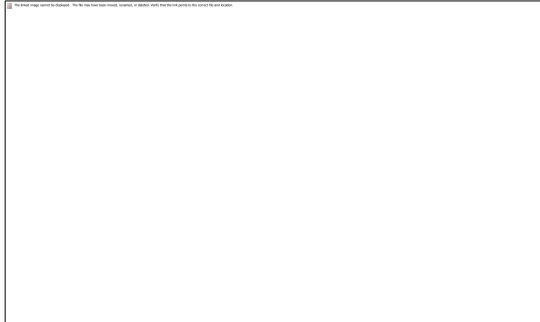


~ Vows of the Heart ~

by Alex Tryst

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This tale follows "Love in Photographs", "Georgia on My Mind", and "Stick to the Script". This is the fourth and final story in the New York Series.

As always, comments and feedback is welcome at alextryst@hotmail.com.

Green eyes studied the ceiling as hands idly caressed the dark head on her bare breasts. Open French doors

allowed the sounds of morning waves of the distant water into the room. Normally Helen adored this time of the day most with Torrance, but this morning found her dejected. She sighed deeply.

"What is it, beautiful?" the photographer softly asked, breaking the silence.

"Nothing. I was just thinking."

"About?" the forty-year-old brunette questioned, lifting her head from her wife's endowment.

Seeing adoring green eyes showing concern, the blonde shook her head lightly. She wanted to express what was really on her mind, but she decided not to do so, given their time constraints that morning. Instead she merely smiled and answered, "I was just thinking about how much I'm going to miss you and the kids."

Torrance grinned down at her elegant wife of five years. "Trust me. Once you, Georgia, and Sarah get on that plane, you're going to forget all about us. The three of you are going to have a great time in New Orleans. You need this vacation, Helen. You need time away from our little holy terrors," she joked. "This girls trip is just what you need."

"But I don't need time away from you," she whispered, cupping the brunette's face in her hand.

Torrance smiled down at her before lowering her mouth to the blonde's ear. Kissing it tenderly, she whispered, "Restez-vous avec moi?"

Helen giggled lightly as she held her wife tighter. "Do you even know how much I love it when you speak French to me when we make love?" she asked as their mouths came together gently.

"Vraiment?" the photographer inquired meeting green eyes.

"Yes. It's so sexy," she teased.

"Je t'aime, mon madame," Torrance responded as her left hand trailed down over the blonde's shoulder to her naked breast.

Helen spared a smile for her beloved before kissing her again. "I love you too, Torrance, so much." Moments passed with them slowly escalating their intimacy for a second time that morning. However, when Helen felt her need overtake the idle caressing, she whispered, "Please make love to me again, Torrance. It will be so long until I can feel you again."

Torrance laughed lightly since her wife made her two-week vacation seem like forever. "Avec plaisir," she answered, going about the task with great joy.

Half an hour later their alarm began to emit the sounds of the news, signaling the end of their activities. Regretfully the blonde turned to her lover. "I hate leaving you," she confessed.

"You'll manage," Torrance answered.

Helen nodded. "Promise me when I get back we'll try again for number three. I hate being away during this time of the month."

The taller woman looked down at her spouse. She heard the sadness in the thirty-five year old's voice. For close to a year they had been trying for their third child without success, and Torrance knew it was wearing on her beloved. Their other two children had been conceived with relative ease, so they both were feeling a little frustration that they were not able to do so again. Nevertheless, Torrance never voiced her disappointment to her lover, knowing that Helen was taking it harder than she.

The photographer smiled at her green-eyed angel as she lightly rubbed the smaller woman's midsection. "I promise that we'll try again," she vowed. "Come on now. You need to finish your packing while I go check on our kids. They're being too quiet for their own good."

Meanwhile, over in the bustling city of New York, the Erwin household was already stirring with a flurry of activity. Blake sat with their twins at the table supervising breakfast while Georgia went over the itinerary with the attorney. "Well, here's the number for the hotel and a list of all the reservations that we have so far for dinner and such," she stated, handing a copy over to her wife.

Blake perused it as she sipped her coffee. "Looks like you ladies are going to have fun."

"Yeah. I cain't wait to get back to the South. I've missed it, and I just love Nawlins too."

Blake cracked a grin at her wife's thick drawl. "What did you just call it?" she teased.

"Nawlins."

"New Orleans?" the attorney clarified.

"Yeah, that's what I said. You Yankees just don't know how to pronounce it," Georgia said with her own proud smile.

The older woman shrugged. "Just try to stay low while you're there. You know the Klan is notorious in Louisiana. I don't feel completely comfortable with this."

"I know, but I promise to stay out of trouble. Now if you have any problems with the kids Mama has offered to help."

"We won't be trouble, Mama," Luke announced with a mouthful of cereal.

The writer smiled at their three-year-old twins. "I know you and Lana will be on your best behavior for Mom. It ain't you I'm worried 'bout. My babies are angels. Ain't that right, Lana?" The dark-haired child nodded as she ate. Looking back at the forty-two-year-old attorney, Georgia joked, "No, it's Mom I'm worried 'bout. She cain run the world but not know what to do with two three-year-olds."

"I'll be fine. I'm taking my own little vacation from work as are Tor and Jamie, so we're going to all help each other."

Georgia shook her head skeptically. "All right. Well, I need to take care of some last minute-packin'. We have to leave in just a bit. When you two finish breakfast, Mom will help you get dressed."

In the meantime on Staten Island, the newlyweds spent their last few minutes alone in bed together before their son, Stephen, made himself known. Sarah sighed at the shrill of his cry and reluctantly left her wife's embrace. Jamie just looked up at her with sympathetic eyes. "You know, you won't know what to do with yourself on this vacation," she mentioned. "The nights will be too quiet without Stephen waking you."

"I know. Are you sure you're going to be okay alone with him?" the twenty-eight-year-old blonde questioned in concern as she picked their child up out of his co-sleeper.

"I'll be fine. I managed with Katrina and Eve. I think I can do this for two little weeks. Besides, Tor and Blake are planning on helping out too. We figured it would be better if we had three adults for seven kids. They were worried about me taking on three at once," she teased.

"Although between the three of us, I think it's really Blake that has it worst. She's a great parent as long as Georgia is there for backup. Heaven knows what's going to happen when she's alone with those kids without a net. It wouldn't surprise me if she gave up after the first day and hired a sitter."

"Come on now. She loves her kids. She just doesn't have the touch Georgia does. Her maternal instinct is a little rusty."

"You would think after three years she would've found it," the tall woman stated, rising from bed and coming to her wife. She embraced the naked blonde from behind and nuzzled her neck as Sarah changed Stephen's diaper.

The small woman shrugged. "Enough talk about Blake. There are other things we need to discuss."

"Such as?"

"Katrina," Sarah stated seriously. Jamie sighed at the mention of her eldest daughter's name. "I know you don't like talking about this, but she is getting worse. I love her dearly, but at ten, she's one of the biggest nightmares I've ever faced. She makes all the divas we know seem like kittens."

"I know. I just don't know what to do, Sarah. Her whole life she's gotten everything she's ever wanted. Now she's just expecting everything to be placed at her feet. I don't know where I went wrong with her."

"I'm tired of her attitude, Jamie. I know you want her to live with us, but the girl drives me crazy every day. She responds better to Samantha and Doug than me, and that's not the way it should be. Changes need to be made."

"I know, I know. I promise that by the time you get back I will have thought of something. Okay?" the brunette said trying to pacify her wife.

Sarah gave a nod. "Thank you. I know we can make this work. We just have to find a way to reach her before it's too late."

Changing the subject Jamie stated, "Give me the little one. You need to start getting ready. I'm going to go see if our other two are up yet."

As the tall woman moved to leave the room to check on their daughters, Sarah called her back and kissed her lightly on the mouth. "I love you, Jamie."

"I love you too, Sarah. Get a move on now. It's going to take this crew a little while before we're ready to go to the airport."

By eleven that morning all three families were at JFK airport. Between the three of them, they had decided to take the newly acquired Whitfield family jet down to New Orleans instead of public transportation. They all figured it would be easier given Sarah's still recent Oscar notoriety. The three blondes wanted peace, and since Georgia always aimed for convenience whenever possible and Helen was simply used to the jet for most of their travels, it seemed to make the most sense.

All three women said goodbye to their respective partners and children before heading for the plane. The three brunettes watched quietly as their angels ascended up the staircase. Each of them turned and waved before disappearing into the cabin. When all of them were inside and the door was closed, Jamie looked at her dark-haired counterparts.

Torrance was standing there holding John and Marta's hands in each of hers. Her green eyes

were almost misty, and the photographer was silent. Blake had a child on each hip as she too gazed on at the plane, but her look was more of panic than sadness. As for Jamie, she held her son in one arm and grasped Eve's hand with her other while keeping a watchful eye on her eldest. Trying to lighten the moment, she teased, "Oh, are we in such trouble."

Immediately Torrance laughed at the joke. "Should we take bets on who calls a baby sitter first?"

"That's too easy," the actress answered.

Simultaneously they looked at the attorney. Blake faked affront but then shrugged. "Yeah, that is too easy," she conceded.

Up in the plane, the three blondes settled themselves for their flight. As they all took their seats, Helen and Sarah looked out the windows at their wives. "Are we sure this is a good idea?" the former model suddenly questioned skeptically all of a sudden.

"Jamie will be fine. She's used to juggling kids and schedules," Sarah replied. "I'm more concerned about Blake."

"She has to learn sometime," Georgia quickly answered.

The actress looked at Helen and inquired, "What about Tor?"

"She'll be fine. The kids are her life. I'm going to miss her though," she confessed.

Both of the other women chuckled lightly. "I swear you're like newlyweds," the writer jibed.

"If anyone should be missing their wife, it should be me. After all, Jamie and I are still technically in our honeymoon phase," Sarah joked.

As the plane began to taxi away from their families, Helen took one last look and then turned to her friends. She signaled their flight attendant and requested a bottle of champagne to be opened for them. Within moments three glasses were served.

The eldest blonde raised her flute. "To our vacation," Helen toasted.

"To our vacation," Georgia and Sarah seconded before proceeding to drink.

Several hours later the threesome landed in the Big Easy. As soon as their plane came to a stop, a limousine was already waiting to take them to their hotel, the elegant Ritz-Carlton on Canal Street in downtown New Orleans, just a few blocks from the French Quarter. When they arrived, they were quickly ushered up to the Club Level for check-in. It had been decided upon by the three of them to share one suite during their stay, preferring the girlish comradery instead of the solitude of separate living quarters, and the Louisiana Suite's four bedrooms were more than able to fit their needs.

The attendants escorted them with the luggage up to their accommodations. Helen smiled over at Sarah as they all admired their suite. "Your assistant does good work. You'll have to give her a raise."

"Yeah. I gave her an extra week of vacation for making all the arrangements. Figured it was only fair since I'd be gone two weeks. You know you two should think about getting personal assistants. It makes a world of difference," she mentioned.

The writer shrugged. "I don't think Blake would go for that. I'm still workin' on a nanny for the kids, so I cain work from home. The magazine is on me 'bout bein' behind in my articles, and I'm tryin' to write my first book. Maybe this time 'lone will do some good. She'll realize how hard it is to watch two kids everyday."

"I'm sure she doesn't mean to come across that way, Georgia. She's so busy as it is. You just have to take the matter into your own hands. You just have to get the nanny without her permission. Forgiveness is much easier to ask for, you know. Once she sees how much better off you are, she'll be glad. Works with Torrance anyway."

The writer laughed. "Yeah. Tor would give you anythin', Helen. We're talkin' 'bout Blake Erwin here."

"Well, we don't have a nanny and do all right," Sarah piped in. "Of course we do have family right across the street too, so that helps. I think Helen is right, Georgia. If you really think you need a nanny, you should get one. Blake will thank you for it when the two of you get some time to yourselves."

"Yeah. We certainly haven't had any of that. You have no idea how long it's been since we've had the time, much less energy, to even be intimate," the thirty-year-old confessed to her friends with a hint of sadness. "Who would have ever thought that after three years of marriage sex would be a thin' of the past."

Both Sarah and Helen gave Georgia sympathetic gazes. Neither of them could relate to the sentiment. Helen and Torrance always found time for each other, even if it was scheduled, and Jamie and Sarah always had to arrange their rendezvous with their equally demanding calendars, but they did so without complaint.

"Well, we should probably settle in. We have a few hours to kill before dinner. According to our itinerary, we have reservations at Bella Luna at seven. What do we want to do after that?" the actress inquired.

"I don't know. There's so much to take in. Maybe we should just walk the French Quarter to see our options," Helen suggested.

"Works for me," seconded Georgia.

"While we wait, should we decide who gets the first bubble bath in Napoleon's alabaster tub?"

Sarah asked, speaking of the impressive historically tub in one of their bathrooms. "I wonder how big it really is. He was a tiny guy."

Both of the other women shrugged. Curiously they went to investigate the notorious bathing vessel. Georgia laughed at its size when they came upon it. "I don't think any of our wives could get into that thin'," she mentioned, referring to their tall, strong, dark-headed champions.

"But I'd certainly like to see Torrance try," Helen whispered as her mind drifted to what her lover might actually look like.

"Oh, it's going to be a long two weeks if you're already fantasizing," Sarah joked, hitting the oldest blonde lightly on the arm as they moved back to their sitting area.

Helen had the decency to flush slightly. "I can't help it. She's just so..." she trailed off a moment moaning faintly. Picking up in mid-sentence after a brief pause, she continued, "And when she whispers to me in French, oh my."

"What? She speaks French to you in bed?" Sarah inquired in playful inquisitiveness. "I didn't even know she knew French."

Helen nodded. "There's this look she gets on her face. She arches her right brow and stares at me with those green eyes. I miss her already," the tall blonde admitted. The actress and writer both laughed at Helen's antics. The oldest blonde looked at them. "Oh, come on. I'm sure Jamie and Blake have something that they do that just drives you crazy," she pushed.

"Oh yeah," Sarah answered brazenly. "I love it when she gets rough. It's so sexy."

Turning their eyes to Georgia, both of them just waited for their friend to chime into the chatter. Georgia shrugged. "It's all good with Blake."

"Oh, come on. Give us more than that," Sarah pushed.

"Well, I guess it would have to be when she sneaks up on me," she conceded. "The way her body feels pressed into my back, the sound of her labored breathin' in my ear as she kisses my neck. Her hands always seem like they're everywhere at once," she mumbled, thinking about the last time she had the pleasure of feeling her lover that way. It had been such a long while. Looking at her friends, she inquired, "Do you think they are missin' us as much as we are them?"

"More," Helen assured. "Right about now they're wondering what they agreed to. Two weeks with just the kids is a lot for anyone to take."

Over the next several days, the blondes filled their time with all their favorite activities from shopping and historical tours to eating in the city's most prestigious restaurants and enjoying the refinements of the hotel's spa. Meanwhile back in New York, the three career-minded brunettes were trying to earn their badges as mothers of the year with the seven children between them. They met daily for joint activities but after the first three days found Torrance and Helen's

Hamptons mansion the best place to remain given that it had all the necessary amenities the children wanted, including a pool, beach, and lots of games. On the fourth night, though, after the younger kids had been put to bed and Katrina had retired to her room, the three of them sat around drinking scotch and bemoaning their situation.

Blake sighed as she looked at her two friends. Torrance was reclined in a leather wingback chair and Jamie stretched out on the couch holding a sleeping Stephen. "I can't take it any more," she admitted. "I need Georgia back. I didn't realize this was going to be this difficult."

Torrance chuckled as she took a sip of her beverage. "I don't think you're the only one. Jamie looks like the walking dead," she joked.

"Stephen's been unhappy. I think he knows that Sarah's gone," she stated. "What I would give for a little blonde right now."

Torrance nodded in agreement. "I'm going through Helen withdrawals. I'd give all my money to feel that woman's soft skin underneath me," she confessed.

Blake gave a nod. "Don't blame you for that. That'd be a wise investment," she quipped jokingly. "The bed's been too cold without my sweet Georgia peach."

"We are truly pathetic," the youngest brunette joked as she finished off her glass of scotch. The photographer poured her another. "Here we are pining away for our women while they are having the time of their lives. You know they aren't even thinking of us. They're busy off getting drunk at some jazz club in the French Quarter. I bet you right now some fools are trying to pick up our women."

The comment hung in the air a moment before Blake said, "You know we agreed to watch the kids, but we never did specify where we would watch them."

"Uh oh. Sounds like the attorney is coming out to play. I love it when your mind works this way," Torrance mentioned. "What is that devious brain of yours thinking?"

"We could go down to Nawlins, as my sweet would say."

"With the kids? Those ladies would kill us," Jamie replied. "They're supposed to be on vacation. It would be quite another thing if we could dump the kids and go alone. I think they'd like that, but to bring seven kids down there, I think our wives would murder us in our beds."

Torrance shrugged. "What if we did ditch the kids?" she suggested. "I think I could convince my mother to take the children for a couple of days, especially if she knew what I was going to do. Don't you think Cindy would like to spend a little time with her grandchildren?" pointedly she asked. "And what about Samantha and Doug? Do you think you could drop Katrina and Eve at least with them just for a day or two?" The attorney and actress both shrugged. "Isn't it worth finding out?" Torrance pressed.

"I think someone is thinking with something other than her brain," Jamie joked. "Still the idea has merit."

"It sure does," Blake granted. "It wouldn't hurt to find out."

An hour later the three of them convened again. Smiling triumphantly Jamie announced, "Samantha and Doug will take all three of them off my hands for a few days."

"Cindy was more than happy to help out. What about you, Tor?"

"My mother said she'd come down from Albany. This is going to be great. The ladies are going to love this. How soon can everyone be ready to go?"

On Friday evening the dark-haired threesome stepped off their plane into the humid New Orleans night. Torrance checked her watch as they waited for their bags to be loaded into their limousine. "I bet they've probably already left for dinner. We should hit the hotel first to drop off our stuff and then try to catch up with them at the restaurant," she suggested.

Blake nodded in agreement but Jamie mentioned, "We aren't going to be able to get into Commander's Palace without a reservation."

The photographer shot her a lopsided grin. "Who said anything about going inside? I've got a better idea," she stated before letting them in on her intentions. The actress and attorney immediately agreed. "Let me just call Helen to make sure that's where they went. It would be terrible to go through all this if they changed their plans." Pulling out her cell phone, she called her wife as the three of them took seats in the car. She motioned for her friends to be silent as she waited on an answer.

The three blondes were sitting at an exquisite table sharing a bottle of champagne as they simply chatted about their dinner options when Helen's cell phone began to ring. Reaching into her purse, she mumbled, "I thought I turned this thing off." She was about to do so, when she noticed that the number was her wife's cell phone. "It's Torrance," she explained. "I better answer it just in case it's important. Excuse me." Flipping open her phone she quietly greeted her lover.

"Hi," Torrance cheerfully greeted.

"Hi, Torrance. What's going on?"

"I was just seeing how you were," she said.

"I fine. We're in the middle of dinner. I can't really talk right now. Are the kids okay?"

"They're fine. I just wanted to hear your sweet voice a moment. I didn't mean to disturb your dinner. Where did you ladies go tonight?"

"Commander's Palace."

"Oh? What are you eating?" she questioned, trying to push for as much information as possible to see how much time they had to implement their plan.

"I don't know yet. We haven't ordered. Now as much as I appreciate your call, I really should go. I'll talk to you later. I promise."

"Okay. Have a good evening. Have some fun."

"We will. Kiss the kids for me."

"I will. See you soon, mon petite chou."

"Bye, Torrance," she said with a little laugh before ending the call. Looking back at her two friends, the tall blonde shrugged. "I think my darling is missing me. Who would've guessed she would be the first to break down and call?" The other women laughed before the three of them looked back at their dinner selection choices.

Hanging up her side of the call, Torrance cracked a grin. "They're at Commander's Palace and haven't even ordered. We have plenty of time."

Two hours later the three blonde were just finishing their desserts. However, as they talked about their plan for after dinner, Sarah's eyes were caught by a presence speaking to the maitre d'. Shocked at what she thought she saw, she stared more intently for a moment.

"What is it, Sarah?" Georgia inquired, seeing that her friend's mind was elsewhere.

"I swear I just saw a woman that looked exactly like Blake standing over there." All three of them immediately looked to that spot, but no one other than then host was standing there. "Must have been my imagination," she mumbled.

A few minutes later their waiter came to the table with an envelope in his hand. "Excuse me, Mrs. Talbot-Dean, Mrs. Erwin, and Mrs. Whitfield. This just arrived for the three of you."

Quizzically Sarah reached for it and opened it for them. "The honor of your presence is requested at the curbside of Commander's Palace as soon as possible," she read off the card. She didn't recognize the handwriting, so she handed it over to Georgia.

The waiter shrugged and passed it on to Helen. "Well, I guess we better go then," she stated. Looking back to their server she requested, "I think we need our bill."

"That has already been taken care of. Have a lovely evening, ladies," he said with a smile and slight nod of his head before walking away from them.

"I wonder what this is 'bout," Georgia speculated as they rose from their table.

"I don't know, but this has Torrance written all over it," the oldest woman said.

Slowly the three of them made their way through the restaurant to the exit. As soon as they stepped out the door, however, they were greeted by an unexpected, sexy surprise. A black stretch limousine was parked at the curb with three dark and dangerous ladies waiting. The attorney was wearing dark gray slacks with a black shirt. She was sitting on the trunk of the limo, one foot propped up on the bumper, and she idly played with a glass of bourbon she had taken out of the car as they waited. The actress was leaning with one hip against the car with an unlit cigarette in the corner of her mouth. Her outfit was a revealing black silk top with a pair of low riding black leather pants that showed off her fine physique. Her cocky attitude was apparent. Last was the photographer. She leaned casually against the back door with her ankles crossed. She was dressed in black slacks and a white shirt with black pin-stripes. All three women held a single red rose.

An extended moment passed in silence. The three brunettes could tell they had succeeded in taking their wives completely off guard. Breaking the stillness though, Torrance finally stepped forward and issued a greeting. "Bon soir, madames."

"What are you doin' here?" Georgia asked as Blake slid off the car and approached her.

The attorney shrugged. "We thought we could use a little distraction as well," she answered for her friends.

"Where are the children?" Sarah inquired as Jamie neared her.

"With Samantha and Doug. Everything's fine. We just had to give up. It was too tough for us. We had to come down here and tell you all that you three deserve the mother of the year awards, not us. We can't take it," she joked slipping her arms around her wife. They kissed gently.

"So, the night is young as they say. Where would you ladies like to go?" Torrance asked, pulling open the car door in invitation.

"Well, we were planning on going over to the House of Blues," Helen stated.

Sarah broke away from Jamie's mouth long enough to add, "But suddenly I'm feeling very tired. I think I might just want to go back to the hotel."

"Me too. That was a long flight," Jamie added.

Blake laughed at the obvious lie. "Yeah, I believe that. The two youngest women here tired? I think she just wants to get laid. I guess we better let Jamie do her duty, huh, Tor?"

The photographer shrugged. "Yeah. It's best to keep the ladies happy," she conceded. "All right. The hotel it is for the Talbot-Deans. What about the Erwins?"

"I want to go out to the casino. Perhaps my wife would indulge me?" the attorney questioned of

the writer.

Georgia smiled wrapping her arms around Blake's waist. "Anythin' for you."

Smiling down at her own wife, Torrance asked, "And for Madame Whitfield?"

"I could go for some fun out but not Harrah's. Let's go to the French Quarter."

"I guess that settles it then," Blake stated. "Come on, ladies. Your chariot awaits."

All six of them got into the limousine. Their first stop was the hotel. Quickly Jamie and Sarah rushed to get out, making their friends laugh. Watching them go inside, Georgia asked, "Where do you want us to drop you?"

"Actually, it's only a few blocks from here. We can walk," Helen mentioned.

"Are you sure?" Blake inquired.

"Yeah. We'll be fine. Have fun, you two. See you in the morning," Torrance answered as she and Helen stepped out of the vehicle as well.

In the hotel Jamie and Sarah leisurely made their way up to their room. However, as soon as they were in the door, the little blonde gave her lover her best bedroom gaze. "Have I missed you, Miss Dean," she growled, tugging anxiously at her wife's shirt buttons.

Jamie chuckled as Sarah's urgency. "I missed you too, love," she whispered leaning to catch her lover's open mouth in a kiss. "It's so nice to have you alone without the kids to bother us." Her fingers found the zipper to Sarah's summer dress. "Show me to your bed, Mrs. Talbot-Dean," she requested scooping the small woman up into her arms.

Within seconds they were in the bedroom. Jamie gently placed her wife down against the down-turned bed and then stood at the bedside to undress. Sarah watched with rapt attention as her lover's frame came into view. The sight of Jamie never failed to awaken her own body's fervor. Reaching out her hands, the petite woman demanded, "Come to me."

Flashing her notoriously arrogant grin, the tall woman did just as she was told. Leaning down, she captured Sarah's soft lips with her own as she slipped onto the bed. Her hands quickly began to remove the younger woman's clothes, and within minutes, they were both naked. "You're so beautiful, Sarah. You never cease to amaze me," Jamie whispered as her hands reverently mapped her wife's frame.

"Please, Jamie. I need you now," the blonde responded with rising ardor.

"I need you too, Sarah," the tall woman replied giving in to her lover's needs.

It was mere moments before they were both of the verge of peak as they clung tightly to each

other, helping the imminent moment approach as fast as it could. When it came, they both were left spent and panting for several minutes.

"I've missed you so much, Jamie," Sarah whispered as she curled up into Jamie's body. The older woman knew she was speaking of more than just the absence during the vacation. It had been so long since they had been together like this given the obstacles in their lives. Between their work schedules, their new family arrival, and other family duties, they hardly ever had the time much less energy for the sexual intimacy they craved, often settling for physical closeness. However, they knew it was the way it had to be between them if they wanted careers and a family.

"I have missed you too, beautiful woman. It's so nice not to have to worry about being interrupted by Stephen."

Sarah nodded in agreement. "Are you sure Samantha and Doug will be okay with him? He's only a few months old. That was quite a favor to ask."

"Samantha assured me that it was fine. I think she needs a baby fix anyway. She's kind of been dropping hints about wanting another, but I think this will be a wake up call for her. She'll remember what it's like to have an infant and change her mind," the brunette joked lightly.

"That or confirm her decision. What does Doug think about that?"

"Don't know really. Knowing him though, he'll do whatever Samantha says. She has him around her finger."

"Sounds like someone else I know," Sarah said with a smile as she propped herself up on Jamie's chest.

The tall woman smiled as she caressed her wife's cheek. "Yeah. You've certainly got me that way. I love you, Sarah."

"I love you too, Jamie," she answered leaning down to give her a soft kiss.

Meanwhile down on the streets of New Orleans, Helen and Torrance walked hand in hand through the French Quarter. Street musicians filled the air with jazz, and locals and tourist mingled along Bourbon Street. Putting a soft hand on the photographer's arm as they strolled, Helen looked up at the woman who had held her heart for so many years. Torrance smiled down at her. "So, tell me. Whose idea was it to sneak down here?" she asked conversationally.

The dark-haired woman shrugged. "I think it was mine. Blake suggested coming but bringing the kids. Jamie talked her out of that, and I came up with this plan. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all. It's nice to have some time alone with you. Who's watching the kids?"

"My mother came down from Albany to stay at the house. She seemed more than happy to leave the governor's mansion for awhile. Politics apparently aren't as great as they once were. I think if

she had her way, she'd get my father to resign. He's doing well by the state, but I think he's getting the inclination to take even bigger steps."

"Joining the senate again?"

"Bigger than that," Torrance answered.

"You're kidding? He's not thinking about running for president, is he?"

The photographer shrugged. "Well, the party likes what he's doing. There's been talk of him going on the ticket but in which position no one is sure. I think my mother will try to talk him out of it if she possibly can. She wants her husband back."

Helen nodded. "I understand that. He tried to retire once before. He needs to stop, Torrance. There's no need to pursue anything else. He has all that he wants already. Why is he pushing on like this?"

She shrugged. "The Whitfield men never stop, Helen. You know that by now."

"Except for you," she joked, knowing Torrance's family thought of her as an honorary male member.

The tall woman gave a laughing smile. "Well, when I have the most perfect woman on my arm, a career that can't get much better, and two fabulous children, there isn't much more that I could want."

"Except for another fabulous child," Helen mumbled.

Looking down into the green eyes that she adored, Torrance said, "I don't need another child to feel fulfilled, Helen. I have a perfect world as it is."

The blonde nodded in response. Changing the direction of their talk, she mentioned, "This street is too loud. Do you think we could find a place a little better suited for us?"

"Of course. Come on," she said taking a right at the next block to leave the crowded street. Cutting through Jackson Square, Torrance pointed over to Café Du Monde. "How about some coffee?" she suggested.

"Sounds good," Helen answered.

Once inside they had to fight a small crowd to get to the counter. However, then they ordered some café au lait and chicory coffee to go with their beignets and found a seat in the open air patio of the café. Quietly they enjoyed their snack as they listened to the bustle of the streets. Looking over at her wife, Torrance smiled. The blonde had managed to get powdered sugar on her pastel green linen dress. Nevertheless the photographer thought it the most adorable thing she had ever seen. Leaning over the tiny bistro table, she reached to brush it off for her. "You

managed to cover yourself," she teased.

Helen looked down at herself and Torrance's hand as it lightly brushed over her chest in an innocent gesture. Nevertheless, the soft touch sparked a flame inside her. "Anywhere else?" she questioned as the tall woman withdrew her hand.

She shook her head. "You're perfect."

They remained at Café Du Monde for close to an hour, simply talking and reveling in the feeling of closeness. However, when they felt they had occupied the coveted table long enough, they left for more strolling. They walked at a slow pace through Jackson Square again. Music filled the night. Coming to a stop in the middle of the square, Torrance embraced her wife around the waist. "Voulez-vous danser avec moi?" she whispered.

The tall blonde smiled up at her lover. Torrance was always full of romantic surprises, which made her feel as if she was continually falling in love with her spouse. Slipping her arms around the photographer's neck, they began to move at a much slower pace than the jazz that floated on the breeze of the Mississippi River.

People passed by around them, but neither of them noticed having only eyes for each other. Helen sighed in contentment. She felt adored as strong arms held her. Her thoughts began to drift as they swayed to the music. The blonde knew that her lover's words from earlier were true. Torrance felt complete with or without another child. However, there was something in her that yearned for a third baby. She needed to give the photographer another child. John and Marta were gifts she wanted to give Torrance as sign of their bond, and she wanted to prove her love once more that way. Suddenly her musings were broken by a voice in her ear.

"What are you thinking about?"

Helen looked up into Torrance's green eyes. "How much I love you," she replied with a beautiful smile.

"I love you, too, Helen, more than you can possibly ever fathom. I live to see the light of your eyes, your smile, to feel your tender embrace. You couldn't conceivably know how my heart aches for your very touch. You are by far the greatest gift I've ever been given, Helen. I still don't know how after all these years how I managed to snag you. I'm so lucky."

"I'm the lucky one, Torrance," she countered, leaning up to her wife's mouth to kiss her.

It was a soft exchange but full of promise. The brunette moaned softly as she pulled the blonde impossibly closer. When they broke for air, she murmured Helen's name. Questioning green eyes gazed up at her. "Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir?" she softly whispered, gazing longingly into green eyes.

Helen's body responded to the solicitation as it usually did, instantly humming with anticipation of pleasure to come. Giving a sweet smile, the blonde answered, "Qui, Madame Whitfield."

Making their way back to the hotel suite, all was quiet as they entered. "I guess Sarah and Jamie wore each other out," Torrance teased lightly.

"Like I intend to do with you," Helen mentioned, pulling her wife back toward her bedroom. However, when they got into the room, the blonde stopped in the doorway. It had been intimately decorated with flowers and candles. Seeing the photographer's bags sitting on the floor at the foot of the bed, she turned to her lover. "How did you get in here while we were gone?" she questioned.

"You know me. I can sweet talk my way into anything," she teased. "You like it I hope."

"I love it. Thank you."

"You're welcome. I have a surprise for you tonight. I want to try something different if you don't mind."

"I'm yours for whatever," Helen replied as they kissed.

Without any further words, Torrance began to unzip the green dress her wife was wearing. It fell to the floor within a moment. Helen reached for her own bra clasp, knowing how much the photographer loved to watch as she freed her femininity. This time was no exception as she saw green eyes darken in arousal as they came into view, but Torrance didn't reach for them yet. Instead she worked on her own clothes, slowly undressing for her wife. This was a game they liked to play to see who would give in to their need to touch the other first. Almost without fail it was Torrance that crumbled. Tonight though, Helen succumbed to the want as she reached to assist her wife with her clothes.

When they were discarded in a pile on the floor, they moved toward the bed. "Just relax, Helen. Keep those pretty green eyes closed. I promise you'll enjoy this," Torrance whispered. "Turn over onto your stomach."

The former model did as the photographer requested, closing her eyes and turning over as she waited for what was to come. Torrance reached for the bedside table and opened the drawer where she had stashed some things earlier that night. Removing the lavender oil, she poured some of it into the palms of her hands. Helen moaned lightly as powerful hands took hold of her delicate shoulders and began to massage them. "Oh, you're better than the masseuse they have downstairs," she mumbled.

"Don't go to sleep on me now. This is only the beginning," Torrance assured quietly.

The room was silent as the brunette worked on her lover's body, pulling all the tension from her tall slight frame. Her mouth followed closely behind her hands, kissing over each curve of her back. Torrance then moved further down with her hands to each leg. The blonde was quiet until she felt her lover's mouth on her again. Torrance's lips were doing wonders. She felt a tongue sneaking up her inner left thigh as hands massaged her hamstrings. Finally, though, questing

fingers found their way up to the juncture of her thighs. Helen gave a little gasp as her hips instinctively raised slightly off the bed. "She certainly didn't do that," she whispered as Torrance's fingers teased her lightly

"I hope not," the older woman answered as she slipped into her lover for just a moment. Helen moaned. However after a few strokes, the brunette withdrew, much to the smaller woman's disappointment. "Turn over for me," Torrance asked. Helen managed to do as she was told. However, instinctively she opened her eyes to gaze upon her lover. The photographer was wearing a sexy little smile. "I told you to keep your eyes closed," she lightly admonished. "You wouldn't want me to stop, would you?"

"No. Please don't stop," the blonde panted shallowly.

"Then keep those gorgeous green eyes shut," she demanded. Regretfully Helen closed them again. She enjoyed seeing Torrance as much as feeling her, but she decided that she would do as her wife asked. She heard the taller woman pull something else out of the nightstand but didn't ask what it might be. She figured it was some sort of sex toy, which they experimented with only occasionally. The leisurely massage continued, but it was even more intimate as Torrance's mouth caressed every curvature her hands charted. An especially long time was spent on her feminine endowment. It was obvious that the photographer's methodical pace would not be altered, so the blonde merely laced her hands through graying dark hair to enjoy all the attention. Hands and mouth traveled her whole body but eventually settled where she had hoped.

As Torrance gave her wife the most intimate pleasure, she reached up for a pillow off the headboard, knowing she would need it in a few minutes. The blonde hardly seemed to notice when she managed to slip it under the smaller woman's hips, raising them slightly off the bed. Helen was too far removed with the exquisiteness of her lover's mouth to realize what Torrance was actually planning to do. Continuing the course with her tongue, the older woman gently opened her lover further. Helen's body responded in growing urgency. The forty year old could tell that her wife was closing the distance to the summit faster than she thought.

Helen knew she was close with each passing stroke. The slow pace was just right for her in that moment. Suddenly she felt a plastic phallus shape enter her as Torrance persisted with her mouth. The blonde, who usually preferred just her lover without assistance, didn't mind as the photographer kept each little thrust in perfect unison with her rocking hips. It was an impeccable orchestration of stimuli, leaving Helen helpless to the tender assault on her body. Her thighs began to strain as she neared her pinnacle.

Torrance felt the first signal of Helen's peak as the blonde's thighs began to instinctively try to close, but her shoulders held her open. Helen's hands pushed her head deeper as the blonde whimpered, "Torrance."

"I've got you, love. Je t'aime, mon madame. Let go for me, Helen," she quietly spurred as she slowly began to apply pressure to the end of the baster. Silently she prayed that this time would work for them for Helen's sake. When the salty taste of semen hit her own mouth, she wanted to choke but managed to refrain as Helen began to climax. Knowing it was time, she released the

rest of it. The overflow came back at her though, the awful taste filling her mouth. However, the blonde was hardly even cognizant of the fact of what her wife had just done as an earth-shattering peak enfolded her. It was only when she was starting to descend and heard her lover sputtering between her thighs that she came back to the moment.

Looking down between her legs and seeing Torrance coughing as she held a baster, Helen realized what her wife had just tried to do for her. "Are you okay, Torrance?" softly she asked.

The photographer gazed up at her with a loving smile. "Well, I have to admit I never thought I'd ever taste sperm, and I never want to again. That stuff is nasty," she teased tossing the baster aside. "Are you all right?" she asked turning her attention back to her wife.

"I'm more than okay," Helen replied cupping her wife's face in both hands. Torrance raised herself from her position and leaned up to kiss her. "Thank you, Torrance."

"You're welcome, Helen. I know you didn't like being away while you were ovulating."

"How did you know it was today though?"

"I do read our calendar. I've been paying attention, love. I just thought the change of scenery and relaxation might help a bit."

The blonde's eyes grew misty as she kissed her wife again. "You are the best, Torrance."

"Anything for you, Helen. You know I mean that." Grabbing another pillow, the photographer lifted her wife's hips to place it under her to assist gravity. "You stay put for awhile now."

"Hold me," Helen requested.

"Always," whispered the brunette sliding her arms around the woman she loved. They were quiet for a long time in contemplative silence. However as they just lay in each other's embrace, they heard noise coming from the sitting area of the suite. They exchanged quizzical gazes. "You think I should go check?" offered the photographer.

Helen was about to answer when they heard Sarah's passionate plea to her lover. Both of them giggled. Just then a loud groan obviously from Jamie ensued. They heard the crash of glass as the sounds grew in intensity. "My God. They're like animals in there. What is that growling?" Helen questioned.

"Oh, the sounds of youth," Torrance joked. "What I would give to be as young as Jamie again. I'd be likely to hurt you if that was the case though."

"You could never hurt me," Helen answered. Getting a mischievous look in her eyes, she asked, "Do you think we could silence them with our own fireworks?"

"I'd certainly be glad to try," Torrance answered.

The following morning Helen and Torrance were up first. After taking a leisurely shower together, they dressed for the day before heading into the common area of the suite. However, what they saw made them stop. In front of the fireplace were Sarah and Jamie, covered by a blanket, blissfully asleep. The brunette actress was stretched out on her stomach, revealing her strong naked back. She had an air about her very much like the feline that graced her shoulder. Curled up against her was the little blonde. The older couple just looked on for a moment not knowing exactly what to do, because they had ordered breakfast to be delivered. Knowing that neither actress would want to be caught by any of the hotel staff that way, they decided it would be better to wake their friends.

Nudging the tall brunette's leg, Torrance whispered, "Hey, lovebirds. Time to rise and shine. I'm getting a good show of your lady, Jamie."

Jamie and Sarah both awoke with a start, clutching the blanket closer to them as they sat up. Sarah rubbed her eyes as Jamie looked up at their friends. "Oh, we didn't mean to fall asleep out here. Sorry," she apologized.

"It's all right."

Cracking a grin, the dark-haired actress joked, "If you two weren't so damn loud, we wouldn't have had to drown out your noise."

Helen blushed as Torrance chuckled. "Room service is on their way up with our breakfast, so unless you want to give them a show, I suggest you get back to your room." As if on cue, there was a knock on the suite door.

Both actresses rose from the floor but only Sarah bothered to conceal herself. Jamie merely shot Helen a cocky smile as she strolled completely unabashed and bare toward the other room. Turning to her wife, she opened her mouth to comment, but Torrance beat her to it. "Don't even think about it. I can't get my body to look like that for all the lipo in the world," she stated.

Half an hour later the couple joined them again looking fresh from the shower. However, the attorney and writer hadn't appeared. "Do either of you know if they even came back last night?" Sarah asked conversationally.

"No idea," Torrance mumbled looking toward their bedroom door. Not a sound had come from that direction since they had all been awake. "Maybe I should check." The other three shrugged, so she made her way over to the door and knocked. "Blake, Georgia? Anyone there?"

"No one's home," came the growl of the attorney. Rolling onto her side, she sat up slightly enough to look around the room. She and Georgia were both lying half dressed across the bed surrounded by small bills.

The blonde mewed as she stretched. "What time is it?" she whispered reaching for her wife.

"Too early. I take it we won last night," Blake teased lightly, holding up some of the money.

"I think we were celebratin' that when we passed out," Georgia added as she looked at their state of undress. She smiled over at the attorney before leaning to kiss her as she pulled her tiny frame on top of the taller form. "Maybe we could continue that now?" she questioned, suddenly feeling amorous at the sight of Blake naked from the waist up with slacks hanging open.

Blake moaned in response to the idea as her hands perched on her wife's hips. Georgia's dress was already unzipped, so the older woman pushed it up over her head, leaving the blonde only clad in her intimate apparel. It had been so long since they had been sexual with each other that Blake was not going to let the opportunity pass. However, another knock on the door interrupted their flow.

Torrance's voice called through the door, "Are you two going to join us this morning or not?"

"Not!" the attorney growled in answer. "And if you knock again, I'll kill you and make it look like an accident! What does a woman need to do around here to get laid?"

Hearing her friend's response, the photographer chuckled and headed back to the table where the other three were waiting. "Well, I think they're going to catch up with us at lunch," she informed them.

Back in the bedroom, the brunette whispered, "Where were we?"

Georgia took her wife's right hand and maneuvered it between her thighs. "You should've been right 'bout here," she replied as their mouths came together again. Bypassing the silk that separated her from her goal, Blake found her lover's entrance and filled her even before Georgia seemed ready. The blonde cried out at the invasion, calling her wife's name.

"God, you feel so good, Georgia. I've missed this so much."

"I've missed it too," the smaller woman managed to say as her body instinctively kept in time with Blake's thrusts. "I want to feel the rest of you."

Nodding in reply, the attorney withdrew long enough to flip the writer onto her back and yank off her own pants. Georgia hurriedly rid herself of the rest of her own clothes and then pulled her wife down on top of her. She moaned as soon as the larger body covered her own. Grasping at graying brown hair, the blonde directed her lover's mouth, pushing it down from her neck to her chest.

Blake was more than happy to oblige the little woman, taking the crest of one of her fair breasts into her mouth as her hand once again found its way home. "God, you're beautiful," the tall woman murmured.

"Blake!" Georgia called loudly as she felt herself rushing toward a climax in record time. The long absence of her wife's touch had heightened the sensations that now roared through her

frame.

Outside in the eating area, all four friends stopped conversation as the sound of the attorney's name permeated the suite. "Well, it looks like Blake hasn't lost her touch after all these years," Torrance quipped, taking a sip of her coffee.

Jamie laughed as did the blondes. "We shouldn't be sitting here listening," Helen lightly admonished.

"We're not. This is common space. They are invading our privacy not the other way around," the photographer countered.

"That's right," Jamie seconded. "Who knows? Maybe I could even pick up a few pointers from the old woman."

"Oh, you did not just call her that," Torrance stated. "I'll have you know, Blake and I were laying women while you were still in diapers, young one," she teased.

The brunette actress just shrugged and laughed. "So, what are your plans today?" she inquired, changing the subject.

"Well, we were going to go look at antiques today, but with Georgia otherwise engaged, maybe we should wait on that," Sarah answered.

"I know I'd like to get some photographs of New Orleans for my collection, but I can do that alone," the photographer mentioned. "We came to surprise you, ladies, not alter your plans, so whatever you want to do is what we'll all do."

"Well, I know this afternoon we were planning on taking a tour of the Garden District. I'm sure you'd get plenty of opportunity for pictures there, Torrance," Helen said. "Why don't we at least stick to that part of the plan? By then hopefully Georgia and Blake will have joined the land of the living again."

That afternoon after the six of them had lunch, they did take a tour of the Garden District of New Orleans. Torrance knew that wasn't what Jamie and Blake wanted to do, but the brunettes had agreed that they would not try to alter their wives' plans too much by their presence. Besides Torrance didn't mind, because it gave her a chance to capture some of the prestigious antebellum homes in photograph. She knew she wanted to document other areas as well but decided that she would venture out on her own if she had to in order to get the pictures she wanted.

The rest of Saturday passed with the six of them enjoying each other's company. However, on Sunday all of them agreed to accompany Torrance on her expedition to some of the famous cemeteries of the city. Their last stop of the informal shoot was to Saint Louis Cemetery Number One. Upon their arrival though, they were disappointed to find the cemetery locked. No one seemed to be around. Looking up at the ten-foot concrete wall that surrounded the cemetery, Torrance looked over at the tall actress.

"Jamie, I need you to give me a boost. Help me up there, will you?" she asked.

The youngest brunette looked at the attorney and then her own wife before inquiring, "What are you planning on doing?"

"I just want to see if I can see Marie Laveau's mausoleum. Come on. Lift me up there," she insisted, putting her camera around her neck.

"Tor, if you get caught, you'll be arrested," Blake stated.

Cracking a grin, she answered, "That's why you're here, Blake, to bail me out of jail."

"I don't like this, Torrance," Helen said firmly, but the photographer ignored her wife.

Reluctantly the actress put her hands out for Torrance to step into, so she could help lift her onto the wall. Within moments the photographer was straddling the high barrier scanning for the tomb she had seen in other photos. Spotting it farther into the cemetery though, she looked down at her wife and four friends on the ground.

"I'm going in," she announced.

"Torrance Whitfield, don't you dare," Helen demanded.

"Helen's right, Tor. This is a bad idea," Blake added. "How will you get back out?"

"I'll worry about that later. Just make sure no one spots me," she said before jumping down on the other side.

"You are in so much trouble, Torrance," Helen scolded.

She only heard a laugh on the other side of the wall. "You guys just stay there. I'll only be a little bit."

The tall blonde shook her head at her wife's behavior. Looking over at Blake, she said, "I hope you're prepared to bail her out of jail when she gets arrested."

The minutes passed slowly as the five of them tried to act like just interested tourists while they waited anxiously on the photographer. About twenty minutes later they heard her trying to climb back over the wall.

"Um, I've got a problem," she proclaimed after several false starts.

"You bet you do," Helen stated.

"No. I'm serious."

"So am I, Torrance Whitfield," the blonde answered.

"I can't climb back up by myself. It's too high."

"We tried to warn you, Tor. Now what grand idea do you have for getting yourself out?" the attorney inquired.

"Well, if I can get on top of one of these mausoleums here, I think I could grab the top of the wall maybe. Let me try that."

"Hurry up, Tor. This neighborhood is starting to look a little less friendly than when you went in awhile ago," Jamie informed her, taking in the dilapidated housing in the few blocks around them. Locals were starting to stare at them, leaving all of them with uneasiness.

The photographer climbed on top of the stone structure that was closest to the wall, but she was still a few feet too far away. "Damn. Still can't reach," she notified. "I have another idea. Blake, Jamie, why don't one of you boost the other up to the top of the wall? I could use a hand."

The actress and attorney looked at each other, realizing they really didn't have any other options if Torrance was going to get out. "Well, looks like we're all going to go to jail," the actress joked. "Would you rather lift me or go get her sorry ass?"

"I'll lift," the attorney answered. Looking at the blondes, she instructed, "Keep your eyes out for us." Moving to the wall, Blake assumed the same position Jamie had to assist Torrance the first time.

The actress easily hoisted herself up onto the top of the wall. She had to chuckle as she saw Torrance standing precariously on top of a mausoleum. "You owe me big time, Tor," she said as she extended her hands toward her friend.

"Yeah, yeah. Just get me out of here. This is starting to creep me out a little. I don't like standing on top of someone's final resting place like this. It's irreverent." The photographer put her camera around her neck again and took hold of her friend's wrists. Jamie pulled as hard as she could to get the older brunette up. The photographer's body slammed against the wall, smashing her camera, causing her to groan in disgruntlement. "My camera," she bemoaned. Grasping the top of the wall, Torrance was proceeding to lift herself the rest of the way when she mumbled, "Shit."

"What's wrong?" Jamie asked as the photographer straddled the wall next to her.

"We're busted," she mumbled.

Jamie looked in the direction that Torrance was and saw two police cars coming to a stop near the gate. "Dammit," she muttered, jumping down to the sidewalk again. Torrance followed suit, landing on her feet as the officers got out of their vehicles.

"What do you think you're doin'?" gruffly one of them asked.

"Um, officer, we just wanted to look inside. The gate was locked. We didn't mean any harm. We were just sitting on top of the wall," Jamie explained.

"But I saw you comin' over the wall from the other side," he accused pointing to Torrance.

"Yes, you did. I dropped my camera, and it's very expensive. I just went to retrieve it. I didn't disturb anything," she justified.

"You're trespassin', both of you. How did you get up there anyway?" the same officer questioned, instinctively eying the attorney. When no one answered, he pointed at the three brunettes and stated, "The three of you are under arrest."

"You have no right. I didn't do anything," Blake argued as the other officers approached them.

"Tell it to the judge. Now up against the wall, and I don't want any funny stuff."

Torrance sighed as she slipped Helen two rolls of film before turning to assume the position the police had indicated. Her wife just shook her head in disappointment. Looking at her two friends that were spread up against the wall on either side of her, she apologized, "I'm sorry. This is all my fault."

"Don't worry about it, Tor. They can't make this stick on Jamie and me. I'll bail you out," Blake answered.

Cracking a cocky smile, Jamie added, "And for me bad press is better than none at all."

The officers cuffed all three of the brunettes and took the photographer's camera from her before placing all three of them into the squad cars. Just as the officers were about to reclaim their own seats, one of them noticed Sarah standing there with the other two blondes. "Hey. Aren't you, Sarah Talbot?" he inquired.

"Sarah Talbot-Dean actually," she answered. "Could I ask where you are taking my wife and friends?"

"Down to the station for booking. If you have a car, you can follow us there."

Sarah nodded. "We're parked over there. Give us just a moment."

The three blondes got into their rented car to follow the police down to the station. "I can't believe Torrance did this," Helen complained. "She is really in trouble when I get a hold of her."

"Oh, don't be so hard on her, Helen. She just wanted a few pictures," Georgia mentioned.

"She could've hurt herself or damaged property," the oldest blonde mentioned.

A little later all six of them were down that the police station, the three blondes in the waiting area and the brunettes locked away in a cell waiting for arraignment. Blake served as representation for all three of them and with ease got the charges against Jamie and herself dropped.

However, when it came time for Torrance's turn, she and Blake stood in front of the magistrate with their wives and the two actresses in the first pew behind them. "Well, in the matter of Torrance Whitfield versus the city of New Orleans, let's see what we have. Trespassing I see," the magistrate read from the docket.

"Your honor, if I may, I would like to suggest these charges be dropped. Torrance is a photographer by trade, and she only wanted to take pictures of the cemetery. The gate was locked, so she got up onto the wall. She had no intention of going in but accidentally dropped her camera as she tried to keep her balance. It is an expensive piece of equipment, so she merely went to retrieve it. She didn't touch or deface any property, merely recovered her camera and was attempting to climb back over the wall when the police arrived on the scene," Blake stated.

However the prosecution rebutted, "Your honor, Ms. Whitfield has quite a record. If I may read aloud?"

"Please do."

"Let me see. We have a few DUIs, narcotics possession, possession with the intent to distribute, and reckless driving. Clearly she is a danger to others and should be held in remand until trial."

Torrance's shoulders slouched down as she heard her list of past crimes read off in front of her wife and friends. Even though she had told Helen years ago about her past faults, she still felt shame in having them presented in such a place. Sneaking a look over her shoulder, she met green eyes. The blonde showed obvious discontent, making the photographer feel even worse.

"Your honor, may I please address those issues?" Blake inquired.

"If you can," answered the magistrate.

"Everything that the prosecution has just presented were incidents that happened more than twenty years ago. Torrance was in college when those took place. She has paid her debt to society and is now a model citizen in New York. Tonight's occurrence was just an accident. Again I humbly request these charges be dropped."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Ms. Erwin. Even if past charges against Ms. Whitfield took place two decades ago, they still exist. However, I am not requesting that she be placed on remand either. Bail will be set at \$10,000 and a trial scheduled for first thing Monday morning. Ms. Whitfield will be placed back in her cell at the moment until you, as her representative, can come up with the money. The case is adjourned until Monday."

Compliantly Torrance let herself be led back to her holding cell for the time being. Taking a seat on the empty cot when she arrived, she sighed. It had been decades since she had seen the inside of one and had sworn to herself never to return. She was angry with herself for acting so irresponsibly. She knew with her previous convictions, the matter was a little more serious than if had she had a clean slate. Only a few minutes had passed before one of the officers escorted Helen back to her.

The blonde crossed her arms across her chest and glared at her wife. "Well, what do you have to say for yourself, Torrance?"

"I'm sorry," she offered, standing and moving over toward her wife.

"You're sorry? Torrance, how could you do this? You're forty, not some twenty-year-old! You have children to think about! You could serve time for this, and what would I tell people? Where those pictures worth spending time in jail?" she yelled.

"No," she mumbled in obvious shame.

"With your prior convictions, you're facing time! I have half a mind to let you stay here overnight to think about what you've done!"

"Honey, please don't do that. I don't want to spend the night in jail."

"Well, you should've thought about that before you climbed that wall, Torrance!" she screamed, putting her hands on the bars.

The photographer nodded her head guiltily. However, she eased her hands over Helen's. The mere touch seemed to settle the blonde a bit. "I'm really sorry, Helen. This was totally irresponsible of me. Please don't make me stay here tonight. If I'm facing jail time, please let me have one more night with you," she tried to joke, but the younger woman didn't seem amused.

"Even if you got out of here, I doubt I'd let you touch me. I'm really mad at you right now," she said.

Torrance gave a nod of understanding. "I know," she whispered, letting her hands stroke her wife's forearms lightly.

For a moment it seemed Helen forgot her own anger, but then she pulled back. "I'm going back to the hotel, Torrance. Blake's in the process of getting you out of here. I hope by the time you get home I will have calmed down enough to talk about this rationally. I'll see you in a little while," she stated turning to go.

"Helen, I love you," Torrance called out to her retreating form.

The blonde turned to look over her shoulder. "I love you too, you misfit, but I'd still rather slap you than kiss you right now. See you back at the hotel."

A couple of hours later Torrance and Blake returned to their suite. The actresses were nowhere to be seen, and Georgia was sitting on the sofa obviously involved in her writing. However, she looked up and smiled. "Welcome back, jail bird," she teased.

"Thanks. Where's Helen?"

"I think she's takin' a bath. I have to tell you though, Tor. She's still upset."

"Thanks for the warning. Guess I have some making up to do now. Good night, you two."

"We have to be in court bright and early, Tor. I'm going to convince the D.A. to cut a deal. You'll be out of this in no time. Don't give it another thought," Blake told her.

"Thanks, Blake. Don't know what I'd do without you. See you in the morning."

Going into the bedroom, Torrance noticed light in the bathroom making her figure Georgia was right about where Helen was. Quietly moving to the door, she softly knocked and then opened it. The blonde was lounging in a luxurious bubble bath. Candles filled the small space and rose petals were scattered along the tub and in the water. The beautiful green eyes Torrance loved so much were closed. She knew Helen heard her knock even though the smaller woman didn't respond.

Coming into the bathroom and closing the door, the photographer began to shed her clothes to prepare for bed. Leisurely unbuttoning her shirt, she peeled it off her shoulders. Torrance looked down at her stomach. It had been badly scraped when Jamie had pulled her up the wall, and trickles of dried blood stuck to her. There was also a large bruise where her camera had gotten smashed between her body and the wall. Her pants were next. Fortunately they looked like they hadn't sustained any damage. Hanging them on a hanger in the closet, she turned to her wife. "Are you still not talking to me?" she questioned.

Helen opened her eyes at the question, but she wasn't prepared for the sight of the photographer standing there half-dressed. Totally forgetting her anger, she looked at her wife in concern seeing her injuries. "Are you all right? That looks like it hurts."

"It does," Torrance answered. She took a seat on the edge of the tub. She watched as Helen reached for her midsection. A delicate wet hand wiped at the dried blood. Taking her wife's hand, Torrance brought it up to her lips and kissed the back of it gently. "I know you're still mad at me, but I am sorry. I'm so much like the other Whitfields. I don't know when to stop sometimes. I just wanted the pictures, and I never gave any thought to consequences. Had I done that I never would have gone in there. Please forgive me, Helen. Your disappointment is harder for me to bear than anything else."

