

"Today, tonight, whenever. If you're busy, we'll do it some other time."

"Oh no. I'm not busy. What do you want to do?"

"Actually, I haven't gotten that far ahead. You have any ideas?"

"I'm pretty tired. I don't feel much like getting dressed up to go out."

"Well, you could just come over here. There's plenty of fun stuff to do. I've got a hot tub, pool table, and a variety of movies, lots of liquor. Just about anything you want, I have."

"A hot tub, huh? That sounds relaxing."

"Then bring your suit when you come."

"All right. Sounds like a plan."

"Great. What do you want to eat? I can't get much delivered out here, so I'll have to go get it."

"You mean you're not going to cook?"

"Well, I really didn't want to poison you on your first trip. Trust me. Take out would be better."

"Then I'll just pick something up on my way."

"Fine. Suit yourself."

Melissa arrived around 7:00 that evening with Chinese for them. "Meat! I love you!" Dan

exclaimed. "Brittany's a vegetarian, so I hardly ever get meat unless I make it for myself." he explained taking it into the kitchen.

"Your house is huge!" Melissa stated looking around her.

"Well, we plan on filling the place with kids. Plus we have a lot of family that like to visit often. I'll give you a tour if you want."

"Definitely but later. Right now I'm starving!"

"What would you like to drink? We have beer, wine, soda, water, juice."

"Wine sounds good."

"Wine it is then. You want to sit on the deck? We can watch the sunset."

"Sure."

"Cool. Follow me then." Dan led the way outside. After he lit some candle to keep the insects away, he opened the wine. Over dinner the conversation centered around Victoria, as usual with Dan. After about half an hour though, he realized he was monopolizing the conversation. "Am I boring you? I'm sorry. Somehow I just get to talking about Victoria and can't stop."

"I think it's cute. It's nice to see a father who adores his children."

"Well, she's such a doll. I wish they were here, so you could meet them."

"It's all right. Next time."

Dan nodded in agreement. "Looks like we finished that bottle. How about another?" he asked.

"Sure. The evening is still young. I'm game."

Dan returned with another bottle and refilled their glasses. The sun was almost gone, leaving them in the glow of the candle light. Dan raised his glass to her. "A toast to our friendship and hope that my wife doesn't kill me for it." he teased.

"Do you really think she'll have a problem with it?"

"I hope not." he mumbled chugging down the glass before pouring another. "Well, now that we're all fed, what shall we do? I think your vote would be for the hot tub." Melissa nodded enthusiastically. "All right then. I'll get the thing up and running."

"Okay. I'll just put these dishes inside."

"You don't have to do that. I'll get them."

“No, no. I’ll get them.” Melissa insisted.

While Melissa was inside, Dan started the hot tub and lined the ground with the candles from the table. Setting the wine and glasses down next to the tub, Dan went inside where Melissa was just finishing the dishes. “Thanks, Melissa. That was nice of you.” he said.

“My pleasure.” she replied taking the dish towel from his hands, her fingers lingering on his a moment longer than necessary.

Dan’s body instinctively leaned closer into hers for a moment. “Well, I’m going to change. There’s a bedroom at the end of the hall down here, so you can change in there. I’ll bring a towel out for you.” Dan quickly went upstairs to change. He was just on his way back outside when the phone rang.

“Hi, honey.” Brittany said.

“Hey, sweetie. You make it there okay? How’s Victoria?”

“We’re both fine. She’s asleep right now. Mom, Dad, and I went out to dinner with her, so she was a little worn out. So what are you up to? Getting into trouble?” she teased.

Dan gave a nervous laugh. “No. I’m actually stepping into the hot tub as we speak.”

“Alone I hope.” she joked.

Not commenting, Dan asked, “What are you doing?”

“Oh, just lying naked in bed, thinking of you.” she growled seductively. Dan looked up when he heard footsteps. Taking in the sight of Melissa in a scantily clad two piece made Dan gasp. “You like that?” Brittany whispered hearing his change in breathing.

Dan turned away from Melissa as she stepped into the water. “You know I like that idea a lot, Brittany.” he groaned.

“What would you do if I were there with you right now?” she inquired.

“What would I do if you were here?” he repeated looking back at Melissa. “Oh, the things I’d love to do.”

“Like what?”

“Well, first I’d pour us both a glass of wine.” he stated watching Melissa pour and hand him his. “Then I’d watch as you brought it up to your perfect lips to take a sip.” he said, watching Melissa follow his directions. He felt her foot on his bare inner thigh. Dan closed his eyes as he tried to calm himself.

“Then what?” Brittany prompted.

“Huh?” Dan asked.

“Daniel, are you okay? You seem distracted.”

“Oh no. I’m not distracted.” he said pushing Melissa’s foot away. “I’m just not feeling too well. I’m not really in the mood for this. I’m sorry.”

“Oh, poor baby. I’m sorry you’re not feeling well. You should try to rest. I don’t want Victoria to get sick.”

“I’m sorry, sweetie. We’ll pick this up later. I promise.”

“I’m sure we will. I’m not worried about that. You just get some sleep. I’ll talk to you later.”

“All right. I love you. Kiss Victoria for me.”

“I will. I love you too. Get rested. We’ll pick up from where we left off when I get home.”

“I look forward to it. Good night.” When Dan hung up, he gave a heavy sigh.

“You okay?” Melissa asked.

Dan looked at her. “Melissa, I’m pretty close to being drunk. I miss my wife and baby, and I’m sitting in a hot tub with an incredibly sexy woman, thinking about how nice it would be to relieve some of this tension I feel but knowing it would be so wrong. My wife calls me thinking I’m alone and wants to have phone sex. I think I could be losing my mind. Between the two of you my body is about to explode.”

Melissa gave a smile and nod in understanding. “Listen, Dan. I think we’ve both thought about what it would be like to be together, but it’s just because we’re drunk and lonely. You’re married, and I know you love your wife and child. I respect that. Let’s not make this mistake. It’s not worth your relationship with your wife, and it’s not worth our friendship. Let’s just be friends and leave it at that.”

“Yes, just friends.” he mumbled chugging back his beverage.

Refilling his, Melissa raised her glass. “To Brittany and Victoria, the two luckiest ladies in the world.” she stated.

Later that evening they ended up on the couch watching movies until the early hours of the morning. “Dan, I hate to break up our little party, but it’s late, and I’ve got to drive back.”

“Why don’t you just stay here tonight? That’s a long drive to make alone at this hour. It’s not



like I don't have plenty of space."

"Are you sure Brittany wouldn't mind?"

"Well, are you going to be in bed with me?" he teased.

"Don't tempt me." she answered with a seductive smile.

"No, seriously. Stay here. You've had too much to drink. I'd feel better."

The following morning Dan awoke to the sound of the bedroom door. "Brittany." he mumbled trying to open his tired eyes.

"Dan." Melissa whispered.

Dan opened his eyes and saw Melissa standing over him fully dressed. "Hey. How did you sleep?"

"Fine. You?"

"I've forgotten what's it like to sleep straight through the night. No baby crying. Just silence."

Melissa nodded. "I just wanted you to know that I was leaving. I had fun last night."

"Me too. You have plans for tonight?"

"No. You want to go out?"

"Yeah. I feel like going clubbing. Haven't done that in forever. What do you say?"

"Sounds fun. I'll call you later then."

Dan awoke again later that morning to the phone. "You still in bed? It's after 11:00 You feeling poorly still?" Brittany asked.

"I'm okay. A good night sleep has done wonders. No night time feedings or changings. It's been wonderful."

"I'm sure it has. Don't get to use to it, though. We'll be back in the morning instead of tomorrow evening. I thought I'd be able to get this lab report written while I was here, but it just hasn't turned out that way."

"Well, sounds good. I'll be glad to have you back early. I'm missing my girls."

"I'm sure you are." Brittany teased sarcastically. "Well, I've got to run. We're about to go to the zoo for the afternoon."

“Have fun. Take pictures.”

“We will. Don’t worry.”

“Be careful. I love you.”

“Love you too. Bye.”

Daniel smiled to himself as he thought of his daughter at the zoo as he drifted off again.

Late that night Dan picked Melissa up for dinner in his convertible. Escorting her out to the car, she asked, “Can we ride with the top down? It’s such a great evening.”

“Yeah, sure.”

“You know you don’t seem like the type to have this car. I would have thought for sure you’d have something brand new.”

“Well, I got this car on my sixteenth birthday, and it was brand new then. I have a Jaguar for when I have to play family man, but I love this car. I can’t bear to part with it. Who knows? Maybe I’ll give it to Victoria when she’s sixteen. It’ll be a classic by then. I like to drive it when Brittany’s not around. She doesn’t want me to take Victoria out in it, but this is my baby.”

Melissa smiled as he turned on the stereo. “Oh turn it up! This is a great song!” she stated reaching for the knob.

Dan laughed as she turned it up so high they couldn’t even hear each other talk. They got stares from people that they were passing, but seeing how much fun Melissa was having, Dan didn’t care until he saw flashing lights behind him.

“Damn.” he mumbled pulling over and turning the music off.

“You kids are being a little loud.” the officer stated stepping up to the car. Dan looked up at him wondering if he could get out of this. When their eyes met, the cop studied him closely for a moment as if trying to place him. “Licence and registration.” he mumbled. Dan handed it to him, hoping he’d be recognized. “Daniel McKnight? Of the Cowboys?” the officer asked. Dan gave a modest nod. “I knew it. Could I please have an autograph for my son? He loves you. He’ll be eight next week, and it would be the best present.”

“Yeah, sure. No problem.” Dan replied.

Signing the autograph, Dan handed it over to the officer. “Thanks. My son will love this. May I ask you a personal question? Why did you quit football?”

Being used to the common, curious, but invasive question, Dan smiled pleasantly. “You’d have

to talk to my beautiful wife about that one.”

The officer looked over to Melissa. “Beautiful indeed.” he mumbled “Well, why don’t you keep the music down a little?” he suggested handing Dan back his information.

“We’ll do that. Thank you, sir.” Dan answered trying not to laugh until the cop pulled away. Turning to Melissa, Dan said, “You heard the officer, wife. Keep the music down.”

At the club that night, they spent the first hour drinking before braving the dance floor. Dan was used to dancing with Brittany, who was by far the best dancer he’d ever seen, so to see Melissa try was laughable. Pulling her into his body, he leaned to her ear stating, “You could never pass as my wife. You can’t dance at all.”

“Hey, this was your idea. You dislike my dancing so much, you better teach me some moves.”

Wrapping her arms around his waist, he said, “Just follow me.” They danced for quite awhile with their bodies constantly rubbing up onto each other until a slow song came on. “You want another drink?” he asked looking into her eyes for the first time in an hour. They were sparkling with energy. They just stared at each other a moment before Dan pulled away. “Oh God, I’m doing it again.” he stated covering his forehead with his hand in frustration. “Come on. Let’s go outside.”

Going out into the courtyard, they found a vacant spot in the corner. “What’s wrong?” Melissa asked. “What did you mean you were doing it again?”

Dan looked away for a moment. “I’m finding myself in the same position as last night, drunk, lonely, and wanting something I can’t have. I mean is it just me, or do we have chemistry?”

“It’s not just you, Dan. It’s very real. I admit I’ve rethought last night, but I know neither of us wants to deal with the consequences of doing something together. You’re quickly becoming my new best friend, and I wouldn’t let curiosity ruin that. You’re married with a kid. Let’s just acknowledge that the chemistry is there and move on. If you ever want me to be friends with your wife, we have to move past this. She’s going to think something is going on between us when there isn’t. We just have to push it away. I want to keep you as a friend so badly, Dan.”

“So do I.”

“Okay then. Do we agree not to address this again? Our ground rules are firmly established?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. I’m going to get another beer. You want one?” Dan nodded.

As soon as Melissa went up to the bar, a man approached her. Dan watched the interchange from a distance. The man was obviously interested, and Melissa seemed to be responding openly to him, which pleased Dan greatly. After a few minutes he saw them heading his way. After a brief

introduction, Melissa gave Dan his beer before saying, “You don’t mind if I go dance some more, do you?”

“No, not at all. Knock yourself out.” he answered.

“Great. I’ll meet up with you a little later then.”

Dan grabbed her by the shoulder as she turned to go. Leaning to her ear, he whispered, “I’ll be upstairs by the pool tables if you need me.”

Melissa planted a kiss on his cheek. “Thanks.”

Dan spent the next hour on the balcony of the second floor observing Melissa dance. Even though she couldn’t, Dan found her amusing anyway. Dan began to think about Brittany, fantasizing about dancing with her. He wondered where the times of clubbing went until he realized it stopped with Victoria. Brittany had changed so much over the term of the pregnancy. The wild side Dan was first attracted to had vanished, being replaced by conservativeness. Dan hoped that Brittany’s playful side would return after she settled into her role of mother, because he sorely missed it. Then he realized that was probably why he was so attracted to Melissa. She reminded him of Brittany two years ago. He was in love with that Brittany and wanted her back.

Dan found himself becoming thoroughly depressed as he stared out into nothing. He didn’t even notice Melissa approach him until he felt her hand across his back. He felt her lean to his ear. Her breath sent shivers down his back. “You okay?” she asked. Dan shrugged. “You’re thinking about her again.” It was a statement not a question. “She’s a lucky woman. Listen, let’s get out of here. There are better ways to drown that sorrow than in the end of a bottle.”

“What do you suggest?”

“My favorite, ice cream.”

Dan laughed. “All right. Ice cream it is then.” he answered taking her hand.

Going back to her place, they both curled up on her small sofa with bowls of ice cream and watched a movie. Dan glanced at his watch. “Oh God, it’s after 3:00. I should get going.”

“You don’t have to. You can stay here if you want.”

“And just how would I explain that to my lovely wife?”

Melissa smiled. “You’re right. In that case, let’s get you out of here.” Going to the door they hugged closely. “Listen, tomorrow I’m going to work on my English paper. May I enlist your help?”

“Yeah, sure. Why don’t you come out to the house? Brittany and Victoria will be home then, so you can meet them.”

“Sounds good. Now get out of here. I’ll see you tomorrow.” Melissa stated kissing his cheek. Dan raised a flirtatious brow. “Don’t look at me like that. Just go.” she stated firmly but with a smile.

Dan awoke on Sunday morning with a spinning head. Groaning he sat up and stretched. Thinking a shower might do him good, he took a long one before throwing on a pair of boxers and heading downstairs. He was just reading the paper when he heard the garage door open. Getting up, he went out to see Brittany trying to get Victoria out of her car seat.

Brittany smiled at him as she said, “Look, Victoria. It’s Daddy. We missed Daddy very much, didn’t we?”

Dan took Victoria in one arm and wrapped the other around Brittany. “Daddy missed his favorite girls very much too.” he replied giving Brittany a seductive grin and intimate kiss.

“Oh, I’ve missed you.” she breathlessly whispered.

“Isn’t it time for Victoria’s morning nap?” he questioned hopefully.

“Should be about ready for a bottle and then nap in half an hour or so.”

“Why don’t I see if I can get her to eat now?” Brittany gave a smiling nod at his urgency.

Curling the infant tighter to his chest, Dan sighed with contentment as he went inside. He began to speak softly to her about nothing in particular as he prepared the bottle. Finally when it was ready, they sat in the kitchen chair. “Okay, Victoria. Here’s some yummy milk for you. Please drink it, so Mommy and I can have some much needed and anticipated alone time.”

As if she understood, Victoria complied taking the bottle enthusiastically. Dan smiled down at his daughter as his chest pounded at the most beautiful creature ever created. “You know, Victoria, you’re only six weeks old and already men are fawning all over you. Look at me. I’m wrapped around your little finger.” he stated kissing her little hand that had clutched onto his index finger. “You’re going to be a heart throb just like your mother. You know, she had me hooked from the moment she hit me with the door.”

Half an hour later she was soundly asleep against Dan’s shoulder. Taking her up to the nursery, he gently laid her down in the crib before brushing back one of her gold locks. “Love you.” he whispered before going into their bedroom.

He found Brittany unpacking her bag. Pulling her into an embrace, he asked, “So, how did it go at Mom and Dad’s house?”

“Fabulous. We all missed you, though. Wish you had been there.”

“Well, I got some work done. Victoria’s new swing is up. I’ll have to show it to her later when

she wakes. I missed my girls so much.” he whispered leaning into her neck.

She giggled at first but the more persistent Dan’s mouth became, the more her body began to rock into his. “I’ve been thinking about you all weekend, Daniel. I’ve been aching for you.” Dan groaned at the admission. “It’s been so long since we’ve made love. I can’t wait any longer. I have to feel you deep inside of me. I need to feel you there. Please.”

“God, Brittany, I want you so badly. I’ve been wanting you all weekend too, but I don’t want to hurt you. It’s only been six weeks since you gave birth. Are you sure you’re ready for this?”

Brittany yanked Dan’s head back to meet his eyes. Hers were wild and lustful. “I don’t care how long it’s been. I want you now!” she commanded.

Their mouths met so forcefully it was almost painful. Dan groaned as he ripped the shirt off of her sending the buttons flying all over the room. Both of them were naked within moments and collapsed onto the bed, wrestling each other roughly for advantage as their hands groped each other frantically. Finally Dan wedged his hips between her thighs. She was smiling wickedly as she gasped for air, causing her flushed breasts to rise and fall rapidly. Taking one into his mouth, Dan latched on hard causing her to scream. Suddenly he tasted something unfamiliar and pulled away. He noticed a trickle of milk run down the curvature of her breast.

“What’s wrong? You didn’t hurt me.” she stated heaving them back in his face.

Dan smiled. “Nothing’s wrong. Everything’s just perfect. I was just enjoying the moment.” he answered.

“Please. I want to feel your mouth all over me.” she begged.

“Anything you want.” he replied descending her body to give her the pleasure she desired. An hour later Dan lay on his back with Brittany draped haphazardly across his naked frame. “So good.” he mumbled trying to catch his breath as he played with her sweaty dark blonde hair.

“God, I’ve missed you.” she whispered kissing his collarbone. Dan squeezed her petite bare waist tighter.

“I love you, Brittany, more than words could ever say.” he confessed.

Later that day Brittany was in her office working on her physics lab while Dan was outside with Victoria when the door bell rang. When Brittany answered the door, there was a woman about her own height with beautiful blonde hair and green eyes standing there with a back pack across one shoulder. “Hi. You must be Brittany. I’m Melissa. Dan’s told me so much about you.” Melissa noticed Brittany eyeing her suspiciously. “Dan and I are in class together. We’re supposed to study this afternoon.” she continued feeling uncomfortable under Brittany’s critical gaze.

“Oh, he must have forgotten to tell me. Come in. Dan’s out back.”

“How does Victoria like her new swing? Dan was so proud of himself for getting that thing together.”

“She likes it.” Brittany answered. This woman was making her uneasy. Brittany led Melissa out to the back.

Dan looked up when he heard the door. “Melissa, hey. I see you met Brittany.” he said with a huge smile, one that she returned.

“Yes. How’s it going? That must be Victoria.” she said stepping off the porch to go to him.

Brittany watched from the porch a moment. There was a natural chemistry between her husband and this woman. Brittany wondered how she could’ve known about the swing set. Obviously Dan had spoken to her while she was away. Had she been here, and why hadn’t he mentioned it? Brittany felt an uneasy gnawing in the pit of her stomach, but she tried to push it away. “Daniel, I’m going to go back in to finish my report.” Brittany stated hoping to regain his attention.

Without even looking at her, Dan yelled, “Okay, honey.” His eyes were glued to Melissa who was now holding Victoria. Jealousy began to boil in Brittany. Going back into her office, she slammed the door. She stared at the her computer screen for several long minutes trying to calm herself, explaining to herself that Dan would never cheat on her. After failing to get refocused, though, Brittany went into the kitchen to find the three of them at the table with Victoria in Dan’s arms.

“Here. Let me take her for awhile. What are you studying?” she asked playing with Dan’s ear seductively. Melissa informed her. “Sounds like fun.” sarcastically she mentioned taking Victoria upstairs.

Once Dan and Melissa were alone again, Melissa stated, “Your wife hates me.”

“Oh, she’s fine. How could she not like you? She’s just under some stress. You’re the best.”

Melissa rolled her eyes. “I told you she would think we were messing around.”

“Just give her a chance to warm up to you. It’ll be fine. I promise.” Dan tried to assure her, but he also felt the tension radiating from his wife.

A little while later Jen and Becca called to let them know that they were on their way over to see the baby. “Well, looks like you get to meet everyone in one day. Becca and Jen are on their way over. You have to stick around until they get here.”

“I don’t know. I don’t want to infringe on Brittany. It’s obvious she’s uncomfortable with me.”

Dan shrugged. “Well, I’ve had just about all I can stand of studying for now. Let’s play pool or something.”

Brittany was trying to focus on her paper again, but Victoria was being fussy. Picking her up, Brittany marched off to find Dan. "Take our daughter off my hands for awhile. I'm trying to write a paper." she snipped.

"Yeah, sure. No problem, honey." Dan gently replied taking Victoria. "Sweetie, are you okay?"

Brittany held his eyes in a stare. "I have a headache. I have to get this work finished, and I'm having to deal with the baby who has decided to be impossible this afternoon while you're in here entertaining. I'd appreciate a little help. I need a break, Daniel." she stated through gritted teeth.

"Fine. Take a break. I've got Victoria. Don't worry about her. Just do what you need to. Becca and Jen are on their way over. We'll make dinner for you, so you just try to relax." he answered touching her hair sweetly, but she pulled away from it. Dan then knew what things were really about. He looked over at Melissa, who was pretending to be more interested in her pool cue than their conversation and came to a decision. He wouldn't let his wife's insecurities ruin this friendship. Looking back at Brittany, Dan said, "Just go away and do what you need to. I've got our daughter."

Brittany was still hiding in her office when Jen and Becca arrived. There was an instant comradery with Melissa, Becca, and Jen as Dan expected. Soon the four adults were enjoying each others company and laughing so loudly the sound filtered into Brittany's office.

Brittany shook her head trying to remain focused on her closing paragraph. A few minutes later though a knock disturbed her again. "What's wrong?" Jen asked poking her head into the room. "Come on. Talk to me, Britt. Obviously you're upset over something." Jen pressed coming into the office and closing the door.

"That woman." Brittany hissed.

"Melissa? What about her?"

"She wants my husband."

"A lot of women want your husband." Jen reminded her.

"Yes, but Daniel's never given them as much attention to anyone as he's giving her."

"What are you saying? Daniel's having an affair? Do you know how crazy that sounds? Daniel loves you and Victoria more than life itself. He would never do that, Brittany."

"How can you be sure?"

"Do you really have that little faith in him?" Jen asked seriously.



“No. I don’t know what I’m thinking. She’s just so gorgeous, and I just feel fat and miserable.”

“Why because you’re in a size eight instead of a six? Brittany you look better six weeks after giving birth than most women look in their whole lives.”

“Did you see her breasts?”

“No.”

“Her breasts are better than mine. Daniel loves breasts, and she has a tighter ass than I do.”  
Brittany sobbed.

Jen rolled her eyes, irritated that she was actually having this conversation. “Maybe she does. So, she’s got a nice rack, but do you honestly think that’s all Dan sees? Do you think all he wants are some great tits and ass? If that’s what you think, you’ve way underestimated him. Yes, Melissa is a knockout, drop dead gorgeous woman but so are you. That doesn’t mean he’s going to go after her. Give him some credit.” Brittany lowered her head into her hands. A silent moment passed. “Look, Brittany. I like Melissa. I think she’s pretty cool. I think you would too if you just gave her a chance. Give them both a chance. Dan doesn’t deserve to be treated this way. He’s just trying to make a new friend, and you’re making it harder.”

“I’ve got to get this finished.” Brittany stated turning back to her computer, ending the conversation.

“Very well. I’ll tell them you’re stuck under all this paper work and can’t find your way out to be social.” The rest of the evening Brittany hid in her office even though she could tell they were having a great time.

When it came time to put Victoria down for the night, Dan stood and excused himself, but Melissa asked if she could go with him. Up in the nursery, Dan put Victoria in her crib and then just watched her. “Dan, I’m sorry about today.” Melissa softly stated.

“Why? You didn’t do anything wrong. Neither did I. The problem my wife has is her own.”

“Maybe but I never wanted to threaten her. I just wanted us to be friends.”

“We are, Melissa, regardless of how Brittany feels.”

“You’re hurt by her insecurity, aren’t you?” Melissa inquired.

Dan shrugged. “I guess I am. It’s like she doesn’t trust me. I just don’t think I’ve done anything wrong. You know how hard I’m trying to be a good husband and father. I want some credit for that. I just don’t understand why she feels this way. Do I look or act like the kind of man who would stray from his wife after the first attractive woman who comes along?”

“Not to me, and you proved it on Friday night as well as Saturday. You kept your hands to

yourself at the club. You didn't even dance with any other women. I noticed. I even felt bad about leaving you alone to dance with that guy. You seemed so distant from everyone and everything."

"Yeah, I was missing Brittany a lot. She and I used to have so much fun together at clubs and stuff. I realized that has slipped away with Victoria. I wish we could have that back, but it's like she's a completely different person now. I wish I could have my old Brittany back, the one who enjoyed partying and having fun, the one with modest confidence. I don't know if I'll ever get that Brittany back. I hope so." Dan mumbled.

Brittany could feel tears streaming down her face as she listened to Melissa and Dan's conversation on the baby monitor. Dan was right. She had changed with Victoria, but she remembered the Brittany Dan was referring to. She used to be more secure in herself, but since becoming completely dependent on Daniel, things had changed. It was a choice she had made willingly, but she now wondered if it had been the right choice. She forgot her thoughts as the conversation continued.

"Listen. Don't worry about Brittany. Jen and Becca obviously like you. I think Brittany will come around in time."

"I hope so. I just wanted to be a friend to her."

"I know. That's what I wanted too. Come on. We better let the little one sleep. I wouldn't want Brittany to think I brought you up to my kid's room to steal kisses from you." Dan said in jest, but Melissa knew it was more in hurt.

That night Dan and Brittany went to bed separately. Dan pretended to be asleep when he heard Brittany come in for the night. She dressed for bed quietly before climbing in next to him. Dan knew she was staring at him, but since he didn't feel up for conversation, he kept his eyes shut. He heard her settle herself and sigh in discontent. After only a few minutes Victoria made her presence known. Brittany was out of bed before Dan could even respond. Dan just listened to Brittany cooing at their child. His heart fluttered with joy at the sound, and he knew he had to make things right with his wife.

Sitting up in bed, he turned on the light and waited, letting Brittany enjoy her moment alone with Victoria. Ten minutes later Brittany reappeared in their bedroom doorway. "What are you doing up?" she asked.

"Couldn't sleep."

"Something on your mind?"

Dan patted the bed next to him. "Come sit down, Brittany. I want to talk to you."

Brittany did as requested sitting in the spot he'd indicated. She looked around the room, avoiding his eyes. "Look at me, please." he stated. When the contact was made, she saw the longing in his

eyes. "Did you know that you are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen?" he asked tracing her arm lightly. Brittany blushed. Sitting up, he leaned into her ear. "Did you know that I love you more than life itself, and you're the only one I want to be with for the rest of my life?" Brittany's blush deepened as it spread down her neck and to the tips of her ears as she looked away. Dan cupped her face, bringing their gaze back together. "You bring me such happiness, Brittany, and I cherish every moment with you. I love you, and I only want to make you happy."

A tear trickled down Brittany's cheek. Dan wiped it away gently with his thumb, looking at her with tenderness. "I'm so sorry, Daniel. I don't know what's wrong with me these days." she sobbed falling into the cradle of his arms.

"It's okay. I love you no matter what." he assured her.

"I love you too." she cried.

"Come here. Just let me hold you." he said lying them both down. Pulling the covers around them, Dan held her until exhausted crying overtook her, and she drifted to sleep.

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In the middle of December that year, Dan and Brittany had a holiday party with all their friends and family. Joe had come down from New York to see his niece for the first time and Brian and Mary were staying at the house as well. Even though there had been no opportunity for Brittany and Melissa to develop a friendship, Melissa had been drawing closer to Dan, Jen, and Becca.

As Brittany and Dan greeted their guests that night, Melissa showed up alone but in good spirit. Dan immediately hugged her. "So glad you could make it." he greeted kissing her cheek. "You remember my wife, Brittany."

Turning to her, Melissa answered, "Of course. Hello, Brittany."

Brittany took Melissa's hand in an obvious attempt to relay her emotions of the past few months. "We're both glad you could make it tonight, Melissa." she said.

Melissa squeezed Brittany's hand tighter to let her know all was forgiven. "Thank you."

"Oh, by the way, Melissa, all our single male friends are here, so you can pretty much have your pick." Dan informed her jokingly.

"Thanks for the tip." she quipped.

As the evening progressed, Dan noticed Melissa carrying on an in-depth conversation with his brother and his attorney, Mike. Making his way over to them, he curved a protective arm around Melissa's waist. "These guys giving you any trouble?" he asked in jest.

"We should be asking that about you." Joe replied nodding at the hold Dan had put on Melissa.

“You never told me you had such a handsome brother.” Melissa mentioned.

Dan looked at Joe and smiled, trying not to laugh. “Well, that’s a matter of opinion I guess. He’s not trying to hit on you, is he?”

Joe laughed and Mike snickered behind his glass. “What’s so funny?” Melissa inquired.

“Oh, nothing. What about this guy over here? He giving you trouble?” Dan asked playfully slapping Mike’s shoulder with the back of his hand.

“They’re both being perfect gentlemen, which is more than I can say for you, Daniel.” she answered as his grip became tighter.

Dan felt her squirm and released his hold. “Okay, well, you just better watch out for Mike. He’s sneaky. You can’t ever trust an attorney, especially mine.” Dan teased before walking away.

By the end of the evening, it was obvious to Dan that Mike and Melissa were hitting it off well. As Mike left that night, he pulled Dan away from Brittany. “What are my chances of getting Melissa to go out with me?” he asked.

Dan smiled. “I saw you two. You seemed to be clicking. She’s single, but as far as her going out with you, I don’t know. You are considerably older than she is. She’s young enough to be your daughter.”

“I’m serious, Dan. I’d like to see her again.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what. I’ll feel her out for you. If she’s interested, I’ll set something up for the four of us.”

“Sounds good. I’ll talk to you after the holidays about it. The kids are spending Christmas through New Years with me this year, so I won’t have much free time.”

“Yeah, all right. Tell them I said hi. I’ll talk to you later.”

Melissa was one of the last few people to leave that night. As she came to hug Dan good bye, he asked, “Did you find any one particularly interesting this evening? You had all my friends in one place.”

Melissa grinned. “You know, I think I did.”

“And who might that be?”

“Michael.”

“Mike? Really? Well, you do know he’s forty with two teenage boys, right?”

“I know, but I still like him.”

“Well great, because he was asking about you.”

“He was not.”

“No, he really was. I told him that the four of us should get together after the holidays. He thought it was a good idea. What about you?”

“I’m up for that.”

“Great. He’ll be thrilled to know.”

“Wonderful. Give him my number, will you?”

“Sure thing. Travel safely.” he said letting her go.

She kissed his cheek lightly. “Wish Brittany happy holidays for me.”

“Will do. Good night.”

Once Christmas was over, Mary and Brian left and Joe had to get back to New York, leaving Brittany and Dan alone with Victoria. The three of them were relaxing in the living room one evening in front of a fire. Victoria was asleep on her blanket on the floor, and Brittany was just lying next to her watching her sleep. Dan sat reclining on the sofa watching his two favorite girls fondly in silence.

After a few minutes, Dan softly got Brittany’s attention, motioning her over to the couch. She came to him, straddling his legs to face him. Dan sighed as he brushed some of her hair behind her ear. “I love you.” he said with a smile.

