

~ How Do You Mend A Broken Heart ~

by Ali Vali
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If the thought of two women being romantically involved is not for you, then this story is one you won't want to read. But seriously if you are underage and live someplace where that is not allowed, please find more appropriate material.

Sit back and enjoy the story, any comments can be sent to me at terrali20@yahoo.com.

I want to thank my betas for correcting this for me. Beth and Len, you are godsend. I bow to your grammatical knowledge and for your very prompt turnaround.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the wonderful people who have taken the time to read this particular story. It was one of the first I posted and still receives a tremendous amount of feedback, which is truly humbling. I wanted to go back and smooth out some places so it's a more enjoyable read, and to revisit the characters. After doing this, I think they made it clear they still have plenty to say. On their behalf, I say thanks for reading and for the many wonderful notes you've sent over the years. I appreciate them all.

This is dedicated, as always, to the one woman who holds my heart. As in all things you've taught me to enjoy life and to live it so no day is ever wasted. To me every second with you is a treasure.

Chapter 1

The old metal doors leading into the emergency room at Charity Hospital in New Orleans slammed open letting in the rushing EMTs. On the gurney lay a small blond woman with a grotesquely mangled leg. The bone fracture was so severe it had pierced the skin just below the knee causing the white sheet on the gurney to soak through with blood coming from the wound. As the pain intensified it was the patient who turned a sickly shade of white indicating shock wasn't too far behind.

"Sally, get a doc in here stat, we didn't want to medicate her figuring she was going be worked up for surgery, but she's fading on us fast." David, the short redheaded EMT ran along side the gurney with an IV bag held as high as he could get it, following the nurse he'd addressed into the first available examination room. He'd worked for the ambulance service for over five years and witnessed some horrific things, but this would be a case that would stick with him for a while.

It had taken them twice the time to get to the hospital, having to wait outside the small shotgun house at the cusp of an undesirable neighborhood until the police could subdue the young

woman's husband before they were permitted to go in to retrieve her. David would never forget the bloody baseball bat lying next to the moaning woman, knowing it was what the son of a bitch had used on his wife's leg.

"We're in luck, Davie, God just finished up in the OR and should be able to descend from on high. I just paged her when y'all called in from down the street," said Sally, trying her best to sooth the patient until Dr. Harry Basantes was available to come down and see her. The young woman reminded her of her own daughter, and she thought if something had happened to Mindy, Dr. Basantes would be the only person she would want to fix the problem.

Not yet thirty-five, Harry was regarded as a prodigy in orthopedic surgery. Many local athletes from high school to the professional ranks had her to thank for their continued careers. The head of orthopedic surgery at "Big Charity" as it was referred to in New Orleans, Dr. Basantes also taught at the LSU Medical School located next to the hospital. Between her responsibilities at this hospital, the medical school, and her own private practice, she had little time for a social life, but had skills very few could rival.

Walking up behind Sally, with a group of students trailing behind her, Harry bent down and whispered in the nurse's ear, "Taking my name in vain again I see, Nurse Hardass?" The low sexy voice sent a thrill down Sally's back, and she was sure that if there were fewer years between their ages she would have made a play for the young doctor by now.

"Doc, I was comparing you to God, how can you take that the wrong way?" She turned around and gave Harry her best smile. Sally was one of the only people in the big building who could give her such a hard time and not get pulverized by the equally famous Basantes temper.

"Uh huh, let's see what we have here." She stepped around the portly nurse, but not before she slapped Sally on the butt.

Not looking at the patient's face first, Basantes' attention went immediately to the injury. She let the noise and chaos of the emergency room fall away, her concentration fully on what it would take to fix the problem. Barking out orders for x-rays to be taken and other blood work to be done, the doctor finally moved up to address her new patient. When she looked into the tear stained face and watery green eyes, memories of high school flooded her brain and Harry had to clutch the side of the gurney in shock not to fall over.

"Desi? Sweetheart, is it you?"

"Harry? What are you doing here?" She wiped her face as surprise replaced the pain if only for a second. This would have to be the most humiliating day of her life, injury aside.

"I'm here to fix your boo boo as you used to refer to them. You have a severe fracture just below the knee from what I can tell, and it'll require surgery. A couple of pins and you should be good to go. Sally is going to give you a shot for the pain and once I get a look at your pictures we'll head into the operating room." Harry smiled at her before turning her attention to the chart Sally had handed her. With handwriting only a few understood, Harry started writing down all the

orders she had just issued verbally.

"You're a surgeon?"

"No, I'm actually the janitor, but we're a little short handed at the moment so the state expects everyone to pull their weight." When she was done teasing she looked at her with a sincere and open expression. "Look, if you want someone else to do the procedure, it won't hurt my feelings, so just think about it. I'll be back as soon as your x-rays are back, okay?"

Not giving Desi a chance to respond, Harry moved away from the gurney running her hand through her hair. It was a nervous habit she'd had ever since she was a child and one that hadn't made an appearance in years. She moved to the nurse's station to finish filling out the orders in the chart and to put some distance between them. The emotions from seeing Desi again made Harry think that maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea to let someone else do the surgery. They had a history she had tried to bury in the deepest recesses of her heart.

"But damn if I don't find at least a minute of everyday to think about you, Desi. I wonder if you've given me a second thought since those caps went flying into the air at graduation?" The sentiment was whispered under Harry's breath causing one of the admit nurses to stare at her with an arched brow.

Back in the examination room, Sally and the EMTs very carefully lifted Desi from the gurney and onto the exam table. Sally draped a clean sheet over her chest to keep her warm and lifted the IV pole to the right height. While most patients watched Sally intently when she was in the exam rooms to see what was happening with their care, Desi kept her focus in the direction Harry had walked off in.

"You know, the decision is up to you," said Sally as she stuck a syringe in the IV unit. "And granted, there's a lot of good doctors in the building, but none of them are Dr. Basantes. If she's offering, don't turn her down."

The adamant defense caused Desi to cry harder. Before she could move and cause more damage, Sally finished with what she had to do and reached over to run her hand over Desi's fair hair. She continued the comfort even after the medication had taken affect and her breathing had evened out. The only trace she was still upset were the fat tears that still fell in silence down the beautiful face.

Lost in her thoughts, Harry didn't notice Kenneth Reynolds walk up and stand beside her. One of the few people she did keep in touch with from her childhood was her best friend and also the head of pediatrics at the hospital. The nurses referred to them as the dynamic duo, at first wondering if there was a romance to go with the friendship that they obviously shared.

"It's not often that we see the Goddess of Bones down in the ER. What gives, Harrietta?" He leaned against the counter next to her and drummed his fingers on the old Formica counter top.

"Don't call me that, Kenneth, or I'll share with Sally what Tony calls you when you're at home.

Got me, sugar pants?" Harry never peered up from the chart she was writing in as she gave as good as she got.

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry it's just been a long day and I felt like teasing you a little." He put his hands up in surrender and laughed. "Does someone have their leg coming out of their ass or something? It'd take something that drastic to lure you down here with the little people." He stood against the counter waiting to see what was wrong with his old friend. The first thing he had noticed when he stepped off the old elevator was Harry running her hand through her hair. It wasn't often the confident surgeon messed up those dark curly locks. Something had set her off and he was there to see if he could help with whatever it was.

"Did you learn that diagnosis technique in medical school?" Harry finally turned her blue eyes his way as she handed the chart off to the waiting nurse. "Ken, you wouldn't believe who's lying behind curtain number three." She made another swipe through the dark hair.

"Do I win a new washing machine if I guess right? Tony informed me old Betsy is about to call it quits. I've had that washer since we were in college," his tone was wistful, momentarily forgetting what they were talking about.

"If I bought you a new washer would you shut up?"

"Sorry. Who, Dr. Harry, is behind curtain number three? I've got no clue, and I'm horrible with guessing games so you're going to have to give in and tell me." He turned his full attention back on her and gave her an indulgent smile, maybe whoever was behind the curtain was the reason for Harry's demeanor.