"Torrance, the thought of ever losing you scares me. That's why I'm most upset. You could go to jail for this, and I couldn't bear it if you did. I can't be without you," she whispered as tears came to her green eyes.

"You won't be without me, Helen. Blake's going to cut a deal with the D.A. tomorrow morning. I promise you. I'm not going to go to jail," she tried to assure. However, in the back of her mind, she wasn't so sure of what might happen. She knew the system would not look favorably upon her given her past convictions, but she didn't want to alarm her wife. Sympathetically she ran her hand up the younger woman's arm toward her neck and then cheek. With her thumb she wiped tears from the blonde's face. After a moment she dipped her head down and claimed Helen's lips in a consoling kiss.

The younger woman clung to Torrance as if her life depended on it. "Get in the tub, Torrance," she murmured when the soft exchanged ended. The photographer nodded in understanding. She knew her lover needed reassurance that could only be provided with her physical presence.

The following morning all six of them went to the courthouse. However, by the time they had gotten there, Blake had already spoken to the District Attorney in depth about the case, so Torrance and she sat in a meeting with him before they were called into court. As the two brunettes took seats, he glared at the photographer. "Did Ms. Erwin tell you what we agreed to?" he questioned.

"Not yet," Blake answered for Torrance. Turning to her friend, she began, "Torrance, we have made a deal that will keep you out of jail."

"Great. What is it?"

"You pay a fine of \$100,000. Additionally you make a \$250,000 donation for the upkeep of Saint Louis Cemetery Number One. Lastly, you do one 120 hours of community service in conjunction with the Department of Tourism, for which you will be photographing the city for some of their new advertising campaign," the district attorney announced.

The photographer shot her friend and representation a scowl. "A quarter of a million dollars! What kind of a deal is that?" she yelled.

However Blake held her ground. "One that keeps you out of jail and with Helen," bluntly the attorney answered. "That's what you want, isn't it? Now shut up and take it before they rescind."

"A hundred twenty hours? That's three forty-hour weeks!"

Turning to the district attorney, Blake asked, "Could I have a moment alone with my client?" When they were alone, Blake glared at her friend. "Tor, I'm doing all I can for you here, but you've got to do the rest! They want to throw your ass in jail! Money talks, Tor! It's either this or jail. You're guilty as sin. You and I know that, and they know that! Take the deal, or else I'll get Helen in here, and you know that won't be pretty. It is three weeks of full time work. The whole time you will be monitored with an electronic tracking device, but you won't go to jail."

"But they're taking advantage of this opportunity by trying to take my money," the photographer stated.

"Yes, they are. Let them. You know Helen would tell you the same. Take the deal, so we can get out of here. They are going to let you schedule your community service when it's most convenient for you. They are giving on that point, but it has to be done."

Torrance pondered it a moment, knowing she really didn't have any choice in the matter. She wanted to stay out of jail at any cost. "All right. Fine. I'll take it," she conceded.

"Good. Now you'll have to go in and tell the judge exactly what happened, how you dropped your camera and all," she explained sparing her friend a wink, making the younger brunette smile.

"Sure. I'll tell them."

"Great. Come on. I want to get out of here. I thought New York lawyers were slimy, but New Orleans takes them to a new level," Blake teased.

By the end of Monday evening, all three brunettes were on their way back to New York, leaving the blondes to finish the last several days of their vacation. When Blake arrived back at her place, Georgia's mother was sitting on their couch reading.

"Welcome back," Cindy greeted, hugging her daughter-in-law. "How was it? How was my baby girl?"

"It was interesting. Sorry we're a day late getting back though. As I said over the phone, Torrance got arrested, but we got that taken care of. Georgia was great. She seemed to be having a blast. She's in her element to say the least. She was actually getting a lot of work done while we were there, which surprised me. She's treating it more as a working vacation. Nevertheless, she's getting articles finished and was even working in her book a bit."

"Nawlins has always been one of her favorite places," Cindy mentioned. "She takes to that city like a duck in water."

"I could see that. If the Klan wasn't there, I'd be for all of us visiting there more often, but I still have my concerns. Even with Melvin in prison, I still feel like I'm being watched whenever I go south of the Mason-Dixon," Blake admitted. Changing the subject, she inquired, "How were the kids?"

"Perfect as usual. We had lots of fun."

"Good. Now if I can just make it through the next six days, Georgia can come back and continue being the perfect mother. I guess her being away has made me realize how hard that job is. She's been asking for a nanny, and I finally understand why."

"You goin' to get one now?"

The attorney nodded. "I think we'll have to if Georgia wants to continue to work. I thought I would go ahead and look around and do some research on the matter before she gets back, so we can make a choice as soon as possible."

Cindy nodded. "Well, I'm sure she'd appreciate that. I should get goin'. It's late. The little ones are already fast asleep. If you need any more help, you cain call me."

"Thanks, Cindy. I appreciate your offer, but I want to see if I can stick it out."

"All right. Well, brin' Jamie, the jailbird, and all the kids down to Georgia's sometime this week," she said.

Blake laughed. "I'll see what I can do."

On Saturday morning all three blondes prepared to leave New Orleans. When they were finished packing, they had the bell person come retrieve their bags. However, Sarah and Helen were surprised when Georgia instructed that her bags be placed in another car separate from their own.

"Georgia, what's going on?" Sarah inquired.

"Oh, I'm stayin' here for a few more days. I'm really gettin' into my writin', so I want to take advantage of the momentum," she said.

"Blake agreed to that?" Helen questioned in surprise.

"I don't need Blake's permission to live my life," she quipped. "I left her a message. She'll be fine for a few more days. My mama will help her."

Not knowing what else to do, the other blondes just shrugged. They were both surprised at the turn of events but didn't give it any other thought, because Blake and Georgia's marriage wasn't their concern. "All right. Well, I guess we'll see you when you get back. Be careful down here," Helen said hugging her friend. Sarah followed suit.

"I'll be fine. See y'all soon. Have a safe flight back."

Late that afternoon all three brunettes left Torrance's place to meet their wives at the airport. As the Whitfield private jet came to a stop near its hanger, all three of them prepared themselves for the anticipated arrival. However when only two blondes came off the plane, the eldest woman gave her friends a confused look.

"Um, where's Georgia?" she asked of Helen and Sarah after they had hugged their own families.

Both blondes exchanged a look before Helen answered, "She's still in New Orleans."

"What? Why didn't she come back with you?"

Looking at her wife, Helen saw confusion on her spouse's face as well. "She told us that she was staying to write for a few more days. She said she had left you a message. Obviously you didn't get it."

The attorney shook her head. Just then her son, Luke asked, "Where's Mama, Mom?"

"You know what, Luke? I forgot that she wasn't coming back today."

"But you said she was, Mom," complained Lana.

"I know, and I'm sorry, honey. I'll make it up to you though. Why don't we go visit Grandma down at the restaurant? She'll make you that peach pie you two love so much," she suggested.

"We'll go with you," Torrance quickly added, knowing her friend was upset.

"So will we," Jamie piped in.

The oldest brunette gave them a half-hearted smile. "That's okay, guys. I can handle this. Really I'm all right."

"Are you sure?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah. I know all of you are anxious to get home."

"If you're positive," the photographer said.

"I am."

"Okay. You know where to find us if you need us," Helen stated before directing her children over to their family's SUV. Sarah and Jamie moved their family toward their car as well.

Torrance assisted Lana into her car seat as Blake did the same for Luke. Once they were in their seats, the photographer moved to the driver's side door. Blake looked at her old college buddy and shook her head. Making sure her kids couldn't hear her, she mumbled, "I could kill her. How could she do something so selfish?"

Torrance shrugged. "Don't get all upset until you talk to her, Blake. There has to be a good reason. Speak to her before forming an opinion."

"I don't have time for this. I've already taken two weeks off work. What am I supposed to do?"

"Do you want Helen and me to watch them for a few days?"

She shook her head. "I'll figure this out, but thanks anyway. I'll see you later."

"Okay."

Getting into her car, Blake sighed. She looked at her twins through the rearview mirror. She was glad they seemed to accept her explanation of why their mother was absent. Driving them over to Georgia's, they had dinner with Cindy. The older woman seemed glad to see her grandchildren but sympathetic although unsurprised at her daughter's disappearance. Over pie and ice cream for the kids, Blake looked over at her mother-in-law. "Cindy, why did Georgia do this? You don't seem all that startled at this development. Did you know this was going to happen?"

"No. I didn't know, Blake, but I'm not surprised either. Georgia's the independent type. You know that. I know she's needed some time away for awhile now. I just didn't think she'd do this. Can't you see that over the last several months that she's been dead on her feet? She's been tryin' to keep up her job, the kids, and the house all for you, and she's tired, Blake."

"Are you saying this is my fault?" the attorney asked.

"No."

"If she was so tired, why didn't she tell me?"

"She told me she tried, Blake. You weren't 'round enough to listen though. You work twelve to fifteen-hour days consistently. From the way I hear it, you only saw her long enough to fall in bed beside her at the end of the day."

"Someone has to pay for her lifestyle, Cindy. I've got four mouths to think about now."

"Blake, somehow I think you'd be comfortable financially even if you only worked a forty-hour week. Call it a hunch. That's not why you stay away from home."

"Oh, that's what you think, is it? Then what do you think keeps me away?" she questioned irritably.

Cindy nodded her head in her grandchildren's direction. "I know the love is there, Blake, but you're not takin' to motherhood the way she had hoped. You're still too detached for Georgia's comfort."

"What does that mean? She thinks I'm not committed to my family? The three of them have everything they want. I love all of them. I'm doing the best I can."

"I don't think so and neither does she. Georgia wants you to be a family woman."

"Well, I am to the best of my ability," she argued.

Cindy held up her hand. "I don't want to fight with you 'bout this, Blake. I'm just givin' you my opinion."

"All right. Then tell me what you think I should do, Cindy. Give up my practice?"

"Not at all. Just make more effort to be with her and the kids. Maybe hire someone to help with the kids, so Georgia cain take a break. She's burnt out, Blake."

The attorney nodded. Looking at her kids, she pondered what she could do to make this situation right before it got more out of hand. "Well, it just so happens that I'm interviewing a woman for a live-in nanny position tomorrow. I was going to surprise Georgia with that, but I guess it will have to wait until I talk to her. Well, I should get these two home. It's starting to get to be their bath time," she mentioned.

"Do you need some help tomorrow? I'll come to the loft if you need me to. Jack will understand if I have to be there instead of here."

"It would be helpful. I have to be in the office at some point. Maybe you should come around nine or so."

"All right. I'll be there. Good luck until then though."

Going back to the condo with the twins, Blake got them prepared and settled in their respective beds for the night. After that she went into her office and opened her bar for the bottle of scotch she kept there. As she was pouring herself a glass, the phone rang. She grumbled a greeting, figuring it would be her wife.

"Hey, honey," Georgia greeted cheerfully.

"I'm not in the mood, Georgia. I can't believe you did this to me. Exactly how long are you going to be gone?" she inquired, dispensing with the small talk.

"I don't know, Blake. I'm really gettin' into my book. I need to work on this or else my publisher is goin' to be upset."

"Well, I wish you had told me about this in advance. We could have planned for it. Instead you just don't come back from vacation. Georgia, you're down in New Orleans alone. You're without protection. Where are you staying? Is it at least safe?"

"Yes. It's safe, honey. I'm at this bed and breakfast in the Garden District," she informed, telling her wife the name and the contact information. "Look. I just need some time away. I know you cain handle this."

"Damn right I can. When can I expect you home, Georgia?"

"I don't know, a few weeks."

"A few weeks? Georgia Erwin, what in the hell are you trying to do to me?" she asked in anger.

"Blake, you need to have time with the kids, and I need time to work on my book. You'll be surprised how fast it will go."

"I still don't like it. If you're going to be down there that long, I'm going to insist that Tor be with you when she returns for her community service. I don't feel good about you being alone down there with so many Klan members lurking around. I wouldn't want anything happening to you, Georgia."

"I know, and I'll be glad for Tor's company. When is she goin' to be back?"

"A month for a three-week stint."

"Fine. She'll have a place here with me. Now I should go. It's gettin' late, and I know you have to work tomorrow."

"All right. Be safe down there, Georgia. Talk to you soon."

"Good night, love."

"Night, my Georgia peach." Hanging up the phone, Blake sighed. It was going to be a long few weeks without her wife around.

The next morning the attorney was up and working long before Cindy arrived. However just after she got there, there was another knock on the loft door. Blake went to answer it, knowing that it was her interview. Pulling the door open, she was taken back a moment by the woman standing at her door. She was a petite blonde that looked about twenty-five. Her hazel eyes sparkled brightly as she smiled at the attorney. Over her shoulder she had a nice briefcase, and she was dressed in a modest but perfectly pressed business suit.

"Ms. Erwin?" she asked.

"Yes. Call me Blake. You must be Renee Summers. Come in," she said extending her hand. They shook hands as the young woman entered. Pointing over to where Cindy was with the kids, she said, "This is my mother-in-law, Cindy. Cindy, this is Renee Summers. She's here to interview for the nanny position."

"Hi," the little blonde said. "Nice to meet you." After they shook hands as well, she looked at the twins. "I take it these are your children."

"Yes. This is Lana and Luke. Renee, my office is this way. If you would follow me, we can get started." Leading the way back to her home office, Blake waited until the blonde had entered to close the door. "Please have a seat," she said going to her side of the desk. Once Renee seemed settled, Blake began, "I already took the liberty of contacting the references you sent me. They of course gave you glowing reviews. We've already talked in depth about your experience, and I've liked what I've seen so far. You're still current on all your First Aid certifications I assume."

"Yes. I have all my certifications with me if you'd like to see them."

"And you've been doing this for three years now. Your previous employer had complimentary things to say about you. Tell me again why they released you."

"They were moving out of the area, and I had no desire to leave New York."

"They said the same thing. They wanted you to go with them," she said with a smile. "They are sad to see you go."

"I've enjoyed my employment with them tremendously. New York is my home though," the small woman mentioned.

"Well, being that we've had several phone interviews already, I think you and I have a clear idea about what this position did entail. However, something unexpected has come up. I thought my wife would be back to do this interview with me, but she is on an extended business trip, not to return for several weeks, so I'm on my own for this decision. I've liked what I've seen and heard from you, which is why I invited you here. I wanted you to get a chance to meet and spend some time with the kids to see how the three of you get along. I think it's important that the three of you mesh well."

"Of course. I understand."

"And assuming that all goes well there, I'd like to talk about some details for the arrangement if you feel this is a good match."

"Wonderful. Then why don't I start with Lana and Luke right away? No time like the present," she suggested.

"All right. You know where they are. Go to it. I have some calls to make. I'll be out to check on you in a little bit," Blake stated.

Instead of being taken by surprise at the dismissal, the young woman simply nodded and headed out of the office. The attorney decided to give her prospective employee half an hour with the kids, knowing that Cindy would do a thorough evaluation while she was out there. Sure enough her mother-in-law appeared in her office doorway twenty minutes later just as she was finishing a call. Blake motioned for her to come in and close the door. As soon as she hung up the phone, she looked at Cindy questioningly.

"Where did you find her?" the older woman asked.

"Why? That bad?"

"No. She's fabulous. You have to hire her. You should see her with the kids. They've already taken to her. She's the one, Blake."

The attorney nodded. "I was hoping you'd feel that way. I knew you'd have an opinion. She has an impressive resume and recommendations. The question remains though. Will she get along with Georgia?"

"I think so as long as no one gives Renee more than a passing glance," Cindy pointedly remarked.

"What are you suggesting, Cindy? That I'm offering her a job, because she's a hot girl?"

"So you did notice."

"She's even younger than Georgia. I wouldn't ever do that."

"But would Renee? There's a question for you."

"Perhaps I should inquire as to her sexual orientation. That could be a point of contention. I'll ask her about it. Otherwise she's good?"

"Perfect. Go hire her."

"All right then," she said, rising from her chair.

Together they moved out of the office into the living room. Blake saw Renee sitting on the floor with the children reading them a story. Both of them looked enthralled. The little woman didn't even bother to look up when the attorney took a seat on the sofa near them until the story was complete. When their eyes met, Renee spared her a smile.

"Okay, kids. Mom needs to talk to Renee for a minute. Let's get our rooms straightened up a little," Cindy suggested taking each of them by the hand.

When the two women were alone, Blake said, "I think I better show you the room that you would be using before we talk figures." She led the way to the spare bedroom near the children's rooms. Opening the door, she gestured for Renee to walk in ahead of her. "Unless you have furniture that you would like to move in, this room will remain as it is. You can rearrange it as you see fit though. You have your own private bathroom and sitting area," she stated, pointing to different features of the spacious room. "Luke's room is next door to yours and Lana's just on the other side of that. Georgia's and my room is at the other end of the hall. You'll be welcome to use any part of the loft. It will be your home, and I will rely on you heavily to be at the children's disposal at almost all hours. They will be like your own, especially while Georgia is away. You'll be in charge of the upkeep of their rooms and their laundry as well. Georgia and I can fend for ourselves in that area. Is this space suitable to your needs?"

"It's fine. It's bigger than my last place," Renee responded.

"Good. Then why don't we go back into my office to talk numbers." Together they moved back

into the office. "There is just one other thing I wanted to speak to you about, Renee. I want to be extremely careful about the influences on my children. This will be your home, but I want to be extra cautious about your visitors, especially overnight guests."

"I understand. I take my positions seriously, Blake. I know discretion is crucial. I can assure you that it won't be a problem. Besides I'm not currently involved anyway."

Blake gave a nod, knowing she couldn't directly inquire about her prospective employee's orientation. Deciding just to let nature take its course, she said, "Renee, I would like to offer you the position. However I need to ask that we make it on a trial basis. I'll give you a ninety-day probationary period to see if it works. Would that be agreeable to you?"

The young blonde smiled and gave a nod. "I understand. You want to give your wife a chance to evaluate me."

"Yes. Here's my offer. Ninety days probationary period. You get room and board, health insurance, and a gross salary of \$50,000 annually that will be paid out biweekly. From what I gathered that's a ten percent raise for you. What do you say?"

The small woman was silent for a moment before answering, "I think I should ask where I sign up."

"Funny you should say that. I have a written offer for you, so we are both clear on our responsibilities," the attorney said, pulling two pieces of paper out of a file on top of her desk. Getting out a pen as well, she requested, "Please review that and see if changes need to be made."

Each of them read their respective copies before Renee answered, "It looks fine to me except for the start date. That's blank."

"Well, when can you start?" Blake inquired.

"When do you want me?" Renee questioned.

"How about right now? I have a meeting to get to. Cindy will stay here with you to help you get acclimated. I'll be back this evening, and you and I can go get the rest of your things while she watches the kids."

"Sounds good."

"Great then," the brunette replied, writing Renee's starting date down on her copy of the offer letter before signing it. She handed it over to the blonde and received the other copy in return to do the same. When they both had signed the two copies, Blake handed one back to Renee and then stood, extending her hand professionally. "Welcome to the Erwin household, Renee."

"Thank you, Blake. I think this will work out well."

"Well, you settle in for a moment and then find the kids. I'm off to the office. When I get home tonight, I'll make you a list of numbers you might need. In the meantime if you need me, Cindy will know how to find me. I look forward to seeing you tonight."

"So do I. Have a good day."

That evening Blake had to stay later than she wanted to try to catch up on some work. Deciding it would not be good to stand Renee up on her first night there, she called up to the house. After the first couple of rings, someone answered, "Erwin residence."

"Renee, hi. It's Blake," the older woman announced.

"Oh, hi. I was beginning to wonder about you."

"Yeah. Well, I got stuck at the office, but I'm on my way out soon. How is everything over there?"

"It's fine. I have the kids eating dinner, and Cindy and I were just chatting. After this it's bath time and then off to bed. Will you be around to see them off to sleep?"

"I'm hoping to. I know that I promised to help you with some of your things tonight, and I don't want Cindy to have to babysit all night while we do that."

"Well, we don't have to do that tonight. We could do it tomorrow evening if you preferred."

"No. You won't have anything to wear if we do that. I'll tell you what. We'll get the kids to bed, and then go get your stuff while Cindy watches them. I'll even throw in some Chinese take-out for my tardiness," she joked.

"Sounds good, Blake. I just happen to love Chinese. Hurry home though. I know these kids would love to see their mom."

"I'll be there soon," she promised. As guaranteed, Blake got to the loft just as her children were getting ready for bed. They were happy to see her and ran to give her hugs. The brunette smiled at them before giving her new nanny a grin as well.

"How was your day?" Renee inquired, reaching for Blake's briefcase.

The touch seemed a little odd for the older woman, but she released her bag to the younger woman who set it aside on the foyer table. "It was long. I'm glad to be home to see my perfect angels though," she said, picking each of them up in an arm. Taking them back to their bedrooms, she deposited Lana onto her bed and left her there in Renee's care as she went into Luke's room. Tucking her son into bed, she gave him a kiss as she stroked back his blonde hair. He looked so much like Georgia.

"Mom, when will Mama be home?" he asked as he reached to hug her again.

"I really don't know, son. She's off doing work, but I'm sure it'll be soon. Don't worry about it." He nodded at her before settling under his covers. "I love you, Luke," she whispered kissing him on the forehead.

"I love you too, Mom."

"Sweet dreams."

"Is Renee going to be here tomorrow?"

"Yes. She's going to be with you during the days now. Is that okay with you?"

He nodded. "I like her. She's fun and pretty," he bashfully stated.

Blake chuckled. "Yes. She is pretty, Luke," Blake conceded.

"But not as pretty as Mama," he clarified.

"You're right. Your mama is the most beautiful woman in the world, isn't she?" He gave a nod in reply. "All right. You need to go to sleep now. Renee's going to come say good night, and then you have to go to sleep," she instructed.

Going next door to her daughter's room, she stopped in the doorway to observe her nanny with Lana. The blonde was sitting on the bed with the three-year-old girl obviously finishing an impromptu story. As Blake watched on, she thought of her wife. She had seen Georgia act the same way with the kids, and it made her miss her lover. When Renee was through, she hugged the little girl and then rose from the bed. As she turned her eyes met Blake's. "Time for the switch?" she teased lightly.

The attorney just nodded moving toward Lana's bed. She knelt down next to her daughter as Renee left the room. "Well, I hope you have sweet dreams, baby girl," she whispered gently, tucking her covers around her and then leaning to kiss her dark head. "I love you."

"I love you too, Mom."

"Tell me one thing before you go to sleep. Did you have fun with Renee today?"

She nodded. "Yeah. She read to us and played dolls with me."

"Good. I'm glad. She's going to stay here with us now. Would you like that?"

The three-year-old shrugged. "Maybe," she answered.

"Maybe? Why only maybe?"

"Because I want Mama instead," she said.

"Oh. Well, Mama is going to be here too. She and Renee are both going to take care of you during the day, but for now it's just going to be Renee until Mama gets back. Is that okay?" Her daughter nodded. "Good. Now it's time to shut those pretty brown eyes and go to sleep."

Giving a nod, Lana said, "Have good dreams, Mom."

"You too, sweetie."

Going back into the living room, she saw Cindy sitting on the sofa. "Well, how was your first day back?" the older blonde asked.

"Tiring. How were things here?"

"Wonderful actually. The kids took to Renee perfectly. She was the right choice, Blake."

"I'm glad to hear that. Your opinion means a lot to me since Georgia's not here to give hers. Listen. I promised Renee I would help her move some of her stuff tonight. Can you stay for a few more hours just in case the kids need something?"

"Of course. I was thinking about just staying the night."

"Great. I'd like that," Blake stated as Renee appeared from Luke's room. "Well, are you ready to get some of your things?"

"Yeah. Most of it is still packed from when I moved out of my last place. I've just been staying with a friend in the meantime, so it's still mostly in boxes and suitcases."

"Maybe I should drive then. How much do you have?"

"Not much. It's mostly clothes, stereo equipment and a computer."

"All right. That should fit in my Hummer," she mentioned. "Cindy, can we get you anything while we're out? I promised Renee Chinese."

"I'm fine. Thanks though. I'll probably be in bed by the time you get back."

"All right. See you in the morning then. Sleep well. I'll come in and get the children's monitors when I get back, so you don't have to listen for them all night."

Blake escorted her nanny down to the garage. Quietly they got into the large SUV and headed out onto the streets of New York. Renee gave her directions but for the most part the drive was silent except for the music the attorney had on. Managing to bribe the building's attendant into being able to park directly in front of the building, the two of them made their way up to the

apartment where Renee was staying. Since her friend was home, the three of them were able to get all her things in just a couple of trips.

By the time they got it home and unloaded, though, it was half-past nine. The blonde looked at Blake and gave a tired smile. "Maybe that Chinese should wait for another day. I'm getting tired, and I'd like to get some of this put away."

"You sure? I could run down and get it. By the time I get back you will have gotten some of this put away. It's no trouble. You have to eat something."

Renee shrugged. "All right. If you're sure." Blake nodded.

At 10:30 that night the attorney returned to find her nanny diligently putting away her things. "Time for a break, Renee. You've done enough for one night. Come have some food."

The young blonde nodded and followed the brunette into the kitchen. "Wow. You have quite the spread here," she said, seeing how much food the older woman had actually gotten for them.

Blake shrugged. "I couldn't decide, so I got all of my favorites. What do you want to drink?" she asked, opening the refrigerator.

"What do we have?"

"Let's see. Milk, juice, beer, wine, soda."

"Wine sounds good if it's white."

Blake pulled out the bottle from its hiding place and poured Renee a glass. She retrieved herself a beer before going for two plates and utensils. Settling down at the table with the smaller woman, the attorney unceremoniously began to dig into her meal. Renee followed suit, and they chattered amiably while they ate. Once dinner was over however, Blake excused herself to bed, knowing she had an early start the next morning.

The next day she was busy at work when her assistant alerted her to a phone call. Picking it up, she greeted, "Blake Erwin."

"Hey, Blake. It's Sarah," the blonde actress announced.

"Sarah, hi. To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"Well, Jamie and I were wondering how you were doing with the kids. I called up to your place this morning and found out you had hired a nanny. She seems nice."

"Oh, Renee is perfect. She's working out well so far. Things are going okay."

"Did you find out when Georgia was coming back?"

"No. She said several weeks, but I have no idea what that means. By the sound of it, it seems like over a month, because she intends to stay down there while Tor is doing her community service."

"Wow. That's a long time."

"Yeah," Blake mumbled, wondering if there was a real point to the conversation.

"Listen, Blake. I wanted to ask you something about Jamie's custody agreement with Samantha and Doug. Do you have a minute?"

"Sure. What do you want to know?"

"Is there any provision for Jamie getting sole custody of Katrina?"

"No. Jamie's made it clear she doesn't want to get involved in a battle with them over that. Why are you asking? Is she thinking about trying to file for sole custody?"

"I was just wondering, because things with Katrina are getting so trying. I just thought if Jamie had sole custody or I had joint custody that she might respond better to me."

"Oh, I see. I have to tell you, Sarah. I don't think you'll get Jamie to agree to giving you partial custody of Katrina just for the simple fact that it would mean taking custody away from Samantha and Doug. She doesn't want to fight with Stephanie's family like that. What's going on, Sarah? Are things that bad between you and Katrina?" she inquired in concern.

"She listens to Samantha better than me. I just feel like an outsider in my own family, Blake. There's a bond between Jamie, Katrina, and Samantha that is so strong."

"Are you jealous, Sarah?"

"I wouldn't call it that. I just want to be respected as an authoritative figure in Katrina's life. Now that Jamie and I are married there are four adults in her life guiding her, and I feel as if I'm the last one on the totem pole. I'm her stepmother for goodness sakes. I deserve a little respect."

"What does Jamie say about all this?"

"She won't face the issue. She sees that it's there, but I don't think she knows what to do any more than I do. I just thought maybe there was something that could be done on the legal side to make my position more prominent."

"Well, there are always ways of doing that, but do you want to upset Samantha and Doug? I know Jamie doesn't. Maybe the four of you should talk about this rationally before flinging them back into court. Jamie won't like it, and I know you're on good terms with them. Why ruin your relationship when there are other ways to resolve this? Did you ever think that maybe Katrina was better off living with them again? I know you and Jamie wanted all five of you to be a

family, but she seemed to do better with Doug and Samantha. Maybe that's something you and Jamie want to think about. Sarah, I'll do anything that Jamie asks me to of course, but I don't think this is the best way."

"But we could do it assuming I convinced her?" the blonde inquired.

"Sure. We can do anything. I don't recommend it, but we can do it," Blake answered.

"Great. That's what I wanted to know."

"Sarah, I must advise you against trying to convince Jamie to do this. It wouldn't be good for any of the relationships involved."

The blonde sighed. "I know, but I'm at the end of my sanity, Blake. Something has to give. At least if Jamie knows I spoke to you about it, she'll know I'm serious about making changes."

"Just be careful, Sarah. You're messing with something larger than you think."

"Well, I have to go. Eve's being too quiet, which means there's trouble. Thanks for your time, Blake."

"You're welcome. That's what I'm here for. You two take care. Let's get together soon if your schedules permit."

"Sounds good. Talk to you later."

Hanging up the phone, the actress went to find her two daughters. She found Katrina sitting on the front porch doing her favorite activity, chatting on her cell phone. Switching Stephen from one hip to the other, Sarah looked around the yard for Eve but didn't see her. Glancing at the ten-year-old she questioned, "Where's Eve?" Without even bothering to address her stepmother directly, Katrina gestured across the way to Samantha and Doug's house. "How did she get over there, Katrina? Did you walk her over?" The blonde child ignored the questions. "Katrina, answer me."

"She walked over herself," the girl grumbled.

"You let her cross the street alone?" Sarah asked, her voice raising with her anger. "She's four, Katrina. She could've gotten hurt." Again there was only silence to her comments. Finally getting frustrated at her stepdaughter's behavior, Sarah demanded, "Get off the phone, Katrina. You and I need to talk."

"Later. I'm busy."

"Now!" yelled Sarah, grabbing the phone and ending the call.

"Hey! You can't do that! I was talking to someone!" she screamed. "I'm telling Mom!"

"Good. I want her to know, Katrina. You have no right talking to me that way. When I tell you to do something, you better do it. Now why did you let Eve cross the street alone?"

"I watched her! Geez, Sarah! Don't get all bent out of shape about it!"

"What did you just call me?" Sarah questioned. Katrina had called her Mama since she and Jamie had gotten married, so this new and unexpected turn took her off guard.

"I called you Sarah! That is your name after all! I'm going to Uncle Doug and Aunt Samantha's!" she declared.

"Oh, no you're not. You're staying right here, young lady. We're not finished."

"I don't have to do what you tell me," the ten-year-old countered with attitude before starting to walk down the sidewalk to the street.

"Get back here, Katrina!" Sarah yelled.

"No!" the blonde girl hollered back over her shoulder as she crossed the street.

At a loss as to how to handle the situation, Sarah simply watched her go. When Katrina was in her aunt and uncle's house, the actress collapsed into the chair on the porch with her son. Tears began to fall from her eyes as she realized she had lost all control over her eldest child.

Later that evening when Jamie got home Sarah was still alone with Stephen. Taking their son from her wife, she bestowed kisses on both of them before inquiring, "Where are the girls?"

"They're over at Samantha and Doug's," Sarah mumbled in defeat.

"What's wrong, Sarah?"

The blonde looked up at the older woman and shook her head. "I can't do this with Katrina any more, Jamie. She doesn't accept me as a disciplinarian. I can't even talk to her without her getting an attitude with me. Something has to give."

"What happened this time?"

"I was on the phone with Blake today and left her to watch Eve for a few minutes. She let Eve walk across the street alone, because she was too lazy to get up out of the chair and walk her over there. She was on that damn cell phone you gave her. I don't know who a ten-year-old needs to be talking to all the time. Of course I got upset about her letting Eve go unattended."

"I'm sorry," Jamie said taking a seat next to the shorter woman on the couch.

"That's not the worst of it, Jamie. We started to fight. We both were yelling, but she called me

Sarah, Jamie. She's called me Mama since we got married. Now she calls me Sarah. That hurt my feelings. It makes me feel as if she doesn't see me as another mother."

"I'm really sorry, Sarah. I'll talk to her."

"You need to do more than talk, Jamie. I'm serious. I can't deal with her when she acts this way. I don't know what's going on with her, but I'm tired of taking the brunt of her frustrations and attitude. You need to let her know with whom she's dealing since she won't listen to me."

"I understand. I'll do something. I promise," the brunette said, rising to her feet.

"Where are you going?" Sarah asked in confusion.

"To talk to Katrina. I want this over with as soon as possible. Be back in a bit."

Jamie walked out of the house and over to Samantha and Doug's. She gave a strong knock on the door and then walked in. Her former sister-in-law and brother-in-law were sitting in the living room with their kids plus Katrina and Eve.

"Mom!" Eve greeted rushing over for a hug.

"Hi, Eve," she said with a smile for the four-year-old. "Did you have a good day?"

"Yeah. I did lots of fun stuff."

"Good. I'm glad. You'll have to tell me all about it, but right now I need to talk to your sister. Katrina, outside now," she stated pointing out to the back porch. Her daughter didn't say anything but rolled her eyes. Once they were alone, Jamie crossed her arms over her chest and put on a scowl. "What happened today?" she inquired.

"Nothing. I was minding my own business when Sarah started yelling at me."

"All right. You hold it right there. Since when did you start calling her Sarah? What brought that on?"

The little girl shrugged for a moment as her attitude deflated under her mother's cold glare.

"She's not my mom," she mumbled. "I don't want to call her that."

Looking down at her daughter, Jamie saw something was truly bothering her, so she decided to take a softer approach. "Come here, Katrina. Come sit with me for a minute," she suggested, taking a seat in one of the chairs. Katrina followed her actions, but instead of allowing the little girl to sit in her own chair, Jamie pulled her down into her lap. Katrina immediately curled up into her strong mother. Silence ensued for several moments. "Katrina, Sarah is your stepmother. If you don't want to call her Mama any more, you don't have to, but it would hurt her feelings if you started calling her Sarah after all this time. She loves you, Katrina, as much as I do. She wants you to be happy as much as I do."

"All she does is yell at me," the child complained. "She likes Eve and Stephen better than me."

"That's not true, Katrina. All three of you are our children, and we love all of you equally."

"Then why is she so mean to me?"

Jamie sighed as she idly caressed her daughter's fair locks. "Katrina, I know this is hard to understand, but she's not being mean to you. She's trying to discipline you, but since you aren't listening to her, she's getting upset and frustrated. She doesn't like yelling at you. It upsets her to have to do that, but you aren't paying attention to what she asks of you. You need to start doing what she tells you to. If you do that, I can promise you that she won't scream. It's not in her nature."

"But she never asks Eve to do anything," Katrina mumbled.

"Well, honey, Eve's four. You're ten. She does ask Eve to do things. They're just things that a four-year-old can handle. Since you are older, you can handle more responsibility. It's a part of being a big girl. When Eve's your age, she'll ask Eve to do the same things. She'll ask Eve to watch over Stephen just as she asks you to look out for Eve. You're the big sister, Katrina, and that's a great thing to be, but it does have its responsibilities. Sarah knows that Eve looks up to you. She watches what you do, and it would be so helpful to us both if you were doing the right thing."

Silence prevailed for a moment before the little girl softly stated, "I wish it was just you, me, and Mom again."

Hearing the pain of her child's voice, Jamie felt it in her own heart. It was the first time Katrina had spoken about Stephanie in such a way. She suspected that her daughter missed her mother, but the little girl had never actually said it in the five years she had been gone. "I know you miss her, baby," Jamie whispered as she felt hot tears trickle down her neck from where the little girl was clutching to her.

"Do you miss her, Mom?"

"Of course I do," she admitted. "If she were here, I'm sure the three of us would be happy together. However, she's not here, Katrina, and I know she wanted me to find someone else to be with and to help raise you. Your mother would approve of Sarah. I know she would. I wish you would too."

Katrina didn't say anything, so Jamie just waited for her daughter to speak again. The ten-year-old simply cried, making her mother begin to as well, and the two of them wept together, Katrina for her mother and Jamie for her daughter's pain until the little girl had fallen into slumber. Knowing it was getting late, the actress scooped her daughter up into her arms as she rose from the chair. Katrina didn't stir much, only nuzzled closer to her. Going back into the house, she called to Eve, saying they needed to go home. The four-year-old complied, coming to take

Jamie's outstretched hand.

"Is everything okay?" Stephanie softly inquired walking them to the door.

"No but we'll talk about it later," the tall woman replied. "Good night. Thanks for looking after the girls."

Quietly the three of them made their way back to their own house, Eve clutching tightly to Jamie's hand as Katrina continued to sleep on her shoulder. Sarah was sitting in the living room holding a sleeping Stephen when they came in. She could easily see the distress in her lover's eyes, but she didn't ask what was wrong in front of the children. Instead she softly said that it was time for Eve's bath.

Jamie nodded. "I'm just going to put Katrina to bed, and then I'll give Eve her bath. You put Stephen down and meet me in the bathroom."

Walking upstairs to her eldest daughter's room, Jamie gently put Katrina down on the bed. The little girl hardly moved as she began to remove her clothes. Slipping on clean pajamas, she put the child under the covers and then knelt down next to her bed. Jamie gazed at her daughter for a long time and cried over the revelations of the evening. Her daughter was mourning, and she hadn't been paying enough attention to help her sooner. Instead it escalated to the point that Katrina and Sarah's relationship was suffering. Pushing the flowing blonde hair off the ten-year-old's face, she leaned in to kiss her forehead. "I love you, Katrina," she whispered. "Sweet dreams."

Moving into the bathroom, she saw Sarah next to the tub starting the water. Eve was next to her, squirming her way out of her clothes and chatting, oblivious to the strain Sarah was showing. Coming to join the two blondes, Jamie knelt down next to her wife as Eve got into the water. Neither woman spoke to the other, instead focusing all their attention onto their middle child. As usual Eve was thrilled to be the center of her parents' attention and began to tell Jamie all of the wonderful things she had done that day. For her part, the tall woman listened attentively, but she knew once Eve was down for the night the woman next to her and she were going to have to talk about the problem that now faced them. Stalling for time to compose herself, Jamie took over the duties of dressing their little girl for bed. She tucked her in and told her a story before wishing her sweet dreams. Hearing Sarah come into the room to do the same, Jamie retreated to the master bedroom to get ready for bed herself, seeing that Sarah had done so already.

Ten minutes later Jamie was standing on the deck off their room looking up at the night sky. Stars were just beginning to make their presence known. However, she didn't pay them any attention. Instead Jamie cried alone. She didn't know what to do to help Katrina. Helplessly Jamie looked heavenward. "What do I do, Stephanie?" she questioned aloud. "How do I help her?" Pausing a moment she mumbled, "I wish you were here."

Sarah stared out the open double doors at her wife. She wasn't surprised that her beloved spoke aloud to her late wife, but the last comment took her off guard. Her heart sunk a little at the thought of Stephanie actually being there, because she knew what the ramifications would mean,

but she knew she had no right to be jealous of a deceased woman Jamie had once dearly loved. She was the one Jamie loved now, and she was the one that shared her life with her and their three children. Quietly Sarah moved out onto the deck and slipped her arms around the strong tall body. The tension immediately began to fade.

"How did it go tonight?" Sarah softly inquired.

Jamie shook her head. "I'm not sure I got through to her or not," she confessed. "She told me something that upset me. I haven't exactly been mindful of her needs. I feel terrible about letting her suffering continue without even as much as an acknowledgment. What kind of a parent am I?"

"Jamie, don't do this to yourself. You're a wonderful mother. You've done everything for all three of our children."

"No, I haven't. My daughter is in pain, Sarah, and I've done nothing to help her."

"That's not true. You do everything you can for her."

The brunette shook her head. "No. I should have seen this. I should have realized that she's acting out because she misses Stephanie. I guess having you here makes her miss Stephanie all the more, and she's having a hard time dealing with you as a mother because of that."

"Poor baby. I'm sorry, Jamie. I should have tried to be more sensitive."

"I guess her living with Samantha and Doug had been hiding that all along, because Samantha and Stephanie are so much alike. It was probably comforting to her, and now she's over here with the two of us. The transition is harder on her than I thought it would be. Listen. I don't know what's going to happen when she wakes up tomorrow. She might still be a thorn in your side, and she still might call you Sarah. If she does that, then I'm truly sorry. I know that hurts your feelings. Could you just bear it though? I'm hoping this is just a phase. I told her how much you love her, but she's not ready to see you as a mother yet. I wish I could get her to change her mind about that, but I'm hoping she will do it on her own in time. I made it clear to her that she should be doing the things that you tell her though. I'm hoping that she remembers that much at least. She told me that she thought you always yelled at her. I promised her that if she minded you that you wouldn't yell. Think you can handle that?"

Sarah nodded. "I never want to yell at her, Jamie. She just pushes me until I'm at the end of my sanity."

"I know, and I'm sorry. Maybe there is something we can do for her. Maybe we should get her professional help. If she could just work out some of this stuff instead of taking it out on you, that would be best."

"We'll look into it. For now however, let's just relax. Stephen's down for a little while. I'd love to spend a little alone time with you. What do you say?" she asked enticingly as her hands mapped

over her wife's defined back.

Jamie turned in the small woman's embrace. "That sounds good. What did you have in mind?" Sarah didn't answer. Instead she just gave an enticing smile and motioned for Jamie to follow her as she retreated toward their bedroom.

A month later Torrance returned to New Orleans for her community service. Even though she dreaded being apart from Helen and their two kids for that long, she knew Blake had gotten her out of jail time, so for that she was relieved. As she walked off the plane that day and down the corridor towards the baggage claim area, an excited blonde was there to meet her.

"Tor, how have you been? How's Helen?" Georgia inquired as they hugged lightly.

"All right. Helen's doing well. She's not happy about me being down here, but there was no getting around that."

The little blonde nodded. "Well, at least you'll be in good hands while you're here. I won't let you get into any more trouble," she joked as they walked to get the photographer's luggage and equipment.

"I'm sure she appreciates that," Torrance answered with a demure smile. Even as much as she enjoyed Georgia's company, she was a little upset at what the woman was doing to her long-time friend. For the past month Georgia had stayed down in New Orleans alone, leaving Blake to take care of things in New York. If it hadn't been for Renee, Torrance knew the attorney would have lost her composure by then. As it was, Blake wasn't happy with the writer's extended absence, but she didn't speak about it much except to say that Georgia was following her own dreams at the moment.

After picking up the brunette's things, the two of them quietly made their way back to Georgia's place in the Garden District. As they pulled up to their house, Torrance turned to Georgia in confusion. "This is where you've been staying?"

"Yeah. It's a great place. I rented it for a couple of months. It's a bed and breakfast, but I convinced them to rent me the whole place. It's been nice."

"Different than New York," the tall woman mentioned.

Georgia nodded in agreement. "This is more my pace than New York," she stated.

Torrance quirked her brow in response but didn't reply to the comment. She had secretly feared that the young blonde had thoughts of permanently living in New Orleans with the way she was acting, but she hadn't said that to anyone but her own wife. To hear Georgia admit she liked the city better than her home only served to strengthen her assumption. "Must be hard being away from Blake and the kids though."

Georgia gave a nod. "I miss Luke and Lana terribly. I wish they were here. Of course I miss Blake too, but she's always so busy anyway. She hardly had time for the kids and me while I was in New York. It's not that much different now. We talk on the phone."

"Surely you miss being with her though," the photographer pressed.

Blue eyes sparkled as she looked at her friend. "I miss that too, Tor. Don't get me wrong. However, I've been busy with my book and my articles. This time away has been good."

"Well, when you finally do get home, you'll be happy with the nanny Blake hired. Renee's been great from what I've heard. The kids have really taken to her, and even Blake seems pleased. Apparently Renee's a great cook on top of it all."

"She cooks for Blake?"

"Yeah, cooks, cleans. She was quite a catch from the way Blake tells it," Torrance said, wondering if all the talk about Renee would get to her friend. She saw Georgia deep in thought for a few moments as they got her things up into the house.

Putting the photographer's bags down in the entryway, Georgia tried to sound casual as she asked, "How old is Renee?"

"Don't know exactly. Twenty-five, twenty-six, something like that."

"What's she look like?"

"Blonde, hazel eyes, very attractive," the tall woman admitted, intentionally pushing the envelope, looking for a reaction.

Georgia nodded in silence. The thought of a woman younger than her living in her house in her absence sharing time with Blake and her kids was eating her up on the inside. However, she didn't say that to the photographer. "Well, enough 'bout her. Let me show you to your room."

The next morning Torrance had to report to her assignment early, so she was up and out of the house before Georgia even stirred. After hearing what her job was going to be in detail for the next three weeks, she realized that it wasn't going to be as horrible as it first seemed. Blake had arranged for her to be spending the whole three weeks photographing different aspects of the city, so she decided to just enjoy the opportunity to do her work.

When she returned home that evening, the writer was in the kitchen. "Hey. How was it today?" Georgia inquired.

"Fine. This won't be so bad."

"Good. I was makin' some dinner. You hungry?"

"Yeah. Food sounds good."

"All right. It'll be ready in a few minutes. By the way, Helen called for you earlier. She said she wants you to call her back right away."

"All right. Thanks. Let me do that, and then I'll join you."

Going up to her room, Torrance stowed her equipment on the sofa and then picked up the phone to call her wife. "Hi. You called," she said softly when Helen answered.

"Yeah. How are you? How was it today?"

"Okay. It won't be so bad. Blake did well by me down here. I would even say I might enjoy it if you and the kids were with me."

"Well, we all miss you, Torrance."

"I miss you all as well. How are John and Marta? Behaving I hope."

"Of course. Our children are perfect," the blonde reminded.

Torrance laughed a little. "You know it would be a lot more fun if you were here. Why don't you bring the kids down? I'll have to work during the days, but at least we'd all be here at night."

"I don't want to disturb Georgia."

"Don't worry about that. Come on. Think about it, will you?"

"Sure. I'd love to be there with you," Helen conceded. "Um, Torrance, I actually called for a reason. I would much rather do this in person, but I guess this will have to do under the circumstances. I have to tell you something," she stated with a light giggle.

"What is that, mon madame? Is it what I think it is?" she questioned, hope evident in her voice.

"Yes. I guess you were right. The change of scenery did us a lot of good. I'm pregnant, love."

"Oh, this is so great! Oh, Helen, I wish I was there with you right now. This is so wonderful."

"I knew you would think so. We have so much to plan for when you return. I'm so happy, Torrance. Thank you for giving me this. I love you."

"Je t'aime, Helen," Torrance whispered softly. "When should we tell the kids?"

"I was hoping we would do it together when you came home. I don't want anyone else to know until then. I mean it's still early. I just found out today."

"Of course. We'll keep it between us. Oh, I wish I was there with you now. You're going to go through a lot of morning sickness alone. I'm sorry. Be strong for me and know that I'm thinking of you, Helen."

"I know, but you owe me for this, Torrance. It's one thing to be sick when you're here but quite another when you're away on business. You have to promise never to get into this kind of trouble again. You now have three kids to think about plus me."

"I'll never do this again, Helen. You have my word."

"All right. Well, I need to feed the kids dinner. I'll talk to you later. I love you, Torrance."

"I love you too, Helen. You've made me so happy. Take it easy now. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

The following morning Helen and Sarah decided to take their children into the city. They had planned to meet Blake with her kids at Georgia's for lunch. However, that day as they walked into their friends' restaurant, they saw the attorney sitting with her children and an attractive young blonde at a table near the back. The oldest woman was talking so intently with her nanny that she never even saw Helen and Sarah approach with their group. It wasn't until Helen spoke up that Blake even turned toward them.

"Oh, you're here already," Blake mentioned checking her watch. The time seemed to pass so quickly whenever she and Renee talked. "Um, Sarah, Helen, this is my new nanny, Renee Summers. Renee, this is Sarah Talbot-Dean and Helen Whitfield. Helen is Torrance's wife. You met Torrance a few days ago."

"Oh yes, of course. Nice to meet you both after talking on the phone," the youngest blonde said as she stood to shake hands with the other blondes.

"Have a seat," Blake said, gesturing to the empty chairs.

After settling all the kids and placing orders for lunch, the attorney turned to Helen and Sarah. "So, what do you two have on your agendas today?"

"Actually we're taking the kids shopping. Jamie gave me free reign to buy whatever I wanted, so I have to make the most of that opportunity," Sarah teased.

"And of course Torrance is still making things up to me so a shopping spree is a good way to do that," Helen added jokingly. "What about you all?"

Blake shrugged. "I'm just working. What are you planning on for the rest of the day, Renee?"

"I hadn't actually decided yet. Speaking of shopping though, I was planning on asking you about getting some new clothes for the kids. They seem to be growing so quickly. It would help to get them some new things."

"Then you must do it."

"You could go with us if you want," Helen stated.

"That's a great idea," Blake answered turning to her nanny. "You should go with Sarah and Helen. They know all the best spots."

"I wouldn't want to intrude," Renee hesitated.

"Nonsense. Blake's right. We do know all the places," Sarah countered.

"It's settled then," the brunette announced.

Lunch passed relatively easily even though there were seven children making the meal interesting. When it was over, Sarah and Helen gathered all the kids, even Blake's, since Renee said she needed to speak to her employer alone for a moment. When it was just the two of them, the attorney looked at the younger woman questioningly. Renee looked over at the two blondes and then back at the tall woman. "I'm not sure the weekly allowance you gave me for the kids will cover this shopping trip," she said tentatively.

"Oh, right. Of course," Blake replied reaching for her wallet. Taking out a credit card, she extended it to her nanny. "I actually meant to give this to you a few days ago. I put you on my account, so you could buy things for the children easier. Just collect the receipts as you go along, so I know where it's all going and give them to me when you get back."

As the conversation continued, Helen and Sarah exchanged glances. "Do you see what I do?" the actress inquired of her taller friend.

Helen nodded. "This isn't good," the green-eyed woman responded. "They have a natural chemistry together. If I didn't know better I would think there was interest there on both parts."

Sarah nodded in agreement. "I hope Georgia knows what she's risking," she mumbled as Renee started for them. "Ready to go?"

"Yeah. Thanks for waiting. I just had to get the finances squared away with the boss," the youngest blonde said with a smile. "This should be fun."

That evening when Sarah arrived home with her three children, Jamie was sitting across the street on the porch with Samantha. When she saw the blonde trying to carry Stephen and the numerous bags, though, she jogged across the way to help. "How was shopping today?" she asked curiously as the group went into the house.

Sarah rolled her eyes at her wife. It had been a trial with Katrina and even Helen had noticed it, but she didn't want to get into that with her other kids there. Instead she answered, "We have some things to talk about, Jamie. Katrina wants to spend the night over at Doug and Samantha's

again."

The brunette actress nodded in understanding. "Well, was she behaved while you were out?" she inquired of her wife even though she looked at the ten-year-old.

"Not exactly."

"Then she can't go," Jamie answered firmly. Gazing down at her eldest daughter, she stated, "In fact I think it would be a good idea if you spent some time up in your room and away from that phone of yours, young lady."

"But, Mom, that's not fair," complained Katrina.

"I think it's completely fair, Katrina. If you can't behave while you are out, you won't go out. Sarah is in charge of you, and you didn't listen to her. It's time to pay the consequences. Now hand over the phone," she demanded, extending her hand. Reluctantly Katrina relinquished it. "Thank you. Now go to your room and stay there until I come get you." The ten-year-old girl sulked up the staircase to her room before Jamie turned to Sarah. "Well, that takes care of her for the moment. Want to tell me what happened while I work on dinner?"

Sarah followed her wife into the kitchen with their son attached to her hip. "Well, she had a terrible attitude the whole time we were out. Helen even commented on it. Not only that she was rude to Blake and Georgia's new nanny, Renee. She was simply trying to be nice to our daughter, and Katrina pretty much told her where she could go. I don't know what to do here, Jamie."

"Well, Samantha and I were talking while I waited on you to come home. This change didn't really happen until we all moved in together. She started with the attitude a little bit then, but after Stephen was born, she really turned into a hellion. Samantha and I were discussing how much better she was under she and Doug's care," the tall woman mentioned. "I was trying to get information out of her how she managed to do it. Apparently she's started with the attitude with Samantha and Doug as well, but they never said anything about it until now. This is worse than I thought."

"What are we going to do then?"

"I told Samantha about our idea to send her to counseling. She seemed to think it might help. I mean don't know what else to try yet. We can always hope that does the trick."

"I guess we'll find out," Sarah mumbled.

"Anything else interesting happen today? You saw Helen?"

"Yeah. She's good, and I met this Renee woman. I'll tell you this, because you're my wife, but I hate to think of it. I think Georgia's about to find herself in a bind."

"What do you mean? What makes you think that?"

"Renee and Blake get along extremely well. You should have seen them together."

"Are you saying Blake's having an affair?"

"No but the two of them are something to see. I would hate to think Georgia would lose Blake after all they've been through, but her absence isn't easy on Blake. I can see the strain she's under, and Renee seems to be the only thing keeping her sane right now."

"Oh. That's not good. Does Helen think that too?"

Sarah nodded. "She's not thrilled with the situation or Georgia right now. She also sees what Blake is going through, and since Blake is Tor's best friend, it's easy to guess whose side Helen's going to be on when bad things happen."

"Well, that's too bad, but it's not for us to get involved. We just have to be there for them." The little blonde gave a nod in agreement. Coming to embrace her wife, Jamie whispered, "It just makes me all the more lucky to have you."

That night over at the Erwin house, things were quiet once the kids had been put to bed. Blake sat on the sofa reading leisurely and enjoying the stillness while Renee finished up the dinner dishes. When the blonde had completed the chore, she joined the brunette on the couch. The attorney looked over the top of her reading glasses and gave her companion a small smile.

"You look tired tonight. I guess the kids wore you out on the shopping trip, huh?"

"They were a handful, but we got some good stuff. It was worth it. We couldn't have them not walking around in the latest fashion. Somehow based on their wardrobe when I first arrived, it seems like Georgia would appreciate it if they were dressed by only the best designers."

Blake chuckled lightly tossing her book on the coffee table and slipping her glasses into the pocket of her dress shirt. "Well, it is her forte. She is one of the best fashion columnists in New York, and if she has her way, she'll be a best-selling novelist on top of that."

Renee nodded. Seeing dark eyes holding sadness, she asked, "You miss her, don't you?"

"At first I did. Now I guess I've gotten used to it. I mean four weeks is a long time. Having you around has helped though," she replied.

"Well, I'm glad. That's what I'm here for, to make your life easier in any way that I can," her nanny stated.

Blake studied the petite woman next to her for a moment. They still hadn't discussed the woman's sexuality since she had been employed there, but Blake had come to realize that Renee's interest lay in the fairer gender, striking her as curious. The attractive woman never spoke about anyone. Deciding to inquire, the attorney said, "You know, Renee, I've been

wondering something."

"What's that?"

"Why doesn't an incredible woman such as yourself have a girlfriend?" she asked softly.

Renee flushed slightly at the question. She shrugged. "I don't know. I guess it's hard with what I do. I mean I basically work twelve-hours a day running after two kids. I'm pretty tired after they are put down for the night. I don't really have any energy to go out. Maybe if I had a day off it might help, but I'd probably just hang out at the house anyway. I don't have great social skills when it comes to meeting girls," she answered.

The older woman laughed under her breath. "I don't believe that. I think any woman with half a brain could see what a catch you were. I understand about being tired though. Maybe we should arrange for you to have some time off. You've worked four weeks without a break."

"You've been busy though. You've needed me to watch the kids. I've seen you when you get home. You barely have enough energy to take care of yourself. Why do you think I've been making all the dinners? I knew if it were up to you, the kids would never get fed," she teased lightly, touching Blake on the arm.

The tall woman felt the touch send heat up her arm. Looking into hazel eyes, she nodded. "You have a point there. You've been a great help to me, Renee. I don't know what I would do without you. You're the only reason I have my sanity. I should do something nice for you in return. What do you say?"

"I think you're already doing it by paying me so much," the blonde responded.

"No. I don't think so. I'll tell you what. Why don't I take you out this weekend? We'll have dinner and go anywhere you want, and it'll all be on me. What do you say?"

"What about Lana and Luke?"

"Cindy can watch them for one evening. Come on. You need some excitement. You never know. You might meet some gorgeous woman that sweeps you right off your feet."

Renee shook her head. "They'll all be looking at you. I don't stand a chance."

"A beautiful young thing like you versus an old has-been like me, there's no competition."

"You're not a has-been, Blake," Renee retorted. Her hand managed to find the attorney's arm again unconsciously. "You're quite attractive, you know."

Blake placed her hand on top of it and patted it lightly. "Thank you for thinking so, Renee. It makes me feel better to know a woman young enough to be my daughter finds me attractive."

Renee laughed gently. "You're not that old either. You're just overworked. That needs to change."