“I love you too.” she answered leaning in for a kiss making Dan moan. With the stress of school, Victoria, and the holidays, they had had little time to themselves. “This is so nice.” Brittany mentioned putting her head on Dan’s shoulder. Dan nodded in agreement as he slipped his hands under her sweater to massage her bare back. Brittany’s body moved against his as she moaned, “That feels so good.” Dan pressed harder eliciting another groan. Working his way up her back, Dan worked open her bra. One hand continued on her back as the other slid to cup the side of her breast gently. Brittany kissed his ear. “If you’re trying to turn me on, it’s working.” she teased softly.

Dan chuckled. “You want to go upstairs?” he asked.

“No. I want to stay right here.” she stated sitting up straight.

Dan watched as she pulled the sweater over her head. His eyes widened in appreciation of her

breathhtaking bare torso. “God, you are so beautiful, Brittany.” he said sliding his hands along her waist to the zipper of her jeans. He worked it open as she unbuttoned his shirt. Brittany stood up in front of him, her hands lingering around the waist of her jeans. Dan was all ready working himself out of his own pants as he watched her. Slowly she slid them over her small hips down past her thighs until they fell on their own accord. Dan always groaned wantonly at the sight of his wife’s nakedness. She was the vision of perfection.

Extending his hand he whispered, “Come here. I need to make love to you right now.” She gave a consenting smile as she climbed back on top of him.

A little while later their naked limbs were intertwined as Brittany lay on top of Dan with a blanket covering their lower bodies. Nuzzling into Dan’s chest, Brittany gazed over at Victoria, still blissfully asleep. “She is so beautiful.” she whispered.

“Just like her mother. She’s an angel. I can’t believe she actually slept through that, though.”

“Well, she seems to be sleeping sounder these days and for longer periods at night, which is a blessing to us all.”

“Yeah, not as many midnight changings. That’s good for both of us.”

“We should probably get her upstairs.” Brittany mentioned not attempting to move.

“We will soon.” Dan mumbled tightening his embrace around her torso.

Neither of them realized they had fallen asleep until Victoria’s cries woke them. Regretfully they sat up. “I’ll get her. You go upstairs and warm up the bed for us.” Dan suggested.

Brittany sleepily nodded in agreement. By the time Dan came into their bedroom, Brittany was fighting consciousness. Spooning his naked frame into hers, Dan held her closely as they generated a comfortable heat in which they both fell asleep.

## **Part 6**

A week before Dan and Brittany’s first anniversary, Jen, Becca, Melissa, and Brittany were out at lunch. The first part of their meal was focused mainly on what Melissa and Mike should do on their first official date, but once that had been decided, Becca asked, “So, Brittany, what have you gotten Dan for your anniversary?”

Brittany blushed. “I can say anything to anyone if I tell you.” They all swore themselves to secrecy. “Well, I think I’m pregnant again. I won’t know for a few days.”

“Are you serious?” Jen asked with surprise.

“Oh, that’s so cool. I get to be an aunt again.” Becca mentioned with excitement.

“How does Dan feel about this?” Melissa asked, being the voice of reason.

“He doesn’t know yet. We’ve always said we would have more kids. I just never thought it would be so soon. Even as unexpected as this is, I think he’ll be just as thrilled as he was with Victoria.”

“I’m sure he will.” Melissa tried to reassure her.

The night of their anniversary Jen took Victoria so they could enjoy some time alone. Dan took Brittany to her favorite place for dinner where they had a secluded table awaiting them. Dan looked over the wine list, asking if Brittany had any preferences, but she only shook her head saying she was fine with just water. Dan looked at her quizzically. “Are you okay?” he asked taking her hand. It trembled in his. “Honey, what’s wrong? Something bothering you? Would you rather go somewhere else?”

Brittany smiled nervously. “No. You know I love this place.”

“Then what is it? This Valentine’s Day, a day for happiness and romance. Don’t let something stand in the way of having a good time. Just tell me what it is. You’ll feel better. You know you will.”

Brittany squeezed his hand. “Can we exchange presents first? I’m dying to know what that is.” she asked pointing to the gift Dan had sitting next to his water glass.

“If you’d like. Here you go.” he stated placing it in front of her.

Carefully Brittany opened it. It shimmered in the low light of the restaurant. “Oh, Daniel, this is beautiful.” she exclaimed pulling the diamond necklace from the box.

Dan came around to her chair to help her put it on. She kissed him soundly. Grinning he teased, “So, where’s my present? I didn’t see you bring anything in. Is it in your purse?”

Smiling Brittany shook her head. Taking his hand she pressed it against her midsection, her fingers interlocking with his. “It’s right here.” she whispered gazing lovingly into his eyes.

Dan stared back as realization of what she was saying dawned. He smiled warmly. “Are you telling me you’re pregnant again?” he asked trying to reign his excitement. She gave a hesitant nod. “Well, you’ve just given me the best present ever! Nothing compares to this, sweetheart. I love you so much.” he said rubbing her stomach lightly.

“So you’re happy?”

“Of course. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Because Victoria is only six months old. We’ve just gotten used to having one child in the

house. Now we're going to have another."

"Brittany, I love you and Victoria very much. Yes, it's unexpected again, but you know how much I love children. You couldn't have made me happier." he assured her leaning to give her a kiss. Taking his seat again, he asked, "Have you told anyone else about this?"

"Well, I mentioned to the girls that I thought I was, but I wanted you to be the first to know of course. I'm only six weeks along. We don't have to tell people just yet if we don't want to."

"Well, if Becca knows, she'll tell Dad and Joe. Then we'll have to tell your parents."

"Well, I'd like to keep it a secret a little longer if we can, just to make sure. I mean last time I told you at eight weeks. Someone has to control their excitement, though." she teased.

"I'll try. We'll do this however you want."

## Chapter 8

The day Brittany and Dan went for ultrasound was a hectic one. Ten month old Victoria was as cute as ever but getting into everything she could get her hands on. Dan was trying to be patient with her as he scooped her up into his arms, relieving Brittany momentarily. Holding her securely to his chest, so she'd stop trying to play with medical equipment, he paced back and forth. "Well, now this is interesting." the doctor commented.

"What?" Dan snapped as he tried to keep Victoria from pulling his glasses off his face.

The doctor looked at Dan, then Brittany. "You're having twins." flatly he stated.

"Twins?" Dan repeated. The doctor nodded. Dan looked at Brittany and saw the apprehension that he felt. "It'll be okay, honey." he assured her.

"What sex are they?" Brittany asked. Dan knew what Brittany wanted for an answer.

"They are both girls."

"Two more girls? Well, aren't I the lucky guy?" Dan joked trying to ease his wife's discomfort and disappointment that at least one wasn't a son. "They're both healthy?"

"Yes, they are." the doctor informed them.

"Well, then that's all that really matters." Dan replied squeezing Brittany's hand.

Later that night after Victoria went to bed, Dan and Brittany sat in contemplative silence.

"Daniel, I'm sorry. I know you would've have liked a boy." Brittany whispered.

"There's nothing to be sorry for, Brittany. I'm thrilled for another girl, but two? I think we're



going to need some help.”

“We’re going to have to rethink school. Maybe I should quit to take care of the girls.”

“No. I don’t want you to do that. You have so much more potential with school than I do. If anyone should quit, it should be me. I’m just doing it to keep from getting bored. Whatever we decide, I think we should consider a nanny. Three infants is a lot for one person regardless.”

“I don’t really see a way around it. The only other option would be day care, and I’d much prefer for them to at least be at home where we can keep an eye on them.”

“We’ll figure it out. We should rest now. You’ve got school in the morning.” Dan mentioned rubbing her stomach lightly.

The following Saturday morning Dan was out of the house early to meet Mike for a round of golf. Mike was in the clubhouse having coffee when Dan arrived. “Dan, so glad you could make it. I was beginning to wonder about you.”

“Sorry. It was a rough night. It’s just nice to be able to get away from everything for awhile.” he mumbled.

“Something wrong?” Mike asked hearing Dan’s stressed tone.

“We had an ultrasound this week.”

Instantly Mike became concerned. “Is it the baby?”

Dan shook his head. “No. We have two healthy girls in there.”

“Twin girls? You have your work cut out for you.”

“I know. Just thinking about it makes me tired.”

“Well, I invited you here for a reason, Pops.” Mike joked. “Come on. We tee off in ten minutes.”

Through out the first nine holes Mike never mentioned what he had to say to Dan, making him curious. Finally he broke down asking, “So, are you going to tell me what’s up or, do I have to guess?”

Mike smiled brightly at him. “Dan, you’re looking at a man deeply in love, and I hold you and Brittany at fault for that.” he teased.

“Melissa, huh? Does she feel the same? I haven’t seen her in awhile.”

“I think so. Dan, I really think I’ve found the woman of my dreams.”

“But she’s so much younger than you. She’s only twenty-four. How do your kids feel about her?”

“They like her. They’ve been up here on summer break, and things are going really well.”

“Well, that’s great. Tell you what. Why don’t we all get together next weekend? Bring Melissa and the kids out to the house. We’ll have dinner. I’d love to see the rascals.”

“Dan, they’re not so little any more. Mike, Jr. will be starting college in the fall, and Nick is a senior. They’re bigger than I am. It’s been quite awhile since you’ve seen them.”

“Well, if you can tear them away from the ladies, bring them. Otherwise you and Melissa come on out.”

“Sounds great. We’d love to.” Mike answered sinking another putt.

“So, Mike, may I ask you a personal question? How is Melissa in bed? I’ve always been curious.” hesitantly Dan inquired.

Mike laughed. “I should hit you for that, but I won’t. Actually, I’m almost ashamed to admit that we haven’t ventured that far. I’m not sure why, but she is holding back. I think I am just out of practice, but I’m not sure. Maybe you could give me insight after you see her again.”

“It’s like riding a bike, Mike. Your technique might be a little rusty, but we know it was effective at least twice before.” Dan joked. “Seriously though, I’m sure it’s nothing. Women can be like that. The good ones are worth the wait.” Dan tried to reassure his friend.

On Saturday afternoon Mike brought Melissa and his sons out to Dan and Brittany’s. Mike was right. They had turned into men since Dan had last seen them. Dan watched Melissa carefully that afternoon as the group hung out around the pool. She and Mike had obvious feelings for each other. However it struck him as odd that Melissa avoided the boys as much as possible.

When Melissa went inside for a moment, Dan watched as Mike, Jr. followed her inside. Sensing that something might be up, Dan waited a moment before going into the house as well. Stepping into the kitchen, he heard Melissa’s voice in the corridor, begging Mike, Jr. to stop what ever he was doing. Stepping into the hall, Dan saw Mike, Jr. pinning Melissa to the wall with one hand around her wrists and the other groping her breast roughly. Instantly Dan yanked Mike, Jr. off of her. “Excuse me! That just happens to be one of my best friends!” Dan yelled wedging his way between the two of them. He could feel Melissa gripping his arms in fear. “You okay, Melissa?” he asked. Dan felt her nod into his back. “Normally I’d beat the shit out of someone like you, but I’m friends with your father, Mike. You’ve put me in a difficult position.”

“Why don’t you just mind your own business, Dan? This doesn’t concern you!”

“Melissa, tell me what you want me to do. It really up to you.”

Melissa rested her head against Dan's back and gave a heavy sigh. "I have to tell your dad, Mike. I can't pretend this didn't happen again."

"Well, go ahead. He won't believe you, but you can try, you little whore! All you really want is his money anyway!" arrogantly Mike spat.

Anger got the better of Dan, and before he could control himself, he punched Mike in the jaw. Instantly a scuffle ensued, which started Melissa screaming at them. By the time Mike and Brittany were inside, Mike, Jr. had Dan on the floor in the hallway, kicking and punching him unmercifully.

"Mike, what the hell are you doing?" his father screamed, pulling his son away. As Mike pulled Mike, Jr. up, Mike, Jr. spit a mouthful of blood into Dan's face.

Melissa knelt next to Dan who was moaning in pain. His face was bloody and battered. "My side." he winced.

"What the hell did you do to my husband?" Brittany yelled getting up into Mike, Jr.'s face.

"He started it! Serves him right!"

"All right. Everybody just calm down. Mike, go get your brother. We're leaving." Once his son was gone, Mike looked down at Dan still on the floor. "Dan, are you okay?"

Dan scowled but calmly stated, "He's never allowed in my house again."

"What happened?" he asked Melissa, who was trying to wipe Dan's face as Brittany paced back and forth trying to calm an upset Victoria.

"We'll talk about it later, Michael! Dan's hurt! He needs a doctor!"

When the boys returned, Mike pushed them toward the front door. "Dan, I'm really sorry for what happened. Melissa, are you coming?" he asked extending his hand to her.

She looked at it a moment before looking at Dan. "No. I'm not coming with you. I won't be going anywhere with your son. Dan needs my help."

Mike scowled at his son before saying, "Very well. Call me with an update as soon as you can."

Once they were gone, Melissa asked, "Can you sit up?"

Dan attempted to but fell back in pain. "It hurts too much."

"Honey, we have to get you to the hospital. Now you can either sit up, or we'll have to call an ambulance. Melissa and I can't lift you." Brittany stated trying to motivate him.

“It just hurts so bad.” he mentioned giving another shot. With Melissa’s help he got to his feet.

“I’ll go get you some pain killers for the ride.” Brittany said hurrying up stairs as Melissa held him upright.

Dan’s face was still battered but clean now. Leaning up to him, Melissa kissed his mouth gently. “Thank you.” she whispered.

“Anytime.” he answered with a crooked grin.

“I wanted you to hit him. I’m just sorry he hurt you.”

“Well, you can’t always win every fight. I’d say I got my ass kicked. However, I’d take another fall like that for another kiss.” he joked.

Melissa laughed at his attempt at humor. “Well, just this once.” she said kissing him a second time.

“Must be my lucky day.” he mumbled teasingly.

“No. It’s mine.”

“You want to tell me what that was about?”

“We’ll talk about it in the car.” Melissa helped Dan into his seat as Brittany strapped Victoria into hers.

“Okay, what happened?” Brittany asked when they were on their way.

“Oh, where to start? Well, I might as well tell you the whole thing. I met Mike, Jr. and Nick when they were on their spring break not too long ago. Michael and I had been getting along great, and I couldn’t have asked for anything more perfect until the boys arrived. They are absolutely spoiled rotten. Michael gives them whatever they want. However, I figured I’m not their mother, so I should just stay out of it. I’ve tried to be polite but keep my distance. Anyway, over spring break I went over to Michael’s one afternoon before he got home, and Mike, Jr. was drunk. I was concerned but didn’t say anything. Next thing I knew he was coming on to me, touching me, and making me really uncomfortable. I managed to get out of there unscathed much to my relief, and I didn’t see him again until today. He was at it again. I don’t know what he thinks he’s doing. I care about Michael very much, but Mike, Jr. is ruining our relationship. I can’t be with a man intimately when his son is trying to manhandle me. Everything is ruined.” Melissa sobbed. Dan reached back gingerly and caressed her bare calf in sympathy.

Once at the hospital, a long, painful wait ensued. Brittany and Melissa sat on either side of Dan while Victoria kept trying to climb into her father’s lap, making him extremely uncomfortable. She was being unusually fussy, so Brittany finally decided to walk her around, leaving Melissa and Dan alone. Melissa curled up into a tighter ball in her chair as she mumbled about how cold

it was.

Dan reached out and took her hand gently. "I'm so sorry for what happened to you." he mumbled.

"It's okay. I guess being a tiny woman, I'm used to men trying to grope me. I find it irritating more than anything else."

"But you were afraid, weren't you?"

"Yes. Mike, Jr. has an aggressive nature about him which makes me uncomfortable in general. Who knows what he would've tried to do had you not been there."

They sat silently for a moment before Dan asked, "What are you going to do about Mike?"

"I just don't know. What can I do? I have to tell him. It would be deceitful not to, and by telling him I acknowledge the fact that what Mike, Jr. did was wrong. Right now he thinks he's going to get away with it, but I'm going to show him that I'm one woman who speak out when I'm wronged."

"Good. I'm glad."

While Brittany was gone, the nurse came up to them. "Mr. McKnight, you and you wife come this way."

They smiled at the common mistake as she helped him to his feet. "I'll go try to find Brittany." Melissa said as he was escorted into the examining room. He gave a nod and winning smile before she left.

The women were back before the doctor even arrived. However when he walked in the room, he mumbled, "Well, this certainly is a full room. Perhaps, Mr. McKnight, we could dispense with your entourage."

Dan glared at him. "Listen, Doc. One of these beautiful women just happens to be my wife, and the other gorgeous one was witness to the incident. She could probably tell you better what happened. I want them both to stay." Dan's comment earned blushes from both ladies.

"Very well, but as long as everyone stays out of the way." After an exam and x-rays, the doctor came back in the room. "Well, we've had a look at things. You have three broken ribs. Must have been some fight you were in. Here's a prescription for pain killers. You're going to have to take it really easy. No picking up stuff, like you daughter over there. You have to be conservative in your movements."

After hours at the hospital, they were on their way home. They dropped Melissa off at her home before finding an all night pharmacy. "I'm really sorry about this, honey." Dan whispered.

“I know. You never meant to get hurt. This is going to cause problems, though. Maybe I should call my mom to come up for awhile. Since you are pretty much immobile, I’ll need help with Victoria while I’m at school.”

The next day Melissa came over to babysit Victoria and Dan while Brittany went to class. However due to Dan’s drug induced state, it didn’t leave him to be much of a host as he drifted in and out of sleep. When Brittany returned home she found Melissa playing with Victoria on the floor in the master bedroom next to the bed where Dan slept. “How’s the patient?” she asked dropping her book bag into the chair.

“He’s been asleep most of the time. He’s been mumbling a lot, though.”

“Well, he talks in his sleep a lot. Anything interesting?”

Melissa blushed. “I think he’s been having some sort of sexual fantasy.”

“That’s not all that unusual. You’d be surprised how normal that is for him.”

“Doesn’t that bother you?”

Brittany shrugged. “A man can dream, can’t he? It used to bother me, especially when I heard names other than my own, but now I realize that is just his way of fantasizing. I’d much prefer that to kinky stuff or pornography. As long as his waking hours are spent faithfully to me, I’m not going to get upset over a little dreaming. Most of the time, it’s me anyway.” Dan disturbed them with a deep sexual groan. “Has he called out any names?” Brittany inquired with curiosity. Melissa shook her head. “I wonder who it is this time.” Brittany mumbled leaning to kiss his open mouth lightly. Dan moaned. Brittany slowly made her way to the floor to be with Melissa and Victoria where they chatted for awhile until Melissa’s name escaped Dan’s lips.

Melissa gave Brittany an uncomfortable glance before looking up to the bed, thinking Dan might be awake. Dan’s breathing was becoming labored as he groaned, “Melissa, you feel so good. I’ve wanted this ever since that night in the hot tub.” Melissa covered her embarrassed face as Brittany’s eyes bore into her suspiciously. Dan’s subconscious admission continued, “Oh, baby, I was so blind to let Mike have you. We’ve both known from the start that we were meant for each other.”

“Stop it!” Melissa screamed suddenly, slapping him in the foot to jar him from his dream, but he was soon snoring softly again. The women sat in awkward silence.

“Melissa,” Brittany began in a stern voice. “I trusted you. Have you and my husband done something to betray that trust?”

“No!” emphatically Melissa answered. “I would never do that to you, Brittany. I swear it. Dan and I have never done anything inappropriate.”

Brittany desperately wanted to believe her. “And the hot tub?”

Melissa sighed. "Okay, okay. I'll tell you about the hot tub. Dan and I had agreed to keep it to ourselves, but being that it's out in the open, I should explain. The very first time I came to your house, you had taken Victoria out of town for the weekend."

"To my parents house, I remember. Daniel was acting strange whenever I called."

"Well, I spent the whole weekend with Dan."

"What?" Brittany asked incredulously.

"Britt, let me finish. That Friday night we were in the hot tub when you called."

Brittany flushed in remembrance. "He said he was sick." she mumbled.

"Nothing happened, Britt. He loves you and Victoria and the twins. He would never be unfaithful to you, and as your friend I would never hurt you like that."

Brittany's eyes watered. "I always feared this."

"What?"

"That Daniel would really want someone else. I've seen the chemistry all along, but I wanted to ignore it. I had hoped he never noticed that you were more beautiful."

"Brittany, have you lost your mind? Your hormones are running overtime again. You are a beautiful woman. You have a body most women would kill for. Even pregnant you look better than me. I'm just small by nature, but you have all this toned muscle. I know for a fact how sexy Dan thinks you are. He would never leave you, not for me, not for anyone. A love like yours is rare. I only wish I could find someone that brings me the happiness you and Dan share." Brittany was crying, so Melissa embraced her.

"I love you, Melissa. You, Becca, and Jen are the closest thing I have to sisters. Daniel and I want you and Jen to be godmothers to the twins."

"Of course. I'd love to. It would be such an honor. I love you too, Brittany." Melissa answered tears coming to her own eyes.

Dan awoke to the sound of sobbing. Turning his head, he saw them on the floor, holding each other in tears. "Brittany, Melissa, everything okay?" he asked with concern.

Melissa's eyes met Brittany's. "Everything's fine. Brittany just asked me to be to be godmother to the twins."

"Well, good." he replied, thinking how bazaar women's emotions really were.

“Well, I think I’m going to go get lunch started. Sandwiches fine with everyone?” Brittany inquired slowly getting to her feet. Dan and Melissa both nodded.

Melissa scooped Victoria up and sat in the bedside chair. After a quiet moment, Dan asked, “You talked to Mike yet?”

“Briefly this morning. I told him how you were, but we haven’t spoken about Mike, Jr. yet. He said he was going to come out here around lunch time. I figured I’d talk to him then.”

“Well, I saw what happened. He can’t deny it if there’s a witness. As much as the dad in him might want to, the attorney in him won’t.”

Melissa patted his hand. “I’m going to see if Brittany needs any help. She’s starting to get less mobile with these twins. Can’t believe she’s already six months along.”

“Yeah. We’re quite a pair, aren’t we? Hopefully, we’ll find a nanny soon. I’m pretty much useless now, and she’s not going to be able to pick Victoria up easily much longer.”

Going into the kitchen, Melissa put Victoria in her chair as she asked, “What can I do to help?”

“Oh, I’ve got it.”

“Come on, Britt. Let me help. Why don’t you take a seat? You need a break. I’ll get lunch together.” Melissa insisted.

Brittany gave an appreciative smile before taking a seat next to Victoria. “Have you talked to Michael about last night?” Brittany inquired, absent-mindedly playing with Victoria’s socked foot.

“No. He’s coming over later. We’ll talk then. I’m just afraid he won’t believe me.”

“Do you still want to be with him after this?”

Melissa looked over at Brittany for a moment. “Britt, I’m in love with him, and I think he feels the same for me. We could be very happy, but if doesn’t believe me, I don’t see how we can have a relationship.” Brittany gave an understanding nod. Changing the subject, Melissa asked, “Have you and Dan talked about names for the twins yet? I haven’t heard either of you discussing it.”

“We haven’t really had a lot of time. I can’t believe we’re having two more girls. Poor Daniel. I’d really like to give him at least one boy.”

“You mean you’re thinking about putting yourself through this again? Britt, you’re a twenty four year old mother of three. Don’t you think that’s enough for now?”

“I’d be willing to give it one more shot, just one, but that’s it. I’m not going to be the mother of



five.”

“Well, for now let’s concentrate on getting these two out.”

“I hope they look more like Daniel. Victoria doesn’t look like him much.”

“No. She really doesn’t. She has his green eyes, but that’s about all.”

“I hope they have dark hair, but I guess we’ll just have to wait.”

“Yeah, so anyway, back to the names. You have any ideas?”

“A few, but we haven’t decided. We’re probably going to wait until we see them to decide.”

“All right. I can take a hint. You’re not going to tell me. I’ll just wait like everyone else.”

That afternoon Mike came by to see how Dan was doing. Taking a seat next to the bed, he just sat taking deep breaths. “Dan, I’ve spoken to Mike about yesterday, but I can’t seem to get a straight answer from him as to why you two were fighting. I need to know what happened. He said you lost your temper.”

“Damn right I did. How could I not when I saw what he was doing to Melissa?”

“What do you mean?”

“I told Melissa that I would let her talk to you about it. However, I will say this. Mike, Jr. is the reason Melissa hasn’t moved to the next level with you. He’s made her extremely uncomfortable. Now, Melissa is waiting to talk to you, but when you do talk, listen with your heart. You love each other. I think that will get you through this if you want to continue to see each other.”

“Dan, you’re worrying me. Does she want to break up with me, because of what my son did to you?”

“No. Melissa is worried you’ll break up with her, because you won’t believe what she has to say. Just go talk to her. Remember that she loves you, and you said you loved her. Don’t throw it all away. She’s a good woman, and she deserves to be happy. She wants you to make her happy.”

“All right. I’ll go talk to her. By the way, what did the doctors say?”

“Three broken ribs. Hopefully with rest, I’ll be better by the time the twins are born.”

“This is really bad timing. I’m so sorry for Mike’s behavior.”

“I know, but he’s a man now. He doesn’t need his dad apologizing for his mistakes.” Mike just nodded before leaving him alone.

A few minutes later Brittany came in with Victoria. "I thought they could use a little privacy. How are you feeling?"

"All right. Still sore, but I'll live. How are my four favorite girls?"

"Well, Victoria is about to go down for a nap. The twins are content for now, and as for me, I've been better. Mom will be here this evening. Hopefully that will help us through the end of this week. We've got a serious problem on our hands, though. We have to get a nanny, Daniel. The twins will be here before you know it, and I think it might be good for everyone if we had an adjustment period before they are born."

"I agree, especially now that I can't help out with Victoria as much. We'll work it out."

"We may need help with the nursery too. You haven't even started it yet."

"I know. Just give me a couple of weeks. I promise I'll have it together by the time the twins arrive."

"Daniel, there's something else we need to discuss. Fall registration is coming up soon. We should decide whether one or both of us are going to continue."

"I think you definitely should, Brittany."

"I think we both should. If you go full time, you'll be finished with your Masters by next summer."

"I'm not sure I want to do that, but I'll think about it." Dan stated.

In the back of Brittany's mind, she was thinking of confronting Dan about that weekend he spent with Melissa. She wondered what he would say if she asked. Deciding to think over her approach more, she said, "Well, I've got to get some work done in the office. Just yell if you need something."

An hour later Melissa came back upstairs. Dan had moved himself to their sitting area and was reading in his favorite chair. "You're up?" Melissa asked with surprise.

"Yeah, had enough of lying down for awhile. How did it go with Mike?"

Melissa shrugged trying to hold back her tears. Dan motioned her over to him "Come here. Sit down, and tell me about it." Taking her hand, he pulled her toward his lap, but she hesitated.

"Dan, I don't want to hurt you." she commented.

"You won't. You look like you could use a shoulder to cry on. Now sit down."

Melissa complied, gingerly taking a seat on his knee. Dan encircled her with one arm and slowly

brought her to his body. They sat silently for a moment before Melissa stated, "Brittany's a lucky woman. No wonder her favorite place is in your lap."

"Why do you say that?"

"It feels so safe. You have a way of making women feel safe, Daniel."

"Well, I hope after yesterday you know that I'll always try to make you feel safe. Whether it's my wife or my friend, a lady deserves the upmost respect, and I'm going to make sure she gets treated that way." Melissa smiled into his neck. "Now, what happened with Mike? He believed you, didn't he?"

"Well, I don't know. He didn't say much. I did most of the talking. He mostly sat there looking hurt and confused. I'm sure it must be a hard thing for him to take."

"Well, what did he say when he left?"

"He told me he loved me."

"That's a good sign."

"Well, it was the way he said it. It was like the voice of resignation or defeat. It wasn't spoken the way you think it would be for the first time. I'm scared I've lost him."

"Give him time. He probably wants to talk to Mike, Jr. first. Give him a chance to do that. You're the best woman to ever come into his life, and if he doesn't realize that, then he doesn't deserve you."

A few minutes passed in silence before Dan noticed a change in Melissa's breathing. She had fallen asleep. Under normal circumstances, he would've moved her to the bed, but being that he couldn't lift her and didn't have the heart to wake her, he just went back to reading his book. Awhile later he also began to doze until he heard quiet movement in the room. Opening his eyes, he saw his wife moving toward him.

She stopped when their gaze met. She gave him a skeptical raise of her brow. He glanced at Melissa who had managed to wrap herself completely around him. One leg was stretched out over the leg of the chair, and her other foot was tucked between his thighs. Her head was resting in the crook of his neck with one arm around his shoulder, lightly fingering his collar in her sleep.

"Don't give me that innocent look, Daniel Ethan McKnight. I know you're trying to get a little action on the side now that I'm out of service." she stated in mock anger. Dan would've been terrified had he not seen the smile and playful twinkle of his wife's eyes. Stepping toward him, she leaned towards his ear whispering, "I'm going to give you the thrill of a lifetime. Not only do you get one gorgeous woman in your lap, you get another one doing this." She lightly kissed around his mouth as her hand worked between Melissa's foot and the crotch of his khaki shorts.

Her fingers groped him gently as her open mouth covered his to catch his groan. Their kiss deepened as Brittany became more persistent with her hand. Dan whimpered helplessly, being trapped in the chair by these two intoxicating beauties.

Suddenly Melissa stirred and gasped when she saw just how close she was to Brittany and Dan's mouths hungrily feeding on each other. Trying to squirm away, she realized Brittany's stomach had locked her into her current position, so she was forced to watch the erotic show.

Finally Brittany pulled away, smiling down at their shocked faces. "Serves you both right for making moves on each other behind my back." she joked turning and waltzing away triumphantly.

Melissa jumped out of Dan's lap. She saw him panting breathlessly. "What the hell was that?" she asked as she watched him stand.

"The old Brittany." he simply stated with a amorous grin following Brittany out the door. He caught up to her in her office. Taking her by the arm, he spun her around to plummet deep into the cavern of her mouth.

Breaking away, Brittany laughed at his impassioned state. "Careful there, Daniel. Don't start what you can't finish. We have company."

"Screw Melissa. I can't wait to have you." he growled.

Brittany pushed him off lightly joking, "I'm sure you'd like to screw her. Once again your dreams betray you."

"What?" he asked seriously backing up a step.

"Daniel, it's okay. Don't get defensive. You had a dream about her today during your nap. I guess you both betray yourselves in your sleep. No slumber parties for the two of you." she teased.

Even though Brittany was kidding, Dan didn't like what she was saying. "Are you going some where with this?" he asked suspiciously.

Brittany paused a moment, before deciding to confront him now about what Melissa had told her. "Daniel, I'm just trying to make light of a potentially strained situation. It's obvious that you two are attracted to each other. At first it really bothered me. After all, she is beautiful, smart, and funny, but I know now you'd never betray me. If you actually turned her down, I know you'd be never be unfaithful to me."

"You doubted that? How could you?"

"Well, you did lie to me about a certain night when I thought you were sick and alone, but really you were entertaining Melissa in our hot tub. Even though you never admitted to it, I felt it. I

knew something had occurred.”

“How did you find out about that?”

“It doesn’t matter. What matters is that I could choose to be angry with you. After all, you lied to me, but I’ve decided to try to put it behind me.”

“When did Melissa tell you?”

“Well, today when you were having your little fantasy. She assured me that nothing ever happened and that nothing ever would.”

“So you believe her and not me?” he asked insulted.