"Desi Thompson. Can you believe of all the hospitals in the world, she had to walk into mine? Well technically she was wheeled in but it still doesn't change the fact that she's here and needs a surgeon." That she was now rambling was a clue as to just upset she was.

"She's in luck then, don't you think? You're a surgeon after all. Unless you forgot to pay the club dues and they've taken away your key and special decoder ring. By the way, did you sing the song 'A Kiss is Just a Kiss' when you first saw her, or are you waiting for the post op to do that?" For a brief second Kenneth thought about driving home and picking up his partner Tony. He was much better equipped to deal with old emotional baggage like this, while runny noses and nasty scrapes suffered on the playground were more his forte.

"You do realize, smart ass, that I'm bigger than you, thus I can deliver the leg out your ass thing?" She was now tapping the counter with her pen, letting Kenneth know seeing Desi again was driving Harry to distraction. He didn't think Harry even realized she was displaying every one of her nervous ticks.

"Sorry, pal, just go in there and do your job. After you're done, I'll take you home and treat you to a home cooked meal. You know Tony's red fish stew is to die for and he's been chopping stuff since early this morning. The man can't find a job but is a wizard in the kitchen. Just pretend she's one of the hundreds of nameless faces who walks in here everyday and put those memories

of yours back in the box." Just as he finished, another patient with an ear hanging on by just a small piece of cartilage was wheeled into the bay next to Desi's. "See, just another typical day in the ER in the great city of New Orleans," finished Kenneth with a slap to her back. "Just do your job, Harry, and the rest will stay buried if you let it."

"That, buddy, is easier said than done."

"True, but most people don't have Tony and me to help them through it. And we'll be there for you no matter what you decide."

"Doc, your pictures are back," Sally called from the curtained partition. She waved the large yellow envelope in the air and motioned for Harry to come back. Slapping Ken back a little harder than she meant, Harry promised to meet him for dinner. With a sigh, she walked back to the girl who had walked out on her so many years before.

"Harry, hurry up or we'll be late for class. I'm not sure why you need to go to class, you know more about algebra than Mr. Boswell. You have to promise me you'll come over this afternoon and help me with this stuff. If I flunk this class I won't be able to go off to college with you. And if that happens, who's going to take care of you?" asked Desi. She was walking down the hall backwards so she could keep up her conversation with Harry. It was getting harder to talk to Harry without getting lost in those incredible blue eyes and dark hair, so Desi tried to face her in any dialog they exchanged.

Strolling behind Desi and laughing at all her fussing was Harry. They had met in grade school when Harry had transferred from one of the private schools in town. Harry's parents had moved into a different school district just before summer, giving them no choice but to change where Harry and her brother went to school. The tall personable girl had spent the summer making friends with some of the neighborhood kids, all of who attended the local public school. Begging her parents, Harry talked them into letting her attend the school her new friends did.

As she was getting into her mother's car on the first day of fourth grade, Harry noticed some of the older kids picking on two small blondes standing in line for the bus. After briefly listening to cruel comments about their worn clothes, plain shoes and patched school bags, Harry excused herself from her mother and came to their rescue. Standing between the bullies and the girls, she offered them a ride.

"My mom won't mind so come on. You two don't want to be late on the first day do you?" She held out her hand and Desi had looked at it for a second before accepting it.

That had been the beginning of a friendship that would take them through high school. Unlike those kids at the bus stop that first day, Harry never noticed Desi's second hand clothes or the shoes with holes in the soles. Her parents never said anything when Desi would come to their house to spend the weekend and eat them out of a week's supply of groceries. The fact that she made Harry so happy was good enough for them.

"Time enough to think about that later. Now let's just do what Ken said and get the hell out of here," Harry mumbled to herself as she walked to the exam space Desi was in.

Firing up the light boxes attached to the wall Harry explained what needed to be done to fix Desi's leg to her as well as the students who were observing. The pain medication now flowed freely through her veins so Desi was able to follow what Harry was saying and study her without her noticing.

During the explanation Desi couldn't help but notice that time had been good to Harry. She was good looking in school but now her features were more refined and the tall lanky body had filled out leaving a strong confident woman standing before her. For all the things that had changed though, some things about Harry were still the same. Like the fact she talked with her hands and when she was finished explaining something, you understood the problem at hand as well as her well thought out solution.

"Do you have any questions, Desi?" Seeing her friend shake her head Harry continued, "Would you like for me to call one of my associates to do this for you? Don't worry about hurting my feelings, I just want you to be comfortable with your care." The only response Harry got was the tears rolling down Desi's face again.

Sally directed everyone to the other side of the curtain so Harry could have a moment with Desi before heading upstairs. She had known Harry since she was a resident tearing up these same halls, and Sally knew she was a sucker for a crying woman.

The second Sally closed the curtain behind her, leaving them as much privacy as possible, Harry leaned down and took Desi's hand into hers. All of Kenneth's warnings flew out of her head the second the glassy green eyes connected with hers. "Sweetheart, don't cry. It's going to be all right, I promise. After some rehab you won't even remember you got hurt, and I'll take extra care in my stitching so you'll still look good in a bathing suit." That made Desi smile up at her. It was like a fantasy to feel Desi's hand in hers again; the dreams she had didn't compare.

"I don't want anyone else, Harry. Please don't leave me alone now." Desi pulled her closer with the little strength she could muster. "I don't have any right to ask you, but please don't leave me alone."

"I promised you a long time ago that I'd take care of you and I never break a promise, so don't worry. You won't be alone in this, I'll take care of everything." With a slow and gentle hand, Harry wiped away the tears that had fallen down her before moving to put her arm around Desi."

"I've missed you, Harry. I'm sorry I never wrote or called you. I never stopped thinking about you. I've always wondered what you had gotten into so it's good to know you've done so well." Desi greedily soaked up the comfort Harry was offering. It felt wonderful to be back in the arms that had given her so much comfort in the first part of her life. After Harry left, Desi never felt

safe or cherished, and it had made for a very lonely existence.

"Don't worry about that now. I need you to relax and let the medicine take affect. You rest and I'm going to take care of you." In an old reflex, Harry kissed the top of the blond head. "And I'll be there holding your hand when you wake up. You're not alone in this and I promise I'll take care of you."

"Do you want something to drink, Harry? We have water or water," called Desi from the kitchen. Looking out at the front porch where Harry was stretched out, she fantasized about what else they could be doing instead of studying for finals. There was something about the way Harry looked at her that made her stomach do funny things.

"I think I'll take water, if you have it," called Harry from the front of the house. "Hey, Mr. Thompson, how's it going?" Harry asked Desi father Clyde who was walking up from the bus stop.

"Okay, Harry, just going to take a siesta before my next job. Studying for something with all those books out?" He pointed to the stack sitting next to her.

"Trying to teach Desi word problems in math, sir. Should make for a long afternoon. Would you mind if I took her and Rachel out for a burger later?"

"Nah, just have them back early, it's a school night."

"You got it, Mr. T, thanks."

They sat on the swing, shoulder to shoulder, for the rest of the afternoon while Harry patiently explained the concepts Desi needed to solve the problems. When Desi's younger sister Rachel got home, Harry took them both to dinner. Dining on hamburgers and baked potatoes that were a specialty at the French Quarter restaurant Port of Call, the girls enjoyed each other's company like they had on many previous nights. It bothered them at times to let Harry pay their way for all the fun extras in their life, but their big guardian angel loved to look after them.

Harry's father was a surgeon at one of the local hospitals. Though a foreigner with a thick Spanish accent, Raul was loved by all the patients he came into contact with. The generous man had on many occasions waived his fees when a family that couldn't afford the medical treatment that had brought them to the hospital found themselves under his care. Many times Raul came home with a payment of an ice chest of shrimp or other food item for a favor he had done for someone. With her dark curly hair, brilliant blue eyes and powerful build, Harry had inherited not only her father's good looks but also his gentle nature.