Blake nodded. "Maybe it will." They sat for a moment longer before Blake noticed they were still touching. However, instead of removing her hand from Renee's, she simply looked into hazel eyes. They showed no sign of displeasure in the touch. Instead the brunette saw a glimmer in those eyes that hadn't been there moments prior. "So, do you have any ideas where you might like to go? I'll take you anywhere in the city as long as we can get in that is," she amended.

"I'll think about it. There are so many options," Renee answered, putting her other hand on top of Blake's, so the attorney's was enveloped by both of hers. "For now I think it's time for you to retire. You look like you've had a long day yourself, Blake. I bet a nice soak in that jacuzzi of yours would feel great. Want me to start it for you?"

"That does sound nice, but you've had a harder day than me. Maybe you'd like to sit in it for awhile. You are welcome to it any time you want."

"That does sound nice. I think I'll take you up on that."

"Great. Why don't I get it started for you while change into more appropriate attire? Just come into my bathroom whenever you're ready," the older woman said rising from the sofa. She wandered off toward her bathroom to prepare the jacuzzi for her nanny. After she had started it, she began to pull on her pajamas. It was only a few minutes before there was a soft knock on the bathroom door. Beckoning Renee into the bathroom, Blake was surprised for a moment when the little blonde appeared in only a short robe with a towel tossed over one shoulder. They just looked at each other for a moment awkwardly, because they really hadn't had occasion to see each other dressed in such a fashion. The tall woman's eyes surveyed up the petite form, taking in the bare legs and expanse of Renee's chest that wasn't covered by the robe. The swell of her breasts was so alluring set off by the satin black robe wore. Trying not to think about how attractive and soft she appeared, Blake met her nanny's eyes. "Well, it's all yours now. I'm just going to go to bed. Feel free to stay in as long as you like."

"Okay. Thanks," the blonde answered, obviously waiting for her employer to leave before disrobing.

With a nod of her head, Blake was out the door. She closed it behind her and took a deep breath. She had thought Renee lovely from the moment she had laid eyes upon her, but her thoughts had not drifted beyond that. However something had happened in a matter of moments on the couch. What had started as playful banter seemed to take a sensual turn suddenly, leaving Blake disconcerted. Nevertheless, she tried to dismiss it as her longing for Georgia. Moving to the bed, she climbed under the covers and clicked on the television to catch up on the news of the day before sleep.

The following morning Torrance woke up before her alarm went off. Her mind had been racing most of the night with thoughts of Helen and their baby-to-be, so she didn't get much sleep. Nevertheless, she felt completely energized when she got up for her community service that day.

Heading into the bathroom, she quickly showered and dressed. Figuring Georgia was going to sleep in as usual, she tried to be quiet as she moved around her room preparing her equipment before lugging it down to the living area. Going into the kitchen to grab something to eat, she was surprised to see the small blonde sitting at the coffee table reading the paper.

"Good morning. I didn't expect to see you up yet," the photographer mentioned going to the pot of coffee that had already been made.

"Mornin', Tor. I couldn't sleep. I've been thinkin' 'bout what you said 'bout Renee over the last couple of days. I just cain't stop thinkin' 'bout it actually," she confessed.

"What about her?"

"That she's attractive and she's been attentive to Blake."

"You shouldn't worry, Georgia. You and Blake are married. There's nothing to be concerned about."

"I know, but still I was thinkin' 'bout doin' somethin' for her as a surprise. I don't want her to think I forgot 'bout her completely now. What do you think?"

"That would be nice. Did you have something in mind?"

The author nodded. "I was wonderin' if it wouldn't be much trouble to take some pictures of me to send to her," she requested as a slight blush rose to her cheeks.

"That's no trouble. What kind of pictures though? By the look on your face I'm thinking you want them to be intimate."

The small woman nodded with a modest flush. "But I don't want you to be uncomfortable, Tor. It's just that I know I cain't trust you."

"I understand. Whatever you want to do is fine. I've photographed women intimately before. It's no big deal. You just tell me what you had in mind, and we'll work it out. I know Blake would love it."

Georgia nodded. "Well, I was hopin' sometime over the next day or two would work well. I know you'll need time to develop them."

"Fine. We'll do it when I get home tonight. That gives you the day to figure out what you want. Do you want black and white or color photos?"

The writer shrugged. "I don't know. Whatever you think is best."

The photographer studied her moment before answering, "Your skin tone and hair color would be highlighted best in black and white, but we can do some of both. I'll have to get some more

film on my way home tonight."

"All right. I'll pay for it. Just tell me how much I owe you."

"Whatever. It's no big deal. I have to get going now. I'll see you tonight."

"Okay. Have a good day."

"You too," Torrance replied picking up a croissant and her coffee before heading out the door.

Georgia looked out the window and thought about where she wanted the pictures to be taken that evening for a few minutes before the phone interrupted her thoughts. She walked over to the back door where the phone was mounted on the wall and greeted, "Hello."

"Good morning, Georgia," Helen said. "How are you?"

"Hey, Helen. I'm good. How 'bout you? How are the kids?"

"We're all fine. Is Torrance there? I wanted to talk to her a moment before she left."

"Actually you just missed her by a few minutes. She's gone for the day, but I'll tell her you called though."

"All right. Thanks. Tell her that the kids and I are going to be coming down there on Saturday for a week."

"Oh that's great. It'll be nice to have you 'round. She'll be thrilled. I'll tell her. "

"Wonderful. So, how is the book coming along?"

"It's coming along all right. I'm well into it now."

"Any plans to come home soon? I know Blake and the kids would love to see you."

"I know. I miss all of them as well. I wish she would come down here for awhile, but I can't seem to convince her to. She's too busy it seems. Apparently Renee is helping out a lot though," she mentioned wondering what her friend thought of the nanny.

"Oh yeah. Renee is working out well, but there's no substitute for the real thing though. I mean when I was out with Renee and your children yesterday they were telling me that they missed you. It's been a month, Georgia. They are too young to be without you."

"Well, if Blake would bring them down here, they wouldn't have to miss me, but she won't," the younger blonde quipped.

Helen heard the edge in her friend's voice, so she decided she wouldn't press the issue any more.

It was obvious Georgia was beginning to become defensive on the matter. Deciding to change the subject, she inquired, "Do you want me to bring them down to you this weekend?"

"Well, I'm down here to work. I don't think I could watch the two of them and accomplish that. That's why I left in the first place. However maybe if Renee came with them that might work. I think I'll ask Blake. Are you sure it wouldn't be any trouble?"

"Not at all. Just let me know," Helen answered.

"I will. Thanks, Helen."

"You're welcome. Well, I should get going. John and Marta are bound to be looking for me any moment. I'll see you this weekend."

That evening Torrance returned back to the bed and breakfast to find dinner already on the table for Georgia and her. The little blonde looked pensive though as she hovered around the kitchen, setting the table, making the brunette wonder if something was on her mind. Dropping her equipment gently down on the floor, Torrance stepped closer to the writer. "Hey. Dinner looks great. How was your day?"

"Fine. I talked to Helen this mornin' after you left. She and the kids are comin' down on Saturday for a week."

The tall woman grinned. "That's just about the greatest thing I've heard since I started this job."

Georgia nodded. "Renee is comin' down with Luke and Lana as well, so we should have a full house."

"Is Blake coming?"

"No. She said she needs to work. Enough 'bout her though. Sit down and eat somethin'."

Torrance did as she was told. Over the course of the meal, she could tell that Georgia's mind was elsewhere, but she didn't want to pry, figuring it was on the attorney. Instead they just ate in companionable quiet. When the meal was complete, the older woman helped with the dishes before inquiring, "Are you still up for our little photo shoot?"

"Oh yeah. I've decided to just do it in the bedroom. I'm all set whenever you are."

"I'm ready. Let's do this."

"Okay. Just give me a minute to change and then come up?" she questioned.

"No problem."

Rushing upstairs Georgia went into her bedroom. She had created most of her atmosphere earlier

that day, so it was just a matter of her outfit. As she slipped out of her clothes and into the skimpy revealing robe she had chosen, her thoughts turned to Torrance. She idly wondered what her wife's best friend might think of her this way. She had always thought the photographer dashingly attractive and considered Helen lucky to have the arm of such a woman. Even more, she had never worn so little in front of another woman who was so obviously interested in only the softer gender, so she pondered whether Torrance would find her empirically beautiful.

Torrance waited a few minutes before going upstairs to Georgia's room. She gave a strong knock on the door and then waited for Georgia's response to enter with her equipment. When she opened the door however at the small woman's beckon, she was unprepared for what lay on the other side. There was the little blue-eyed blonde, standing in the middle of a romantic room in only a short blue robe. The tall woman felt her own breath catch at the thought of seeing her best friend's wife in such an intimate state. In that moment she realized exactly why Blake was drawn to the Southern belle. Her body in combination with the honey-laden drawl was enough to drive the most composed woman to delirium. Unable to help herself, Torrance flushed lightly for a moment as she broke their gaze.

Seeing the older woman's response, Georgia knew the brunette did find her attractive, and it pleased her greatly. "So, I was thinkin' we'd just use the bed," she stated.

Torrance looked at the furniture in question. The bed seemed an average setting. Turning her attention elsewhere, she saw the French chaise over by the window. "We could do the bed, but I think the chaise would suit better," she suggested, trying to get into a professional mode.

Georgia looked it as well and shrugged. "Whatever you think is best. You're the photographer after all. Maybe we can do some of both."

"Fine. Let's get started. Take a seat on the chaise for me. I want to get an idea of your presence behind the lens for a moment." Georgia took a seat while Torrance dug out her camera. After several minutes of arranging the blonde, Torrance began the shoot. However, Georgia had a natural way with the camera that made it extremely difficult to keep her thoughts from straying. She had to give the writer more credit than she had originally for her seductive powers. She now knew why Blake had succumbed to them. Moving around the little woman, Torrance tried to stay on the task at hand. However she knew things were about to get more intimate between them at her next request. Finishing a roll, the brunette waited for it to rewind before loading another. "Okay, Georgia. Now it's time to get serious about this. Are you wearing anything under that robe?" she questioned. The younger woman shook her head. "Great. Blake will love that. I want you to lying down all the way on the chaise now and open your legs slightly." Georgia did as she was told, knowing full well that Torrance would be able to see everything if she did so. However, the older woman didn't look up as she got into position, instead giving her some privacy. "Good. Now take both your hands and cover yourself. Put the left hand on top. We need to show off that rock of a ring for your wife," she joked. Getting into the correct position with her hands strategically placed between her thighs, Georgia awaited further instruction. Coming to the end of the small chaise, Torrance knelt down at the arm, so she was almost on eye level with her model. Taking a look through her camera, she shook her head. "That's not quite it," she mentioned. Rising she went to Georgia. Without thought she reached for the robe, pulling it open

further to see the expanse of the petite woman's ample breasts. Accidentally her hand skimmed the soft surface, and she felt Georgia's body respond. Suddenly blue eyes met brown. An intense but awkward moment ensued. Finally breaking it though, Torrance moved back to the foot of the chaise. The charged atmosphere seeped into the blonde's eyes, further fueling the intimacy they were sharing.

When the photographer completed another roll, Georgia inquired, "Do you mind if we move this over to the bed now? I want to get some pictures of that as well."

"No. Not at all. Lead the way," Torrance answered.

The small blonde went over to the bed and unceremonious disrobed, leaving her in absolutely nothing but naked glory. Being taken off guard by the action, the older woman blushed and quickly averted her eyes. She hadn't expected to see all of the Southern woman. Seeing the discomfort on her friend's face, Georgia asked, "Tor, are you all right with this?"

Torrance shrugged. "Georgia, I've been doing this a long time, so I feel like I should tell you this. We can do this any way you want, but most of the time the most alluring pictures are not when everything is on display. It's those that create an illusion, those that spark the imagination, which are most seductive. I think you'd attain your goals with Blake if you were hiding just a little something," she explained, risking a glance at her best friend's wife.

"Whatever you think, Tor. You're the expert. Will a sheet suffice?"

"Yeah. That should be fine. Go on and get in bed. I'll come position you in a minute. I just need a moment to get the lighting correct." Torrance focused on the lights of the room in order to keep her eyes from straying to the display. This was turning out to be harder than she had thought. However, she knew nothing would become of what was so obviously beginning to happen in the room. She didn't think Georgia was intentionally trying to be seductive towards her. It was just for the pictures, but Torrance was finding it difficult to concentrate. The times she had photographed others nude had been in a much different environment. She had never been alone with her subject like this, so things were awkward and yet so enticing. Reminding herself what the intention of the photographs was though, she steeled herself against any more potential physical responses and turned to complete the project. Her eyes moved to the bed where Georgia lay covered by the white sheet. Coming to her Torrance started to rearrange it the way she thought most appropriate.

However, when she had backed away to study the creation, the writer spoke up and asked, "Could I show just a little something? I think Blake would like that."

"Whatever you want, Georgia. This is your gift. Show me what you had in mind."

The young woman immediately pulled the sheet down to expose both her breasts. "Just these. What do you think?"

"Cross at least one arm across them for me," Torrance bargained. "I still want to live when Blake

sees these. If she knew I even saw you like this, she'd kill me. You do realize that?" she asked jokingly as her dark eyes instinctively looked at what was on exhibition. Seeing that her gaze was affecting the little woman physically as well, she snapped her head up to meet the blue eyes again.

"How 'bout just one of them?" Georgia countered. "And no covering."

Knowing she wasn't going to win the argument, Torrance conceded with a nod. "Fine. One of them. Pick your favorite."

The older woman moved to the end of the bed with her camera and looked through her lens at what Georgia had created. The writer was giving her the best bedroom gaze she had ever seen from anyone other than her own wife. However, she desperately tried to center her attention on the shoot instead of her model. Going into professional mode again, she moved her way around the bed taking pictures of the angelic and yet alluring blonde. Getting so into her work, she didn't even really consider the fact that she had crawled onto the bed with her best friend's naked wife. All that really mattered to her was the fact that she was getting incredible photos of the glorious creature in her presence.

It wasn't until Torrance was standing on the bed, her feet on either side of Georgia's hips that she realized the position in which she had placed herself. Her legs quavered slightly when she felt one of Georgia's naked legs bump into hers, followed a full body shudder when the blonde's hands found their way to her calves.

"Are you okay, Tor?" the writer inquired, holding on to the brunette's legs in a vain effort to keep her upright. The photographer came down onto her knees and continued to furiously click away with her camera until a petite hand came up and took it from her grasp. "I think you've done enough, Torrance," Georgia said softly, putting the equipment aside. Reaching back to the brunette, Georgia took hold of her by the front of her shirt. Torrance allowed herself to be drawn closer until their faces were only inches apart. She could feel Georgia's naked frame pressed into her own with only a flimsy sheet and the photographer's clothes between them, and yet she was paralyzed to do anything except stare into captivating blue eyes. A fair brow quirked questioningly.

Suddenly Torrance realized how close her lips were to the writer's as Georgia's sweet breath swept across her face. "Helen," she mumbled.

A blonde head nodded, repeating, "Helen." Still neither of them moved for a moment. Finally Georgia started to push the brunette away lightly, saying in a strained voice, "If you don't get off of me right now, Torrance..."

Immediately the tall woman rolled off of her and jumped from the bed. "Oh God," she whispered shakily. "We almost..."

"But we didn't, Tor," Georgia added, rising from the bed and wrapping the sheet around herself. "I could never do that to Helen. She was my first friend in New York. I could never do that with

you because of her."

"I never even thought of you that way until tonight," the photographer confessed. "Blake and Helen are going to kill us."

"They don't have to know. Nothin' happened. We just got a little carried away with the pictures, but we didn't do anythin' wrong. There's nothin' to tell," she stated, putting a hand on her friend's arm.

Torrance looked at it and then its owner. Georgia still looked tempting, but she had her senses back enough to realize nothing would happen between them. Taking a deep breath, she nodded reluctantly. "You're right. There is nothing to tell other than the fact that we had a photo shoot. Nothing happened." Georgia gave a nod in affirmation. "Well, I should go though," Torrance said, quickly beginning to gather her equipment. The blonde didn't stop her. "I'll develop these negatives for you. I'm sure they'll come out great."

"I'm sure they will. Thanks for your help. Tor."

"No problem," the older woman answered, making her way to the door. Taking one last look at her friend, she said, "Well, good night, Georgia."

"Night, Tor."

That Friday evening Cindy came to stay with Lana and Luke, so Blake could take Renee out as she had promised. The three adults made sure the kids were settled before the attorney and the nanny took off together for the night. As soon as they were downstairs on the street, Blake smiled at her company. "So, where am I taking you this evening?"

"Well, we're having dinner in Soho, and then there is the club called Henrietta Hudson I want to go to. Some of my friends are going to be there tonight, and I wanted to meet up with them. Is that okay with you?"

"That's fine. This is your night. I promised to take you wherever you wanted to go. Your wish is my command this evening," she said with a sexy grin as she hailed a cab for them.

The two of them had a leisurely dinner down in Soho and then went to a local coffee shop after that, so they didn't even reach the bar until close to eleven. Going into the small establishment, Blake noticed that it was packed with many different types of women almost all of them dancing to the blaring music. Since it was difficult to hear over the sound, Renee just took the attorney by the hand to lead her through the crowd over to a small table where her friends were.

Blake noticed the contact but didn't complain. Instead she just went with the flow. Renee yelled over the music to introduce Blake to her friends before taking a seat. The attorney stood quietly observing the atmosphere of the club. It had been so long since she had been to such a place, and she felt a little too old to be amongst the company she now found herself. However, she had promised Renee a night of whatever she wanted, so she decided to make the most of it. Leaning

down to the nanny's ear, she asked what she wanted to drink from the bar. When Renee answered, she went off to do the blonde's bidding.

Going over to the bar, Blake ordered two drinks and just watched Renee from afar as she waited on the bartender to make them. Seeing the blonde in this atmosphere helped her remember how young the woman really was. When they were alone in the privacy of the attorney's home, the nanny seemed so mature, but as she looked at her now, she was reminded that she was a handful of years removed from being a teenager. After paying for the drinks, Blake made her way back to the table. When she handed the blonde hers, Renee took it, her hand sexily caressing the attorney's at the hand-off. Hazel eyes glimmered playfully as the little woman thanked her.

Not too long after they had settled themselves, Renee and her friends got up to dance, leaving the attorney to just study them as they all moved seductively close to each other. Meanwhile Blake gulped down her beverage and checked her watch. She wondered how long they would be here and if her employee would be offended if she left her there with her friends. Blake was wondering about the best way to suggest that when she noticed the petite blonde coming back to the table.

Renee smiled and stretched out her hand in Blake's direction. "Dance with me, Blake," she demanded.

Putting her empty glass aside, Blake decided a dance couldn't hurt, so she placed her hand into Renee's. The younger woman escorted her to the floor. Blake felt a little self-conscious dancing among the group of young women, but as the songs transitioned from one to another, she began to be more comfortable in her surroundings, especially when she realized Renee's friends all seemed to be interested in dancing with her more intimately. Obliging the small gathering, Blake playfully took turns with the younger women, but as she found herself paired with Renee, the music began to slow. The floor began to empty, but the nanny only pressed her body closer to the attorney signaling she had no intentions of vacating her spot. Accommodating the small woman, Blake slipped her arms around Renee. Swaying gently to the sounds of the music, hazel and brown eyes stayed locked. All too soon it was over though as the tunes shifted again. However, when Renee's friends returned to their sides, neither woman noticed them. Instead their eyes were only for each other as they continued to grind heavily against each other long into the night.

Arriving back at the attorney's place after three in the morning, they quietly moved through the foyer. It appeared as if Cindy had already settled herself in one of the guestrooms, so it was just the two of them awake. Blake checked her watch. "Wow. It's late. You're going to be tired tomorrow. That's a long flight to New Orleans."

"I'll be fine. Tonight was definitely worth any sleep I'm going to miss," Renee answered stepping into the older woman's personal space. "Thanks for the great night, Blake. I haven't had this much fun in ages."

"Me neither," the attorney responded, touching Renee on the arm lightly. They just looked at each other silently for a moment as if they were waiting for something else to happen. However neither moved. "Well, good night, Renee. Sleep well."

"Good night, Blake. See you in the morning," the nanny replied, rising on her toes long enough to place a quick kiss on the attorney's cheek. "Thanks again."

"You're welcome," Blake replied, watching her employee walk away toward her quarters with a little more sashay to her hips than she had ever noticed previously. Just as Renee turned the corner into the hallway leading to her room, she looked back over her shoulder and gave the attorney a sexy smile and wink before disappearing.

Saturday afternoon Torrance and Georgia went to the airport to pick up their visitors. Neither of them had spoken about what had happened between them, but there was an uncomfortable tension in the house ever since that night, so Torrance was glad her family was going to be there for a week. As soon as the Whitfield private jet came to a stop at the hanger Torrance had rented to house it for the week, the photographer moved toward the plane. When the door was opened, she rushed onto it.

"Mom!" Marta and John both exclaimed, hurrying out of their seats and toward her. She wrapped them both in a strong embrace. Looking at Helen, Torrance gave her most becoming smile. "Madame Whitfield," she uttered, stepping to her. She enveloped the tall blonde in her arms and kissed her with all the feeling she had.

"Whoa. Someone missed me, huh?" Helen teased with a flush when they broke.

Georgia boarded the plane a little slower than her friend, because she wasn't sure what to expect from the nanny. Seeing her children though, she smiled at them and gave them both hugs before addressing the youngest blonde. "Well, you must be Renee. I'm Georgia Erwin, Blake's wife."

"Nice to meet you, Georgia. Blake and the kids have told me so much about you already," she answered, extending her hand.

The writer shook it as their eyes met in a long stare. Georgia could tell Torrance's earlier assessment of Renee had been right. She was an attractive girl, making her wonder if Blake thought her that way as well. Looking back at her kids, she said, "Come on Luke and Lana. There are so many fun things we have to do, but we have to get home first. Let's go get in the car."

Eagerly each of them took hold of either of her hands to be escorted down the stairs of the plane and to the car. Torrance smiled at Renee and gestured for her to go first. When it was just the photographer with her family, she said, "I've missed you so much, Helen."

"You've only been gone a week, honey."

"It's been too long already. I'm so glad you all are here. Come on. Let's get back. I can't wait to get the kids to bed tonight, so we can have some time alone," she whispered with a sexy grin.

That evening after everyone had settled into their rooms and the children had been put down for

the night, Torrance and Helen retired to their room as well. Helen stood at the window looking out over the street and thinking about the last time she was in New Orleans. Her wife had fulfilled her utmost wish by conceiving the child that now grew inside of her. She sighed in contentment as she felt arms embrace her from behind. Instinctively she rested her head back against the brunette's shoulder. "I love you, Torrance," she whispered.

"Je t'aime, Helen," the tall woman uttered nipping the blonde's ear lightly.

The former model turned her head enough to meet Torrance's eyes with her green ones. The older woman leaned down to claim the sweet lips of her beloved. Helen moaned softly. "I've missed your arms, Torrance. I've wished you were there with me every moment you've been gone. My morning sickness has started."

"I'm sorry I haven't been. At least I'll be around for the next week, and then it's only one more week without each other. This week has seemed like forever though."

Helen nodded in agreement. "But it's getting much better now," she mumbled. Meeting her lover's eyes, she whispered, "I want to go to bed, Torrance."

"Anything you want, Helen. You know that," the older woman answered turning her wife around, so they were facing each other. Helen's arms came around the brunette's neck as they kissed more deeply.

When it ended, the blonde gently extricated herself from the strong arms that held her, suggesting, "Let's get ready for sleep first. I promise it will be worth the wait."

"It always is," growled Torrance, following Helen into the bathroom. Both of them got ready for bed, but as usual Torrance was finished first. She took the time to go into the bedroom and pull the covers down for her wife. Getting comfortable on her side of the bed, she just waited for Helen's arrival. A few minutes later the blonde came to the bed and slid into it. Turning out the lights, she rolled over toward the photographer and pushed her back against the mattress as their mouths came together lustfully.

Torrance groaned as her wife immediately began to grapple with their sleeping attire. The older woman loved it when her beloved aggressively sought out what she wanted. As always she was there to give Helen exactly what she needed and quickly took control of the passion between them. Leisurely they loved each other before finally being overcome with exhaustion.

Lying wrapped together, Helen took a deep cleansing breath. "That certainly was what I hoped it would be," she confessed. "I've wanted you since the day you left."

"I'm glad I can make you happy. Thank you for being my wife, Helen."

"Thank you for giving me all I ever wanted, Torrance. I love you."

"I love you as well, so much."

The following morning the whole house was up early. Torrance had arranged for them to have breakfast at the Court of Two Sisters in the French Quarter, so all four women got the children together for their outing. As Georgia and Renee worked together to dress Lana and Luke, the writer noticed that her kids listened to the young blonde well. In fact they did exactly as she instructed them, but Georgia didn't know if that made her feel better or worse. It was obvious Renee was good at her job, but she didn't like seeing her kids dote on the younger woman.

Breakfast that day was an affair within itself being that it was a buffet, but the four of them managed it by each of them taking charge of a child. After getting their food and getting the kids settled at the table, the waiter came around to get them beverages. When he offered them mimosas, three of the adults eagerly agreed, but Helen said she would be fine with only orange juice.

"Why aren't you havin' any champagne, Helen?" Georgia asked teasingly. "Tor got you knocked up 'gain?"

The thirty-five-year-old blushed gracefully. "We're still trying, so I just want to be careful," she answered, gazing fondly at her wife.

Torrance smiled at her and reached for her hand. Bringing it to her lips, she kissed it gently. Looking back at Georgia, Torrance joked, "Maybe one of these days I'll get it right again."

"Well, if the old sayin' that practice makes perfect is true, I don't think y'all will have anythin' to worry 'bout. Y'all are just 'bout the most practiced people I know," she joked, making both Torrance and Helen flush.

"Sorry, Renee," the photographer apologized. "Somewhere along the way this Southern belle lost her couth."

Changing the subject a little, Renee looked at her other employer. "So, Blake tells me that you're writing a novel. What's it about?"

"It's a mystery set in New Orleans. It involves an attorney, a crime photographer, and a criminal investigator. The three of them are tryin' to keep an innocent woman from death row. Of course there are other elements as well. There is a lot of Voodoo and supernatural happenings."

"That sounds exciting," Helen mentioned.

"I have to admit Tor gave me the idea."

"I did? How did I do that?"

"It came to me the night you got arrested for breakin' in the cemetery to see Marie Laveau's mausoleum. The photographer and the attorney in the book do somethin' similar. I'll admit I fashioned them after you and Blake as well. Publishers say you should write 'bout what you

know, and well, I know my wife and her best friend."

"Well, how flattering," Helen mentioned, looking at her wife.

"Bein' here on location has helped so much. I can actually go to the places and see them as I write them. It gives the book real life. There's no way I could be doin' this in New York."

"Well, we all can't wait to read it," the oldest woman said, taking a sip of her mimosa.

"It won't be for awhile though. I'm almost finished with the bulk of it, and then I think I'm goin' to finish up in New York. As much fun as I'm havin' down here, I do miss Blake and the kids," she stated, giving Renee a glance. "I hope not to be away for more than another month or so."

"I'm sure Blake will be thrilled about that," the nanny piped in.

Over the next week, Torrance spent all her free time away from her community service with her family. It was such a pleasure for her to have them there even though Helen was constantly battling morning sickness. Nevertheless, they were able to hide that fact from the writer. Georgia equally enjoyed the time with her children, often visiting with them during the day instead of writing. After the first few days with Renee, she wanted some time alone with them to see what they really thought of her. She came to the conclusion that Lana and Luke were enamored with the young nanny. She questioned to herself if Blake found her that way as well. Renee was undisputably beautiful and seemed to have the personality to match, so she wondered if that had played a part in the job offer. Knowing her wife's dating past, she knew the attorney had been promiscuous up until the woman before her, so she contemplated the thought of the attorney pursuing someone else in the writer's absence. Georgia wasn't entirely sure Blake had it in her to be monogamous unless she was constantly at the brunette's side. She knew the older woman loved her, but the last year or so had been difficult for them, leaving her with doubts, doubts that had unconsciously surfaced when she and Torrance had done the photo shoot together.

Friday morning the photographer regretfully had to go to work, leaving her wife and children to get themselves to the airport. Georgia had left the house early as well, so it was just Helen and Renee watching after the four kids as they prepared for their trip back to New York. Since the older blonde had an easier time given that John and Marta were slightly older, she decided to take it upon herself to make breakfast for the entire crew.

She busied herself with bacon and eggs for all six of them while her two kids played around the first floor. However she instinctively knew when they were getting into mischief by the fact that she could no longer hear them talking with each other. Going in search of them, she found them in the small utility room on the first floor that her wife had been using for a makeshift dark room.

"John, Marta, you know better than to be in here. You aren't supposed to be playing with Mom's equipment," she reprimanded. "Now get out of there and come into the kitchen."

"Yes, Mommy," they both answered with their heads hung low at being caught.

Helen watched them proceed with bemusement that she didn't show, because it was always almost comical the way they reacted to the lightest discipline. She thought she and Torrance were lucky that Marta and John responded to words instead of harsher measures of punishment. She knew they both would have a hard time dispensing anything other than sharp retorts if pressed. Once she saw the two make the corner toward the kitchen, she quickly glanced around to make sure nothing was disturbed, but something caught her eyes.

Going into the room, the blonde walked over to where a stack of pictures lay on a counter. Her brows scrunched as she picked up the black and white photographs and examined them closer. Her heart sank a little lower with each one she flipped. There was Georgia captured, looking so glamorously seductive in a multitude of pictures, each one just a little more intimate than the one preceding it. When she got to the end and saw the writer, a woman she considered one of her closest friends, lying virtually naked to the camera, she felt anger invade her body.

It was true that Torrance was a photographer and an international success at it. However, these photographs were nothing like Helen had ever seen before. She had viewed her wife's work, even the nude photos of other people and never responded with anything close to the rage she was feeling. It was the fact that the subject was Georgia. Georgia was bare to the brunette's camera and eyes. Her wife had seen their good friend naked and by the looks of the photographs, in an extremely intimate setting. Not knowing how to react to what was in her hands, she put the photographs back on the counter and quickly left the room. However, Helen couldn't get them out of her mind though the rest of the day as they all made their way back to New York.

That night when Torrance returned from work, she called her wife to see that she had made it home safely. When Helen answered, the tall woman greeted, "Bon jour, Madame Whitfield."

"Hello, Torrance," the blonde quietly responded.

"I just wanted to see if you got home okay. You sound exhausted. Did the flight wear you out?"

"Yes, I am very tired, and I actually want to go to bed. So, if you don't mind, I'd like to hang up now," she snipped.

Hearing the shortness of her tone, the photographer was taken by surprise. However she passed it off as her wife's abruptly changing hormones. "Sure. Of course. Whatever you need, honey. Are you all right though? You sound upset."

"I'm not in the mood to talk about it, Torrance. I would appreciate it if you just let me get some rest."

"All right. Know that I'm just a phone call away though. I'll be home in a week. Just hold on for me. Good night, Helen. I love you."

"Good bye, Torrance," Helen replied, not returning the affectionate sentiment before hanging up the phone.

Hearing the dial tone instead of her lover's voice whispering her enduring love as usual, the older woman pondered what she could have done to be receiving such the cold shoulder from her wife. It was clear that Helen's anger was directed at her, but she had no idea why she was the recipient of the attitude.

When Blake got back from work that evening, Renee was already feeding the kids their dinner at the table. The blonde smiled at the attorney brightly as she came into the kitchen and dropped her briefcase. "Mom!" the twins exclaimed as she came to give them hugs.

"How are my children? I missed you," she said, kissing them both on the top of their heads.

"Let me get you something to eat, Blake. Sit down," Renee insisted, rising from her chair.

"You don't have to. I can do it."

"I'm already up. Just relax. I'm sure you've had a stressful day."

Blake did as she was told, taking her usual seat. A moment later Renee came to her with a plateful of food. The older woman felt the nanny's hand touch her on the back as she set the plate down in front of her. The brunette spared her a smile. "Thank you, Renee."

"My pleasure."

Looking back to her children, Blake said, "So, tell me. What did you do while you were visiting Mama?"

For the rest of dinner Blake listened to Lana and Luke talk about all the things they had done while they were in New Orleans. Both of them seemed as if they had a great time with their mother and had been sad to leave her, but the attorney wasn't sure what she could do to reassure them that Georgia would be home soon, because she really had no idea what her wife's plans were for coming back to New York.

Once dinner was complete, the brunette took her children to take their baths while Renee cleaned the kitchen. Kneeling by the tub, laughing with the twins as they played in the water, Blake realized just how much she had really missed them.

"You know, I missed you two while you were gone," the attorney said as Lana's dark eyes met hers.

"We missed you too, Mom," the little girl replied.

"Yeah. We missed you," Luke added, his blue eyes connecting with hers as well.

The attorney gazed at the two of them. They were as different as she and Georgia, one of them with dark features and the other light. However, they were the essence of she and her wife, and it left Blake with a bittersweet ache. She loved her children, but looking at them made her miss

Georgia as well.

Suddenly her thoughts were broken by Renee entering and asking, "How is it going in here?"

The small blonde knelt next to Blake. The older woman looked at her and smiled. "We're doing fine."

"Here. Let me help," she offered taking the shampoo Blake had been holding. As their fingers brushed, hazel eyes met brown. "The kids missed you, you know," Renee said.

"Yeah. They were just telling me that."

"They weren't the only ones," the nanny continued. "Georgia, Helen, and Tor weren't any substitute for our conversations. I know Tor and Helen were always trying to include me, but it was so obvious they wanted to be elsewhere. I've never seen two people more in love."

Blake nodded in agreement. "Yeah. Tor is one of the luckiest woman in the world. It's too bad she's screwed it up. I always thought of Helen as the ideal woman since the first time I met her. Tor was lucky enough to snag herself a perfect woman. I had always hoped to do the same. Somehow it didn't quite work out the way I had planned."

"But you love Georgia. And what do you mean Tor screwed it up?"

"Of course I love Georgia, but people change, Renee, and sometimes they grow apart. I'm starting to wonder if that's what has happened with us."

"Well, if it makes any difference, Georgia said she was hoping to come home in about a month."

"I don't know if I can take it another month. I'm about ready to call it quits right now," she stated. "She's made a mockery of this marriage, running off, abandoning her children, sleeping with my best friend. That's enough to drive anyone to file for divorce."

Renee's eyes opened a little wider at the revelation Blake had just shared. "She slept with Tor? How did you find that out?"

"Helen told me. I could tell she didn't want to, but she was so upset over Tor that she had no choice. She's leaving Tor because of it."

Renee shook her head. "Oh, that's so sad. Helen is so sweet. How could Tor do that to her? How could Georgia do that to you?"

"I don't know, but I think it's over. I've lost my best friend and my wife. I don't think I can get over that."

Placing a hand on her employer's arm, Renee whispered, "I am so sorry, Blake."

"So am I," the attorney replied. Not wanting to upset her children though, she smiled at them and joined their play, effectively ending the conversation.

Continued...

**~ New York series ~
Love in Photographs
Georgia On My Mind
Stick to the Script
Vows of the Heart**

**Alex Tryst's Scrolls
The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

~ Vows of the Heart ~

**by Alex Tryst
Copyright August 2004**

This tale follows "Love in Photographs", "Georgia on My Mind", and "Stick to the Script". This is the fourth and final story in the New York Series.

As always, comments and feedback is welcome at alextryst@hotmail.com.

Part 2

Torrance's plane landed in New York around mid-day after three weeks away in New Orleans. Knowing that it would be difficult for Helen to bring both children to there to meet her, the photographer had arranged for her grandmother's chauffeur to pick her up and take her home. As she expected, he was standing by the baggage claim waiting on her when she got there.

"James, good to see you. How have you been?" she inquired with a pleasant smile.

"I've been good, Ms. Whitfield. How are you?"

"Wonderful. I'm so glad to be back. Three weeks away from Helen is too long," she teased, moving to retrieve her luggage off the conveyor belt. James took one of her bags while she took the other two.

"The limo is just outside," he stated turning to lead the way.

The ride back to the house was quiet between them. The photographer's thoughts were on her family and how soon she'd be able to see them. However, when they pulled up to Torrance and Helen's estate, the woman was surprised to see her in-law's car sitting in the driveway. James helped her put her luggage in the foyer of the house before leaving her.

"Hello? Anyone home?" she called out, moving through the living room. She heard her kids talking with her father-in-law in the kitchen. "Hello," she said, stepping in the room.

"Mom! You're back," John said.

"Hi, Mom," Marta added as she hugged them both.

Looking at her Helen's father, Torrance smiled. "Hi, John. What are you doing here?" she asked as she moved to hug him. She noticed that he only gave her a half-hearted one in return.

"You don't know what I'm doing here?" he asked.

"No clue, although you're always welcome. Don't get me wrong," she mentioned with a grin.

John looked down at his grandchildren. "You two stay here and finish your lunch. I'll be right back," he told them before motioning that Torrance follow him. Both of them moved to the dining room for privacy.

"John, what's going on?" she inquired, seeing the seriousness in eyes.

"You tell me, Torrance," he stated, crossing his arms across his chest. She looked at him in confusion. When neither said anything for a minute, he assessed, "You really don't know."

"No. Enlighten me."

"Helen called us a two days ago. She was having complications with the baby. We of course rushed here, but we were too late. Helen miscarried yesterday, Torrance," he softly explained.

Torrance's heart sank. "Oh, God and I wasn't here," she mumbled as tears wet her eyes.

"Why would you be?" he questioned.

The brunette quirked her brow at him in confusion again. "Excuse me? What does that mean?"

"Well, you and Helen are separated," he stated as if it was obvious.

"Separated? Helen and I aren't separated. Who in the world told you such a thing, John? I would never leave Helen." He just looked at the floor in silence instead of answering her question. It took the photographer a minute before she asked, "Did Helen say that to you?"

Feebly he replied, "I thought it was common knowledge. I didn't realize she hadn't said anything to you."

"Helen's leaving me? Why? Did she give you a reason? I mean, what brought this on?" Torrance inquired in panic. The thought of ever losing the woman she loved was hard to wrap her mind around.

"She didn't give us a reason, but she was quite upset over something, and it's more than just the baby. I can tell you that much. Torrance, I don't know what it is, but it can't be so terrible it breaks up everything you've made together. I know the love you share is strong, so I don't know what on earth could move her to such an action unless..."

"Unless?"

"Unless there was another woman," he supplied.

"Is there? Did she say if she was seeing someone else?" Torrance frantically asked.

"I was actually referring to you. Is there someone else in your life, Torrance?"

"No. I would never do that to Helen."

"Then I don't know," he said sadly. "All I know is that she's shattered, and I can't do anything to help her."

"Where is she? I need to get to the bottom of this."

"Upstairs in her room," he responded. Torrance turned to go, but he stopped her. "Torrance, please help her. I know she still loves you regardless of what's gone wrong."

The forty-year-old ran up the stairs to the master bedroom. Barging in she immediately saw her wife sitting on their balcony overlooking the water in the distance. Just by the way she was sitting, the slump of her shoulders and slightly bowed head, Torrance could tell the blonde was upset. Quietly she walked to where her beloved was sitting. Standing behind her, she placed a comforting hand on the little woman's shoulder.

She was met with a cold retort to the gesture. "Don't touch me, Torrance."

Taking her hand away, the older woman walked over to the balcony edge and then turned to face the blonde. "I know you're upset about losing the baby. I'm terribly sorry I wasn't here when it happened. Had you called me I would have been on the first flight I could get. I wish there was something I could do to take away your pain," she whispered gently.

Puffy, red-rimmed, bloodshot eyes finally met hers. Helen's entire face was wet from her mourning. Her physical and emotional pain was obvious. Unable to stay away, Torrance moved

closer and knelt at her side. She put her hand on her wife's knee. Angrily the younger woman knocked it off, screaming, "I said don't touch me!"

Torrance swallowed hard at the rage directed at her. She knew Helen had it in her to have outbursts like the one she was witnessing but such furors were rare and only when Torrance had utterly messed up in a way that was hurtful to the younger woman. Deciding to confront the issue John had brought to light, she asked tentatively, "So, is what I hear from your father true? Are you leaving me?"

"You left me first!" she snapped.

"Helen, I had to go to New Orleans, or they were going to throw me in jail. I had no choice. I hated every moment that I was apart from you and the kids, but nothing could be done about it," she countered.

"Not New Orleans, Torrance! I'm talking about Georgia! I'm talking about what you did with her while you were down there!"

"What did I do?" the brunette asked unaware of any wrongness on her part.

"You know what you did! You slept with her! And you took those pornographic photos of her!"

"You found the photos," Torrance mumbled, suddenly understanding what was going on with her wife.

"Our children found the photos, Torrance! How could you? How could she?"

"Helen, I know you're angry, but I promise you that neither of us were unfaithful to you or Blake."

"How can you say that? The evidence was right there in black and white! She was naked, Torrance!"

"Yes, she was. I'll concede that. I saw Georgia naked but not for the reason you think. She asked me to take some risque pictures of her to give to Blake as a present. They aren't for me. I didn't sleep with Georgia. I didn't kiss Georgia. I didn't even lay a hand on her," she adamantly stated.

Helen looked at her wife, desperately wanting to believe what she was saying. Torrance was emphatic in her innocence, but the photographer's green eyes told the whole story. Helen saw there was more that she wasn't saying. Hazzarding a guess, Helen questioned, "But you wanted to, didn't you?"

The older woman sighed and broke their gaze. "Helen, Georgia is an attractive woman. We were alone. She was naked and giving me her best gazes for the camera. If I weren't already married to the most wonderful perfect woman in the world and Georgia married to my best friend, then maybe I would have tried to pursue something, but the fact of the matter is I am joyously,

blissfully wed to you. You are my life, Helen Melbourne Whitfield. You always have been since the day we met. I couldn't go on if I ever lost you, so I would never do anything to jeopardize what I hold so dear." Pausing a moment, Torrance once again tried to touch the woman she loved. Her hands went to Helen's knees and rested there tentatively, waiting for any sign of rejection. None came. "Helen, please let me stay with you. Don't ruin what we've made with fallacious insecurities. Please let me stay and love you and our children with everything that I have."

Helen didn't answer her, but Torrance knew everything was all right when the blonde leaned in closer and began to sob uncontrollably. Dutifully the older woman wrapped her in consoling arms. The fair head snuck into the crook of Torrance's neck. Tears streamed down both their faces. There was so much pain emitting from the smaller woman.

"I'm sorry, Torrance. I love you," Helen whispered, clutching the strong woman closer.

"I'm sorry too, Helen. I love you more than life itself." After a moment she suggested, "Let me take you to bed, Helen. You'll be more comfortable there." The blonde nodded, so the older woman eased her wife out of her chair. She saw Helen wince and heard her gasp as pain racked her midsection at the movement. Slowly Torrance escorted her into the bedroom and guided her down onto the bed. Careful not to move jar it any more than necessary, Torrance slipped onto it and wrapped her arms around her wife again.

"Torrance, I told Blake," Helen whispered in tears.

"You told Blake what?"

"That you slept with Georgia. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have, but I was so upset when I went to file for divorce."

"I'll fix it. Don't you worry about that. I'll fix things with Blake. Just rest now."

Neither spoke any more, but words were no longer required. All that mattered was they were once again all right. In time they would move beyond their pain of losing a baby and almost each other. A little later Torrance was roused from sleep by the sound of quiet knocking on the bedroom door. However, before she could respond, it opened, and Helen's mother, Diane, poked her head into the room.

"Oh, Torrance. I didn't realize you were here," she stated coolly.

"Yeah. I got back a little while ago."

"Are you sure it's a good idea that you're here?" Diane questioned, looking at her daughter who was still sleeping.

"Well, I do live here, Diane, and Helen needs me. I don't think there is any other place I should be."

"But I thought you two were no longer together."

"We talked that through. Helen's changed her mind."

"I see. Well, as long as she's happy, I suppose that's what matters most."

Torrance nodded in her mother-in-law's direction. Over the years she and Diane had traveled a rocky path. At the beginning she had been adamantly against Torrance and Helen's relationship, but once they were married and began having children, Diane had conceded Torrance wasn't leaving. They had formed a tentative relationship with each other, and it was in moments when Helen seemed unhappy that Diane always blamed the photographer for her child's misery. Torrance could tell that Diane was surprised at the quick revitalizing the photographer had performed to save what seemed to be the end of Helen and Torrance's marriage. "I make her happiest, Diane, and I would never do anything to endanger that. She and I just had something to work out, and we did, so now we can focus on what really matters."

"Still those pictures sounded horrific," she countered.

"How did you know about those?"

"Helen told me of course."

Torrance nodded. "Well, I am a photographer, Diane. That's what I do, like it or not. Now it's been settled between Helen and me, which means it's over. We both just want to move forward," she stated, having no doubt that Diane could have helped Helen form such a appalling opinion about the photographer's activities. She knew the woman's past behavior.

Diane just gave a curt nod. "Well, I just wanted to check on her, but it appears as if you have things under control. I'll just leave you two alone." With that she turned and closed the door.

The rest of the day Torrance and Helen stayed locked up in their room together. The blonde was so fragile, emotionally and physically that the photographer didn't want to leave her side, especially since she knew John and Diane would watch over Marta and John. Helen was thankful to have Torrance there with her. Even though she didn't talk about the miscarriage, she knew her wife understood everything through the silence. Everything she had wanted had been stripped away, and she was too immobilized with heart-wrenching pain to even begin to express her sorrow.

However when morning came, the younger woman knew that Torrance had to smooth things over with Blake as soon as possible, because she realized she had done great damage to the attorney with her false statements against Georgia. After they dressed for the day and had made their way downstairs, the former teacher said, "Torrance, I think you should go see Blake today. I don't think you'll be able to talk to her on the phone. Somehow I know I hurt her."

"You're probably right. Do me a favor. Just in case she is angry at me, you call her and see where

she's going to be today, and then I'll go over. I don't want her to avoid me."

Helen nodded in agreement and then went to make the call. She returned to the table where her family was waiting. "She's going to be at home today. Cindy has the kids, so she's catching up on work."

"All right. I'll head over after this. Everything will be fine, Helen. You'll see," Torrance assured her, seeing the sadness in her wife's eyes. "And when I get back, if you're feeling better we can all go out and do something."

"Okay. We'll see."

Blake was sitting in her office that morning trying to work on some cases, but her thoughts kept straying to Georgia. Giving in to her need to see the woman she loved, she pulled out the stack of photographs that had been sent to her. Leisurely she looked at each one. There was her Georgia posed in all the ways in which Blake saw her in dreams, sexy and uninhibited. However, the thought of her wife letting her best friend take the photos and being intimate with her was more than she thought she could bear. She was more shocked than anything that Torrance would risk losing the most perfect woman in the world for a round with the Southern firecracker. Nevertheless, Blake hurt for the indiscretion. She hurt for the fact her best friend had betrayed her, her best friend's wife was now suffering, and her own wife had abandoned her. Her musings were broken when she heard the doorbell. However, she decided to let Renee answer it and got back to work. A moment later, however, the nanny entered the office followed by Torrance. The two brunettes just looked at each other a moment in awkwardness before Renee excused herself.

"You have some nerve coming here," Blake said, standing from her chair and starting for the photographer.

Seeing the anger in her friend's eyes, Torrance tried to hold her at bay. Putting out her hand to keep the attorney out of her personal space, she warned, "You don't want to hurt me, Blake. It would be a mistake."

"Like hell it would," Blake grumbled. Nevertheless, she stopped just in front of her friend. "What do you want, Torrance?"

"I've come to right the wrong that's been done here, Blake, but you have to listen to me."

"Listen to you? I don't even want to look at you, Tor! All I really want to do is kill you for what you did to Helen and me!"

"Contrary to what Helen told you, I didn't fuck your wife, Blake. It was a misunderstanding. Please let me explain before you decide to try to rearrange my face," hurriedly Torrance stuttered, seeing that Blake was contemplating do just that.

The older woman stepped back a little at the declaration. "But Helen said you did. Why would she lie to me?"

"She didn't intentionally lie to you. She did honestly think I slept with Georgia, but it's not true. I took pictures of your wife naked. That much is true, but I didn't sleep with her. Those pictures were for your enjoyment only, Blake. They were a gift from Georgia to you. I was merely the photographer that she trusted enough to take them. There wasn't anything between us, Blake. It was strictly a professional thing for me. I didn't lay a hand on her. You have to believe that."

The attorney shook her head. "Helen believes that because she wants to, doesn't she?"

"Helen believes it, because it's the truth, Blake," countered Torrance.

Blake sighed deeply as she looked at her old friend. She wanted to believe Torrance as well. Moving back to the desk, the older woman picked up the stack of photos she had left on her desk. "These were a professional sitting?" she questioned, waving them at Torrance.

"As professional as I could be on short notice. We used what we had around the house. She trusted me enough, Blake. I take pictures of naked women all the time. Hell, I've taken nude photos of Sarah, and you don't hear Jamie complaining about it."

"I'm sure that was for a magazine, though. That's hardly the same." Looking down at the pictures, Blake mentioned, "She looks so different. This is not the way she normally looks at me, Tor. I haven't seen those eyes looking at me since the twins were born."

The photographer shrugged. "She said she wanted to give them to you as a gift to remember that she was still there. I thought I was doing her a favor."

Blake nodded. Looking back at her friend, she stated, "I believe you, Tor."

"Good. I was worried this might do permanent damage to you and Georgia."

Changing the subject slightly, the attorney mentioned, "Helen filed for a divorce from you. Did you know that?"

"Yeah. I know. Infidelity is the one thing Helen can't forgive, but since it's not true, she's not going to pursue that. She doesn't want that. She was just really upset. Between thinking Georgia and I had been intimate and losing the baby, I think it was just too much for her to bear."

"She was pregnant again?" Blake asked in surprised.

"Almost eight weeks."

"Oh, Tor, I'm so sorry."

The photographer shrugged her shoulders. "Maybe we just aren't meant to have a third child," she said softly.

Coming to her, the older brunette put her arms around her friend. "Don't give up if it's what you really want."

"It's what Helen wants." Blake nodded in understanding. "So, please tell me that this hasn't done permanent damage to you and Georgia. Helen was really concerned about that, and I want to be able to reassure her."

At the mention of her wife's name, Blake dropped her arms from Torrance's frame. She shook her head. "I wish I could reassure her as well, but the day Helen came to me about filing and she told me what she thought you and Georgia had done, I was so angry I filed too."

"But you can stop it. Don't make me have to tell Helen she caused you two to divorce. She couldn't bear that."

"She didn't cause it, Tor. You tell her as much. I could stop it, but the truth is, I'm not sure I want to," she said.

"What do you mean? Why not?"

"Tor, things haven't been the same since the twins were born. It's been a long road, and she just walked out on us."

"She was following her dreams, Blake. I thought that's what you wanted her to do."

"She could have followed them in New York. She has left us for New Orleans. She's been gone for almost two months, Tor. In all that time I've been here trying to raise our children. If it weren't for Renee, I don't think I could do it. I've needed help, and Georgia should be here. She's their mother. That's abandonment. She's my wife, and she's left me for what? Her freedom to do as she chooses. She made that choice, and now I need to make mine. I can't let her go on thinking I am going to stand by and let her run off whenever she wants. She has responsibilities to these children. She wanted them. I would have been satisfied had we not had any. I wasn't feeling empty without them, but she wanted them, so we had some. Now I love my children and couldn't imagine my life without them, but Georgia needs to face the fact she is also responsible for them. Not only that, Georgia married me, which means she has responsibilities to me as well. My wife is gone, Tor. I know you can imagine the horrible feeling it is."

The photographer nodded. "I suppose I can. However, there has to be another way. Do you want to remain married to her or not?"

"If she lives on my terms, then yes, but that means taking responsibility for the life she has created with our kids. I can deal with being ignored, but I can't deal with them being brushed aside, because she's too busy."

"Georgia's never lived on your terms, Blake. Why now?"

"Because she has to grow up! She's thirty years old! It's time she take our life together seriously

or find another one to live!" she yelled as tears came to her eyes.

It was Torrance's turn to offer the comfort as she put her arms around Blake. "I'm sorry, Blake. I guess I didn't really think about it. I know I wouldn't be able to make it without Helen that long. It would be so difficult. I guess I just thought the time apart was helping the two of you sort through some things. She loves you, Blake. Shouldn't that be enough to make you want to fight to keep your marriage together?"

"Sometimes love isn't enough, Tor," the attorney whispered. "It was so different for us when we began dating. There was no pressure, no serious responsibilities to each other. We just wanted to be together because of the joy that it was to be so close. Now life has gotten in the way. If I could go back to the way it used to be, I would, but we can't. Maybe it's just me. Maybe I'm not cut out for marriage. Commitment was never a strength of mine."

"I don't think you should do this, Blake, but it's not my place to say. It's your marriage and your life. I just want you to be happy."

Blake nodded her head. "Enough about my marriage disaster. I don't think I'm the only one headed for singleville."

"What are you talking about? I just told you Helen and I aren't getting a divorce."

"I'm talking about our young actresses."

"Jamie and Sarah?"

The attorney nodded in confirmation. "That would be a real shame though. They really do love each other. That's one I wish I could help with a lot more."

"What's going on with them outside of Katrina being a hellion?"

"I think that's enough, Tor. Apparently she's out of control."

"Did Jamie or Sarah say something to you?"

"I can't give you the details, because I was acting at their attorney at the time, but there is trouble brewing in that paradise, and it all has to do with Katrina."

Torrance shook her head. "I can't imagine having to deal with a child like that. We're so lucky our kids have the temperaments they do. What can we do to help them?"

"I don't know. I guess we just be the best friends we can to them," Blake answered.

Nodding her head in agreement, Torrance looked at the attorney. "I should get back. I know Helen is still really fragile. Are you going to be all right?"

"I'll be fine. Tell Helen she had nothing to do with this. It's been a long time in coming. Honestly, the thought of something like that happening didn't surprise me. It hurt, but the only thing that shocked me about it was that it was you. If she had said Georgia had been with some random person, it wouldn't have come as a surprise."

"Do you think she's having an affair down there?"

"You would know that better than anyone, Tor. What's she been like down there?"

The photographer thought a moment. Knowing her friend deserved the truth, she slowly answered, "She seemed happy to me, Blake. I don't think she is seeing anyone, but she did seem content. I'm sorry."

"Don't be. You had nothing to do with it. I guess maybe she just doesn't want to live in New York any more. She could have said that instead of skipping town. No matter though. In just a few days those papers are going to be delivered to her, and then we'll see what happens."

Torrance nodded in understanding. "Well, I should go. Take care of yourself and your children, Blake. It's going to get tough but know that Helen and I are here for you."

"Thanks. Kiss Helen for me."

When the photographer left, Blake wandered into the living room where Renee was sitting reading. The nanny looked up at her. "Did things go all right?"

Blake nodded. "Yeah. Tor and I are fine. Turns out she didn't sleep with Georgia contrary to what Helen thought. That makes me feel better. I didn't want to believe that."

"Well, I'm glad you got it straightened out then. She seemed like such a good friend."

"She is." After a brief pause, the brunette said, "Renee, I think I should tell you something. I filed for divorce and custody of the children. Georgia hasn't been served her papers yet, but it should happen any day now. Things are going to get complicated around here. I just want you to know that I have full faith in your abilities and intend to keep you on as long as you would like to stay, but it's going to be difficult for awhile."

"I understand. I'm sorry that it's come to this with you and Georgia, but sometimes things just don't work out the way we hope."

Blake nodded. "Look. I have some more work to do, but if you're not doing anything this evening, I'd like to go out. Would you care to join me? Cindy will have the kids until tomorrow."

"Sure. That sounds nice. I hadn't planned anything yet. Where do you want to go?"

"Somewhere where I can forget about things for awhile."

"How about a movie?"

"That sounds good. You pick it."

That night Blake and Renee took in a movie after a dinner at home, which Renee prepared. During the whole film, the attorney kept thinking about the woman at her side. The young woman was always such a pleasure to be with that Blake continuously wanted to seek her out for time. The attorney knew she was lonely with Georgia being away, and when she had been there, there hadn't been much in the way of intimacy, even if it was just quietly talking together alone. She missed those things with a woman, and she easily found them in her employee.

After the movie, the blonde convinced the older woman that the night was too young to go home, so the two of them went to one of the local bars for drinks and pool. Blake was more than happy to go along, not wanting the evening to end either. At the bar they easily made new friends with the other pool players and ended up playing as a team against some other women in the club. Turning on her charm, the attorney found it easy to be the center of women's attention in the mainly female crowd. Sitting alone at a table near the pool area waiting for another game to begin, Blake waited on Renee to return from the bar with a round of drinks. She was minding her own business as she watched a game in progress when a cute redhead approached the table. Easily and quickly the attorney engaged her in conversation.