“She didn’t lie to me, Daniel. You did. I do believe that nothing happened. I just needed to hear it from her. I needed that verbal assurance from her to rid myself of the insecurity I had. Because of her confession, I can be the Brittany you wanted back. I can be strong again where you’re concerned, and I can also be forgiving.” Brittany stared at him expectantly, wondering if he would apologize. When it didn’t happen immediately, she said, “I don’t want you and Melissa to talk about this. Don’t make her feel bad for your indiscretion. She did the right thing, Daniel. She told me the truth.”

Dan nodded lowering his head. “I’m sorry for misleading you. I should’ve told you I had company when you asked. I was just afraid that you would be upset if you knew it was another woman.”

“I wouldn’t have been nearly as upset. Being honest with me would’ve saved all of us a lot of grief. I never would’ve treated her the way I did, and I never would’ve had reason to doubt your fidelity. By avoiding it, you made yourself look guilty, and I took my frustrations out on her when all along I never should’ve had to feel that way.” Dan gave a slow nod, not sure of what else to do. “Now, can we kiss and make up?” she asked, holding her arms out to him.

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Two months later Dan was almost fully functional again, and with the help of the new nanny, Kimberly, the twins’ new nursery was ready. Sitting in the rocker with Victoria, Kimberly asked, “Do you think Brittany will be impressed?”

Dan nodded. “Kim, may I ask you a personal question?” She shrugged. “Do you have a boyfriend?”

Kim laughed. “No, I don’t. Why do you ask?”

“Just curious. I just kind of wanted to know if you had a significant other of some sort in case they were going to be coming around a lot. Why was that funny?”

“Oh, it’s just that no one has asked me that since my freshman year of college.”

“Why’s that?” Kim looked at Victoria for a silent moment. “Listen, you don’t have to answer that if you don’t want. I wasn’t trying to pry or make you uncomfortable.”

“It’s okay. I’m not uncomfortable. I guess I should tell you that I’m a lesbian. I might be having some company over, so I guess you need to know.”

“Well, that’s fine. That doesn’t bother Brittany and me. My twin brother is gay. We just want to know what kind of influences you might expose the girls to. That’s one we’re not really concerned about. I should have asked you that more appropriately.”

“Well, that’s good to know.”

“Do you have a girlfriend?”

“No. I just broke up with one, which was why this job was so appealing, a free place to live, hardly any expenses.”

“Glad it works for you, because it sure does help us out a lot. With both of us back in school soon, it’ll be good to have an extra set of hands to help out.”

“Are you excited about the twins? It’s only three weeks away.”

“Oh yeah. I’m more than ready. Brittany was about a week early with Victoria. I wonder if the twins are going to be early too. I’m sure Brittany is wishing for that right about now. She’s really uncomfortable.”

“I couldn’t even imagine it. I love kids and all, but I never want to be pregnant.”

“Well, I’m going to go start getting things ready for our party tonight. You are going to stay, aren’t you?”

“I think so. I have some other plans, but I want to meet these people you two talk about. Who’s coming again?”

“Well, my brother and his flavor of the month, my sister and her boyfriend, and the twins godmother’s, Jen and Melissa.”

“Are they together?”

Dan laughed. “No, they aren’t. They’re just good friends.”

“Are either of them single then?” Kim asked hopefully.

“Well, Melissa is in a rocky relationship right now. I’m not sure it’s going to work out between

them. It's really too bad, because they love each other. Jen on the other hand is free. They're both good looking too. I've slept with Jen, and I would've with Melissa if I wasn't already married. If you're hoping for a little action, I'd go with Jen. She's a wild woman. I've never known her to be into chicks, but she strikes me as the kind of girl that will try anything once." he mentioned grinning.

"I'll think about it. It might be a fun challenge."

"I'd be willing to bet on it, a whole day's pay in fact. She'd give you at least a little fun."

"And what would you give me if I got her in bed?"

"I'll give you a whole day's pay plus another hundred. And if you don't, what are you prepared to give me?" he asked.

"I'll cook dinner for you and Brittany for a week."

"Oh, you are so on." he said extending his hand for her to shake.

Guest started arriving around 4:00 that afternoon. Dan dutifully made introductions for Kim before turning his attention to the grill. A moment later Kim approached him. "Are you sure Melissa isn't worth giving a shot?"

Dan laughed so hard at the comment it gained everyone's attention. Kim slapped him in the arm. "Sorry." he mumbled. "We had a deal remember, but just to sweeten the offer, I'll extend my part to Melissa as well. However, I think you'll strike out there. Trust me, Jen's your girl."

Melissa looked at Kim and Dan whispering, conspiring together. "Britt, are you sure you want her for a nanny? It appears as if you got Dan a playmate instead."

"Yeah. I know. They've been like that all day. I wonder what they are up to."

A few minutes later Dan interrupted everyone's conversation by suggesting they play a drinking game like old times. "I Never" was the game voted upon, so Dan took a seat next to Brittany and Kim next to him.

"Are you sure we really want to play this game? Last time we played it got risque." Brittany mentioned.

"That was years ago, honey. We've all matured since then."

"That's what I'm afraid of." Brittany joked.

"Well, at least we know you're not too innocent any more, Britt. We know that you've had sex at least twice." Jen kidded making Dan laugh.

Brittany blushed at the teasing. "All right. Let me fill my lemonade up before we begin." she stated.

The game started out innocently, but Jen was the first to intensify it. Looking directly at Kim, she said, "I've never kissed a woman sexually." Kim gave a sly grin as she drank, but the group was more shocked that Jen drank as well.

"Jen!" Brittany screamed in surprise.

"What? Kim drank. Why can't I?"

"Who?" Dan asked curiously.

Jen looked over at Becca and her boyfriend for a moment. "A friend of Becca's, but I won't tell you who."

"All right. My turn. I've never had sex with a woman." he said staring at Jen for her response. Jen just laughed before drinking.

"Jen, I can't believe you!" Brittany stated with shock.

"Oh, it's not that big of a deal, Britt. It was only once." Kim grinned at Dan, who winked at her and nodded. "Hey, I saw that. What are you two planning over there?" Jen inquired.

"Nothing." Dan said still smiling.

"You know you can't scam me, Dan. I will find out, and Kim's going to tell me."

"I am?" Kim questioned.

"Oh, yes. You'll tell me, even if it takes all night to get out of you." Jen purred causing Kim to blush to the roots of her auburn hair.

"You're in trouble now." Dan giggled. "That voice means business." Brittany slapped him in the shoulder.

Later that evening Joe announced that he and his boyfriend were tired from the flight and wanted to retire for the evening. "We should probably be going too." Becca mentioned taking her boyfriend's hand. "Jen, you want to ride back with us?"

"No. Actually, I think I'll stay a little longer." She looked at Kim. "I still have some unfinished business."

Dan looked at Melissa. "You're going to stay, aren't you?"

"Actually, I should be getting back. I've got work to do tonight."



“Oh, come on. Stay.” he pleaded as she stood.

Looping her arm through his, she said, “Walk me to the door.”

After saying good night to their guests, Brittany and Dan embraced in the foyer. “Well, I think our house is going to be buzzing with the sounds of lust this evening. I give my brother and his boyfriend about ten minutes before they’re in the sack, and as for Kim and Jen, I think they might even find their way into the sheets.”

“I just can’t believe Jen never told me. I’ve known her all this time. You would think she would’ve told me about that.”

“Oh, come on. She’s the easiest woman I know. It doesn’t surprise me at all. It’s really not that big of a deal.”

“I know it’s not. It just surprised me.”

“Well, they’ll sleep together tonight, but I don’t see Jen as the type to have a lesbian relationship. She just wants a good lay.”

Brittany nodded, nuzzling into Dan’s neck. “I wish I could have a good lay. Everyone else gets to have their own private party. I want one too. It’s been a long two months.”

“Yes, it has.” Dan moaned. “Let’s say good night to our guests and go upstairs. They’ll entertain each other just fine.”

Making their way back through the kitchen, they spotted Jen and Kim on the patio kissing. “Looks like we’re too late.” Brittany mentioned.

“Come on then. Let’s just go to bed. They’ll never even miss us.” Dan suggested.

Dan and Brittany’s foreplay started in typical fashion, but between Brittany’s eight and a half months pregnant figure and Dan’s injured ribs, it was awkward trying to find a comfortable position. Finally Dan laughed in frustration, but Brittany wasn’t amused. “I’m not sure this is physically possible, honey, without one of use getting hurt.” he stated with a chuckle.

Brittany grabbed him by the shoulders. “Don’t you dare give up on me now! It’s not fair to bring me this far and not come through! Now figure it out!”

Dan laughed at his wife’s state. Brittany had always been aggressive in their love making, but tonight she was unusually forward. “All right. Calm down. I think we can do this if you get on your hands and knees.”

“Fine! We’ll do it in whatever position you want! Just hurry!”

Dan laughed in amusement as they both got into position, but as soon as their bodies became one, a groan of sexual relief passed through them both. It had so long since they had been together due to Dan's ribs that each touch was magnified, sending pleasure rippling through them. The passion was intense but short lived, and half an hour later, they lay next to each other spent.

"Daniel, are you awake?" Brittany whispered.

"I am now. What is it?" he mumbled.

"I'm having contractions."

Dan smiled with his eyes closed. "That good, huh? Never seen you have an orgasm after the fact." he joked.

"Daniel, I'm serious. I'm having labor pains."

"Okay, don't panic. I'll call the doctor. How far apart are they?"

"Not very, but that's definitely what they are."

By the time dawn broke, Brittany, Dan, and Victoria were at the hospital awaiting the arrival of the twins. Dan waited until after ten to call everyone, thinking it had been a busy night for all. By noon everybody including Brittany's parents had arrived. Having been up all night, both Brittany and Dan were in horrific moods.

"Doctor, it's been fourteen hours now! How much long are we going to have to wait?" Dan snapped.

"It's very close now, probably within the hour. Just try to relax, both of you."

"Relax? You're telling me to relax? Why don't you come get up on this table and see how it feels? Then tell me if you could relax!" Brittany barked.

"All right. Let's get everybody out of here. Clear the room. We'll let you know when it's over." Once Dan and Brittany were alone, the doctor said, "All right, Brittany. I want you to just close your eyes and listen to this music that I'm putting on while Dan gives you a massage. Concentrate on his hands until I tell you otherwise."

As predicted less than an hours later, the room was filled with the cries of two little girls. "You did wonderful, sweetheart." Dan said kissing Brittany's lips gently.

"They have dark hair." Brittany mumbled. "They're beautiful."

"Yes, they are. I'm going to go get the family. Now you can rest, for a moment anyway."

Later that day after Brittany and Dan both got a nap, they announced the names they had chosen to the family. Alexis and Ana had been their top two choices, Alexis being the older of the two. During a lull in the family visits, Brittany yawned. "I don't know about you, Daniel, but I could go for another nap. Why don't you crawl up here with me? I could use my favorite pillow right now." she suggested. Dan came to her, kissing her softly before slipping in beside her. Instantly she put her head on his chest and went to sleep.

The next few days when the girls came home from the hospital, the house was buzzing with company. Lying in bed one evening, Brittany stated, "You know, I think we should build a guest house. That way we can stick everyone over there and have some peace."

Dan laughed. "That's not a half bad idea. We should think that over."

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A couple of months later, Dan and Brittany had gotten used to being students and the parents of three. With Victoria walking, she was getting into everything, so having Kim around was proving to be the best thing they could've done. During dinner one night, Dan turned to Kim, who was supervising Victoria as she ate. "Kim, Brittany and I have been discussing something, and we wanted to run it by you. We've decided to build a guest house on the other side to the pool. It's going to be two bedroom, two bath, with all the amenities, small but efficient. We wanted you to move in there when construction was finished. It would give all of us separation between work and home. We want you to feel like you have time to yourself. What do you think about that?"

"Sounds good. I'm all for that. When are you going to start on it?"

"In a couple of weeks."

"Does this work for you, Brittany?" Kim inquired.

"Yeah. We just thought you could use a little more space and privacy. I mean as it is when you're off, you just go to you room, and we don't want you to feel confined like that. We wanted you to be able to have a den and kitchen without having to put up with the five of us."

"That's very sweet of you." Kim replied giving Brittany a fond smile, which lingered a little longer than Dan thought it should have.

"So, how were the twins today?" he asked.

"A handful as usual." Brittany stated looking over at him. Dan noticed Kim's gaze still focused on Brittany, stirring his curiosity.

A few mornings later Brittany awoke after Dan had left for school. She wished she could stay in bed longer but instead pulled herself away. Throwing on her silk robe, she sauntered downstairs in search of her morning caffeine. She found Kim in the kitchen with the three girls.

“Well, sleeping beauty awakens.” Kim commented giving her a warm smile. “How about a cup of coffee?”

Sleepily Brittany nodded dropping into a kitchen chair. She closed her eyes for a few moments until she felt a hand on her shoulder. Kim squeezed it gently eliciting a groan from Brittany. “That feels so good. I’m really stiff and sore this morning.”

“You feel like it.”

“I spent most of the night in the rocker in the nursery.”

Kim put her hands on either of Brittany’s shoulders, digging her fingers in firmly. Brittany moaned in consent as Kim’s hands began to work the tight muscles. Brittany started to drift but became aware of a change in Kim’s hands. Several minutes passed before Kim had worked her way into Brittany’s golden hair, gently pulling her head back. Kim’s fingers were no longer massaging, but caressing her hair. Brittany felt a tremble in Kim’s hands that coincided with a labored breath. Brittany’s own breath caught as she realized what was happening. Suddenly Kim’s hands changed directions again, working down the sides of Brittany’s neck into the collar of her robe. Feeling Kim’s hands slip onto her bare shoulder, Brittany quickly opened her eyes, catching a gaze on Kim’s face she’d never seen.

Kim yanked away quickly. “I, uh, I thought you’d fallen back asleep.” she stammered.

“Almost, but I’ve really got a lot of work to do today. I should get dressed.” Brittany stood, pulling her robe tighter around her, trying not to let on that she’d seen Kim’s unguarded look.

“Here’s your coffee.” Kim stated picking it up off the table.

“Thanks.” she said patting Kim’s hand.

Kim smiled brightly as Brittany disappear up the stairs. Getting into the shower Brittany ran her hands through her hair to wet it as she thought about Kim’s gentle stroking. She blew out an anxious breath, trying to rid herself of the feeling that Kim’s attention was more than friendly, but she couldn’t shake it.

When Dan walked in that day, Brittany instantly was all over him. “What’s gotten into you?” he asked enjoying her attention. “We’re not alone.”

“Maybe we should be.” she seductively stated loud enough for Kim to hear her. “Let’s go upstairs, Daniel.”

“All right.” he answered leading her up to their bedroom. Once they were alone, he asked, “What’s going on with you? Not that I mind the attention, but what are you doing? Kim was standing right there.”

“You might think this is crazy, but she...”

“Has a thing for you?” Dan finished for her.

“Yeah.”

“Took you long enough to figure out. I suspected it. I just thought you were okay with it. What made you come to the conclusion?” Brittany didn’t answer at first causing him concern. “Baby, did she say or do something to make you uncomfortable?”

“This morning she started rubbing my shoulders, and I think she thought I was asleep, because she started stroking my hair. It was just the way she did it, Daniel. It was unmistakably sexual. All day I’ve tried to convince myself that it wasn’t, but it was.”

“Do you want me to talk to her?”

“No. I’m not sure that’s the right approach. I don’t really know what to do. She’s great with the girls. The girls like her. I would hate to fire her for that. Maybe we should just wait to see what happens.”

“Can you live with knowing?”

“I think so.”

“Okay, if that’s what you want, that’s what we’ll do. If you’d rather have me speak to her, I will. I don’t like people hitting on you, regardless of whether they are men or women. I’ll set her straight if you want.”

Brittany laughed at the pun. “No. It’s all right. I want to give her a second chance. After all she is on the rebound. Maybe it’s just a phase.”

“All right. If you change your mind, you let me know. You just have to be careful with her and not lead her on. You’re very physically affectionate with people. It’s one thing to do with Jen, Becca, and Melissa. You can’t do that with Kim.” Brittany nodded. “Well, it’s four. Kim gets off in a hour. Why don’t I take you and the girls to dinner?”

“Dinner sounds great, but do you really want to take the girls out?”

“Good point. Let’s see if we can get a sitter. I’ll call Becca and Jen.”

When they arrived at Becca and Jen’s, both women were there as well as Becca’s boyfriend. Brittany anxiously left them a verbal list of instructions, which Becca and Jen listened to with amusement. Finally Becca cut her off. “Brittany, we’ve got it under control. Between the three of us, we can handle it. You and Dan just go have a good time. In fact they kids can stay here tonight, so you two can have some alone time.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that. The twins are only three months old. They aren’t on a regular schedule.”

“Just think about it. You can call us if you change your mind.” Becca said taking Brittany’s hand. “So, where is Dan taking you tonight?”

“My favorite place, and then I think we might actually go dancing. We haven’t done that in forever.”

“Sounds like fun.” Becca answered walking backed out into the living room, leaving Brittany and Jen alone.

“Britt, what’s wrong? It’s not leaving the girls here.”

“No. It’s not. It’s Kim, actually.”

“Oh? How is Kim? I haven’t seen her in awhile. What’s going on with her?”

“She came on to me today.”

“Really? Well, that’s awkward, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, it is.”

“Well, listen. If you want, I’ll feel her out for you, see what’s going on with her.”

“That’s feel her out, not up, right?” Brittany joked.

“Oh, you are so funny.” sarcastically Jen replied.

“I’m still in shock I guess. I mean we’ve known each other a long time, and you’ve never mentioned it to me. Is it one of your wild, get sex wherever you can streaks, or are you really bisexual? I mean you’ve been with two women now. Are you developing a pattern? Is it boredom?”

“Britt, listen. It’s mainly boredom. I’m not seeing anyone right now. I’m just in it for the quick lay as usual. I’m not attracted to women really. It’s more like I’m attracted to their attraction to me. Make sense?”

“In other words it’s an ego thing?”

“Sort of.”

“Well, in any case, I appreciate your help with Kim. I don’t want to have to fire her.”

Over dinner Brittany and Dan discussed school and the idea of a new car to accommodate their

growing family for the most part. For the first time since they'd been married, it seemed like they were dating again, which was a pleasant surprise to them both.

When the meal was complete, Dan inquired, "So, what do you want to do now?"

"I thought you promised me dancing." Brittany informed him, brushing her body into his.

Dan groaned. "Have I ever told you how much I loved this look on you?" he inquired embracing her momentarily.

"Oh, once or twice. Don't think I've forgotten your Catholic school girl fantasy. I'm just glad to have my old body back, so I can pull it off for you."

"You look fantastic." Dan growled slipping his hand under the hem of her black skirt. She swatted it away playfully. "Not in the restaurant. Later, I promise." she whispered.

"Come on. I can't wait to get you on the dance floor. I'm going to be the envy of the club."

Indeed Brittany did attract a lot of attention at the club that night. Both men and women were staring at her sultry moves as she completely overpowered Dan with her seduction. Leaning to her ear, he growled, "I can't stand it any longer. I have to have you. Please, let me take you somewhere."

Brittany laughed at his state. She hadn't seen him like this in a long time. She was usually the aggressor, but she could see the passionate, lustful, desperation in his eyes. Deciding to play with him a little more, she continued to brush against him earnestly.

He whimpered uncontrollably. "Oh God. Please, don't make me lose it right here." he begged. "Please, let's get out of here." he pleaded.

Smiling Brittany nodded in consent. After they got to the car, Dan leaned over giving her a deep kiss as his hand slipped under her skirt. Her teasing had affected her as well, but deciding two could play the game, he turned his attention to the road. However he kept his right hand in her lap to tease her unmercifully. They made it to the girls' apartment in record time. They were both breathing erratically.

Dan turned off the engine and gazed over at her. Knowing his thoughts, she unbuckled her seat belt and turned her body toward him, propping one foot up on the steering column. Instantly his body covered hers. Neither knew or cared how much time had passed when they were sated.

"Damn woman, the way you make me feel." Dan mumbled. "I could never get enough of you."

"Nor I of you, my sweet Daniel." Brittany whispered.

Dan lifted his head from her breasts to gaze into her hazel eyes. "I love you so much, Brittany. There are no words to express how my heart overflows with love and adoration for you, light of

my life, mother of my children. My soul is complete just being in your presence. To have you at my side it the greatest gift I've ever been given." he whispered through feathery kisses on her lips.

Pulling his head back, she gazed at him through misty eyes. "I love you too, and I'm so glad to have the sensitive Daniel back. I've missed him dearly."

"Come on. We better get the girls, and get out of here. I'm sure Jen and Becca have other things to do than babysit all night."

They tried to make themselves as presentable as possible before knocking on the door. Jen answered wearing a big grin. "Have fun?" she asked looking over both of them. Embarrassed, Brittany and Dan brushed into each other. "I didn't know married couples still had sex in cars. Those were the foggiest windows I've seen in a long time." Jen further teased.

"All right. That's enough." Dan warned. "We just want to get the girls and get out of here. It's getting late."

### Continued Part 7

#### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ Triumphant Love ~

by Alex Tryst

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**Disclaimer:** This is a story like none other posted on this site, so please thoroughly read this disclaimer before beginning. This book contains original characters and is about one couple's struggle with their demons as they venture through their relationship. As with real life, there are gay, lesbian, and straight people even though the focus is primarily on the heterosexual couple. Derogatory, racists, and homophobic language is used. Additionally, sensitive subjects matters are addressed such as but not limited to: teen pregnancy, abortion, racism, rape, child abuse (verbal, physical, and sexual), hate crimes, sexual dysfunction, infidelity, and anger management problems. Please be aware that this story is not for everyone and may not be appropriate for all readers. If you are under age 18, you probably should not be reading this material. I tried to write of these subjects with delicacy and discretion, but it may still be offensive to some, so please understand what you are becoming involved in as you begin to read. As always constructive criticism and comments are welcome at alextryst@hotmail.com.

**Dedication:** To my wife, you are my fondest wish, and to the woman that was the inspiration for this story... I hope I captured your essence as a strong and enduring spirit in the character of the lovely Brittany Saxton.



Now on with the show...

## **Part 7**

### **Chapter 9**

Months quickly passed into a year. Dan finally graduated from school with his Masters in English while Brittany decided to continue on to her Ph.D. in physics. Two year old Victoria was looking more like Brittany daily while one year olds Alexis, who Dan had gotten accustomed to calling Alex for short, and Ana, were showing a mix of their parents. Kim was still with them, living in the guest house. Eventually she and Brittany had worked through things, and Kim had found someone else to occupy her thoughts. Jen and Melissa ended up moving in to a small house of their own when Becca and her boyfriend of a year and a half decided to live together. David, much to everyone's surprise though, had managed to hook himself a sweet, middle- aged, petite brunette divorcee with adult children of her own, named Kelly, with whom he was seen on a regular basis.

Lounging together in the living room one night after the kids had been put to bed for the evening, Brittany and Dan snuggled in content silence as they each read their books. "You want me to get you another cup of tea?" he asked finally breaking the silence.

"No, thanks. I'm fine." Brittany whispered.

"Brittany, I've been wanting to talk to you about something important."

"What is it?" she asked closing her book and looking at him.

"I've been thinking I want to go back to work. I've finished writing my poetry book, and the college is looking for someone to teach some undergrad poetry classes in the spring. I mentioned to them that I was interested, and they seemed to think it was a good idea."

"Well, that's great. I was wondering what your plans were once school was over. I'm happy for you."

"Are you sure you're okay with it? I mean after all that's happened, I just wanted to know how you felt about it."

"You've grown up considerably, Daniel. You're twenty seven now, not twenty two. I know you can handle it. If they are willing to look past your resignation, I think it's wonderful. I definitely think you should pursue it if that's what you want."

"Good. I was hoping you'd feel that way."

"Since we're on important topics, I also have something I was thinking about."

"What's that?"

"After finishing my doctorate, I'd like to have another baby." she hesitantly presented.

"Are you serious? Why? Three's not enough for you?" Dan inquired with surprise.

"Yes, I'm serious. I want to try to try to have a son. I'd really like to give you a son, Daniel."

"Brittany, I already have paradise with you and the girls. I don't need a son to be happy."

"I know, but it's something I've wanted to do. Our children have never been planned, but I'd like to plan for one more. I just want one more opportunity. I promise no more after that."

"Well, if it's what you really want, I'll do it, but let's give it some more thought. You still have two years before you're finished with school."

"You mean it?" Brittany inquired hopefully. Dan nodded giving her a loving smile.

That spring Dan began teaching freshman poetry as well as advanced poetry and was a student advisor for freshman. On the first day of classes, he walked in with coffee in one hand, books in the other. He immediately noticed the majority of the class was female. Setting his things on the table in the front of the room, he grabbed a vacant chair. "Good morning class. My name is Daniel McKnight, and this is the freshman poetry class. The first thing I want to do is rearrange the desks into a circle, so everybody up out of their seats." After a few minutes of rustling, the students were in their circle awaiting Dan to continue. "Fabulous. Now being that this is the first day, we're just going to discuss the syllabus, but first off I'd like everyone to introduce themselves. I believe that for most writers, their work is personal, and it takes trust to share it. In order to build that trust, we must know and respect people's differences as well as similarities. Having said that, I'll go first to ease any tension. As I said before, my name is Daniel McKnight. I would like to be called Dan, since I want the class to have an informal feel. I'm twenty seven years old. I've been married for almost three years to a wonderful woman named Brittany, and we have three girls, Victoria, Alexis, and Ana. I just finished my Masters, and I'm about to publish my first book of poetry."

"Didn't you used to play for the Cowboys?" one male student asked.

"Yes, I played for the Dallas Cowboys for two years." Dan curtly replied, making it known that the matter was not up for discussion. Once introductions were complete, Dan handed out the syllabus. "We will be going over the fundamentals of poetry, but for the most part, this will be a creative writing class. Everyone will be required to turn in a certain amount of original pieces for us to read and discuss. The details are in the syllabus. I want everyone to read the first two chapters in our book and begin working on their poems. The first submission date is next Monday. That's all for today unless anyone has any questions."

Dan went back to his office since he had a couple of hours before his next class. A knock on the door brought him out of his book. "Coach McKnight." a male voice called tentatively.

Dan looked at the man standing in his door curiously. "No one has called me that in years. You're too young for me to have been your coach. How do we know each other?"

"Actually, you were my coach in high school when I was a freshman. I took a couple of years off before starting college. You probably don't remember me. I've definitely changed."

"What did you say your name was?"

"Peyton."

"Cooper?" Dan asked. Peyton nodded. "No way! You certainly have changed! I remember you as this scrawny, lanky, five foot six kid. You ran distance, right?" Peyton nodded again. "Wow! Look at you! I never would've recognized you. You certainly have grown. What are you up to? About six two, 200, 210?"

"Something like that."

"The girls must be wild about you." Dan commented.

"I get my fair share. You've changed a lot too, married, kids." Dan nodded. "So, Brittany, was that the same Brittany that was student teaching at our school?"

"Sure is."

"Man, I used to have the biggest crush on her. She was something else."

"She still is." Dan commented turning the picture on his desk so Peyton could see her and the girls.

"What's she doing now?"

"Well, she's playing mother and full time student. She's getting her Ph.D. in physics."

"Wow, that's impressive."

Dan nodded in agreement. "So, Peyton, what are you hoping to get out of my class?"

Peyton shrugged. "Well, all the freshman have to take a writing class of some sort. I thought it would be mostly girls in poetry. Thought I might get lucky."

Dan laughed. "At least you're honest about it. Still I'm going to try to make it interesting for everyone."

"May I ask why you quit football? I remember watching you. You were great."

"I don't normally like discussing football with people, but basically I quit to save my marriage. Brittany and I weren't having the relationship we wanted with each other, and when we found out we were expecting, it just seemed logical. Everyone's happier this way."

When Dan returned home that evening, he was greeted by all his girls. As soon as he closed the door, he heard the familiar footfall of his eldest, followed closely behind by the twins. Kneeling down, he embraced them all in a hug. "How are my girls? Were you good for Kim today?" he asked as they climbed all over him. Brittany turned to corner to see Dan surrounded. Scooping Ana up into her arms, Brittany watched Dan get Victoria and Alexis in each of his. Standing he gave Brittany a slow kiss. The girls squirmed and squealed to get free of their parents. Letting them go, Dan and Brittany walked back into the family room. "How was school today, Mom?" he asked playfully pinching her jean clad posterior.

"Hectic but good. How was your day?"

"Great. I met a former runner of mine. He name is Peyton Cooper."

"I think I remember him. He's a tiny guy, one of those distance runners that used to pace me when I ran."

"Yeah, but he's not so tiny now. He's turned into quite a man actually. He told me he used to have a crush on you." Brittany just smiled as she settled herself on the floor amongst the girls.

Settling the girls for dinner that night was like most every night, quite an affair, but it became an unvoiced understanding that each adult, including Kim grab one child to get situated. As usual dinner focused around the children. With two year old Victoria beginning to speak and the one years olds trying to fed themselves, meal time was always entertaining as the three adults tried to do damage control on the furniture and clothing. Once dinner was over, Dan and Brittany took the girls upstairs for their bath time while Kim did dishes. Most of the time, Dan and Brittany would throw all three kids in together and both work on bathing them, before dressing them for bed. While Brittany worked on Ana, Dan dressed Victoria, and Alexis ran around the nursery naked and wet, delighted to be free from the confines of her clothing.

"I'll go get our little streaker." Dan joked when he finished with Victoria. Dan crawled to the bathroom door and peered around it into the room. As always Alexis was standing in the middle of the room waiting on him. Dan smiled to himself. This was his favorite game to play with his daughter. Unlike her other two sisters who fled when Dan playfully stalked them, Alexis liked to charge him, trying to knock him over. Even though Brittany tried to discourage the behavior, Alexis had differentiated between her sisters and mother, whom she couldn't run into and her father and Kim which she could. Running as fast as her little legs could carry her, she came barreling at Dan. Just before she made contact, Dan fell to the floor, so she tumbled onto him, laughing with excitement. Then all at once he was pounded my all three girls. Dan sighed in contentment as he smiled at Brittany in the bathroom doorway. He was blissfully happy with his life.

Once the children had been put to bed, Brittany and Dan sat quietly together, Brittany studying

her physics and Dan preparing for classes. At nine Brittany announced that she had to work on a paper in her office, leaving Dan alone on the family room couch. Stretching out, he closed his work and just thought about his family. His beloved twenty six year old wife continued to bring him happiness like he'd never known. Her magnificent physical beauty was only surpassed by her tender yet strong spirit. He knew he wouldn't be the man he was without her. She had pulled him from the depths of emotional hell and transformed him into a person who cared and who could love again completely. She had given him the greatest gifts he'd ever known, her undying love and devotion and three beautiful children, who enriched their lives daily.

Dan couldn't imagine life without his little girls. Every time he looked into Victoria's face, he saw Brittany smiling back at him. Even at two she was trying to exert her independence. Her strong interest in art pleased Brittany and Dan greatly, even though Dan found paint spatters in places he never imagined in her room. He had finally given up on scrubbing the floor and walls, deciding to just redecorate when she had grown out of her paint throwing phase. His little Ana was the most proper of the girls, looking like a doll at all times. She was the only one who made notable effort to keep herself clean and neat, often getting upset if either of her sisters managed to mess up her clothes with food or toys. She was a shy child with strangers and liked to stay as close to Brittany as she could, often quietly following her around the house. Then there was Alexis. It was obvious that she took after Dan, with her looks and natural athletic aptitude. She liked physical play, which Brittany considered too rough most of the time, but somehow she knew Dan and Kim would allow her to get away with it. It seemed like the only time she wanted to be still was when she looked at her books.

Dan never even realized he had dozed off until he felt familiar, supple lips against his own. Opening his eyes, he saw Brittany standing over him. "Come on, handsome. It's after 11:00. Come to bed." Dan checked all the doors before joining Brittany upstairs. She was already in their bathroom, standing in her robe, brushing out her golden hair.