"Harry, have I ever told you how happy I am that you came to our rescue all those years ago?" asked Rachel as she popped the last of her burger in her mouth. They were sitting in the corner table of the small restaurant with Harry and Desi sitting close enough that their thighs were

touching.

"No, squirt, but I'm glad you're glad. You two finish up, I promised your father I'd have you home early." Harry paid their bill and piled them into the small car her father had bought her at the beginning of their junior year.

It was a two-seater that Harry loved to drive, especially when Rachel came along. That meant Desi would have to sit practically on her lap for the duration of the ride. Desi took those opportunities to lay her head on Harry's shoulder and pretend they were coming home from a date. As strongly as they felt for one another, they were afraid to voice their feelings.

Taking care of her throughout the beginning of Desi's life had been a labor of love for Harry and something Desi missed more than anything. It was almost unbelievable that it would be where Harry would pick up when they saw each other again, or even that she would even consider taking care of her again.

The reality of the situation wasn't lost on Desi as she stared up into the bright lights of the operating theater. She wondered if anyone had told Harry how it was she came to be there, and if Harry would even care after so much time. One of the nurses came over and started prepping her leg for surgery. She checked Desi's IV and started talking to a young man in a booth on the left side of the room.

"What do you think the doc's in the mood for today, Sam?" asked Tyler.

"She's scrubbing up so why don't you wait and ask her when she finishes up. Are you feeling any pain, ma'am?" Sam directed her question to Desi.

"No, whatever they put in that drip sure did the trick. Have you worked with Dr. Basantes for a long time?" Desi rolled her head trying to keep up with her movements around the room.

"For a couple of years now, honey, so don't you worry. You're in the best of hands. They don't call her the Goddess of the Bones for nothing. Just relax and when you wake up you'll be good as new."

Desi was about to rephrase her question so she could learn more about Harry's life, when the object of her curiosity backed into the room with her hands held out in front of her. "Crank it up, Tyler, let's go," Harry called out to the boy in the booth.

"What do you want to hear, boss?"

"I seem to remember Miss Thompson liked the Go Gos way back when, so cue it up, my man." Harry requested as she moved over to Desi.

Tyler was there to witness her work in the OR as many times as he could. Having met the

charismatic Harry the previous year at a gathering put together by the city to match up professionals with kids from the inner city, he had begun to hang around the hospital eventually getting a part time job working for her. The boy's dream was to one day work along side the surgeon who had given flight to his dreams by being his tutor when her schedule allowed. When it didn't, she had one of the residents sit with Tyler and help with his schoolwork.

The nurse continued putting out all of the equipment Harry would need as Harry bent down and started speaking softly into her ear. "Okay, sweetheart, I want you to take slow deep breaths and let the medicine do its job. Hopefully we'll be out of here in less than three hours if we don't find any more damage in there once we go in. I promise it'll be all right, so just relax." Harry's voice was getting softer and softer as the anesthesia started to work its way through Desi's system. The last things Desi remembered were the sound of that deep voice next to her ear, and the all girl band singing in the background.

"Doc, there's a detective here to see you from the NOPD once we finish up. Said he'd wait," Sam told her as she got into position to start handing over instruments.

"What'd you do now, Sammy girl?" teased Harry.

"Cut the wise comments, comedian, it's about her and her injuries," she pointed to Desi.

"I never did ask her how she got here. Was it a car accident?" asked Harry as she got into position.

"I think a car wreck would be less traumatic to recover from in the long run. This was no accident, her husband did this to her with a baseball bat, that's what David told Sally down in the ER." A shiver went through Sam's body as she thought of someone coming after her with a bat. "Isn't that just horrific?"

Harry had to take a minute to fight back her anger when she heard that. In her mind Desi would always remain the sweet innocent girl from high school, not someone's punching bag. "What happened to you, Desi, and why didn't you come to me for help?" Sam heard the question but she held the scalpel out for her boss and kept her comments to herself.

The surgery went smoothly and Harry was pleased that there wasn't as much ligament damage as she first suspected. She felt comfortable with the first diagnosis she had given Desi, in that with physical therapy, she would heal nicely. Washing up, she stepped into the waiting room to talk with the officer who had waited patiently during the two and a half-hour surgery.

"Dr. Basantes?" asked the short blond man. If Harry had to guess by looking at his clothes, the guy had spent his time sleeping in one of the plastic chairs while waiting.

"Yes, and you are?"

"Detective Roger Landry of the New Orleans police department, ma'am. I know you've had a long day but I was wondering if I could ask you some questions about Desiree Simoneaux?" He stood and tried to smooth out the wrinkles in his jacket.

"Simoneaux," Harry said the name slowly and softly as if trying to retrieve it from the recess of her mind. Of course Sammy had just told her there was a husband and Desi would have taken his name.

"Doc?"

"Sorry, ask away, detective, I don't know what I can tell you, but I'm game." He went on for about fifteen minutes and asked about the extent of Desi's injuries and about security measures at the hospital. It was a given that Byron Simoneaux, Desi's husband, would be out on bond before the night was over and the rumpled detective wanted to make sure Desi would be all right. The last thing she deserved was for the asshole to come and finish the job once he was out of jail.

"She's married to Byron Simoneaux? The guy whose dad owns the old mechanic shop and gas station?"

He arched a brow at how incredulous Harry sounded. "Sounds like you're familiar with him."

"Not really, just a name and face from a very distant past." Harry exhaled deeply and ran her hand through her hair. "I'm just surprised that's who Desi ended up with. I never realized they were close."

"I'm sure given their history together, if she had a do over, she would've made different choices. But tonight's reality is what we have to deal with. From what I know about this guy, when he gets out, probably tonight, he's going to come looking for her. An apology veiled with threats is what I predict for Desi's future if he finds her. That is if he doesn't stop at a local waterhole before he gets here. If that happens it's anybody's guess, you know?"

"Tell you what, Detective Landry, why don't I have Desi moved to another hospital once she's out of recovery? I'll have one of the services move her over to Mercy and into a private room. Don't worry about security, I'll take care of that myself. Once she's conscious tomorrow you can come by and talk with her. I don't know how these things work so I'll leave that part up to you." She ran her hand through her hair again then noticed that she was doing it, looking at her hand like it had somehow betrayed her usual cool façade.

"Thanks, doc, I'll see you both tomorrow. It's a shame what that asshole did to her. The boys in the precinct tell me it wasn't the first time, but she never wanted to press charges no matter how many trips they had to make out there." He handed her his card and shook her hand. "This time I'm hoping she'll think before just giving him a free pass, or there might not be a next time."

"Is there someone we should contact before we head out? I knew Desi in high school and she lived with her father and sister then, have they been contacted?"

"I'll check into it and let you know tomorrow," He pocketed his small notebook and turned to make his departure. "Thanks for everything, Dr. Basantes. I'm sure it was a comfort to Mrs. Simoneaux to see a friendly face tonight. It's going to help put this nightmare behind her."

Calling Kenneth's house and talking to his lover Tony, Harry explained what was going on and that she was moving Desi to another hospital. It would make it more convenient for her during Desi's convalescence to have her at Mercy Hospital, since Harry's house was so close.

"Do you want Kenny to meet you over there? He called a few minutes ago and said he's on his way home. I could get him to take a detour," said Tony.

"Nah, don't bother. I'm sure the big guy wants to get home after wiping snotty noses all day. Sorry about dinner, I'll call you guys tomorrow," Harry finished the conversation by snapping the small phone in her hand shut. Desi was resting in recovery so she found a chair to sit by her bed. The minute it was safe to move her patient they would be heading uptown.