However a few minutes later her charm was interrupted by the nanny's voice. "Who are we entertaining, honey?" she questioned teasingly putting the drinks on the table and sliding into Blake's lap. "I'm Renee, Blake's girlfriend," she introduced, extending her hand.

Quickly the other woman escaped, leaving a chuckling attorney behind. "What was that about?" she asked Renee.

"Hey. You came with me, and you're not leaving with anyone else," she bantered laughingly, her hazel eyes sparkling.

"If you say so," the brunette conceded with a grin as her arms came around the little woman. The twenty-five year old felt good against her. Renee didn't try to pull away. Instead she settled herself in the attorney's lap. Together they watched several other people play for awhile, but the older woman's mind was focused on the feeling of Renee's frame against her own. Her libido began to awaken as the tiny body shifted against her every few minutes. Instinctively her left hand found the nanny's khaki shorts-clad leg. Renee's skin was soft to the touch. Blake heard the small woman give a quick, uneven exhale as her fingers grazed lightly. Blake leaned her body in closer, so it was pressed against the blonde's back and let her head rest on Renee's shoulder. They sat in silence still, but the petite woman's body was giving louder signals than words ever could. She was enjoying the older woman's attentions. The attorney could feel the nanny's hands on her thighs, squeezing them a little harder whenever her roaming went higher than it had moments before. Finally the blonde turned to look over her shoulder at her. Blake had never seen the gaze now in those hazel eyes. They seemed like a mix of lust and arousal. Taking advantage of the situation, the taller woman let her own needs guide her. Leaning into the blonde's ear, her breath swept over Renee's neck softly as she whispered, "What is it, Renee?"

The small woman quivered lightly in her arms. "I...I want..." she tried to say, but her voice failed her.

However Blake knew what she was saying. "I know. I want it too, but it would ruin everything."

Renee nodded shakily. Blake's hands didn't cease though, even at her own words. The nanny shifted herself in the attorney's lap, so they were facing each other completely. Hazel eyes met brown. "It would ruin everything," Renee repeated softly as her hands found dark hair. Her fingers combed through it. Her hips instinctively searched for the attorney's. Both of them moaned breathlessly as they came together.

"I'm married," Blake uttered desperately.

"Not any more," the nanny countered.

"Right," Blake stuttered as the small woman's perfume invaded her senses when her nose traveled further into her neck. "We can't though. You work for me."

"Just once. I just want one..."

"One what?" the forty-two-year-old questioned. Both of them had let her hands start roaming more freely.

"One kiss," Renee whispered. Before she hardly even finished her request, their mouths came together roughly. Renee moaned pulling Blake closer. The attorney growled as the touch awakened her senses even more. When it broke she immediately moved her lips to the blonde's neck. "God, Blake. I've thought about this for so long," she admitted.

"Thought about what?" the older woman spurred, wondering what the younger woman's fantasies entailed. She loved that she was a part of them.

"Having you for one night, you touching me, making me come over and over again," she groaned, clutching tighter as the brunette's teeth scraped against the pulse in her neck.

"I bet you feel good from the inside," the older woman murmured sexily.

"Find out just how good. Take me home," Renee requested.

Without another word the attorney stood, gently placing the nanny on her feet. Taking the younger woman's hand, she led her out of the bar to the street to hail a cab. As soon as the older woman gave the driver the address, Renee slid over to her to continue what had started in the bar. Quickly Blake pulled her into her lap again and attacked her fair neck with kisses. However, the nanny didn't seem to be satisfied with that. Instead she took Blake's hands and guided them to her covered breasts.

"Touch me, Blake," she demanded. "Feel how hot I am for you."

The attorney groaned as she worked open the buttons of Renee's top. Her right hand squirmed its way between the folds and popped the front clasp of her bra. Within seconds her hand was filled with warm flesh. Both women gasped in rising need. Risking a look down at the younger woman's body, the tall one saw the pale pink tips hardening even more as moments passed under her ministrations. Renee took Blake's left hand and began to kiss and suck each finger in turn provocatively. Blake moaned. When the blonde's mouth reached her finger ring, the attorney watched in fascination as Renee managed to work her wedding band off with only her teeth.

"You won't be needing this any more," the twenty-five-year-old stated, tucking it into the attorney's pants pocket for safekeeping before their mouths connected again.

Just as they kissed, the driver slammed on his brakes in traffic. Blake glared at him through the rearview mirror. "Don't kill us now. We'd like to make it home," she growled.

When Renee giggled, Blake met her eyes. "So strong," her employee whispered before leaning into the attorney's neck to reciprocate some of the attention she had already received. Biting the brunette's earlobe, Renee uttered, "God, you're sexy. You make me so wet, Blake. Touch me. I'm dripping at the thought of you. I want you to fuck me like no one ever has."

Blake groaned. She didn't take Renee's word for it. Instead her right hand dropped to the little woman's shorts and quickly opened the zipper. Sliding into them she realized the nanny wasn't lying to her about her arousal. However, before she could go any further, the cab driver announced their arrival. Quickly the attorney paid him and ushered Renee out of the car. They both greeted their building's doorman hurriedly before rushing through the doors to the elevator. Neither said anything, but thick sensuality charged the air around them. Once in the elevator alone, Blake moved toward her wrapping her in strong arms. Renee looked up but said nothing. Mutually their lips came together in a soft exchange. It was only broken when the doors opened on their floor. Going down the hall to their door, Blake unlocked it and escorted the younger woman inside. They slowly made their way to the master bedroom. Both of them suddenly seemed aware of what was really about to happen as they lingered in the doorway a moment.

"Renee," Blake whispered.

"Yes?"

"You are a beautiful woman," she began, brushing the blonde's cheek affectionately.

"But?" hesitantly the nanny asked.

"But I'm not sure this is a good idea. I'm old enough to be your mother, but more importantly, just because Georgia and I are getting a divorce doesn't mean I don't love her still. I do love her, and it's going to take some time I think before I'm ready to move on completely. Most importantly, however, is that you work for me, and if we did this, I don't see how we could go on that way. How could I have one night with you and then be forced to watch as you go off with

women almost half my age? I can't compete with that," she said gently, hoping that by putting a spin on her feelings, Renee wouldn't feel hurt by the rejection she was giving. "I'd much prefer to take things slowly."

The blonde nodded. "I guess I never thought about it that way. I wouldn't want to hurt you after all you're already going through."

"I appreciate that more than you know, Renee," Blake said with a small smile, seeing that the nanny had bought her story. "For now though, I'd like to invite you in but only if you promise to keep me on my best behavior no matter how much I might resist," teasingly she requested.

The small woman nodded. "Of course. I'll fend off all your advances."

"Will you stay with me tonight and just let me enjoy your company?"

"Of course."

"Thank you," the tall woman whispered.

"Let me just change for bed. I'll be back in a few minutes." Less than ten minutes later both women were in the master bedroom. Blake was in bed reading as Renee simply watched television for awhile. However when both of them tired, the younger woman let Blake hold her as they fell into dreams.

The next morning the attorney awoke to sound in the condo. Opening her eyes she realized that Renee was still asleep clutching tightly to her. Just then there was a knock on the bedroom door before Cindy's voice could be heard through it asking, "Blake, are you home?" Before the attorney could answer, however, the door came open, and Georgia's mother entered.

Cindy and Blake just looked at each other for a moment, each of them in shock. "You're early," feebly the brunette stated.

Cindy's eyes went from her daughter-in-law's to the nanny's sleeping form. "This certainly complicates things," she stated

"Cindy, it's not what you think," Blake explained.

Her mother-in-law merely quirked her blonde brow in much the same way Georgia did. "I ain't buyin' that, Blake."

"All right. Maybe it is exactly what you think but not for the reasons you think it. I'm not cheating on Georgia."

"This is cheatin' in my book."

"Cindy, I haven't told Georgia this, but we're getting a divorce. I filed earlier this week. She's

going to be served any day now. It's over, Cindy. I'm sorry you had to find out this way, but Renee and I are just friends, contrary to what this looks like."

Cindy just stood in silence a moment looking at the two women in bed together. Instead of commenting on Blake's declaration, she merely stated, "I'll watch the kids while you get dressed, but I need to get goin' soon. I've got to get down to the restaurant."

"Of course. I'll be right out. Thanks, Cindy."

A little later Georgia was sitting in the living room of her New Orleans house overlooking the street in contemplative silence when the phone rang. Slowly getting up to answer it, she mumbled a greeting to the caller. "Hello."

"Baby girl, you've got a problem," Cindy announced without even a salutation.

"I know, Mama," she whispered looking down at the papers in her hand. They had just been delivered a few minutes ago. "Blake's asked for a divorce."

"No doubt thanks to that woman livin' there," Cindy quipped.

"Renee? What does this have to do with her?"

"I found your wife in bed with her this mornin', sugar. She's left you for a younger piece of ass. You better get up here and take back what's your before it's too late. She's gonna leave you with nothin'."

Georgia shook her head in disbelief. She knew she and Blake were having problems, but she never thought it would actually come to this. "Mama, I don't know if I cain change her mind."

"You've got to try, baby girl. Do you want her to take everythin' from you? Your house, your children, your friends, and your money? She cain take it all."

"You sound as if I only married Blake for those reasons. Well, I didn't, Mama. I married Blake, because I loved her."

"Well, if you still love her, you better get yourself back up here and fight."

"I don't want to fight, Mama. Blake and I have had our problems, but I never thought she'd do this. We'll work everythin' out regardin' everthin'. She'll be amiable, I'm sure. I don't care 'bout much except the kids. She cain keep everythin' else if she really wants too. I just want us to be happy. I wish she would still want me, but she don't."

"Georgia, you listen to me, and you listen good. You cain have Blake back if you want her. This ain't over yet, but you've got to come home."

Georgia looked around her rented house for a moment before she mumbled, "I am home, Mama."

This is where I belong. New York ain't the place for me anymore. You and Jack and Blake all do well up there, but I've been missin' the southern way of life. Nawlins is the place for me to be."

"So, that's it? You're just gonna leave your family, your life behind?"

"It was never my life, Mama. It's was Blake's. I was livin' her dreams. It's time for me to live my own, and I want to do it here. I wish Blake and the kids were with me, but they ain't. However, I'll get the kids. I guess I'll have to live without Blake," she whispered as tears rolled down her face.

"Georgia, how cain you willingly just give up on the woman you love?" Cindy asked in disbelief.

"Because she gave up on me first, Mama," the writer sobbed. "I don't want to stand in the way of Blake's happiness. I love her that much, but I also want my own life. Now I've got to go. I need to find an attorney down here to help with this. I'll be back in New York in a few days to get my stuff."

Cindy gave a long sigh. "Georgia, don't make this decision so quickly. Take a few days. You know where I am if you need me."

"I know. Thanks, Mama."

That morning Jamie and Sarah were up early with Stephen having breakfast before their two daughters awoke for the day. Neither woman really said anything to each other as they just read their respective sections of the paper. However, every few minutes the brunette's eyes would seek out her wife across the table. Sarah kept her head down as she merely pushed her food around her plate. The older woman could tell the blonde was exhausted. Trying to placate the smaller woman, Jamie suggested, "Why don't you go out and have some fun today? I know you could use a break. I'll stay with the kids."

Sarah shrugged her shoulders. "Helen's sick, and Georgia's gone."

"Well, what about Tabitha? Is she in town?"

"I don't know."

Scrunching her brown, the brunette reached across the table for her wife's hand. "What's wrong, Sarah?"

"I'm just tired, Jamie. I'm leaving for a film shoot tomorrow, and it's going to be hard to be without all of you. I'm not exactly thrilled about going."

The tall actress nodded her head. She understood the feeling well. "I see. It's a great project though. We're going to come visit you too. Besides, you'll be so busy that you won't even have

time to miss us," she teased, trying to lighten the younger woman's spirits.

"I always miss you, Jamie, but maybe this time away will do me some good. I need a chance to regroup when it comes to Katrina."

"Yeah. Hopefully by the time you get back I'll have found someone who will see her. I haven't liked any of the psychologists I've talked to so far. Her school counselor suggested someone, so I'm going to try there next."

"I hope you find someone soon. She's driving me crazy," the blonde stated.

"I know. Samantha suggested that maybe Katrina come live with them again for the rest of the summer. I know they're trying to help, but I don't know how I feel about that."

Sarah gave a small nod. Thinking about the conversation she had with Blake previously, she wondered if she should bring it up now. Deciding there was no point in waiting, she softly said, "About Samantha and Doug, there is something I wanted to ask you."

"What's that?"

"Do you think it would be easier for us to control Katrina if you had full custody of her? I mean having all four of us trying to raise her has got to be confusing. What if you had full custody or we had joint custody?"

"We do have joint custody already," the brunette countered.

"No, you have joint custody with Samantha and Doug. I mean you and me having joint custody like with Eve and Stephen," she proposed.

Jamie looked at Sarah intently for a moment before asking, "Do you realize what you're suggesting? You're asking me to take Samantha and Doug to court. You're asking me to take Stephanie's sister, a woman that I care about deeply, into court to take custody from her."

"I know, Jamie," Sarah replied hesitantly.

The brunette shook her head adamantly. "I won't do it, Sarah. Samantha and Doug are family. They have taken care of Katrina and me in the worst of times. I can't yank everything that we've all known out from under them just because you and Katrina are going through a hard phase in your relationship. I can't do that to Samantha."

"Jamie, just please think about this. I'm sure Samantha would understand why we wanted it this way."

Again the older woman shook her head. "No, Sarah," she announced more firmly. "I refuse, and there is nothing you can do to change my mind. Samantha and Doug are keeping partial custody of Katrina, and that's final."

"There is nothing that will change your mind?" the blonde questioned as the tall woman rose from the table with her plate.

"Nothing comes to mind, Sarah. Look. I know this is hard on you, and I wish I could do something for you both, but it's going to take some time and effort on our part. I think it would be counterproductive and end up hurting her even more if she saw Samantha and me fighting. Katrina needs a harmonious household, not her mother and aunt squabbling over custody. You're just asking me to do something so terribly wrong in regards to my relationship with Samantha."

"Well, what about your other two children, Jamie? Eve looks to Katrina, and I don't like what she sees. Katrina is setting a poor example for her, and I won't let my child follow in those footsteps," the blonde stated in frustration as she too rose from the table with Stephen attached to her hip.

Jamie felt her own anger surface at the way Sarah had claimed Eve. "Your child, Sarah? Eve is your child? I have just as much parental rights and responsibilities for her as you do! The state of New York sees me as her second parent!"

"Yeah, well, the state of New York sees you and Samantha as Katrina's! Where am I in that picture, huh? Tell me! You want to know why Katrina doesn't listen to me? It's because she doesn't see me as a mother! First it was Stephanie, and now she sees you and Samantha! Yes, it's tragic she lost her mother, but you're her mother as well, and I'm your wife! How would you feel if Robert still had partial custody of Eve? How would that make you feel to know you were on the outside, Jamie?"

"You're not on the outside, Sarah! You live with her for goodness sake! You are with her more than anyone else, me included! You have more of an opportunity with her than any of us! You don't need custody of her! I won't take that from Samantha, and that's the end of it!"

The blonde woman rolled her eyes in frustration. "You know what, Jamie? I think I am going to go out today. Obviously you won't see reason on this. I need some time away. You take care of the kids for the day. I'm going shopping," she declared, thrusting their son in the older woman's direction.

Jamie took Stephen into her arms and sighed as Sarah made her exit from the room. She knew that Sarah was upset and hurt by Katrina's rejection, but she wasn't quite sure what to do to help her. However, she did know she couldn't take Katrina away from Samantha and Doug. Her late wife's sister and brother-in-law meant too much to her to drag them into an unnecessary confrontation.

Later that morning once all three kids were up, Jamie took them over to Samantha and Doug's place for some family time. As always Samantha was more than happy to take all of them in to share in the day's activities. Since Doug was working that day, the two women decided to take the five kids swimming at the country club on the island to which they all belonged.

Sitting in the kiddie pool with Stephen on her lap, Jamie watched on as Eve splashed around near Samantha and her. The brunette was off in deep thought when her former sister-in-law's voice asked, "Do you want to talk about whatever is bothering you?"

The actress shrugged. "Sarah and I just got into an argument this morning. She asked me to do something that I simply refuse to do, and she got upset. It'll pass."

"Are you sure? I've noticed Sarah getting quite upset as of late over some trivial things. Is she stressed with work? Are the kids too much for her?"

"Katrina is too much for her to handle at the moment," the tall woman replied, looking over at the topic of conversation. Katrina was sitting on a lounge chair with music blaring through her headphones instead of playing in the water with her cousins. "Neither one of us knows what to do with her. She's out of control with Sarah. I can tell that it's only a matter of time before Sarah breaks, and I'm not sure that would be wise. I'm afraid of what might happen if she's pushed too far."

"You don't think she'd hurt one of the children, do you?"

"No, never. However, I do think she could have a breakdown. Trying to follow an Oscar win professionally is difficult, and the stress of three children on top of that is getting to be too much for her. I know how it feels though. I'm feeling the strain as much as she is, but I just don't show it in the same ways. Sarah's a vocal person. I just keep it all inside."

Samantha nodded. "That's the truth. I think Katrina is getting to be the same way. She's holding back with whatever really is bothering her but blows up at Sarah for no reason. We just have to break through that barrier."

A moment passed before Jamie asked, "Could I ask you something?"

"What?"

"Have you ever thought the fact that you and I have custody of Katrina instead of Sarah and I could be causing some problems?"

"No, never. Why do you ask? Do you think it is?" Samantha inquired.

The actress shook her head quickly. "No. I think our arrangement is fine. However, I had the thought today that maybe Katrina doesn't feel connected to Sarah, because in a legal sense, she isn't. Eve and Stephen belong to Sarah and me. I wonder if that makes her feel different. She's the only one in our household that has the last name of Taylor-Dean. The rest of us have Talbot-Dean. I'm proud that she's a Taylor, but maybe she'd rather be a Talbot to fit in. Do you know what I mean?"

"I never thought about it that way."

"I hadn't either until today," the younger woman admitted, leaving out the fact that her wife had brought up the point with their disagreement. "I don't want to hurt Stephanie's memory, Samantha, but I want to do whatever it takes to get Katrina and Sarah to get along again. When Sarah and I were dating, they had a great relationship, but once we got married and especially after Stephen was born, Katrina just rebelled against Sarah worse than I could have ever imagined. I don't know what to do here."

"Well, if you think a name change would help, then maybe you should ask her if that's what she wants, Jamie. I can't tell you one way or the other what that girl is thinking. We used to be close too, but she's even started shutting me out. You know, I expected this behavior when she was a teenager, but I never would have imagined it to start at ten. You need to talk to her. You're the only one she seems to respond to anymore with any sort of consistency."

The tall woman gave a nod as she looked down at her son. "I don't know what to say, Samantha. I don't know where to even start."

"What about just the two of you going away together for awhile? Maybe she just needs your undivided attention to open up. Go upstate for a few days. Stop in on my parents. I'm sure they'd love to have the two of you. Maybe even a little trip over to see Stephanie might do her some good. How long has it been since she's seen her Mom?"

Shaking her head, the younger woman said, "I haven't been up there since Sarah and I got married. Sarah wanted all of us to go as a family, but I don't think she's been back since then."

"Maybe you should take her. My parents would like to spend some time with her too. Do you think sending her up there for a little while would help?"

"I'd be willing to try anything, Samantha. However, a trip will have to wait while Sarah's away on location. She's flies out down to Texas tomorrow to start a project. Katrina will be back in school by the time she gets back, and then I'm scheduled to go to California for my next film. I just don't see how Sarah and Katrina are going to survive each other with me gone that long. They hardly survive while I'm gone for a day or two."

"If it would be easier on Sarah, Katrina could stay with us while you're gone."

"I think that would only make it worse, don't you? I mean I leave, so Katrina has to as well. The idea is for her to feel included, not excluded."

"Then why don't you take Katrina to see Stephanie for a few days, and we'll take Eve and Stephen. Just make it a long weekend or something. Hopefully that will help."

Looking over at her daughter again, Jamie nodded. "I guess I can try that. What weekend would be best for you?"

"Any weekend is fine. Whatever fits into your schedule."

"Well, with Sarah gone I'm going to be around most of the time. Someone has to watch the kids. Why don't we try for this coming weekend? I'll call your parents and see if they are available."

"Great. Just let us know. We're here for you and Sarah, Jamie," Samantha softly said, patting her former sister-in-law on the arm.

"I appreciate that more than you know."

That evening Jamie was feeding the children dinner when Sarah arrived home. Her hands were full of shopping bags, but when she sat them down and raised her sunglasses onto the top of her head, Jamie could clearly see that her day away hadn't done much good. Blue eyes still held distress. Nevertheless, the brunette gave her wife a smile as she moved to greet her.

"Welcome home. We just sat down to eat. Let me get you a plate," she said, leaning to give the blonde a quick kiss.

Sarah gave a little whimper at the feel of her lover's lips on her own. Whenever things were rough between them, she always could feel whole again with just a touch from Jamie. She needed that touch now before she left for work in the morning, so she could leave on good terms. Instead of saying that however, the little woman just whispered, "Thanks." Going to the table, she took her usual chair. She smiled at her daughters. "Katrina, Eve, how was your day?" she asked.

"Fine," the ten-year old mumbled.

"Great, Mama. We went swimming with Aunt Samantha," Eve said.

"Oh, did you? That sounds like fun. Sorry I missed it."

Jamie smiled at Sarah as Eve told her blonde mother all about the pool that day. The four-year-old rambled on excitedly for several minutes while the brunette woman fixed a plate for her wife. Coming back to the table, she placed it in front of her before taking her seat once again. "As you can tell, we had quite the adventure. Right, Katrina?" Jamie asked, trying to include their eldest in the conversation.

"We went to the pool. It was fine," she grumbled, looking back at her plate.

Suddenly the ten-year old blonde's cell phone rang, interrupting the dialogue. Immediately she rose from the table to fetch it, but Sarah called out, "No calls during dinner, Katrina."

Katrina just rolled her eyes and looked at Jamie. "Sarah is right. We're having family time right now. You can talk later," she stated. It felt awkward for her to use her wife's first name with her daughter. For so long both girls had called her Mama, but in an effort to reach her oldest, she went with the name Katrina claimed was most comfortable for her. However, Jamie could see the affect it had on her wife.

"But, Mom, it could be important," she whined.

"Nothing can be that important right now. Sit back down and finish your dinner. Come on. I have some news of my own to share with the group, so come take your seat."

Reluctantly, Katrina did as she was told. Sarah looked across the table at the woman she loved. "And just what is this news, my dear?"

Jamie looked at her daughter. "Next Friday Katrina and I are going to Albany. We're going to spend the whole weekend there together, just the two of us. How does that sound?"

"Really?" Katrina asked, looking hopefully at her mother.

"Really." Turning to Eve, she smiled. "And you Miss Eve, you and Stephen are going to stay with Aunt Samantha and Uncle Doug. They're going to take you swimming and to the zoo. Would you like that?"

"Yeah. Sounds like fun, Mom."

"I thought you'd like to do that."

Sarah looked at Eve and then Katrina before her eyes settled on Jamie. "And just what are your big plans up in Albany?" she questioned.

"Well, we're long overdue for a visit to the Grandma and Grandpa's house. We're going to stay the weekend with them and just spend some time. Maybe will go over to the church and take in some of the old memories. We'll just do some mother-daughter bonding," she explained, hoping that her wife understood what was left unsaid in regards to seeing Stephanie. When she saw Sarah nod, she knew the blonde did.

"Well, that sounds like it will be a fun trip. Meanwhile I'll be stuck in Texas missing all of you."

"Oh, don't worry about that. We're going to all come see you the week after we get back. You can't get away from us," the tall woman teased.

"Good. I'm glad to hear that," the petite actress replied, catching dark eyes. The women exchanged a meaningful gaze before their attention was divided once again by their girls.

Once dinner was finished, Jamie and Sarah started to prepare the kids for bed. Both of them decided to let Katrina do whatever she wanted for the time being as long as she stayed in her room, playing quietly after her bath. As for Eve, they did their usual tag team for bath time, one of them taking the four-year old while the other took charge of Stephen. Lucky for them Eve was tired from the extended time in the sun that day and had no qualms about going to bed on time.

Once the girls were settled, both women moved into the master bedroom. Jamie sat on the bed, leaning against the headboard and watching her wife as Stephen lay sleeping in her arms.

Meanwhile Sarah scurried around trying to pack for her trip. "I can't believe I'm already going back to work. Right now I'm wondering if I shouldn't have taken off another six months."

"You'll be fine, Sarah. This is a great part. It's perfect for you."

The blonde nodded. "I know. I know. If I hear that one more time from anyone, I'm going to have to hurt someone. The part is perfect, but I'm going to be gone for so long. This isn't the most convenient time to be working."

"You have to start back sometime. You can't just win an Oscar and then quit. The public expects more from us."

The younger woman shook her head. "I know. That is the life we've chosen. Sometimes I just enjoy being a mother of three though, going to the club, lounging by the pool with the kids. I don't even mind going grocery shopping. There are days when I'd give it all up to stay home."

"Then of course you'd have to deal with Katrina all the time. I'm not sure either of you could survive that right now," Jamie pointed out.

"Speaking of Katrina, where on earth did you get the idea to take her to Albany?"

"It was Samantha's actually. We got to talking today while we were at the club. I mean we're all grasping at straws here. She just thought maybe a trip to see Stephanie and her other grandparents might do her some good. It's the only plan we have right now other than the counseling. I don't see how it could hurt."

"You're right. I agree. I just thought it was strange, but I can see where you are coming from on it. It's fine with me as long as Samantha and Doug are okay with taking Stephen and Eve for a few days."

"They're fine with it. Samantha offered, so Katrina and I could have some alone time."

Sarah nodded. She didn't want to bring up their conversation from that morning again, so she simply stayed quiet as she pulled clothes from the closet. The rest of the packing passed quietly. Finally when Sarah was finished with as much as she could do for the night, she looked over at her wife and son. Both brunettes had their eyes closed. Coming to the bed, the smaller woman gently took Stephen from Jamie's arms. Immediately dark eyes opened in confusion.

"I'm just putting him down in the nursery for awhile, because you and I need to talk about something important," she whispered.

The tall actress nodded sleepily. Stephen normally slept in a co-sleeper next to Sarah at night, so the fact that she was putting him down in another room intrigued the older woman. She knew Stephen was only separated from them if they were going to have an intimate conversation, so she anxiously awaited the blonde's return. It was only a moment before she graced the room again.

Sarah walked over to the bed where Jamie was and took a tentative seat. Dark eyes met blue ones in a long gaze. "Jamie, I'm sorry about this morning," she began. "I just don't know what to do with her anymore. I want Katrina to be happy."

Jamie nodded her head. "I know. We all want that, and we'll find a way. I'm sorry for not putting myself in your position. I would feel like an outsider as well if Robert still had joint custody of Eve with you. I just want the four of us adults in her life to work together on this without having to go back to court. My relationship with Samantha and Doug is so important to me and to Katrina as well. Samantha is the closet thing Katrina has to her real mother anymore. I mean even though the state thinks of me as her mother, I know as well as you do that Stephanie will always hold that special place regardless of what Katrina calls us. I don't want to take that from her."

"I know. We'll find a way. All four of us will just have to find a way to reach her," the blonde whispered leaning in closer to the dark-haired woman. "Enough talk about that though. We have more important matters to discuss."

They kissed lightly. "We do? Like what?" Jamie teased as Sarah began to unbutton her own blouse.

"Like how you're going to make love to me so I have something to remember on those lonely nights," she murmured as their mouths came together a second time.

"I like the sound of that," Jamie replied as her hands joined the fray. Within moments the small woman's blouse was on the ground. "You are so beautiful, Sarah," the brunette reverently uttered as they exchanged kisses that were growing heated by the second.

"Tell me, Jamie. Tell me what you want to do to me. I love hearing you talk to me while you touch me."

Jamie moaned as the little blonde straddled her legs. "God, Sarah, I love you so much. I love feeling your skin against mine," she whispered as her hands worked off the younger woman's satin and lace bra, revealing Sarah's endowment. With her still pumping milk for Stephen, her breasts were even larger and more sensitive than normal. The brunette gently cupped her wife's left one and squeezed lightly, emitting a moan from Sarah. "I love your breasts, Sarah. I love the way they feel in my hands and in my mouth," she murmured letting her mouth trail down to the objects of discussion.

Sarah clutched the back of her lover's head as Jamie's mouth closed over the crest of her right breast. This was what she needed to feel whole again. The older woman's touch never failed to right anything that had gone awry. "Jamie, please, baby," she pleaded softly. "Touch me."

Knowing what her wife needed, the tall woman stayed on course with her mouth but let her hands trail down to Sarah's pants. She opened them with quick proficiency and then guided the material down her beloved's hips. Breaking their contact briefly, Jamie gazed into blue eyes.

"The sight of you naked never fails to make me breathless, Sarah," she admitted as the small actress took over the duty of removing the rest of her clothes.

"Good. Now it's time to make me breathless," the blonde answered teasingly, reaching for Jamie's shirt. She pulled it off quickly.

The older actress worked on her own shorts, pulling the belt open as they kissed again. Petite hands joined hers in the process of ridding the strong frame of the rest of its clothes. Once they were both naked, Jamie pulled the little woman down on top of her. Both of them groaned as bare skin met firmly. Jamie let her right hand drop between their bodies and trace her wife's inner thighs. "You're so soft here. I love the feeling of your thighs. I can feel them twitching in anticipation. You want me, don't you?" she inquired cockily as her fingers lingered just outside from where Sarah wanted her.

Sarah's only reply was a whimper. Secretly she loved it when Jamie acted arrogant during foreplay. It made it that much sweeter when she made the brunette beg for release. However, she wasn't quite ready to start reciprocating yet. She was enjoying the moment far too much to rush it. Giving just enough encouragement, she moaned her lover's name. She was rewarded with her wife pushing closer to the goal as a powerful hand cupped her wetness.

"God, you're so wet. I love it when you get this way. It makes me so hot knowing how much you need me. Tell me. Do you want me, love? Do you need me inside of you?"

Knowing her part, Sarah breathlessly answered, "Yes, Jamie. Please. Touch me from the inside."

Hearing the desperation in her lover's voice, the brunette immediately gave in to Sarah's wishes. Both of them groaned in unison as the tall woman filled her wife. Wanting her deeper though, the younger woman sat back on her knees astride Jamie's hips. There was silence except for heavy breathing as blue eyes stayed locked on brown ones. The older woman pumped at a gentle pace with her right hand as her left grabbed hold of the blonde's backside. She began to knead the muscles as she thrust in time with Sarah's hips. As good as it felt to have Jamie inside of her, Sarah knew the moment for her to give back to her wife was upon her. Arching her back causing the brunette to go even deeper, Sarah let her right hand drop back behind her and slip into Jamie without warning. She smiled as she saw dark eyes roll closed in pleasure.

"Sarah," the taller woman moaned. Her wife always took her by surprise when they made love, taking the lead between them whenever she least expected it. However, even as much as she was used to being the dominant one in the past, she secretly enjoyed allowing the blonde to take the reins whenever she wanted. Her body never failed to respond to her blue-eyed angel's touch, making her as desperate to be fulfilled as to gratify. Sarah was only one of two women who had ever had that effect on the brunette, and Jamie loved to indulge in the feeling. "Please, Sarah," she beseeched. "I need you."

"Don't worry, love. I'll take care of you," the petite woman assured.

Together they moved in an instinctive rhythm, their hips and bodies meshing in synchrony as

they traveled together toward the summit of pleasure. As usual it was Jamie that reached it first. Her hard body shuddered against Sarah's smaller one, and she whimpered her wife's name. Sarah simply smiled lovingly and cradled Jamie into her frame, enjoying the tide of emotions that surrounded the tall woman's peak. Patiently the blonde waited for Jamie to descend from her pinnacle, knowing the brunette would satisfy her when she had regained her senses.

A few minutes later brown eyes opened and looked up into blue. Jamie gave a content smile. She knew that her wife hadn't climaxed with her, but she was determined to correct that situation. However before she proceeded to refocus her energies, she whispered, "You know, my reputation would be totally ruined if anyone knew you could incapacitate me like that," she teased. "If the public knew Bad Girl Jamie Talbot-Dean was just a woman that quivered at your touch, I'd never get work again. You've turned me into such a lovesick fool."

Sarah smirked. Leaning to her wife's ear, she kissed it lovingly. "Don't worry, Jamie. I won't tell anyone your secret."

"You better not," playfully the brunette warned. "Or else I might have to stop pleasuring you."

"Oh, we couldn't have that now, could we?" Sarah asked, rocking her hips down against her beloved's, reminding her that there was unfinished business which needed attention. Taking the direction, Jamie once again started to direct her wife to peak. It only took a few minutes before the younger woman was as incapacitated as she had been. Stilling herself inside of her lover, Jamie wrapped an arm around her, maneuvering them both down onto the mattress.

Sarah enjoyed the presence of her wife as they lay in silence together, basking in the moment. Even as difficult as things got between them with their children, Sarah knew as long as they could have moments like the one they were sharing, things would eventually work themselves out. After several minutes she whispered, "I don't want to leave in the morning."

"I don't want you to either, but we both have to get back to work eventually. Both our agents are hounding us. We have to get back in the saddle. You have a great project ahead of you."

"I know. I just hate being without you and the kids."

"We're going to come down the weekend after next. You'll be so busy you'll hardly notice."

"Oh, I'll notice all right. My breasts won't let me forget that Stephen's supposed to be there," she joked.

Jamie laughed lightly. "Well, if you'd rather take him with you it's fine with me. I just think it would be easier for you if he stays here. You're going to be working long hours as it is. The last thing you need is to have to deal with his unpredictable hours. I guess you'll just have to pump while you're away unless you're finished breast feeding him."

"Not even close. Eve had breast milk until she was two. Stephen's getting the same. I had Eve on the set with me during that time for that purpose. I really am reconsidering taking him. I think it

would be best, Jamie."

"Well, he is more content when you're around."

"Maybe I should take Eve as well for those first two weeks. It would give you and Katrina some time alone together. I think I'd feel a little strange letting Samantha and Doug take just Eve for the weekend when you went up to Albany."

"They'd do it, Sarah. It wouldn't be a problem."

"I know, and I love them for that, but maybe that time alone with Katrina would help her sort out some issues."

Jamie shrugged. "That's fine with me if that's what you want to do."

"I think that's what I want to do, Jamie."

The older woman nodded. "All right then. Tomorrow morning we'll get Eve and Stephen packed. I'm sure they can make arrangements to have the kids along for you."

Pulling her body over onto Jamie's, Sarah smiled down at her wife. "Thank you for understanding, Jamie. I love you so much."

"I love you too, Sarah, always. We should get some sleep. Tomorrow is a big day for you."

Cracking a grin, the fair-headed woman proposed, "Or we could not go to sleep and I could render you helpless again."

Jamie chuckled. "I'm at your mercy. You know that."

A few days later, Georgia made her way back to New York for the first time in almost three months. After she had been served the divorce papers, she didn't bother to call Blake. Instead she decided to simply show up at their condo to speak to the attorney in person about it. When her plane landed at JFK airport, it was late that night. Gathering her own luggage, she quietly went outside to catch a cab to upper Manhattan.

Getting to their building, she was greeted politely by the doorman before moving inside to catch the elevator. The ride to their floor seemed way too long. The bell finally chimed, though, and the writer stepped out into the quiet corridor. Going to their door, it took her a moment to find her key. The place was silent when she entered, and only one small light was on in the kitchen. Figuring the children and Renee were probably asleep, she walked toward the master bedroom. A light shone from under the door, so she softly opened it. There was Blake leaning against the headboard. Her reading glasses were still on her face, and papers littered the bed. However the attorney was sound asleep.

Georgia just studied her wife for a few minutes in silence. The older woman still had her heart. It pained her to think their relationship was really over. Unable to stay away, the blonde moved to the bed and took a tentative seat next to the taller woman. Blake didn't even flinch when the mattress moved. Not knowing what to do, the younger woman quietly began to gather the papers and folders spread out over the bed and stack them neatly on the night stand before gently removing Blake's glasses from her face. The forty-two-year-old mumbled incoherently and rearranged herself for a moment.

Georgia just watched her. Blake looked so vulnerable and beautiful at rest that it caused a pang in her soul. She still wanted the attorney even if those feelings were no longer reciprocated. Giving into her need to touch her wife, the small woman touched her on the face. Her heart dropped when Blake grumbled their nanny's name instead of hers. Knowing that Blake was thinking of someone else made the writer begin to cry. The woman she had loved for the last five years now had given her heart to someone else.

With tears cascading down her fair skin, Georgia leaned toward her wife. She just needed to know the feeling of the attorney's mouth against her own one last time, so she lovingly pressed her pink lips to Blake's. The brunette's eyes opened sleepily and obviously showed their confusion at Georgia's presence. "Hey," the thirty year old whispered.

"Georgia? What are you doing here? Have you come home?" she tiredly inquired.

The writer shook her head solemnly. "Just for a few days. I got the papers. I'm just here to collect my things and the kids."

"What?" the attorney asked still not fully awake.

"I got the divorce papers that you sent, Blake," she explained.

"Oh," Blake mumbled as she finally started to become aware again.

"I don't want to fight with you, Blake. I'll give you the divorce if that's what you want. I just need to get my things and the children, and I'll be on my way back to New Orleans," she stated a second time, seeing that the older woman was now cognizant.

Blake shook her head. "I don't think so," she countered. "You can take all you want out of this place, but the kids stay with me. I'm not letting you take them down to New Orleans," the attorney announced as she rose from the bed testily.

"Excuse me? Those are my children."

"They're my children too, Georgia, and I'm not the one who abandoned them. You've been gone for almost three months and only seen them once. You expect me to just let you walk in here and take them away from me after all I've been through with them? You weren't the one who they asked every night when Mama was coming home. You want to leave me, go right ahead. I'm a

grown woman, and I can take it. But how dare you walk out on Luke and Lana for three months? And how dare you even think I'm going to let you take them from me?"

"Blake, they belong with me. They're mine. I gave birth to them."

"That doesn't mean shit to me, Georgia! The state sees me at their equal parent, and I will fight you to the bitter end if I have to in order to keep them with me! They're happy here in New York, Georgia! They're well-adjusted three-year-olds, no thanks to you! If it weren't for Renee, I'd be fit to be tied, but thankfully, she has helped me hold this house together while you've gone off and lived your own life away from your family!"

"Oh Renee? The woman my Mama caught you in bed with? That'll hardly go over well with a judge!"

"And abandoning them without so much as a good bye will? You gave up your rights the minute you decided not to get back on that plane at the end of your vacation! Georgia Erwin, we might be finished, but I'll be damned if I let you ruin my life by taking my kids!"

Before the blonde could offer any sort of retort, the woman of conversation appeared in the open doorway. Renee seemed surprised to see Georgia, but she didn't say that. Instead she merely whispered, "You're going to wake the kids if you keep this up."

Georgia scowled at the younger woman, but Blake nodded in response. "Thank you for the warning, Renee. Sorry if we woke you. We'll keep it down." Both of them waited until the nanny was gone again to look at each other. Blake sighed for a moment before asking quietly, "Why don't you want to come home? What did I do so wrong that you had to run away from me, from our family, from our life? Why did it take divorce papers to get you back here?"

Georgia shook her head and broke eye contact. "There are so many reasons. I don't even know where to start, but at this point, it don't matter any more anyway. You wanted this divorce. Well, you have it. Here are the papers," she said digging them out of her carry-on bag. "I signed them, and I expect our prenup to take effect immediately. The first alimony payment should be made the first of next month and our assets divided according to our agreement. I'm giving up quite a lot by not fightin' with you 'bout that. However, I will fight you for my kids. I don't care how long it takes. I have petitioned for full custody all ready, and I will do whatever it takes to win," she threatened.

Blake gave an arrogant chuckle. "Have you gone mad, Georgia? Have you forgotten who I am? Have you forgotten with exactly whom you are dealing? There is no way in hell I'm going to let a little thing like you try to squash me in court. I don't care who you have for representation. I've been doing family law a lot of years. I know what it takes to win, and you don't stand a chance in hell. You might as well give up."

"Never, Blake! I carried those kids for nine months! I went through labor to brin' them into the world! My blood, sweat, and tears went into havin' them. I will never turn my back on Lana and Luke!"

"You already did, Georgia! Now I've had about enough of this for one night! You can get your things tomorrow! I'm going to bed, and you're leaving!"

"This is my home! You can't throw me out!"

"Oh, I beg to differ! This is my home! My name and only my name is on the deed! Even more according to the prenup, I keep the primary residence! It's mine, and I say it's time for you to go!" she yelled, taking the blonde by the arm.

"You let me go, Blake, or I'll call the cops!"

"And tell them what exactly? You are trespassing! They're going to throw your ass in jail, not mine! Now I suggest you turn yourself around right now and go out the front door before I have security remove you from the premise!" she screamed.

"Mama?" a tiny voice called interrupting their argument. Both women turned toward the sound and saw their son standing in the doorway of the bedroom, rubbing his eyes sleepily.

Immediately Georgia went to him and scooped him up in her arms. "Oh, Luke, we're sorry. We didn't mean to wake you," she softly said.

He looked at her with worry as he asked, "Mama, why are you crying?"

She smiled at his concern. "I'm just upset, Luke, but I'll be fine. Don't you worry 'bout it. Come on now. Let me take you back to bed." Georgia scowled at Blake over their son's head before exiting the room. She carried Luke back to his room and put him down in bed again. Giving him the best smile she could muster at the moment, she whispered, "You need to go back to sleep now."

His blue eyes met hers. "Mama, why were you and Mom yelling?"

"We just got in a fight. We didn't mean to yell, Luke. I'm sorry if it scared you."

He gave a sleepy nod as she tucked the comforter around him. "Are you going to be here tomorrow, Mama?" he asked hesitantly.

"Yeah, I'll be here. Why do you ask, Luke?"

"I don't want you to go away again."

Georgia's blue eyes began to tear again at her son's words. She wished she could reassure him that she would be there, but she knew facing Blake in court would be difficult at best. "I don't want to go away either, but sometimes we have to do things we don't want to, Luke. However, don't you worry 'bout it. I'll be here tomorrow. Okay?"

"Okay. I love you, Mama," he whispered as she brushed back his blonde hair from his face.

"I love you too, sweetie, more than you could ever know. Sweet dreams," she replied kissing his forehead. Quietly she moved toward the door. Looking back at him from the doorway, she smiled at him asleep. Seeing the light on in her daughter's room, she poked her head in there. To her surprise, she saw Renee kneeling by her daughter's bed.

However as soon as Lana saw her mother, her dark eyes sparkled in happiness as the little girl smiled. "Mama!" she exclaimed, crawling out of bed and scampering over to Georgia.

The writer picked up her daughter and hugged her tightly. "Hey, angel. How's my baby girl?"

"I missed you, Mama."

"I missed you too, Lana," Georgia responded. Gazing over at the nanny, the writer resisted the urge to say something biting in front of her child. Instead she just glared at Renee. Just the sight of the younger woman infuriated her, because instantly she thought of their nanny in bed with her wife. "Renee, I have this under control," she stated coolly.

The nanny nodded slowly. "Of course, Georgia," she softly answered. Looking at Lana she smiled. "Good night, Lana. See you in the morning."

"Night Renee," the little brunette child answered with a wave.

Once they were alone, Georgia took her daughter back to her bed. "It's way past your bedtime," she mentioned. "Why are you awake?"

"I heard noises that scared me," the three-year-old said.

"Well, you're safe now. Nothin' is goin' hurt you if I'm here. Come on. Let's get you back under the covers." The blonde gently put her daughter down. "Here. Here's your favorite teddy bear," she said, placing it in the girl's arms. Lovingly she tucked the long dark hair behind Lana's tiny ears. Just looking at the three-year-old made her think of Blake, and Georgia once again found herself on the verge of tears.

It was only when a small hand touched her on the face that she realized tears had escaped her eyes. "Don't cry, Mama."

Georgia kissed her daughter's hand. "I can't help it, Lana. I just missed you and Luke so much."

"Did you miss Mom too? She missed you."

The blonde nodded. "Yeah, I missed Mom too," she admitted. "You should go to sleep now. Have sweet dreams."

"You too, Mama," the little girl replied as Georgia kissed her on the top of her dark head.

Leaving her children's bedrooms, the writer made her way back toward the master bedroom, but Blake was no longer there. Hearing noise in the kitchen she followed it. The attorney was leaning against the counter with her arms crossed over her chest, and she wore a scowl. Had the taller woman not been glaring at her, Georgia would have found it easy to be excited by the sight of the brunette in a small pair of boxer shorts and a t-shirt, toned legs and arms on perfect display. However, the menacing glower made it impossible.

"I think you should leave now, Georgia," Blake suggested in a calm voice, but the writer still heard the anger.

Knowing it would do no good to try to fight with the older woman, the blonde nodded. "Fine. I'll go, Blake, but this ain't over. I may have lost you, but I refuse to lose my kids. I'll be by tomorrow for my things."

"Fine. Now give me your key," she demanded, extending her hand.

Georgia hesitated for a moment. She didn't want to relinquish the key to the place she had called home since right after she and Blake had gotten married. It would be like giving up the last piece of hope for them. However, she knew Blake was not going to let her walk out without surrendering it either. Reluctantly she removed the key from her key chain. Instead of putting it in the attorney's hand though, she simply placed it on the kitchen counter top.

Without another word between them, they walked to the front door. Neither looked at the other. "I'll be by tomorrow mornin'," Georgia softly said.

"Fine," the attorney stoically answered. Without a good bye, the writer left. When Blake closed and locked the door, she just stood there a moment in silence trying to take in what had just transpired. Georgia had just left her. Suddenly she found it difficult to breathe as she began to quietly sob. She didn't want to wake her kids or Renee again, so she just stood there in the entryway with her head against the door whimpering in virtual silence as the life as she had known it came to a expeditious collapse. The love of her life, the mother of her children was gone. She stayed there for several minutes bemoaning the turn of events, but a set of arms encircling her waist brought her out of her daze.

"It's going to be okay, Blake," Renee whispered consolingly.

"I just acted like a total asshole," the attorney whispered. "Had I just acted better she still might be here."

"Blake, if she wanted to stay, she would have."

"I just kicked her out, Renee. I didn't give her a choice. My wife is gone, and it's my fault."

"Come on, Blake. This isn't doing any good. Let's get you back to bed. You've got an early meeting," the nanny suggested, pulling her toward the master bedroom. The attorney went along

willingly. Renee put the older woman back in bed and then took a seat beside her. "Do you want to be alone, or would you like company?"

"I'm not sure I would be the best company right now," the brunette answered.

"That's okay. If you want me to stay, I will. Just tell me what you want."

"What I want?" Blake questioned placing her hand on Renee's arm. "There are two things I want right now, and I can't have either."

"How do you know? What are they?"

"I want Georgia to come back, and that's not going to happen."

The younger woman shrugged. "What about the other thing?"

"I want you to stay, and I can't have that either. At least I can't have that and respect myself in the morning," she admitted.

Renee broke their gaze and settled her eyes on the attorney's hand gently caressing her forearm. "It would be so easy," the blonde mumbled. "Georgia's gone."

"But my children need a nanny more than I need a replacement in my bed."

"Is that all I would be?" Renee asked. Not knowing how to answer that best, Blake shrugged for a moment. However, the nanny pushed, "Well, is it?"

"Yes," Blake replied honestly. Seeing the younger woman smirk, the brunette knew Renee wasn't offended.

"Well, then I don't see what the problem would be with me staying the night."

"You mean, you don't want more than that?" Blake asked in surprise.

"No, Blake. I don't want to be your wife or a mother to your kids. I don't even want to be your girlfriend. I just want to sleep with my boss," she stated lightly.

"Well, I didn't know that. That certainly changes things a bit." Blake met hazel eyes. She knew the twenty-five-year-old was hers if she wanted. However, she knew she wasn't ready for such a night. Giving the nanny a smile and nod, she said, "Well, maybe someday we'll do that but not tonight if that's okay with you. I'm not ready. Maybe we could just sleep together instead. I really don't want to be alone right now."

"That's fine. What are friends for, Blake?" Renee questioned rhetorically, moving to the other side of the bed. She slid under the covers and looked at the attorney. "If you need anything else, just let me know."

Blake nodded. "Thanks, Renee, for everything."

"Anytime. Try to sleep now."

The next morning Blake was up early. She knew she had a meeting with some clients, but she decided to cancel it, because she wanted to be there when Georgia came to the loft. She was simply sitting in the kitchen reading and drinking coffee when there was a knock on the door. Figuring it was probably the little blonde, Blake went to answer it. Pulling open the door, she was greeted by the sight of Georgia, Cindy, and her business partner, Jack along with moving men.

Without even bothering to greet the attorney, the writer brushed by her with her entourage close behind. Turning to the moving men, she commanded, "Everythin' goes."

"Whoa. Wait just a minute Georgia Erwin. This is my house," Blake stated.

"Yeah but I own everythin' in it. Check that prenup of ours, Blake."

"Georgia, the kids aren't even awake yet. This is really not the best way to do this."

"Well, fuckin' our nanny wasn't exactly the best way to end our relationship either!" Georgia yelled.

"I did no such thing, Georgia! In fact, it was you who tried to seduce my best friend, your best friend's wife!"

"I never touched, Tor!" the smaller woman screamed. Before anything else could be said, the master bedroom door opened. All eyes turned to see the nanny step from the room in only her pajamas. "What were you sayin' 'bout not screwin' the nanny, Blake?"

The older woman just shook her head and rolled her eyes. "You know what, Georgia? You take it all! It means nothing to me! You're the materialistic one!"

"I earned it, Blake!"

"Earned it? What does that mean, Georgia? How did you earn it? On your back?" Blake yelled. "You're good but not that good."

Blue eyes flashed angrily, and before either one of them knew it, a petite hand connected solidly with the side of the attorney's face. "How dare you?" the blonde accused as tears rolled down her face.

"Where did you get that little move, Georgia? Your Klan buddies?" the brunette asked as she idly rubbed the side of her face.

"Blake Erwin, that's enough! I've had enough! I don't deserve this! I did everythin' for you! I lived here in New York! I had your children! I played the perfect wife for all these years, letting you live your dreams! And now that I'm tryin' to live one of my own, you leave me! I'm tired of your selfishness, Blake! I want my own life!"

"Well, now you have it! I never should have let you back in my life! That was the biggest mistake I ever made! But I assure you that won't happen again! Get your shit and get the hell out!" she screamed before turning to go back to her bedroom. She slammed the door behind her so loudly pictures fell off the wall. Tears poured out of her eyes as she sunk to the floor against the door. She couldn't believe the way she had just acted. She had never spoken so irreverently to a woman in her life, especially not to one she loved, but she was so upset she just let things fly out of her mouth without thinking about the repercussions. Knowing she had to pull herself together for her children, the tall woman quickly focused on what she needed to do. She showered and dressed before going to get her kids. She found Renee already there helping them get dressed for the day. The two women looked at each other.

"I figured you didn't want them to be around for this," the younger woman said.

"Thanks, Renee." Looking at her kids, she put on a smile. "Guess what, you two? The four of us are going to go out and play today."

"Is Mama coming too?" Luke asked.

"No. Mama has a lot to do today, so she can't come. Let's get the rest of our clothes on quickly. Come on."

As soon as the foursome was ready, Blake led the kids out into the living area. When the two three-year olds saw their blonde mother, they took off for her. Georgia smiled at both of them as she kneeled down to hug each of them. "Hey. How are my babies?"

"You're crying again, Mama," her son mentioned.

She nodded. "I'm sad, Luke."

"Why?" Lana queried.

Georgia looked at Blake and then back at her children. "Because I have leave, and I wish I didn't."

"Don't leave again, Mama," Luke requested.

"I have to, baby. Remember last night I told you that sometimes we have to do things we don't want?" He nodded. "Well, I have to do this even though I don't want to. You see, your Mom and I have decided it would be better if we didn't live together anymore, but that means one of us have to leave. Don't worry, though. I'm gonna be at Grandma's for awhile. You two have to be strong for me, okay?" Both of the kids nodded. "I love you two more than anythin' else in this

world, and Mom loves you too. We would never let anythin' happen to either one of you. Just remember that. All right?"

Once Georgia had let them go, they scurried over to where Renee was. Blake looked at the writer. "Thank you for that," she softly said.

The tiny blonde scowled at her. "You will not take my children from me, Blake. This is far from over. Mark my words."

Blake stayed out with Renee and the twins most of the day. They visited all of the children's favorite places in an effort to take their minds off of their other mother. It was a successful tactic for the most part, which was of great relief to the attorney. However that night as they returned to the house after dinner, they were greeted with a surprise. When the brunette opened the door, she stood for a moment in shock at the loft. It was completely bare.

"Oh my God," she mumbled as the four of them entered. Nothing was in the living room or kitchen. Moving toward the master bedroom, she found everything removed except for her personal effects. In concern she moved to her children's bedrooms but was relieved to see their rooms still intact. However, all the furniture Blake had put in Renee's room was gone but thankfully her personal belongings were still there. Going into her office, the attorney realized that room had been left untouched as well.

"She really cleaned you out," the nanny mentioned coming into the office.

"Yeah. At least my couch folds out into a queen-sized bed. You can sleep on that for the time being. Tomorrow we'll work on getting some furniture in here. For now though, let's get the kids settled for bed. It's been a long day."

Renee and Blake got the children in bed before the attorney went into the kitchen. Grabbing herself a beer out of the refrigerator, she took a large gulp before sighing. A headache was starting, and she was tired from the drama of the day. Blake drained the beverage before going back to the master bedroom. She changed into her pajamas and then left the room to find a blanket with which to sleep since Georgia had taken all the bedding as well. Seeing the light on in her office, she walked over to see if Renee was getting ready for sleep. The nanny was just making the bed. She spared her boss a smile.

"I'm glad that you at least have sheets," Blake mentioned.

"Yeah. Where are you going to sleep, Blake?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'll sleep on the floor in Lana's room. She's got that area rug that's pretty comfortable."

"Do you want to stay in here with me? The bed is big enough for both of us."

"I don't want to impose."

"You aren't imposing. Sleep with me. It'll be better for your back than the floor."

"If you're sure."

Renee nodded. "Come on. Get in," she demanded lightly, patting the bed next to where she was. Blake did as she was told. Getting under the covers, she settled herself. Renee turned out the light and joined her. Neither spoke for a few minutes. However, the blonde finally broke the silence. "This has been quite the day."

"You're telling me."

"You and Georgia certainly had a knock-down, drag-out this morning."

"Yeah. I can't believe she slapped me."

"Well, in so many words you inferred that she was a whore and not a very good one. I would have been upset too."

The older woman shook her head. "I can't believe I said that. I didn't mean that at all. I was just so angry that she said she had earned all that she was getting. I thought I made lots of concessions in our marriage. I didn't think I was being selfish, but maybe I was."

"Don't even think that. It's obvious you gave Georgia everything she wanted."

"Obviously not. If I had she wouldn't have felt the need to run off in the first place. Well, I guess there is no point in talking about it now. It's over. She's gone."

"Why don't you just try to get some rest? We have a lot to do tomorrow, and I know you need to go to work at some point."

"Yeah. Good night, Renee."

"Night, Blake."

Sometime during the night Blake awoke with a startle. As her eyes came open, she felt Renee next to her stroking her arms soothingly. "Renee?" she whispered.

"Yeah? I'm here. You were having a bad dream. You were whimpering in your sleep."

"Oh. I was having a nightmare about the Klan. It's nothing. That happens sometimes but not often."

"The Klan? You mean like the Ku Klux Klan?"

"Yeah. When I first met Georgia, we got to be friends, and the Georgia Klan didn't take well to

that. They gay-bashed me one night, tried to kill me. Jack saved my life. I don't think about it much, but I guess I started dreaming about it, because I mentioned it to Georgia."

"What a terrible thing to endure. That was all because of Georgia?"

"Yeah."

"And you still married her?"

"I loved her, Renee. She was the first woman I ever loved that way, and as much as I struggled with what had happened, I continued to love her. She's the only one that has sparked a fire in my heart, a fire that hasn't gone out. I still love her, Renee."

"Then why all of this fighting?"

"She doesn't want to be with me any longer. I love her enough to let her go if that's what she wants. It's obvious she wants her own life, and she deserves to get what she wants. I guess I'm just having a hard time letting go, and in my hurt and anger, I've said things I can't retract. I didn't mean them, but they've been said, and I can't undo that. Today was the last straw. When she hit me, I knew it was really over," Blake whispered.