Dan came up behind her encircling her waist. "Thank you for making my life so wonderful." he whispered kissing the nape of her neck.

She moaned softly. "You know exactly where to touch me and what to say, don't you?" She turned to face him. Dan kissed her intently. When it broke, she stated, "You know if I wasn't totally exhausted, I'd be completely into this."

Dan stroked her hair gently. "I know. I'm pretty tired myself. I'll tell you what. Why don't I give you a back rub in bed? You're all stiff."

"Oh, I'd love you forever." she mumbled.

"You mean you don't already?" he teased.

They both awoke around five the next morning to attend to the twins, but once they were sleeping again, Brittany and Dan went back to their bedroom. Brittany crawled into bed, as Dan disappeared into their dressing area. He reappeared in his running clothes a few minutes later. "Do you really have to go running right now?" Brittany asked as he sat on the edge of the bed to

tie his shoes.

"Well, I was going to go into the office early today to prepare some lesson plans."

"But I have the morning off. I don't have to be at school until after lunch." she mentioned embracing his shoulders. "What if I offered you an alternative cardiovascular exercise? Would you stay here in bed with me for awhile?" she purred into his ear as her hands ran over his chest. Dan could feel her shapely breasts rubbing into his back, making him groan. "Kim's going to come over early to take care of the girls, so we can spend some time together. Come on, Daniel. Don't go."

Dan slid off his shoes as Brittany's hands worked under his shirt to his bare abs. "How could I resist such persistence?" he asked lying down again and pulling her into his arms.

Dan and Brittany spent the rare luxury of being alone asleep in each others embrace. Finally at 8:00 they leisurely dressed before going downstairs into the whirlwind of their children.

They opted to go out together for an early lunch, before Brittany took Dan to his office. Being that they had extra time before she had to go, they walked hand in hand through campus toward the English department. Suddenly Dan heard his name in the distance. Turning, he saw Peyton headed toward them. "Hey, Peyton. How are you?" he greeted when Peyton got closer.

"Fine." he replied his eyes on Brittany.

"Peyton, you remember my wife Brittany. Brittany, Peyton Cooper."

"So I assumed. How are you, Peyton? Good to see you again."

"Dan wasn't lying. He is the luckiest man alive to have you. I remember you as beautiful, but age has made you undescribably so. You're absolutely radiant."

Brittany blushed deeply, shifting closer to Dan. "Well, not only have you become a physical work of art, you've become quite a Casanova as well. I remember you being not much taller than me, chasing me around the track."

It was Peyton's turn to flush. "Yeah, well," he muttered. "I needed something to keep me motivated."

As Brittany and Peyton spoke, Dan felt like an outsider in the conversation. Never in his life had a man stolen his wife's attention away from himself.

"Dan showed me a picture of your girls. They are beautiful. Looks like motherhood suits you. I hear you're working on your Ph.D. as well. Beauty and brains. What I would give for a woman like you."

"I'm sure you get your share of ladies." Brittany stated sensing the tension suddenly coming from

Dan.

Peyton shrugged. "Well, most of the women I meet are through my lawn and pool service. They are all bored housewives looking for a little excitement. Not the makings of a relationship by any means."

"You own a lawn and pool service?" Dan asked finally breaking in between their chatter.

"Yeah. I started in high school, and it's just grown from there. I never intended for it to happen, but it's become quite lucrative, so I've stuck with it."

"Well, that's good to know. I actually have become dissatisfied with the company we've been using the last few years. I was thinking of using someone else."

"Well, I'd be happy to come give you an estimate sometime."

"That would be great. We'll talk about it later. Right now we really have to get going."

Brittany noticed the slight edge in Dan's voice and knew he was growing tired of Peyton's company. "Yes, we really do." she repeated.

"All right. It was good to see you again, Brittany."

As they walked away, Brittany took Dan's arm. "He's turned into quite the ladies' man." she stated.

"Yeah, as long as he stays away from my lady, that's all I care about."

"Don't tell me you're jealous that he was giving me some attention."

Dan shrugged. "I know men look at you and probably flirt with you when I'm not around, but I've just never had one do it in front of me before. I wanted to punch him."

Brittany laughed. "Don't get worked up over nothing, honey. He was just being nice."

"Nice? Nice is saying you look great, not whatever line he gave you."

"Daniel, there's no need to feel insecure. There's no contest. I'm yours heart, mind, body, and soul. Besides, he's only what? Twenty one? That's way too young for me." she joked trying to lighten the mood.

"Promise? I know I'm not the young stud I used to be. I'm getting gray hair and have to wear glasses now. You could have any man you wanted."

"But I only want you, Daniel. You don't need to feed me lines, never did. All you ever have to do is touch me, and my insides melt into liquid fire. You are a wonderful man, and you've helped

me become a better person."

"You've helped me too. I know I owe my life to you. If it weren't for you, I'd still be angry at the world and taking it out on everyone. You and the girls have made me a pushover. I'm just a big softie."

"But what a sexy pushover you are. You know, this morning I promised you a workout. Just because we didn't get to it then, don't think I forgot." she whispered as they arrived at his office door.

Dan felt her hand dive into his front pocket suggestively. Quickly he unlocked the door checking his watch. "Well, you do have a little under an hour before you have to leave." he stated giving her the eyes. Escorting her inside, he locked the door behind them.

"A futon, how convenient." Brittany said taking Dan by the arm. Pushing him onto it, she straddled his legs.

"You know what I love about you, Brittany? I hardly ever have to ask for sex. Your sex drive equals if not surpasses my own, which I wasn't sure was possible. Many men would kill for a woman like you."

Brittany giggled. "You made me this way. It's your own fault for being so damn good." she teased, but then her face took on a seriousness. "You know after Stephen, I never thought I would be able to enjoy sex or even enjoy being physically close to a man again. You brought my spirit back to life, Daniel. It's like every time we make love, it feels like an incredible dream. The tenderness and deep, all-consuming emotion is so powerful. I never want it to change."

Dan stroked her cheek gently. "It never will, because I'll always be deeply and madly in love with you, Brittany. I'm destined to love you for eternity. Never in my life has someone touched my heart so deeply. You've touched places I didn't even know existed."

Brittany leaned into his mouth, giving him a sensual open-mouthed kiss. When it broke, their eyes met in a loving gaze. Knowing how much it turned him on when she asked, she whispered, "Make love to me, Daniel."

Dan knew he would never deny that request from her, so he laid them both out on the couch. Just as many times before, they were completely in tune to each other. However Brittany teetered on the brink of fulfillment longer than usual, only falling over the precipice at the sudden unwelcome invasion of an auburn haired twenty one year old Romeo in her mind. Unnerved that Peyton had appeared at her pinnacle of pleasure, her eyes shot open, surprising Dan.

Dan had never seen the look on his wife's face before. Stopping his ministrations, he asked, "Are you all right?"

Brittany was shocked that Dan had read her so easily. Meeting his eyes, she saw the loving concern pouring out from his green pools. Her heart ached and her eyes began to tear. "I'll be



okay." she whispered, trying to shake Peyton from her head.

"Maybe I should stop." Dan offered beginning to pull away, but Brittany clutched his body back to her.

"Please don't." she begged.

"But if I hurt you..."

"You didn't, Daniel." she insisted.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. It was nothing. Please don't stop."

Dan continued as requested, but he noted that she never peaked again before he finally did, concerning him that he had hurt her, even though she said otherwise.

When Brittany went to class that afternoon, she cried all the way there, disturbed by Peyton intruding into her deepest thoughts only reserved for her husband. Never in her life had her mind strayed away from her cherished Daniel during physical closeness, and even as active as Dan's mind was, she was confident that he was only thinking of her during intimacy. Her mind had betrayed her, and she felt guilty for the unintentional impropriety.

The following Saturday morning Brittany and Kim were letting the girls play in the front yard when they noticed a car turn into the driveway. "You expecting someone?" Kim asked.

Brittany shook her head as the car approached the house. Brittany stared closely trying to see the driver. "Oh God." she gasped.

"What?" Kim inquired.

Brittany just looked on as Peyton parked his car in the circle drive. She watched him step from his car as her eyes made their way up from his tennis shoe clad feet up his strong legs to his khaki shorts and knit shirt that accentuated his broad shoulders and chest and finally up to his smile.

"Good morning, ladies." he greeted.

"Hi, Peyton. How are you?" Brittany asked embracing Ana who had crawled into her lap at his arrival.

"Fabulous. Your beauty is only magnified around your children, Brittany. You glow. It's amazing."

Brittany couldn't fight the blush rising in her cheeks, but she ignored the comment. Instead she

gave him quick introductions to Kim and the girls.

"Well, where's Dan this morning? He said he wanted to walk to grounds with me while I did the estimate."

"Oh, he's not here. He went out to run errands. Knowing him, he probably forgot. That man forgets everything if he doesn't write it down. Let me call him for you." She returned a few minutes later. "He said he'd be back within half an hour, and to go ahead and start if you're in a hurry."

"I'll just wait. I'm not in a rush. Besides it appears as if Alexis isn't finished with my shoes yet." he mentioned looking down at Alexis who was pulling on his shoe strings.

Instantly Brittany came to get her. Bending down she stated, "Sorry. Daniel taught her to untie shoes thinking it was funny. We don't even notice any more."

Peyton gave Alexis, who was now in Brittany's arms, a warm smile before turning to Brittany. "Smart kid. Must take after you." he joked before retying his shoes.

Brittany desperately tried to push the thoughts she'd been having about him over the past week from her mind as they spoke. Twenty minutes later she was relieved to see Dan's old Mustang turn into the driveway.

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Over the next few months Peyton and his company made weekly appearances at the house, usually Saturdays. Most of the time, Dan was out at the golf course with Mike leaving Brittany to deal with him alone. Although Peyton had always been complimentary with his words, he never tried to get physically close to her, so Brittany assumed that he was uninterested and therefore harmless. However, she had let herself become more comfortable with the idea of him in her thoughts. Slowly she had found herself having fantasy scenarios with him, figuring they were a safe way of dealing with the attraction she felt toward him.

One particular summer Saturday Dan went to his usual golf game. Kim was out for the day, and Jen and Melissa had come to pick up the girls early so Brittany could plan an afternoon alone with Dan. Knowing he wouldn't be home for several hours, she decided to get some sun. Slipping into Dan's favorite bikini, she settled herself by the pool, thinking about how wonderful it would be to have time together without the kids.

Dan and Mike played nine holes that day, but Mike's poor performance and solemn mood made Dan wonder if something was bothering his friend. Once the round was over, Dan suggested that they get lunch at the clubhouse. Mike agreed quietly. After it was brought to them out on the patio, Dan asked, "What's bothering you, Mike? I can tell something is on your mind."

"It's Mike, Jr."

"Something wrong with him?"

"He's gotten himself into serious trouble at school. He called me from jail last night asking if I would post bail for him."

"Oh no. What did he do?" Mike didn't answer at first, concerning Dan further. "Mike?"

"He was arrested for three counts of rape." flatly he stated.

Dan groaned in displeasure. "Are you going to try to get him off?"

"I'm not sure what I should do. I know of several good attorneys that could probably beat whatever case they have. I'm just not sure I should get involved."

"Do you think he's guilty?" Dan questioned hesitantly, reading his friend's demeanor.

"I'm not going to say I think he's innocent."

"I'm really sorry, Mike." Dan apologized.

"You know what really upsets me, though? I keep thinking about Melissa. When she told me what he had done, I didn't believe her. She was telling the truth, wasn't she?"

"Yes, she was." quietly Dan answered.

"I screwed up so badly with her. I loved her, and I didn't believe her when she needed me the most. Maybe if I had, Mike, Jr. could've gotten help before getting himself into this mess, and maybe she and I would still be together."

"

It's pointless to speculate, Mike. It'll only drive you crazy."

"I know, but I can't help it. She was the best thing to come into my life, and I blew it. I told you once that I thought she was the love of my life. I still think that, even after all this time. This year and a half has done nothing to change the way I feel about her."

"Why don't you tell her?"

"What would I say? I'm sorry I didn't believe you when you said my son assaulted you?"

"Yes, say exactly that. I think it would make a difference if she knew how you felt."

"Even so, I'm not really worthy of that woman's love after how I treated her."

"Why don't you let her decide that?" suggested Dan, trying to give Mike some hope.

Brittany was awakened from her snooze by the sound of lawn mowers. Slowly opening her eyes, she jumped seeing Peyton standing at the end of her chaise, staring at her with unguarded lust. "Sorry," he stuttered. "I didn't know if you were asleep or not." Brittany could feel his eyes burning her skin. He sighed heavily. "Well, we're going to get to work. I'll do the pool last."

She just nodded as she looked over him in his white tank top and blue running shorts. She had long ago acknowledged to herself that she was attracted to him but felt it wasn't mutual. Now having seen him gaze at her brazenly, she felt a disconcerting churning in the pit of her stomach that settled with an agonizing pang between her thighs. She found herself imagining him there again. Turning onto her stomach, she closed her eyes, drifting back to sleep with him on her mind.

She didn't know how much time had passed when she awoke to a spray of water across her back. Instantly sitting up and turning over, she saw Peyton standing there with the hose, smiling at her playfully.

"You just looked like you could use a little cooling off," he joked.

Returning the grin, Brittany walked directly to him. Just within his reach, she took the hose from his hands. He eyed her suspiciously. Suddenly she turned it on him, splashing the front of his shirt, the wet cotton clinging to his defined chest. He grabbed the hose, turning it back on her to get her front side wet. For a few moments they fought for control over it, but then Brittany found herself in strong arms. She exhaled quickly as her chest brushed into his, but she didn't pull away.

"God, Brittany, you don't even know how many times I've dreamed of touching you," he confessed whisking a trickle of water off her bare shoulder.

"Peyton, please don't. Let me go," she said placing her hands on his upper arms but not trying to pull away from his body.

"Brittany, please. If you really want me to let you go, I will, but just listen to what I have to say first." When she didn't protest, he continued, "Brittany, you are so sexy. Every Saturday I come here not to mow your stupid lawn but to see you. You are one of a kind. No other woman I've ever met compares to you, to your beauty, to your intelligence, to your spirit. I'd hardly be a man if I didn't get all worked up whenever I saw you."

Brittany was stirred by the urgency in his whisper. She could feel him leaning into her, his stubbled jaw against her cheek putting her on sensory overload. Suddenly she felt his lips on hers, his tongue diving into her mouth. Brittany's world began to spin out of control as he purposefully ground her hips into his. She could've drowned in the feeling had Dan not penetrated her thoughts. Pulling away she covered her mouth with her hand in surprised shock at what she had allowed to happen. "Oh God," she whispered. She jumped when she heard the sliding glass door slam open. "Daniel," she croaked meeting his horrified glare.

Dan said nothing at first as his eyes went back and forth between the two of them. Never in his life had he imagined seeing his wife kissing another man. Ignoring the pain of his shattered heart for the moment, he asked, "Where are the girls?"

"Jen and Melissa took them for the day, so we could have some time together."

"You mean so you could have time together with Peyton!" he yelled.

"No! This is not what it looks like!"

"Then exactly what is it?"

"We were talking and..."

"Bullshit you were talking!" He cut her off. "I'm leaving! I can't talk to you right now!"

"Daniel, no! Please don't go! Just let me explain!" she begged following him into the house and grabbing him by the arm.

He quickly yanked free. "Don't touch me! I'll die if you touch me ever again after seeing you in his arms! How could you do this to me, Brittany?" He wasn't even attempting to hide the tears that cascaded down his face.

Brittany had never seen him in such pain in her life. "Daniel..."

"No! Don't say another word! I can't take it! Just leave me alone! Don't touch me! Don't talk to me! I'm leaving! Don't call me on my phone either!" he screamed moving toward the front door. Brittany tried to hold him back by the arm. Dan swiftly turned with his hand raised like he was going to strike her. She flinched. Realizing it would be the biggest mistake of his life, he dropped his hand. "Brittany, I said don't touch me." softly he stated.

The threat of him hitting her had moved her back several steps. She just watched as he got into his car and raced off down the driveway as she began to weep. After a few minutes, she felt a hand on her shoulder. She turned angrily. "If you respect me at all, never touch me again! I could lose him! I could lose my children! I can't let that happen! Just go, Peyton! I never want to see you again!"

"Brittany, we can work this out."

"Get out of my life! There's no room for you in it!" she screamed pushing him out the door. Running up to the bedroom, she collapsed onto the bed letting painful sobs rack her body. Seeing Dan in such pain, knowing she had caused it was too much to bear.

Dan's vision was so blurry he could hardly even drive. He went straight to Jen and Melissa's house to see his kids. When Melissa opened the door with Victoria by her side, Dan's tears began anew. Sweeping Victoria into his arms, he held her tightly as he wept.

"Dan, what's wrong?" Melissa asked.

Victoria began to repeat his name causing him to smile at her. "Yes, sweetheart. Daddy's here." Looking at Melissa he asked, "Where are the twins?"

"Still napping. Are you all right?"

He shook his head but didn't comment further. "I'm going to look in on them."

Brittany awoke in a daze hearing the phone. Grabbing it she asked hopefully, "Daniel?"

"No. Sorry, Britt. You sound awful. Did you and Dan get into a fight? He's here right now and looks terrible." Melissa stated.

"He's there? Put him on the phone."

A few minutes later Melissa came back. "I'm sorry, Brittany. He refuses to talk to you right now."

"Dammit Daniel. Has he said anything to you?"

"No. He refuses to talk, just wants to be alone with the girls."

"All right. See if you can keep him there. I'm on my way over."

Less than an hour later Brittany arrived. As soon as Dan saw her, he handed Victoria to Melissa. "Could you keep the girls occupied for a minute? I don't want them to have to see this." When they were alone, he said, "I thought I told you that I didn't want to talk to you."

"Daniel, we have to talk about this. What you saw or what you think happened didn't."

"You mean I imagined you kissing the pool boy! I saw you, Brittany! I saw you from the moment he sprayed you with the hose! I saw the smile you gave him! You were flirting with him, and you allowed him to touch you, to hold you, to kiss you, God dammit! I'm disgusted! Do you mean to tell me I imagined all that?" he screamed before tears choked him up. "Brittany, how could you? I love you. How could you tear our family apart like this?"

"Daniel, I'm so sorry. It was a big mistake, but it was an accident. I never intended for that to happen."

"An accident? You never even tried to pull away from him! How can you say it was an accident?"

"I love only you, Daniel. Please believe that."

"But you don't want only me! Tell me. Is there more to this relationship? Have you given yourself to him?"

"No! There's nothing between us! I swear it!" Dan started for the door. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"I am not your concern any more!" sharply he stated.

Brittany was obviously hurt by the rebuff. "Will we see you at home later tonight?"

He sneered at her. "How could you even ask me such a ridiculous question? No, I'm not coming home! How could I? How could I share a home not to mention a bed with you? The whole time I'd wonder if you were thinking of him!"

"Daniel, at least tell me where you're going. I'll be worried about you if I don't know."

"Why? You sure as hell weren't worried about me earlier! What were you thinking anyway? How to get him in bed?"

"Damn you!" Brittany screamed. "You really want to know what I was thinking? I was thinking of you, Daniel! You! When he kissed me, I thought of you! It felt awkward and wrong, and I pulled away from him."

"It took you that long to realize it was wrong?" he asked. When her answer was not immediately forthcoming, he took the chance to slip out the door.

Brittany went into where Jen and Melissa were playing with the kids. Getting onto the floor, she accepted Ana into her lap and silently rocked her back and forth as she cried. After several minutes she mumbled, "I guess you heard all that. I've just lost the only man I've ever loved. I can't go on without him. I don't want to."

"Who's the guy?"

"His name is Peyton Cooper. He cleans our pool."

"What's he like?"

"Twenty one, six two and gorgeous. Damn! Why did I let this happen? He's the first man I've ever been attracted to other than Daniel, but I should've been able to handle it."

"Apparently the attraction is mutual." mentioned Melissa.

"I really didn't mean for this to happen. If I could just take back those two seconds when he kissed me, Daniel would still be upset, but he wouldn't be shutting me out like this."

"He's really hurting, Britt." Jen said.

"I know, and I hate the fact that it's my fault."

Dan spent the night at his father's place that night. Since his father was out of town, he had a lot of time to think about where he wanted things to go. Brittany spent her night alone in their bed balling. Neither slept well. The following day Dan went by the house. Brittany was out, so he found Kim watching the girls.

"God, you look like shit, Dan." she commented.

He ignored her heading up to the master bedroom. He was just packing his clothes when he heard Kim put the kids down for their nap. She halted in the bedroom door. "What are you doing?" she asked.

"Packing." he mumbled.

"Going out of town?"

"No. I'm moving out."

"What?" Kim asked with surprise. "Why?"

"Because I can't stay here with her any more."

"You're leaving Brittany?" He nodded slowly. "Why? Does she know? What about the kids?"

"The kids have you and Brittany. I'll see them as much as I can while she's at school."

"You don't want to leave her, do you?"

"No, of course not, but I can't stay here either. I love her, but I can't pretend it didn't happen."

"What did happened? You two are in love and happy. How could that have gone so bad so quickly?"

Looking at her directly for the first time, he bluntly replied, "I found her with another man."

"Oh, Dan, I'm so sorry. You're obviously crushed."

"I don't know how I am. I just feel dead inside. I don't want to leave, but I don't know what else to do."

"Does she know about you moving out?"

"I'm going to wait until she gets home and tell her then."



When Brittany turned into the driveway and saw Dan's Mustang, her heart fluttered with hope, thinking maybe he had calmed down enough to speak to her. However as she pulled up to his car, she saw the suitcases in the back, and she was seized by panic. Rushing into the house, she confronted him in the family room. "What's going on, Daniel?" she asked nervously.

"Oh, you're home. I need to talk to you. Why don't we step outside?" Before getting off the floor he kissed each of his children before leading the way out to his car. "Last night I had a lot of time to think about things. I'm not really sure what to do. I don't really want a divorce, but I can't live here with you right now. You've hurt me deeply, Brittany. I don't know if I can forgive you. I guess only time will tell. For now though, I'm moving in with my dad."

"Daniel, please, don't leave. Don't leave me. Don't leave our children. They need you. I need you."

"I'm sorry, Brittany. I just can't stay. It would be too difficult. I plan on making arrangements with Kim to see the girls daily. I'm not walking out on them."

"No, you're waking out on me. You're leaving me for two minutes of indiscretion. Is our family worth so little to you?"

"It wasn't two minutes of indiscretion! It started here long before!" he yelled pointing to her heart. "Or maybe it started some place lower! I guess only you know!" he spat in anger.

Brittany's head snapped back at the venomous affront. "How dare you speak to me like that? You make me out to be some sort of whore! I feel bad about hurting you, Daniel, but I won't sit here and take your lewd innuendo! I know you're hurting, but right now you're just being an asshole!" she screamed in tears barging back into the house.

Dan sighed heavily. He had never stooped so low, speaking to a woman that way. Part of him wanted desperately to go after her and apologize, but the hurt refused, so he left feeling even worse.

By the time Dan had finished unloading his things, his father had returned with his girlfriend in tow. "Dan, what a surprise. What are you doing here?" David asked.

"I'm sorry, Dad. I just didn't know where else to go. I had to get out of that house. If you don't mind, I need to stay here for awhile."

"Of course, I don't mind, but what's wrong? Why aren't you at home with your lovely wife and wonderful children?"

Dan didn't answer at first looking over at Kelly. "Maybe I should go to let you two talk." she suggested.

"All right. I'll call you later." David stated. Dan watched them kiss good bye quickly before she left. "So," his dad began again. "What happened? She kick you out?"

"I left."

"Why?" When Dan didn't answer, his father stated plainly, "There's someone else." Dan nodded. "What's her name?"

"His name is Peyton!" Dan yelled rubbing his wet eyes.

"Oh boy." David mumbled. "I've always suspected Joe, but never would I have expected that from you. You've genuinely shocked me, son."

Dan glared at his father. "Not me, Dad! Brittany! There's someone else in Brittany's life!" he clarified slamming himself into the couch.

David wheeled himself to his son. Placing a gentle hand on his knee, he whispered, "Daniel, I'm sorry. I never would've guess it. You know this for a fact?" Dan nodded. "How did you find out?"

"I saw them kissing by the pool. They didn't know I was there, and I didn't confront them until they broke apart. I had to watch. I had to know if she was really an active participant. Had she struggled even slightly, I would've come to her rescue, but she didn't want to be rescued. She went willingly into his arms."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know. This is not easy. We can't just break up. We're married. I have children to consider. I don't want to divorce her, but I'm not sure staying together would be right. It would only be for the children, and they would realize something was wrong. They are very perceptive."

"Do you think you can work it out? Divorce is not fun, Dan. It should be your last option, not your first and only."

"How can I work it out? Every time I think of her, I think of him. I think of them kissing, and I can't help but wonder if there are other things I don't even know about that they've done together."

"Give it time, Dan. You stay here with me as long as you need. Time will reveal the answer. Right now everyone's emotions are very raw. The wound is too fresh. Let some time pass. Things will look clearer."

"Thanks, Dad." Dan mumbled.

Tuesday morning Dan awoke after a relatively sleepless night. He went for a longer run than usual as he thought about the past few days. His anger resurfaced, but this time focused on Peyton. He wanted him to hurt as much as he was hurting. When he got back to his father's he

grabbed his keys, heading to Peyton's office, feeling fairly sure he'd be there. Barging inside, he yelled, "We need to talk now!"

Peyton calmly surveyed his employees before answering, "All right. Let's go out back where it's more private."

Dan followed him out to the small warehouse before they squared off against each other. "I have to know. Do you love her?" Dan asked in controlled hostility.

Peyton laughed. "Love her? Hell no. I just wanted to fuck her. She wanted me to fuck her. She was screaming for a good lay. Maybe you're not man enough to do it, so she came to me."

"You fucking asshole! You played with her feelings! You don't care about her at all, do you?"

"No, I don't. I just wanted a piece of that fine ass. I have to say that she's pretty vulnerable between the thighs, Dan, and what a screamer."

"You made love to my wife?" Dan asked feeling his breakfast about to make a reappearance.

"No. I fucked her brains out. I've never known a woman to be so anxious to go down on a man before. That mouth is quite talented. Face it, Dan. She might be a beautiful, but she's a whore."

"I'm going to fucking kill you!" Dan screamed lunging at him with his fist.

Peyton side stepped easily, landing one punch in Dan's stomach, the other across his face. Dan felt the crack of his nose and tasted blood. Turning to face Peyton again, he decided that he didn't care how he won this fight, only that he make the man suffer. Knocking Peyton off his feet, they both fell to the ground and began wrestling and pounding on each other unmercifully. Dan knew he was losing his fight badly, so to end it, he managed to get to his feet. Just as Peyton started to stand, Dan kicked him in the knee as hard as he could. Peyton screamed as it cracked, landing back on the ground in a quivering heap.

Instantly employees entered the warehouse. Dan looked down at Peyton knowing he'd just blown out his knee, potentially ending his running career. He wanted to put the man out of misery permanently, but the opportunity wasn't going to present itself, so Dan just kicked him once more for good measure. "Enjoy your knee surgery and stay the fuck away from my wife!"

Racing back to his dad's, Dan found David in the kitchen. "What the hell happened?" David asked.

"I got in a fight. I need you to set my nose."

"All right. Sit down. Let me get you some ice." After David set the nose again, Dan stripped off his bloody shirt, using it for an ice pack. "So tell me what happened."

"I confronted Peyton. Put that son of a bitch out of commission. He's going to need surgery and

lots of rehab. Hope he thinks of me in every ounce of pain."

"Did you talk to him at all or just beat the crap out of each other?"

"We spoke briefly. Brittany lied to me. They had sex."

"How do you know? Because he told you that? Couldn't he be lying?"

"I guess." Dan mumbled.

"Does it matter to you?"

"Hell yes! I'd divorce her in a heartbeat if I found out she's been fucking around!"

"What do you believe, Daniel? Who do you believe? I think in your heart you know who is telling the truth. I think he's just trying to get you two separated, so he can get in her pants. After he does he'll drop her like yesterday's news. He's going to hurt her if you don't stop him."

"She's a grown woman, Dad. She'll do what she wants obviously. Besides, why should I fight for her? She hurt me."

"You fought for her today, even as angry as you are. That shows you're not ready to give up on your marriage."

"Well, that might be true, but she should fight for me if she wants me back. Obviously she doesn't. I haven't heard from her in two days. If it were me, I'd be ringing the phone off the hook."

"She's hurting too, Dan."

"Not as much as I am. I have to shower now. Kim's coming by with the kids."

David and Dan spent the afternoon with the girls. At Dan's urging Kim took the afternoon off but promised to come get them before dinner. As six o' clock approached, they heard the doorbell.

Brittany shifted nervously on her feet contemplating who she wanted to see less, Dan or her father-in-law. When the door opened, she looked down to see David.

"Well, what a surprise. We were expecting Kim." he stated.

"Kim's at home working on dinner. I thought I should pick the kids up."

David nodded as Brittany stepped inside. David took her hand, holding her back momentarily. She looked down at him expectantly, dreading what he might have to say. "If you love him, fight for him. I believe in my heart you two can work this out if you want."

"I guess you know everything."

"Yes, but I'm in no position to judge you, Brittany. Lord knows I've done much worse than this. If you still love him and want him, you can win him back."

"But he hates me."

"No, he doesn't. He loves you, and that's why it hurts so much. He hates what's happened. More than anything, he needs time, but if you do want him, you have to tell him. If you don't love him, he deserves to know that too." Brittany just nodded as she walked toward the living room. She paused in the doorway for a moment and just watched Dan on the floor with the girls. When he finally looked up and noticed her, she gasped at the disfiguration under his eyes and around his nose. Forgetting herself for a moment, she rushed over and kneeled next to him. She reached to touch his bruised face, but he swiftly retreated standing.

"I had a talk with your boyfriend today." he stated.

Frustrated by the remark, Brittany answered, "I don't have a boyfriend, only an absentee husband who I miss desperately."

Dan looked at her still on her knees. Ignoring her statement, he said, "I talked to Peyton. Tell me the truth, not what you think I want to hear. Do you love him?"

"No, I don't. I love you, Daniel."

"Did you ever have sex with him?"

"No."

"Did you ever perform oral sex on him?"

Brittany's stomach turned, the line of questioning making her nauseated. "No, never. Why are you asking me this?"

"Because he said you did. In fact, he said even though you were a whore, he still enjoyed fucking your brains out. He said he loved how loud you screamed and that you gave pretty good head." casually he informed her.

"He said that?" she asked in hurt surprise.

"Yeah, so I'll ask you again if it's true."

"It's not true. Please, you have to believe that. The only thing that has ever happened between Peyton and me you saw. That is the truth whether you choose to believe it or not."

"Are you going to see him again?"

"No. The day everything happened, I told him to get out of my life. I told him I didn't want or need him. All I want and need is you, Daniel, and our children. This family means everything to me."

Dan just nodded. "I'll go get the girls' things." he mentioned walking into the other room.

Brittany heard the familiar creak of her father-in-law's wheelchair as she stood. "How did it go?" he asked touching her hand. Brittany shrugged. "Did he tell you what he did to Peyton today?"

"No."

"He got in a fight with him over your honor. He got himself a broken nose for it, but he put the guy in the hospital for the awful things he said about you."

"He didn't tell me that."

"Well, he did. He still loves you, Brittany."

"He's just so cold. He won't let me in."

"That's his way of protecting himself. It's going to take time. The more you push the longer it's going to take. Just let him know where you stand."

Leaning down, Brittany gave David a hug. "Thank you for everything you're doing."