Long moments passed without an answer so Harry thought Desi had fallen asleep because of the motion of the swing. They had just returned from dinner where the conversation had centered around their future and Harry's leaving for college soon. It was the crying that made Harry wrap her arms tighter around her in comfort. "Tell me what's wrong, Desi?"

"You're going away and you'll probably forget me. I just don't know what my life is going to be like without you here."

"I told you that you're welcome to come with me. It's just Baton Rouge, so you'll be close to your family. I could get a part time job and help you through school if that's what you're worried about."

They sat there in silence again except for the symphony of crickets coming from the garden. "Daddy would never let me do that. He needs help with Rachel and the house. I can't just run out on him. Without me here Rachel will be all alone, and..." There was a feeling of depression running through her as she clung to Harry.

As much as she trusted Harry, she couldn't bring herself to voice her fears about leaving her sister alone with their father. Clyde was a man who had grown angrier through the years and Desi didn't want to add to that, especially if her sister would bear the brunt of that decision. The desire to give into what Desi knew were selfish dreams was strong but she couldn't bring herself to commit and abandon her sister.

"Okay how about this?" Harry knew not to push - not yet anyway. "Rachel is only a year behind us, so for the next year you work and save your money, and I'll do the same. After that you both move in with me and we get you started on that nursing career you talked about, and we'll both help get Rachel started on what she wants to do. I love you, Desi, and I don't want to lose you either." It was a risk, finally admitting how she felt, but Harry couldn't leave and not tell her. Not

seeing her everyday was eating away at her and maybe this would give her hope that Desi would someday join her.

"I love you too, I have for so long." Desi's tears dried after finally voicing her secret and finding the courage to seal it with a kiss. She was thrilled when it was returned with the passion she had only dreamt about.

For the next three weeks, the two made plans for the next year, and for all the ones to follow. While they waited for Rachel to graduate they would have to live for long weekends and school breaks at Louisiana State University, which is where Harry had decided to go. Despite her father's money, Harry was going on both athletic and scholastic scholarships. She was as good on the softball field as she was at solving math problems and had been heavily recruited by the state institution.

On their last night together they sat on their swing holding on to each other. The touches and kisses had gotten a bit more heated over the last three weeks, and Harry was trying to memorize the taste of Desi's mouth. They never saw the man standing under the street lamp on the corner watching them. For the first time since anyone he worked for could remember, Clyde Thompson had gotten sick and had to go home early.

"Harry?" rasped Desi. She tried to lift her head and was confused as to where she was. She remembered being held by Harry and then total blackness.

"Try not to talk, " said Harry with a comforting voice from the chair next to her bed. The twitching of Desi's fingers woke Harry up from the deep sleep she had been enjoying. "Just relax and lay still."

After giving Desi a few chips of ice to sooth her throat and checking all her vitals, Harry called David in to get her loaded. After working at the hospital together for years, the EMT and Harry had gotten to be friends, so she didn't hesitate to call his service and have him waiting outside.

"Where are we going?" asked Desi.

"I'm going to move you to Mercy and into a private room. Charity is where you want to come to get your surgery, but not the best place to heal up. Don't get me wrong, the staff is excellent, but I just thought you might be more comfortable uptown. Ready, on two," said Harry as she grabbed on end of the sheet Desi was lying on. "Try to not hit any bumps and jar her leg, David. You wouldn't want to mess up my beautiful work." Following the gurney to the ER entrance, Harry called ahead to Mercy and asked one of the night nurses to get a traction setup ready for their arrival.

"Harry, I don't have the greatest medical insurance in the world so maybe it would be best if you left me here," Desi told her as she motioned for more ice.

"You can cook me dinner once you're back on your feet. I'm taking care of this so just sit back and enjoy the ride. David, hit one pothole and I'm going to come up there and rip your tongue out." The order was yelled through the small partition as David's partner secured the back doors after loading up.

"How about if I just try and hit all the potholes instead of trying to find a piece of paved street? It'd be easier on all of us." He looked back at them from the front cab and bit back a laugh at the glare he was receiving.

"How about I go up there and kick your ass?" retorted Harry as she tried to fold her long frame into the cramped space of the ambulance in an effort to get comfortable.

"How about I go nice and slow?"

They drove off the emergency room ramp having to maneuver around the dozens of other ambulances, police cruisers and private cars trying to get in. A Friday night in the ER at Charity in New Orleans was often compared to a triage unit during the Vietnam War. The trauma surgeons this hospital produced were the best in the country, which was why the competition to get in was so fierce. It was easy to fathom once you realized that on the weekends they averaged a hundred gunshot wounds a night, and even more stabbing victims. It was a typical night in the Big Easy.

As they drove further away from the chaos of Tulane Avenue, through the deserted downtown area and into the large oaks of uptown, the streets got wider and quieter. Uptown had its own share of crime but here the houses were bigger and surrounded by even higher fences keeping out the ugliness of what New Orleans had to offer. Most of the mansions along the city's famous St. Charles Avenue were owned by old money establishment, and nothing like the violence that had marred Desi's leg ever came in contact with their families unless it was invited in. The rich lived, played and socialized among these beautiful old trees. That had been the way since the city had been founded.

Driving up the ramp at the new hospital, Desi could tell the difference right off. There was no crowd of people waiting to be seen and no noise. Surprising for a Friday night, but then if you had been shot you wouldn't be here. Rolling along the professionally decorated walls the gurney stopped on the third floor in front of a private suite. From the moment the elevator doors opened, two attractive nurses crowded around Harry trying to offer assistance.

"Dr. Basantes, your room is ready, and all the equipment you ordered has been set up. Can I help you get your patient settled?" asked Mitzy. She walked up and leaned into Harry trying to get her undivided attention.

"Thank you, Mitzy, it's been awhile. How have you been?" She took a step back trying to put some space between them.

"Waiting for you to call me, doc, but it seems like you've cast me aside since you haven't made the effort to pick up the phone."

"Not the place or time for that discussion, Mitzy. Let's keep our minds on the task at hand shall we?" Harry gave her a glare that cooled her ardor.

Moving Desi into the room, the team gently transferred her onto the hospital bed. Harry spent twenty minutes getting her leg into the traction position Desi needed to help with the healing of the fracture. David took the time to talk to the forlorn appearing Desi bidding her goodbye and good luck. Once Desi was comfortable, Harry dismissed everyone allowing her some peace.

"How long do I have to be here?" asked Desi. She was having a hard time looking Harry in the eye now, so she looked instead to the warmed blanket the nurses had brought in to cover her.

"We need the bone to begin knitting, then we'll discuss your release. So sit tight because you're going to be here for at least a week if not a little longer. I know you're tired, Desi, but do you want to tell me what happened? Who did this to you?" She watched as Desi twisted her fingers into the bedding with a defeated look now that they were alone.

"I really don't want to get into that with you. Not that I don't appreciate your help but this really isn't your concern. This is my problem. I'm just sorry you got dragged into the situation because of rotten luck. You have your life and don't need my complications messing you up," answered Desi in a sharper tone than she intended.

"Desi, I wouldn't have asked if I didn't want to know. You aren't a complication to me, you never were. I thought you were my friend. The reason I'm asking is there was a police officer waiting for me when I got out of surgery tonight, and he had some pretty disturbing things to say about what happened. My offer's genuine. I want to help you if that's what you want," Harry finished with a sigh. Shouldn't she be the one getting angry? After all it was Desi who had walked out without explanations or reasons. But the urge to touch Desi was so great, she had to sit on her hands to keep from reaching out.

"If you know already, why ask me?"

"Because you were always the one preaching that there are always two sides to every story." Harry scrubbed her face with her hands, trying to fight off the fatigue she was battling. "I'm not trying to pry into your life, I'm just trying to help you."

"Why would you want to help me?" Desi's head came up for the first time since being placed in the room expecting to see pity and rejection in Harry's face. The compassion she found was surprising.

"Because I care about you, time doesn't kill that, or at least it hasn't for me. I won't lie and tell you I understand why."