"It'll be all right. You'll see."

"Yeah. I hope so."

The following day Blake went to the office as usual, trying to focus on the one normal event in her life to keep her sane. That morning as she left the house she gave Renee strict instructions on what to do if Georgia came by wanting to spend time with the children and requested that her nanny spend some free time that day looking for some suitable furniture for the place, leaving her with the phone numbers of several influential designers that could take care of the attorney's needs on short notice.

Even though her heart was not into her work for once, Blake pressed on, hoping that she could find some small solace in her office. However, the only part of the day that gave her any real joy was when Torrance and Helen stopped by to take her to lunch, but even that was short-lived, for just as the threesome of about to get on the elevator to leave, the receptionist called out to the attorney.

"Blake, Governor Whitfield is on the phone for you. He says it's urgent."

"What's my dad doing calling you?" the photographer inquired lightly as Blake went to the phone sitting on a side table in the foyer. Blake just shrugged her shoulders as she picked it up.

"Thomas, to what do I owe this pleasure?" she greeted as friendly as she could while looking at

her two friends, who were staring at her curiously.

"Blake, I'm sorry to disturb you. I was actually looking for Torrance. I called the house, and the housekeeper said she and Helen were coming to see you. Neither one of them seems to have their cell phones on, and it's urgent that I speak to one of them right away. Are they there by chance?"

"Actually, they're both right here. Is something the matter?" she asked, sensing by the sound of his voice that something was awry.

"Please put Torrance on the phone then," he requested seriously.

"Certainly, Thomas," the attorney answered before extending the phone to her friend. "Tor, your dad wants to speak to you."

Taking the phone from Blake, Torrance inquired, "Dad, hi. What is it?"

"Torrance, I'm really sorry I had to track you down at Blake's, but something has happened. Your mother just got a call from Italy," he began, his voice cracking with emotion.

"What is it, Dad? What's happened?" she asked, automatically assuming the worst since she could hear her normally controlled father crying.

"Your grandfather, Torrance. He passed away just a little while ago."

"Nonno," the photographer whispered as tears immediately came to her eyes. She spared a look in her wife's direction. Helen sensed something was wrong as soon as she saw Torrance's face and moved to her, embracing her around the back.

"Apparently he said he wasn't feeling well and went to take a nap. Your grandmother wasn't able to wake him for supper. Your mother and I will be flying over as soon as possible. We were hoping to be down to New York to take the jet this evening. It would mean everything to your mother if you were on that plane with us, Torrance."

"Of course. Helen and I will go home straight away and start packing. We'll meet you at the airport tonight. What time?"

"Hopefully it will be by six. I still have a lot of things to rearrange here before leaving."

"All right. Call us as you're leaving then. We'll be ready. See you then," Torrance answered. When she put the phone back in its place, she didn't say anything at first. She simply cradled the back of Helen's fair head and brought it against her shoulder as she started to cry.

"What is it, Torrance?" the blonde softly inquired.

"Nonno died," she simply replied.

Blake came to the both of them and embraced them in her arms, holding her two friends as they cried together. The attorney felt saddened for their loss, because she knew just how much Torrance's grandfather meant to her friend. "Is there anything I can do?" she asked after several minutes.

The photographer shook her head and wiped her eyes vainly. "We have to cancel lunch today. I'm sorry."

Blake gave her a comforting smile. "It's fine. Go on. You need to get home to pack. Is there anything you need?"

"Thanks, Blake, but I think we should just get home," Helen stated.

The attorney nodded. "Well, let me know if there is something I can do. We'll do lunch whenever you get back."

The drive back to Helen and Torrance's house was fairly quiet between them. Helen drove since the brunette seemed to be in no condition to do anything other than weep. The blonde felt crushed at her wife's pain, because she knew there was really nothing she could do except be there for the older woman.

When they got back to their home, Helen took it upon herself to break the news to their children, knowing that Torrance needed some time alone to process the news before beginning to get John and Marta packed for the trip to Italy. Once that was complete, she went into the master bedroom where Torrance was. The photographer was silently packing her bags when she came into the room.

"How are you doing?" Helen asked coming to hug her.

"I'm okay," the brunette replied softly. "I'm just sad."

"I know, and that's okay. Nonno was in his nineties. He lived a long life."

Torrance nodded. "I know, and he died in his sleep. At least he didn't suffer at the end like so many people," she mentioned. "It's just hard to imagine that he's really gone."

The blonde nodded in understanding as she held her wife tighter. After a silent moment though, she stated, "The kids are already packed. I just need to get my things together and take a shower."

Torrance gave a nod. "That's fine. My parents haven't left Albany yet."

"Is there anything I can do to help you, honey? How about a nice relaxing shower with me? I could give you a back rub. Tell me what I can do to help you," the younger woman enticed wanting to be close to her lover but not knowing the best way to comfort the taller woman. "Come on. Why don't you get out of these clothes? You shouldn't travel in this suit," she

mentioned gently beginning to unbutton Torrance's pressed blue shirt.

Torrance willingly allowed Helen to undress her. Her wife's small hands felt soothing to her as they caressed her back lovingly once her shirt had been removed. The photographer let the blonde work open her slacks and push them to the floor before meeting green eyes. Bringing a hand up to her wife's face, she cupped her cheek softly. "I love you, Helen. Thank you for being here," she whispered.

"I love you too, Torrance. You mean the world to me. Come on. Let me give you a hand in the shower." Helen led her lover by the hand into their master bathroom and proceeded to start the water, fixing it at the perfect temperature before shedding her own clothes.

Torrance just watched as the former model's frame came into view. In the eight years they had known each other, the photographer's body still reacted to the sight of her angel as if it were the first time, in utter awe and adoration. As Helen stepped out of her slacks, she winced as pain shot through her midsection, but she tried not to show it to her wife. However, she knew she had failed when she felt a gentle hand come to rest tentatively on her stomach. "Are you all right?" Torrance questioned in concern.

Knowing that she could never hide the truth from the woman she loved, Helen's green eyes grew watery. "I'll be fine. It just hurts still."

Hearing her beloved struggling, the photographer felt pain grip her heart even more. "I'm sorry, ma cherie. Here I am thinking of only myself. I should be stronger for you."

The blonde shook her head in disagreement. "We need to be strong for each other, my love. We'll get through this the way we always have," she answered taking Torrance by the hand and pulling her into the shower.

They stood embrace in silence letting the warm water cascade over them, taking in the feel of each other. Lovingly their hands moved over the planes of each other's bodies, caressing in a consoling manner in an effort to draw them closer emotionally. Neither spoke for a long time, but words weren't needed either. Just as it had been a few days previously, everything was understood in the stillness that surrounded them.

Later that night as they flew over the Atlantic Ocean, Helen entertained the children with a book but kept her eyes closely on her wife. Torrance sat next to her mother and father. Thomas Whitfield sat stoically pretending to read some papers he had pulled from his briefcase, but Helen knew by the fact he had been on the same page for over an hour his mind was elsewhere. Maria Whitfield looked out the window into the darkness, and Torrance simply sat with a hand on her mother's arm. The only sound in the cabin was Helen's voice as she spun the tale of the book she was holding for her two sleepy children. When the book was complete, the blonde moved her son and daughter to the sleeping compartment, so they could sleep before taking her own chair again to resume her vigil over the photographer.

Within just a few minutes, green eyes met. Silently Torrance relinquished her mother and stood.

Knowing that she didn't even have to motion for the blonde to follow, she made her way back to the king-sized bed where her children resided and laid down on the other side. Immediately Helen was next to her before she could even settle herself. The two of them laid in the quietness, both watching their children sleep and mourning at the loss of Torrance's beloved grandfather.

Once they arrived in Italy, the family driver was there to retrieve them from the airport and take them back to the house. The rest of the family had already managed to arrive before them, making the house a flurry of commotion when they got there. However, when Torrance found out what room their grandmother expected them to stay in, she knew that even in her sorrow, the older woman still remembered the smallest details of her grandchildren's lives.

Going upstairs Torrance and Helen dropped their kids' bags off in the room next to their own before going into their quarters. Helen couldn't help but crack a hint of a smile when she saw the balcony doors already opened for them. "It's been a long time since we've slept in here," she mentioned.

Torrance nodded. "So it has. Eight years," she mumbled placing her suitcases down at the foot of the bed.

"Nonna remembers everything, doesn't she? Even the meaning of this room." The photographer nodded. "However, sharing this bed with you will be much different than it was eight summers ago," she whispered, putting her arms around the woman she loved.

Giving a small smile of her own, Torrance gently teased, "You mean you won't run away from me after I give you the world's best orgasm?"

Helen flushed lightly at the mention of their first encounter in the bed just a few feet from them. "No running away. I promise," she whispered.

Instinctively they leaned to kiss each other softly, forgetting for a few moments the reason they were there and instead enjoying the closeness and privacy. Finally Torrance pulled back slightly and stated, "We should get downstairs. I need to be with the family."

Helen nodded in agreement and took hold of her wife's hand to guide them back downstairs. Going into the living room, they found their children playing with Thomas quietly while Maria and her mother sat on the sofa with other relatives simply reminiscing about Torrance's grandfather. Both women took a seat on the floor near their kids but listened attentively to the conversation going on around them. Even though there was much chatter among the family, the solemnity was thick in the room.

Torrance took a moment to study her grandmother from her position on the floor. The elder woman sat holding hands with her daughter, and she had a vacancy in her eyes. The photographer could not even fathom what she could possibly be feeling at the moment, for she knew she would not be able to go on if she lost her beloved Helen, and they had only been married for five years. To lose someone after more than seventy years of marriage had to have been devastating.

The rest of the day passed quietly. With the service scheduled for the following morning, Torrance and Helen wanted to make sure John and Marta were well-rested, so the four of them retired early after the evening meal. Both women took care of getting their baths and putting them in pajamas before settling them in their room. Torrance took the liberty of playing a quiet game with them while Helen unpacked the children's suitcases and prepared their outfits for the next day. When the blonde was finished with her task, she joined the game in progress, and the four of them spent the rest of the night alone together until it was time for John and Marta to go to sleep.

Once they had been settled for the night, the blonde and brunette returned to their own room that adjoined their children's. Both of them started to unpack their things as well, hanging their clothes for the service in the closet in hopes of the wrinkles working themselves out before the morning. The photographer then put the rest of her belongings in the dresser. Helen followed suit in quietness until both were finished.

Helen could tell just in her wife's mannerisms that she was not up for conversation, even with her, but she also knew instinctively that the taller woman wanted her company. Following the older woman out onto the balcony, she took a seat next to her. They didn't exchange a word as Torrance pretended to read a book and Helen presumed to admire the view. However, the smaller woman could tell by the slow speed of her lover's reading that Torrance's mind was elsewhere. In an effort to help alleviate the restlessness she knew Torrance was feeling, Helen stood and moved behind the older woman. Without a word she began to gently rub the hard shoulders under her hands. The photographer moaned lightly in appreciation at the act but still didn't speak. Helen continued for a few minutes, running her hands up her beloved's neck into her brown, graying hair. Torrance whimpered again as petite hands started massaging her scalp.

Finally not able to stand the affection any longer without saying something, the older woman whispered, "That feels so good, honey."

Helen smiled to herself and leaned to her lover's ear. Kissing the rim of it lightly, she answered, "Good. That's what I'm here for, Torrance. I want to do anything I can to help you."

The photographer let out a low chuckle. "Well, I'll tell you that if you keep doing that, I might be in need for some other kind of attention."

Helen smiled again and kissed Torrance's ear once more. Breathlessly she mumbled, "That certainly would be a nice diversion."

"Do you feel up to it though?" the older woman inquired as she felt her wife slipping her reading glasses from her face.

Green eyes met green for a moment. Helen sighed regretfully. "I wish I was, baby, but I don't think I can."

Torrance gave her a sympathetic gaze as she cupped her angel's face. "It's okay. I understand.

We don't have to. I don't want to put you in any more pain than you already are, Helen."

The former teacher moved to sit on her wife's lap. She merely gazed into the photographer's eyes a moment before she smirked sexily. "I have another idea," she mentioned. "Be right back."

Torrance wondered where her lover was going, but a few minutes later, Helen returned with something in her hand. Looking at it, the photographer immediately knew what the blonde had in mind. The younger woman came and knelt between her wife's legs. "Helen, you don't have to if you don't feel up to it," the older woman mentioned hesitantly.

Giving Torrance a reassuring grin, Helen answered, "It would bring me as much pleasure as it would you to do this, Torrance. You know that."

"Then do what you will. You know I'm always grateful of your attentions."

Knowing that she had her companion's consent, Helen reached for the taller woman's belt and opened it slowly. Instantly Torrance's breathing hitched in anticipation as small fingers unzipped her pants. Helen pulled her wife's shirt out of her slacks and began to unbutton it leisurely, kissing every piece of skin that came into view. When that was complete, her attentions went back to the photographer's pants. Torrance assisted the process a little by lifting her hips enough for Helen to pull them down to her knees. The green-eyed blonde gently raised the photographer's legs. Torrance followed the silent instruction, bracing herself with her feet on the balcony railing as Helen's head neared its destination.

Torrance groaned as she felt the blonde kiss her inner thigh. With them focusing on trying to impregnate Helen, it wasn't often that Torrance got to feel her wife's mouth on her body this way. Instinctively her hands found perch in fair hair as the former model's mouth neared its goal. As soon as Helen's tongue reached her, the photographer seemed to forget about everything else as the feeling of her beloved bestowing her touch took Torrance immediately to the edge. She became vaguely aware of the toy her wife had brought from home slipping inside of her, but in an unexpected turn of pleasure, Helen began to use her mouth on the double-ended phallus. Quickly Torrance found the precipice again. However, after descending from it, Helen went back to just gently pumping it in and out and a slow pace.

"Torrance," she whispered as she kissed up to her lover's stomach.

"What?" the older woman breathlessly inquired, wondering why her wife got a sudden urge to speak during their activity.

"May I ask you something?" she muttered as her tongue dipped into the brunette's navel as the phallus once again entered the older woman.

"Anything, Helen. What is it?" she asked, barely able to concentrate on anything but the feeling the blonde was creating.

"What if I told you I wanted to do something truly naughty to you with this dildo. What would

you say?"

Opening her green eyes, Torrance cast a curious glance at her wife. Seeing the amorous glint in the eyes she adored, the taller woman answered, "I'd say you could do anything you wanted to me. Exactly what did you have in mind?" she playfully inquired.

Helen didn't answer the question. Instead she dipped her head again to feast upon the brunette. Torrance's eyes rolled shut as she felt the phallus being removed and her wife's manicured fingers taking its place. She moaned, first in satisfaction but then in loss when she felt them leave her body. However, within only a moment, they were back again, touching the one place on her body that the blonde had never explored. Torrance jumped in surprise at the feeling of the blonde's finger at her other entrance. Meeting the former teacher's gaze, they just looked at each other a moment.

"Is this okay?" hesitantly Helen queried.

"Of course. I'm just surprised. If this is what you want, you can have it. You know I'd give you anything. You don't even have to ask," the older woman replied.

"Have you ever done this?" Helen inquired inquisitively.

"No. Have you?"

"No, never," the shorter woman stated.

Cracking a smile, the photographer joked, "Oh goody. Looks like we get to lose our virginity to each other after all. Are you going to let me do it to you if I let you do it to me?"

"If you want to. We just have to wait until I'm feeling better."

Torrance nodded in understanding. "Well, then. What are you waiting for?" the older woman questioned, guiding her wife's head down between her legs again.

With the decision made, Helen went back to her task. Even though Torrance was slightly anxious about her lover's request, she was determined to give Helen all of herself, no matter what it included. Knowing what Helen had in mind, Torrance tried to relax her body to accommodate her lover's wishes. When the moment was at hand, the photographer simply allowed Helen the latitude to do as she desired, and with that relinquishment came a surprising pleasure she had never known about until in the arms of her dearest love.

When it appeared the brunette could take no more, Helen slowly pulled out of her lover. Torrance only sighed in contentment and reached for the blonde, cradling her head into her stomach. For a moment there was only breathing, but then the blonde heard quiet weeping. Looking up at her wife, Helen asked softly, "Are you all right? Did I hurt you?"

Torrance shook her head. "No. I just--you are the love of my life, Helen. I don't know what I

would ever do if I lost you," she said.

"You're never going to lose me. I'll always be here."

The older woman shook her head. "That's not true. We all have a time. Nonno had a time, and look at Nonna. She's devastated," she cried.

"Torrance, my love, it's true we all have a time. Death is a part of life. I can't help that any more than you. However, you will have my love until the moment we cease to be. As painful as it is for Nonna now, I know that she would not have wanted to miss out on the last seventy years with Nonno. Every moment of happiness far outweighs what she's feeling now. It will take time for her to realize that Nonno is still here with us. He now just lives in our hearts instead of our lives."

"She spent virtually her entire life with him. He was her life as she was his. I want that. I want to spend my life with you."

"We will, Torrance. We'll always be together."

"Regardless of what happens?" the older woman inquired.

Helen looked up at the woman she loved. "No matter what happens we'll always have each other." Silence ensued for several more minutes before the blonde mentioned, "It's getting late, and we have to be up early tomorrow. Perhaps we should get to bed."

The taller woman nodded in agreement. Helen stood and offered her hands to Torrance in assistance. The brunette chuckled lightly as her wife pulled her to her feet. "I sure hope none of my family heard us out here," she stated as she reached down to retrieve her slacks that were around her ankles.

"Even if they did, don't you want them to know that I treat you well?" the shorter woman teased.

"They already know that. They don't have to hear me screaming your name in the throes of sex to know it," the photographer bantered, wrapping her arms around her lover. Together they moved into their bedroom and prepared for bed, knowing that the next day would be rough emotionally for the both of them.

The next day the entire family was up for an early breakfast and then attended the service for the man they had all admired. Torrance was not surprised that many people from the village were in attendance as well as guests from across the country. Being that her grandfather had been an influential businessman in the community, it only made sense for his service to be full of mourners.

However, once the service was over and all the cordial visitation with guests had been attended to by the family, they were all left with their thoughts. Torrance needed the solitude to grieve after being surrounded by people, so while Helen put their kids down for their naps, she took a

walk to her favorite place in the vineyard to contemplate the events of the last several days.

Taking a seat at the base of the middle of the three crosses that sat on a small hill at the far side of the grove, the photographer thought about her father's father and him leaving the earth in the very spot she now occupied. Then her thoughts shifted to Nonno. Her eyes filled with tears at the thought of him being gone. With her other grandfather, she had expected it, because he had been ill for such an extended time. However, with Nonno it was different. She never thought when she had seen him the last time that she would never see him again, and she felt empty that she had not been able to tell him good bye.

She thought of the last hug he ever gave her, his strong arms around her shoulders just as she, Helen, and their kids were about to get on a plane and head back to the States. Looking in his eyes then, Torrance had never once thought it would be the last time. Had she known, she would have spent more time looking into his eyes and studying the curves of his face to burn them into her soul for safekeeping. As it was, the image of him standing at the terminal with her grandmother wishing them a safe journey home haunted her at the moment, because she had been too concerned with her own children who had been dawdling to take the time with him, and he was now gone.

Closing her eyes, she allowed the emotions to overcome her as she wept into a lightly sleep. She only awoke much later when a shadow was cast over her frame, blocking the sunlight from her face. Disoriented, she looked up toward the intruder on her privacy. Her eyes traveled up thin jean-encased legs past a white cotton blouse to the fair hair and green eyes of her wife. Helen was looking down on her in concern.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you. It's just that you've been out here for hours, so I thought I should check on you," the blonde said, squatting so she was eye-level with her companion.

Torrance took a moment to wake as she gazed at the beauty before her. "I just needed some time alone," she mumbled, stretching her tall frame.

"I understand. Are you ready to come back to the house?"

"Not yet," the older woman replied, reaching for the blonde's hands. She brought Helen down into her lap. Nuzzling the fair hair, she whispered, "Thank you for being here."

"Anything for you. You know that."

Torrance nodded. Not wanting to talk about her grandfather at the moment though, she idly surveyed the blonde's clothes. "Since when do you wear jeans?" she asked casually.

The smaller woman shrugged. "I just felt like buying a pair when I went shopping with Sarah and Renee. Do you not like them?"

"Are you kidding me? I think they are just about the sexiest thing I've ever seen on you," Torrance growled playfully as her hands roamed over the clothing of discussion. "In fact it

makes me want what I know is hiding behind the seam of those jeans," she mentioned as her right hand came to rest between her wife's thighs.

Helen sighed. "I wish I could give you that right now, Torrance," she said with regret.

"I know, but it's okay. I want you to fully recover first. I wouldn't dream of putting you in more pain just to satisfy my desires at the moment. You know I'll wait forever if I have to."

"That's why I love you so much."

"I love you too, Helen."

A moment passed before the blonde whispered, "You know, I'm really sorry about what happened concerning the baby."

"It's not your fault, honey. There was nothing you could have done."

Helen shook her head. "Sometimes I wonder. I got so distraught when I thought you and Georgia had been intimate that I wonder if I did something that caused this to happen," she confessed as she began to cry.

"Don't even think that, darling. Women have miscarriages all the time. I know that doesn't make it easier, but this kind of thing does happen for reasons people can't explain. You didn't cause this. Nothing you could have done would have ever caused this to happen. I know for a fact that regardless of what you thought might have happened, you would have still given that baby your top priority. That's the kind of woman you are, Helen, and I love you for it. Believe me when I tell you that this was not your fault in any way."

"I want to desperately, Torrance," she replied.

After several minutes, Helen's tears slowed, and the conversation resumed. "Helen, I'm beginning to wonder with all our difficulties in conceiving that we might not be meant to have a third child. I mean, have you thought about that at all?"

The blonde nodded. "I think about it all the time, but, Torrance, I want to have another baby."

"Why? I mean, I don't need another child to feel fulfilled. Is this something you truly need?"

"I don't know if you could ever truly understand what is in my heart, Torrance. All I can say is that I long for another child. The need I have to carry another baby that we brought into this world out of our love consumes me. It's a gift I want to give you, and I would do anything to make that happen. The window is beginning to close for us, Torrance. I'm thirty-five, and even though I know women can have children in their forties, I want one now. I don't want to wait another five or ten years. I want our children to be close in age, the way I am with my brother and sister. This is the only time we have, and I want to seize it."

Torrance nodded. "All right. We'll keep trying if it is something you truly want."

"I do."

"Fine. Maybe we should consider some other method of conception though. Things aren't going as smoothly as they have in the past."

"This is the way I prefer, but at this point I am a little frustrated with things as well," the younger woman mentioned.

"Then perhaps we should go back to the fertility clinic we've been using and see what else is available to us," the photographer suggested.

Conceding to the idea, Helen answered, "Maybe we should."

Pulling her wife closer into her arms, Torrance said, "I won't give up on this dream if you don't, but let's be realistic about when it might be time to stop if we see things aren't working. I want to do this for you, Helen, but I don't want to spend the next five or ten years trying for something that might not happen. I want you back, baby. I don't want every time we make love as a chance to conceive. I'd really like to just make love to you, because the need strikes me. That's what I'm missing most about this endeavor, the opportunity to just be close to you. It seems like you are so focused on the conception of this child that it means everything. I know you don't truly feel that way, but there are moments when it seems like it. Just give me a date, Helen, and we'll stick to it, whatever it is."

Helen could hear in her lover's voice that Torrance was going along with what she wanted out of her love, but she could also hear the doubts lining the photographer's tone. Knowing that it was only fair to the brunette to give them a timetable, the blonde nodded. "All right, Torrance. Just give it one more year. If we aren't pregnant again by this time next year, let's reconsider other avenues. There are other ways of bringing a child into our lives, but this is the one I really want. However, I understand how you feel. I've been going out of my way to try to be available for those spontaneous moments of passion, but I guess I am getting caught up in trying to get pregnant again. I guess in some way I'll feel like I've failed if we can't conceive again."

"Never, Helen. You're an absolutely perfect woman in my eyes. You could never fail me or our love. That's just never going to happen. Let's just relax. We'll keep trying, and if it works, then I'll feel blessed that it did. If it doesn't, I'll still feel blessed that I have you and the children."

Back in Manhattan Blake was doing her best to keep what little life she had left together. Georgia was adamant in her pursuit of the children, so within days she was served papers to appear in court for a child custody suit. Knowing that she could no longer keep the situation from the rest of her fellow co-workers, she asked her prized junior attorney, Jeff Delgatto, to serve as her counsel on that matter since he had secretly served in that capacity for the discreet divorce papers Blake has requested.

When the day came for their appearance, both he and Blake put on a strong front, even though secretly the older woman was barely keeping her sanity after losing the woman she loved and the threat of having her children taken from her. Walking into the courthouse, Blake immediately saw Georgia sitting with her mother, Jack, and her own attorney on the far side of the lobby. The kids saw her as well and took off in her direction, screaming happily as she gave them her best smile.

Kneeling down, the little blonde embraced both of her children as they got to her. Looking over their heads, she saw Blake standing there stoically with Jeff and Renee close behind her. However, she didn't bother to greet the attorney. Instead she looked at Lana and Luke and asked them how they were.

The older woman just watched, hurt. She hated the fact that it had come to this with the southern beauty. She still loved Georgia desperately. Her thoughts were interrupted by Jack coming to her. He extended his hand. "How are you, Yankee?" he asked.

Blake shook his hand. Even though he was Georgia's ex-husband, they were still business partners at the restaurant. "I've been better, Jack. How are you? How's Vincent?"

"Vincent's fine. I, on the other hand, am extremely distressed over what's happenin' between you and Georgia."

"You're not the only one, Jack."

"Look, Yankee, I owe you my life. I've never forgotten that, but you're hurtin' Georgia, and I won't stand for it. I don't care if we are partners."

"She's doing her fair share of hurting me, Jack. This is a two-way street. I know you have to do what you think is best, and I don't hold it against you. You can be mad at me privately all you want, but let's just make sure this doesn't affect business. That's all I really care about right now. According to our prenup, Georgia's lost all her rights to the restaurant, so you and Cindy just have to deal with me as the major shareholder. I own more than fifty percent of the place, so the three of us are just going to have to work it out."

Jack nodded. "I am mad at you, Blake. You shouldn't have done this, but you have my word on the restaurant. I'm not goin' to sink it intentionally as long as you don't. By the way, when Cindy found you in bed with your nanny, she asked me to buy her out. She don't want nothin' to do with you, Blake, so it's just you and me fightin' it out. Personally I think you should sell out to me now. You always said you'd sell me your shares when the time came. That time is now."

Blake shook her head. "I don't have time for this now, Jack. Besides, how do you plan on affording that proposition?"

"Vincent and I have the means. I want your shares, Yankee. Just think 'bout it."

Dismissing the idea with a wave of her hand, she mumbled, "Fine. I'll think about it. Now if that's all, I have more pressing matters." Jack nodded and started to step away, but Blake took him by the arm. "Tell me one thing, Jack. How's Georgia doing with this?"

Both of them looked toward the woman of conversation. The writer looked tired under all the pretense for the children. "Why do you care? You're the one that asked for the divorce. If you're that curious, why don't you ask her? It's not my place to discuss it."

When her business partner made her way back to her ex-wife, Blake turned to go where Jeff and Renee had taken seats. Dropping onto the bench, Blake sighed. Seeing the younger woman with her children made her want to cry. The sight of it was so beautiful and tragic, especially since she knew that woman was no longer hers. She had been the one to initiate the divorce, and Georgia had not contested it, meaning that it truly was over between them. Since Jeff had filed the papers on the brunette's behalf, their marriage no longer existed, but much to Blake's heartache, her love for Georgia still did.

When their case was finally called to be heard, Blake and Georgia both went into the courtroom with their respective attorneys, leaving their children in the care of Renee, Jack, and their grandmother in the lobby. Neither wanted Luke and Lana to be present for the ugliness that was sure to ensue on their behalf behind the large oak doors. Heading directly to their table, Blake and Jeff sat huddled closely together, going over last minute preparations.

Georgia just watched the display. Inwardly she feared that Blake was going to be unmerciful to her in such a public setting, but she knew she had to remain strong for the children she loved. Even though she and the attorney couldn't work out their problems, she knew she had to have a life with her kids, so she resolved to take any action necessary to do so.

When the judge entered all four of them rose respectfully before taking seats again. Since Georgia had filed the suit, her attorney was allowed to make the first statement. The taller woman listened attentively as her ex-wife's attorney verbal assaulted her abilities to be a suitable parent for Lana and Luke. However, instead of showing any outward reaction, she merely gazed over at the woman across the room from her. Georgia's head was hung low, a far difference from the feisty woman Blake knew.

As the younger woman's representation closed his open argument, Jeff stood and buttoned his suit jacket. Moving around the front of the desk where Blake was sitting, he launched into his own prepared speech of how Georgia had ruined their marriage and reasons for not giving custody to the writer. As Blake listened to Jeff drone on about the blonde's faults, she began to feel remorse for taking the course of action she had set Jeff upon. It had been her idea to demoralize her ex-wife's character in an attempt of winning the suit, but as she sat listening to Jeff spinning a picture of the worst side of the woman she loved, she felt her heart breaking.

Before she could stop herself, she rose from her chair and stated, "Excuse me, your honor."

Immediately Jeff stopped speaking and turned toward her in confusion. "Blake, what are you doing?" he inquired.

"I'm sorry, Jeff. I have to do this," she said. Looking at the judge, she continued, "Your honor, if I could, I would like to say something."

"By all means, Counselor Erwin, speak," the judge, whom Blake knew well professionally responded.

"Your honor, Georgia Erwin abandoned her children. She left them for several months without so much as phone calls to check up on them. However, just as her counsel as stated, I too abandoned them. I worked longer hours than necessary consistently. I made my professional career the top priority in life, and when my wife tried to do the same, it ended with us divorced. Now we can't repair our relationship. It's too late for us. However, as I was sitting in the lobby waiting for our hearing, I realized I don't want the same thing to happen to our kids. Luke and Lana need Georgia in their life as much as they need me. They are our children. We are their parents, jointly. I'm prepared to accept joint custody of the children with Georgia with a few conditions. If it is satisfactory to her counsel, I would like to settle this out of court with a moderator if possible."

The judge looked over to Georgia and questioned, "Ms. Erwin, would you and your counsel like to take Counselor Erwin's proposition?"

Georgia met Blake's eyes for a moment as she contemplated the offer. She could hear her attorney whispering something into her ear, but she didn't heed it. All that she could focus on was Blake's eyes as they bored into hers. After a moment she turned to her attorney and gave a response. Blake could tell that Georgia's attorney disagreed with whatever Georgia had stated but turned and stood before the judge.

With defeat evident in his voice, the writer's attorney answered, "Ms. Erwin will accept the proposition of a moderator."

"Wonderful. Then please adjourn to the conference room. The bailiff will escort you. I will have a moderator sent in directly. Attorneys, wait in the lobby until you are needed again."

Silently Georgia and Blake followed the bailiff to the conference room. As instructed, Jeff and Georgia's counsel were forced to wait outside the room. When the bailiff closed the door, Blake waited for Georgia to sit before doing so herself, choosing a spot across from her. Neither spoke as they waited. However, every once in awhile they snuck glances at each other.

Finally when the younger woman couldn't control her curiosity any longer she looked at her ex. "Why are you doing this, Blake?" she questioned coolly.

"Because it's right for the children," she replied shortly.

A few minutes later the moderator arrived and introduced herself before taking a seat at the end of the table. After she was settled, she asked, "Very well. Who would like to speak first?"

"It was your idea, Blake. You talk," Georgia stated distantly.

"Fine. I propose joint custody for us, and I only have one non-negotiable demand. I don't want the children taken out of the state without my acknowledgment and consent. In order to get that, I demand a full itinerary of where they are going and when they are to return. I must agree to the terms of the travel before it can take place. You might want to skip town again, Georgia, but I don't want you doing it with the children in tow."

The moderator looked at the blonde. "Georgia, what about you? Are there any terms you have that would be non-negotiable?"

"As a matter of fact, there are. I also have one demand. Blake, you have to fire Renee, and she must vacate the premises in a reasonable amount of time. I don't want her 'round the children. If you will do that, we will choose a nanny together that will be with the kids as they travel back and forth between us."

Blake pondered the request for a few moments before answering, "Fine. Renee's gone if you agree to my terms."

"Fine, Blake. However, I want you to know now that I fully intend to take them to New Orleans. I am going to make that my primary residence, so the children will travel there often."

As much as Blake didn't want to agree to letting the children go down there, she knew to disagree would be harmful to their mediation. "The nanny will be with them the entire time. They will travel with the kids regardless of where they go, and they are not allowed to leave New York until we agree on who will fill the duty. Not only that, I don't want them gone for more than one week at a time."

"Two weeks at a time," Georgia bartered.

Blake thought about it a moment. "The children will be schooled in New York and only here. They will not be taken out of school early or start school late for travel. As far as breaks, they can be in New Orleans for up to two weeks at a time. We alternate holidays. During the school year, they are free to stay with you at your residence in New York for your allotted time. No going to New Orleans during the school year unless it's on a break."

It was Georgia's turn to mull over the proposition. Knowing the potential that Blake had to turn things atrocious, she figured that the attorney was being quite generous in her offer. Deciding to give into the demands set forth, she nodded her head. "Fine. I'm fine with all of that."

Within an hour they moved back into the courtroom with their attorney's after the mediation. With the moderator standing between both parties, she announced the terms of the agreement to the judge. He nodded attentively before addressing the group. "Since both of you have agreed to the terms set forth, I order that they be put into effect immediately. A formal agreement will be written for you to sign later, but as of now you all will work under the written agreement you came up with and signed under witness of this moderator. Case dismissed."

As soon as the judge had left chambers, Blake quickly made her way out into the lobby. Her kids greeted her with hugs. Georgia was close behind and received the same greeting. "All right, Lana and Luke, you two are going with your Mama for the rest of the day. Say good bye to Renee and Jeff." Both three-year-olds did as they were told. Looking at the writer, Blake said, "When can I expect them home?"

"If it's all right with you, I'd like to keep them tonight," Georgia requested civilly. "After all, it's been so long since I've been with them."

"Fine. You'll be at your mother's?"

"Yes. I'll bring them back tomorrow evenin'." With a nod Blake knelt and hugged her kids again before heading out of the building.

Jeff hailed a cab to go back to the office, and Blake and Renee did the same to head home. Once they were in the backseat, the blonde inquired, "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Yes, we need to but not here. We'll talk at home," she mumbled looking out the window. Silence ensued for the rest of the drive. Going up into the loft, Blake went into her bedroom to change. By the time she had returned, Renee was setting lunch on the table for the two of them. Graciously the attorney thanked her nanny before taking a seat.

"So, tell me. I can tell you're upset," Renee said, trying to get right to the point.

"I am, Renee. There's something I have to tell you, but it pains me to do so."

"Just tell me, Blake. Whatever it is, I'm sure it isn't that bad. Did you and Georgia come to an amiable agreement?"

"We came to an agreement, but it cost me something in return."

"Which was?"

"You," plainly the older woman answered, looking at the nanny for the first time since she'd taken her seat. "I'm sorry, Renee, but according to the terms of our custody agreement, I'm required to terminate you. Georgia has asked that we find a new nanny, one that we both agree upon. I am required to fire you and ask that you vacate your room within a month," she commented.

"Oh," Renee mumbled quietly. Neither said anything for a moment. However, then the young blonde shrugged, saying, "I understand why you have to do it, Blake. I know Georgia doesn't like me. She never did. Actually, when I first met her, I thought she would have demanded you do this sooner. I knew she wouldn't allow me to be here past my probationary period if she had a say in it. She and I just don't mix well."

"I'm sorry, Renee. You know, you are the hardest person I've ever had to fire. This goes beyond business. This is a personal vendetta that Georgia has against you. Nevertheless, I had to agree to it to get the terms I wanted. Effective immediately you are released of your duties. I will give you a generous compensation package and glowing recommendation to anyone that you ask me to. That's all I can do at this point."

The twenty-five-year-old nodded. "Thank you for that much, Blake. Now I have to tell you something. Because I knew how Georgia felt about me, I had already started looking for a new position, and I have a few leads. I would like to take you up on the offer of recommendations."

"Certainly. Whatever you need."

Giving the graying brunette a smile, Renee said, "Blake, don't feel bad about this. I'll be fine."

"I'll try," the attorney conceded.

The rest of the day Blake did work at home. That night Renee convinced her that they should go out and take advantage of the opportunity of being without the kids, so they went to the younger woman's favorite place for dinner before returning to the apartment upon which Blake immediately retired to her room. Getting into her pajamas, she slid into bed with a book and her reading glasses. However, she stared blankly at the pages as she thought of the day. For the first time since she had petitioned for a divorce, the attorney felt the true finality.

The life she had known for the last four years was gone. Her Georgia, the woman who made her feel so much, was no longer a fixture in her life. It had all happened so quickly that she barely had time to process it. Closing her eyes, she let her mind wander over the life she had been so quick to abandon. Suddenly a knock on her closed door broke her musings.

Renee poked her head into the room and gave a small smile. "You feel like company?" she questioned softly.

"Yeah, sure," Blake answered. She watched as the younger woman moved into the room. Renee was dressed in a short robe, but the brunette couldn't tell what was underneath it.

Tentatively the blonde took a seat on the bed facing the older woman. "How are you holding up?"

The taller woman shrugged. "It's strange not to have them here. It's too quiet."

The nanny nodded. "Well, I'm sure it's only a matter of getting used to it. It seems that the two of you came to a real compromise today. That's the best you two have acted with each other in awhile. What brought that on?"

"I just saw them with her today and realized I'd only be hurting them to take her away. They love her, and I want what's best for them. As much as I don't like it, I know this is what's best."

"That's a very mature approach to take, especially after all that's happened."

"I suppose it is," the taller woman muttered.

"Blake, I'm proud that you could put your hurt aside for the good of your kids. It just proves what a wonderful parent you really are. I hope someday to have a spouse just like you," she teased.

Blake smiled ruefully. "I'm not exactly a good example of what a spouse should be," she whispered. "After all, I did hire the youngest and hottest nanny I could find intentionally to get under my wife's skin. I accomplished that with disastrous results. Instead of luring her back, I ended up here."

"Do you think that this might be for the best? I mean both of you finally get what matters to you. You both get to have the careers you wanted and the kids. As much as you care for your family, it's obvious your job is your first love."

Blake shook her head. "I always thought I'd be miserable at this. I'm just not meant to be married I suppose. Commitment has never been a strong point for me. I guess that showed throughout my marriage to Georgia. I didn't commit my time to her that she felt she deserved." Blake paused a moment as if to ponder that comment before shaking her head. "Doesn't matter now. It's over. Enough about what should've been. Want to watch a movie?"

"Sure. That sounds good," Renee answered going to the other side of the bed. Unceremoniously she took off her robe revealing a short black chemise that barely covered her body before slipping into bed next to the attorney.

The older woman tried to ignore the fact that the woman who she had always found attractive and who was no longer under her employment was now lounging scantily clad in her bed. From numerous conversations, Blake knew how the little blonde felt about her, so she wondered if this was a ploy for them to be intimate. Nevertheless, she decided she was just not ready to pursue something like that with Renee and focused on the TV.

A few hours later the brunette yawned sleepily. Her ex-nanny had already fallen asleep next to her, so she quietly turned off the television and settled down on her own side of the bed. Clicking off the light, she sighed as she thought once again about the day. She wondered what Georgia was doing at the moment. She imagined her asleep in bed, her golden hair strewn around her and the covers molding to her form. Blake wished that she could be there with her, holding and protecting the woman she still loved in the darkness of night.

The following morning the attorney awoke to the sound of Renee's voice. Sleepily she opened her eyes and looked up at the twenty-five-year-old standing over her wearing a pretty smile and holding a tray. "Morning, sleepyhead. Time to rise and shine," she said, sitting the tray down on the bed next to Blake.

"What's this for?" the older woman inquired.

"You have to eat breakfast, Blake. You have a busy day ahead of you. You need energy," Renee answered, pouring cream into the attorney's coffee cup.

"Uh, did you forget that I fired you yesterday?" she teased. "You didn't have to make me breakfast."

The petite woman smiled at the attorney. "This is because I wanted to, Blake," she said cupping the side of the taller woman's face. Leaning in she kissed Blake softly on the lips. "Now be good and eat it."

"Hey. Wait. What about you?" Blake asked, clutching to the sash holding Renee's robe closed as she started to pull away. The movement caused the knot to untie and the folds fall open, exposing the skimpy lingerie underneath to the older woman's gaze.

Gamely, her former employee placed one knee up on the bed and leaned toward her slightly again, showing off a toned thigh and the expanse of her fair breasts. "I'm not eating that, Blake. That's not the kind of meal I like for breakfast. Now can I get you anything else to eat?" she whispered sexily.

Blake knew exactly what Renee was really asking. The blonde looked tempting that morning, and for the first time the older woman considered going through with what the blonde had obviously always wanted. Testing the waters, the brunette placed her hand on the younger woman's exposed thigh. Renee didn't respond at first, but Blake felt the skin under her hand warm to her touch.

"Sit with me, Renee, for a little while I eat this wonderful meal," she stated, her other hand moving to the blonde's opposite hip and maneuvering her all the way onto the bed. Compliantly the younger woman followed the direction and quickly sat straddled across the taller woman's waist. Blake smiled at her and reached for a piece of bacon off her plate. Taking a large bite into her mouth, she held the other part up for Renee, who took a bite as well. For the next few minutes the attorney ate her meal and leisurely fed her counterpart some as well, all the while with one hand perched on the blonde's hip, idly rubbing the satin material under her fingers. The process continued on until the plate was cleaned. "That was fabulous, Renee. Thank you," she complimented.

"You're welcome, Blake. How about some dessert now?" she inquired leaning closer and letting breath fan over the attorney's face.

Blake chuckled lowly as both her hands found their way under the short chemise Renee was wearing to her bare backside. She squeezed lightly eliciting a sexy moan from the younger woman. "And exactly what kind of dessert is on offer, Miss Summers?" she questioned as she ducked her head into the blonde's neck.

Renee cried out lightly as the attorney's mouth attached to her and began to suck with persistence. "Anything you want, Blake," she managed to reply.

"In that case," the older woman mumbled. Her hands left their spot and went to the robe Renee was wearing and slid it off the smaller woman. Immediately the smaller woman started to remove the rest of her own clothing, but Blake protested, pulling the chemise back into place. "No. Leave that on for now. It's so sexy on you," she whispered as their mouths locked together sensuously. The younger woman did as requested, allowing the garment to fall back into place as she pulled Blake closer. For several minutes the two kissed with rising fervor, but finally the attorney pulled back and looked at the woman on top of her. "You're a beautiful woman, Renee," she said softly stroking the smaller woman's cheek lightly.

The ex-nanny smiled at her former employer. "But?" she asked.

The taller woman shook her head. "No but. I just wanted to tell you that. Are you sure this is something you want?"

Renee nodded her head. "I've been patiently waiting for the right moment, Blake, to tell you. I'm glad you fired me. I didn't think I could stand it much longer anyway. That's why I really started looking for a new job, but if you can't, I'll understand."

"There's nothing stopping me, Renee. You aren't my employee, and I'm not married any more. This will just be the first time I've been with someone other than Georgia in a long time. I guess I've just kind of forgotten the spontaneity of it all."

"Well, don't let that stop us. We can go at whatever speed you're comfortable, Blake, as long as you want to go there."

The attorney nodded. "I want to go there, Renee," she answered confidently.

The blonde smiled. "Good. I was hoping you would. Let's just take our time then." Picking up the tray of food, she moved it down to the floor before sliding onto the bed next to the older woman. The attorney rolled onto her side and leaned to kiss the blonde again. Renee responded by slipping her arms around the brunette's neck. For several moments they simply kissed, but then the ex-nanny started to lift Blake's t-shirt over her head. The older woman allowed her to do so. Pulling back slightly, Renee mentioned, "You're so incredibly strong. How do you stay in such great shape when I never see you work out?"

"I have a gym at the office. It's a great stress reliever. I work out almost everyday," the strong woman murmured, kissing the blonde's neck as her hands reached under Renee's chemise again. Her hands stroked the smaller woman's hips lightly, slowly easing up the satin material. The twenty-five-year-old responded in kind, assisting the attorney with her pajama pants. Soon the tall woman was undressed, lying between the younger woman's thighs. Kissing her way down over Renee's breasts, Blake brought her hand up between her legs and slowly began to tease her.

Instantly Renee cried out as her hips jerked in response to the expert touch. "Please, Blake. Don't torment me," she beseeched, pressing the dark head closer to her frame.

The attorney chuckled lowly before giving her companion a one-sided grin. "You want me? You

want me inside of you?" she questioned needlessly, methodically stroking the blonde everywhere except where she wanted it most.

"Yes, baby. I always have," the shorter woman moaned in reply.

Knowing how much she wanted it as well, Blake gave in to her carnal desires, completing their connection. Renee clutched her tightly and groaned with growing fervor as the attorney set a leisurely pace at first. However, by the passing minutes both of them started to gain momentum as the blonde's body undulated fiercely into the one above hers, and Blake catered to her former employee's physical need. Soon they were rocking at an erratic pace, both heaving loudly from the exertion. A few minutes later the blonde reached an intense peak, leaving her exhausted for the time being.

The attorney just lay there on top of the younger woman in silence, her arms around Renee. Her body gave the pretense of relief as well, but she quickly realized the encounter was nothing like she thought it would be. Something was missing from the moment. Something was absent from the blonde's embrace. Blake knew exactly what it was by the emptiness of her heart. What was lacking was the woman she loved. Subtly casting a glance over at her clock, she wondered how long she would have to lie there with Renee before retreating to the shower alone, but the decision was taken from her a few minutes later.

Renee stretched her body under Blake's and sighed. "That was quite the nice diversion," she commented with a smile.

"Yeah," the older woman replied, trying to act normally.

"I really have to get going though, Blake. I have an interview in a bit. Forgive me for just bailing on you, will you?"

"Yeah, no problem."

"Thanks. Maybe there will be more where that came from later if you're up for it," the former nanny stated.

"Maybe. With the kids around it might be complicated though."

The smaller woman nodded in response as the attorney let her rise from the bed. "We'll play it by ear then." Leaning down she kissed Blake softly on the lips. "Have a good day."

"You too. Thanks for breakfast."

"Anytime, sexy," the younger woman answered with an alluring smile and wink before taking her leave.

When Blake was alone she rolled onto her back and gave a heavy sigh. Even though Renee's body was responsive to her, she was left completely unsatisfied by the rendezvous. She knew it

had nothing to do with the enchanting twenty-five-year-old, because the attorney was attracted to her. She had even fantasized about having the younger woman. Rather it was the fact that the only woman she truly wanted to be with was the Southern beauty queen she had married four years ago.

However, she knew there was nothing she could do about it. They were divorced according to the state, and Georgia was free to do as she pleased with whomever she chose. Feeling the weight of the divorce more acutely than she ever had, the attorney started to cry. In that moment she knew she had acted rashly out of jealousy and hurt and divorcing the blonde was not what she had truly wanted. Instead she wished Georgia would have come back begging for another chance, but when the smaller woman hadn't done so and instead signed the papers without a fight, the attorney was so enraged at Georgia's apparent blasé attitude that she escalated her poor behavior into something unforgivable. When she accused the writer of being no better than a prostitute and the younger woman had slapped her for the comment, Blake knew there was no way to reconcile. She had let her emotions guide her into saying something she didn't mean, and there was no way to rectify the situation. Georgia had left her, and Blake felt that the blonde had been right in doing so after the way the attorney had treated her. Wondering if her heart would ever get over the woman she loved, Blake knew she had to do her best to continue on as well as she could now that Georgia was gone.

By the fall of that year, Torrance and Helen were once again trying to conceive their third child. However instead of going about it in the fashion of their other two children, they finally conceded to get some help from the fertility clinic. They had made several trips after Helen had recovered physically from her miscarriage to try a more scientific method of artificial insemination. Even though Torrance and Helen had both enjoyed the passion of trying to conceive themselves, they both were resolved to the fact if they were going to have a third child, they needed help. However, there had been a small consolation in as much as the doctors had allowed Torrance to inject Helen whenever they were there for treatment.

Neither of them spoke about the matter to any of their family or friends, because they didn't want to have to deal with the sympathies they were sure to get if they were not successful in their endeavor. It was emotionally painful enough for both of them to have to go this route that they weren't sure they could handle more disappointment if things didn't work, especially knowing their families would only try to support them but making it worse for Helen who had still not truly recovered emotionally from their loss.

One afternoon in late October Torrance had just returned from the city from a photo shoot when she found her beloved playing in the living room with John and Marta. Helen greeted her with an excited smile as the photographer joined them all on the floor. The older woman hugged her kids and then leaned to give Helen a kiss on the cheek.

"You're in a good mood," she mentioned. The blonde nodded. "Why? What's going on?" the brunette questioned curiously.

The shorter woman leaned to her wife's ear, kissing her on the neck gently before whispering, "It worked, Torrance."

Playfully the photographer growled as she answered, "It certainly is working."

Helen slapped her jokingly in the stomach, making the older woman laugh. "You know what I mean, Torrance."

Smiling at her spouse, the taller woman nodded. "I know exactly what you mean, sweetheart," she murmured leaning to kiss her again. "This is great news. Did the doctors confirm how far along you were?"

"Four weeks. I guess our after-session activities helped a bit," the blonde teased with a flush, referring to their passionate encounter at the clinic after the doctor had left them alone to allow Helen to dress. One comforting kiss that the photographer had bestowed on her wife had suddenly initiated a fiery session of spontaneous lovemaking on the doctor's stool in the examination room. It was something that the blonde had giggled about the entire ride home. The older woman had teased her unmercifully for the former model's sudden amorousness that day, even though she was grateful for her wife's playful return.

"Oh, Helen, I'm so happy for us. You need to be careful now. Make sure you take it easy," Torrance stated caressing her lover's cheek softly.

"I will. I won't let anything happen this time," she assured.

Torrance smiled at her consolingly, knowing she still felt some guilt about losing their other child, but she didn't mention it. Instead she just kissed her wife again before turning her attentions to her children. "So, what are we going to do tonight?" she asked them.

"Mommy said Aunt Blake was coming over with Lana and Luke," John announced. "Eve and Stephen are coming too."

"Oh really? What's the occasion?" Torrance inquired. "Why are all our best friends coming to the house?"

"No occasion. I just thought it would be nice. Jamie's on location, so I thought we'd give Sarah a little break, and as for Blake, you know she can always use a hand. She's bringing their new nanny too. It should be interesting."

"Yeah. What do we know about this new nanny? What's her name?"

"Her name is Anne. She's thirty-five, but most importantly to Georgia she's straight," Helen teased.

Torrance laughed. "I guess that's a good thing for both of them. No competition. I figured that was the way they were going to have to go. Had she been gay and too feminine, Blake might

have tried to sway her, and if she had been more like Blake, Georgia might have tried to as well."

Helen nodded. "It's so sad to watch them, Torrance. It's obvious to me that they both still love each other. I don't understand why Blake did this."

"Well, Georgia did as well. She could have contested the divorce, but she didn't. Leads me to believe she wasn't interested in saving their marriage either."

The blonde nodded. "I miss her, Torrance. Georgia has been my best friend for the last five years. It's hard not seeing her as much as I used to. New Orleans is so far away from New York, and even when she does come up here, I still don't see her. It's as if she wants to block out everything that has to do with Blake, even us. She's isolated herself from me, and I just don't know what to do. She'll talk to me on the phone if I call her, but she never calls me. She never wants to go out with me any more. I can't even get her to go shopping, just the two of us."

"I don't know, Helen. She doesn't talk to me either. I thought I was trying not to choose sides between them, but Blake has been my best friend for decades. I'm not letting her go, but I didn't want to lose Georgia either."

The younger woman nodded. "She's just turned into the one woman I never thought she would. I never thought she would turn into a workaholic, but she has. She's become another Blake, and I never thought that was possible."

The photographer shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe she's happier this way. Her book has gotten excellent reviews. She's riding the tide of success. I mean I guess this was what she wanted. She made the Most Eligible list in the 'New York Blade's' last issue independently from Blake. The woman has just now come into her own, and she's not handling it the way we thought she would. I hope this doesn't last forever, but there is always the possibility that Georgia will not come back to us, Helen. That's just a potential reality we might have to face. When people get divorced, it's usually inevitable that the friends get divided as well as everything else."

The blonde gave a sorrowful nod of her head. "I just don't like going through this, and I'm not even the one that got divorced. I can only imagine the pain she's going through, but she just won't talk to me about it."

"Blake won't talk to me either. I think she regrets what she's done, but she's too proud to admit that she made a horrible mistake. I know her well enough to see it in her eyes. I think if she could get Georgia back, she would try to do so, but from what I've heard the two of them don't talk except when it comes to the kids. They are strangely civil with each other, but their only conversation is about Luke and Lana. Blake has utterly messed this up, but for once I don't know how to help her. She has to decide if she really wants to try to reconcile, and if that's the case, she's got a lot of making up to do to Georgia and vice versa."

"I'm worried about Sarah and Jamie as well," Helen mentioned. "Sarah's told me that it's been pretty bad between she and Katrina with Jamie gone. Katrina wants to spend most of her time at Samantha and Doug's when she's not in school, and Sarah's finally given up and let her go over

there. She doesn't know what to do, and with Jamie out in California, Katrina doesn't listen to a thing she tells her to do."

"Is that why Katrina's not coming tonight?"

"Sarah said she didn't want to come, that she wanted to be with her aunt and uncle instead."

"Poor thing. I know it's trying for her to have such a hectic schedule and raise three kids alone while Jamie's gone. At least when it was the other way around, Katrina did listen to Jamie."

"Well, we can only hope for the best for them too. I don't want to see them in the same position as Georgia and Blake."

"Me neither, Helen, me neither."

After several minutes of both of them playing with their children, the doorbell rang. The photographer rose to get it. Sarah was standing there with her two younger children and a smile for her friend. "Hey, Tor. How's it going?" she asked as they hugged.

"Good. How are you holding up with Jamie gone?"

The young blonde rolled her blue eyes. "I don't want to talk about that."

"All right. We won't. Come on in. The kids are excited that you're here. I just got home a little while ago, so I don't even know what's on the agenda yet."

"I don't think there is one except to let the kids play together and have some dinner," the actress stated, following the brunette into the living room.

Instantly John and Marta included Eve in their game as Sarah took a seat on the couch with Stephen. Torrance went into the kitchen to retrieve drinks for the adults before settling down next to the youngest blonde in the living room for adult conversation. Not too long after that the doorbell rang again, so the tallest woman got up to get it, leaving the two blondes talking about idle gossip on their mutual friends.

When Torrance opened the door, the attorney was standing there with an attractive redhead and the two kids. "Hey, Blake," she greeted with a smile.

"Hi, Tor. I'd like you to meet, Anne McDonald. She's the new nanny."

Extending her hand Torrance said, "It's nice to meet you, Anne. My wife told me you'd be here this evening. Welcome."

"Thank you."

Looking down at the twins, the photographer smiled at them. "And just how are my favorite

niece and nephew today?" she asked.

"We're good, Aunt Tor," Luke answered for them before racing into the house to join the other kids. The adults followed more slowly. Helen had taken Torrance's vacated spot on the couch, so Anne took a chair as did Blake. The photographer then offered everyone beverages and went to get them before settling down next to her beloved.

The rest of the evening passed with easy conversation and a movie for the kids after dinner. Meanwhile the adults sat in the kitchen chatting about different things going on in their lives. Even though Helen and Torrance had the perfect opportunity to tell their friends about the blonde's pregnancy, they didn't. Instead they avoided the topic of their recent efforts so much so that their friends finally got the hint that they did not want to speak of it and moved on to other subjects.

However, once everyone had left for the night and the kids had gone to bed, Torrance and Helen sat on their balcony overlooking the dark water in the distance. The fall breeze made it cold, but the brunette had brought a blanket out for them to share, and so they sat together stargazing in silence for awhile. "Torrance," Helen whispered after a long while.

"Yeah?"

"I'm really nervous about this baby," she admitted.

"I know you are, honey. I'm nervous too. I don't want you to have to go through any more trauma trying to bring another baby into this world just for me."

"This baby is going to make it, Torrance. I can feel it. I'm going to do everything I can to make sure of that."

"I know you will and so will I, Helen."

"Tell me. Do you want a girl or a boy?"

The older woman shrugged. "It doesn't really matter to me. I would just feel blessed to have another child. Whatever God wants to give us is fine with me. What about you?"

"It doesn't matter. I kind of want it to be a surprise."

"You mean you don't want to know ahead of time?"

"No. I don't think I want to know ahead of time. Let's make it a complete surprise, Torrance. What do you say?"

"Okay. If that's what you want, sure. We can do that. That will just make it all that more exciting."