Dan escorted Brittany and the girls out to the car. "All right. Give daddy a kiss good bye." Brittany said to Ana.

Dan leaned down to kiss Ana's head before kneeling down to Victoria, while Brittany settled Ana in her car seat. "Do I get a kiss?" he asked.

She smiled at him before leaving a wet kiss on his cheek. "Bye, Daddy." she said as Brittany picked her up to put her in the car.

Dan could feel his heart beginning to break from the idea of separation from his girls. With Victoria strapped in, Brittany held her arms out for Alexis. Alexis turned away burrowing further into Dan's neck.

"Come on, Alexis. Time to go home." Brittany tried to cheerfully state. When Brittany pulled her from Dan, she began screaming, her eyes tearing as she extended her arms to him.

"What's wrong, Alex?" he asked taking her back from Brittany. She calmed after a moment, so Dan passed her to Brittany, at which point the tears began again.

"It's okay, Alexis." Brittany tried to soothe her but to no avail.

Dan could see the sadness in his daughter's eyes, and he melted completely. "All right, honey. It's okay." he assured her reaching for her. She scurried back into his embrace. "I don't think she wants to go."

"Well, she's not old enough to decide that." Brittany stated holding her arms out, but Dan didn't relinquish her.

"She can stay here. It's no big deal."

"Giving in to temper tantrums is not a good habit to start, Daniel." Brittany pressed.

Dan looked into his girl's eyes. "I'm sorry. She doesn't want to go, and I don't want them to either."

"Well, two of them are already in the car, so they are coming home with me. Now put her in the carseat." Brittany demanded with annoyance.

"No, I won't do it. She's staying right here with me. I'll bring her back tomorrow."

Brittany huffed in anger as they stared at each other. Finally folding, she stated, "Fine. Get her bag out of the back."

Dan walked Alexis around to the driver's side door. "Kiss Mommy good night." he prompted. Alexis lifted her head off Dan's shoulder slightly to receive a kiss on the cheek from Brittany. The feeling of Dan's body as she brushed into him set her ablaze, but the sudden withdrawal made her ache. Dan gave her a knowing glare. "Good night, Daddy. I love you." she confessed holding his eyes.

The feel of Brittany's skin had set him on fire. He couldn't deny the sexual energy surrounding them, but it still hurt too much to think the last man she had touched was Peyton. Instead of responding to her, he waved to the girls in the back seat. "Wave to your sisters." he said to Alexis.

Brittany needed to hear him return the endearment terribly, but noting that it was not forthcoming, she sighed heavily getting into the car. Dan and Alexis watched until the car had disappeared until returning to the house.

As Dan went to bed that evening, he checked on Alexis once more in the guest bedroom. She was sleeping soundly, so he went to his room. He flipped through tv channels for awhile stumbling upon an adult movie. Watching it for a few minutes, he realized it only made him feel more alone. Shutting it off completely he laid on his back closing his eyes. Brittany appeared in his mind. She was naked straddling his hips. Her body was covered in a sheen of perspiration, and her golden hair was drenched from exertion. He could feel himself deep within her, making them both groan. She was moving on top of him in an erotic display of passion, but as soon as she opened her mouth, Peyton's name was on her lips. Dan opened his eyes, growling angrily. He

was frustrated, and he ached for the relief that only Brittany provided him.

Quickly weighing his options, he decided that he'd have to try to focus on something else or try his rarely used technique of self-fulfillment, choosing the latter, all the while yearning for his beloved wife.

Brittany awoke late that night with a startle. Thinking it might be one of the girls, she listened closely, but all was quiet. Suddenly she heard the thunder of a summer storm. Realizing that was all it was, she laid down again, turning toward the middle of the bed. Her eyes fell upon the empty place next to her. Brittany thought about how many times she'd awakened in the middle of the night and just watched Dan's sleeping form. Her heart twinged in sorrow seeing his empty pillow. Pulling it to her, she breathed in his distinctive scent.

She whimpered his name, closing her eyes to fight the tears that were welling up in her. She saw him in her mind as she had so many times in real life before, seeing his reflection in the bathroom mirror as he approached her from behind. He was only in a towel, fresh from a shower, and she was standing in her silk robe, brushing her hair. His arms encircled her waist as he began to kiss her neck softly. She giggled reaching behind her and yanking the towel away. Playfully she teased him, knowing at any moment he would turn her around. When he did, he slid the robe off her shoulders, and took her down to the floor. Even now she could feel the cold bite of the tile against her back and the heat of his body covering her, warming her entire being.

Brittany sighed with sadness. So many mornings she had begun her day wrapped in his arms, being filled with his love and melting into oblivion with him. Now there was no morning intimacy. There was no playful caressing. There was nothing, but the nagging reminder that she was now alone. "I'm sorry, Daniel." she whispered into the night before allowing herself to be overcome with sobs.

## **Part 8**

The following morning Brittany awoke later than usual. Knowing Kim had already taken care of the girls, she slowly made her way to the bathroom, leaving the door open in case Kim needed anything. Stepping into the shower, she just stood under the warm spray with her eyes closed.

When Dan arrived at the house, Kim had the girls eating breakfast. Dropping Alexis into her highchair, he inquired, "Is Brittany still here?"

"Yeah. She hasn't come down yet."

Dan nodded heading up to the master bedroom. Seeing the door open, Dan looked inside. He saw through the room into the bathroom where he saw her in the glass shower. Quietly stepping into the room, he looked closer. Her eyes were closed as she bathed. Dan watched the path of her hands over her wet skin, lathering her ample breasts with soap. He saw the peaks harden responsively. Her hands moved lower down her taut stomach between her thighs. Dan felt his insides tighten and smolder. Knowing his body was about to betray his conviction, he took a deep calming breath before slowly making his way out of the room.



Brittany felt as if she was being watched. Quickly opening her eyes, she looked into the dark bedroom, seeing a form retreating into the hallway. Brittany finished her shower as fast as she could. Dressing in only her robe she came down downstairs. "Did you need something?" she asked Kim.

Kim gave her a confuse stare. "No. Why do you ask?"

"I thought I saw you in the bedroom while I was in the shower."

"No. Dan went upstairs for a moment when he dropped Alexis off. He asked if you were here, and when I said you hadn't come down yet, he went upstairs. He just left looking all upset. I thought maybe you two had gotten into another fight."

"No." Brittany mumbled, knowing it was his presence she had felt watching her.

Dan spent most of the morning in his office. Even though he wasn't teaching summer school, he found it a private place to work on his second book. However over the last few days, his work had consisted of only pain and suffering. Around noon that day Melissa dawned his doorway. "Hey. What are you doing here?" he asked in surprise.

"I was just doing some research for my book. I thought I'd stop by on the off chance you were here to see if you wanted to go to lunch."

"Yeah, sure." On their way out to his car, he inquired, "So, how is your book coming?"

"Great. I guess your talk with your publisher helped. They're going to publish my book. They've made some suggestions on it, and we've talked over what we consider weak points. I'm just working on those right now."

"Well, that's more than great. It's fabulous. It's what you've always wanted. Congratulations are in order. We should celebrate. Let me take you out to dinner tonight."

"I'd love to, but I can't. I already have plans."

"Oh? Hot date or something?" he teased.

"Actually, I'm going out with Mike. He called me yesterday and said he really wanted to talk to me about something important."

"Really?" Dan asked with interest.

"Yeah. I was wondering if you know anything about that."

Dan smiled. "Maybe I do, but I'm going to stay out of it. How do you feel about this whole deal? I mean you two haven't dated in over a year. How do you feel about him calling you out of

nowhere?”

Melissa shrugged. “Well, you know I never wanted to break up with him. I was in love with him, and it took a long time to get over. I’m just curious what he has to say that’s so important after all this time.”

“Do you think you could find it in your heart to love him again?” Dan inquired hopefully.

Melissa smiled. “Well, I still find him physically attractive, and I know he’s a good man. He’s the type of man I’ve always hoped for, but he has to believe me.”

“What if he apologized for not believing you? Would it help?” Melissa nodded. Dan gave her a warm smile. “Well, I hope you have fun tonight.”

Over lunch matters turned toward Dan’s personal life. “How are things between you and Brittany?”

Dan shrugged. “I moved out of the house. I just couldn’t stand the thought of seeing her. Every time I do, I think of it, and I really don’t want to think about it any more.”

“Where are you staying?”

“With my dad for now. I’ll probably get my own place of my own soon, though, so the girls can come visit for extended periods.”

“Do you think you’ll get a divorce?”

“I haven’t ruled it out as an option. It’s really too painful to even think about right now.”

“Do you think you can work it out?”

“I don’t know.”

“Dan, I know you’re hurting, and she is too, but I know you love each other.”

“I won’t deny that I love her, but I’m not sure I can trust her. I know you understand that.”

“But it was different with Mike and me. We weren’t married with children. You have a lot to lose.” Dan just shrugged closing the discussion. Changing the subject, Melissa said, “So, Victoria’s birthday is right around the corner. Brittany told me you all were planning a little pool party. Is that still on?”

“I don’t know. I guess so. Maybe I should ask.”

“Have you gotten her anything yet?”

“No. I haven’t even thought about it. I can’t believe she’s going to be three already, and the twins will be two in November. Time is just flying.”

“It really is. That’s why you shouldn’t waste it by being away from your family.”

Dan sighed. “You know, I confronted Peyton the other day about this whole thing. I just felt like I had to have answers. I thought maybe I was fighting a force greater than myself and maybe they had fallen in love or something like that. As much as that would’ve hurt, I think I could’ve handled it better than this. I asked him if he loved her, and he was so arrogantly insulting. He said horrible things about her. When I confronted her with the information, I could tell she was hurt. She says she doesn’t love him, but I think maybe she felt a little something for him. In a way I feel sorry for her that he played with her feelings like that. Makes me think about all the women I screwed around on when I was his age. I never spoke about them the way he did, but I definitely treated them the same, just getting laid whenever and wherever I could. I was even like that when I first met Brittany. You can ask Jen. I still had sex with her while dating another girl and having feelings for Brittany.”

“You had sex with Jen? I never knew that. When?”

“Brittany and I had just become friends. She and Jen were still in college. I knew I had feelings for Brittany, but she was dating this guy named John at the time, and I was with a woman named Kristen. Jen and I both just kind of found we had a mutual interest in sex.”

“Did Brittany know about it?”

“Oh yeah. She caught us in the act once. That’s the moment I realized if I was ever going to have a chance with Brittany I was going to have to change my ways. I thought it was worth a shot, so I did.”

“And it worked. You got her. Isn’t she worth holding on to?”

“Melissa, I know you are only trying to help, but I’d really appreciate it if you would stop bringing it up.”

“All right. I’m sorry. I just can’t stand seeing you two like this. It’s painful to watch.”

“Well, regardless of what happens between Brittany and me, I still have my children, who bring me great joy. As the mother of those children, Brittany will always hold a special place in my heart. If nothing else, I guess I will respect her always for that.” Dan mentioned.

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The month between Dan moving out and Victoria’s birthday was difficult on Brittany and Dan. They hardly spoke or saw each other except on a rare occasion when they were transferring the kids between them. However for Victoria’s birthday everyone had been invited over for a pool party.

Dan arrived late that morning to help Brittany and Kim set up. Going up to the door, he contemplated whether or not to use his key, deciding to ring the bell instead. When Brittany answered it, she just stared at him a moment before realizing the implication of the small gesture. He no longer considered it his home, and it grieved Brittany. Trying not to dwell on it too long, she forced a smile. "Hi. Come on in."

Dan walked into the kitchen, depositing the present onto the table before turning to her. "When's everyone arriving?"

"Around noon, so that leaves us a little less than two hours."

"All right. Just tell me what I can do to help."

"Actually if you wouldn't mind, the patio furniture needs to be wiped down and the grill set up. Kim will be back with the food shortly."

Dan nodded going out the back sliding glass door. Brittany saw him pause for a moment as his eyes fell upon the place of the incident. She watched him walk over to the hose and slowly turn it on as he held it in thought. Brittany knew what he was thinking, so she stepped outside.

"Daniel," she began.

Dan looked at her, for a moment seeing her in his mind in the same suit she'd worn that day. "Brittany," he stated cutting her off. "I'd like to go through this afternoon without talking about what happened. I don't want to talk about us or where we think our relationship is going. This is Victoria's day. Can we do that?"

"Yeah, sure," she mumbled.

"Thank you," he replied going over to the lawn furniture. The first piece he came to was the chaise where Brittany had been lying that day. Dan sprayed it down thoroughly with water before wiping it down. Stepping back he studied it before hosing it down again. Brittany watched Dan work from the window. He rewashed the chair several times as if trying to purify it before moving on to the other chairs. Just as he had finished Kim came outside with tray a of food.

"Hey, Dan. I didn't even know you were here," she mentioned.

"How's it going, Kim? What's on our menu today?"

The guest list that day consisted of Dan and Brittany's closest friends and family. Everyone except Melissa and Mike had arrived when Dan began to start the food. "Where's Melissa?" Dan asked Jen. "I thought she'd come with you."

"Oh, she said she and Mike had to go shopping first."

"Melissa and Mike shopping together? Are they dating again?" asked Brittany with surprise.

“Yeah. It surprised me too.” Jen stated.

“What about you, Jen? You have any new boyfriends?” Dan inquired.

“Uh, no. I guess no one told you.” hesitantly she answered.

“Told me what?” He looked at her expectantly.

“Well,” Kim began taking Jen’s hand. “You haven’t been around much, and no one I guess mentioned it to you.”

“Kim and I...” Jen started.

Understanding dawned quickly. “Oh, sorry. I didn’t know. I had wondered why Kim looked so damn happy all the time.” he joked making them all laugh. “How long has this been going on?”

“A few weeks.”

“Shocked the hell out of you, didn’t it, Brittany?” Dan asked.

“Yes, I admit it did, but it’s fine now. Everyone’s happy. That’s what matters.”

By mid afternoon the children had gone down for their naps, leaving the adults lounging pool side. The young love bird couples were up on the deck dancing to Brittany’s favorite jazz music, leaving Dan, Brittany, and Becca to talk. Dan just listened to them chatter, mostly about Becca’s boyfriend as he watched the two couples dance.

He could tell that they were all genuinely happy, and Dan had to smile at the fact that he and Brittany were instrumental in bringing love into the lives of their four closest friends. During a lull in conversation, Dan looked over at Becca. “So, how about a dance with your big brother?” he asked.

Becca’s eyes moved to Brittany before accepting Dan’s outstretched hand. Brittany watched her husband and sister-in-law for a few minutes. It had been so long since she’d felt his embrace. The only times she’d felt him over the past month were accidental brushes of their bodies while dealing with the children. He hadn’t attempted to touch her at all, nor she him fearing the reaction she received last time. She had been shocked and afraid when he had raised his hand to her in anger. For a moment she thought he might actually strike her.

“Why don’t you ask Brittany to dance?” Becca suggested after a few songs. Dan shrugged. “Oh, come on, Dan. Give her a break. Can’t you see she’s trying?”

Dan glanced over at Brittany who was busy studying her glass of lemonade. “Hey, Brittany.” he called over to her. Her head snapped up at the sound of his voice. “You want to come join us?”

Brittany's heart thudded in her chest. "Uh, that's okay. I don't think Mike wants to dance with me right now." she replied.

"I wasn't talking about Mike." Dan stated. Dan knew everyone was trying to act casual even though it was a monumental moment. Dan cracked a smile at how fast Brittany sprang from her chair.

When she came toward him, her steps slowed unsure of how close he wanted to get with her. Dan took her hand and wrapped a tentative arm around her waist as they began to move to the music. Even though there were only two points of contact, Brittany was melting. Desperately she wanted to close the gap between them, but since Dan made no effort to do so, she maintained her distance.

Looking down into her eyes, Dan thought about the first time he'd ever asked her to dance. He had taken her to a steakhouse not knowing she was a vegetarian. A country band was playing that night, and he had taught her how to two-step. He remembered holding her for the first time as they began to dance and feeling the sexual energy that flowed between them even though they were only friends at the time.

Dan didn't even realize she had begun to smile until Brittany inquired, "What's the smile for?"

"Oh, I just thinking about the time I taught you to two-step."

"That was a fun night." Brittany mentioned.

"Yes, it was. Maybe we could do it again sometime." he suggested.

"I'd love to."

"How about next Saturday?"

"Yeah. Great. Sounds wonderful." Brittany answered trying to withhold her excitement.

"Okay, then. Next Saturday it is."

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The following Saturday Dan picked Brittany up at 6:00. He rang the doorbell and shifted nervously on his feet as he wiped his palms on his jeans. He knew this time together would have significant bearing on where their relationship was headed. At least Dan hoped to regain an amiable friendship with her for the sake of the children.

When Brittany answered the door, Dan's mouth dropped open at the sight of her. She was dressed in a pair of tight jeans and a sweater set. Her hair was pulled back into two braids. "I'm almost ready. Just let me do my hair." she mentioned letting him inside.

“No. Leave it like it is. You know I love it like that.”

She smiled and nodded. “Okay, then. I’ll just get my purse. The girls are having dinner.”

Dan walked into the kitchen to see Jen and Kim eating with the kids. “Oh, looking sexy, Dan. I always thought that shirt looked good on you. Brings out your eyes.” Jen mentioned. “Nice boots too.”

“What time do you think you’ll be back?” Kim teased.

Dan shrugged playing along with the game. “I don’t know. Midnight maybe if that’s all right with her moms.”

“Great. Gives us lots of time to have sex after the girls go to bed.” Jen joked earning a laugh out of Dan.

When Brittany came into the kitchen, they both said good night to the girls before going out to the car. Dan dutifully opened her door for her before getting in himself. Things were quiet and awkward for a few minutes as they just listened to the radio. Finally Dan was the first to speak asking, “How’s school going?”

“Fine. I only have two more major classes to take before my dissertation. I’ve already outlined my paper. I think I’ll get all A’s this semester.”

“Yeah, I’m sure you will being the brainiac that you are.” he teased playfully.

“How about you? You ready for next term?”

“Oh yeah. They’ve given me another class to teach, so I’m up to three. Plus I’m working on my second book. Should be busy.”

“Great. I can hardly wait to read it.”

A few more minutes passed as Brittany wondered what to say about the incident, if anything at all. She wanted to know what his intentions were, but she was afraid of pushing him too hard for answers. Finally deciding to test the waters, she asked, “How are things working out living with your dad?”

“Actually, I’m going to get my own place by the time school starts up in the fall. I think he and Kelly are pretty serious about each other, so I figured they could use the privacy. Besides, I want a place that the girls can visit. Dad’s place isn’t childproof. I’ll probably get an apartment near school. Makes the most sense.”

Brittany nodded, swallowing hard and trying to hold back the tears. “Yeah, I guess it does make the most sense.” she mumbled.

Dan heard the sadness in her voice, but he didn't address it. Instead he changed the subject. "So, I was thinking after dinner maybe we could catch a movie or something." Brittany nodded in consent.

After placing their order at dinner, Dan asked Brittany to dance. As it was on Victoria's birthday, Dan left a gap between their bodies. The foot and a half seemed like a mile wide chasm to Brittany, but instead of seeing it as it was, she opted to hope that they were at least on their way to reconciliation.

While they ate that evening there was little talk. Brittany kept waiting on Dan to set the pace of the evening but so much silence made her uncomfortable. Dan finally put out a line for her by asking, "How did you find out about Jen and Kim?"

"Jen and I went out for lunch one day a couple of weeks ago. She just looked so happy, happier than I've ever seen her. She said she wanted to tell me before finding out from Kim. She says she's in love, and I've never heard her say that in her life. It's still a little weird for me to see her with Kim, but they seem so happy. How could I not support that?" Dan nodded in agreement. "I can't believe that Melissa and Mike are back together. I have a feeling you had something to do with that." Brittany mentioned.

Dan chuckled. "Maybe I did. I just talked to both of them about it. Mike has some serious issues to deal with concerning Mike, Jr., and he told me he was sorry for not believing Melissa. I told him that he should tell her that. Apparently he took the advice. I'm glad they're back together, and I think this time it'll stick."

"What kind of issues with Mike, Jr.?"

"Oh, I meant to tell you, but with everything going on, I guess I forgot. Mike, Jr. was arrested on rape charges. It's a big mess at school and all."

"Oh, that's awful. Poor Michael."

"Yeah. He's just not sure if he should offer legal help or not."

"So he has doubts about Mike, Jr.'s innocence?" Dan nodded. "God, I hope we never have to deal with something like that."

"Me too." Dan agreed.

They arrived home that night shortly before midnight. Dan slowly walked her to the door and watched her unlock it before she turned back to him. "You want to come in for awhile?" she asked tentatively.

"Oh, no. That's okay. I should probably get going."

"You're sure? Not even for a drink or bathroom or anything?"



Dan saw the hopeful look in her eyes. “No, really. I’m fine.” he answered.

Brittany was determined to get him inside so she flirted softly, “Surely I have something inside you might want before you go, Mr. McKnight.”

Dan’s groin jumped in response, but he didn’t take the bait. He simply shook his head.

“Not even your favorite ice cream?” she inquired.

“Ice cream?” He asked raising an interested brow.

“Yeah.” she whispered. Her hand slowly moved to his arm. The feeling of her finger tips grazing over his skin made him weak. He couldn’t deny how her touch affected him, especially after such a long absence. “I have all kinds of ice cream inside.”

“Vanilla and chocolate?” he inquired forgetting himself long enough to respond with his own line. “You know how I love to have them mixed.”

Brittany’s blood was rushing south at his deeper meaning of her heritage. “If you’re lucky I might even have a cherry for you to put on top.” she breathed as her fingers played a circular pattern across his forearm.

“Okay. Ice cream it is then.” he replied realizing himself and the position they were in.

Brittany noted the transition back into reservation and withdrew her hand, but he had given her enough to hold on to as he had momentarily flirted with her. Stepping inside they were greeted by Jen and Kim, who seemed anxious to leave as soon as they appeared.

As soon as they were gone, Dan joked, “Guess they had some urgent business to attend to.” Brittany laughed as they continued into the kitchen. Dan retrieved two bowls from the cabinet while Brittany got the ice cream and a popsicle for herself. “What? No ice cream for you?” Dan inquired seeing her open the popsicle wrapper.

She shook her head hopping up onto the counter next to him. Dan scooped his ice cream before returning it to the freezer. Leaning casually into the counter with his hip, he ate in silence as he looked at her.

Brittany felt like they had just started dating. The nerves and energy were almost too intense to address. Deciding to tease him a little further, she looked away from him, pretending to read a random piece of mail on the counter. Trying to act like it was an unconscious act, she slowly began to work the popsicle in and out of her mouth.

Dan watched her. She seemed unaware of her actions, but his mind raced with desires as he studied her mouth taking the popsicle all the way in before slowly sucking it as she pulled it out. Her tongue circled the tip several times before sliding it passed her lips to repeat the process.

Brittany knew she was having the desired effect on him. Dan knew if he made the first attempt at seducing her, she'd willing give herself over to his passion. His body still wanted her, but he knew he wouldn't be able to stay in her bed once he had finished with her, which would only damage the fragile relationship further. He'd leave her hurt and confused as to where they stood.

Quickly finishing his dessert, he rinsed his bowl and spoon putting them into the dishwasher. "I really should get going. It's late, and the girls are going to be up early."

Brittany just looked over him. His need was obvious. She knew he still wanted her physically, but it was apparent he wouldn't be easily swayed. Sliding off the counter she walked over to him. She extended her popsicle to him, which he took giving her a questioning gaze. She moved in closer, her full body brushing into him. Dan closed his eyes at the feel of her. He could feel her hands on his belt. "I'd rather have the real thing." She worked open his pants. "And I know you would too." she whispered kissing his neck.

Dan felt his primal need overtake him. She had set him so close to the edge that her touch sent him crashing over into a frenzy. Self-fulfillment had done nothing to satisfy his need for her.

Their fervor was too intense to sustain itself, and they found themselves lying semi-naked in an exhausted heap of clothing and melted popsicle half an hour later. Dan could feel Brittany's body quivering under his as they laid silently on the kitchen floor.

Suddenly the cries of a child interrupted the afterglow. As Brittany ran upstairs to tend to the child, Dan began to dress. He knew he had to get out of there. Part of him wanted to flee without seeing her, but Dan knew she deserved the truth from him.

While Brittany attended to Ana's diaper, she reveled in the release they had given each other. She hoped that this had made things right with him again. When she came downstairs, she saw him dressed hovering in the foyer, his hand already on the door knob. "Where are you going?" she asked in confusion.

Dan took a deep breath knowing this was going to cause a confrontation. "I have to go home." he stated.

"What? You're not staying here?"

"No. I'm not."

"I don't understand."

"Brittany, I'm sorry. Nothing's changed between us in my eyes. Your infidelity still plagues me. We shouldn't have done this. It was a mistake on my part, and I'm sorry if I lead you on by it."

"A mistake? You consider making love to me, your own wife, a mistake?" Brittany asked in anger.

“Brittany, please. Let’s not make this more difficult than it has to be.”

“Difficult? It is difficult! You think it’s been easy for me to deal with your absence?”

“That’s not my fault. You’re the one who decided to be unfaithful.”

“And you won’t let me forget it, will you? You know what, Daniel? Peyton might’ve called me a whore, but you’re treating me like one! I give myself to you in an act of repentance, and you’re throwing me away just like every other woman you’ve ever been with! I thought I was different!”

“So did I.” Dan stated.

Brittany took a moment to collect herself. “I think you should go, and I think you should think about what you might want from me in the future! If all you want is me on my back taking it from you out of guilt, I’m here to tell you it’s not going to happen! Never in my life have I been treated so poorly! You’ve made me feel used and cheap, and I’m not going to let you do it again! Now get out!” she yelled in tears.

The next morning Dan awoke to the sound of female laughter. Groggily he opened his eyes to find himself still in last night’s clothes on the couch in his father’s den. Beer bottles were scattered across the floor and coffee table from his binge when he returned from Brittany’s. He heard the soft giggle again. Fighting the pain shooting through his eye sockets at the introduction of light, he sat up enough to look over the back of the sofa. He saw his father in his pajamas in his wheelchair and Kelly in his lap. His father appeared to be busy ducking into Kelly’s neck between sips of coffee making her laugh. Dan moaned painfully as his stomach churned from last night’s beer.

Instantly David and Kelly noticed him. Kelly was up out of David’s lap as they both came to him. “Dan, we thought you had a date with Brittany last night.” David stated.

Kelly noticed the empty bottles before gazing sympathetically at Dan. “Did it go that poorly?” she softly inquired moving to sit next to him. Dan nodded. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Dan shrugged. “It started out okay, but then we got back to the house. One thing led to another, and we still have our physical chemistry. We just moved too quickly. Neither of us was emotionally ready for intimacy again. She wanted me to stay, and I just wanted to get out of there as fast as possible, because I knew it had been a mistake. Well, she got upset. We started to argue, and she threw me out. She was so angry with me. I think we’ve ruined our chance of getting back together.”

“Maybe not. Maybe all you need is time. Your father and I have been down the path of divorce, and it’s not a place you want to visit in haste. You have extremely young children together, and I see the deep love between you. Don’t give up so easily. You will regret it later. She’ll never be out of your life due to the kids, so you need to find an amiable solution at the very least. However, I would hope that the two of you wouldn’t let pride stand in the way of reconciliation.”

Dan just looked at her as he thought about her words and felt her caress to his thigh. Never in his life had he had motherly affection directed at him, and her simple caring was almost overwhelming. Lowering his head into his hands, he tried to hold back the tears that were stinging his bloodshot eyes. He felt her hand move to his shoulder blade.

“Why don’t you lie down in your room for awhile? I’ll bring you some tea and aspirin for your headache.” she suggested.

He nodded following her instructions. Twenty minutes later she came in to check on him. She sat on the bed and watched him take his aspirin with the tea. Leaning back onto one arm, Dan sighed heavily. “You know, if you ever decide to get rid of my old man, I’d be more than happy to take his place.” he joked trying to lighten the mood surrounding them.

Kelly laughed. “Well, I don’t think that’s going to happen. I plan on keeping him around for a long time.”

“You really love him, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, he’s one of the best men I know. He’s a loving man and father, and he deserves some happiness.”

“I know. He doesn’t really think of himself as a good father, but you, Joe, and Becca turned out fine. I think he did a good job under the circumstances.”

“So do I.” Dan affirmed. “It was a mother that was lacking.”

“Well, I know you’re too old for mothering, but I want you to know that I still care about you and your family very much.”

“I know you do. I can feel it. You’ve been more of a mother to my siblings and me than Laura ever was. You’re the mother I always wished I had as a child. You love and respect my father, and you accept us for who we are, flaws and all. You know, I’m glad that Laura never met any of my children. I know she would have hated them, because they were part black just like Brittany. I couldn’t fathom how anyone could hate a child for their skin color. They’re angels, but she would’ve been down right cruel for no other reason.”

Kelly nodded. “Your father had told me a lot about Laura. Most of it wasn’t good. She treated all of you with such disrespect. I don’t see how a mother could act that way with her own children. So, you prefer to date black women, and Joe is gay. I just don’t understand how either of those could be a problem for a parent.”

Dan cracked a small smile. Placing a hand on Kelly’s leg, he said, “I want you to know that I would enjoy having you for a step-mother if the opportunity ever presents itself. My children

love you and so do I.”

Kelly returned the smile before brushing back a lock of his hair. “You’re a sweet son, Daniel. I know you’re father is proud of the man you’ve become. I think someday, sooner than you may think, you might get your wish. Your father and I have talked about it, and I think we will marry in the near future. I’d enjoy being your step-mother and grandmother to your children, and you are right. They are angels. Why don’t you get some rest now? You’ll feel better after some sleep.”

Brittany spent most of the morning playing with the kids. Every time Dan entered her mind, she quickly forced her thoughts away before anger got the better of her. After lunch however, the girls went down for their naps, leaving her with more free time than she would’ve liked. Noticing Kim and Jen in the pool, she walked out onto the deck.

“Hey, Britt. How’s it going?” Jen greeted.

“Fine.”

“Where’s Dan this afternoon?”

“I don’t know, and I really don’t care.”

“Why? What happened? Things looked like they were going so well last night. We took off so soon, because it look like you two were going to explode in a sexual frenzy at any moment.”

“Yeah. You could call it an explosion all right.” she mumbled.

“What happened?” Jen asked in concern.

“I guess I asked for it. I began playing with him, trying to drive him closer to that edge. I guess I had hoped if we had sex, everything would be better. Well, it backfired. As soon as we were finished, he was putting his clothes on to leave! He made it very clear to me that he had no intension of staying the night with me, and I got upset! I’ve never felt so used by him! He treated me like a woman of the streets! What happened wasn’t making love, wasn’t even just sex! I practically begged for it, and what I got was not what I was expecting. He wasn’t the man that I love. He was very detached. Usually he’s so emotionally involved with me, but he just wanted to get laid. That’s all it was, a quick lay, and when he was finished he just brushed me aside like it meant nothing to him, like I meant nothing to him!”

Later that afternoon Dan decided to go over to see his children. When Brittany answered the door she just stared at him angrily. “What are you doing here?” she inquired abruptly.

“I came to see the girls.” he stated stepping onto the threshold.

She put a hand out to stop him. “I didn’t invite into my house.” she informed him.

“Your house? I bought this house, Brittany! I paid for it with sweat and blood! My name is on the mortgage! The only reason I let you stay here is because I want my children to have a place to lay their heads at night!” he yelled trying to step inside again, but she blocked him with her body and the door.

“Maybe you didn’t hear me the first time! I said I didn’t invite you in!”