"Why what?" She knew the answer to what Harry had said, but as much as it scared her, it was time to provide an explanation that was too long over due.

"Why you walked out of my life? Why you never returned any of my phone calls or never came to the door when I was home from school and came over to visit?" The memories of all that pain came flooding back and Harry had to stop talking to get her emotions back in check. "Did it only take a few weeks to forget how I felt about you?"

"Do you think so little of me to think I did all those things to hurt you? That I could just toss you aside and forget you?" Desi's voice projected a strength she didn't feel, but she couldn't turn back now. "Everything I did, I did because I cared about you. I did it all because I loved you!"

"Because you cared about me? Because you loved me? For the longest time I was in hell. I lost you for no reason, and I had to face that you didn't want me in your life with no explanation. Maybe it was the thought of living a lifestyle your family and friends wouldn't understand. I don't know, only you have the answers and they can remain with you if that's what you want."

Harry had to use all of her willpower not to sit on the bed and take Desi in her arms when her words obviously hurt and Desi dropped her head again. Funny how the feelings she had spent so long trying to bury could spring to life with so little effort. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to dump all of that on you especially now. It's just been a really long day, and you were a really big surprise."

"Do you have someone in your life now?" The fear of knowing the answers to all her questions that had added up in the time they'd been apart won out, and Desi's tears pooled in her eyes again at her own attempt to change the subject. With nervous fingers, she went back to twisting the blanket.

Harry laughed but the act had nothing to do with humor. "No, Kenneth and Tony pull me out of my shell every so often but there isn't anyone I'm seeing. It might have been a good thing for you to walk away from me. I can put someone's bones back together no matter what the damage, but I suck at relationships. Even when I've really tried, something always got in the way. I work, I teach and that's good enough for me." Harry put her hands in her pockets and tried to hide the surprise she felt at the unexpected question.

The truth was after what had happened with Desi, she was always waiting for whoever she was seeing to walk out. The pain of loss wasn't so great if you didn't put your heart at risk.

The defeated tone of the answer made Desi's head whip up. "But you were the most loving person I've ever known. You deserve someone who makes you happy, someone who makes all this work you do count for something."

"My work does count for something. I don't need a little woman patting me on the head at the end of the day to tell me otherwise. I've changed from the person you knew a million years ago. That Harry doesn't exist anymore." Harry's voice still carried a little heat, making Desi drop her eyes again and shrink a little into the bed.

In an instant Harry backed down not wanting to scare her. "Enough about me and my empty life for tonight. Think about my offer and we'll talk about it in the morning. Ring for Mitzy if you need anything. I'll be back around eleven, but someone can reach me if you need me before then."

I have two surgeries in the morning so I'll be up after that."

"You don't have to bother just for me, Harry."

"The surgeries are here, so it's no bother. Charity doesn't pay the bills, the torn rotator cuffs from the tennis set here do. Here are my cell phone and beeper numbers if you need to talk to me directly." She handed over a card and fought back a smile when Desi pressed it to her chest. "Have a good night, Desi."

Harry walked out of the room with a quick stride before her emotions got the best of her. She passed the nurses' station without a word, trying desperately to repair the carefully constructed wall around her heart that had been rocked to their foundation at seeing Desi again. "Do I have anyone special in my life? What a joke." The closing of the elevator doors swallowed the comment as Harry headed out of the building.

Riding the elevator down to the first floor Harry realized her car was still downtown at Charity. "Crap, this day just keeps on giving doesn't it?" Walking out the main entrance she thought maybe a jog downtown would calm her down after the emotional roller coaster she had been on. Seeing the woman who had broken her heart was one thing, but knowing she picked some abusive prick over her was quite something else.

"Going my way, handsome?" asked a singsong voice from the car parked at the corner.

"I don't know, what do you have to offer?" asked Harry smiling genuinely for the first time in what seemed hours.

"A fried oyster pobo and a ride back to your house," offered Kenneth. "My fabulous spouse decided to make one of your favorites even though he's been slaving in the kitchen all day long. Must mean he really loves you to go to those extremes. It'd be dangerous to your health to turn him down."

"I need to pick up my car first, buddy."

"No problem, Tony got the thrill of driving your girlfriend home. We gave her a quart of oil and put her to bed all safe and sound." With all her excuses out of the way, Kenneth waved her toward the passenger seat.

She got in and fell back into the soft leather with an exhausted sounding sigh. A fatigue like she hadn't felt since she was a freshman at LSU fell over her. "It's going to be okay, Harry, just have faith." Kenneth told her soothingly as he started toward home.

Her two friends spent the rest of the evening trying to cheer her up, and offering advice on how to handle the situation. Noticing she had fallen asleep on their couch half way through one of Tony's takes on the situation, they decided to leave her there for the night instead of waking her and sending her home.

"She picked Byron Simoneaux over Harry? What in the hell kind of choice is that? I tell you, Kenny, I thought that girl was one of the good ones back then. It's a crying shame she turned out to be such a bitch. Christ, Harry would have handed her the world on a plate, what was she thinking?" asked Tony as he jammed another glass into the dishwasher.

After hearing what had happened, the more and more aggravated Tony became as the evening wore on. It was making him sick to think of Harry back in that dark hole Desi had dug for her.

"Honey, we don't know all the facts so maybe you shouldn't hate her right off."

The way Tony was holding the glass in his hand made Kenneth think it was about to fly in the direction of his head. His partner was much shorter in stature but someone to be reckoned with when something fired his temper. "Where exactly have you been for the last, oh say seventeen or eighteen years, lover?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Kenneth was still eyeing the glass warily.

"Have you forgotten all those nights we heard her crying herself to sleep? Have all those futile trips to that little shotgun house when we were home for the weekend slipped your mind? She tried forever only to be turned away by her father no less, since Miss Desiree didn't have the balls to do it herself." With each item ticked off the list Tony's voice got lower as his anger built.

"I haven't forgotten any of it, love, and I saw how quickly the same pit swallowed her up when she saw Desi today. What I'm trying to say is, maybe this time around Harry will find some resolution with the past." Kenneth moved closer and placed the glass in the dishwasher before pulling Tony into his arms. "You've given me all the happiness I could hope to have in one lifetime and I want the same for Harry."

"Even after all this time, I still don't understand."

"It isn't our job to understand, baby, it's just our job to be there when and if this falls apart. I tried warning her but I saw the expression on her face when she left that exam room on her way to surgery." Kenneth kissed the top of Tony's head and sighed. "Whatever hold Desiree had over her then is just as strong as ever."

"I could've told you that. No one moons over a woman this long for no reason. The one thing that would've made it worthwhile was if the girl was worth all the pain Harry's endured. The way Desi handled the situation proves she wasn't, but you're right, it's not our place to say so. Harry has to find that out for herself and we'll be here to pick up the pieces when she does."

Kenneth's embrace tightened at Tony's soft side. "That's my little trooper."

"It's not about being a good friend, Kenny, it's about being a realist."

"What do you mean?"

He looked up at Kenneth shaking his blond hair out of his eyes before turning in the direction of the sofa and saw the top of their friend's head. "It means that the first time Harry had her heart broken she was eighteen and there was the promise of the rest of her life to get over it. With time she built a life she's comfortable with, but if Desi pulls the same crap again I don't know if she'll be able to do that this time around." He rested his head on Kenneth's chest and tried not to think morbid thoughts. "I'm just worried about her and what could happen if Harry loses hope."

"You don't think..."

"That she'll do harm to herself?" He pulled away a little and gazed up at the handsome face. "Not really. Harry has too much respect for life. That's what makes her a brilliant surgeon. The other part of that though, is how compassionate she is, and that stems from hope. I don't want to see her ability to deal with her patients diminished in any way because something inside her shuts down."

"That just means we'll have to be more diligent in looking out for her."