The blonde nodded in agreement. "I know that we're going to have to tell people eventually. How long do you want to wait?"

"I don't know. How long do you want to wait, darling? I mean we could conceivably not tell anyone until you start showing. That gives us three months. We can't wait forever."

"I know. I'm just scared of announcing it too soon. Let's wait until the fourth month. I'll just be beginning to show, and by then the doctors can give us some idea of how things are progressing."

"Fine by me. I'll do whatever you want if it makes you happy. You know that," the brunette said, kissing her wife on the top of her golden head.

"I do. Thank you for being my wife, Torrance. There is no one better than you," the younger woman whispered.

"Except maybe you," Torrance mentioned lightly. "I'm blessed to have you, Helen, and I'm thankful everyday for your love and the kids. This one will just add to our happiness," she said, placing her hand on her beloved's midsection. "Come on now. We should get some sleep. You need your rest."

Continued...

**~ New York series ~
Love in Photographs
Georgia On My Mind
Stick to the Script
Vows of the Heart**

**Alex Tryst's Scrolls
The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

~ Vows of the Heart ~

**by Alex Tryst
Copyright August 2004**

This tale follows "Love in Photographs", "Georgia on My Mind", and "Stick to the Script". This is the fourth and final story in the New York Series.

As always, comments and feedback is welcome at alextryst@hotmail.com.

Part 3

That December when Katrina and her cousins got out of school for their Winter Break, Sarah thought it was a good idea to take their kids to the mountain house in Montana for the holidays. The ten-year-old had been driving her crazy since Jamie had been away on location but hoped being with Jamie for Christmas would help Katrina. With that idea in mind, she also invited Samantha and Doug to join them with their children for the holiday.

By the time Jamie had arrived at their house, it had been decorated for the season. She smiled to herself as she got out of her rented SUV and started for the door. Things had been difficult since she had been away shooting in California. She knew Sarah and Katrina had been getting in daily fights, during which Samantha had served as a buffer, so she hoped she could give her little wife a break from the chaos. Heading up to the door with her bags slung over her shoulder, she dug out her keys and unlocked the door. As soon as she had it open, she heard voices coming from the kitchen.

"Anybody home?" she called gladly as she dropped her things in the entry and made her way towards the sound.

"Mom!" Katrina yelled excitedly followed by Eve's voice doing the same.

Jamie smiled as her two daughters came racing around the corner for her. She bent to hug them. "How are my precious girls?" she asked, kissing them both on the top of their heads before each of them took a hand to lead her the rest of the way to the kitchen. Coming in to the eating area, she smiled at Sarah, Samantha, and Doug. The brunette woman came to her wife and slipped her arms around the shorter woman. "It's good to be home," she whispered as she leaned down to kiss her wife passionately. However, even though she felt Sarah participate, there was definite coldness in the blonde's touch, making her wonder what she had done to be given such an icy reception.

"The kids are glad you are here," Sarah answered when the kiss ended.

Breaking away from her wife, the brunette moved to hug the other two adults as well as her niece and nephew. After initial greetings, she inquired, "Where's Stephen?"

"He fell asleep a little while ago. We all were just about to settle down for bed actually when you arrived," Sarah answered. "They have been staying up just to see you."

Jamie nodded, seeing that all the kids were in fact in their pajamas. "Well, I wish I had been here sooner. Things have been so hectic on the set, but I'm glad to have a the next week with all of you."

"So are we, Mom," Katrina stated.

"Well, I guess it's time to get to bed, huh, Eve? Why don't I tuck you in?" Jamie suggested, picking up her five-year-old. "Come on, Katrina."

"Yeah, let's go, kids. Everyone up to bed now," Doug stated to his own children.

The older actress tucked her daughters into bed and then bid Doug and Samantha good night before heading back downstairs for her own baggage that she'd left in the foyer. Going back to the master bedroom, she dropped her things on the bed and began to unpack as she heard Sarah in the bathroom.

A few minutes later though, the blonde appeared wearing a scowl. Looking at her in confusion, Jamie questioned, "What's going on, Sarah? What have I done to get such a greeting from you after months apart?"

"Don't even play games with me, Jamie. You know exactly what you did. You cheated on me."

"What? Where did you get that idea? I did no such thing," the taller woman countered.

"You want me to prove you a liar, Jamie? Here," she stated with a cool distant demeanor, picking a magazine off the night table and thrusting it at her wife.

Jamie looked down at it. She saw herself on the cover with two of Hollywood's most notorious harlots. The older woman shrugged. "So, there's an article of me in 'The Advocate' as Icon of the Year. So what? What does that prove?"

"You're on the cover with Savannah and Augusta Gates, Jamie, the whores of Hollywood."

"So? They came in second place for their activism. The magazine wanted us all on the cover. What's your point?"

"I heard rumors that after this shoot you got really cozy with the Gates girls, Jamie. In fact you were seen out partying with them that night."

"Yeah, I was. So what? Just because I go out partying when I'm on location does not make me a cheater, Sarah."

"Word got back to me that you and Savannah were doing more than just partying, Jamie! People saw you making out with her!"

"Well, it's not true! I wasn't making out with Savannah! She's straight for God's sake!"

"Like that means anything, Jamie! We all know about your reputation with the straight crowd! Besides, everyone knows that Savannah and Augusta travel on both sides of the street, Jamie! I know you even dated Savannah a few years ago! I'm not stupid!"

"Look! Whoever told you Savannah and I were making out has got it wrong! I did no such thing! Why would I? I'm already the envy of the world by having you! Why would I try to ruin that? It doesn't make sense!"

Sarah shook her head furiously. "You are such a liar, Jamie!" she screamed, going back to the nightstand. Opening the drawer she pulled out something else and thrust it at her wife. "I didn't want to do this, but you've left me no choice!"

Jamie looked at what Sarah had in her hand and felt her heart drop into her stomach. Snatching the pile of photos from her wife's hand, she flipped through them. Her night out with the infamous duo was perfectly displayed for her. "What's the meaning of this, Sarah? Did you have me followed? Who took these?" she yelled.

"They came addressed to Katrina in the mail, Jamie! Some sick person sent them to our daughter! The police are looking into it, but that doesn't discount what's in the pictures! Jamie, look at the photos! Do you honestly believe that what you're doing isn't cheating?" Sarah pointedly hollered. "Hell, there is a picture of you and Savannah kissing!"

The tall woman looked the pictures more closely. There was a wide variety of shots from drinking and hanging out with her friends to dancing with the Gates girls provocatively. It was the last photo, however, that left Jamie with incredible guilt. It was outside of the club they had all been to that night. It was a perfect shot of Jamie embraced in a kiss with an unidentifiable blonde woman. By the other people lingering around in the photo though, it was easy to deduce that it was Savannah, and due to the tight tank top Jamie was wearing that perfectly displayed her tattoo, there was no way she could deny that it was her.

Slouching her shoulders and sighing, Jamie quietly said, "It was one kiss, Sarah. We were all leaving the club, and I was about to go get into my car when she pulled me to her and kissed me. I was drunk and so caught off guard that I wasn't able to stop her. By the time I did gain enough of my senses to push her off, it was over. After that I went my way, and she went off with her sister. That's what happened. I didn't make out with her regardless of whatever anyone else said."

The blonde dropped her head as she felt tears flooding over her face. The thought of Jamie with someone else was heart-shattering. "Did you honestly think your behavior was all right, Jamie?" she quietly asked.

"What's wrong with me going out with friends?"

Sarah shook her head. "You don't dance with friends like that, Jamie, and friends don't kiss you when they know you're married. You dated Savannah. You know how she operates. She doesn't care about such things like vows and marriage. If she wants it, she takes it. She wanted you, and you let her take you from me for a night. What you did was totally inappropriate, Jamie, and you've broken my heart," she managed to say, her voice cracking with emotion as she looked up at the woman she loved.

Seeing the pain and tears in her wife's eyes, Jamie felt her own heart tearing into thousands of pieces. Instinctively she tried to reach for the smaller woman, but her gesture was rebuffed. "It didn't mean anything to me, Sarah. I'm so sorry that I've hurt you. I don't love or care about anyone but you."

"It might have meant nothing to you, but it doesn't mean nothing to me. You don't even know how I feel right now. I can't believe I allowed this to happen to me again. First, Robert and now you. I don't know why I keep falling in love with cheaters."

"Oh, for the last time, I didn't cheat, Sarah!" Jamie yelled.

"You kissed another woman, Jamie. That's cheating. I don't care if she did initiate it or that you were drunk or whatever. I don't care what the excuse is. The fact remains that you kissed Savannah Gates. I didn't realize I meant that little to you."

"Are you kidding me? Sarah, you mean everything to me. There is no one else in this world that I would ever want to be with. You're the only one."

"Obviously not, Jamie. You were lured in by another woman. Even if it had started innocently, you know that woman well enough to know what might have happened. You didn't walk away when you had a chance. No, instead you played with the fire, and now I've been burned by your selfish act. The media couldn't wait to get a hold of that juicy tidbit, but I refused to believe it until these photos showed up at our house. I stood by you, denouncing the rumors, but it turns out I was the only one fooled."

Jamie sighed as she looked at Sarah. She didn't know what she could say to take away the pain she had inflicted on the woman she adored more than life. Finally she asked, "So, what happens now, Sarah?"

"I don't know, Jamie. I can't even begin to think about what to do. Right now I just want to go to bed."

"Fine. Let's go to bed. Tomorrow it will all look better," the brunette softly said, reaching for her wife a second time, but again Sarah spurned the touch.

Meeting Jamie's dark eyes, the petite actress said, "I meant I want to go to bed alone, Jamie. This bed is not a place for you any longer."

At those words Jamie felt her own emotions start to slip. Up until that point she had not cried, but hearing her wife excuse her from their marital bed was more than she could bear. Letting her own tears fall, she nodded her head. "All right. If that's the way you want it, Sarah," she whispered hoarsely. Without another word, she went to her bags and picked them up off the bed to shoulder them. "Could I at least stay in the house, so the kids don't suspect what's going on between us?"

"I don't care what you do, Jamie. All I know is that you can't be here with me right now."

Giving a nod in response, Jamie turned and left the room. Once out in the hallway, she started crying harder, but she quickly tried to stop when she saw the door across from the master bedroom open. Samantha just looked at her sympathetically. "Are you all right?"

"I'll be fine," unconvincingly she replied, turning to go down the hall to one of the empty guest rooms. Samantha followed her. When both women were alone behind a closed door, Samantha pulled Jamie into her arms, and the brunette just started crying even harder.

"It's going to be okay, Jamie," soothingly Samantha whispered.

Adamantly the younger woman shook her head. "No. Sarah's hurt, and it's all my fault. She won't forgive me for this."

"Did you really cheat on her?"

"No. I would never intentionally do that to her. I love Sarah more than anything else in this world, Samantha. You know that."

"Then why?"

"I just wasn't thinking. No one has tried to seduce me like that since Sarah and I got together. Everyone's been respectful of our marriage. I was just drunk with my guard down, and someone I shouldn't have trusted got in. It didn't mean anything. It was just a little kiss. It only lasted a few seconds. It was a stupid thing to do. I don't know what to do now though. She's kicked me out of our bed."

"Maybe after some time she can forgive you, Jamie. I don't want this to be the end of your marriage. You two are made for each other. Hopefully both of you can come to comprehend the other's position and come to an understanding."

"I hope so. I couldn't live without her, Samantha. You know that," she whimpered.

"I know. You love her, and she loves you. There's hope for you yet. Don't give up. This is just a tough spot for you, but you two can work it out. I have faith in that."

Jamie nodded. "Thanks, Samantha."

"Try to get some sleep now. Doug promised the kids you two would take them skiing in the morning. You need your rest for that."

Once Jamie was left alone, she put her belongings in the dresser, figuring she would be exiled to this room for the remainder of their visit together. Then she changed for bed and did her nightly bedtime routine before settling down alone. She thought of what had just occurred with her wife. Never in her life did she ever think she would be in this position. She had never cheated on a woman in her life, and even though she felt she hadn't with Sarah, she still felt terrible that the

blonde was hurt by her behavior. Jamie knew going to that party with Savannah and Augusta that night was not the wisest choice she had ever made, but she never thought anything would happen with her ex-girlfriend. However, in just a moment in time, the kiss Savannah had planted on her uninvited was coming back to haunt her. Someone had taken the photos of her guilt and had the audacity to send them to her family.

She wondered who was callous enough to do such a thing. Not many people knew exactly where she and Sarah lived, and they made an effort to keep that from the media as well, so it was strange that the photographs had appeared. It was also peculiar that they had been addressed to Katrina. Jamie pondered who knew enough about their family and life to do such a thing, but she came up nameless. Whoever it was obviously intended to put a wedge between she and Sarah somehow, and she wished she knew who it was, so she could rectify the matter of her invaded privacy.

The following morning Jamie was up before the children, so they wouldn't suspect any problems between she and the blonde. Dressing and making her way downstairs, she found the rest of the adults already in the kitchen. Everyone was awkwardly quiet, attempting small talk to break the tension, but it was obviously present between Sarah and Jamie. However, when the kids finally made their way downstairs, it was easier to the brunette actress to forget about the problems with her wife as she paid much needed attention to her three children.

After a large breakfast, Jamie announced, "How about that skiing now? Doug, are you about ready?"

"Sure am. All right, kids. Go get your gear on." Looking at his wife, he asked, "Are you coming with us?"

Samantha shook her head. "You two go. I'll stay with Sarah, so she can have a hand with Stephen and Eve."

"You don't have to do that, Samantha. I will be fine on my own," Sarah protested.

The redhead shook her head. "I'd prefer to stay with you. I'm terrible at skiing," she teased lightly, getting a chuckle out of Doug.

"All right. It's settled then. I just need to get dressed," the tall brunette stated. "Meet you out by the car in a few, Doug, to start packing."

Going back upstairs Jamie quickly put on her ski gear before going outside. She began loading all the children's skis onto the rack on top of the SUV she had rented. A few minutes later Doug was there to assist her with his and Jamie's things. When everyone's equipment was in the SUV, Jamie went to retrieve the kids.

The three elder children said good bye to Sarah and Samantha before running excitedly to the car where Doug was waiting. The brunette kissed both her younger children and hugged Samantha before turning to Sarah. The blonde still looked saddened by what had taken place. Knowing that

she probably could not get a kiss out of the woman she loved, Jamie just smiled lovingly at her and caressed the blonde's fair cheek softly. "I love you, Sarah. I always will," she whispered before turning to go. "See you, ladies, this evening," she called over her shoulder just before closing the front door behind her.

There was silence for a moment as Samantha and Sarah just stood looking at one another. Knowing the redhead was holding back, the blonde asked shortly, "What?"

"Nothing, Sarah. It's not my business. I just don't like seeing you and Jamie like this."

"I don't either," the actress mumbled as tears came to her eyes. "I don't know why she did this. I thought I could make her happy. I guess I was just as disillusioned as every other woman that has tried to tame her."

"No you aren't. You are the only one that Jamie loves. You're the only one she wants to be with for the rest of her life. I know her heart."

"She kissed another woman, Samantha," Sarah proclaimed.

"I know, but it was a mistake. She knows that. Can you honestly say you've never made a mistake in a relationship? I mean I hate to point this out, but you had an affair with Jamie while you were still married."

"That was different."

"Was it? Jamie gets herself in situations with women that are out of her control all the time. It's the nature of who she is and the way she looks. I'm not saying she shouldn't be held responsible for her actions. I just think that you should believe her explanation instead of everyone else's. She said Savannah kissed her off guard and uninvited, and it happened so fast it was over before she could even try to stop it. Hasn't that ever happened to you? Haven't there been men in your life that have done that to you?"

Slowly Sarah nodded. "Yeah. That happened to me once. Robert was pissed. They even got in a fight the next time Robert saw him."

"And how did that make you feel? It was wrong, and you didn't initiate it, but you were still involved. Did you feel responsible? Did Robert hold you responsible?"

"I felt bad about it, but I didn't think it was my fault. He threw himself on me, and I couldn't get him off fast enough. I felt violated more than anything."

"Exactly. Do you think it's possible Savannah did the same thing to Jamie?"

Shaking her head Sarah stated, "Somehow I don't think Jamie felt violated by Savannah Gates."

"How do you know? Did you ask, or did you just assume that since Savannah is a beautiful

woman that Jamie would be enticed? Just because Savannah is this incredible model and has everything doesn't mean Jamie would want her in any way. She wants you, Sarah."

The blonde shook her head as she began to cry. "It just hurts, Samantha," she confessed.

"I'm sure it does, Sarah, and I'm not saying it shouldn't. I know I would be destroyed if something like this happened to Doug and me, but if Doug was in Jamie's shoes, I would believe him. Not only would I want to but also because I would know he was telling the truth. Don't you have absolute trust in Jamie's honesty? Has she ever lied to you?"

"Never."

"Then why would she now? What do you believe in your heart, Sarah? Do you honestly think she would do this to you?"

Sarah sighed. "No. I don't think she would. Even now when I look in her eyes, I see her love for me. It just hurts me like nothing I've ever known. Not only that, some person felt the need to send those photographs to our house. Someone who shouldn't know where we live does, and that scares me just as much. Our privacy is gone."

"Even more of a reason to lean on Jamie."

"I know, Samantha. It's just going to take some time," the blonde said.

An hour later Jamie and Doug were helping the kids with their ski gear at the slopes. The tall actress wore a ski cap and glasses to try to hide her identity, but they had just gotten in line for a quick warm up run when someone first recognized her. Putting on her professional face, she did her best to seem cordial with people while she and Katrina waited on the ski lift.

When the two of them finally got onto the lift and had started to the top of their run, Katrina looked her mother. "That is so annoying, Mom. Can't you make them stop?"

"I wish I could, Katrina. I can't make people not come up to me. It's just the nature of being a celebrity."

"It sucks," the ten-year-old declared.

Jamie laughed. "Yeah, you're right. It does suck sometimes. Tell me something. Sarah told me last night that someone sent you some pictures of me. Do you know who did that?"

The little girl shook her head. "They were cool though."

"You thought they were cool? Why?" the brunette questioned in confusion.

Katrina shrugged. "You looked like you were having fun. I want to be able to do that someday."

"Well, you still have eleven years before you can do that. Clubs and bars can be fun only if you enjoy them responsibly. Do you understand those pictures are not cool to me, because someone took them without my knowledge?"

"Oh. Well, that makes sense I guess," she answered. Looking back at her mom, she asked, "Are you and Sarah breaking up?"

"What? Where did you get an idea like that, sweetie?" Jamie inquired seriously.

"There was a picture of you kissing someone else, and I heard you two fighting about it last night."

Sighing the actress took a moment to compose her answer. "Katrina, I love Sarah, and I only want to be with Sarah. If she doesn't want to be with me, that's her choice. However, I have no intention of leaving her."

"Then why did you kiss someone else? I thought you weren't supposed to do that."

"That's a hard question to answer, Katrina. You'll understand it when you're older. Sometimes people get involved in things that they shouldn't, and they regret them. That was one such moment for me. However, that doesn't mean I love Sarah any less. To the contrary, I love her more than life itself. You kids and she mean everything to me," Jamie said as they got to the top of their first slope. Getting off the lift, they maneuvered their way off to the side to wait for Doug and his kids, so they could all go together. Then the five of them made a leisurely run down their first slope.

When they reached the bottom again, more people were hovered around the lift where Jamie had been, obviously waiting for her return. She smiled at the group and waved but didn't stop as she and her family moved on to another lift. The next several runs were made with a growing crowd, but Jamie did her best to ignore everyone and focus on the private time with the ones she loved.

Unfortunately though by the time it was early afternoon, the media had been alerted and were on the mountain waiting for moments to catch a photograph of the actress. The brunette did her best to evade them, but some were more persistent than others, even following her onto the ski trails. Finally Jamie, Doug, and the kids made it to the hardest run on the mountain. Being that they were all skillful skiers, the tall actress had no worries about them being able to complete the course, but she hoped it would prove to be challenging to her followers. With the growing paparazzi, she was determined to get some privacy.

Standing at the top of the mountain, she motioned Doug and the children toward her and leaned in closely. "All right. This is getting out of control. Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to ski in front of all of you. Give me about a thirty-second lead before following. Hopefully all the cameras will follow me, so you all can have some peace. When I get to the bottom of the hill, I'm going to go into the lodge. You all ski for a bit while I'm entertaining these pests. I'll meet up with you in an hour or so at the lodge."

Doug nodded his head. "Be careful, Jamie. They are starting to get overly zealous."

"I'll be fine. You just take care of the kids."

With that the actress smiled at Katrina before taking off down the slope. As she had hoped most of the media went with her, leaving Doug with the three children. Jamie did her best to make it difficult for the camera people by skiing around trees and intentionally taking harder jumps than normal. The tactic worked for the most part, but there were still a handful able to keep up with her. In a last-ditch effort, she dodged between some trees, hoping no one would be idiotic enough to follow her. Unfortunately there was one photographer that did. Nevertheless, Jamie kept her eyes on her surroundings. Everything seemed to be fine when she looked over her shoulder to see if the photographer was still there close to her, and she noticed Katrina not too far behind being cut off by a media person. The ten-year-old screamed as she fell, and in an effort to stop herself to come to her daughter's aid, Jamie quickly turned her skis to come to a screeching halt, but before she could, she and the photographer pacing her collided. Everything was a daze to the actress after that until she found herself lying on her back in the snow with Doug kneeling beside her.

"Jamie, Jamie, can you hear me?" frantically he yelled.

She looked up into her former brother-in-law's eyes. "What happened?" she sputtered with a cough. Pain was radiating from her entire body. Katrina yelped as she dropped next to her mother's side. Doug didn't answer the brunette's question. Instead he ripped open her jacket and yanked off his own scarf. Pulling off his gloves, he unbuttoned her shirt and pressed his scarf to her bleeding chest. "Doug, this is hardly an appropriate time," the actress joked, but the pain was obvious in her voice.

Nevertheless he gave her a reassuring smile. "Shut up, Jamie, and keep still. Someone's calling for help. You're badly hurt."

Giving a shaky breath, she questioned again, "What happened?"

"You ran into that photographer. He hit the tree, and a low hanging branch caught your jacket. Then you fell on the tip of his ski pole I think. It punctured your chest. You're bleeding. Just do me a favor and lie here. Help will be here soon." Turning to his niece, he said calmly, "Katrina, give me your scarf."

Katrina did as she was told, handing it over to her uncle but never taking her eyes off her mother. Seeing the terror in her child's eyes, Jamie gave the best smile she could. "Don't worry, baby. I'll be fine."

"I'm sorry, Mom. This is all my fault. I saw you look behind at me. I'm sorry," the ten-year-old cried.

"Katrina, this is not your fault. I promise. I love you, sweetie," Jamie replied. Feeling things start to turn hazy again, she took her daughter's hand. "Do me a favor, Katrina. Be good for Sarah."

Half an hour later Sarah and Samantha were sitting in the living room in front of the fireplace with Eve and Stephen. They were placating the little girl by participating in her tea party while Stephen napped on his mother's shoulder when the phone rang. Samantha volunteered to get it and hurried to the kitchen.

However a few moments later, Sarah heard the redhead screaming and quickly rose from her seat. Rushing into the kitchen, she anxiously inquired, "What is it? What's wrong?"

"Jamie's been hurt. She's being airlifted to the hospital as we speak," Samantha rushed.

Panic struck Sarah at the words the redhead had just spoken. Immediately grabbing the phone, she stated, "Hello?"

"Sarah, it's Doug. I assume Samantha just told you. I'm on my way back to the cabin with the kids right now. Hopefully we'll be there within an hour. Jamie is being taken to Kalispell Regional Medical Center in Kalispell."

"What happened, Doug?" the blonde yelled.

"Jamie had a serious wound to the chest by colliding with another skier. I'll explain it in detail when I get there. Just hold tight. I'll be there to pick you up as soon as I can, but I shouldn't really talk and drive right now. The weather's getting too bad."

"Okay, I understand. Please hurry."

"I will. She'll be okay, Sarah," he tried to assure.

Instead of taking comfort in those words though, the blonde just said, "Be careful, Doug, and please get here as soon as you can."

When the blonde hung up the phone, she looked at Samantha. "It'll be okay, Sarah."

The younger woman shook her head. "It must be serious if she's been airlifted," she whimpered. "I didn't even get to tell her I loved her, Samantha."

"She knows that you love her. She'll be fine, and you'll get to tell her in person. You'll see. Come on. Sounds like we're going on a trip. Let's get the children's bags ready to go."

Knowing Samantha was right, both women hurried to get everyone packed in case they needed to stay close to the hospital for a few days. By the time Doug arrived with the three kids, the blonde and brunette quickly put the youngest children's car seats into the car while Doug threw the bags in, and before any of them could get settled, they were on the road to the hospital.

Sarah sat in the passenger's seat while Doug drove, and Samantha kept the kids entertained in the back. "Tell me what happened, Doug," she demanded impatiently.

"When we got to the mountain, people recognized Jamie. She tried to downplay it, but before any of us realized it, paparazzi was there trying to get pictures of her. In trying to give us some privacy, she skied ahead of all of us, and the media followed her. However, she got in an accident with a photographer. They collided as she was coming through some trees, and from where I was, it looked like he hit the tree, and Jamie's jacket got ripped by a low branch. Then she lost her balance and fell. The tip of his ski pole penetrated her left breast and then ripped across her chest to the right one as she tumbled down the mountain. I don't know if she even broke anything. I was too worried about all the blood. She was badly hurt, Sarah. I'm sorry. I don't know any more. The EMTs wouldn't tell me anything except where they were taking her."

The blonde actress tried to remain strong for the children, so she simply nodded her head and cried quietly. To Doug she whispered, "Please hurry, Doug. I need to be with her."

The rest of the ride was quiet between the adults, the only sound coming from the DVD the children were watching. Sarah couldn't help but worry about her lover. The way Doug described the accident was horrific. She knew most people didn't survive horrendous skiing accidents, and Doug's story left little doubt in her mind of the fate of that photographer. That alone saddened her, but she was even more worried about her wife. Jamie was strong in body and mind, but she just didn't know if even she could survive such a fall.

Given the snowy conditions and mountainous route to the hospital the couple hour drive was extended far past what Sarah thought she could bear. By the time they all finally reached the hospital, she was exhausted emotionally but was determined to see the brunette. The staff, knowing who she was from her celebrity, escorted the group of them to the Intensive Care Unit where the tall actress was. However, coming to the nurses' station on that floor, they were met by the surgeon who had worked on Jamie when she was first admitted. By his countenance alone, Sarah was fearful of what he might say. Quietly he asked to speak with her alone. Giving a nod she followed him to a quiet sitting area.

When they were completely to themselves, he said, "Sarah, my name is Dr. Grayson. I handled Jamie's emergency surgery when she was admitted. Jamie suffered some serious injuries. From what the EMTs told me, her left breast was pierced by a ski pole, and in her right breast, we found fragments of a branch, leading me to believe she ran into a tree. She then tumbled for at least thirty yards down the mountain and fell off a twenty-foot embankment. Her injuries are extensive. She's broken her right collar bone and her right arm. However, even more serious than that, both her breast implants were punctured, and the silicone started leaking into her body. We had to remove what was left of both of them, but silicone is a dangerous and potentially lethal element to the body. Once it gets in, it's hard to tell if that person has a chance of survival, depending on how much was introduced to the system. From what I could tell by what was left of hers, a significant amount got into her system before she even arrived at the hospital. Jamie has a strong body and what looks to be a strong immune system, but I just can't tell you with certainty the outcome yet. We're doing everything we can for her at the moment. She's in critical condition, and these next few days will be crucial."

Sarah nodded her head as she tried to take in what he had just told her. "What happened to the

other person involved?" she inquired.

"He was killed instantly by running into the tree."

"May I see her, Dr. Grayson? I have to be with her," she stated.

"Of course. All of your family can see her. However, I don't want more than two of you in there at a time. Just to prepare you. There is a lot of equipment that she is hooked up to at the moment, so we can monitor her every second. It's not going to be easy, Sarah."

"I understand," the little blonde whispered.

"Very well. I'll take you to her room."

Going back to where the rest of the family was, she asked Samantha and Doug to watch the kids while she went into the room alone. Since she wasn't sure what to expect, she didn't want to subject the children to the scene just yet in case it was too overwhelming. She then followed Dr. Grayson down the hall to Jamie's room. He opened the door for her, and she took a deep breath before entering alone.

Every light in the room was on, illuminating the space brightly. However, Sarah hardly took notice of that fact as she saw the woman she loved lying in the hospital bed. Machines surrounded the brunette. One was helping her breathe and another monitoring her heart rate. Then there were some the blonde wasn't even sure what they did, only that they were keeping her beloved alive. Moving to the bedside, Sarah stood and looked down on the older woman.

Jamie was dressed in a hospital gown that had the opening in the front. Her right arm and shoulder were in one large cast. Curiously the shorter woman reached for the gown and opened it slightly to see the other injuries. Bandages covered Jamie's whole chest, but what surprised Sarah the most was the large reduction in her lover's breast size. She knew her wife had implants, but she had never known how large she was naturally. Now she saw what nature had given Jamie, and it was a far difference from the enhancement she had always known. Putting the gown back into place, she looked at her wife's ashen face. The hint of blue in her lover's lips made Sarah start to cry.

"You can't leave me, Jamie," she whispered. "I need you. Our children need you. I love you more than anything. You have to come back to me." Jamie lay unresponsive to her words. Sighing, Sarah pulled up a chair next to the brunette's bed and sat. Taking her wife's hand, she just watched her.

An hour later there was a soft knock on the door before Samantha poked her head in cautiously. "May I come in?" she asked. The blonde nodded. Moving to the bed, the redhead looked down at Jamie. She didn't say anything for a moment. Finally, though, she mumbled, "This is harder to see than I thought it would be."

"I know," the younger woman agreed.

"Katrina has been asking to see her for the last half an hour. I told her I would ask you if it was all right. May she come in, or would you prefer for her to wait?"

"She can come in. She has a right to see what's going on with her Mom," Sarah answered.

Nodding Samantha said, "I'll go get her then."

A few minutes later the door opened. Sarah looked up to see Katrina and Samantha. Samantha nodded at the little girl before the ten-year-old carefully walked over to the bed. The blonde watched her daughter gaze at her other mother quietly. However, when she saw the young blonde start to cry, Sarah immediately came and wrapped her arms around her.

"It's going to be okay, sweetie," Sarah consolingly said, rocking Katrina lightly.

"She can't die. She can't. This is all my fault. I wish this had never happened," Katrina sobbed loudly.

"Katrina, this is not your fault. Don't think that."

"But it is. If she hadn't looked over her shoulder at me when I screamed, she wouldn't have run into that photographer."

"Honey, it was an accident. She was just trying to look out for you. This is not your fault, Katrina. Please don't blame yourself for something you couldn't control."

"They just wouldn't leave us alone. Why do they do that? Why won't they just leave her alone?" the little girl questioned in tears.

"They just don't understand that your mom is like everyone else. They want to be near here. They think she's fascinating."

"But she's my mom! I want them to stop!"

"We can't make them stop, sweetie."

"She wouldn't have been skiing like that had they not been chasing her!"

"I know. Honey, we just have to think about the here and now. Right now what is important is that we are here for her."

Katrina nodded as she continued to look at her mother lying motionless in the bed. Snuggling closer to the blonde, she continued to weep as she whispered, "I'm scared, Mama."

When Sarah heard what Katrina had called her, she felt it lift her spirit a bit. Not mentioning it to her daughter though, she simply stated, "I know, sweetie. I'm scared too, but the most important

thing is that we're here together." For the next hour Sarah and Katrina sat quietly in the hospital room. Neither said a word, but Sarah knew that Katrina was taking it especially hard due to the circumstances surrounding the accident. The ten-year-old sat curled up in her lap clinging to her tightly and just staring at Jamie as she cried.

Later that afternoon, Samantha kept Sarah company while Doug took the children to find suitable sleeping arrangements, since it seemed like they would need to be close to the hospital for some time. The redhead and the blonde didn't talk much as they kept vigil over the brunette. Finally though, Samantha said, "I called Jamie's parents and my own. All of them are on their way here. Do you want me to call your family for you?"

"No, thanks. That's okay. I'll do it. I just needed some time before I could. I can't believe this, Samantha. This is the second time Jamie's risked her life for one of our children. She has such a selfless nature about her, but it's gone too far. The press responsible for this is going to feel my wrath when I get out of here. My wife has been subjected to this scrutiny for far too long unchecked. She's always been too nice to them. This was the last straw though. I'm going to make sure of it."

"Sarah, what are you going to do? You can't keep them from pestering you and Jamie in public, and if you're rude to them, it'll hurt your image."

"My image? I don't give a damn about my image after this. The only thing the media is going to see is a raving, overprotective bitch when it comes to Jamie. They will not ever get close enough to her again to make something like this happen. You can count on that," the young woman vowed.

"Well, you know Doug and I will help you however we can."

"Well, I guess I should start making some calls now. Will you stay with her while I do that?"

"I'm not going anywhere, Sarah," Samantha answered, patting the actress on the arm.

With that Sarah left the room to make the calls in private. She had a long list of people she needed to inform, from her family to the current director and producer of Jamie's new project. Methodically she called each one, the whole time remaining as strong as she possibly could until she dialed the last person on her mental list.

Blake was sitting at the dinner table with her children and Georgia for dinner that night, since their nanny had already left for Christmas with her own family. The children had requested that the blonde and brunette be with them together for awhile, and since neither woman could deny their children anything, they conceded to the family time even though there was still a strain between them. When the phone rang, Blake excused herself from the table to answer it.

"Blake, hi."

"Sarah, hi. I thought you were on vacation. What's the matter? You sound upset."

"Jamie was in a skiing accident. She's been seriously hurt," the blonde reported. "They don't know if she'll...," she sobbed quietly.

"Oh, Sarah, I'm so sorry. Are you alone?"

"Samantha's with me. Doug has the kids."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"I need Jamie's will and our power of attorney, Blake. I just need to be prepared in case I have to make some choices. They can't tell me anything else except to be prepared."

"Certainly. I can get those to you right way. They're at my office, but I can go up there and fax them to you. Tell me your numbers, so I can reach you," she said, grabbing a pen off the counter. Once Sarah had relayed the information, the attorney inquired, "Is there anything else I can do? Do you want me to come out there?"

"Thanks, Blake. That's sweet of you, but you should be with your own family. It's the holidays. Besides, all the family is on their way. Thanks anyway."

"All right. If there is anything though, call me. I don't care what it is or if it's the middle of the night. Know that you can call me."

"Thanks. You're a great friend. I should get back to Jamie now. I don't want to be gone any longer."

"Okay. I'll have that information to you soon. Hang in there. My prayers are with you."

When the brunette finally got off the phone and came back to the table, Georgia looked at her quizzically. "What's goin' on?"

"Jamie's been in a skiing accident."

"Is it serious?" the writer asked.

"I'm afraid so. I have to go to the office and fax over some of Jamie's papers. The doctors want Sarah to be prepared for the worst. I'm sorry I have to miss the rest of dinner," she apologized.

"It's all right. I understand. You need to go. We'll still be here when you get back," Georgia assured her.

"Okay. Thanks. I'll be back as soon as I can. Again I'm sorry."

Georgia simply nodded and watched her ex-wife scurry to the entry and grab a winter coat and her car keys before rushing out the door. The little blonde was concerned for her friends but

wanted to know more details from Blake when she returned to know the extent of the situation. Until then though, she was determined to keep a happy countenance for the children's sake.

Two hours later the writer was watching a movie with Lana and Luke while they played games on the living room floor when Blake returned. Depositing her coat in the closet, she came to greet them. Hugging each of her kids, she smiled at Georgia. "Thanks for sticking around."

"I was glad to. Cain you tell me more of what's goin' on?"

"I don't really know that much. Sarah was really upset. Jamie hurt herself skiing, and it doesn't look good. Sarah asked me to fax over Jamie's will and their powers of attorney. To me that seems like they are expecting the worst to happen."

"Oh, poor Sarah. She must be devastated and their kids."

"Katrina has already lost one mother and is a hell raiser for it. I'm not sure she could take losing Jamie as well. If that happens, Samantha and Doug are responsible for her. She'd be separated from her siblings. This is just awful," the attorney said, dropping the sofa next to the blonde.

"Well, we can only pray now," Georgia mentioned. Changing the subject she said, "Listen. The kids have asked that we spend tomorrow together. It's Christmas after all, and they want to have both of us there. Would you consider comin' to my place tomorrow? I don't know what your plans are, but Mama is goin' to be there and so are Jack and Vincent."

Looking at their kids, Blake nodded her head. "Yeah. That would be nice. My parents aren't coming in town until the 26th to see the children anyway, so I was just going to hang out here after we had our Christmas morning."

"Then why don't we do a joint Christmas? We'll all open gifts together. I think the kids would like that," the writer suggested.

"All right."

"Great. Well, it's gettin' close to their bedtimes. I should probably go. Why don't I take some of the gifts with me now, so you don't have so much to carry in the mornin'?"

"Okay. Sure. Let me get you something to carry them." Blake went to get a large bag for

Georgia. Together they worked amiably to place all the packages in the bag.

However, Luke asked them, "Where are you taking the presents?"

"They're going to your mama's house. We're going to open them over there tomorrow morning instead of here. We're going to spend the whole day over there."

"All of us?" Lana questioned.

"Yeah, all of us," Georgia answered.

Both the children squealed in delight at their parents' declaration. However then Luke inquired, "Will Santa still know where to find us?"

Georgia and Blake both laughed as they quickly looked at each other. "He'll know where to leave your presents. Don't worry," Blake assured them.

"Now I have to go, but, you two, be good for Mom. Take your baths and then go straight to bed. Santa won't come unless you're asleep."

"Okay, Mama. We will," both the children said as they rose to hug their blonde mother.

Blake then walked Georgia to the door. "We'll see you around ten."

"Sounds good."

Blake stood looking at her for another moment before finally saying, "Thanks for everything. Good night."

"Night, Blake. Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas to you, Georgia. See you in the morning."

On Christmas morning Torrance awoke early. Lying in bed gazing down on the sleeping beauty next to her, the photographer listened for sounds in the house, but all was silent. Looking out the balcony doors, the brunette thought about the day. This was their first time back to Italy since her grandfather's passing, and Torrance could see the toll it was taking on her grandmother. The older woman had lost much of her sparkle, but the photographer understood why. It had only been a few months since Nonno died, and she expected the holiday to be difficult for the family. Nevertheless seeing Nonna struggling wasn't easy for her. She wished desperately to be able to help but knew only time would heal the wounds of the loss.

Sighing she looked back at the blonde sleeping next to her. Helen looked beautiful curled up under the heavy blankets. Quietly rising from bed as to not wake her wife, the photographer went to her luggage and pulled out her camera. Turning toward the former model, she took several shots of the woman she loved fast asleep without Helen even moving. Then she moved quietly to the door that adjoined their room to their children's and poked her head in to see if they were awake. Both her children were awake and sitting in the middle of the floor of their room but looked up when Torrance stepped in to greet them.

"Merry Christmas, Mom," John said coming to her.

"Merry Christmas," Marta followed excitedly.

"Merry Christmas," Torrance replied, leaning down to hug both of them.

"Is everyone up yet?" John asked. "Can we go downstairs?"

"I'm not sure if anyone is awake but the three of us. We can go down and look at the tree though. We can't open anything though until everyone is awake."

"Can I wake Mommy?" Marta asked, scampering to the doorway from where Torrance had come.

"Quietly, Marta. Don't jump on the bed."

Marta and John both ran into their parents' room at Torrance's approval and over to their sleeping mother. Torrance followed closely behind to make sure they did as they were told. Both children climbed onto the bed next to the blonde. Marta snuggled up into her as John leaned over to whisper in her ear.

"Merry Christmas, Mommy," he quietly said, but Helen didn't respond.

Torrance knew her wife was a hard sleeper, so she decided to help her kids wake the beautiful woman. Sliding onto the bed with them, the photographer put her cold feet under the covers and placed them against the younger woman.

Instantly Helen's eyes popped open as she grumbled, "Cold feet." Torrance laughed lightly followed closely behind by her children's laughter, causing the blonde to open her eyes fully. She smiled at her Marta and John. "Well, this certainly is a nice way to wake up in the morning," she commented, pulling Marta closer as John wrapped his arms around her shoulder. Smiling at Torrance she said, "Hey, trouble-maker, get your cold feet off me."

"Merry Christmas, darling," the older woman whispered, leaning to kiss her beloved softly on the lips.

"Merry Christmas, all of you," the former teacher replied with a content smile.

Looking at the younger woman, Torrance saw the greenish color under her eyes. "You feeling all right?" she questioned in concern.

"Okay. My stomach is a little upset, but I'll be fine."

"All right. Well, I'm going to take the kids downstairs to see the tree. You stay up here and take your time getting ready for the day."

Helen nodded. "Sounds good. I'll be down in awhile."

Getting off the bed, Torrance got the kids to softly follow her from the room. Taking one last peek, she smiled seeing that Helen was already drifting back to sleep. Heading downstairs they

were surprised to see Thomas and Maria sitting there with Nonna. "Well, Merry Christmas," the photographer greeted them brightly.

All of them issued a similar exchange while they hugged. Both children scurried around the tree looking at the gifts. "Kids, remember. We can't open anything until everyone is awake," Torrance said when she saw them shaking some of the boxes.

"And where is sleeping beauty this morning?" Maria casually inquired, sipping some of her morning tea.

Torrance smiled. "She's still asleep. You know how she is."

"I certainly do, especially when certain things are happening," she alluded vaguely.

The photographer looked at her mother quizzically for a moment. She knew her mother instinctively knew what was going on with she and her wife even though they hadn't spoken of it to anyone. "True," she confessed.

"Why don't you leave the kids down here for awhile and go back upstairs? The rest of the family will be getting up soon, so you won't have much time together after that."

"I guess that's true. Sure you don't mind?"

"Mind? Torrance, our grandchildren are our greatest pleasure. Go on," her father chimed into the conversation.

"All right. I'll be back later. Kids, you stay with Nonna and Nonno, and no unwrapping gifts yet," she reminded before heading back up to her room.

Helen was still in bed when she arrived, so she slipped in beside her, pulling the beautiful blonde into her arms. The younger woman moaned lightly and turned into her wife's embrace. "Merry Christmas, Torrance," she yawned.

"Merry Christmas, my love," the brunette replied. "Is there anything I can do for you right now?"

Helen shook her head. "No. I'm just queasy. You know how I get during this stage. It's just something I have to deal with the best I can."

"I know, but it doesn't make it any easier for me to watch. I hate seeing you like this, knowing that I was the cause," the older woman joked.

The elegant blonde laughed slightly and pulled her lover closer. "Well, I asked for it, so you shouldn't feel that bad."

"We should probably get up now. As much as I want to stay here with you, the kids are about to revolt downstairs if they don't get to those presents fast."

"Is everyone else up?"

"Not yet but the house is starting to stir. You feel like getting up?"

"Sure. Far be it for me to deprive my children of their Christmas morning, because I feel sick."

With the comment hanging in the air, both of them reluctantly rose from bed. The former teacher immediately went into the bathroom and closed the door while the photographer made their bed. She could hear her wife retching, making her feel terrible, but she knew this was part of the process. Helen had always had horrific morning sickness with her other pregnancies that she wasn't surprised at her wife's physical state of health.

Several minutes later the blonde came out of the bathroom in her robe and slippers like nothing had transpired. Smiling at her sympathetically though, Torrance moved in to give her a consoling kiss. However, she was greeted by a passionate lip lock in return. Giving her a searing kiss, Helen pulled away and smiled at her wife. "So, where's my Christmas present, Santa? I've been a good girl all year."

The photographer chuckled. "Well, I believe there are some gifts for you under the tree, Mrs. Whitfield. However, if there aren't, I'm sure you'll always be able to find one in bed later," she stated with a sexy grin. "Now let me into this bathroom, so I can get appropriate for the family. I don't think they all want to see me until I've at least brushed my teeth."

An hour later the entire family sat in the living room together to unwrap presents. The kids were the most excited of course about the prospect of new toys, but the adults also found a few wonderful surprises, making for a perfect morning of gift exchanging. However, later that afternoon, Helen was standing alone in the living room watching her children with Torrance outside playing with some of their new toys. She sighed in contentment at the sight of the three of them together as she wondered about the new addition to their family growing inside of her. Idly she rubbed her stomach in thought, but then a hand on her arm startled her.

"Helen, my child, I am so sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you," Nonna stated.

"It's all right. I was just thinking," she answered, wrapping an arm around the older woman's shoulders.

Looking out the window, Nonna said, "She is wonderful. I know you two will be happy together for many years to come. Your marriage is unique to any I have ever seen."

"I hope so. She means everything to me."

"I understand. This time together is a gift, Helen. Treasure it while you can."

"I will, Nonna," the blonde responded, hugging the elderly woman.

After a moment Nonna asked, "Does Torrance know yet about the baby?"

At first Helen looked at her in confusion before realizing what Torrance's grandmother was actually asking. "Yes, she does know that I'm pregnant again."

The older woman placed her hand on Helen's midsection and rested it there momentarily. "Take care of yourself, Helen. You did not look so good this morning."

"I didn't feel very well, but I'll be fine. You'll see."

Nonna nodded skeptically at her. "I hope so," she whispered before turning her attention back outside to her great-grandchildren.

Back in New York Georgia's place was beginning to stir with the excitement of the morning. As promised Blake arrived with the children shortly after 10:00. Cindy was already there as were Jack and Vincent. Even though it seemed odd for the attorney to be spending time with Georgia's family that day, she knew it was what the kids wanted, so she was pleased to be able to give them the gift of a united family, even if it was only for the day. Following her kids into the living room, the brunette took a seat on the couch next to Cindy.

"Can I get you anything, Blake? A cup of coffee?" the writer suggested amiably.

"That would be wonderful, Georgia. Thanks."

The blonde smiled and nodded at her ex-wife before going into the kitchen. As she was pouring the coffee into a mug, she thought about the way the attorney looked that day. Blake was dressed casually in a pair of khaki pants and a heavy navy sweater. Her graying brown hair hadn't been styled as usual, leaving it looking soft and slightly disheveled in a most alluring way. The younger woman felt her body warming at the thought of the way her ex was dressed. Even though their relationship hadn't worked, there was no denying the affect the sight of the older woman had on her still. Blake was still her fantasy, and at times when she was alone in the middle of the night longing for someone to hold her, it was always the attorney that flooded her mind and fueled her passion.

Returning to the living room, Georgia presented her ex with the beverage. Blake smiled at her cordially and thanked her graciously for the drink before both parents focused on their children. Lana and Luke were both eager to rip into their gifts and made quick work of the presents to Blake and Georgia's surprise. However, when everything was complete, the brunette pulled one last present out of the jacket she had worn that day and handed it to the writer.

"This is a little something for you and the kids," she stated nervously.

Georgia thanked her in confusion. She hadn't expected Blake to buy her anything, so she wondered what it could be. Carefully unwrapping it, she opened the cover of the small card and read what was on it aloud. "This gift certificate entitles the holder four tickets to a week at Disney World." Looking at the attorney, she questioned, "Four tickets?"

"Well, it's for you, the kids, and whoever else you might want to take. It doesn't have to be Anne. You can take your mom, Jack, Helen, Sarah, whoever you want. It's your choice."

Smiling at the older woman, Georgia said, "Thank you, Blake. That's very generous of you. I'm sure we'll have a great time."

"It was just something we said we wanted to do for them. I figured now was as good a time as any," she mentioned, looking at the blonde. They had discussed it before when the children were younger. Georgia had wanted to take them to Disney so badly, but Blake knew it was more because she had never been able to go as a child herself that caused that want for her kids. By giving the blonde that particular gift, she was giving her a chance to have a bit of her own childhood again, which was a small gesture of wanting the blonde's happiness.

It didn't go unnoticed by the blonde either. "Well, thank you. It's wonderful."

"You're welcome." The two of them just looked at each other for a moment in silence while the other adults in the room began to clean up the mess the kids had created with the wrapping paper.

However after a moment, Cindy broke the spell as she said, "Georgia, want to help me in the kitchen?"

"Sure, Mama. I'll be right there." The blonde followed her mother into the kitchen.

"Well, that certainly was a sight to see," the older woman mentioned.

"What was?" Georgia inquired in confusion.

"The two of you together lookin' at each other like that. What's goin' on, Georgia? Have you forgotten what she's done to you?"

"No. I could never forget, Mama. It's just that she's bein' so nice for the children's sake. I feel like I should too. It's what makes them happy. I want my kids to be happy, Mama, regardless of what goes on between Blake and me."

"I know that look in your eyes, Georgia. Don't let her control your feelings. It's over. She don't deserve you."

"Mama, it's Christmas. I don't want to talk 'bout this. It hurts to think 'bout still. Just leave it 'lone for now."

"Fine. I'm just warnin' you. Don't let that woman back in your life. You'll be miserable."

Shaking her head at her mother, Georgia stated, "When did you become this way? You used to love Blake. Why the change?"

"Because she hurt you, Georgia. She cheated on you, and she divorced you without even so much as tryin' to make amends. That's not the kind of woman I want for you. You cain do much better."

"Mama, it's taken me time to realize I was as much to blame as she was for what happened. What if I did want to get back together with her? You wouldn't approve, even if it was what was best for the children and made me happy?"

"I want you happy, baby girl. That's all I want for you." Pausing for a moment she continued, "You don't want to be with her 'gain, do you?"

Georgia shrugged. "I miss her, Mama. I miss the way things used to be years ago. I just want to feel that way 'gain 'bout someone."

"You will, Georgia. I promise you will."

Just then Blake poked her head into the kitchen. "Do you two need any help?"

"We're fine. Thanks. Play with the kids, Blake," Georgia answered. When she was gone again, the blonde looked at her mother. "Just be nice to her, Mama. She's always been that way to you. That shouldn't change."

"I'll try, sugar. That's all I cain do."

Out in Montana Sarah had a sleepless night at the hospital. Doug and Samantha had taken the children to the best local hotel they could find to get some sleep the night before, and now on Christmas morning, the blonde actress sat by her wife's bedside in the stillness of the hospital room. Jamie hadn't changed much during the night, but the doctors considered that a positive thing under the circumstances. It meant the taller woman's immune system was fighting well for her. Nevertheless, Sarah was still despondent as she sat and kept vigil over her.

A little later there was a knock on the door before Samantha quietly poked her head into the room. "How is the patient today?" she inquired solemnly.

"No change but the doctors say that's good," the younger woman reported.

The redhead nodded. "The family has started arriving. Why don't I sit here for awhile, so you can go to the hotel and sleep a little? It'll do no good to stay up like this. You need rest, Sarah."

"I just can't bear to leave her, Samantha."

"I know, but the hotel is only ten minutes away. If anything happens, I'll call you. Your kids need you, Sarah. Let me stay here for awhile. Just go to the hotel and take a nap. Then get up and have a shower and something to eat. You'll feel better. Doug has the kids, so you'll have some time to sleep."

"You're probably right, Samantha. I wasn't able to sleep much last night. The nurses kept coming in here every hour to check on her. You'll call me if there is any change?"

"Of course. You'll be the first to know. Go on now. Here are the keys," the older woman said, handing over the car keys and a hotel key. Your room has already been prepared."

"All right. I'll go but only for a few hours. I'll be back soon."

"Take your time. I'll be right here," Samantha said, hugging the blonde closely.

"Okay. Be back soon."

"Okay." Sarah turned to leave but then changed her mind and returned to the bed. Leaning down to her wife's pale lips, she kissed her gently. "Merry Christmas, Jamie. I love you. I'll be back in a little bit," she whispered. Jamie of course said nothing, making the blonde start to cry. Nevertheless she turned to Samantha. "Take care of her. I'll be back in a few hours."

"I will. Take your time."

Slowly making her way to the hotel, Sarah used the room key Samantha had given her to go into her room. When she opened the door though, all the kids were there with Doug. He gave her a comforting smile as all of the children rushed to hug her. "Merry Christmas, Sarah. Last night I took the liberty of driving back to the house to get the children's presents, so they could have a little Christmas today. We had just finished with their presents."

"That was nice of you, Doug. Thanks."

"Well, it gives them something to do as well, because they can't really go outside in this weather. How are you? How are things?"

"There hasn't been any change yet. I'm exhausted actually."

"Well, we got the only suite this place has plus the room next door. It's not what you're used to I'm sure, but it was all there was around here."

"It's fine."

"Why don't you take a nap in the room next door? I'll stay with the kids and keep them entertained."

"I appreciate that. I'll only be a few hours."

"Take your time, Sarah. It's a long road, and we all need our strength."

Nodding her head, the actress went into the room next to the suite and shut the door. Not even

bothering with her clothes, she collapsed onto the bed and immediately fell asleep from exhaustion. By the time she awoke later that day, all of the family had arrived. She took her time in showering and dressing before going to be with them. All of them were sympathetic to her and the situation, giving her some comfort by their presence. However, all she really needed was a call from Samantha that Jamie was responsive again. That call didn't come though, and by the time dinner was over, Sarah wanted to return to the hospital for another long night of watching over her wife.

The next several days followed in the same fashion for Sarah. She stayed at the hospital almost every night while another family member took day shifts with Jamie. The older actress was still not responsive to anything, but the doctors kept reassuring Sarah that Jamie was at least stabilized more than she had been when she was admitted, giving them some small assurance in her recovery. Not once had Jamie gotten worse, so it was a sliver of hope to which she clung during the long nights.

However, after the New Year, a tough decision had to be made regarding Doug, Samantha, and the kids. The children were scheduled to head back to school, but Samantha was hesitant to leave Sarah. Nevertheless, the blonde assured them that she would be fine with the other family and asked that they take Katrina back with them, so she didn't have to miss any school. The ten-year-old wasn't thrilled with the idea of parting with the brunette, but her aunt was able to convince her that it was for the best, so they finally left with their kids and Katrina in tow, leaving the actress with her younger children, her parents, and her in-laws. During that time Eve and Stephen were attended to by their grandparents while the blonde spent her time with Jamie.

One night the little actress was in the chair reading a magazine and just thinking when she heard a small moan coming from the bed. Looking over to her wife, she saw the brunette's facial muscles twitching slightly. It was the first movement the older woman had made in almost two weeks. With concern and cautious optimism, Sarah buzzed for the doctor immediately. It was only a few moments before they arrived in the room to investigate.

After a brief examination, they turned to her. "It appears as if she is almost cognizant. Give it a little longer, and with any luck we might see her eyes open."

Thrilled with the potential news, Sarah took her wife's hand. "Jamie, open your eyes for me, love. It's been so long since I've seen them. I miss them and you. Come on. Just look at me." Jamie didn't answer but for the first time, Sarah felt a response from her lover. The taller woman's hand quivered in the blonde's, filling the younger woman with excitement. "That's it, sweetheart. Come back to me," she whispered, running her hand along her beloved's face in affection. For the rest of the night, Sarah sat rapt with the possibilities of seeing Jamie's brown eyes open, and by morning that wish finally came to fruition as the blonde sat beside the brunette sleepily.

When Jamie's eyes opened, it took her a moment to focus on where she was. The room was silent except from some humming sounds. Slowly moving her head, she scanned the room. It was obviously a hospital, and there next to her, sitting there watching her anxiously was her wife. "Sarah," she mumbled.

"Jamie, I'm right here," Sarah answered, moving onto the bed to sit next to the woman she loved.

"What happened?" the older actress asked slowly.

"You were in a skiing accident, love. I almost lost you. You almost followed in the footsteps of your namesake, Jamie. You don't have to die young, you know, just because you were named for a man who did," she teased with relief that her lover seemed to be coming around finally. "Do you remember anything?"

Jamie gave a tiny nod. "I was being chased by a photographer through some trees on the slope. We collided, and then Doug was kneeling over me."

"Yeah. Let me get the doctors, baby. They'll want to know you're awake," she stated, pressing the button for the nurses' station.

Within minutes Jamie was surrounded by medical staff being examined again. The doctor smiled at Sarah for the first time since they met. "It looks like she's finally coming around. This is what we've been hoping for all along. There is still some infection in her body from the silicone, but this is a vast improvement." Then looking at Jamie, he introduced himself. "Hello, Jamie. I'm Doctor Grayson. It's about time you returned to us. We've been worried about you."

"What happened?" Jamie inquired of him.

"Well, you suffered through quite an accident. Both of your breasts were punctured so badly that I had to remove your implants. You broke your collarbone and your arm, and you fell off an embankment. You're quite lucky to still be with us."

The older woman nodded slowly as she tried to look over herself. Immediately she noted that her notorious chest was gone, and her arm and shoulder were in a cast. Looking back at him, she quietly asked, "Can you put them back in?"