Dan stepped back screaming, “Do you realize that you owe your lifestyle to me? You stay here for free! Even though I don’t live here, I continue to pay your bills! I pay for your schooling! You get to stay home and play mother instead of working! If I pulled all that out from under you, you wouldn’t have anything to stand on! You don’t want me to do that, do you?”

“You can threaten me all you want, Daniel! That doesn’t change the fact that I don’t want you in this house! This is my house now, and you’re not welcome in it! You want to see the girls, you make arrangements with Kim. I don’t wish to see or speak with you any more.”

“All right! You’ll be hearing from my attorney!” he yelled bounding down the steps to his car.

As soon as Brittany saw his car turn out of the driveway, she closed the door, placing her forehead against it. She closed her eyes and sighed as the tears began to flow. She knew they had pushed each other too far out of hurt and pride. She feared that Dan would take everything she had worked so hard for away in his anger.

As soon as Dan got onto the main road, he called Mike. After the initial greeting, he requested to see Mike immediately. When Dan arrived at Mike’s house, Melissa answered the door. “Well, I didn’t expect to see you here. He should’ve told me.”

“He said you had some urgent business with him. He’s in his office.” she said going back to the living room.

Dan made his way down the long corridor to Mike’s office. Mike was already sitting behind his desk when Dan stepped into the doorway. Closing the door behind him, Dan took a seat in the large leather chair in the corner.

“Dan, I’m afraid to ask what this important business is.” tentatively Mike stated.

“I want to file for divorce.” Dan stated purposefully.

Mike sighed rubbing his forehead. “Are you absolutely sure you want that?”

Dan paused for a moment before answering, “Yes, I am sure.”

“Well, I have to tell you that it is law in this state to have a waiting period before proceeding with a divorce. It gives a person time to change their mind.”

“Fine. Let the waiting period begin. The sooner it does, the sooner we can get on with it. In the

mean time, I also need a custody agreement.”

“What’s wrong with the way you are working it now?”

“She refused to let me see the kids today.”

“Oh, I beginning to see the whole picture now.”

“It’s not what you think, Mike. I’ve been dragging my feet on this, but after today, she made it clear she wanted nothing to do with me. I at least need a custody agreement, so I can see my girls.”

“Okay. I can do that for you, but may I make a personal observation? I think divorce would be a mistake.”

“Well, that’s why you’re acting as my attorney right now, not my friend.” Dan stated making it clear he was uninterested in Mike’s opinion.

“All right. If that’s how you really feel about it, I’ll stay out of it. Tell me what you want as far as custody.”

“I want half. I know Brittany and I can no longer have a relationship, but the girls still need their mother. They’re too young to be without her, but I want my fair share of time too. They need me just as much.”

Mike nodded. “I think that’s sensible of you, and I will see to it. From this point on, I will communicate your wishes to Brittany on your behalf. Please consider what you are doing carefully. You have to be positive about this divorce. Tomorrow I will let Brittany know of your intentions for divorce and custody. Okay?”

The following morning Brittany was on her way to school when the phone rang. Kim answered it for her as she kissed each child good bye for the day. “It’s Mike. He says he has to talk to you right away.”

Getting on the phone, Brittany stated, “Mike, hi. I’m on my way to school right now.”

“Brittany, I really need to speak with you. If you can’t talk right now, can you come by my office later?”

“Yeah, sure. I guess. I get out of class at 3:30. With traffic I don’t know when I’ll be there.”

“I’ll wait for you. If the receptionist is already gone, just come back to my office. I really have to speak to you today.”

“Is something wrong, Mike?”

“It depends on how you look at it I guess. I’ll see you this afternoon.”

Hanging up the phone, Brittany looked at Kim with concern.

“Everything okay?” Kim asked.

“I don’t think so. He wouldn’t tell me over the phone. I have to go by his office this afternoon. I hope Daniel didn’t do anything rash after our fight yesterday.”

Brittany hardly paid attention in her classes that day as she thought about her upcoming meeting with Mike. Even her lab partner, Colin, who could always make her laugh, didn’t seem funny. As they worked on their lab that day, Brittany continued to drift off into her own thoughts.

“Brittany, are you all right? You’re not yourself today.” he mentioned.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I just have a lot on my mind right now.”

“You want to talk about it?” She shrugged. “I’ll tell you what. Why don’t we finish this up and go to lunch? At least if you decide you want to talk, we won’t be around prying ears.” She gave him a nod in agreement.

Once they had gotten their lunch, Colin lead the way to a secluded corner of the cafeteria. Brittany was quiet at first as she just picked at her salad. “So, how are the kids?” Colin inquired, trying to open her up to talking.

Brittany gave her first genuine smile that day. “They’re wonderful. We just celebrated Victoria’s third birthday. The twins are good. Alexis is getting into everything while Ana is the prim and proper one. They’re complete opposites. It’s funny.”

“They sound like great kids. Maybe one day I’ll get to have my own.”

“You know, last time we had a long talk, you mentioned wanting to find a girlfriend. Have you succeeded yet?”

He shook his head. “No. I just don’t know how to talk to women. You know, I’m thirty. I’m a complete science freak. I don’t have one sociable bone in my body, and I’m not exactly ‘Hunk of the Month’ either. Women don’t give me a second glance.”

“Oh, Colin, you’re a great guy. Some women can be stupid and superficial. You wouldn’t want those types anyway.”

“Face it, Brittany. I’m not in high demand. I mean if you weren’t married, would you go out with me? I think not.”

Brittany looked at him for a moment. “Well, to be completely honest with you, I’d like to get rid of those glasses of yours, but I would go out with you.”



“No. You’re just saying that. Why would the most beautiful women I’ve ever met in my entire life go out with me? I’m not buff. My hair is starting to fall out, and I wear these awful glasses.”

Brittany blushed at his indirect complement. “Listen to me, Colin. Right now I’m married to the sexiest man I’ve ever known, but lately it’s become obvious that we are having marital problems. Looks don’t sustain a relationship. It’s what’s inside that counts. Inside he’s turned into a jerk, and I’m sure if you asked him, he’d say I’ve turned into worse. In fact I think he might be thinking divorce.”

“Oh, Brittany, I’m so sorry. He’s stupid if he leaves you. I’m sure you’re the best woman he’s ever met.”

“My point is this, Colin. Twenty years from now, he may or may not be that ‘Hunk of the Month’ as you say. There needs to be more. You have the more that women want. I have no doubt that you’ll find someone who will love you for who you are, and when you do, it’ll last the rest of your life.”

Colin gave her a shy smile. “That’s the nicest thing a woman’s ever said to me.” he mentioned.

Brittany placed her hand over his. “You’re a good man, Colin. Don’t give up on love.”

“Your husband is an idiot if he decides to leave you. You are so beautiful, but not only that, you are genuinely the sweetest woman I know.”

Brittany blushed. “And you said you couldn’t talk to women.” she teased.

“Well, talking to you is different. You’re unattainable, but you’re also my friend. I’d ever want to risk losing that.”

“I’m glad we’re friends, Colin.” she stated patting his hand before going back to her meal.

After classes that day, Brittany drove over to Mike’s office. The few minutes in the waiting area seemed like an eternity. Her insides were painfully twisted in anxiety. When Mike escorted her back to his office, he was silent until he had closed the door. Brittany took a seat as she watched him sit in his chair and shuffle files on his desk momentarily.

“Michael.” she softly stated.

He looked at her in obvious distress. “Brittany, there’s no easy way to say this. I wish there was. It grieves me to do this. I’m acting as Dan’s attorney when I tell you that he has asked for a divorce.”

Instantly Brittany was in tears as she whispered, “Dammit Daniel.”

Coming to her Mike held her for several minutes as she wept. “I’m so sorry, Brittany. There is

more. Are you able to continue?" When she nodded Mike moved to the edge of his desk. "Dan's also requested a custody agreement. You're going to need an attorney."

"You're the only attorney I know, Michael. Is there anyway you can do this for me?"

"Well, that could be a potential conflict of interest. It depends on how amiable you two are going to be."

"Has he made any demands?"

"Only concerning the children. He wants joint custody, which is fair and reasonable in this case."

"Okay. If I agree to that, will you do it?"

"Brittany, I'm going to give you some advice as a friend. I think divorce is a secondary issue for Dan. The girls are the real issue at hand. If you agree to joint custody, I can draw that up for you, and you two can sign it. As far as the divorce is concerned, I would tell you to contest it. Dan's hurt and angry, and he's looking for a quick solution. By contesting it, you delay the process, and give him more time to think about what he's doing. As I said though, you need your own attorney if you decide to do that, because that would be a conflict of interest."

Brittany sat for a few moments in silence before saying, "I don't want to contest it, Michael. If he really wants this, then I'll let it happen. I don't want it, but I won't try to stop it."

"Are you sure?" he inquired with concern. Brittany nodded. "Very well. Let me tell you how this will play out over the next few months then."

By the time Brittany left Mike's office, she was completely deflated. All her hope of reconciliation with the man she loved was gone.

When she arrived home, Kim had the girls sitting at the table for dinner. "What's wrong? Things go poorly at Mike's?" Kim asked seeing Brittany's swollen eyes.

"Daniel's asked for a divorce."

"Oh no. I'm so sorry." Kim replied coming to her. The two women embraced in a long silence. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. Michael said it could take six months to a year depending on how amicable we are on the terms."

"This has just gone too far. I can't believe one kiss could ruin a marriage like yours. How could he do this?"

"I don't know." Brittany mumbled taking a seat at the table. Looking at the twins, she saw Daniel smiling back at her. Putting a smile on her face for her children, she asked, "How was

your day, girls?”

Several weeks passed without a word from Dan. Mike had made a temporary custody agreement between them outlining visitation times for Dan, but Kim always saw to the transference of the children. Brittany started her last semester of classes, and Dan went back to teaching.

One morning Brittany awoke earlier than usual for classes. As it often was, her first thoughts of the day focused on Dan. She thought about the last night they had shared, the dancing, the tension, the frenzied sex. It had been six weeks ago, but the pain of him walking out was still fresh. As she reminisced a disconcerting thought occurred to her that her cycle was off. In fact she had skipped a whole month, not noticing due to the other stresses around her.

Slipping out of bed, she went to the bathroom. Going to the cabinet under her sink, she just stared at the home pregnancy test tucked away in the corner. She took it out and checked the date on the box, rendering it still valid. She thought for a few moments about taking it, fearing the possibilities. Slowly she took it from the packaging, knowing she didn't have a choice. She quickly took it, but to wait to see the results until after showering. Armed with her answer, she headed downstairs to the kitchen. She fixed herself a bowl of cereal and juice all the while staring at the spot in which she and her now estranged husband had laid together for the last time. Since Kim would pick the girls up from Dan's that morning and bring them home, it allowed Brittany leisure time to dress and prepare for classes.

Brittany was just about to leave for the day when Kim arrived home with the kids. After hugs and kisses for all the girls, Brittany looked at Kim. “Are you all right?” Kim asked seeing Brittany's tired eyes. Brittany shook her head. “What's wrong outside of the usual?”

“I'm pregnant.” she stated softly.

“Oh no. Does Dan know?”

“No, and you're not going to tell him either. This is just between us for now. Promise me that.”

“You know I'd do anything for you, Brittany. I'll take it to my grave if you want.”

“Thank you.”

“Do you know what are you going to do about it?”

“I'm going to have it obviously, but I just don't know how involved I want Daniel to be.”

Kim nodded. “Well, go to school. I'll see you tonight, and don't worry. I won't tell anyone.”

Brittany was preoccupied during her first class as she thought about what to tell Dan, if anything. Going to her lab, she was greeted by a smiling Colin. “Hey, Brittany. I brought us some coffee. You look like you could use it.” he mentioned extending it to her.

“Thanks, Colin, but I can’t.” she answered.

He frowned at her. “Why not? Something wrong?”

“I’m pregnant again. Thanks anyway. It was sweet of you.”

“Uh oh. Does the soon to be ex know about this?”

“No, he doesn’t.”

“Is it his?”

“Yes, it is his.”

“What are you going to tell him?”

“I haven’t decided yet. I don’t think this will change things. I guess it’ll be another child to fight over.”

Curving an arm around her shoulders, he answered, “I’m sorry that he’s a jerk. You deserve better.”

Returning his hug she patted his chest lightly. “Thanks.” she whispered.

“Anytime. You know, if you ever need anything, just let me know. I will help you in any way that I can.”

“Thanks, Colin. I appreciate it, and who knows? I might just take you up on that sometime.”

“Please do.” he replied. As they started their lab, he mentioned, “I just wanted you to know that I finally broke down and took your advice.”

“What advice was that?” she asked in bewilderment.

He took off his lab safety glasses and smiled at her. “Contacts.” he stated. “What do you think? Do I look any more handsome?” playfully he asked.

She smiled at him. “Very nice and very handsome.”

“Now if I could just regrow some hair, I’d be a regular Casanova.” he joked.

Brittany laughed. “Does your hair really matter that much to you?”

“Brittany, all men care about their hair whether they admit it or not.”

“Well, it does look a little thicker on top. What have you done to it?”

“I’ll never tell my secret. It really looks thicker? I could kiss you for that.” Smiling Brittany leaned up to his cheek kissing it lightly. Colin flushed deeply. “What did I do to deserve that?”

“That was for being my friend and a good man. You always find a way to make me smile, Colin. You’ll find Ms. Right, and she’ll be a lucky woman.”

Colin ducked his head shyly. “God, you’re a wonderful woman. Dan has lost a precious gift.”

“Thanks for thinking so.” she mumbled turning her attention back to their lab.

A few minutes passed before Colin inquired, “Brittany, I was wondering if I could ask you something.” She nodded as she read over their lab instructions. “Would you like to go out with me Friday night?” timidly he asked.

Smiling at him she joked, “Are you asking me on a date?”

“Well, um...” he fumbled looking down at the table.

Realizing he was nervous, Brittany seriously asked, “Colin, are you asking me out?”

“Sort of.” he responded. “Listen, I know you’re still technically married, and I would never really ask out a married woman, but I was just thinking that we don’t spend any time together outside of school. I thought maybe you were free, but with your kids and all you’re probably not. Forget it. Forget I brought it up.” he stammered turning his attention to their lab equipment.

“Colin, may I answer your question, or do you really want me to forget you asked?”

“You can answer it if you want.” he mumbled.

“Well, it just so happens that Daniel has the girls on Friday night, so I am available. I would like to go out with you. Why are you so nervous about asking? Did you think I would say no?”

Colin shrugged. “Brittany, I know that you and I are only friends and that’s all we’ll ever be, but that doesn’t change the fact that you are the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever laid my eyes upon. Even the thought of going out in public with you makes me nervous.”

“Oh, Colin. Aren’t you the charmer? You don’t need to be nervous. What did you have in mind for Friday?”

“Well, my parents have tickets to the symphony, and they offered them to me since they can’t go. We could go, or we could do something else. It’s up to you. Whatever you want to do is fine.”

“No. That sounds like fun.”

“Great. Let’s go to dinner too.”

“All right. Let me give you directions to my house. What time will you pick me up?”

When Brittany arrived home, Kim was playing with the girls in the den. “How was your day, Britt? You seem to be in a little better mood.”

“Yeah. You’d be amazed to know being asked out has actually lifted my spirits.”

“Someone asked you out? What’s his name? What’s he like?”

“He’s just a friend of mine from school. He name is Colin, and he’s so sweet. He always knows exactly what to say to make me feel good about myself.” Brittany answered with a smile.

“You interested?”

“Only as a friend, but he’s still good for my self-esteem. Not a day passes that he doesn’t tell me how wonderful I am.”

“Sounds like he’s interested in you.”

“No. He knows we’re only going to be friends.”

“So, when’s this hot date?”

“Friday.”

“This Friday?”

“Yeah. Why? Is there a problem? Daniel has the girls.”

“No. There’s no problem. It’s just that Dan scheduled to come by the house to pack up some of his stuff while he’s picking up the girls. Maybe I should stay late to supervise, just in case.”

“Thanks. I appreciate it. I’m going to try to stay out of his way as much as possible.”

“Do you think he’ll be upset if he sees another man here?”

“What’s it matter? He gave up his claim on me. He has no right to complain.”

### **Continued Part 9**

# ~ Triumphant Love ~

by Alex Tryst

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**Disclaimer:** This is a story like none other posted on this site, so please thoroughly read this disclaimer before beginning. This book contains original characters and is about one couple's struggle with their demons as they venture through their relationship. As with real life, there are gay, lesbian, and straight people even though the focus is primarily on the heterosexual couple. Derogatory, racist, and homophobic language is used. Additionally, sensitive subjects matters are addressed such as but not limited to: teen pregnancy, abortion, racism, rape, child abuse (verbal, physical, and sexual), hate crimes, sexual dysfunction, infidelity, and anger management problems. Please be aware that this story is not for everyone and may not be appropriate for all readers. If you are under age 18, you probably should not be reading this material. I tried to write of these subjects with delicacy and discretion, but it may still be offensive to some, so please understand what you are becoming involved in as you begin to read. As always constructive criticism and comments are welcome at alextryst@hotmail.com.

**Dedication:** To my wife, you are my fondest wish, and to the woman that was the inspiration for this story... I hope I captured your essence as a strong and enduring spirit in the character of the lovely Brittany Saxton.

Now on with the show...

## Part 9

Late Friday afternoon Dan came by to pick up more of his things. When he knocked on the door, Kim answered. "Hey. Thought you'd be off by now." he mentioned.

"No. Not today. Brittany needed me to stay a little longer since she's busy."

Brittany was upstairs contemplating her outfit when she heard Dan come into the house. She wondered how long he'd be, hoping he'd be gone by the time Colin arrived. Holding up two dresses to herself, she appraised them in the full length mirror. Finally she decided on an elegant, full length, black flowing dress that bared her arms. Taking a light button up black sweater out of the dresser, she laid the outfit on the bed for final approval.

Dan cleared out his favorite tools from the garage before heading to the study for his beloved books. He wondered where Brittany was and what she was doing. He figured she would at least be home when he arrived.

Meanwhile Brittany was upstairs showering for a second time that day. She had just finished drying her hair when she heard a knock on the closed bedroom door. Slipping into her robe, she opened it to see Dan. Without even bothering to look at her, he stated firmly, "I need to get the rest of my clothes."

“Fine.” she snipped going back to her dressing area.

Coming into the room, Dan dropped his empty boxes on the bed next to her outfit. He studied it a moment before looking over at her. She was focused intently on applying her make-up in an obvious attempt to ignore him.

Dan wondered what she was doing that required such a dress, but didn’t ask, instead busied himself with his own clothes. Once he’d finished one box, he took it out to the car. Brittany took the opportunity of his absence to slip into her evening attire. When he returned he tried to subtly watch her as she continued her primping. Silence prevailed as Brittany did her hair, and Dan packed. Suddenly Kim’s voice could be heard from the bottom of the staircase. Brittany looked over herself once more knowing Colin was waiting on her. Being satisfied with her appearance, she grabbed her sweater and purse off the bed without a word to Dan.

Coming downstairs Brittany saw Colin in a dark grey suit standing in the foyer, holding a bouquet of flowers. “Wow. You look amazing.” he stated his eyes growing wide in appreciation.

“Thank you. You look dapper this evening.”

“Well...” he mumbled shyly. A quiet moment passed before he recovered.

“Here. These are for you. I’m sure men give you flowers all the time, but...”

“No. Actually I haven’t gotten flowers in a very long time. They’re beautiful. Thank you.” Just then Dan came down the stairs with a box in hand, slowing to a stop when he saw Colin and the flowers Brittany was holding. “Daniel, this is Colin. Colin, this is my-this is Daniel.” Brittany stated nervously. Stoically Dan extended his hand as he looked at the older, slighter built man. Colin shook it tentatively. Not giving them a chance to speak, Brittany pushed Colin toward the den saying, “I want you to meet my girls before we go.”

“Our girls.” Dan corrected heading out the front door.

As soon as Dan was outside, Colin mentioned, “You didn’t tell me he’d be here.”

“Don’t worry about it. He’s just packing some of his stuff. We’ll just say hi to the girls and go.” They spent a few minutes with the children before hearing Dan go back upstairs.

Dan watched from the bedroom window as Colin escorted Brittany out to the car. He saw Colin open her door before getting in himself. Shaking off the discomfort of seeing her with someone else, Dan went back to his task. Once he’d finished loading his things, he came back inside for the girls.

“All right, little ladies. It’s time to go to Daddy’s house.” he said quietly.

“Are you all right?” Kim asked.



“It’s not really my business any more.” he mumbled.

“Well, if it makes you feel any better, Brittany says they’re just friends.”

“It just surprised me.” he said. “He’s hardly what I would consider Brittany’s type. What do you know about him?”

“Not much. Name’s Colin. He’s thirty and goes to school with Britt. That’s about it.”

“Not exactly a stud, is he?” Dan commented.

“She’s not looking for a stud. She’s looking for a kind man. Apparently Colin qualifies.”

Dan shook his head. “I just can’t believe that we aren’t even divorced yet, and she’s dating already. I’m not even doing that.”

“Dan, do you ever second guess your decision for the divorce?”

“No. Why do you ask?”

“Just wondering. There’s really nothing that would bring you back?”

“Not that I can think of.”

“Do you still love her?”

“Kim, I’ve loved Brittany for the past six years of my life. It’s only been a few months since our separation. Of course I still love her. She’s the mother of my children. She still holds a special place in my heart, always will. It does hurt to see her with someone else.”

“Sounds like you’re not ready for this divorce to go through.”

“Maybe not, but obviously she is. I mean this is the second man I’ve seen her with. It’s the best for everyone involved.”

Dinner that night between Brittany and Colin was casual and relaxed. Once the symphony was over, Colin drove Brittany home. As Brittany unlocked the door her mind drifted back to the last date she had, dancing and dinner with Dan.

“Well, would you like to come in?” she inquired turning toward him.

“If you’re not tired. I know you had an early class today.”

“I’m fine. Come on in.” she replied leading him into the house. Turning on the lights as she walked into the kitchen, she inquired, “Would you like a drink or something to eat?”

“A drink would be great. Do you have any coffee?”

“Coffee this late at night? You’ll never sleep.”

Colin shrugged. “I won’t sleep tonight anyway. I usually study all night.”

“Wow. You’re more dedicated than I am. Why don’t you take a break tonight, though? I have the house to myself for the first time in a very long time. No children to interrupt. Why don’t you stay here for awhile and keep me company? Let’s watch a movie or something.”

“Yeah. Sure. If you’d like, I’m up for that.” he agreed.

“Great. Why don’t you make yourself comfortable? I want to change into other clothes.” Brittany headed up to her bedroom. Going into the closet, she slipped off her dress as she contemplated what she should wear. As she looked through her wardrobe, she thought about the man downstairs. It had become obvious to her over the course of the evening that even though he accepted their friendship, his feelings toward her ran deeper. She slid into a pair of dark gray sweat pants before looking at her t-shirts. She noticed Dan had left one of his old Cowboys work out jerseys hanging in the closet. Brittany had often used it for herself as a nightshirt or casual lounging attire. Pulling that on as well, she went back to the den where Colin was looking at the only book on the coffee table, coincidentally Dan’s first book of poetry.

Colin looked up from his reading. Brittany noted the way his eyes lingered over her midriff. She knew the shirt she was wearing bared her stomach when she moved in certain ways. “I didn’t know Dan was a poet. I never would’ve guess it.” he stated. “It’s obvious a lot of his pieces are about you and the girls. He’s an incredible writer.”

“Yes, he is.” she answered going into the kitchen. Pouring a cup of coffee for Colin, she got herself a glass of milk. Coming back to the den, she set the drinks on the coffee table before collapsing on the middle of the couch. Colin shifted further into the corner in which he was already leaning. “Why don’t you pick a movie? They’re over in the cabinet.” Brittany suggested.

When they had settled into the movie, Brittany turned out the lights and laid across the couch, letting her feet land in Colin’s lap. He stirred looking at them before gazing in her eyes. “You don’t mind, do you?” she asked knowing full well the effect she was having on him. He shook his head. She watched him tentatively place his hands over them before turning back to the film. Brittany watched him for a few minutes. It was obvious that he was failing to relax. She knew she was adding to his discomfort, but it had been such a long time since she’d seen a man react to her. She needed to feel wanted, and Colin was making it clear by his actions that he did want her.

After a few more minutes, Brittany sat up and moved closer so her body brushed into his. She slid an arm across the top of the couch as she leaned into his ear. “You know, you could get more comfortable. Take off your tie and jacket.” she mentioned as her fingers went to the knot in his tie. She loosened it before going back for the top button of his shirt. She felt his breath catch, but

he said nothing. Brittany cupped the side of his face, pulling it around so their eyes could meet. "Colin, do you want to kiss me?" she whispered leaning in closer.

"Yes." he breathed.

"Then why don't you?"

Colin took a deep breath before replying, "Because you're a married woman, maybe to a jerk that you're in the process of divorcing, but you're still married."

"What if I asked you to, would you?" she inquired taking his hand and guiding it to her bare hip. He closed his eyes moaning softly. Before she could contemplate the repercussions, she pressed her lips to his softly. He never pulled away, so she pressed harder until she felt him become active. After a moment he pulled away.

"Oh, Brittany, as much as I want to continue, I'm not sure it's a good idea." he said.

"Why not?"

"Don't get me wrong. I'd love to know you this way, but I want to be sure it's really me you want, not just a substitute for your husband." he stated taking her hand.

Brittany dropped her head to his shoulder. "I'm sorry, Colin. I shouldn't have done that."

"It's okay. I understand."

"Can you forgive me for treating you like this?"

"I didn't say I didn't like it." he joked. "Lord knows, you are an amazing woman, beautiful, intelligent, and you kissed me. This goes down as the best date of my life." he stated with a smile caressing her cheek. She smiled back at him as tears began to trickle out of her eyes. He wiped them away gently before leaning to kiss her forehead. "It's going to be all right. This has to be difficult for you. I know you still love him, and you're pregnant with his child. I can't even imagine how a man could possibly leave a woman like you."

"I miss him, Colin. I miss the feel of him, his presence. I miss watching him with the girls. I miss waking in the middle of the night and feeling his arms around me. He was such a sweet, gentle man, but then it all changed. Now he's just cold to me."

"May I ask what happened between you two?"

Brittany gave Colin the brief version of the incident with Peyton. "Daniel just didn't believe it was an accident. I guess it wasn't, but it wasn't intentional either. It just sort of happened, and to this day I feel so guilty. I didn't fight him, but I didn't encourage him either."

"That's what this divorce is about?" Colin asked in disbelief.

“Well, there’s more. After it happened Daniel moved out. He hadn’t filed for divorce, and on Victoria’s birthday he asked me out. Well, I thought it was a step towards reconciliation. We went out and had a wonderful time. He was actually flirting with me, which I took as a good sign. We came back to the house, and one thing lead to another. We ended up having sex, and to me it was make up sex, but he saw it differently. I got angry when he got up to leave. I kicked him out and told him I never wanted to see him again. The next day he came by, not to apologize, but to see the girls. I lost it and refused to let him see the kids. We fought and as soon as he left, I knew we had pushed each other too far. The next day I got the call from the attorney about the divorce.”

“And you got pregnant from that night. He doesn’t deserve you, Brittany. You’re too good for him.”

“Daniel and I have overcome so much together. We’ve helped each other become better people. I mean each of us have had emotional baggage we brought into the relationship. Like for me, I was severely emotionally scarred by being raped when I was sixteen. Daniel was the first person I ever told, and he helped me through it. He was gentle and attentive to my need to move slowly in our relationship. Intimacy beyond kissing was extremely difficult for me when we first began dating, and he always remembered that. It’s because of him that I have a normal, healthy sex life. I’m not afraid any more. He also had a lot of stuff to deal with, his anger, especially toward his mother. He confided things in me about his childhood that he’d never told anyone else, and we got him help too. There was the unexpected pregnancy with Victoria when we were only engaged. We never expected the twins either. Then there was the time I thought he had cheated on me. We’ve had problems, but we’ve always managed to get through them. I don’t see why he’s decided to give up on me. I never gave up on him.” she said as her crying began again.

Colin just held her as they finished the movie in silence. Colin left after 2:00 in the morning. As Brittany held him, he said, “Thank you for such a wonderful night, Brittany. You are incredible.”

“Thanks, Colin. I had a great time too, and thanks for putting up with me. I’m sorry I acted inappropriately.”

He gave a small laugh. “I’m not. That’s the most action I’ve gotten all year and it to be with such a hottie. I’m a very lucky man.” he teased.

Brittany laughed at his attempt at humor. “Thanks for listening and understanding.”

“Anytime. I’ll see you at school on Monday. Take care of yourself, and call me if you need anything.” She nodded. Lifting her chin with his fingertips, he inquired, “May I?” Again she nodded. Colin leaned down and kissed her lips gently. “That’s one for the memories.” he whispered. “Good night, Brittany.”

“Good night. Drive safely.”

Saturday morning Brittany slept in before leisurely getting dressed. She couldn’t help but notice

the stillness of the house. Under the custody agreement Dan had the girls three days a weeks, usually Friday afternoon through Monday noon when he had class. Brittany was uncomfortable in the quietness. It only served as a reminder of how wrong her life had gone over the past few months.

Calling up Melissa to see if she was free, Brittany made plans with her for an afternoon shopping trip. When Brittany arrived at Melissa and Jen's house, Kim answered the door.

"Hey, stranger. How was your date last night?" Kim inquired.

"Fine. It was nice to have a man around, even though we're only friends."

"How did Dan take seeing Colin?"

"Okay. He was polite, which surprised me." Kim just nodded. "So, what are you and Jen doing today? You up to shopping with Melissa and me?"

"You can count me out. I hate shopping, but Jen might be interested. She's in the kitchen."

Following Kim into the kitchen, Brittany found Jen and Melissa at the table. "Hey there. Kim was just telling us about your new beau." Jen stated.

Brittany rolled her eyes. "For the last time, we're only friends. I'm only interested in one man, and it's the man I'm still married to, at least for now." firmly she stated.

"Wow. I think that's the first time you've admitted it since the divorce started."

"Well, after last night I came to realize that. I had a wonderful, perfect gentleman in my home last night who adores me, and all I could think about was Daniel. I mean we have three children together and another on the way. It would be so much better if we could work things out."

"You're pregnant again?" Jen asked in concern. Brittany nodded.

"How does Dan feel about this?" asked Melissa, always the one to want to know Dan's thoughts.

"He doesn't know, and I don't want any of you telling him. It would only add stress to our relationship. He may want to come back if he knows, but I wouldn't want him to come home if it's only for the kids. If he no longer wants me, then I don't want him hanging around being miserable and making me miserable. That wouldn't be good for either of us or the girls."

"All right. We won't tell him. Eventually he'll have to know, though." Jen mentioned.

"I know, but now is not the time."

Melissa and Brittany spent most of the afternoon at the mall shopping and talking about Mike. "So, how are things going with Michael?" Brittany inquired when they stopped for a beverage.

“Oh, I couldn’t be happier. I’m so glad we managed to work things out.”

“You seem happy. I’m glad you two found each other again. He’s a great guy.”

“Yes, he is. I’ll tell you that he’s having a hard time with you and Dan breaking up. He really adores you, and he’s made it clear to me that he thinks Dan is a fool for letting his pride ruin your marriage.”

“Well, I think I’m just as guilty of that. You don’t even know how badly I want to ask him to come home, but I just couldn’t handle the rejection. I’ve never experienced pain the way I experienced it as his hands. His rebuff is more that I can bear.”

“Do you think he really wants this divorce?”

“I don’t know. I can’t read him any more. He’s so emotionally void with me. It’s like talking to a wall, and I can’t make a dent in that armor of his. If he misses me, I’d never know by the way he acted. Enough about my miseries, though. Tell me more about Michael. Do you think he’s the one?”