Tony nodded. "We will be because I refuse to let anything bad happen to her. Aside from you, Harry is the most noble and honorable person I know. That's why I've never been able to understand what happened."

"I don't understand it, guys, she won't return my calls or answer the letters I've sent. The phone is out of the question now, since every time I dial her number I wake her father up. Clyde works three jobs and that's not fair to him. Two weeks ago we were making plans for our future, now she won't even talk to me. What the hell happened?" asked Harry. She felt was like she'd been kicked in the chest.

"Maybe this is her way of telling you she doesn't want to see you anymore, Harry. We get to go home in two weeks, so why don't you wait until then to try again? No matter what happens, buddy, Tony and I'll be here for you." Kenneth told her as he held his crying friend. He couldn't fathom what Desi was up to and he wondered if she realized how much it was hurting Harry. Over Harry's shoulder he watched as Tony cried along with her. It was hellish to watch their friend go through this pain and know there was nothing they could do.

Back in New Orleans, Desi was also making it a habit of crying herself to sleep. After Harry had gone home that last night, her father had confronted her about what he had seen. The choice he'd offered had been getting rid of Harry or being thrown out and disowned, which would mean never seeing her sister again. After his ultimatum, Clyde slapped her across the room to show the seriousness of his words.

"No daughter of mine is going to be some queer. I'll beat it out of you if that's what it takes. If that's what you intend on doing girl get out now. I want nothing to do with you. Just remember,

if she's what you want, you can forget about ever seeing Rachel again. We'll both be dead to you," railed Clyde as he slapped her to the floor again.

Not having the courage to leave her family, Desi chose the only alternative she could live with, and hoped that it would make her father proud of her. She married Byron and tried to settle into the life of a married woman. For sixteen years Desi enjoyed watching her sister grow and soar, and tried to substitute that for the love missing in her own life.

She had stayed long after the forced commitment, knowing there was no place left for her to run. After what she had done, Desi was convinced Harry had moved on with her life and there would no longer be room in it for her. When it was late enough, and Byron was sleeping she could admit it wasn't what, but who was missing in her life that was ripping holes in her soul.

"Dr. Basantes, could you answer some questions for my family and me?" asked the elderly lady in the waiting room.

They had already had their post operation consultation but were still fuzzy about what to expect from the hip replacement surgery the older woman's husband had just undergone. The six residents and three nurses with the rolling cart of charts waited while Harry sat in the bright atrium and answered all of their questions.

As hard as the doctor was on her students, she was just as gentle with her patients and their families. Harry was regarded as one of the most compassionate doctors in the hospital when it came to her bedside manner. It was one of the things she had learned from her father in the years she followed him through the wards.

"It takes no extra effort to be nice, Harry, remember that when you have patients of your own. These people are scared and are looking to you for answers. Don't ever let me hear that you blew anyone off because you didn't feel like talking or answering questions. If you do, you'll need a surgeon when I'm done with you," her father had told her.

Finished with the Hebert family, Harry headed up to the wards to do rounds with her staff. One of the good things about being an instructor at the medical school was, even in private practice, the students assigned to her tagged along. Some of the patients were overwhelmed when that many white coats congregated around their bed, until Harry explained why they were there.

Pulling Desi's chart out of the pile and reading how her night went, Harry dismissed them and headed toward the cafeteria. Deciding instead on one of the local burger places within walking distance of the hospital, Harry picked up lunch for both Desi and herself before heading up to see her.

"I come bearing gifts since I see you're not into hospital food," Harry teased when she stepped in. Desi was sitting up in the bed staring out of the window appearing sad. A hospital tray sat ignored next to the bed. With the rays of light streaming into the room, the red highlights in

Desi's hair were accentuated, and her face had that youthful appearance Harry remembered.

"My savior. You were always that, Harry, weren't you?" As she asked the question, Desi couldn't help the tears that spilled out. She had been sitting there all morning going over the choices she had made and what they had cost her.

"I can be again, if you let me," said Harry as she gave into her inner most desires and sat on the bed next to Desi.

"It might be too late for that. Look at me," replied Desi pointing to her leg. "You don't need some useless woman in your life, Dr. Basantes."

"You can choose to believe whatever you want about me, but don't think of yourself that way. If you do, he wins, and hasn't Byron taken enough from you already?" Desi lowered her head at the question and wouldn't answer.

Thinking Desi needed time, Harry changed the subject and asked about Desi's family. It was nice to hear that Rachel had become a hairdresser and was now working at one of the more posh establishments in town. Desi's father had died five years before of lung cancer, so besides Rachel, Byron was technically the only family she had left.

"Do you want me to call Rachel and tell her where you are?" asked Harry.

"Don't bother tall, rich and good looking," Rachel screamed from the door.

She had cancelled all her appointments for the day after getting the call from her sister that morning. Rachel had driven to the hospital with a smile on her face after she heard who the dashing surgeon was who had been on call when Desi was brought to the hospital. With any luck Harry wasn't hooked up with some skinny uptown bitch who would have to be taken out of the picture.

"Squirt, look at you. You look great. Is it true? Do redheads have more fun?" asked Harry as she rose from the bed to greet Desi's sister. The hair was a definite change from the brunette locks she remembered.

"Come out with me some time, doc, and I'll let you know. How's my big sister?" asked Rachel as she turned her attention to the bed.

"I'm okay. Come here and give me a kiss. My leg's broken not my lips," said Desi.

"Not this time anyway, sis. I hope now you'll listen to me and get away from that asshole once and for all. What's it going to take, Desiree? Him killing you?" Rachel lectured with her hands on her hips and no teasing in her voice.

"Be quiet, Rach, Harry doesn't need to hear all this," said Desi.

"I'll give you two some privacy. Eat your burger, Desi, and drink the entire shake I brought. You need all the calcium you can get at the moment. Rachel, it was nice seeing you again, take care."

It's none of your business, Harry, leave it alone. She doesn't even want you in the room when she talks it over with her sister, thought Harry as she walked down the hall to the atrium. Sinking into one of the comfortable chairs in the empty room, Harry closed her eyes for a moment, thinking about the rest of her day. She had another ten hours of work minimum, and she had to figure a way not to think about Desi in all that time. Her patients needed her head to be clear and her hands to be steady. It was only fair, so Harry tried her best to focus.

"Please don't talk like that in front of her again," begged Desi when the door closed behind Harry. "This is embarrassing enough without having you fill in the blanks for her as to how pathetic my life is."

"It's time to change all the things you think are pathetic, sweetie. Think of this as fate's way of giving you a second chance." The firm mattress squeaked a little when Rachel sat next to her on the bed. "You had your reasons before, Des, but now daddy's not here to hold you back, and that asshole you married deserves to have the jail dropped on him."

"How many times do I have to tell you what I did was my choice?"

Rachel put her hand on Desi's cheek so her sister would look her in the eye. "Tell me those choices didn't cost you the one person who mattered the most?"

"That's not important. I still have you and you're whole."

The red tinted hair fell in Rachel's face when she shook her head. "This time around you don't have to worry about me, Des. Nothing and no one is hiding in the shadows to hurt either one of us, so this time you can have it all, sweetie. You just have to want it bad enough to claim it as yours."

"Life isn't always so simplistic, love, trust me." Her words died away as the emotion started to build. "Could you give me a few minutes?"

The hands that came around Harry's neck were familiar so she didn't need to look up to see who it was. The fingers massaged the tense muscles they found there and in her shoulders, before the redhead came around to the front of the chair and slipped into her lap. "Rachel, darlin', how have you been really?" asked Harry as she cradled Desi's sister in her lap.

"You still smell the same, Harry, how is that possible?" Rachel put her head on Harry's shoulder and pressed her nose to the tall woman's neck.

"I'm a creature of habit, you know old boring Harry."

"You're no such thing. Do you think I would've wasted all the time I have over the years thinking about you if I thought you were boring? And I have, thought about you I mean."