"Jamie, I wouldn't recommend that you do that, at least not until you're completely well. You need to recover first before you even think about getting another set of implants. It's going to take some time to heal first."

Sarah saw the look on her lover's face and knew the older woman was upset. When the doctors left them alone, she took her wife's hand. "What's wrong, Jamie?"

"Look at me, Sarah."

"I am. What do you see wrong, love?"

"They were my career, Sarah, and now they're gone," she mumbled tiredly.

"Jamie, don't worry. There will be time to think about all that. You need your rest now. Please

don't worry about anything but getting better for me. Okay?"

The taller woman nodded her head and sighed a little. "Where are the kids?" she asked.

"Katrina is back in New York, because school started again, and Stephen and Eve are with our parents. I'm sure they'll be by later. You need to just relax now. That's all that's important at the moment."

By the time spring came alive again in New York, Jamie had returned almost as she had been when she was in Montana, with one notable difference. During the time that she was recovering in the hospital, she and Sarah had numerous talks about where to go from that point. A major topic of discussion was Jamie's breast implants. Even though they had brought the actress her currently popularity, the blonde had managed to convince her lover that she didn't need them any longer.

Jamie was reluctant at first to relinquish what she considered to be her biggest acting asset, but as the conversations drifted from her body to her career, the actress made an important decision. From what she did remember about the day of the accident, there was a conversation she had with Katrina that stuck out in her mind. Her daughter had great disdain for the media attention that she got. In fact, she realized it was creating a problem in their relationship, because she wasn't able to spend private time out with Katrina. Given that, she came to the only conclusion she could live with for the betterment of her family. Shortly after returning to New York, she informed Sarah and her children that she was going back to Broadway acting. She had spent enough time in the Hollywood limelight, and she was tired of not having the privacy that she wanted for her family.

Sarah was shocked at this news at first, because Jamie had decided not to complete the project she had been working on when the accident occurred, leaving her without any other films after her Oscar win a year ago. She urged her wife to consider her decision carefully, but in the end, Jamie was satisfied with her choice of giving up the glamorous movie star life for something closer to her heart and to her family. With the decision made, she immediately got work offers in several new productions. Choosing the one she felt was most right for her, she dove into her old theatrical passion. It felt good to her to be on the stage again, and at the end of every day, she went home to her children.

Sarah, on the other hand, made the choice to continue the lifestyle she had always known. Having grown up in the Hollywood scene, it was the place she felt most comfortable. She and Jamie came to an understanding that allowed the blonde to continue to pursue her dreams while the brunette followed her own on the much smaller scale. Of course having Jamie back in her natural element on the stage created its own buzz as she once again became the talk of the international theatrical circle that she had been before pursuing her big-screen acting career.

As for Torrance and Helen, life was passing at the blissful pace it usually did. The blonde was into her second trimester, and as the months had passed, Torrance had scaled back on her photo

shoots, leaving the two of them lots of time to spend with their children. The days consisted of the photographer and the former teacher playing with their kids and relishing the time they had.

Blake, however, was fairing much worse than her friends. With the spring Georgia began to travel a lot more on book tours, taking the children and the nanny with her. Many nights the attorney came home to an empty house, and it was getting more difficult for her to cope with her losses. In an effort to suppress her pain, she became a regular at the local bar a few doors down from her building. She always had a flock of ladies to give her the attention she craved, but at the end of every night, she always returned home without an escort. During that time she had recognized that even though she loved the attention, she was truly not able to move beyond innocent flirting with anyone yet. Georgia still had a hold on her that wouldn't allow any one else into her heart or home.

One Friday evening Blake returned home from work to an empty house. Going into her room, she changed into some casual clothes that consisted of a pair of khaki trousers and a blue dress shirt. Heading into her kitchen, she peered into a bare refrigerator and sighed. It was too quiet that night. Georgia was away with the kids and Anne on a trip to New Orleans. The week and half in which she had alone had been trying for her. She missed her children dearly, but she found herself missing the little blonde as well. Closing the refrigerator door, she decided to head to the bar where she was now a regular for some conversation and food.

A few hours later the writer and nanny arrived back at the attorney's loft a few days earlier than expected, because Lana and Luke wanted to go home and see their mother. However, when they got there, they found the place unoccupied. Nevertheless, Anne and Georgia prepared the children for bed. Not knowing when the brunette would be home, the younger woman contemplated waiting for her but decided it would not be right given their current relationship. Instead she left the twins in Anne's capable hands and left the building.

Going outside to the street, the doorman greeted her politely and asked if he could hail her a cab. The writer smiled and nodded, so he went to do her bidding. However, as they were standing there waiting on a taxi, she curiously inquired if he knew of the attorney's whereabouts. With a nod he informed her of the bar Blake had been visiting only a few doors down from there. Thanking him graciously, the blonde said she would not be needing her cab after all and started to walk in the direction of the bar.

When she arrived there, she paused at the door a moment, contemplating whether she should enter. There was a part of her that knew she should leave Blake to her privacy, but there was a much greater part of her that wanted to see the older woman. Opening the door to the establishment, she tentatively stepped inside the dim place. Conversation was loud and rowdy in the crowd of mostly women, but Georgia didn't see Blake at first. Moving further into the bar, the writer scanned for the attorney. However, it wasn't until she got to the end of the long oak bar that she spotted the woman of her persistent fantasies.

Blake was in the corner leaning against a barstool and dressed in casual clothing Georgia had never known the brunette to wear. The shorter woman just watched her momentarily as Blake idly ran her hands over the pool stick in her grasp and watched the game in progress. It took the

thirty-year-old back to the first night she had ever spent with her ex-wife.

Georgia had been married to Jack and living in rural Georgia. Her life was so much different then. There she had been just a few steps shy of the trailer trash associated with the poor areas of the Deep South. However, the attorney had seen past all of that at their first meeting and interactions in the times that had followed. Blake had never made Georgia feel like less of a person for her financial and social situation in life. The forty-two year old hadn't made her feel embarrassed about coming from a less-than-worthy upbringing. Blake had always treated her with respect. Instead, it was Georgia who had treated the attorney differently by her obvious financial status.

The blonde woman had been interested in how Blake had come by her money and was fascinated by the strong nature she possessed. That allure quickly transformed itself into something deeper, though, the day she saw Blake and her then girlfriend, Cara Lebowitz, in the middle of a passionate encounter. It was then that Georgia realized her own feelings as well as the possibilities in pursuing the attractive northerner. Her plan had quickly gone awry though, and she still regretted what happened to the attorney at the hands of the Georgia Klan. However, even that horrific event hadn't kept them apart in the end. Eventually, Blake had forgiven her for her part in the tragic crime, and they had been able to find the love both of them had always desired. A marriage and two children later, the writer had found herself living the life she had always fantasized about as a little girl. She had the money, notoriety, and career she wanted.

However, as she looked at Blake across the crowded bar, she realized what she had truly longed for, even though only a few feet away, was out of her reach once again. The love of a lifetime was no longer hers, and it deeply saddened her even more than she had already been. Not even the money she had received as a settlement in their prenuptial agreement and what she had made in her writing could make up for the loss of the attorney's embrace, but she knew she had made a choice to have the career she wanted. Her only wish was that Blake had been accepting of hers, but she realized it was hypocritical to ask for that approval when she had never truly given it to the brunette. The whole time they were dating and then married, she had begrudgingly endured the attorney's long hours when she had preferred her to be at home.

With those thoughts running rampant through her mind, she sighed at the sight of her ex speaking with another woman. Even as much as she felt the familiar tingle in the pit of her stomach at the very sight of the sexy attorney, she knew Blake was no longer hers to claim. Deciding it would be best to leave before she was spotted, she turned to go. She wasn't sure why she had come in the first place, and figured it would be best to escape before she was forced to vocalize why she had appeared in the bar if the taller woman spotted her. Making her way back toward the door quickly, she was just reaching for the handle when the melodious voice she had grown to love through the years spoke her name questioningly. Turning toward the sound, she prepared a casual smile for her ex-wife.

"Georgia, what a surprise. What are you doing here?" the older woman asked.

"I brought the kids home early, because they wanted to see you. Anne's with them now. I was just on my way home when the doorman told me where I could find you. I wanted to tell you

they were home, but when I saw you, I thought better than to disturb you."

"Oh, well, okay. Was that all?" Blake inquired. She had her doubts Georgia's only reason was the kids.

"Pretty much. I'm just goin' to get home now."

"Do you have to rush off? You must be tired and hungry. Let me get you something to eat and drink," she suggested.

Looking around for a moment, the smaller woman conceded, "All right but only if I'm not in the way."

"Not at all. Come on," she insisted, gesturing toward the bar. The two of them took seats on empty barstools toward the window. The bartender took their orders quickly before they were left to themselves. Trying to figure out what to say, the attorney asked, "So, how was your trip?"

"Fine. Lana and Luke love Nawlins as much as I do."

"Good. It'll be nice for them then when they go there. And what about Anne?"

"I suppose she enjoys it as well. I gave her a couple of days off to sightsee while we were there. It really is a great city, Blake."

"I know. I had a great time when we were there," the older woman admitted. "I just wouldn't want to live there permanently."

Georgia nodded. Not knowing exactly what to say in response though, she changed the direction of the conversation to the brunette. "So, how's work for you?"

"Busy. As long as celebrities fall in love, get married and divorced, I'll never have a dull moment. Between prenups, divorces, and custody battles, it's always busy. The financial practice is doing well also. My fellow partners are looking into offering Jeff a senior partner position here in the near future. Right now we're just trying to work out a succession plan once we move him. It's still a year or two away, but I'm always planning for my protégé."

"Well, Jeff has always been an excellent member of your staff. He deserves any accolades and promotion you can give him. He's been loyal to you for as long as I can remember."

"That's very true. One of these days he'll be the one to take over my business. It won't be too soon, because I have a lot of good years left in me, but there will be a time to sell out."

"Speakin' of sellin' out, what's the latest between you and Jack if I cain ask?"

"He still wants me to sell, but I'm not ready. I believe the restaurant is only getting better, and it would be foolish to give up my investment due to circumstances. We're still partners, and I have

maintained my silence as per our agreement. We are still able make business decisions amiably, so there's no need to change in my opinion. I know he feels differently, but I think he understands that regardless of you and me, I'm there for the restaurant's success and would do just about anything to ensure it. I'm not going to do anything to jeopardize his financial interest, because I'm so heavily invested in it myself. I'm not going to sell, Georgia, but I'm not going to run it or him into the ground either."

"I guess I understand that." There was a brief pause as their drinks were placed in front of them. Georgia took a sip of hers before turning back to her ex. "Since we're here chattin', there was somethin' I wanted to talk to you 'bout," she mentioned.

"What's that?"

"This Disney World trip that you gave the kids and me. I asked them who should be the fourth person to go with us. They said they wanted you to go."

"Me? Well, that's not exactly what I had in mind."

"I know, but I think it would mean so much to them for us to go as a family. Would you at least consider doin' it? For them?"

"When it is scheduled?"

"In three weeks."

"That doesn't leave me much time to prepare, Georgia, but I guess I'll see what I can do. I wouldn't want to deny the kids if it's what they really want," the attorney conceded.

The blonde nodded her head. "It is. It'll be fun. You'll see."

"All right. I'll look at my schedule tomorrow and let you know."

"Wonderful."

Several minutes of idle chat later their food arrived. Both women were grateful, because it was just the slight distraction from direct interaction that they needed. It was difficult for them to try to act normally with each other when there was so much being left unsaid. However, they managed to make it through their impromptu meal without any problems. When it was over, Georgia thanked the brunette for their dinner and then made a quick escape before anything could go wrong, leaving the attorney sitting at the bar wondering about the encounter.

Going back to her own place, the writer got herself ready for bed. It was still early, but she nevertheless climbed under her covers with a book to relax after the long day of travel. Opening her novel she tried to focus on the text, but her mind was elsewhere. Dark eyes captivated her attention as she thought about Blake. The time at the bar with the older woman was a surprise and pleasure that evening. The attorney looked so sexy to her when she spotted her in the back of

the bar, and when she heard Blake's voice calling her name, it sent a shiver through her body like so many times in the past.

During their small meal, they had to sit so close together due to the crowd that every once in awhile one of them would brush against the other. Georgia didn't know if Blake realized it or not, but every time the dark-haired woman touched her casually, the writer felt as if she was burning. Her skin was set on fire by the mere touch of the forty-two year-old's arm.

Now in the privacy of her bed, Georgia let her mind fantasize about more between them. She imagined Blake's hand stroking her thigh lightly as they ate, her fingers creating circular patterns on her inner thigh as she spoke to the blonde. Georgia's pulse quickened at the thought and her breathing caught. Letting the dream continue, she had the attorney whispering flirty notions as her powerful hand made its way up to the juncture of the blonde's thighs. Blake's mouth closed over her neck as her skillful fingers magically found a way inside of the younger woman's clothes. Managing to meet the brown eyes of her lover, Georgia's eyes said everything for her as she sat happily helpless to Blake's whims. Soon their mouths were joined as were their bodies.

Georgia's eyes began to water as she came back to reality. That Blake wasn't hers any longer. In fact, she hadn't seen that side of the attorney in quite a few years with the exception of the trip to New Orleans almost a year ago. It seemed hard to accept that almost a year had passed since that time together with her beloved and her friends. It was the last moment she remembered being happy. With a sigh she wondered if she would ever be that way again. Not knowing an answer though, she tried to force the thoughts from her mind as she once again looked at her book. However, before she could begin to read, another thought struck her. If Blake was able to go to Florida with them, she wasn't sure she could control her need. The attorney had always had a magnetism she was unable to deny, and even though they were no longer married, it was still hard for Georgia to deny herself the feeling of the brunette's touch. Knowing she had to deal with that only as it arose, she vowed not to think about it.

Three weeks later Georgia's worries from that night at the bar found themselves at the surface again as she looked across the aisle of the airplane and saw Blake sitting there. Surprisingly the attorney had been able to clear her schedule for her children, and the four of them were on their way to Disney World in Orlando, Florida. Neither adult said much to each other as they boarded the plane for their destination. Instead they focused strictly on the kids, each of them taking one under their supervision. With the course of the next week already set for them, the writer wondered what it had in store.

Back in New York, Jamie was on the set of her latest musical working diligently when a lunch break was called for the actors. Heading off toward the dressing area, the brunette was off in thought when she heard her name being called. Looking over her shoulder at the sound, she saw her long-time friend and the producer of the show, Cara Lebowitz, coming toward her.

"Cara, hey," the actress greeted.

""Hi, Jamie. How are you?"

"Fine. You?"

"I'm all right. Listen, do you have any lunch plans? I wanted to talk to you if you were free."

"I'm free. Let's go. I'm starving."

Giving a nod, the producer followed her friend toward the dressing area where Jamie quickly threw on a light jacket and sunglasses. Heading out the side door to the stage, Cara inquired, "So, where to?"

"I don't care. You pick it as long as it's fast." Cara nodded and then pointed down the street toward a small French restaurant. Going inside they were immediately seated and left alone with menus. Jamie looked at her choices and quickly decided before asking, "So, what did you want to talk to me about, Cara?"

"You. I want to talk about you, Jamie. I've known you a long time. Something's not right with you. You want to tell me what it is?"

"Nothing's wrong, Cara. I'm fine."

"I know you too well. Jamie, whatever it is, you can tell me. We're friends."

The younger woman sighed. "I know. I just am having some problems lately. I'll get better."

"What kind of problems?"

"Well, as much as I like being back in the theater, it's still kind of hard. It's just going to take getting used to again."

The older brunette nodded. "Well, hopefully it makes you feel better to know that you are an even bigger star now than when you left."

"It's different though. It's not what I'm used to anymore."

"I know, but is it better or worse?"

"Both. I mean, I'm still hounded by the media, and I suppose I always will be, because I'm married to Sarah, but the focus has shifted more toward her now. I don't like that. I don't want to see her hurt the way I was."

"She's got protection."

"I know, but the fact that she has more bodyguards than ever doesn't make me feel any better. There is always a chance some lunatic could hurt her."

"If I were you, I'd be more worried about myself. You're the one walking around the streets of

New York without adequate protection. Do you really think that one escort you have is going to keep you out of harm's way?"

"I don't like even having one, Cara. I wish I could walk these streets alone the way I used to. There was a time when I could. Back when I was married to Stephanie, back when I wasn't a star, I could go anywhere and do anything. I'll never have that back though. That's a choice I made, but sometimes I do wish I could reverse it. Had I not been famous, I wouldn't have almost died in that skiing accident."

Nodding her head, Cara said, "Well, had you not been famous, you never would have met Sarah. Your celebrity afforded you things you never would have had otherwise. You still would have been a star on the stage if you hadn't gone into movies. You already were, but you would have been vaulted into it even more than you had then. You're too talented not to have had the notoriety. Your voice alone would have gotten you that attention. In fact, I always thought you would go the route of a singer to stardom instead of an actor. Nevertheless, the result would have been the same. You were destined for celebrity, Jamie. Some people just are."

"I guess. It's still hard sometimes though. I mean there are times when I lie awake at night and think about how different my life could have been had I not gone into movies. I never would have been skiing that day. I never would have lost what I did, and I never would have been responsible for someone else's death," the younger woman mentioned quietly, allowing her real thoughts to finally show.

"Yeah. That must be hard for you, Jamie. I know you thought you built your career on your implants, but let me tell you something. You were beautiful before, and you're beautiful now. People stop and stare at you, not because you're a star, but because you are so stunning. Long before your name was household, you still had that effect on people. To be truthful with you, those additions made you into something you weren't. Sure they got you attention, but you hid behind them for so long. It wasn't until Sarah came along that you let your walls down and let her see the real you. Because I knew you before you got those implants, I know the real you, but I also know that many people don't. You've gotten a second chance, Jamie, to make it right. It was lucky that you survived that accident. It could have easily been you instead of that photographer who died up there. You need to make the most of this chance, and I think you've started. You gave up the movies to come back to your real passion. You're able to spend more time with your kids. I know those are things that truly matter to you."

"They are. It's just hard to know my revelation came at such a high price. As much as I am grateful for the chance to do what really matters to me, I hate the fact that someone had to die. Even as much as I didn't want him following me up there, I would have rather us both leave that mountain safely. Instead he got killed, and I almost died. Do you even know how it feels to think about the fact that if I hadn't run into him he'd still be alive?"

"You don't know that for sure, Jamie. He was obviously careless, because he went after you in the first place. It was an accident, and there was nothing you could do about it. He was determined to hound you. If he hadn't been there, you wouldn't have gotten hurt. Think about it that way."

"I know, Cara. It doesn't make me feel any better though."

"Does Sarah know about this, Jamie? Have you talked to her or anyone about this?" the producer questioned hesitantly.

"Not really. She's been through enough, as have my kids. I want them to just be able to put it behind them. It's better for Katrina that way."

"I'm not so sure. I know your daughter too, Jamie. It wouldn't surprise me if she felt as guilty as you do. That's the kind of child she has always been. Maybe you should talk to her. I bet if you did, you both would feel better."

"Perhaps you're right, Cara."

"You should talk to Sarah as well, Jamie. That's what spouses are for. They are suppose to be there for each other."

"I know. I just hate seeming less than strong for Sarah. I've always been the strong one."

Laughing lightly Cara shook her head. "Oh, are you in denial. Are you blind? Jamie, Sarah is the strongest woman I've ever known. Look at all she's been through, and she's still with us. That woman can take anything you give. Now I suggest you let her know how you're feeling. It'll be better for your family."

"I'll think about it."

"Good. In the meantime, know that you can talk to me. I'm here for you, Jamie. I always will be."

"I know. Thank you, Cara."

Giving her old friend a smile, the older brunette stated, "Now can I tell you how great it is to have you back? I'm so glad you found your way home. This is where you belong. Broadway loves you, Jamie, and it is definitely not so quick to scrutinize every detail of your life. This is definitely the place for you to be."

"I'm really glad to be back. It was like coming home the first time I stepped on the stage again. You know, as much fun as I had making films, it doesn't compare to standing in the spotlight with the other actors. The cameras got to be too much after awhile. And of course it's great to burst out into spontaneous song as well," she joked.

Cara laughed. "Yeah. Musicals always have been good to you, Jamie. I'm so glad you're in this one. It's got Tony written all over it now thanks to you."

Later that evening Jamie returned to Staten Island just as the sun was beginning to set.

Immediately heading over to Samantha and Doug's, she picked up her three children, all of whom were excited to see her and made her way back to their house. Since Sarah hadn't gotten home yet, she started dinner for everyone and then sat with Katrina at the table to help her with her homework. It wasn't long before Sarah arrived back at the house.

Taking one look at the blonde, Jamie knew Sarah had a difficult day. "Welcome home," she greeted, standing to give her wife a hug and lingering kiss.

The blonde moaned lightly as she settled into Jamie's strong arms. "It's good to be home. What a day."

"What happened?" the brunette questioned, breaking away to check on the food. The blonde actress flopped down into a kitchen chair and began to rattle off all of the tedious interviews she had to endure in the city. Sympathetically the older woman listened, knowing it was hard for her wife to deal with all the media attention regarding her departure alone. Nevertheless, Sarah didn't mention anything about that. Instead, she just spoke about various people she had met that day.

When Sarah had exhausted the events of her day in full, she inquired, "And what about your day?"

"Mine was fine. Cara and I had lunch together, and the rest of the time I was at the theater working. It was great. I got to practice some of the songs for the production. I'll tell you, Sarah. It feels good to be back."

Standing Sarah came to Jamie and wrapped her arms around the taller woman from behind. "I'm glad, Jamie. I just want what makes you happy. That means everything to me."

"I know. I want the same for you, honey," the older woman replied, kissing the blonde on top of the head. "Why don't you go put on something more comfortable? Dinner is almost ready. After the kids go to sleep, I want to talk to you about something."

With interest piqued, the smaller woman inquired, "Is this a good conversation?"

"There's just something I want to tell you," Jamie answered.

Nodding Sarah went off to change, leaving Jamie to get the table ready for dinner. By the time the blonde returned all the kids were in their seats, waiting on her to begin their meal. Quickly she took her place. During dinner the conversation centered around Katrina, Eve, and Stephen. However, once it was complete, Jamie took the duty of getting Stephen and Eve into their baths and then pajamas while Katrina and Sarah took care of the dishes.

"How was school today, Katrina?" Sarah inquired conversationally. Ever since Jamie's accident, her oldest child was much more open with her, so she always tried to foster that continued growth.

"Fine. Some kids were talking about you and Mom again though," she informed the blonde.

"What were they saying?"

"Just stuff."

"Bad stuff?" Sarah guessed. Katrina nodded. "Well, you know that some people just make things up that aren't true. You know what's true and what isn't, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"And if you ever doubt anything, you can always ask us. You know that, right?"

"I know. Sometimes it's just hard, Mama."

Running her hands through her daughter's blonde hair, Sarah nodded. "I know, sweetie, but you know your real friends are the ones that don't judge you." The little girl put her arms around Sarah's back and held her closely for a moment. Sarah responded in kind, wrapping her arms securely around Katrina, who was only a few inches shorter than she. "I love you, sweetheart, and I'm always here for you."

"I love you too, Mama." After a long moment, Katrina said, "Mama, can I ask you something?"

"Sure. What is it?" she asked, looking down at her eldest child.

"Can I have the same last name as you and Mom?"

"You want to change your name? What brought that on?" Katrina shrugged. "Did someone at school say something to you?"

"I just want to have the same name as everyone else," she answered.

Nodding Sarah pondered the best response. "Have you asked your Mom? Do Aunt Samantha and Uncle Doug know about this?" she asked.

"No. Not yet. Would it be okay though?"

"Well, Katrina, it's a complicated situation, but I promise that I'll talk to your Mom. Aunt Samantha has to agree too, sweetie. It's really for the two of them to decide, but I'll tell them you asked. All right?"

"Okay."

"Now, do you have any homework to do?"

"Mom already helped me with it. Can I go across the street?"

"Sure. Let me walk with you as soon as I finish this."

Quickly putting the rest of the dishes in the dishwasher, the two blondes made their way across the street. Sarah spent a few minutes talking to Samantha and Doug before returning back to their house to speak to Jamie about the interesting development. However, when she arrived back at the house, Stephen and Eve were both too awake to settle down for the evening, so the blonde helped Jamie entertain them until Doug brought Katrina home.

Finally by 10:00 though all the kids were in their beds, leaving Jamie and Sarah some time alone together. Since both of them were tired from the day, they got themselves ready for bed and then sat on their balcony enjoying the spring night. Once they were settled, Sarah stated, "I know you said you wanted to talk to me about something, but something happened with Katrina that I have to tell you. Tonight when we were doing the dishes she asked if she could change her name."

"What? What does she want to change it to?"

"Talbot-Dean. She said she wants the same name as everyone else. We knew this day might come, but I wasn't really prepared to give her an answer when she asked, Jamie. I told her I would talk to you about it, but that it was Samantha's and your decision."

"Oh boy. I'm not sure how Samantha is going to take this. Her name is the last piece of Stephanie Katrina has."

"I know, but if she wants it changed, the two of you should seriously consider it. I think something is bothering her. I don't know if someone at school said something or what, but she wants to fit in. When you were that age, didn't you want the same thing? Maybe it was your accident that cemented the fact that we are family, and I'm not going anywhere. The two of us have had a much better relationship because of it. Maybe she's finally seeing me as the other mother I had always hoped. Nevertheless, she asked, and I promised her I would discuss it with you. Maybe you need to talk to her and see if you can get any more details out of her."

"Yeah. If she's set on it though, it wouldn't be right to stop her from doing it. It's just going to be hard for Samantha. I know it is. I don't know how she'll take it, but if it's important to Katrina, I'll support her."

"I know you will. You're a good mother, Jamie. You always try to do what's best for the children."

Shaking her head the brunette mumbled, "That's just a bomb. You know that says a lot about how she feels for you, Sarah. Essentially she's asking to take your name. The two of you have come a long way."

Sarah nodded in agreement. "As horrible as it was, the accident is what brought us together. It was the only good thing to really become of that whole incident."

"I know," the older woman mumbled. "That's kind of what I wanted to talk to you about," she

admitted, reaching for her wife's hand.

"What is it?" the blonde asked, intuitively sensing something was wrong.

"We've just never really talked about the accident itself. When Cara and I went to lunch together today, she could tell something was wrong, and she convinced me to talk to you about it. I just haven't, because I wanted it to be over."

"What about the accident?"

Sighing the taller woman mentioned, "Sometimes I feel guilty that the photographer chasing me was killed. It was an accident, and I didn't mean to run into him, but there are times when I think about the fact that if I hadn't hit him, he might still be alive."

"You don't know that for sure, Jamie."

"I know. I know that it was just one of those things. He was only trying to get close to me, and I didn't mean to run into him. I had just looked over my shoulder, and I swerved into him on accident. It doesn't make it any easier though."

"I suppose not," Sarah admitted. Coming to her wife's chair, she pulled the older woman into her arms. "Jamie, what happened was a horrible accident. Had he not been chasing you, you wouldn't have been hurt. You were lucky, but unfortunately he wasn't. As annoying as the paparazzi can be to us, most do it because they enjoy it. It's possible that he loved his work. That's why he chased after you on skis. No one else would have done that. Someone who didn't love what they did would never go after you trying to get the perfect shot. It was the thrill of the chase, and you gave him that until the very end. The doctors said he died instantly. He didn't suffer the way you did. He didn't even know."

"But his family knows. Somewhere out there he has a family. Did I take away someone's father or husband? Someone's son or brother? Those people are suffering because of me."

"They might be suffering, but it's not because of you, Jamie. They lost someone they loved in a terrible accident, but that kind of thing happens every day. Death is a part of life. We all have to do it at sometime. It was his time, not yours. It was not your fault, Jamie. You have to believe that."

"I know that, Sarah, but it doesn't make me feel any better," the brunette confessed.

"I know, darling. Sometimes it's hard to accept the truth, but it is the truth, and you can't go on forever thinking that you caused someone's death, because you didn't."

Jamie nodded. "I guess I just need some time to get over it. It was so traumatic for all of us, and it's just going to take awhile."

"I know, but I'm going to be here for you through it all. I love you, Jamie, and I always will," the

blonde whispered, leaning to give her wife a consoling kiss.

Wrapping the younger woman in her strong arms, the brunette pulled her closer. Their mouths merged more deeply as their hands began to become more active. After several minutes Jamie pulled away enough to gaze into her lover's blue eyes. "I love you, Sarah. Thank you for standing by me through this. It's been a long few months."

"I know. It's been difficult for everyone, but we have each other. That's all we'll ever really need," the younger actress whispered. "Now I think you should take me to bed. It's been too long since I've felt you." Since the accident Jamie hadn't been very interested in sex with her beloved given her emotional baggage of the incident and her new body. To the outside world, the tall woman was her normal confident self, but Sarah knew differently. She knew Jamie was somewhat self-conscious by the way she carried herself and the vulnerability in those dark eyes. Seeing that the older woman was wavering in the request, which was actually an improvement in their physical closeness, the blonde thought she would try to push a little more. "Please, Jamie. I want to feel the weight of your body on mine. I need you inside of me," she enticed.

With growing arousal, Jamie nodded at her wife. She knew she would have to face the obstacle of being intimate with the woman she loved in her transformed body eventually, and even more, she wanted to be with Sarah desperately. Putting her fears aside, she cupped her wife's cheek. "It would be my honor to give you anything you need," she answered, allowing the shorter woman to pull her to her feet.

Together they made their way into the bedroom. Sarah got into bed first while Jamie secured the doors to their balcony. Then she moved to her side of the bed and slid under the covers. Immediately the younger woman was in her arms. Kissing her with tenderness, the brunette reached to turn off the bedside light, but petite woman stopped her.

"Leave the light on for me. I want to see you, Jamie," Sarah requested. Even though Jamie was a little self-conscious about it, she nodded her consent. Soon emotions were the driving force behind their exploration as they continued to investigate each other thoroughly. When the blonde reached to remove Jamie's t-shirt, there was slight hesitation on the brunette's part, but she was determined to give her wife everything she wanted. Once it was removed, the blonde took a moment to caress her lover's chest. It still held scars from the accident where the ski pole had punctured her skin and ripped a horrific path across her torso. Nevertheless, Sarah leaned down and kissed lightly along its path in a loving gesture. "You know, Jamie, as much fun as those diversions of yours were, I prefer you like this, because it's the real you," she confessed, cupping her wife's breasts. "I love you, and nothing can ever change that."

"I love you too, Sarah, more than life," she whispered in return before giving herself over to the pleasure that could only be found in loving each other.

The following morning Blake and Georgia were having breakfast with some of their favorite Disney characters when her cell phone rang. Being that her kids were too involved with the atmosphere though, she didn't feel it would detract from their time to answer it. "Blake Erwin," she greeted taking a sip of her coffee.

"Blake, hey. I just called your office, and they said you were out. Are you sick?" Jamie asked casually.

"No. Actually, I'm on vacation with the children and Georgia," she answered.

"You're what? How did that happen?" the actress asked in surprise.

"It's a long story. What can I do for you?"

"Well, I don't want to interrupt. I just needed some custody help with Katrina, but it can wait until you get back, I suppose."

"Are you sure? What's going on?"

"Katrina asked if she could change her name. I haven't spoken to Samantha about it yet, so I'm anxious. I have a feeling this will be difficult for her. I was just hoping it can be solved amicably. That's where you'd come in if needed. As I said though, it can wait until you get back. When are you coming home?"

"Should be home on Saturday. We'll talk when I get back. I assume you want to discuss it before talking to Samantha?"

"Yeah. I don't want to fight over Katrina, but she's asking for something that could potentially harm our relationship with Samantha. I want to try to avoid that if we can. Maybe it's time to rethink custody, but I don't want to do it without your input."

"All right. Well, we'll talk more when I get back."

"Okay. You have fun with Georgia and the kids. You'll have to tell me how that came about when you get home. I'm dying to know what's going on there."

"You and me both, Jamie. I'll tentatively schedule some time on Saturday afternoon for us."

"Sounds good. Talk to you then. Bye."

"Bye." Hanging up her phone, she was met by interested blue eyes. "Jamie sends her regards," Blake mentioned casually.

"Social call or business?" the blonde asked.

"Business."

Georgia nodded her head, knowing she could not be privy to their conversation by that declaration. Nevertheless, she inquired, "How are Jamie and Sarah? I haven't seen them since the accident."

"They're doing as well as expected I suppose. Jamie's left the movies and gone back to the stage. I actually think that will improve everyone's life. It's where she belongs. That's where her true talent lies. As for Sarah, she's only gotten more protective of her family. They've all been through so much lately. It's natural to want to protect the ones she loves. She's in a place now of trying to protect them at all costs. It's understandable."

Georgia nodded in agreement. "I should have lunch with Sarah. I've missed her company."

"I know she and Helen have both missed yours."

"How is Helen? I've been so busy with this book tour that I haven't had any decent time with her."

"She's about as good as any five-month pregnant woman could be. She and Tor are just as blissfully happy as they have ever been. Sometimes I envy that," the attorney admitted.

"Me too. They really have gotten all they have ever wanted out of life."

"And it just seemed to fall in their laps at that. Although Tor would always be the first to confess she still doesn't know how she's kept that angel all of these years. She truly believes she's the luckiest woman in the world."

"She is. Helen is like no other," Georgia conceded.

"You know, she really does miss her time with you, Georgia. I know it would mean a lot to her to spend some time with you."

"It would mean a lot to me too. I've just been hesitant. With Tor bein' your best friend and all, it's been somewhat awkward. However, Helen's always been there for me. She's one of the best friends I've ever had."

"Look, Georgia. Don't let anything stop you from being friends with Helen if that's what you want. We're all adults. If she means that much to you, don't let her go."

The blonde looked at her ex-wife contemplatively as she thought about Blake's comment. She found it odd that the attorney was giving her advice on how to mend her friendship with Helen, the wife of the attorney's own best friend. Wondering if there was more to it than the brunette wasn't saying, she looked at her kids as a signal the conversation was over for the moment.

Over the course of the next several days, the dialogues Blake and Georgia had together while in the children's company remained somewhat mysterious to the blonde. Not once did the attorney say one negative thing toward her about her or the current state of their relationship. Moreover, when it came to those people that had been closest to them when they were together, the older woman encouraged Georgia to seek out individual relationships with them, confusing her more than ever.

As for Blake she was surprised to be having the conversations she was with her ex-wife. For the first few months after their short separation and then divorce, the last thing she wanted was for the blonde to be in her life in any way other than what was court-mandated. She had maintained all the friendships while Georgia had become reclusive when it came to the relationships she had with certain people, her two favorite other couples especially. Even though it was never stated, the attorney knew their friends felt Georgia's absence the way she did. It was as if one day she had been there and the next had vanished. The notion that Blake would even try to facilitate any mending between the blonde and her other friends seemed perplexing on the surface, but secretly Blake did have other reasons.

That night at the bar together led her to make a change in the way she related to Georgia. Sitting there in that crowded bar close together sharing a simple meal gave her something she hadn't felt in a long time. She was happy for the first time since the blonde had left her. The talk, though simple, sparked something in her that hadn't been there months before. Hope sprung forth like one small flame in the darkest night, and that light had started to kindle a larger fire when the writer had mentioned the idea of the family vacation.

Even though her schedule was incredibly busy, Blake had managed to clear it in hope that what had started in that bar was truly genuine. Georgia's eyes and gentle touch gave her faith that it was, but she wanted reassurance, and she knew there would be no way to know unless she had the time alone with the woman she still loved. Now sitting together over breakfast watching their kids interact with their favorite Disney characters while they simply spoke left her with the knowledge that what she had been feeling was real.

Given that the older woman wanted to assist the writer in rebuilding what had been lost when they divorced. By giving her back those relationships that meant so much to the blonde then, she hoped the younger woman would embrace her chance to have those friendships again. Additionally, the brunette thought, if Georgia was once again friends with those she spent most of her time, they would have reason to see each other more often in nonthreatening settings, such as under Cindy's watchful eyes. It was the only thing she could think of to do short of simply requesting to spend time with her ex-wife. She didn't know if Georgia would accept if the attorney was that direct in her interest.

On the last night that the four of them were in Florida, Blake and Georgia let the kids stay up a little later than normal. However, they had them in their pajamas at the regular time and allowed them to stay up to watch one last movie before going to bed. As the four of them sat together on the plush oversized couch, the blonde thought over the trip. She and Blake's relationship had changed once again into more than the writer ever thought possible. Looking over at her on the opposite end of the couch with their children sitting haphazardly between them, Georgia realized this was what she had always wanted from the older woman. She wanted someone as interested in her family as Blake had appeared to be that entire week. She had kept her business calls to a minimum and spent the majority of her time focused on the children's desires, which in turn created desires in the younger woman.

Out of the corner of her eye, Blake could see her ex gazing at her. She knew the look in her eyes

by the years they had known each other. The tender regard was a sure sign of the blonde's feelings. Deciding to test the waters, the forty-two-year-old, put her arm up on the top of the couch. Since Georgia's was already there, their forearms brushed lightly. When the younger woman didn't move, Blake knew exactly what Georgia was feeling. It was the same as her own yearning. She wanted a chance to touch the woman she loved again and began to formulate a plan to achieve that goal once their children had been put to bed for the night.

All too soon the movie was over, and both adults were taking Luke and Lana to bed. Tucking each one of them into one bed, Georgia and Blake both sat with them while the attorney and the writer took turns reading them a story. By the time that was complete, the twins were sound asleep. Blake carefully moved Luke to his own bed and then followed her ex out of the room.

Closing the door she went over to the bar to fix a drink. She needed something to take the edge off the nervousness she felt at the idea of what she was going to do. Meanwhile Georgia had disappeared into her own room, returning a few minutes later in her own conservative pajamas. "Would you like a drink?" Blake inquired over from the bar.

"Sure. That would be nice," the blonde replied, anxious now that they were alone.

Blake fixed two drinks and came back to the sofa. She strategically took a seat on the middle cushion as close to Georgia as she could without being in the younger woman's personal space. "Here you go," she presented, holding the glass up for the blonde to take.

Georgia wrapped her hand around the glass to take her beverage, hers caressing the attorney's for a brief moment as she did so. The charge at the touch was undeniable to either of them as their eyes met for a few seconds. The younger woman could plainly read the look of fervor on Blake's face, because she had seen it many times before when they had been dating and just married. It was as intoxicating at that moment as it had been back then. For Blake's part she could see those blue eyes burning for her. This was the Georgia she couldn't live without, the one who so openly wore her need on her face when she looked at the brunette.

Knowing there was no way she could refrain from the temptation in front of her, Blake leaned toward Georgia with the intent on seeing if the blonde was receptive. She was immediately surprised but thrilled that the writer's mouth cohered to her own within a moment. Both of them moaned loudly at the feeling. The kiss that both of them wanted was happening, and neither wanted to be the first to break it. They let it linger as long as they could before breaking for air, but before either of them had sufficient breath their lips were melded together again, however this time with less hesitation and more ardor. Georgia's head was spinning as she held Blake tightly with one arm around her back. The attorney's touch was even more ardent than she remembered, and for several minutes she didn't want it to end. Letting herself go, she embraced the attorney around the back with her other arm that was still holding her glass. Feeling the writer's body growing more amorous in her arms, the brunette shifted her weight, so they were reclining together, Georgia's small frame under Blake's. For several minutes the intensity grew but suddenly the attorney yelped as she felt cold liquid sliding down her back. Pulling away slightly she realized Georgia had accidentally tipped her drink and laughed lightly.

"I'm sorry, Blake," Georgia offered tentatively.

"It's okay. I'll just take it off," the taller woman stated, removing her shirt with one swift movement.

Georgia gulped hard at the sight of her ex-wife's body. Even though she still remembered what it looked like, seeing it after such an extended absence made it feel like the first time all over again. Knowing that they were moving in a direction that could not be reversed, Georgia tried to clear her mind as Blake leaned down to her mouth again. However, it was impossible to think coherently with the way the older woman was making her feel. Luckily just as the two of them began to become more involved, Georgia heard noise coming from the children's room, forcing them to stop.

Blake was reluctant to let the blonde go, but she knew one of the kids needed something. While the writer was gone, the attorney simply sat on the couch shirtless, trying to clear her mind. She knew the two of them were doing something that could be potentially damaging to their tentative reconnection, but she knew Georgia was feeling the same she was. A few minutes later the blonde closed the door to her children's room and then looked at Blake. The attorney was still on the couch. Even though the body she fantasized about was on clear display for her, Georgia was in more control than she had been before, and her mind convinced her that what they were doing wasn't what was best for their relationship. Just by the look in those blue eyes, Blake knew the moment between them was over and sighed.

"I think I'm just goin' to go to bed," the blonde mentioned. "Tomorrow's goin' to be a long day."

Blake nodded in agreement. "Yeah. I guess we need our rest."

One more awkward moment passed between them before Georgia said, "Well, good night, Blake."

"Night, Georgia." Blake sighed loudly when the blonde closed her bedroom door, leaving her alone with her thoughts. She knew that what she had been working hard to rebuild had just been demolished with the incident between them and wondered how it would affect their relationship now that each of them knew the attraction was still there.

When the blonde closed her bedroom door, she just stood there against it for several minutes. The trip had just taken an unexpected twist between them that left her more confused than she had ever been when it came to the attorney. Blake's desire for her was obvious, and she had laid hers bare to her ex-wife as well, which made her wonder what was going to happen now. She did want to be with Blake again, but she only wanted it if things were different between them. She knew she couldn't go back to the way their relationship was before the infamous trip to New Orleans. Changes had to be made, or the blonde knew it would never work, but the question remained if the attorney was willing to restructure her life to be more inclusive of her and the kids. Knowing nothing would be resolved that night, she retired to her bed more aroused and sexually frustrated than she had been in the last year, leaving her no other option but to finish in her mind what had started on the sofa between them.

The next morning by the time Georgia had dressed and packed her bags, Blake had already done the same plus gotten the children's bags packed as well. Not knowing what to expect from the attorney after the incident, the blonde issued a neutral greeting, which was returned in the same manner, making her realize the older woman didn't know what to say any more than she did. They didn't speak much through breakfast or the ride to the airport, so Georgia assumed Blake just didn't want to talk about what had transpired and respectfully kept her distance. On the plane ride, they only spoke when necessary and the behavior continued when they landed at the airport. Knowing Blake had a meeting with Jamie, she tentatively offered to take the kids with her, so the attorney could get to her office, to which the brunette agreed.

Blake arrived at her office shortly before five that Saturday evening. Even though it was the weekend, the office still had quite a few co-workers milling around and taking care of projects. They all greeted their boss and one of the partners cheerfully and inquired curiously about the infamous trip the whole office seemed to know about, but Blake only responded in depth to her trusted friend, Jeff. They were casually discussing the turn of events when Jamie's presence was announced by the weekend receptionist.

When the actress arrived in her friend's office, she could tell something was wrong with the attorney, so after a brief greeting and hug, she inquired, "Do you want to tell me about it?"

Blake laughed lightly at her perceptive friend. "I thought you were here to get my advice, not give me some. At least that's what I'm charging you for you know."

"Blake, I've known you a long time. I know something is going on with you. This past week had to be interesting for you. Do you want to talk about it or not? I won't force you, but I'm here, so you might as well spill it."

Shrugging the attorney said, "All right. The past week with Georgia was definitely enlightening for me. We had a wonderful time with the kids and even got along extremely well. We never argued or were short with each other. It was perfect until last night."

"What happened?"

"I did something I shouldn't have I suppose, and now she won't even talk to me really."

"What did you do?"

"Well, we were on the couch, and I thought I saw her looking at me in such a way that caused me to lean over to kiss her."

"And? Did she rebuff you? Was she mad?" Jamie inquired.

"Not exactly."

"Then what? Come on, Blake. Just tell me," the younger brunette pestered.

"We started kissing, and it was great. It was everything I remember but better. We were well on our way to reuniting at least physically but were interrupted by the kids. By the time she came back from attending to them, she had closed herself off again. There I was sitting half naked on the hotel couch just looking at her. She looked as helpless and frustrated as I did, but she just left me sitting there. Now today she won't even talk to me. I really screwed this up."

"What are you talking about, Blake? What did you screw up? You're already divorced. It's not like you want to reconcile. You both just had a momentary lapse in judgment."

"Well, that's just it, Jamie. I'm not so sure I was right to ask for a divorce now. I think I may have acted rashly, because I was angry."

"Are you saying you still love her?" the actress inquired in surprised interest.

"I never stopped loving her, Jamie. Even when I was at my angriest, I still loved her under it all. I just let other things get in the way, but I'm not so sure she feels the same. I mean, I suppose she at least feels the attraction between us still, but as far as starting over, I can't really ask her to do that, especially after all the horrible things I've done."

"Wow. This is certainly a surprise. I thought you were enjoying being single again. I mean, you were out all the time."

"Yeah. Well, that's only because I didn't want to be alone in the loft thinking about all that had gone wrong between us. I just don't know what to do."

"Well, it's always possible she feels the same, Blake. If she was actively participating in your impromptu make-out session, there has to be a part of her that still feels something for you. Georgia's not the kind of girl to do that casually. You should know that by now. My guess is that she's still in love with you as well but is afraid."

Shrugging the attorney mentioned, "Well, at this point we can't even seem to speak to each other, so it's a little difficult to get to the issue. Maybe in time there will be a chance, but for now I guess I just have to deal the best I can. Anyway, you didn't come here to talk about me. Let's talk about your situation. You said Katrina wanted to change her name?"

"Yeah. Sarah said she asked her about it, so I had a talk with her. I suppose she's getting to that age where fitting in matters. It's been hard for her since Sarah and I had Stephen. I really think she wants to do this to feel more a part of the family. I mean, she's the only one that isn't a Talbot-Dean. I asked her if she had really thought about what she was asking. She would be giving up her mother's name, but she's thought of how she wanted to handle that as well. She told me she wanted Taylor as a second middle name. I truly think this is what she wants by the thought she's put into it."

"And how does Samantha feel about this?" the attorney asked professionally.

"I haven't told her yet. I wanted to talk to you first. This is something that you can do fairly easily, isn't it?"

"Of course. It's not that difficult, but I think there is a greater issue involved. By changing Katrina's name, you are laying the foundation of possibly petitioning for full custody. Is that where this is going? The reason I ask is because Samantha is probably going to see it that way. I believe that's your reservation in talking to her, isn't it?"

"Yeah. I know she's going to see it that way, and I don't say that I would blame her. After all that has happened, I think the last thing she wants is to give up custody of Katrina, but I truly believe it would be better for Katrina if she did. Sarah has proven that she's quite capable of providing for Katrina's physical and emotional well-being. I think it would make Sarah happier as well."

"Well, are you prepared to say that to Samantha? She could disagree, and it could become a point of contention between the two of you. Are you prepared to take her to court over the matter?"

"I don't know. I am hoping we can work this out amiably before doing something of that nature. But what if it did go that far? Would Sarah and I have a chance or not?"

Blake shrugged. "It's hard to say. The political landscape is making the courts uncertain right now. You might get an activist judge that is willing to side with you. On the other hand, you might get someone so conservative that they would recommend Katrina be placed with Samantha permanently. You don't want that. I would strongly suggest the two of you settle this out of court. I really don't think either one of you wants to put the other in that position. To me it's not worth destroying your relationship. I know it's the most important one you have outside of the one with Sarah."

"That's true. I don't want to fight with Samantha. I just want what is best for Katrina. Hopefully I can get her to see things my way. Well, I guess that's all. Thanks for listening."

"That's what you pay me for, my friend," Blake teased, coming around and hugging the younger woman.

"I know. Good luck with Georgia. Let me know how it goes."

"I will. Now get out of here. I know you'd prefer to be with that precious family of yours instead of me. At least if I were you, that's what I'd want."

Heading home Jamie knew she was going to have to confront Samantha on the issue soon. Deciding it would be better just to get it over with, she went to her former sister-in-law's house before her own. "Jamie, hey. How are you?" the redhead asked with her usual hug as she and Doug tended to their kids, preparing them for dinner.

"Hey. I didn't mean to catch you at dinner. There is just something I need to talk to you about, Samantha. When you're finished, can we go somewhere to talk?"

"Go somewhere?" Samantha repeated. Jamie knew by the tone of the redhead's voice she was confused. Jamie had never requested them leave for any serious discussions, but she nodded her head anyway. "Sure. Why don't I come over after dinner?"

"Fine. I'll be waiting," the actress replied. Going to her own home, she was greeted by her own children and her wife.

Sarah saw the distress in her eyes immediately, though and asked, "What's wrong?"

"I'm going to have that conversation with Samantha after dinner. I just don't know how it's going to go."

"Well, I'm sure it'll be fine. You two have always been able to talk about things. Why don't you just relax until then? I'm making dinner."

"I'll help you," Jamie offered. By the time their meal was prepared, and Sarah had set the table, Samantha was already there. Seeing that they were about to eat though, she offered to come back later, but Jamie only stated, "That's all right. I'd rather do this now anyway."

As the two women walked out of the house, Samantha asked, "Where do you want to go?"

"How about the pier? We can sit and look out at the water," the brunette suggested.

"Fine."

Neither spoke for their entire walk. Finding a spot to sit when they got to the pier though, Jamie sighed. Not meeting the redhead's eyes, she stated, "I don't know how to say you this, Samantha. There's something I have to tell you, but it's going to be hard for both of us."

"You know you can tell me anything. We're family, Jamie."

"I know. That's what makes this so difficult. I don't want to hurt you."

Touching Jamie on the arm, Samantha asked, "What is it?"

Not knowing a tactful way to approach the topic, Jamie just decided to tell Samantha the absolute truth. Sighing she answered, "Katrina has asked that we change her name. She wants the last name of Talbot-Dean, Samantha. I've talked to her about it in depth, and she's sure it's what she wants."

Silence followed for several moments. However, then Samantha said, "I suppose if that's what she truly wants it would be wrong for me to deny her."

"I know it's hard, Samantha. I wasn't really sure this would ever been an issue, but now that it is, I think it's best that we resolve it as quickly as we can for her benefit. She still wants Taylor as a part of her name. It's just that she wants to have the same last name as the rest of the family."

Samantha nodded her head and was silent for a few moments. However, Jamie could see that the woman she cared so deeply for was beginning to cry. Trying to lend her support, she slipped her arms around the redhead, who instantly came into her embrace, placing her head on Jamie's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Jamie. I always wondered if this might happen, and I thought I would be prepared."

"I know. I feel the same way."

"She's my sister's daughter. I don't want her to lose sight of that."

"I know, but she's also my daughter, Samantha, and I want to do what's best for her. I think this will improve her esteem and her relationships with Sarah, Eve, and Stephen. I honestly do, and it's important to me that all my children get along. Changing her name won't change who she truly is, Samantha. We both know that."

"I do know that. It's just hard. Katrina is the last thing I have of my sister," the older woman cried.

With that comment, Jamie knew the next thing she wanted to ask Samantha would be the most difficult conversation they had ever had. Nevertheless, she felt it best to be completely honest with the woman she loved like a sister. Taking a deep breath, the actress stated, "There is something else I wanted to ask of you."

"What's that?"

"I've been thinking about this for awhile, and I'm wondering if it would be better if Sarah and I had custody of Katrina," she proposed hesitantly.

Samantha took her head off Jamie's shoulder and looked into her dark eyes seriously. "What? You're asking me to give up custody?"

"I'm asking you to consider what might be best for her. Samantha, a year ago I wasn't so keen on the idea, but after all that has happened, I feel it's worth considering. If something were to happen to me, I'd want Katrina to be with her brother and sister. I wouldn't want them separated."

"What does Sarah say about this?"

"She thinks it's worth consideration as well," the brunette answered, not giving Samantha all the information she and the blonde had discussed over the past year.

"And Katrina? What is her stance?"

"We haven't spoken to her about it. This is between you and me, Samantha. I don't want to fight with you in court or at home even. I just want us to be able to talk about this openly. I want my daughter to feel like she belongs. That's what this is about mostly. Also, I want her to be

protected should something happen to me. Sarah will be the executor of my estate should it come to that and will always have an interest in what's best for Katrina. Neither of you is going away from my life, but I just feel it might be better for Katrina if she could feel a part of one cohesive family instead of divided between two. That's all I'm saying, Samantha."

"What you're asking of me, Jamie, is almost impossible for me to get my mind around. I never thought you'd request this," Samantha confessed.

"It is difficult for me to ask this of you, Samantha. I never thought I would, but life has changed."

"Tell me this, Jamie. What should become of Katrina should you and Sarah divorce? Have you thought about that?"

"Sarah and I are married for life, Samantha. She's not going anywhere," the younger woman defensively rebutted.

"How do you know?" challenged the redhead.

Growling in frustration Jamie replied, "Because I know!"

"Well, I don't. I don't want Katrina to have to be torn between two houses then, one of which belongs to a woman she's not even related to."

"Sarah is Katrina's stepmother. She loves her, and she would always do what's best for Katrina. Don't make Sarah out to be a bad person, because she's not, Samantha! You know that!"

Samantha sighed. "I never said she was, Jamie. This is just not something you can expect me to agree with. I've raised my niece since before Stephanie even died. I was the one that took care of her while my sister lay dying in the hospital. I'm the one Katrina clung to for support while you were out making your career, and I did it because I love her and you. She knows I'm always here for her. You know I'll always be there for her. Between you, Sarah, and me I've spent more time with that child than the two of you combined. I think it would be more harmful than helpful to have that taken away. I know her mind and her heart, Jamie. This is not what's best for her. It's what's best for you."

Hearing the words Samantha had spoken, the brunette angrily stood. She took several paces in front of the bench of where the redhead sat as she contemplated what the older woman had just said. "You know, I haven't always physically been there for Katrina, but I love her with all that I am. She's my daughter. From the moment she was born, she's brought me the greatest happiness. I just want her to be happy, Samantha. If I can help her achieve that, I will. I think she's showing the signs that this might be the right course of action. I mean, after all, a name change is a serious matter. She wants to take Sarah's name. To me that means she has come to accept her as her second mother. Given that, I think it only fair to entertain the possibility of the next natural step of giving Sarah the rights and responsibility that comes with gaining another child in name. That's my point, Samantha."

Samantha was quiet a moment, signaling she was mulling over the statements. She sighed after a few minutes. "You know what, Jamie? This isn't something that we can decide over one conversation. Why don't we just let it lie for now? We've both said our preliminary feelings on the matter. Why don't we just think over the other's positions for a few days and then talk again? Maybe we'll have to simply ask Katrina what she wants," the older woman proposed.

Knowing that it was probably a wise idea, Jamie nodded her consent. With that her former sister-in-law came to embrace her. "I don't want to fight with you, Samantha. I love you too much for this to damage our relationship."

"I know. I don't want that either. I love you, too, Jamie, and I always will."

Both of them were quiet as they looked out over the water. Minutes passed before Jamie whispered, "You know, sometimes when I hold you it feels like I'm holding Stephanie."

"Big surprise there," the redhead quipped lightly.

"There are times when I still miss her. No one other than Sarah knows me as well as she did."

"I know. You're lucky to have found a second chance at love, Jamie. Sarah truly is perfect for you."

"I am lucky." Breaking away from each other finally, the actress mentioned, "We should get back. I'll call Blake tomorrow about the name change, so she can begin the paperwork. The rest we'll talk about more later."

"Sounds like a plan. Come on now. Let's get back to our families," Samantha stated, taking her former sister-in-law's hand.

Heading back into the house after seeing Samantha safely to hers, Jamie was met by her family sitting in the living room together. Eve was enthralled in a cartoon while Sarah held Stephen and read, and Katrina sat talking on the phone.

"How did things go?" the blonde inquired.

"All right I suppose. It wasn't the easiest of conversations." Looking at her daughter, she said, "Katrina, I want to talk to you. Hang up please."

Katrina did as she was told. Both of them went into the kitchen and took a seat at the table. "What is it, Mom?"

"I just talked to Samantha regarding your request to change your name. She's agreed to let you do it if it's what you truly want. However, I want you think really think about this. Is this something you really want to do? There is no changing your mind?"

"No. I want to do this," Katrina answered.

"All right. Then I'm going to call Blake tomorrow to start this process. However, if you change your mind between now and when the papers have to be signed, I want you to tell me. Don't be afraid to say you've changed your mind, because this is a serious change, and we're not taking it lightly. You shouldn't either. Know that you're making the right choice before it's too late. Okay?"

"Okay, Mom."

Reaching for her daughter, Jamie enveloped her in a long hug. "I love you, sweetie."

"I love you too, Mom. May I go now?"

"Sure."

Later that night as Jamie and Sarah were getting ready for bed, the blonde inquired, "Do you want to talk about how it went with Samantha?"