Melissa smiled. “Yeah, I think he is.”

“Have you talked about it at all?”

“A little. Being that he’s so much older, we do have some different goals. I want kids, and he’s already got two adult children. He’s looking toward retirement at fifty-five. I’ll only be forty then. I think we’ll definitely work it out, probably have children as soon as possible.”

“That’s great that you’ve found the right person. Speaking of which, what do you think about Jen and Kim?”

“Well, I was really shocked, but Jen is happier than I’ve ever seen her.”

“I know. It was a surprise for me too. I mean I’ve known her since my freshman year of college. She never showed that inclination. I mean she slept with more men than I can ever count, even Daniel. You’re right, though. She is happy. Kim is a wonderful person, someone I truly adore, so I’m happy for both of them. They compliment each other.”

“Oh, I forgot to tell you, but maybe you already know. Michael and I had dinner with David and Kelly last night. They’re getting married in January.”

“Are you serious? Daniel didn’t tell me about that. Oh, I at least have to call and congratulate them. David deserves some happiness after his first wife. I love Kelly. She’s good for him. Did they talk about wedding plans at all?”

“A little. It’s going to be at home with only the families. I’m surprised you weren’t told about it.”

“Well, I’m not exactly in the McKnight family loop any more.”

“True, but David and Kelly had only complimentary things to say about you. The divorce came up in conversation. David’s adamant about his feelings. He thinks it’s a mistake.”

“Funny how everyone has an opinion. I’m not the one that asked for it. I’m just not trying too hard to stop it. I mean if it’s what’s going to make Daniel the happiest, then I’ll give him the divorce. I love him enough to let him be happy, even if it means without me. It hurts like hell, but I love him enough to let him go if that’s what he wants.”

“What do your parents think about all this? Have you told them about being pregnant?”

“No, I haven’t told them. I don’t want to upset my father further right now. He’s so angry at Daniel for hurting me, and my mother is upset. She knows how I still feel about him.”

“You know, sometimes I wish I could just beat some sense into that man. He can be so hard-headed at times. He’s throwing away his happiness. God, I just want to hit him.”

“Yeah, well, you have to get in line behind my father, and when he’s through there might not be much left of Daniel.”

On Sunday morning Brittany called David’s house, but a female answered. “Kelly?” Brittany questioned.

“Yes.”

“Hi, this is Brittany. How are you?”

“Oh hi, dear. How are you? How are the kids?”

“The girls are great. Listen, I just heard from Melissa that you and David are engaged. I just wanted to congratulate you both. I think it’s wonderful.”

“Well, aren’t you the sweet daughter-in-law. Thank you.”

“Melissa said it was going to be a small affair, only family, but I was wondering if I could help you with anything. I mean January is only three months away, so there’s not much time.”

“Oh, that’s a very generous offer, Brittany, and we appreciate it, but we have everything under control. There is one thing we wanted to ask of you, though. I thought David might do it, but since you’re already on the phone, I might as well be the one to ask.”

“Ask away. Whatever you need, Kelly, I’ll be happy to help. You just name it.”

“Well, David and I have been talking a lot about what has been occurring with you and Daniel.

David has made it clear that he definitely wants you to come to the ceremony. Divorced or not, you are the mother of his grandchildren, and you hold a special place in his heart. Regardless of Daniel, we want you here.”

“Kelly, David holds a special place with me too. I would love to come.”

“Fabulous. We want you to bring someone with you if you’d like. I mean Joseph and Becca are bringing their boyfriends and my children are bringing their spouses. If there’s someone in your life, we want you to bring him.”

“Well, thank you. That’s very kind. There’s no one in my life, but I’ll think about bringing a date. Give David my best wishes and congratulations, will you?”

“Of course, dear. We look forward to seeing you.”

## .Chapter 10

The day of David and Kelly’s wedding was nerve-wracking for Brittany. The three girls were being difficult to dress that day, and lately Brittany was having problems with her pregnancy. When Colin arrived, Brittany already looked exhausted.

“Can I do anything to help you, Brittany?” he asked with concern embracing her.

“No. I’m just not feeling well, and the girls are trying my patience today. Alexis refuses to cooperate with getting dressed.”

“Would you like me to try?”

“No. That’s all right. She just doesn’t want to mind. She’s her father’s daughter to say the least when it comes to stubbornness and temper.”

When the five of them arrived at David’s, Joe was the first to greet them. “Brittany, good to see you.” he said leaning to kiss her as he accepted hugs from his nieces.

“Joseph, always good to see you. I want you to meet Colin.”

As they shook hands, Joe stated, “I’m that good for nothing’s brother. I’m at least glad someone is taking care of Brittany. Maybe I should’ve swept you up when I had the chance.”

Brittany and Joe both laughed. “Well, you were the first McKnight I was interested in.” she teased.

“First one you kissed too.” he joked. “Well, come on. Let me introduce you to Kelly’s children.”

It was obvious to Brittany that Dan was trying to avoid her that day. He had made no attempt to speak to her, but thankfully everyone else made it a point to make her feel included. As the day



wore on, she kept feeling worse, but she was determined to stay as long as possible. Disappearing into David's study, she sat heavily in one of his reading chairs and closed her eyes. Only a brief moment passed before she heard the door open.

"Brittany, are you all right?" Colin asked in concern as he came and knelt by her.

"I'll be okay. I'm just not feeling well."

"You need anything? How about a glass of water?" She nodded.

Dan was in the kitchen alone when Colin came in. Ignoring him Colin proceeded to get Brittany's drink until Dan slid over to him. "So, it looks like you made quick work out of Brittany," he mentioned.

"I mean she's four, maybe five months pregnant. You work fast. After all, the divorce isn't even final. I'm surprised Brittany was that easy, but maybe she's changing her ways."

Colin shot him an angry glare. "You know, Dan, you are such an asshole! I don't know why that woman loves you as much as she does! You decide to divorce her when she's pregnant with your child! You are the most despicable human being I've ever met!" he yelled.

"You are damn lucky this is my father's wedding! Otherwise I'd throw you through that window for that lie! That can't possibly be my child! If it were, she would've told me! Besides, we've been separated since July!"

"Not so separated that you couldn't use her for your own pleasure one last time! That was the ultimate blow to that woman's self-esteem! Having her own husband telling her that making love to her was a mistake! Do you think maybe she didn't tell you because you made it clear how you felt about the act that conceived that child? You're such a jerk, Dan, and I wish she didn't want you back! She deserves better!"

Dan grabbed Colin by the collar of his shirt and slammed him against the refrigerator, knocking the glass out of Colin's hands. Rage was consuming him as he glowered at Colin, trying to intimidate him, but Colin stood firm.

Before Dan could take further action, Joe stepped into the kitchen. "Dan, is there a problem?" his brother sternly inquired.

Dan let Colin go and just stared at him for a moment before replying, "No. Everything's fine."

Both brothers watched Colin get another glass of water and depart before Joe turned to Dan. "You look shaken. Are you all right?"

"Yeah, I'll be okay. Colin and I just got into a disagreement. He said some things to me that shocked me."

“Like what?”

“Like Brittany wants me back, and that baby she’s carrying is mine.”

“No way. I thought it was his.” Joe stated in surprise.

“So did I, but he says it’s mine. I can’t believe she never told me. Why didn’t she?”

“Would it have mattered?” Joe pointedly asked. Dan just stared at him contemplatively.

Brittany still had her eyes closed when Colin returned. “I heard yelling.” she mentioned.

“Yeah. Dan and I were just talking, and he said some not so nice things. He thinks the baby is mine.”

“What did you tell him?”

“The truth. I got upset, and I let him have it. I just went off on him. I’m sorry. I know you didn’t want him to know just yet.”

“It’s okay. He would’ve have to have been told eventually. Thank you for sticking up for me.”

“Here. Try to drink some water. Are you sure you don’t want me to take you home?”

“Just give me a few minutes. If I don’t start feeling better, you can take me. I just don’t want to leave yet.”

“All right. I’m going to go thank Joe for saving me from Dan’s wrath. I’ll come check on you in a little bit.”

A little while later Dan was trying to find Brittany for a chat when he found her asleep in his father’s library. Hovering in the doorway he just watched her for a moment before deciding to cover her with a near by throw. Taking care to position it just right to cover her body and feet, Dan knelt beside the chair and looked at her. Some of her blonde hair had fallen into her face, so Dan gently tucked it behind her ear. Suddenly he heard movement at the door and turned to see his new step-mother standing there overlooking the situation. Dan stood and went to her, closing the door behind him.

“She doesn’t look well, Daniel.”

“I know. I guess this pregnancy is taking a toll on her. I just wish I had known about it. I would’ve offered to help out more.”

“Why do you think she kept it from you?”

Dan shrugged. “Maybe Colin’s right. It might be because I was such a jerk.”

“You were upset and confused, and you said things you didn’t mean. Sometimes that happens. You’re not a jerk, Daniel.”

“Well, he is right that she deserves more.”

Kelly nodded. “Daniel, you still love her. I saw it just now in your tenderness, so you can’t deny it. Why don’t you try to reconcile?”

“Colin says she wants me back, but what if she doesn’t?”

“Talk to her. That’s the only way for you to find out. Don’t let love slip away from you, Daniel. It’s right here in front of you. All you have to do is take the initiative.”

Curving an arm around her shoulders, Dan smiled down at her. “I knew I’d enjoy having you for a step-mother.”

The following morning Dan called Mike at his office early. “What can I do for you, Dan?” Mike inquired.

“Um, Mike, I’m not really sure how common of a request this is, but I want you to stall on the divorce.”

“That’s not a problem. I can stop it with Brittany’s permission.”

“No. I didn’t say stop. I just said stall.”

“All right. If that’s what you want, I think I can manage that. May I ask why?”

“Did you know Brittany was pregnant?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? Did you know it was mine?”

“Dan, I didn’t ask who it belonged to, and she didn’t tell me. It was quite obvious that she didn’t want to discuss it with me. It’s really yours? How did you find out?”

“She brought her boyfriend to my dad’s wedding yesterday. He told me. I don’t think he meant to, but once it was out there, he didn’t deny it.”

“Do you mean Colin?”

“Yeah, that’s his name. You know him?”

“We’ve met. So, is that why you’re asking me to stall? Are you changing your mind about the

divorce because of the baby?”

“No, not necessarily. I just want to talk to her about this and see where we stand.”

“All right. Well, I will tell Brittany you’ve slowed the process.”

“No. Don’t tell her anything. I don’t want her to know. If she asks about it, just make something up. Tell her you’re working on it or something.”

“Dan, she’s my client. I can’t lie to her. If she asks, I have to tell her the truth, but she never asks. I don’t think she really wants to know where it stands.”

“Where does it stand anyway?”

“Honestly, it could be wrapped up by mid-February. Neither of you have made any difficult demands, so it’s been simple. This is the easiest divorce I’ve ever worked on.”

“Will you stall it until mid-March?”

“I can make that happen.”

“Thank you. Our anniversary is February fourteenth. I don’t want those memories tainted by this.”

“I understand, Dan.”

“Good. I’ve got to call Brittany and see if she’ll talk to me.”

“All right. Take care of yourself, and think about what you’re doing carefully.”

When Dan called the house, Kim answered the phone. “Hey, Kim. How’s it going? How are the girls?”

“Just fine. How are you?”

“All right. Listen, I need to talk to Brittany. Is she home?”

“Actually she is, but she asked me not to disturb her. She’s really sick and working too hard on her dissertation. She’s under some immense pressure, and I think it’s catching up to her. Right now she upstairs passed out in bed. She needs rest.”

“Yeah. I noticed that yesterday. All right. Just let her know that I called, and I’d like to speak to her as soon as she’s feeling better. It’s important.”

“Okay. I’ll tell her as soon as she gets up.”

“Let her know that she doesn’t have to call back today but soon.”

That afternoon after spending most of the day in bed, Brittany wandered downstairs in her pajamas. “Britt, you just don’t look good.” Kim mentioned.

“I feel even worse. I’m just glad I don’t have any classes, but I’m getting behind in my work.”

“You need to worry about getting better. This is not good for the baby. Speaking of getting better, Dan called this morning wanting to talk to you. He said it was important and wants to talk to you as soon as you’re up to it.”

“Well, he’s just going to have to wait. I’m sure this is about the baby, but I’m just not up to it right now.”

“Well, he said it didn’t have to be today but soon.”

“I’m going to give this a few more days, and if it doesn’t get better, I’m going to have to go back to the doctor. I don’t know what they can do, though.” Brittany mentioned as she thought over her symptoms.

That morning she woke to a dull but persistent abdominal cramping, which concerned her. Hoping it would go away, she just tried to ignore it and relax the rest of the day. However through the night came a crescendo of pain. By early morning Brittany could hardly move but managed to call Kim to come over. As soon as she arrived Brittany whispered, “Get the girls. I need to go to the hospital right now.”

“All right. You just stay right where you are. I’ll get the girls in the car and then come get you. Do you want me to call someone?”

Brittany shook her head. “Just hurry.” she winced.

Dan had just gotten back from his afternoon class when he heard the phone ring. Packing up his office for the day, he picked up the call mumbling, “Daniel McKnight.”

“Dan, it’s Kim.”

“Kim, what’s wrong? Is it one of the girls?” he inquired with immediate alarm at the sound of her distressed voice.

“No. They’re fine. It’s Brittany.”

“Oh, God. What happened?”

“Dan, I’m sorry I have to be the one to tell you this, but Brittany’s miscarried. I took her to the ER this morning. We’re back at home now, and I put her in bed. She’s in a lot of pain, Dan. She can hardly move. I’m about to get off work here in a little while, but she’s in no shape to take

care of the girls alone.”

“Okay. Can you stay there a little longer today?”

“Sure.”

“All right. You stay there. I’m on my way. I’ll be there as soon as possible.” he mumbled feeling the familiar heart shattering pain of the loss of a child.

Traffic had never seemed so bad as he made the drive to Brittany’s house. He arrived shortly after 5:30. Kim answered the door with Ana on her hip. “Daddy.” Ana babbled reaching for Dan.

“Hi, pumpkin.” he greeted taking her into his arms. Turning to Kim he asked, “How is she?”

“She’s asleep right now, but she’s an emotional wreck.”

“All right. Can you stay longer and watch the girls?”

“Yeah, but as soon as the traffic dies down, I was going to take the girls to Jen and Melissa’s. They offered to keep them for the night. Then I was going to come back here and stay with Brittany in case she needed anything.”

“Kim, you look exhausted. Why don’t you take the girls to Jen and Melissa’s and then take the rest of the night off? I’ll stay here with Brittany tonight.”

“Are you sure? She’s not up for confrontation, Dan.”

“I know. I promise you that there will be no confrontations. She’s safe with me. I’ll take care of her.”

“You promise me? I don’t want to have to worry about her.”

“Kim, before I married Brittany I had already lost two other children by other women. No parent gets over that. Emotionally I know what she’s going through. She’s going to need help dealing with this and so do I.” Dan could see Kim was contemplating her response. His tears were threatening. Pushing Ana’s head gently into his chest so she wouldn’t see his tears, he whispered, “Kim, I need her, and she needs me right now.”

“All right. I’ll take the girls, but I’ll call you later.”

Handing Ana back to Kim, Dan mumbled, “Thank you.”

Dan headed up to the master bedroom and softly knocked on the door. Hearing no answer, he quietly stepped into the room and went to the bedside to look down on Brittany. Her face was wet with tears, but she was breathing the rhythm of sleep. Dan couldn’t hold back his emotions any longer as tears began flowing freely. All at once he realized the pain he had put Brittany

through over the past six months. Through the whole ordeal she had remained the strong woman he had always loved and admired. He still felt his love for her just as intensely as the day he first discovered it sitting on the bleachers at track practice.

Caving to his need to touch her, Dan slipped into bed, tentatively putting an arm around her waist. Even in her sleep her body sought out his, and she pressed into his chest with her back. Dan sobbed quietly over the loss of their child and their love until fatigued sleep overtook him.

When Brittany awoke, she saw twilight through the wooden slats on the blinds. As she became more aware, she felt another body against her back and hand tucked naturally just under the edge of her breast. Slowly picking up the hand with her own, she noticed the familiar wedding band. Hoping that she wasn't dreaming, she slowly turned to face him. The pain that passed through her body proved it was reality.

Brittany studied him as he slept. They hadn't been this close in five months, but his arms still provided the comfort she desperately sought. She raised her hand slowly to his face, her palm grazing his day old stubble. He turned into the caress in his sleep as her name fell from his lips. Brittany felt her heart pounding loudly as she brushed her thumb across his lips. His eyes slowly opened to meet hers. She saw the unguarded look of love in his sleepy eyes. Expecting it to fade as he woke, she was surprised to find it didn't. Dan took her hand off his cheek and brought it to his mouth to kiss it.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "I'm sorry you have to know this sorrow, and I'm sorry for everything I've done to make the past six months hell. I've been a jerk, and I let my pride hurt everything we worked so hard for."

"I'm sorry I allowed things to happen with Peyton. I never meant to hurt you. You're the love of my life, and I still love you more than anything else in this world."

"I love you too, Brittany," he confessed. Brittany leaned in to kiss him, closing her eyes as his lips splayed warmth throughout her entire body.

When she pulled away, he swallowed hard. "What about Colin?" he inquired softly.

"Colin is my friend and companion, but he's not the man who holds my heart. You're the only one, Daniel, always have been." They laid silently for a few minutes as they both enjoyed the closeness of their bodies. "Where are the girls?" Brittany finally asked.

"They're at Jen and Melissa's. Kim was just too tired to come back and stay with you tonight, so I told her I'd stay. She needed some rest."

"So, we're alone?"

"Yeah. Why don't I make us some dinner? You need to eat something," he said sitting up to turn on the light. "You want to stay in bed or come downstairs with me?"

“I think I’d like to stay up here and take a bath. I haven’t had the chance to bathe today, and I feel kind of gross.”

“Okay. Well, why don’t I run you a nice, hot bubble bath before I start dinner?”

“You don’t have to. I can do it.” Brittany said slowly starting to get out of bed.

Dan saw the pain reflected in her eyes. “Brittany, just relax. I’ll do it. I’ll come get you when it’s ready.”

Dan went into the bathroom to prepare her bath. As the water was running, Dan got out a fresh set of pajamas for her as well as lined the colossal tub with candles. When he came back to the bedroom, he asked, “You want me to carry you?” She nodded. “Why don’t we get rid of this first?” he suggested softly touching her t-shirt. “Do you need help?”

Brittany was relishing the attention too much to decline. “If you wouldn’t mind.”

Dan carefully lifted the hem of her shirt over her head baring her body. Dan felt his pulse quicken but kept his eyes focused elsewhere as he gently slid one arm under her bare thighs and the other around her back. He saw her wince when he picked her up off the bed. Going into the bathroom he slowly lowered her into the water. “I’ll be making dinner. I’ll come help you out of the tub when you’re ready.” When Dan finished preparing a quick meal, he brought it up to the sitting area of the bedroom. Poking his head into the bathroom he inquired, “You about ready to get out?” She shook her head. “Maybe I should bring dinner in to you.” he joked. She smiled. “Well, it can wait until your ready. I’ll just get the bed set up for you later.”

He turned to leave, but she stopped him. “Daniel, if I asked you to join me, would you?” hesitantly she asked.

“You’re in pain. I wouldn’t want to accidentally hurt you further.”

“You won’t. The tub is large enough for both of us.”

“Do you really want me to?”

“Yes. I need to feel you to know you’re really here.”

Dan came to the edge of the tub. Brittany watched him casually undress. Even with the pain she was feeling, she could still feel the sexual current in her body as he revealed his form. Dan stepped in behind her and carefully lowered himself into the water, his legs wrapping around her hips. She leaned into his chest, and neither said a word as they listened to each other breathe.

After the water began to turn cold, Dan got out and dressed in only his boxers and t-shirt before turning to assist Brittany with drying herself and donning clean pajamas. He lifted her again taking her back to the bed for their dinner. Once they were finished, Dan took the dishes down to the kitchen and came back with several of Brittany’s favorite movies. The rest of the evening



passed in relative silence.

Finally at bed time, Dan made an attempt to leave, but Brittany stopped him. “Daniel, please don’t go.”

“I just want you to be comfortable.” he mentioned.

“I’m most comfortable with you here. I need you here holding me.” she whispered.

Dan saw her glistening eyes. Giving a nod in consent, he slid back into bed and turned out the light. Moving toward her, he reached for her body. They came together in the center of the bed. “Good night, Brittany. I love you.” he whispered kissing the her ear.

Dan could tell she was crying as she hoarsely replied, “I love you, too.”

## **Part 10**

Dan awoke early the next morning. Leaving Brittany in bed to sleep, he headed downstairs to make breakfast. He was just off in his own thoughts when he heard the garage door. Following the sound, Dan found Kim unbuckling the kids from their car seats. As soon as Alexis saw him, she ran toward her father screaming in excitement, “Daddy!”

Dan scooped her up into his arms giving her a good tickle. “How are my girls? Were you good for Jen and Melissa?” he asked leaning down to kiss his other daughters. “Morning, Kim.”

“Morning. How is she?”

“Under the circumstances she’s doing all right. She’s in pain and emotionally she’s a mess, but that’s to be expected. I think last night was good for both of us, though.”

Everyone went into the kitchen where Kim began to fix breakfast for the girls and Dan continued with Brittany’s. “After the kids finish eating, why don’t you bring them up to see Brittany? I’m sure they could lift her spirits.”

Brittany awoke to the smell of food. Opening her eyes, she saw Dan staring down at her with tray in hand. “Thought you might be hungry.” he mentioned putting the try on the night stand.

“Thank you.” she mumbled easing herself into a sitting position.

“How are you feeling this morning?” he inquired brushing back some of her blonde hair. She shrugged. “Well, I’m going to go take a shower. I need to get going to class here in a little bit. However I can come back afterwards if you’d like. You’ll probably need some help after Kim leaves.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

By the time Dan had showered and dressed in yesterday’s clothes, Brittany was visiting with the children. Kim was sitting in the bedside chair supervising the activity. Victoria was on one side of Brittany and Ana on the other while Alexis was perched between her thighs.

“You be careful now. Mommy doesn’t feel well. She’s sick.” Dan called out seeing the pain in Brittany’s features as the girls clung to her.

Victoria looked at her father then mother before putting her tiny hand against Brittany’s midsection. “Baby sick too?” she inquired looking at her mom.

Tears came to Brittany’s eyes at her child’s question. She shot a helpless look at Dan. Dan took a seat on the edge of the bed. “Victoria, come here. Come sit in my lap.” he stated. Dan stared at Brittany as he wondered how to tell his daughters the news. As she crawled into his lap, he looked down at her. Her green eyes were staring back at him obviously waiting for an answer to her question. Dan sighed heavily. “Victoria, your Mommy and I both thought we were going to have a baby, but we were wrong. There is no baby.”

“But Mommy said so.” Victoria stated in confusion.

“I know, but I’m telling you now that there is no baby.”

“But I wanted baby.” she pouted crossing her arms.

Dan did his best not to lose it as he brought her closer. “I know, honey, so did Mommy and Daddy. You have to be a good girl now. Maybe we’ll get you one later.”

“Promise?” she asked with renewed hope.

Dan looked at Brittany. “We’ll see. Why don’t the three of you go with Kim now? Mommy needs to rest. You can see her later.”

When the girls were gone, Dan moved to Brittany as their emotional walls crumbled. Wrapping her in his embrace, he held her as they both cried. About half an hour later, Dan stated, “I have to get going. Would you like me to stay here? I could cancel class.”

“No. Go ahead. I’ll be all right.”

“Why don’t you rest? I’ll be back this afternoon.” Dan carefully tucked her under the covers. “Call me at the office if you need anything.”

Brittany took a nap, waking just after the girls’ lunch time. She showered slowly and dressed before going downstairs to find Kim settled on the couch with a book while the girls napped. Taking a seat on the sofa, Brittany just stared out into nothing as her mind thought about last night.

“So, I take it things went well with Dan.” Kim mentioned bringing her back to reality. “I was worried about leaving you here at first, but I could see the pain in his eyes. He said he needed you.”

“Did he? Actually, as horrible as the circumstances were, we did have a wonderful evening. He was the man I fell in love with all those years ago, gentle and attentive.”

“Did you talk about your relationship at all?”

“No, but things are definitely better. I know him well enough to know this is not pity he’s showing me. It’s love, the love we used to share. I don’t want to push him into talking about his feelings until he’s ready. I’m just going to let things unfold as they will over the next few days. I think I’ll be more sure of his intentions by then. After last night, I’ll do anything to get him back into my life.”

“Why’s that? Something happen?”

“I told him how I’ve felt over the last several months. I told him that I still was in love with him, and he admitted that he still felt the same for me. If that’s true, I’ll do everything I can to win him back. I need him.”

Dan arrived home shortly before Kim left for the evening. Brittany and Dan had dinner with the children before Dan took them all upstairs for bath time. Once the three were clean and in pajamas, they all joined Brittany on the couch for a Disney movie. Dan and Brittany sat on opposite sides of the couch with Alexis next to Dan, Victoria in the middle, and Ana curled up with her head in Brittany’s lap.

During the progression of the film, Dan’s eyes strayed to Brittany, who was absent-mindedly twirling Ana’s dark hair. Dan’s heart ached at the sight of her loveliness, even under the circumstances. She was such beautiful creature, and it was only magnified by her actions, so unconscious yet tender. Brittany sat with her eyes focused on the television, but she knew Dan was watching her. She didn’t have to meet his gaze to feel his eyes on her. She wondered where his thoughts led him as he studied her.

When it was the girls’ bedtime, Dan took them upstairs. He tucked each one in before kissing their angelic faces. He then returned to the living room where Brittany was channel surfing. “Would you like a fire?” he inquired eyeing the wood neatly stacked near the hearth.

“Okay.” she mumbled.

Dan started the fire before going to the bar. Opening her favorite wine, he poured two glasses. Turning out the lights, he suggested, “Why don’t I put on some music?” He started her favorite jazz CD before coming back to the couch. They drank their wine in silence for a few minutes before he inquired, “How are you feeling?”

“A little better. I actually made it downstairs, so that’s an improvement.” Dan nodded. “Daniel, I wanted to thank you for this morning. I hadn’t thought about what to tell the girls.”

“It caught me off guard too. Sometimes Vitoria is a little too smart for her own good. Must take after you.” he teased trying to make her smile.

A few more minutes passed before Brittany commented, “That fire feels nice. We haven’t had one all winter.”

“Why not?”

“Too much work for one person, especially with the girls.”

“I guess that’s true. How’s your dissertation coming?”

“Pretty good. This has set me back, though.”

“Well, this is going to take time. Don’t push yourself too hard. It’ll only make your recovery last longer.”

“I know. I know this isn’t going to go away in my heart any time soon. I’m just so sorry this happened.” she whispered.

“So am I, Brittany, but know that I’m here for you.” Brittany nodded as she stared into the fire. The flames blurred from tears. She felt familiar arms embrace her. “It’s going to be all right.” Dan assured her. Turning her head into his neck, Brittany wept.

They spent the rest of the night in a quiet embrace. Once they had finished the bottle of wine, Brittany stated, “I think I’m going to retire for the evening.”

“All right. I’ll lock up the house and then tuck you in.” he joked.

Brittany eased herself up the stairs. Going into each child’s room, she kissed their girls before proceeding into the master bedroom. She changed into her pajamas and conducted her nightly routine before getting into bed. Dan entered a few minutes later and sat in the bedside chair. Brittany took his hand asking, “Aren’t you going to come to bed?”

“Well, I just wanted to know where you wanted me to sleep first.”

“Right here.” she answered patting the empty space next to her in the bed.

Dan nodded. He slipped out of his clothes leaving him in only his boxers before joining her. When he climbed in, Brittany curled up closely. Dan heard her fall asleep, but his mind was too active to follow. Instead he thought about their relationship. Their four year anniversary was only two weeks away. Over the past few days he was beginning to have doubts about the impending divorce. In his heart he knew this was the woman he would always love and wanted for eternity.

Her love for their children only served to strengthen his own feelings toward her. He needed to know if they could mend their tattered relationship. He resolved to speak to her when she was feeling better emotionally.

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Two weeks later was Valentine's Day, their anniversary. Dan had been an attentive father over the past few weeks while Brittany was recovering. He and Brittany had spent every night since the miscarriage together holding and comforting each other. Although he was a regular fixture in her bed again, they hadn't kissed or expressed their feelings since the incident. Being that they hadn't spoke about the direction of their marriage, Dan had been hesitant about getting Brittany anything, but he knew by not getting her anything he might send her the wrong message about how he was feeling. Stopping by his place after school, he dropped off his dirty clothes and packed some clean ones for the next few days before heading to Brittany's. When he pulled into the driveway, he noticed a vaguely familiar car but couldn't place it. Going to the front door, he used his key for the first time since the separation.

Brittany was sitting on the couch with Colin when she heard the lock turning. She smiled brightly to herself knowing it was Dan. Dan stepped into the foyer and saw Brittany and Colin. Swallowing his insecurity, he gave them both a smile.

"Daddy's home. Where are my girls?" he inquired setting his bag on the floor.

"In the game room with Kim. How was your day?" Brittany asked.

"Pretty good. Happy Valentine's Day by the way."

Brittany blushed. "Thank you for the roses. They were gorgeous. The girls liked theirs too."

"Good. I'm going to check on them."

"Maybe I should go." Colin mentioned to Brittany, but Dan stopped him.

"Nonsense. Don't feel like you need to leave on my account. You're a good friend to Brittany, and I'm sure she's glad to have you, especially under the circumstances." Dan walked back to the game room leaving them alone.

"Well, you and Dan seem to be getting along better these days. He got you roses?"

Brittany nodded. "It's our four year anniversary today. He hasn't mentioned it, but I know he remembers."

"Oh, well, I shouldn't be imposing on your time then."

"Don't worry about it. It's actually nice to have you here. I think it would be a bit awkward otherwise. I mean we're not divorced, and it's our anniversary. I don't know if he has any

intentions of celebrating it.”

“Do you?” Colin asked.

Brittany knew what Colin was really asking. He wanted to know if she and Dan were reconciling. “Colin, a lot has happened since the wedding a couple of weeks ago. When I lost the baby, Daniel came to me with open arms. He’s been a great comfort. He’s been caring towards me and even more attentive towards the girls. That first night we admitted we still loved each other. Those were the words I’ve been needing to hear since last summer. Neither of us is running any more.”

“Well, that’s what you wanted, so I’m happy for you. I was going to see if you wanted to go to dinner tonight, but I think you probably want to stay here.”

Brittany nodded. “Thank you for the offer though, and thank you for the flowers. They’re beautiful.”

Colin nodded. “Anything for my favorite lady.” he mumbled.

Brittany could tell Colin was having difficulty with the re-introduction of Dan into her life. She knew there was always a part of him that hoped their friendship would blossom. “Colin, I guess I should’ve told you this sooner.” she mentioned.

“Why? You don’t owe me anything, especially answers concerning your husband. I just want you to be happy, Brittany. I care about you and your well-being.”

“I know, and I appreciate the concern.”

Colin finished his cup of coffee quickly. “Well, I’m going to go.” he stated standing.

“You don’t have to.” Brittany stood touching his arm.

He caressed her cheek lightly for a moment before saying, “I need to. It’s the right thing to do.”

Brittany nodded in understanding escorting him to the door. He pulled her into a hug kissing the top of her head. “Happy anniversary, Mrs. McKnight.” he whispered before quickly bounding down the steps to his car.

Once he was gone, Brittany walked into the game room to see Dan on the floor with the girls and Kim. “So, Brittany, I was thinking I’d take you and the girls out to dinner tonight if you didn’t already have plans with Colin.” he mentioned.