Harry smiled when she felt Rachel pull her hair gently after the reprimand. "I missed you, squirt...both of you."

"Oh, Harry, don't do this to yourself. Nothing that happened was your fault, and you may not believe me, but none of this is Desi's fault either."

"I don't remember saying it was. She had a right to whatever kind of life she wanted, with whomever she wanted." Harry pulled Rachel's hand down and held it in her lap. "I don't blame her...well not anymore, but I can't go back, Rachel. I don't know if you realize how much I cared about your sister."

She squeezed Harry's fingers and took a few seconds to center her thoughts. "I know, sweetheart, and I know how she feels about you." She pulled on Harry's hand when she went to pull away from her. "She loves you, Harry."

"She did for one brief moment maybe, but then she moved on didn't she?" Harry stopped and took a deep breath wondering where all her control had gone.

"Harry, I want you to listen to me, okay? I've spent years missing you, so much so that I didn't think I'd ever forgive my sister for what she did to you. You were so good to us growing up and you never asked for anything in return. I was angry with her for so long, but then she finally confessed her reasons to me, so I'm here to ask you for a favor." She framed Harry's face with her hands so she could see those big blue eyes. "Give her the time she needs to explain what happened. It'll be worth it, trust me. She married that ass, but she never stopped loving you, I know it. She won't admit it yet, but it's in there. Will you promise me to at least try?"

"She doesn't want me in her life, darlin', that much she's made perfectly clear so I don't think my trying is going to make a difference."

"Then promise you'll try because you're crazy about me." Rachel scratched the back of Harry's neck and smiled to try and make her feel better. She laughed and nodded in agreement. "Good, now kiss me goodbye, doc, I've got to get back in there and take my lumps for saying something in front of you earlier." Pressing her lips softly to Harry's, Rachel got up and walked back to her sister's room leaving a confused Harry behind.

Sitting with Desi for the afternoon, Rachel tried to make her comfortable and pull her out of her funk. She washed Desi's hair and put on a light coat of make-up for when Harry came back. At five, Detective Landry returned to interview Desi about what had happened in her house the previous day. Between his and Rachel's urgings, Desi decided for the first time to press charges against Byron.

This wasn't the first time he had sent her to the emergency room, but it was the first time she needed surgery and a long hospital stay to get recover from the beating. Rachel only asked that

the officer give her enough time to go by the house and get her and Desi's things before they issued a warrant for Byron.

Desi's husband would have to be rearrested since his father had posted his bail the night before. It had been her salvation when her younger sister had moved in after their father died. It was the only thing Desi could attribute to Byron not having killed her by now.

Walking in as the interview was concluding, Harry wanted to check the settings on the traction Desi was in before heading home. Desi looked tired but better since that morning, and Harry figured Rachel had been playing hairdresser. She was about to walk out to let them finish their conversation when Desi asked her to stay.

"Ms. Simoneaux, where will you and your sister be staying once you are released? For your own safety, I recommend you don't return to the house you share with your husband. Just call my office with an address and number where I can reach you and I promise to keep you informed. Take care of yourself, ma'am, and just remember, no one deserves this kind of treatment." He turned his attention to Harry. "Doc, it was nice seeing you again. Maybe next time I'll schedule more time so you can look at this bad knee I got. We can trade, I'll take care of any outstanding parking tickets and you can fix my leg," he said with a chuckle. He held his hand out and shook Harry's before bidding them all good-bye.

"You got it, Detective Landry, thanks for stopping by today and talking with Desi."

When it was just the three of them, Harry turned her attention from the door to the bed. "So you ladies need a place to stay?" She prayed she wasn't about to make another huge mistake.

"Yes," said Rachel.

"No," said Desi at the same time. Desi glared at her sister for answering for her.

"Rachel, feel free to come and stay with me. You can help your sister find some place to go after she gets discharged," said Harry addressing Rachel and ignored Desi fuming on the bed.

"Harry, you mean it? Do you still live around here?" asked Rachel.

"I bought a house over on St. Charles last year. I hired Tony to decorate for me, he just didn't know at the time he had to pick out the house as well. Kenneth was so thrilled with the contract and that it kept Tony so occupied, he sent me to Barbados last Christmas. It's almost finished, just a few dozen more fights and I'm sure we'll agree on something. Tony doesn't understand the concept of white walls, and I don't understand the difference between mauve and pink so it makes for interesting dramatic outbursts. If you can live with that, you can stay," said Harry as she rocked on her heels.

"You live on the Avenue?" asked an impressed Rachel.

"Two blocks up from Napoleon, trailer trash, so I should expect you?"

"Harry, we've never lived in a trailer so take that back," whined Rachel stomping the floor with her foot and putting her fists on her hips.

"I take it back, and you can stay with me, if you talk hardhead over there in to coming with you." Harry cocked her head in the direction of the bed and wiggled her brows.

Desi couldn't help but laugh at their antics. Being around Harry again was like balm on her soul.

They spent the next week developing a routine. Harry rearranged her schedule so she could have lunch with Desi every day, then came back to see the girls together at night. The day they decided they would be coming to stay with her, Harry had driven Rachel to the small house she shared with Desi and Byron to collect their things.

Tony was thrilled with the developments since it gave him a reason to go shopping for new bedspreads more suitable for ladies having announced that Harry didn't count, and a way of gathering information about Desi. Accompanied by Rachel, Tony made sure all the clerks in the more exclusive shops in town would never forget them.

"Ready to head out tomorrow?" asked Harry.

"You sure we won't be in your way?" Desi had asked the question a thousand times before but felt the need for that last bit of reassurance. Having asked again, she put the last spoonful of ice cream Harry had brought her in her mouth.

"Desi, I've lived with Tony and your sister for the past week, believe me, you won't be in the way," answered Harry from her position next to the bed. They were slowly returning to the comfortable relationship they once shared. The realization hit Desi as she looked at Harry's socked feet propped up on the bed. *When did I put my hand on her foot and I wonder if Harry noticed?* Desi asked herself, but she didn't remove her hand.

"Desi, can I ask you something?"

"You know you can."

"I apologize if I'm way out of line here but, I have a friend who works down in the D.A.'s office who handles most of the domestic abuse cases for him. Would you be offended if I called her and asked her to come and talk with you?"

"It would make me feel better if you knew what you were in for, and what to expect. Serena's been doing this for awhile and can walk you through the process." The empty container of ice cream hit the side of the garbage can before going in as Harry finished up. "I know Rachel and everyone else who cares about you wants you to take a stand here, but I think it's important for you to know all the facts before you make your final decision on what you should do with your

life."

"Don't you think I should pursue this?"

"Right now it's not really important what anyone wants but you."

"So you don't think I should charge Bryon with anything?" persisted Desi.

Harry laughed remembering their conversations from the past. When she set her mind to it, Desi could ask questions until you cried uncle. "I believe what I said is that you should be the one who makes that call. Not me, not your sister nor anyone else who has your best interests at heart. I care about you, and I care about what happens to you, but I think you have to be comfortable with what's coming. If you were with a man like Byron..." The fact Harry just stopped talking made Desi curious as to what the end of the sentence was.

"If I was with a man like Byron, what?" She put her finger up to stop the denial she knew Harry had ready. "If you care about me, then don't say it's nothing, and I'm sure that was going to be the next thing you said. If I was with Byron then what?"

"If he was capable of this, if he's the one who in fact did this, then I'm thinking he isn't just going to sit back and wait for the police to drag him off." This time it was Harry who put her finger up to stop whatever Desi was going to say. "If you want me to be honest, then I will. I think you should meet with Serena then try and find a little of that girl I used to know and nail this cowardly bastard to the wall. Only don't do it because that's what everyone else wants. Do it because that's what you want, as payment for everything that's happened to you."

"And if I decide not to do this? What will you think of me then?" Harry noticed where Desi's hand was when she squeezed her foot. "Will I also be a coward in your eyes?"