"Well, it was tough, Sarah. I had a hard time asking her about the name change, but she agreed to let Katrina do it if it was what she really wanted. I also asked her to consider giving us full custody of her."

"Really? I thought you were against it. What did she say?"

"I was against it, but I think the idea has merit now. She didn't quite see it the same way though. It's going to be a battle to get it done, but we've both agreed to think about the other's opinion and talk again. I don't want to go to court over it, and even more Blake says our chances for winning aren't great, so I'd like to be able to just convince her without taking that route."

"Do you think you're going to be able to do that?"

"I'm not sure. She brought up some valid points, but I think I did as well. It's just going to be a slow process for us to decide. It's not going to get done any time soon. We just have to be patient with each other. We all want what is best for Katrina, so if we can just keep that in mind, I think we'll come to the right decision together."

"I hope so. I just want Katrina to be happy."

Smiling at her wife, the brunette replied, "That's what we all want, and we'll make it happen. I'm sure of it."

The next day Torrance and Helen left Marta and John in the care of the photographer's mother, who had come down for a long weekend, to go to a doctor's appointment. So far the blonde's pregnancy had gone smoothly, which was a great relief to them both, especially after the miscarriage. Arriving for their appointment, they made themselves comfortable in the waiting

room. Helen looked at her wife as she thought about all the things they had on the agenda that day. She couldn't help but smile at the thought of shopping with her beloved for furniture for the baby's room.

Meeting eyes with the shorter woman, Torrance gave a brilliant smile as she placed a hand over Helen's tummy. At the end of her second trimester, the younger woman was glowing as she had with her other two. "You okay?" she asked gently.

"I couldn't be more perfect," she answered, taking her lover's hand.

"Good. You know we promised we'd talk about baby names today. Have you come up with any more?"

Helen shook her head. "Not yet. You?"

"I'm still at a loss. Being that this is our last one, I want it to be a perfect name."

Chuckling the blonde inquired, "Are you suggesting our other two children don't have perfect names?"

"Not at all. They are aptly named. I just want this one to have the same."

"Well, we'll think of it. It's not like we don't have time."

"True."

A few minutes later they were called back for Helen's examination. Taking her usual seat, Torrance waited while her wife undressed and took a seat on the table. Neither spoke, but as always, it was a comfortable silence between them. When their doctor arrived, they immediately started on the exam as they chatted about plans for the rest of the day. However, once the doctor had done a thorough checkup, she furrowed her brows at the couple.

"Something wrong?" Torrance asked in concern, seeing the face.

"It's a little too soon to tell. Helen, how much activity have you been doing lately?"

"Nothing more than usual. I'm with the kids all day. Why?"

"Well, your blood pressure is a little higher than I'd like. I think you should cut back on your exertion. I wouldn't want anything to jeopardize a full-term pregnancy. It's just a precaution."

"Fine. If that's what she has to do," Torrance answered.

Helen looked at her wife and then back at her doctor. "When you say cut back, what exactly does that mean?"

"Just not going out as much, staying at home and off your feet if you can."

"And if I do that, things will be all right?"

"Well, let me put it to you this way. High blood pressure is extremely dangerous to the mother during delivery. We want to avoid that if at all possible. That's why I think it's best for you to stay off your feet and just rest. I don't want any complications."

Nodding her head, the former model mentioned, "If that's what it takes."

"Good. Don't worry. You'll be fine," the doctor assured.

Leaving the appointment the taller woman could tell her wife was concerned about the precaution she had been given. In order to try to cheer her up, she said, "Before we go shopping, I'm taking you to Georgia's for lunch. I figured we hadn't been there in awhile."

"That'll be nice, honey," the younger woman answered, her words not quite sounding sincere.

"Helen, it'll be fine. You'll see. We just have to keep you off your feet. I'll cancel all my photo shoots for the summer, so I can spend it chasing after the kids. That way you can rest."

"Thanks, Torrance. You're always so good to me," the blonde said with a smile.

"Anything for you, Helen. You're my life, and I intend to keep you healthy."

When the couple arrived at Georgia's restaurant, they were seated immediately. The older woman could tell her wife was still bothered by the news they had received, so she decided to spring the surprise on her that she had originally wanted to give her later that day. After they had ordered, the photographer reached across the table for her beloved's hands.

Helen smiled into her favorite green eyes. "What? You have that look in your eyes," she teased.

"There's something I wanted to ask you," the brunette stated with a smile.

"What's that?"

Pulling a small box from her pocket, the older woman opened it and placed it on the table before inquiring, "Would you marry me again?"

"What?"

"Would you renew your vows with me, Helen? I'd like to renew our vows. It's the perfect time. Once the baby is born, our family will be complete, and I'd really like to have a ceremony with our children to celebrate our relationship and how much joy they've brought us."

"Oh, Torrance, you're so sweet, you romantic fool. I would love to renew our vows. Nothing

would give me greater honor."

"Great. I thought we could do it on our anniversary. I already took the liberty of checking with the minister who did our ceremony originally. It's a perfect day for it."

"Yes, definitely. I'm just not sure I could travel far with the newborn. The birth date and our anniversary is a week apart."

"I know, but I thought maybe we could do it at home. We could have a little ceremony on the beach with our family and closest friends. It's going to be much more like we had originally intended when we got married the first time. What do you say? You won't even have to plan it if it's going to put stress on you. I'll take care of the whole thing."

Smiling at her wife, Helen answered teasingly, "Sounds like you have it all worked out. So sure I was going to say yes, were you?"

"I would have been devastated had you not."

"Well, fortunately for you, I would do anything to make you happy, Torrance. I love you so much."

"I love you too, Helen. Here. I know you can't wear this right now with the weight you've gained, but I want you to have it now anyway," she mentioned, taking the ring out of the box and handing it to the blonde.

"It's beautiful, Torrance. Thank you. I can't wait to wear it, but let me keep it in the box for now, so I don't lose it," she said, putting the ring back in its box. "Will you hold it for me?"

"Of course," the brunette answered with a smile as she took the box from her beloved's grasp and tucked it back into her pocket. Taking the blonde's hand, she kissed the back of it in affection as she whispered, "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For being the best thing that's ever happened to me," Torrance said sincerely.

Blushing lightly the tall blonde smiled. Not knowing what else to say, she merely avowed, "I love you, Torrance, and I always will."

In the third week of August of that year, Torrance and Helen decided to have a get-together for some of their close friends. The blonde was almost full-term at that point but determined to have at least one fun afternoon after spending her summer off her feet per the doctor's orders. She had talked so excitedly about the idea several weeks prior that the photographer had reluctantly agreed. She knew the blonde had done her best to stay to a strict regimen during the final term of

her pregnancy but that the younger woman was stir-crazy. They hadn't done their typical summer outings, so Torrance was willing to concur with the idea of a pool party for their friends and kids.

However as they awoke that morning, a steady rain had started, making them wonder if they should just cancel the event. "We can do this some other time," the older woman proposed.

"No. The kids are excited about playing with their friends. Even if we can't be in the pool, there is plenty of space in the game room. Besides we already have all the food. Let's just stick with the plan," Helen debated shortly.

Hearing a stinging tone in her wife's voice, Torrance looked at the blonde quizzically. Helen didn't usually have such a timbre in her language, so the taller woman was concerned something could be wrong. Tentatively she questioned, "Are you all right, honey?"

"I'm fine. Why do you ask?"

"You don't sound fine. What's the matter?"

Shrugging the smaller woman answered, "I'm a little tired is all. I just need to rest awhile."

"Helen, why don't we just cancel the party? It's clear you aren't yourself today."

"No. Jamie and Blake are going to come with all their kids. If anything it'll be a chance for us to relax and let them watch over John and Marta for awhile."

"If you're sure," Torrance hesitantly mentioned.

"I'm sure, Torrance. It'll be fine. You'll see."

"All right. Then why don't you stay up here and rest? I'll get the kids ready for the day and start preparing the food."

"I can help."

"No. You stay off your feet. The doctor said that's what was best for you."

Sighing the former teacher mumbled, "I'll be so glad to have this baby, so I can get back to my life."

"It's just a few more days, love, and you'll have your wish," Torrance said, kissing her wife on the head. Rising from bed Torrance went into the bathroom for a shower. She had only been in there a few minutes when the door opened and a naked smiling blonde stepped in to meet her. Grinning in return the older woman said, "Well, this certainly is a nice surprise."

"It'll be awhile before we can do this again, so I thought I might as well enjoy it while I can," Helen answered, bringing her arms around her lover's neck.

Torrance in turn loosely slipped her arms around the blonde's body. They stood in silence for a moment enjoying the feel of each other before the photographer picked up the younger woman's shampoo. Pouring it into her hand, she began to gently lather it into blonde tresses. Not a word was spoken between them, but it was clear that the shorter woman was relishing the attention. After shampoo and conditioner had been applied, the older woman caressed her wife's body as she leisurely bathed her, touching her in the most reverent of ways as she thoroughly washed her beloved's form.

When she was finished, Helen took the older woman's shampoo as she whispered, "My turn." Torrance allowed the blonde to give her the same treatment. However, as Helen's hands trailed between the brunette's thighs, the older woman leaned down to kiss her. Quickly their intimacy escalated, and it was only moments before Torrance was begging for release from her wife's talented hands.

With a dazed and satisfied gaze, the older woman murmured, "God, you're beautiful. I wish I could return the favors."

"Me too. I can't wait for that, but it's going to be a few months."

Moaning sexually Torrance muttered, "And you'll be breast-feeding. Your breasts are so sensitive then. I forgot about that. Just the slightest touch can make you amorous." The brunette's hands went to the objects of discussion and ran her thumbs across the peaks.

Helen whimpered. "Maybe you could just kneel down and say hello," she suggested.

Smirking the older woman did as was asked of her. Getting on her knees, she kissed Helen's thighs gently before settling her head where the blonde wanted it. Methodically she worshiped the younger woman's body. She knew she had to be careful with her wife, so she intentionally didn't try to bring her to orgasm, just give her pleasure.

Both of them were getting carried away with the feeling, but suddenly Helen asked, "Stop, Torrance. I'm getting light-headed."

"All right. Let's get you out of the shower then," the photographer stated quickly in agreement. Escorting her lover out of the shower, she wrapped her in her favorite robe and sent her back to bed. Torrance in the meantime dressed. By the time she had returned to the bedroom, Helen was asleep again. The older woman smiled at her wife before going off to wake her children.

Later that afternoon Jamie arrived with Katrina, Eve, and Stephen in the middle of a storm. Sarah had left on a movie shoot, so she hadn't been able to make it, but the Talbot-Deans were nevertheless excited to be playing with their friends. Shortly after that Blake arrived with her twins. Since she and Georgia had returned from Florida, their relationship had been awkward but civil. Georgia was due to return that evening and would be joining them later if she felt up to it. Torrance, John, and Marta greeted all of them warmly and then moved into the game room where Helen was lounging on the sofa. She smiled at her friends and received their hugs, but the

photographer could tell she just wasn't herself.

Settling the children with a movie and some games, the three brunettes moved into the kitchen to work on their meal. "This weather really sucks," Jamie mentioned.

"Yeah. Maybe it'll clear up later. I know the kids really want to go swimming," Torrance mentioned.

"Hey, Tor, is everything okay?" Blake asked. "Helen doesn't seem right today."

"She's just tired. She's only a couple of days from her due date, and she's uncomfortable and cranky."

"Would she rather us not be here? We don't have to stay," the attorney mentioned.

"She's the one that insisted you still come. Don't worry about her. She just needs to relax."

"Well, in that case, I'll go keep an eye on the kids," Jamie stated helpfully, returning to where the seven of them were.

Blake looked at her long-time friend. "Are you sure that's all?"

"That's what she says. I'm not convinced though."

"Neither am I, my friend. Well, at the first sign of her getting tired, just let me know, and we'll be out of here."

"Thanks, Blake. For now though, let's get this lunch ready. Hopefully by then the rain will have passed. Tell me how things are with Georgia."

The older woman shrugged. "Still awkward. It's strange though. We're completely courteous to each other, but when I look at her, I see what we always had. We look at each other like the interest is there, but we're not quite sure how to approach each other. I feel like I did when we first met, except now we have Lana and Luke. It's our one link that keeps us tied together. We both use them as a crutch."

"Do you think the two of you can reconcile? Do you want to?"

"I don't know. I know I want her. I want her the way I always have, but as far as being married again, I don't know if that's possible."

"So where does that leave you? You want to bed her but not be married to her? Blake, you have the twins to consider."

"I know, which is why I haven't made any sort of advance since we came back from Florida. I realized then that to indulge in her body yet not be committed wouldn't be what's best for the

kids."

"And she would never go for that either. Georgia wants to be married before being with someone like that again. Now that she has the kids, her outlook on life has changed. You two just need to swallow your pride and work towards reconciliation is what it sounds like."

"Well, I don't think either of us is ready for that. Besides, changes need to be made or else we'll just go down the same path and end in divorce again. I don't want to go through that ever again."

"I understand."

Shaking her head the attorney mumbled, "No, we're better on this course right now until we figure out what's meant to be."

"Well, I wish you luck, Blake. I know you still love her, but there's more to marriage than love."

"I know. Jamie and Sarah are proof of that. They've had some problems but have managed to work through it all. I wasn't so sure for awhile they were going to make it."

Torrance nodded her head. "Luckily they did. Now it's time to focus on you."

"Yeah, I know. Enough about Georgia, though. The sooner we get the kids fed, the better off we'll be. How can I help?"

Lunch that day consisted of hamburgers and hot dogs since it was what John and Marta had wanted on the menu. As the group sat around the table, the kids monopolized the conversation as they chatted about swimming. Torrance looked at her wife. Helen still seemed lethargic but didn't ask to be excused, so the photographer assumed she wife was all right. Luckily after lunch the weather had let up enough to go out to the pool. Each woman was in charge of her own kids, getting them ready and then taking them outside. Torrance took care of her own two while sending the blonde out to take residence in her favorite lounge.

For the next several hours the three brunettes played with the seven children while Helen sat in the shade and read. However, after awhile the blonde asked if the children wanted some ice cream. There was a resounding yes to the suggestion, so Torrance offered to get it for them. Moving into the house, the photographer opened the freezer to find that Helen's favorite was missing. Thinking she might like some though, she ducked her head outside.

"We don't have the flavor that I want. I'm just going to run up to the store quickly."

"Why? Just choose another flavor, Torrance," the blonde complained.

"It's your favorite that's missing, love," she teased.

"Oh, well in that case, I'll be right here when you get back," Helen said with a smile at her beloved.

"Kids, what flavors of ice cream do you want?" Torrance inquired. Making a mental list of what was requested, she kissed Helen on the head and said, "I'll be right back."

Once she was gone, Helen turned to her company. "Jamie, Blake, do you all want anything from the house? I'm going in for a drink."

"I'm fine. Thanks, Helen," the attorney answered.

"Yeah, I'm good. Thanks anyway."

Leaving the two brunettes in charge of the kids, the blonde went inside. Turning to Blake Jamie asked, "What's going on with Helen?"

"I don't know. Tor says she doesn't feel well."

"She doesn't look quite right either."

"Well, she is only days away from delivering. We probably wouldn't feel that good either."

"True," Jamie answered with a grin.

Focusing on the kids, both brunettes lost track of the fact that Helen didn't return after a few minutes. It was only when John asked where she had gone that they noticed. Thinking it best to go check on her friend, Blake said, "I'll go see where she is. Can you handle the seven of them?"

"Yeah, I'll be fine for a few minutes."

With a nod the eldest brunette moved back into the house. "Helen," she called, heading toward the kitchen. There was no response at first. Coming into the kitchen area, Blake called again. This time she heard her name being faintly whispered from somewhere on the other side of the large island in the middle of the kitchen. "Helen?" she questioned in concern as she rounded the obstacle to find the blonde sitting on the floor. "Helen, are you all right?"

The younger woman shook her head. "My water broke. I need to go to the hospital."

"All right. Why don't I call Tor? She'll come home and pick you up," the attorney suggested.

Adamantly shaking her head, Helen muttered, "No. I need to go now, Blake. I need you to take me."

Sensing that the blonde was in distress, the older woman thought it best to do what was requested of her. "Okay. Just let me tell Jamie where we're going. Hold on for me." Helen nodded feebly but remained in her position on the kitchen floor. Meanwhile, Blake rushed outside. "Jamie, I'm taking Helen to the hospital. Her water just broke, and she doesn't want to wait. Can you watch the kids?"

"Yeah. Sure. No problem."

Looking at the children collectively, the attorney said, "All of you be good for your Aunt Jamie and do as you're told." Moving back into the house, she went to where Helen was still on the floor. "Here, Helen. Let me help you up." Gently the attorney picked the blonde up and assisted her to her feet. "Can you walk, or do you want me to carry you?"

"I think I can walk," she answered.

"Okay. Lean on me. I'll put you in the car and then get your overnight bag." Once the two of them were in the car, Blake called the photographer.

"What's up, Blake? You have more to add to the list?" she teased lightly.

"Forget the ice cream, Tor. Helen's water broke, and I'm taking her to the hospital. We need you to meet us there."

"Is she okay?" the younger brunette asked.

"I'm not sure. Just drop everything and meet us there, will you?"

"Yeah. I'm on my way."

Closing her phone, the older woman looked over at her friend. The blonde looked uncomfortable. In an effort to extend her comfort, Blake gently placed her hand on the blonde's thigh. Instantly Helen grabbed it, intertwining her fingers with the brunette's. "Tell me what I can do for you, Helen. You need more air? You want the windows down?"

"I'm just nauseated, and these contractions are a lot closer together than I expected them to be," she managed to answer.

"All right. Just close your eyes. We'll be there soon."

"That doesn't help. Makes me feel worse," the younger woman said. "I just need Torrance."

"She's on her way to the hospital. She'll meet us there. Just hold on for me. Everything will be fine."

Nodding her head, Helen smiled at her wife's best friend, a dear friend of her own. "Thanks for being here, Blake."

Casting a bright smile of her own, the attorney teased, "There's nothing I wouldn't do for my favorite blonde."

Helen chuckled lightly. "Favorite blonde, huh? I think there's one blonde that you like more than

me. Am I right?"

"Luke? Well, maybe," the taller woman joked, knowing full well it wasn't her son to which Helen was referring.

"You might be able to hide your feelings for Georgia from everyone else, but I see them, Blake. I know you love her still even after all that's happened between you. The two of you fight hard, but I have heard that you also love hard. It's just the nature of your relationship. If you put fire and dynamite together, you're going to have an explosion, but instead of destroying things, the two of you need to learn how to channel that for a better purpose. You're both so strong-willed and hard-headed, but I know for a fact that you love her. I knew it when it first happened, and I know it now. I just wish that you two would swallow this pride you both have and look into each other's eyes. If you did, you would see what I do, two women still madly in love."

"You think you're so smart, don't you?" Blake joked, trying desperately not to acknowledge the fact that her friend was right.

The rest of the short drive between them was quiet. When they arrived, Torrance wasn't there yet, so Blake helped Helen check in, but by that time the photographer came rushing down the corridor toward them. Kneeling down in front of her wife, who had taken a seat in a wheelchair for comfort, the brunette looked at her in concern. "You okay, darling?"

Helen smiled at her wife as she cupped her face. "I am now that you're here, love."

The three women made their way to the blonde's room. Once Helen was settled, Blake asked, "Do you two want to be alone?"

"No. You can hang around for awhile," Torrance answered. "Is Jamie with the kids?"

"Yeah. Let me call and check on them to make sure everything is okay." Leaving the room to do just that, Blake left Torrance and Helen to themselves.

Gazing down at her wife, the photographer sensed some uneasiness from the blonde. "Helen, are you sure everything is fine?"

"I just feel differently than with John and Marta. Something's different. I was never this nauseated."

Torrance nodded in understanding. Even though she didn't know what she could do to help, she stood by her and held her hand in silence. Several minutes later a nurse came into the room to take her vitals. After doing the usual routine, she turned to them and mentioned, "Your blood pressure is quite elevated."

"Yeah. That's been an issue for her through most of the last trimester," the brunette mentioned. "That's not a problem, is it?"

"It's a concern, but a lot of women can have it. I wouldn't worry about it right now. The doctor will be able to tell you the best course of action for it. For now just relax. Your doctor should be here shortly."

By the time Blake had returned, her friends were settled for their wait. "The kids are fine. Jamie has them all in the game room with movies and video games. Do you need anything?"

"We're fine for the moment," Torrance answered.

"All right. Then maybe I should leave you two alone then."

"Well, if you don't mind, it would be nice if you stuck around. My mother was here for the last two kids, but this looks like it's going to go fast. I wouldn't mind having company until it's time," the younger brunette stated.

"All right. No problem. I can stay for awhile."

About an hour later Helen's doctor arrived and smiled at the three of them. She took another round of vitals before turning to the anxious parents-to-be. "Well, Helen's blood pressure is high, too high for my comfort actually. I know you wanted to have a natural birth, but under these circumstances, I don't want to do that. It's too dangerous for Helen. We need to do a caesarean instead."

"Are you sure?" Helen asked softly.

The doctor nodded her head. "Yes. I wouldn't recommend it if I wasn't positive. You're at too much of a risk otherwise. I told you two this the last time I saw you."

"But we were kind of hoping we wouldn't have to do it this way," Torrance responded. "You know what's best though."

"If it's the right thing," the blonde added.

Nodding, the doctor stated, "It is. We'll get you prepped for it as soon as possible. I'll be back shortly."

When the doctor was gone, Blake looked at her nervous friends. Wanting to help them, she mentioned, "Georgia was the same way with the twins. Her blood pressure was too high, so they opted for the c-section. Women have them all the time. It'll be fine. You'll see."

Torrance nodded her head. "Blake's right, mon madame." Helen only nodded and closed her eyes as another contraction took hold of her body. A couple of hours passed with the three of them just talking quietly to pass the time, but finally it was time for Torrance and Helen to go in for the blonde's c-section. The three friends made their way down to the operation room, but Blake had to stay behind as Torrance and Helen went the rest of the way alone.

Just before passing through the doors, the photographer looked at her friend. "Will you stay here until it's over?"

"Of course. I can't wait to see my new nephew for the first time. I'll be right here waiting," she said with a smile. They exchanged a quick hug before the attorney was left alone, looking through the glass at her two dearest friends as they disappeared down the end of the hall and around the corner. Knowing it would be awhile, she took a seat in a nearby chair and silently prayed for their safety.

When Torrance and Helen got into the operating room, the brunette waited for instructions from the staff as to where she should be. Once Helen had been settled, they directed her to the head of the table where she took a seat near Helen's shoulders. Immediately she took the blonde's left hand into her own and smiled at her wife. "Je t'aime, mon amour."

"I love you, Torrance," the blonde answered with a smile of her own.

Not knowing exactly what to do, the photographer decided to take the time to distract them both from what was happening. "You know, Helen, you are the greatest gift I've ever been given. When you came into my life eight years ago, I never imagined this life we've created together. For my entire life I always dreamed of finding my truest love, but I wasn't sure it really existed until I met you. You made me believe in it, and from the moment we became friends, I dreamed of some day being lucky enough to win your heart. It took a long time, but every minute was worth it. You have brought me more happiness in the five years we've been married than I've had in the rest of my life combined."

"Six years next week," Helen mentioned softly.

"Yeah. Six years next week. In six years you've given me three children and a lifetime of happiness. I don't know what I would have ever done without you. You've made me the woman I am today."

With wetness in her eyes, the blonde whispered teasingly, "It's not fair to make me cry right now, love."

Torrance shrugged. "I'm sorry. I just wanted to tell you that I love you more than anything or anyone else in this entire world. You have made my life complete in a way I never knew was possible."

"As you have done for me, Torrance. From the first time I met you, I knew you were different. I could feel it inside me the first time you smiled. This life with you has been a dream. You've given me all I've ever wanted and so much more. Thank you for waiting for me in the beginning."

"Thank you for giving me a chance," she whispered, leaning to kiss her wife's fair brow. "So, can you believe that this day is finally here? Our last baby is being born. It's hard to imagine after all we've been through in the last year and a half."

"I know. I'm so happy I got a chance to do this once more. Thank you for not giving up."

"I could never do that for something you wanted so much," the photographer mentioned. Her eyes were averted for a moment to what was happening further down the table. She smiled at the sight of a baby being lifted from Helen's frame. When a small cry broke the air, she turned. "It's official. Our son is here."

Helen began to cry when she heard the sound of her son. Turning to her wife, she whispered, "I love you, Torrance."

"And I love you, Helen. Thank you."

A few minutes later their son was brought to them. Placing him down on the blonde's chest, the photographer and her wife just gazed at him in silent amazement. Neither woman spoke for several moments, but finally Helen whispered, "He has dark hair."

"Yeah. He's perfect." Sidetracked by the commotion going on around them, the brunette noticed the team of doctors talking urgently amongst themselves, piquing her curiosity and anxiety. She could tell something wasn't quite right by the way they were acting. Looking back at her wife, she noticed that the blonde's face was starting to lose some color. "Helen, are you all right?" she asked softly.

"Take the baby, Torrance," came the weak reply.

Doing what was asked, the older woman took her son into one arm as she gently caressed her wife's blonde head with her right hand. She looked again at what was going on behind the curtain they had put up blocking Helen's line of sight. The blonde's ob/gyn was frantically massaging the blonde's uterus as another doctor was quietly issuing orders to a nearby nurse. Torrance could see that her wife's uterus wasn't doing anything as the doctors worked on it. She watched as they started to inject drugs. With worry in her face, she looked back at the younger woman. The blonde's color was quickly fading. Finally not able to stand it, she inquired, "What's going on?"

"The uterus isn't shrinking like it should. We're trying massage and pharmacologic therapy right now," her doctor curtly replied. "Keep talking to her."

Turning back to the blonde, Torrance started to cry as she watched her wife. "Helen, I'm here. Can you hear me?"

"Yeah."

"Just hold on for me. It'll be over soon," she stated as soothingly as she could as a nurse took her son out of her embrace. With her arms free, she put them tentatively around her wife.

"What's happening?" the younger woman questioned weakly.

"They're having a problem with your uterus is all. It won't go back to its normal size yet." The taller woman looked down at the table again. She overheard the doctors say her wife was losing too much blood and to start a transfusion. Gazing back at the blonde, she saw green eyes struggling to stay open. "Everything's going to be okay, Helen," she asserted, even though she was worried.

"I'm tired," the younger woman whispered.

"I know you are."

Locking eyes with her wife, Helen gave her a longing gaze. "I love you, Torrance."

"I love you, Helen. Je t'aime, mon amour, ma vie," she confessed in return as she saw her wife's eyes flutter closed. Once again Torrance watched the doctors. With growing agitation she questioned, "What's happening? She's starting to turn blue."

"We're starting a blood transfusion, because she's losing too much blood. We're still trying to shrink the uterus, but if we can't we'll have to do a hysterectomy." A few minutes later the doctor looked at her again. "I'm sorry, Torrance, but you need to leave now."

"No! I'm not going anywhere!" the photographer screamed.

"You can't be in here any longer. We have to do the hysterectomy. It's her best chance," they explained.

"Fine but I'm not leaving her!" she objected. With her dissension she quickly found several nurses helping her from her seat. However, she struggled. "No! You can't make me leave my wife! I won't do it!" No one said anything as she continued to rant. "Helen! God, please be okay!" she pleaded as she was dragged away from the table. Wrestling with the two large orderlies who were removing her, she kept screaming long after being forced from the room.

Blake was reading a magazine when she heard commotion and yelling down the hall. Hearing Torrance's voice, she stood and immediately came rushing toward the sound. "What's going on?" she inquired quickly as they placed the photographer on her feet finally. The younger brunette completely ignored her friend and kept fighting with the large men to be allowed back to her wife.

"She had to be removed from the room," they informed the attorney.

"Fine. I'll take care of her. Tor, come here. Come sit," she instructed. Torrance fought her, but finally Blake got her onto a nearby sofa. "Tor, what's going on?"

"Helen!" the younger brunette screamed in tears. "I have to go back, Blake!"

"You can't go back. They won't let you. Now what's happening?"

"She was starting to lose a lot of blood, and they said they had to do a hysterectomy. They said

it was her best chance. Blake, they can't take her from me! How did this happen?"

"I don't know. You need to stay calm, though," she stated as she took a seat. Immediately the younger woman fell into her and started sobbing uncontrollably. The attorney began to cry as well at the sorrow coming from her friend. She was deeply concerned about the turn of events. She knew something had gone wrong if the doctors felt a hysterectomy was the only way to help her friend. Nevertheless, she prayed that everything would be fine as she held her emotional friend.

The minutes seemed to pass like centuries as Blake held Torrance, who had finally cried herself into a light sleep. She anxiously watched and waited for any signs of Helen's doctors. Finally the attorney saw one of them and nudged her friend awake. Both women were on their feet by the time she reached them. Just by the way she held her countenance, Blake could tell something was wrong.

"Torrance," she began slowly. "We were unable to shrink Helen's uterus after the baby was delivered. Sometimes that happens, so we use massage and drugs to assist. In some cases even that doesn't work though. Unfortunately, Helen was such a case. With the amount of blood she was losing we thought a transfusion was necessary as well as doing a hysterectomy. We were successful in removing it, but Helen started to go into shock, and I'm not sure she's going to recover. I'm sorry."

"What are you telling me? Helen's going to die?"

"I'm sorry, Torrance. We're trying everything, but I don't know. I came to take you back to her."

"Do you want me to stay here?" Blake questioned.

The photographer shook her head. "My children need you," she whispered.

The attorney nodded in understanding. "I'll stay with them. Call me if you need anything."

With a nod and a hug, Torrance followed the doctor quickly down the hall again. Coming back into the operating room, she immediately took a seat next to her wife. "Helen," she whispered, wrapping her arms around the lithe shoulders. Burying her head into the crook of her wife's neck, Torrance began to weep. "You can't leave me, Helen. I need you. Our children need you. Please, God. I'm begging you. Please don't take her from me. I'll do anything. Please, take me instead. I beg you. Take me," she prayed placing a hand over her wife's heart. "Don't go, Helen. I love you. I've loved you for so long. I can't be without you. Our kids can't be without their mother. Oh, God, don't take her. Please don't take her," she begged as she wept into her beloved's blonde hair. "I love you, Helen," she mumbled repeatedly as she sobbed in heart-wrenching ache. It was late when Blake returned to Torrance's home. The house was quiet as she entered the front door, so she assumed the kids had already been put to bed. Wandering around the ground floor looking for Jamie, she couldn't find her, so she figured she was also upstairs with the children. Going into the study, she dropped into one of the leather chairs and sighed deeply.

The evening had been trying for her. She had to stay strong for her best friend in her moment of need, and the attorney did so without reservation. Through the entire thing, Blake remained strong, knowing she was the only one who could help the younger brunette at that moment. She had stoically made all the phone calls to both Torrance's and Helen's family after getting in her car, telling them what had happened at the hospital, because she knew the photographer was in no condition to speak with anyone.

However, sitting alone the feelings she had held at bay began to set in around her. She tried to take normal breaths but failed as tears cascaded over her face, and she whimpered as uncontrollably as Torrance had at the hospital. The emotions over what happened were just too much to bear. She adored Helen so profoundly herself and loved Torrance as if she was her blood. The tragedy of the night was more than she could even comprehend.

Blake was so withdrawn into her own pain that she didn't hear the door to the study open, but she looked up when she felt a hand on her head gently caressing her hair soothingly. Looking up she was surprised to find her ex-wife standing over her. "Georgia, what are you doing here?" she questioned in confusion.

"Jamie called me. She asked if I could come out and help with the kids. I guess seven was a little much for her. Then when she had to get Katrina back for school in the mornin', I offered to stay here. She said Helen went into labor but that she didn't know much else."

The attorney nodded her head. "Where are the kids?"

"They're all upstairs in bed. I figured Lana and Luke were better off just goin' to sleep since I didn't know how long I'd be here. What happened, Blake? Why are you so upset?" The brunette nodded sadly as she closed her eyes again in anguish. Seeing how much pain was coming from her former wife, Georgia knew something was terribly wrong. Hesitantly taking a seat on the ottoman in front of Blake, she reached for the taller woman's hands and held them in her own. "Blake?"

"I can't. It hurts too much to think about, Georgia."

"Please, sweetie. Tell me," she whispered, pulling the attorney into her embrace instinctively. Blake was obviously hurting too much for her not to extend her comfort. The attorney immediately slipped her arms around the blonde in return.

"It wasn't supposed to happen this way. It wasn't supposed to be like this," the older woman wept. "Tor is devastated."

"Why? What happened to Helen and the baby, Blake?"

"She went into labor today while we were here. Tor had gone to the store to get something we had forgotten for our barbeque. I had to rush Helen to the hospital. Tor met us there, and they immediately admitted her. Her blood pressure was so high they wanted to do a c-section instead of natural delivery. Even though that wasn't what either of them wanted, they agreed to it. Then

it seemed like all hell broke loose. I don't know all the details."

"Then just tell me what you know, honey," Georgia coaxed consolingly, running one hand through Blake's hair while the other rubbed her back as she tried to keep her own emotions at bay until she got the whole story.

Blake held to the blonde tighter and took a few breaths before continuing. "They took her in to do the caesarean. Tor was with her. The next thing I know I hear Tor screaming and see that she's being dragged out of the operating room by security. I immediately tried to step in, because I didn't know what was happening. They said she was causing too much commotion and had to be removed. All the time Tor was just yelling Helen's name and crying uncontrollably. I still wasn't sure what was going on at that point. When they left us alone, I tried to ask Tor, but all she kept doing was clutching me and screaming for Helen. Finally Tor wore herself out and fell asleep against my shoulder. The doctor finally came out and told us what happened."

Hearing the attorney pause, Georgia kissed her on the forehead in consolation. "It's okay. Take your time," she whispered. She knew Blake just needed a moment to compose herself before continuing, so she didn't push the taller woman, merely held her and waited for her to continue. However, as she wrapped her mind around what Blake had said so far, she was scared for her friends.

Taking another deep breath, Blake resumed the story. "The doctor said that after they had delivered the baby Helen's uterus would not shrink again. They tried all the usual things, massage and drugs, but it just wouldn't contract back to its normal size, and the whole time she just kept bleeding. Apparently that's when Tor freaked and finally had to be removed. They gave her a transfusion for the blood loss, but nothing seemed to be working. They had to do a hysterectomy, but they said she was going into shock and might not recover. After the doctor said that, Tor went in to see her again and asked me to come back here to be with the kids. I didn't want to leave her, but she asked me to, so I left. I've been driving somewhat aimlessly, because I was dreading seeing the children. I haven't heard anything else."

"Oh, God. Helen and Tor. Please be with them, God," Georgia mumbled helplessly as she clung closer to Blake.

"She could die, Georgia," Blake whimpered. "All this for another baby."

"What happened to the baby?"

"He's fine."

Georgia nodded her head and wondered what she could say in the moment. "You know, Blake, Helen loved Tor so much that she wanted to give her another child. She ached for that chance. She longed for it and mourned it when it wasn't happenin' for them. It was a miracle that they conceived 'gain after tryin' so long and havin' a miscarriage, but she never gave up hope. She didn't give up on her dream and the love she and Tor share. We cain't give up either. We have to let our love surround them and give them the support they need."

"While I was driving, I kept thinking about you. The same thing happened when you had the c-section with the twins, but they were able to fix it easily. I just don't understand how this could happen."

"I know, Blake. It's hard," Georgia agreed sadly.

"Tonight made me realize that I wasn't doing what was important in life."

"Which is?"

"Spending time with my family. Life is truly so short, Georgia. After tonight I'm not sure I can go on without seeing the children everyday, because every minute is precious. You never know when that could be the last moment you share. It made me care less about work and more about my family. I'm glad I was there for Tor, because she needed someone desperately, but it just made me realize how much I wanted to be with our kids. It made me realize how much I wanted to be with you, Georgia," she confessed, risking a glance up at her ex-wife. "You were the first person I wanted to be with... the only person," she added hesitantly.

Georgia looked down into the attorney's dark eyes. The older woman's admission made her heart start pounding in her chest, because it was the only thing she had ever wanted to hear since Blake had filed for a divorce. It was what she had held onto all the months they had been living apart. Through all the fights, all she ever wanted was to tell the dark-haired woman that she still loved and wanted to be with her, but Blake seemed so adamant in her decision that she never even tried to reconcile. However, the words she had longed for had just been spoken. Giving her ex-wife a reassuring smile through her tears, the writer answered, "I'm glad to be here for you, Blake. I'm always here for you. I love you too much to not be wherever you need me."

The taller woman looked into the blue eyes she had always adored quietly for a moment as she let Georgia's words wash over her. The southern belle still loved her after everything they had experienced. "I still love you, Georgia. Through it all, that hasn't changed."

"Then why aren't we together? Why did you want a divorce?"

Dropping her head so she didn't have to look into the younger woman's eyes, she mumbled, "My ego, Georgia. My pride got in the way."

"Why?"

"Because I couldn't handle you being away doing something you loved. When we got married, it was different. You had a job, but you were still always there when I came home at night. You always had everything taken care of everything for me at home. I wanted you there when I got home at the end of the day. However, then you ran off to New Orleans, and you weren't here for me. You weren't here for our children. Yes, I could've handled it, but the truth was, I didn't want to. I had grown so accustomed to you being at home that I couldn't embrace the change."

"In other words you wanted me to remain at home instead of followin' my own dreams," the smaller woman stated.

"I know that's not fair, Georgia, but yes, I wanted you at home. I wanted a wife who was there every night."

Nodding the writer observed, "So you wanted what Tor has. You wanted me to be like Helen."

"I suppose. That was kind of what I had in mind when we got married. I wanted to take care of you, Georgia, and I had a hard time seeing you so independent."

Taking the attorney's hands in her own, the blonde looked into her eyes. "Blake, for as long as I've known you, you've held Helen on the highest pedestal that I have ever known, so much so that if I were an outsider, I would think you were in love with her. However, I know your heart. I know how strongly you feel for her and how much you love her, but that love is as a siblin' more than anythin'. Nevertheless, you have this image of her in your mind, this image of perfection. Helen isn't perfect. She's a wonderful, lovin', carin' woman, but she'd be the first to tell you that she's not flawless. You have to be able to accept that I will never be like her. I love her as much as you do, but I can't emulate her. My career is so important to me. For the first time in my life, I have somethin' that's my own. It's somethin' that I can be proud of, and I'm good at it. I have to have this, Blake. Do you understand?"

"I understand. That's the way I felt about my career until tonight. Now I'm not so sure it means that much to me anymore."

Georgia nodded. "Well, I have a confession to make. Just like you wanted me to be more like Helen, I wanted you to be more like Tor. She spends an incredible amount of time with her kids and Helen. I wanted to have that time with you."

"I know. I couldn't do it then though. It just wasn't me, but now, after this, I know how important it is. I want to rethink my life and how I spend my time."

"I think we can make this work if we want it to, Blake. However, we've got to work at it. We have to try. You have to let me have my career. If you can't do that, then it's not right for us."

Blake gazed into the blue eyes of her dreams. For the first time since their divorce, they were looking back at her with such an open vulnerable expression that she knew she had to take a chance at reconciliation with this woman. Gently tucking a piece of blonde hair behind the younger woman's ear, she stated, "I want to try, Georgia. I want us to be a family again."

The writer felt tears once again fall freely from her eyes but this time for a completely different reason. Blake had just asked for another chance at a life together, something she had always wanted. "I want that too, Blake," she whispered, leaning to hug her ex-wife.

They clung together in a close embrace for several moments before the attorney pulled back enough to look into Georgia's eyes again. "I love you, Georgia Erwin," she declared.

"And I love you, Blake," the shorter woman replied before their lips met tentatively. Both of them were crying, the events of the day too overwhelming to process. However, they knew they would find their strength in each other. After several silent moments of just holding each other, the writer mentioned, "Maybe we should go to bed. Tor will call when there's news, and we need our strength for the kids."

"You're probably right," the brunette conceded. Both of them stood from their positions and quietly moved through the house to secure it for the night. Then together they made their way upstairs. Georgia stopped at a guest room that was situated in between John and Marta's rooms and across the hall from where she had placed Lana and Luke to bed. Blake lingered there for a moment. Not knowing what to say at the moment, she simply inquired, "Is there anything I can do for you right now?"

Georgia knew the question was thrown out as a stalling technique, because Blake didn't really want to be alone. Truthfully she didn't either, so she responded, "Will you stay with me tonight? I don't want to be by myself right now."

"Sure. I don't really want to be alone either."

Going into the bedroom together, Georgia gathered up her pajamas from her suitcase and made her way into the bathroom. Since Blake hadn't been prepared to spend the night, she didn't have anything to wear. She knew she could borrow some of Torrance's clothes, but she didn't have the heart to go into her best friend's bedroom at the moment, so she opted to just sleep in the clothes she was wearing.

When Georgia came out of the bathroom several minutes later, the attorney took her turn. She washed her face and then used a spare toothbrush to brush her teeth before heading back into the bedroom. The blonde was already pulling down the covers on the bed. Without a word the older woman went to the other side of the queen bed and did the same.

As the smaller woman got into her side of the bed, she noticed that Blake hadn't changed and asked, "What are you wearin' to sleep?"

"This. I don't have anything else, and I don't want to go into Tor's bedroom right now."

"That's not goin' to be very comfortable. You cain take your clothes off. It ain't like I haven't seen you before."

Knowing she would be more comfortable without her slacks and dress shirt, she gave a nod. "As long as it's fine with you," she mentioned before proceeding to undress. Georgia nodded her consent. Feeling a little self-conscious with the lights on, Blake went to extinguish them before taking off all her clothing. She draped it on a nearby chair before carefully slipping into the bed next to the blonde. Neither said anything for quite some time. Figuring Georgia had fallen asleep, Blake sighed and stared up at the ceiling as her mind went over the day. Suddenly though her musing was broken by a head resting against her shoulder and an arm across her body.

"I'm scared, Blake," Georgia whispered softly. "Helen's been my best friend for so long."

"So am I, Georgia," she conceded, bringing her arms around the younger woman. Blake could feel the writer's bare legs rubbing against her own under the covers, and the light cotton shirt Georgia was wearing left it very easy to feel the curves of the smaller woman as they lay pressed against each other. "But I'm here for you," the attorney said, kissing the top of the blonde head against her shoulder.

Propping up on her arm, Georgia looked down at the attorney in the darkness. Dark eyes were gazing back at her quizzically. "I'm here for you too, Blake."

Silence followed for a moment as they continued to regard each other. Instinctively Blake's right hand went to the blonde's locks. She fingered them around her ear for a moment before sliding through them to cup the back of her head. Then without even realizing it they embraced in a slow kiss. The hesitancy that had been downstairs when they touched wasn't there as their mouths melded together in a methodical exploration. Blake groaned as her passion came to life. It had been so long since a woman's touch made her feel so alive.

When the younger woman heard the attorney's moan, it struck a place deep within her that had been closed off since their separation. Blake's soothing caress helped calm her fears while at the same time lighting a fire within her that had been absent so long. Even though she didn't realize it, her instinctive desires took over, and her body found its way on top of the older woman's as their lip lock continued, shifting from consoling to amorous.

It took Blake several minutes to realize the turn of the moment, but she became aware of the fact that one of her thighs had become firmly situated between her ex-wife's bare legs and that the smaller woman's hips were rocking against her in growing intensity as both of their hands became more active. The attorney noticed that her left hand had wandered under Georgia's nightshirt and was rubbing her lower back while intuitively pushing the younger woman's hips closer to her own. As for her right hand, it was drifting from the blonde's hair to her face and all the way down her side and was currently inches away from the writer's clothed breast. Managing to pull back a little, it took a minute for the older woman to find her voice. Her breathing was so erratic as was Georgia's.

Meeting the blue eyes she loved, she gently asked, "Are we sure we should be doing this? I mean, I want this. I have for so long, but are we ready for this again? I don't want to regret this later."

Georgia broke their gaze for a moment as she looked over the position of their bodies. Going back to the older woman's face, she took a deep breath. "I've missed this between us, Blake. I want this too but only if you're ready. I want this to be a new beginnin' for us."

Blake nodded her head in understanding. "So do I, Georgia," she whispered, leaning up to the blonde's lips. As soon as they met again, everything was forgotten except their desires to be fully reconciled with each other. For the rest of the night, they made the most of their time, loving

each other tenderly, crying for their friends, and finding comfort in the other's arms. It was only with the first light of morning that they drifted to sleep together, their hearts and spirits reconnected with the hope of their future.

Green eyes opened after a long night. As usual the sounds of the ocean in the distance could be heard through the open French doors leading to the balcony. This was Torrance's favorite time of the morning with her beloved Helen. However, on this morning the blonde was not there as she turned to her wife's side of the bed. Instead, there was nothing but emptiness, a reminder that Helen had not been there the entire night.

Torrance sighed deeply as she gazed on at the empty place. So much had happened since that fateful night at the hospital when the blonde had given birth to their son, Emanuel, but most of it had passed in a daze to the photographer due to the long nights with their son and the numerous family members descending on their house to lend their assistance and support.

Turning from the place where Helen should have been, the brunette looked over to the night table. There sat a small box with a platinum necklace draped on top of that. The tall woman picked up the necklace and gently cupped the two rings that dangled from it. The diamond and emerald engagement ring she had given her lover and the matching platinum wedding band Helen had worn all those years sparkled in the morning rays of sun. Helen had taken them off when her pregnancy was further along with Emanuel, because her fingers were swelling and never had the chance to put them on again.

Gazing back to the nightstand, she looked at the precious box that held her heart and soul. She reached for it, caressing it with the reverence she bestowed only on Helen as she thought of its contents. It embodied the spirit of her wife and by extension the essence of herself. Her past was concealed within it, the years of selfless love she had given and received from the only woman she could ever love. The very thought of everything she and Helen had experienced made emotions swell within her. Just then there was a knock on the bedroom door before Torrance's mother admitted herself.

She spared a small smile at her child. "How are you feeling?" she inquired.

"Tired. Thanks for taking care of Emanuel last night."

"Not a problem, darling. Anything for you. You know that."

Torrance gave a nod as she sat up in bed. Her mother touched her on the shoulder. "It's going to be a long day," the photographer mumbled.

"You should probably start getting ready," Maria suggested. "Your father and I will take care of Emanuel and Marta. John and Diane are going to get John dressed for the service," she informed, referring to Helen's parents.

Nodding again, Torrance stated, "Thanks. I appreciate the help." Moving into the bathroom, she dropped her pajamas on the floor. Stepping into the shower, she let the warm water flow over her. Torrance closed her eyes as her mind drifted to the last time she had held her beloved in that same shower. It was the morning Emanuel was born. She had taken great care in washing the blonde's hair that morning in an affectionate gesture. She assumed then that it would be the last time she would be able to render such service to her wife for several days, but never in her dreams did she think that a week after Emanuel's birth she would be standing alone longing for the green eyes she adored.

Going into automatic motion, the photographer bathed herself. She thought of her three children. She knew they were all missing their mother more than they could ever even express, especially John. He often sat with Torrance over the past week, embraced in her strong arms, listening to the waves of the ocean in silence as the photographer had often done with her wife in the evenings after their children had been put to bed. Every night John had fallen asleep enfolded in her arms, much the way Helen usually did. Torrance would look down at him as he slept cuddled against her, seeing her wife in every curve of his face. He was their first-born, their love child, and held such a special place with the both of them. Every night since coming back from the hospital, he had slept in his parents' bed with the exception of the last one when he had taken to his grandparents' bed.

Once the shower was complete, Torrance moved into her walk-in closet to dress. She picked the black suit Helen had always liked best on her to wear that day and pulled it on. When she was ready, she moved back into the bedroom. The brunette made the bed slowly, knowing Helen would want her to. She lingered though as she arranged her wife's pillows on her side of the bed. They still held the distinctive scent of her shampoo even after a week of her absence. Torrance felt the tears coming and closed her eyes to hold them at bay. However, that only made it harder as she then could almost imagine the lithe blonde standing there in her embrace, the smell of her hair and skin permeating the photographer's personal space. It was also the last thing she remembered smelling of her wife the night their son was born. It had been such an emotional week for her that she wasn't sure how much longer she could hold herself together. She hadn't had any time to process all that had taken place, and that was taking its toll on the photographer.

Finally putting her wife's pillow back in its rightful place, Torrance moved to her side of the bed. She picked up the box and Helen's rings that still hung suspended from the necklace and walked out to the balcony. She knew it would soon be time to make her way down to the beach, where she would be surrounded by their closest friends and family for the service that had been arranged to commemorate the blonde and their marriage, but she wanted to spend her last moments of solitude in the place she and Helen loved to share looking out over the water.

Torrance didn't know exactly how long she stood there thinking about her lover, her wife, Helen Melbourne Whitfield. For years she had possessed Torrance's soul, and the brunette knew that she always would. Helen was the mother of her three children, her long-time companion, and her best friend. The younger woman had helped make Torrance what she was, and the tall woman knew she would never forget that. The photographer thought back to the night Emanuel was born. The excitement of their third child was quickly overshadowed by Helen's condition. As she remembered clutching to her lover, she recalled her urgent, pleading prayer. In earnest she

begged God not to take Helen from her. She held tightly to the frail fair frame, hiding her wet eyes in the crook of the blonde's neck. Her river of tears had rained down on golden tresses, wetting them, and her hand covered Helen's heart as if she could will her own life into the woman that lay motionless on the operating table if she just tried hard enough. Torrance knew she would have given up her own life just to save her wife's if that was what was needed.

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by two hands on either of her shoulders. Torrance knew whom they belonged to without even turning. The attorney stood just behind her to the right and the actress on the other side. Three brunette women, all dressed in black, were silent for a few minutes just looking out over the water.

Finally, though, Blake whispered quietly, "It's time to go, Tor."

The photographer nodded but didn't move from her spot just yet. "This has been a hard few days," she mumbled, her eyes still cast out over the ocean.

Jamie squeezed her shoulder in support. "I know what it feels like, Tor," she stated. "We're both here for you."

Looking over her shoulder at the younger woman, Torrance realized Jamie would know better than anyone what she was feeling. "Thanks, both of you," she murmured, looking at her best friend from college as well. A few more moments passed with them still standing on the balcony. "You know, this is Helen's and my favorite time of the day. She loves to make love in the mornings," she mentioned. "She's the best thing that has ever happened to me."

"We know, Tor," Blake answered, not knowing what else to say to her friend in the moment. It appeared as if the photographer was about to let the dam of emotions crumble after the last several days, but they knew people were waiting on them to start the service. "Are you ready?" she questioned after several moments. The photographer nodded slowly. "Do you want me to carry the box?" Blake offered.

"No, thank you. I need to carry it," Torrance replied. With the support of her friends, Torrance made her way through the house and out the back door toward the beach. As they approached, she saw the small, intimate gathering of the loved ones closest to Helen and her gathered around the minister who had performed their wedding ceremony all those years ago. She saw Emanuel and Marta being held by her parents, and John standing with Helen's siblings. Everyone was silent as the three of them neared. Coming to a stop in front of the minister, the photographer reached out her hand to her oldest son. Immediately, John came to her, putting his arms around her waist. Looking at the group, Torrance said, "I know if Helen were here now she would thank you all for coming, so I will do it for the both of us. Thank you for being here on such an important day in our lives. You'll never know how much it really means to the both of us to have this support."

No one said anything for a few minutes. Torrance just looked at the minister and waited for the right moment to begin their ceremony. She didn't have to wait too long before John screamed in excitement, "Mommy!" Breaking away from Torrance, he took off up the stairs leading back to

the house. Marta scurried out of Maria's embrace to do the same. The photographer watched them and smiled as she saw her angel in a simple white dress gingerly making her way down to the crowd, escorted by her father. Helen still looked fragile from her week-long stay at the hospital but Torrance thought her flawless as usual. Seeing her children hug their mother tightly around the legs, the brunette began to cry. Looking over to Blake, she held the box and Helen's rings out for her to take. "Hold this for me," she requested.

Blake did as she was asked, taking the items from Torrance. Torrance slowly made her way over to her ladylove as she reached the last stair. The photographer was openly weeping. They embraced in a tight hug.

"You didn't think I would stand you up, did you?" Helen asked lightly, trying to soothe her wife. It was obvious that Torrance could no longer hide her emotions of the last week.

"I never thought I'd make it through the night without you. The past six days having you at the hospital was so hard, and then all this nonsense about sleeping apart the night before we renewed our vows was almost too much after everything. I almost lost you that night for good, Helen," she cried. "I don't know if I could have ever gone on without you."

"I'm not going anywhere, Torrance. It was close, but I'm still here, and I will be here for years to come. I promise," the little woman avowed, clutching tightly to the woman she loved. After a few moments of collecting themselves, the younger woman insisted, "Help me the rest of the way."

Gladly Torrance took the duty, extending her arm to her wife. Helen held on with both hands, taking tentative steps the rest of the way down to the water's edge where everyone was waiting. When they finally came to a stop in front of the minister, they turned toward each other and gave reassuring smiles.

"Torrance and Helen, you are gathered here today in front of your family and friends to renew your vows to each other. This day holds special meaning in light of the recent events of the past week. It has been a test of faith for you both, and I am happy to see you all standing here today in front of God and these people to reaffirm your commitment to your marriage and children," the minister began. Looking toward Blake, she gestured for Helen's rings. Placing them in Torrance's hand, she said, "Torrance, please give these rings to Helen as a sign of your commitment and repeat after me." The photographer took the necklace and placed it around her wife's neck since Helen's fingers were still too large to wear them again and waited for her cue. When it came time to repeat after the minister, she did so with all the feelings she felt as she gazed down into the green eyes that had been the captor of her soul from the moment she had seen them. When her part was complete, she took the blonde's hands again and waited for Helen to speak.

The blonde moved her eyes from her wife's to the minister's for a moment as she awaited her instructions. After the minister stated her vow, the little woman looked back up into the green eyes she loved. Torrance's face held so much emotion, love, relief, and joy. Since the photographer had not taken off her ring, there was none to place upon her hand, but Helen still repeated the words that had been prepared months ago for this special moment.

Once they had finished, Torrance turned to Blake and asked for the box. When the attorney handed it over, she in turn gave it to the minister. "Well, now that you two have exchanged your vows, there are three other vows that need to be made today," the minister announced, opening the box to reveal three small rings, all on platinum chains. "If John would please come up to the front and stand between you."

The little boy did as was asked of him, taking his place between his two mothers. The photographer took the largest ring and necklace from the box and looked down at their eldest son. She and Helen both placed their hands on his shoulders. "John, Mommy and I want to give you this ring as a sign that you are our son. Both of us will always be here for you through the good times and the bad, when you're sick and when you're well. Our love for you, John, is forever," Torrance said, trying to use words he would understand.

Taking the necklace from the brunette, Helen slipped it over their son's head. "John, with this ring you will always be known as our son. No matter what, know that we will both be there for you. You will always be loved, John, by this family. We love you," she stated softly. When she had finished speaking to him, both she and Torrance leaned down to hug and kiss him.

Leaving him standing between them, Torrance looked to her father, who brought Marta forward. The photographer took their middle child, their only daughter into her arms. The minister handed Helen the necklace with the little girl's ring attached to it. Gazing down at the child in her arms, Torrance said, "Marta, with this ring we give you, you are known as our daughter. Your Mommy and I will always be here for you through good times and bad and when you are sick and well. Our love for you, Marta, is forever."

"Marta, no matter what, you will always be supported by this family. We love you," the blonde added before placing the necklace around her daughter's neck. Together they bestowed the same hugs and kisses they had with John.

When her turn was finished, Torrance motioned her mother forward to turn over Emanuel. Helen carefully took him into her embrace. Torrance took the final necklace and held it as she gazed on at their son. She gave a smile and sigh as she gathered her thoughts for what she wanted to say to their youngest, only a week old.

"Emanuel, I think we named you correctly. On the night you were born, your Mommy nearly gave her life for you as I would have done for her, but as your name implies, God was with us to watch out over you both. We give you this ring today, Emanuel, as a symbol of our family. By it you will be known as our son, and when you are old enough, I hope that you wear it with the same amount of love and pride with which we give it to you," she said placing her hand on top of his dark head. He slept peacefully in his mother's arms.

"Emanuel, Mom and I will always be here for you during the good times and the bad, when you are sick and when you are well. Our love for you is forever, and you will always have the support of this family. We love you," Helen stated before both of them leaned to kiss him.

Looking at her wife, Torrance whispered, "I love you, Helen Whitfield."

"And I love you, Torrance Whitfield," she answered.

Embracing the small frail frame, the photographer kissed her wife with the renewed passion befitting another chance at life.

**~ New York series ~
Love in Photographs
Georgia On My Mind
Stick to the Script
Vows of the Heart**

**Alex Tryst's Scrolls
The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**