She shook her head answering, “I’m free.”

“Great. How about your favorite place? I think they could accommodate the kids with some advance notice.”

“Sounds wonderful.”

“All right then. I’ll make the reservation.”

Dinner that night focused mainly on the children, easing the tension between Dan and Brittany. Both of them knew the time for talking was at hand. However they delayed it until the girls had been put down for the evening. They were sitting in the den quietly gazing at the fire when Dan retrieved a wrapped box from his overcoat.

“What’s this?” Brittany asked when he extended it to her.

“I’m just returning something that belongs to you.”

Curiously Brittany opened the box, but there was only a paper heart inside with Dan’s name written across it. She smiled. “Are you getting sentimental on me?” she joked trying to keep the mood light to ease the tension.

Taking Brittany’s hands Dan knelt beside her. “Brittany you’ve always owned my heart. It belongs with you.”

“What are you saying, Daniel?” she asked nervously hoping the moment she had longed for was at hand.

“Brittany, I... I want to come home. I want us to be a family again. Being here over the past few weeks has proven to me that this is where I’ve always belonged, with you and our children. I want to correct the mistakes I’ve made before it’s too late if you’ll let me. Will you take me back into your life?”

Brittany smiled as she withdrew one hand to wipe her eyes. “Oh, Daniel, I had hoped you would want to come home. I’ve missed you desperately. I want you back in our house and in my life. You will always be in my heart, Daniel, and I could never stop loving you. Please come back to me.”

Dan gently wiped her tears before leaning to kiss her mouth sweetly. “God, I’ve missed that.” he whispered, leaning his forehead into hers.

“I love you, Daniel.”

“I love you too, Brittany. Happy anniversary.”

“Happy anniversary to you too.”

The following morning when Dan got to his office he called Mike. “Dan, you sound happier than you have in months.” Mike mentioned.

“That’s because Brittany and I have finally come to an agreement concerning the divorce. Neither of us wants to pursue it any more.”

“Well, that’s great! I’m so relieved! Nothing like a baby to bring you back together, huh?”

Dan hesitated for a moment before saying, “Actually Mike, things didn’t go so well with the baby. In fact Brittany had a miscarriage.”

“Oh, no! She was already in the second trimester! That’s horrible! I’m so sorry!”

“Well, it happened about two weeks ago just after Dad’s wedding. We’ve kept it to ourselves. As awful as it is, it’s been instrumental in getting us to talk about things.”

“Well, I’m at least glad you’re both giving up this foolishness. I’m just sorry it came at such a high price.”

“We both are too. It made us realize how stupid and childish we were being. It’s been a hard lesson to learn.”

“Well, I’ll be happy to tear up all the paperwork. As Brittany’s attorney, I’m going to have to speak to her about this and confirm it.”

“I understand. She’s at home right now if you want to call her. By the way, just so you know. We haven’t told Melissa, Jen, or Becca about the miscarriage. You don’t have to keep it a secret, but I’m not sure Brittany’s ready to face it either.”

“All right. I’ll keep that in mind. I’ll talk to you later.”

After work that day, Dan went to his place to pack up most of his things. When he pulled up at home that evening, he saw his mother-in-law’s car in the driveway. Dan grabbed an armful of clothes before heading into the house. As he opened the door, he heard Brittany and her mother in the kitchen. “I’m home.” he called out as he walked toward their voices. He rounded the corner to see his wife, mother-in-law, and father-in-law all staring at him.

“I was wondering where you were.” Brittany mentioned coming to him.

They kissed quickly before Dan said, “I just thought I should get some of my stuff moved back into the house. You didn’t tell me your parents were coming.”

“I didn’t know. They just surprised me.”

“Well, it’s good to see you again, Brian and Mary. It’s been a long time.” Dan greeted them. Dan saw the dislike in Brian’s gaze but ignored it.

“It’s good to see you too, Daniel. Are you moving back in?” Mary inquired.



“Yes. Brittany and I have settled our differences, which has been to the benefit of both of us and the girls.”

“Well, I’m glad everything has worked itself out. As long as Brittany’s happy, that’s all we care about. Right, Brian?” Mary prompted.

“Right.” he mumbled shooting daggers at Dan.

Brittany patted Dan’s chest lightly. “Well, I’m very happy that Daniel and I were able to work it out.”

“Well, I think I’m just going to go unpack my stuff.” Dan stated.

Once Dan was gone, Brittany turned to her father. “Dad, you have to try. I know you’re upset with him, but if I can forgive, I need you to try as well.”

“Honey, that man hurt you. That’s hard to get passed.”

“Dad, we hurt each other. He said and did inappropriate things but so did I. I fully admit that things were more my fault than Daniel’s. He’s forgiven me, and I’ve forgiven him for the things he did in hurt. We’ve apologized to each other for our mistakes, and we admitted that we still want to be married. That’s the way it is, Dad. Now please, don’t hold this over him. This is my marriage. This is what I want. Please respect my wishes.”

“For you sweetheart, I will try.”

“Thank you.”

That night after the children had gone to bed, Brittany and Mary went into the guest room for girl talk, leaving Dan and Brian alone in the den. “Want another drink?” Dan inquired going to the bar.

“No thank you.” stiffly Brian answered.

Dan just nodded before fixing himself another. Settling onto the couch again, he said, “All right. Let’s have it. I know you have words to say to me. You might as well get them out instead of harboring them.”

“I promised Brittany and Mary I wouldn’t.” he answered.

“Brian, I really think we should talk about this. Please, if we’re going to have any kind of relationship again, I think we should get this out in the open.”

“All right. She’s my baby, Dan, my only child. You hurt her terribly. I always told her anyone that hurt her would pay.”

“So you want to make me pay? I am paying, Brian. It’s because of our pride that we lost a child. I should’ve been here for her. I wasted seven months of my life, because she hurt me. I spent all that time trying to hurt her as much out of my pain. We made each other suffer and for nothing. We had a problem. Looking back on it, I know there were more productive ways to resolution, but hurt impairs one thinking. She hurt me deeply, and I lashed out at her in anger. I regret that now. I’m sorry I hurt Brittany. I never intend to do that again. I want to be her husband and father to those girls. She’s been gracious enough to allow me back in her life, and I’m going to take the opportunity to its fullest. We both deserve the happiness we once had, and I know we can find it again. I just want to make her happy, Brian.”

Brian nodded. “She loves you. She always has.”

“I never stopped loving her. She is my life.”

Brian rolled his eyes. “If she was your life, Dan, you wouldn’t have walked out on her in the first place.”

“Brian, do you even know the circumstances surrounding my departure?” Dan inquired testily. “I think you might feel differently if you knew the reason why I decided to leave. Did she tell you?”

“No. She didn’t really give us an explanation as to why, just that you had some problems to work out.”

Dan contemplated explaining the situation, but he figured the details would harm Brian’s image of his daughter, so he stated, “Basically that’s true. We did have some problems to overcome, and it didn’t look like we would. However fate has brought us back together, but it was at a high price. We lost a child. We can never get that back, and it grieves us to know we had a hand in it. It didn’t have to be this way. We’re just trying to pick up the pieces and move forward.”

“I just don’t want Brittany to have to go through this again. She deserves better.”

“Yes, she does, and I’m going to try to give her better. In fact when she’s ready, I’m going to try to give her the one thing she wants most.”

“What’s that?”

“Another baby, hopefully a son. That’s if she still wants one. After what’s happened, she may have changed her mind.”

“A grandson would be nice.” Brian mentioned.

“Well, we’ll have to see. It could take some time before she’s ready again, if she ever is.”

“I think she will be. She’s got determination like her mother. When she wants something, she goes after it. Just give it time. When Mary had her two miscarriages, I wasn’t sure she would

want to try again, but she did, and it's because of that longing that we had Brittany."

"Well, it'll take some time. Right now we have to work on our relationship first."

Meanwhile up in the guest bedroom mother and daughter were curled up on the queen bed chatting about the children, when Mary stated, "It's good to see you happier, Brittany. I know this miscarriage was rough on you."

"Well, it was easier to bear with Daniel here. He's been such a perfect gentleman, catering to my every need. I'm glad we were able to work things out finally."

"May I ask what really happened between you two? I could sense you didn't want to tell your father the truth, and then earlier you mentioned that it was more your fault than Daniel's. Is it what I think it is? Were you unfaithful to your husband?"

"Mom, it's more complicated than that." Brittany replied.

"Is it? I think I know Daniel well enough to know that's probably the only reason he'd ever even consider divorce. That's just about the only wrong you could do in his eyes." When Brittany didn't respond, Mary asked, "What could've caused you to go outside your relationship? Was Daniel treating you poorly? He didn't hit you, did he?"

"No, Mom. He's never struck me."

"Threatened you maybe?" Brittany shook her head. "Then what? What would cause you to have an affair?"

"It wasn't an affair! It was one kiss!" she yelled. "One stupid kiss!"

"So you were unfaithful. What possessed you to do that? What was so wrong in your relationship with Daniel?"

"Nothing, honestly. I just was attracted to this other man. It never should've happened, and I did regret it, but Daniel caught us in that compromising position. All hell broke loose, and he was too hurt to see the truth. Then I tried to reconcile with him and thought I had succeeded when he and I were intimate again, but it wasn't the case. That's when I lost it, and pretty much told him it was over between us. The day after he filed for divorce. That's the real story. I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell Dad."

"You know, honey, you're always going to find other men that you're attracted to. That's a natural part of life, but when you're married you have to withstand that temptation. That's part of the obligation of being married. Are you truly prepared to do that? If you're not, that's okay, but you have to be honest with Daniel. Was this an isolated incident, or do you think there are other options you need to pursue?"

"It was a mistake, Mom, and I know that. Daniel means everything to me. I so want this marriage

to work.”

Mary nodded. “If this is what you want, I support you. I always will, and I want you to feel like you can talk to me if this temptation comes up again. I won’t judge you, sweetie. Relationships are difficult sometimes, and I just want you to be in one that makes you happy.”

Leaning over to hug her mother, Brittany whispered, “Thanks for understanding, Mom.”

Brain and Mary stayed for a few days leaving Brittany and Dan little time to themselves. The time they did have was usually spent right before bed and just after waking, so most of it was spent in the confines of bed, being close to each other. They had quickly gotten back into their old routine, although sex was no longer a part of their agenda. Dan had made an effort to substitute it with physical closeness, because he knew Brittany wasn’t ready nor would she be for quite some time.

Weeks passed and with it spring descended upon them. Their weekends were filled with activities for the children. One such afternoon Brittany and Dan had taken them to the park and were supervising from a near by bench as they cuddled together. “Honey, I’ve been wanting to talk to you about something important. I’ve put it off for awhile, because I wanted us a chance to get some normalcy back in our lives before asking.” Dan began hesitantly.

“What is it, Daniel?”

“Well, quite some time ago you mentioned the idea of having another baby. After all that’s happened, I was wondering if you’ve changed your mind.”

“Well, I hadn’t thought about it. I’m not against it. I think I would still like to have another, but whether I will be able to or not remains to be seen. I need to go to the doctor and be checked out. They told me that I should do that when I was at the ER, but I haven’t yet. I’m kind of anxious about what they might tell me.”

“Well, you know that whatever they say, I support you completely. If they say we can’t have more children, then I will still feel blessed with the three we have. Each is a precious gift, and I’m thankful for them.”

“Me too, but I guess I just don’t want that door to be closed on us. I want to still have the option.”

“I know. Listen, if it will help ease your anxiety, I’ll go with you.”

“I’d like that.”

“Fine. Just let me know when.” A moment passed before he asked, “How’s your dissertation coming along?”

“I’m a little over half finished. Hopefully I’ll be done by the end of the summer.”

“Then what’s your plan? Have you thought about going back to teaching?”

“I’m thinking about it, but I haven’t decided if I should teach on the high school or collegiate level yet. In college most people are in physics because they want to be there, unlike high school. Although I love the challenge of turning a kid on to science. It’s pretty amazing when it happens. Means more to me than money ever could.”

“Yeah, I used to feel that way too. Sometimes I miss high school English and coaching. If I could coach again, I’d really like to, but I’m not sure I could.”

“Why don’t you at least try if you want to? Would you want to go back to track?”

Dan nodded. “Either that or football.”

“Not football, Daniel, please. I don’t want our girls subjected to that side of you. We’ve come so far with your anger. I wouldn’t want to destroy all that hard work. As a football coach, I could see you going down that path again.”

Dan shrugged. “Well, it doesn’t really matter. Coaching of any kind would take away from the girls, and I’m not sure I want to do that.”

“Whatever you decide, I’ll support you. If you want to coach, we’ll work it out.”

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As weeks progressed, Brittany and Dan continued to focus on the children instead of their relationship. That had regressed to the point that the physical intimacy they shared was limited to chaste kissing and cuddling. In fact to Dan it felt like the brief friendship they had shared before they finally revealed their feelings. Dan hadn’t even considered propositioning Brittany for more in fear that she wasn’t ready physically or emotionally in return to that kind of relationship.

Brittany on the other hand was counting every day that passed since they had reunited. She knew Dan was wary of her physical frailty, but it had been four months since the miscarriage and nine since they’d been intimate. She wondered if Dan was still having difficulty forgetting about the incident with Peyton, and that’s why he hadn’t made any attempts to become close to her again. Figuring that maybe they needed time alone and away together, she planned a weekend vacation for the two of them to the beach.

Dan seemed all for the idea, so Friday morning they dropped the children off at David and Kelly’s. The first part of the drive was quiet as they just listened to the radio. Dan kept glancing over at her, sitting there in only her bikini top, wrap skirt, and sandals. “You know, you look so sexy like that.” he mentioned. “It reminds me of the time we went to the Carribean.”

She smiled. “That was a good trip, wasn’t it?”

“I’d say so. You finally let me get in your pants.” he teased.

She laughed. “But wasn’t I worth the wait?”

He gave her a loving smile. “You always have been and always will be.” They were quiet a moment just holding hands before Dan said, “I’m glad you talked me into this trip. We haven’t really have any extended period of time alone together.”

“Yeah. It’ll be nice to just be alone together for a few days. What do you want to do first?”

“Well, knowing you, you’ll probably want to lay on the beach, so I guess I’ll just lay next to you and watch all the guys gawk as they go by.”

Brittany blushed. “Oh, please. I’m nothing special.”

“You are to me. Not only that you’ve had three children and still have your twenty-two year old body. I bet you’ll even get carded at clubs.”

“Well, you know the girls will be staring at that perfect body of yours.”

“Only if they can get passed the graying hair.” he mumbled.

“I think it’s sexy.” Brittany mentioned touching a patch of it just above his ear. “You’re going to be such a gorgeous old man.”

Dan laughed. “I’m glad you think so, because you’re stuck with me.”

“Good. There’s no other place I’d rather be.” she replied leaning over to kiss his cheek.

They spent most of the day on the beach before heading to a club that night, arriving shortly after 11:00. “I feel so old, Daniel. I feel like it’s after our bedtime.”

“Feels weird, doesn’t it, but you’re not old. I know you can still dance better than any of these college kids. Come on, let’s give them a lesson.” Dan suggested. Dan and Brittany blocked out everything but each other and the music as they finally connected to each other without distraction. Dan still found her amazing as she moved her body to the music. He could feel that old feeling start deep within him as they ground their bodies together. He wanted her desperately.

Brittany saw the familiar gaze overcome Dan’s face and knew she finally had his full attention. After an hour she suggested they go for a walk on the beach on the way back to the hotel. Silently they strolled holding hands, as Brittany contemplated her next move. She knew she’d have to be the aggressor if she wanted something to happen, so she finally stopped walking. “Can we sit down for awhile?” she asked when he looked at her questioningly.

“Yeah, of course.” Dan sat first before pulling Brittany gently into his lap.

Brittany leaned in to kiss his neck, making Dan moan appreciatively as her hands ran over his covered chest. Their mouths met softly as Dan slipped his hand under her shirt to her bare waist. Brittany dropped her hand between his thighs making him groan her name.

“You have no idea how good that feels.” he whispered sucking in a breath as she pressed harder.

“Then you better show me.” she stated softly guiding his hand between her own legs.

Dan pulled away slightly. “Are you sure?” he inquired.

“Daniel, what does a girl have to do to get you to make out with her?”

“I just wanted to make sure you were okay.”

“I’m fine. If you’re that worried, just go slowly and everything will be fine.”

Dan nodded heeding the instruction. Methodically they touched and kissed, working each other up to climax, and even though there was no sex involved, they both were left feeling sated and content.

The following morning Dan was up early for his morning run and had just gotten in the shower when Brittany awoke. Hearing the running water, she wondered if he would be up for a little morning fun. Going into the bathroom, she undressed before pulling back the shower curtain. “Is there room for me?” she inquired.

Grinning at her naked form, he replied, “Always. How did you sleep?”

“Wonderfully, better than I have in quite awhile. You?”

“Great. No complaints here.” Dan slid his arms around her bare waist. “I had a really good time last night.” he mentioned kissing her neck.

“Me too. Hopefully there will be more to come.”

Dan smiled. “I sure do hope so.” Picking up the soap, he looked at her questioningly asking, “May I?”

“Only if I get to return the favor.” she answered with a smile.

That night Dan took them to a secluded, candle lit dinner. “It’s a shame we have to leave tomorrow.” he said sipping his wine.

Yeah. It’s been nice to be away, but I miss the girls.”

“So do I, but we’ll see their angelic faces tomorrow.”

“Daniel, can we talk about something serious?”

“Of course. What’s on your mind?”

“Well, I just wanted to make sure you knew that I was physically okay. For the past several months you’ve treated me so carefully. I’m not fragile you know.”

“I know. I just didn’t know how you were feeling physically. I mean your body has gone through a major trauma. I didn’t want to put you in any discomfort. Besides we hadn’t really worked on our relationship much having been so busy with the kids. I wasn’t sure if you were ready to move back into deeper intimacy.” he mumbled.

“Daniel, I planned this whole trip in effort to work on us. I thought if we had a change of scenery and time alone, we’d be able to become close again. Should I just stop trying to drop hints and come right out and ask you to make love to me?”

Dan sucked in a quick breath at her question, but it made him start choking on his dinner. After several loud coughs he wheezed, “Oh my. I didn’t realize you were ready for that.”

Brittany waited for more of a response but got none. Trying to fight away her fear that he wasn’t interested, she hesitantly inquired, “Are you not ready? I mean I don’t want to push you into something you don’t want. If you’re not, we’ll wait. I just had kind of hoped you were ready. After last night I thought I saw it in your eyes.”

“Brittany, I have enjoyed this weekend with you tremendously. Feeling you in ways I hadn’t in such along time makes me ache with need for you. I’ve never been more ready.”

She smiled, seductively leaning to his ear and whispering, “Good. Can we hurry this meal along? I’m all ready wanting dessert.”

Dan attacked the rest of his meal with a vengeance as he eyed Brittany across the table. They weren’t even touching, but the anticipation alone was driving him mad with desire. Having finished their meal, they began the walk back to the hotel along the beach talking about trivial things, but each could tell the others mind was on what was about to happen.

One back in the room, Brittany made her way out to the balcony to watch the last little bit of sunset. Dan went to the bar and retrieved a bottle of wine before joining her. “Drink?” he inquired holding up the bottle. Brittany nodded, so Dan poured two glasses.

“The sunset is beautiful tonight.” Brittany mentioned. “It reminds me of the night you finally proposed. You were so nervous. It was so cute.”

“You still give my stomach the butterflies, Brittany. It’s like I’m perpetually falling in love with you.”



“You sure do know how to charm a girl, Daniel.” she teased softly as they embraced for a gentle kiss.

“I love you, Brittany Saxton.”

Brittany giggled at the use of her maiden name as it made her feel like he was courting again. “And I love you, Daniel McKnight. Let’s go to bed.”

They moved inside and slowly began to undress each other, eyeing each other appreciatively as if it were the first time. Brittany moved away from him long enough to pull the covers back on the bed before pulling Dan by the hand down on top of her. Everything was methodical as they reacquainted themselves with each others bodies. The moment their bodies became one, Dan gazed into Brittany’s eyes. They were glistening with love and passionate energy. “This feels so good, Daniel.” she whispered running her fingers through his hair.

“From this end too.” he softly replied as he began to lead them through the intimate dance they’d shared so many times before. Long into the night they explored each other until exhaustion called an end to the activities. Dan was lounging on his back with Brittany curled around him when he looked at the clock. “My God. It’s after 4:00. What time did we get in bed?”

Brittany shrugged. “Eight, maybe nine.”

Dan gave a soft laugh. “I guess we’re not as old as we thought we were. I don’t think we’ve ever made love for eight whole hours.”

“No, I don’t think we have, but we had a lot of catching up to do.” she stated kissing him on the chest.

“You don’t stop that and we won’t be getting to sleep anytime soon.”

“Oh really? You think you have the stamina to keep going? I’d like to see that.”

Pushing her onto her back, Dan grinned. “Fine. Either I’ll succeed or die trying.” he joked as they kissed deeply.

The next time they pulled away from each other, they noticed the sun rising and heard the seagulls on the beach. “Let’s get some room service and watch the sunrise on the balcony.” Brittany suggested.

Smiling lovingly at her, Dan answered, “Anything you want, Brittany.”

Brittany and Dan arrived at Kelly and David’s around dinner time that evening. “Well, look who’s here.” Kelly said to the girls.

“Mommy, Daddy!” they all screamed racing to their parents.

“How are our favorite girls?” Dan asked picking up Alexis after hugs for all of them. “Did you have a good time with your grandparents?”

“Yeah. Grandma took us shopping.” Victoria stated.

“Did she now?” Brittany inquired letting Victoria and Ana lead her off toward the family room.

Dan grinned at Alexis. “What did you do this weekend, Alex?”

“Grandpa gave me new toys. Wanna see?”

“Yeah. Where are they?”

She pointed toward the library, so Dan took her into the study where he saw his father sitting at the desk. “Hey, Dan. Welcome back. Have a good trip?”

Dan gave a huge smile. “The best. It was just what we needed.”

“Good. You look like a new man.”

“I feel like it.” Dan teased raising his eyebrows suggestively making his father laugh.

“Here, Daddy.” Alexis interrupted holding up two palm-sized cars.

“Oh, wow. I haven’t seen these in years.” Dan mentioned sitting next to his daughter on the floor. Alex, did you know that these used to belong to your Uncle Joe and me? This was my favorite.”

“That’s what Grandpa said. I got blocks too.”

“Really? Are they little different colored wooden one?” Alexis nodded her head enthusiastically.

“Looks like we have a little architect on our hands. Either that or a race car driver.” David teased.

“These are great toys, honey. We’ll play with them lots at home.”

A few minutes later Brittany poked her head into the room. “So, Alexis decided to join the Boys’ Club, huh?” she playfully asked. “Hi, Dad.”

“Nothing wrong with that.” Dan answered.

“Hi, Brittany. Have a good time?”

She smiled and nodded. “Kelly’s about to set the table for dinner and asked if we were staying.”

“It’s fine with me if it is with you.”

“All right. Well, we need to start rounding up the girls. Dinner’s in about five minutes.”

“Okay, Alex. We should get washed up for dinner.” David stated.

“I wanna ride.” Alexis stated.

Dan looked at David curiously wondering what that meant. “All right, Alex. Hop on.” Alex eagerly climbed into her grandfather’s lap. “I suppose you want to drive too.” he mentioned. She nodded quickly.

“Okay but let me get us out into the hallway first.”

As Dan followed them out of the room, he asked, “Dad, how in the world did she talk you into this?”

David shrugged. “Just a sucker for a cute face I guess.” David took Alex’s hand and put in on the control to his wheelchair under his own. “All right, Captain Alex. Take me to the kitchen.” Alex squeaked in delight as the chair took off making Dan laugh.

Brittany was settling Ana in her chair when she saw David and Alexis whipping around the corner in his wheelchair. She couldn’t help but chuckle at the pure delight on her child’s face.

“I think my vote is for the race car driver, Dad.” Dan said stepping up behind him and scooping Alexis into his arms.

Sometime after dinner David too the girls into the den to play while they watched a baseball game. However Alexis got a hold of the remote while the men were talking and began flipping channels. Dan didn’t notice at first until blaring music came out of the tv. Dan glanced up to see his daughter had stopped it on a music video and was mesmerized by the screen.

“Honey, what are you watching?” he inquired as he saw a blonde bombshell singing on tv. “She’s sexy.” he mumbled towards his father not even realizing he had said it in front of his children.

“Looks like Mommy.” Alexis mentioned.

“You think so?” Dan asked.

Just then Brittany came waltzing in asking, “What’s the racket?” Seeing the tv she inquired, “Daniel, what are you allowing our daughter’s to watch?”

“It’s harmless, honey.”

“A woman prancing around half-naked is not harmless.”

“Looks like you, Mommy.” Alexis stated.

Brittany raised a brow curiously. “What makes you say that, sweetheart?”

“Sexy.” she mumbled already averting her eyes to the screen again.

Brittany’s eyes shot open in surprise. Looking over at her husband and father-in-law, she asked, “Where did Alexis learn such a word?” Neither of them would look at her at first as they snickered. “Which one of you said it?”

“Don’t look at me.” David stated. “That’s girls way too young for me.”

Dan cast a sheepish glance at his wife. “What can I say? Alex has good taste in women.” he teased. Brittany scowled playfully. “Okay, Alex. Mommy’s right. That’s enough of this channel.” he said taking the controls from her and turning it back to baseball. He looked over at Brittany and saw the humor in her eyes. “You thought that was funny. Admit it.”

“Maybe a little but we all should be more careful what we say around the girls. They don’t need to know what that really means, and they are all articulate for their ages. That’s all we really need is for her to go around saying that in public.”

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Over the next few months Brittany focused on her dissertation and Dan on his latest book of poetry. It was close to the end of the summer when they had their annual pool party, that coincided with Victoria’s fourth birthday. After lunch the girls went down for naps, leaving the adults time to themselves. Dan noticed Melissa and Mike huddled closely together discussing something at the far end of the deck. Being curious he playfully asked, “Hey, you two have something to share with the group?”

Melissa smiled at him. “We’re planning on doing just that, but we had to have a little talk first.” She looked at Mike who gave an encouraging nod. “Well, I guess I should just come right out and say it. Michael and I are engaged, and we’re also expecting in February.”

Collectively the woman screamed in excitement as they hovered around Melissa for hugs. Dan approached Mike with a huge smile. “Mike, you old dog, didn’t think you still had it in you after all this time.” he teased. “Congrats.” he said embracing his longtime friend.

“Thanks. It’s your fault you know, and for that reason, I want you to be my best man.”

“It would be an honor. What’s the date?”

“Sometime next spring.”

Leaning over to Melissa, Dan kissed her cheek. “Congratulations, Melissa. Someone finally

hooked him. I'm glad it was you. I'm so happy for you."

"Thank you for helping us, Daniel. You're a good friend."

"It was my pleasure, but all I really did was put the idea into your heads. You two did the hard part. Well, Mike got to do the fun part." Dan teased under his breath slapping Mike on the shoulder.

Brittany backhanded him in the stomach playfully. "Men, that's all you think about." she growled jokingly.

"Hey, I just hope that when I'm Mike's age I can keep up." Dan teased.

"If anybody could, it would be you and Brittany. You're practically a baby factory."

"Not if I have any say about it. We're only having one more."

"Really? Think you might actually try to plan this one?"

"We'll see. I kind of like the surprise of it all. So, do you want a boy or girl?"

"Girl. I already have two sons."

That evening after the girls had gone to sleep, Dan and Brittany settled into bed with a movie. "I think it's so wonderful about Melissa and Mike. It's what they've both always wanted." Brittany stated curling up around Dan's side.

"Yeah. It took them long enough. I'm glad they're both happy, but I am a bit surprised about the baby, though. I mean Mike's forty-four and has two grown children. I guess Melissa talked him into it. He didn't stand a chance against her wiles. She could probably talk him into anything." Dan laughed to himself.

"What's so funny?"

"Oh, I was just thinking about Mike. He's been wanting a piece of her action for as long as I can remember. Glad to know he finally got some."

"You're incorrigible you know. Never realized that at twenty-eight, you'd still be acting like a seventeen year old when it came to sex."

Dan just laughed as she wiggled his brows. "They don't call me 'Dan the Man' for nothing. Gotta have that action." he teased.

Brittany smiled sexily as she asked, "What about my action? Think you can handle that, 'Dan the Man?'"

He smiled. “You’re too hot to handle sometimes, but I always like to try.” he replied leaning into her neck.

They kissed for a few minutes before Brittany pulled away. “You know, now that I’m finished with my dissertation, I think it’s time we had that baby talk that we promised each other. Any thoughts on the matter?”

“Well, first of all, is it something you are set on doing?”

“I’d like to, Daniel.”

“Okay, then we will. Do you want to try to plan it, or just let it happen?”

“I kind of like the surprise of it all, but I don’t want there to be such a large age difference between Victoria and this one. I’d like one within the next year or two. Maybe we could just put a little extra effort into it on a monthly basis, but I don’t want either of us to feel the pressure of having to perform either.”

“I hear you, and I agree. We’ll just take it as it comes along with no pressure. So, do you think we could put our plan into action now?” he asked hopefully.

“Oh, twist my arm a little harder, Mr. McKnight.” she teased bring him into a deep kiss.

## Chapter Eleven

The following spring was Mike and Melissa’s wedding. They had ended up having twins, a girl named Hailey, who was the image of Melissa and a boy named Harrison, who had Melissa’s blue eyes but dark hair like his father. That morning as the McKnight household prepared to go to the service, Dan noticed Brittany smiling contemplatively at him.

“What is it, beautiful? Something wrong with my tux?”

“No. You look so handsome.”

“Well, you look absolutely beautiful. Melissa did a good thing by her bridesmaids by letting them pick out their own outfits. Yours is just stunning. I wonder if the girls have managed to keep themselves presentable while we were changing.”

“I hope so.” Brittany replied giving him a dreamy smile.

“What’s up with you, Mrs. McKnight? You’ve been acting strange for the past two days. Every time I look at you you’ve got that far off look in your eyes and stupid grin. You’re making me feel like I did something right for once.” he kidded looking back to the mirror to work on his bowtie.

“Can’t a woman just be happy?” she asked coming to assist him.

“Yeah but I know you well enough to know something’s up. You’re keeping something from me, aren’t you?”

Brittany just smiled. “Maybe.”

“Tell me.”

“No.”

“Why not? I thought wives were supposed to tell their husbands everything.”

“Who gave you that crazy idea?” she joked. “Seriously, we’ll talk about it later. This is Melissa and Mike’s day. I don’t want to take away from that.”

“Oh, come on. Now you’ve got me all curious. Tell me. I won’t tell anyone.” he whined playfully.

“You’re as bad as the girls. Now I know where they get it.”

“Please?” he pestered giving her a sad pout.

“Promise not to tell anyone?” Dan nodded enthusiastically. “All right but you promised. Just remember that.”

“Okay. The suspense is killing me.” he said with a grin.

Brittany leaned in close to him as she embraced his back. “Well, let’s just say that we now have a good excuse of why we were late to the hospital the day the twins were born.”

Dan furrowed his brow in confusion. “The day the twins were born? Weren’t we late because we were having...” Brittany just smiled and nodded as she saw the implication come over his face. “Oh, my.” he said in wonder. “Are you sure? That was only two months ago.”

Brittany nodded. “I’m sure, Daniel. I found out two days ago, but I didn’t want to overshadow Melissa and Mike’s wedding by saying anything. You’re going to be a daddy again.”

Dan pulled her into a tight hug. “Oh, Brittany. This is so wonderful. I love you so much.”

“I love you too, Daniel. Now I have everything I ever wanted. Thank you for making my life complete.”

The End

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