"As long as you are comfortable with your decision then I'll support you. It's the fact that it's your decision that'll make me happy." Harry smiled and nudged Desi's uninjured side with her foot. "Just talk to her and I think you'll be better prepared for what's coming."

"Sure, I'd like that. So, what color is my room?" asked Desi trying to steer the conversation away from her miserable marriage.

"Magenta was the last I saw." They both laughed having formed a picture in their head of Tony and Rachel together.

"Am I ready for this?" joked Desi.

"I'm thinking you're going to drown in fabric swatches and paint samples in the coming weeks. There's nothing Tony likes more than a captive audience."

"I am that," said Desi pointing to her leg.

"I have it on good authority from your doctor that you'll be as right as rain sooner than you think."

Desi squeezed her foot again and smiled. "She's the best, so I guess we don't have any other choice but to believe her."

[Continued in Chapter 2](#)

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~ How Do You Mend A Broken Heart ~

by Ali Vali
December 2005

Disclaimers: [See Part 1](#)

Comments can be sent to me at terrali20@yahoo.com.

Chapter 2

Not wanting to take any chances with Desi, Harry arranged for an ambulance to take them home. She had assigned her morning rounds to her resident team, wanting to be there when her friend came home.

Pulling through the gates of one of the larger homes on the block, Harry heard the driver let out a long slow whistle as they made the turn into the drive. *I have to give that boy credit; Tony knows how to pick a house*, thought Harry. As soon as they made it through the side doors into the house, Harry's pager went off with the number from the OR at Charity.

"What you got for me, Sam?" Harry listened as her surgical nurse went through the list of accident victims expected in emergency any minute as she watched the two men wheel Desi further in.

It would take three operating rooms and most of the day to get through the list of patients in need of surgery she realized, as she listened to the list of injured Sam was ticking off. "So much for my day off. Call in Smith and Butler then page and separate my babies in between all three rooms, I'm on my way. Tell Tyler to cue up something hopping to keep me awake."

"You got it, doc."

"Sorry, Desi, I have to go. Sounds like some drunk caused a forty-car pileup on the interstate coming into town, and he's the only one who walked away unscathed. Kenneth and Tony are here if you need anything, and Rachel called to say she'd be a few hours. She had some regulars she couldn't cancel, but I think you'll be all right until then. If not, Mona will be back tonight to pitch in." Harry sounded apologetic as she knelt next to the gurney Desi was laying on, taking a hold of her hand.

"Who's Mona?"

"She's my housekeeper slash right hand. She has Sunday through Tuesday off so she can visit her kids. After two days she's ready to come home, and then I don't seem that bad."

"Be careful and I'll be here waiting for you." She gave Harry a warm smile and squeezed her fingers.

"You take it easy and try and get some rest. If you need me for anything though, pick up the phone and call. Just remember you're not ever bothering me so don't be shy."

"I'm sure I'll be fine."

Harry's blue eyes held Desi in warm affection, and she didn't hide any of her feelings. "I'm sure sometimes you may not really believe that, but I promise you will be."

Desi watched Harry walk away for as long as she could from her reclining position, then she turned her attention to her friend's house. Tony had indeed done a great job in decorating, including both his and Harry's taste into one livable space. She thought the idea of a decorator was to blend in the owner's taste but she remembered Tony from school, compromise wasn't a word high on his priority list.

"Desi, darling, you look positively horrible," called Tony from the sunroom doorway as he clutched his chest.

"Thank you, Tony, it's nice to know some things in life never change. You always did have a way of making everyone feel good about themselves." Her tone was highly facetious but Desi warmed it some by smiling.

"Blame it on my mother. She always insisted honesty was the best policy," Tony shot back. "Not to worry though, we'll nurse you back to health in no time. It'll just take good care, good food and a beautiful setting."

"I see Harry didn't exaggerate about the job you've done here. From what little I've seen, the house is beautiful. Doesn't scream Harry though does it?" asked Desi rolling her eyes at him.

"Girl, that woman would live with a box to sit on in the middle of every room given the

opportunity. Harry should fall on her knees and thank God for me everyday for giving her a little class. Let's get you up to your room and then we'll get caught up on old times. This way James," Tony told the two ambulance workers.

"My name's Henry, sir," said the man in front.

"Of course it is, how good of you to remember," Tony snapped back.

"Tony, cool it would you, these guys have to carry me up those stairs. I don't want them dropping me."

"No one has a sense of humor anymore I swear." He dramatically threw his hands in the air as he trotted up the stairs.

Tony led them into a large room in the corner of the second floor of the house. The hardwood floors were covered with muted Persian silk rugs and there was a balcony that overlooked the back gardens of the house. The most beautiful antique four-poster bed Desi had ever seen gracefully filled up the middle of the room. The dark wood in the room was accentuated with dark blue paint on the walls, giving it a comfortable but rich look. The two men moved her onto the bed then took their leave. Tony put a little metal tent looking piece down by her feet so he could pull up the goose down comforter without putting pressure on her injured leg.

The room was full of interesting architectural details and furnishings but one picture on the mantle grabbed her attention, and it brought tears to her eyes that Harry had kept it. The image had to be a harsh reminder of a time the doctor should've long ago forgotten.

"It doesn't really go in here but I thought I'd allow her one little indulgence for sentimental reasons. Does it bring back memories for you?" asked Tony in a sarcastic tone. He was trying to be nice, but seeing the person who had brought Harry so much pain was making it difficult.

In the old gilded frame was a picture of Desi and Harry with their caps and gowns from graduation, capturing one of the last happy memories the injured woman cherished. Both smiles lit up the room, and Harry's arm was draped over her shoulders. It was supposed to be the beginning of their life together, not the end.

"Yes it does. I want to thank you for being Harry's friend all these years. It's good to know she wasn't alone after everything that happened." Desi's eyes never left the picture sitting on the mantle.

"I may be way out of line here, but I think as Harry's friend I've earned the right to speak my mind."

She sighed and nodded her head. "Go on, I'm not stopping you."

"You hurt her, Desiree, so deep it took everything in our power to help her get past it. And here you are right back in her life like all those years never happened. The fact you are makes me see

she still hasn't gotten over the hump, not really anyway. You learn to read her eyes after awhile. There's so little that brings life into them, but you do, and I'll be the first to admit, I don't understand it. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad you're back and I'm glad you're okay, but if you plan on walking out once that leg is healed, tell her now. I'm not eighteen anymore and she isn't either. It won't be so easy to get over it this time and Kenneth and I don't have enough magic left to put all those pieces back together again."

She ran her hand over the soft duvet and tried to stem the tide of tears threatening again. There was no fight left in her especially since everything he'd said was true. "I don't want to hurt her. You have to believe that. I didn't mean to back then."

"I know you may not have meant to, but that's what ended up happening, darlin'. She's carved out a life for herself, Desi. Don't take that away from her, that's all I'm asking. It's what'll happen if you just walk out without so much as a goodbye again. Harry has her parents, her work and us. It's not enough for what I'd define as a full life, but for her it is. No one's ever come close to that picture she has in her head about you, so I'm here to tell you, hurt her and I'll make you regret it. The first one was free, but this one's going to cost you." Tony finished his speech and sat next to the bed regarding Desi's reaction to it.

"Fair enough, thank you for being honest with me. Was it really that bad when I left? I figured Harry would move on after a few weeks and find someone more her caliber. You and I both know I wasn't in her league. It was like second hand Rose meets the Vanderbilt's, she was better off," said Desi, still afraid to face him.

"Bullshit, she was the one who had the right to know why you walked away from her. While you were busy cozying up to the ape Byron, Harry was going through hell. She'll never tell you that because she's not the kind of person who would want to make you feel bad. Tell me, when did Harry *ever* make you feel less than what you were because of your clothes or your house?" He wasn't screaming, but there was more than a trace of anger in his tone.

Her eyes were shiny with tears when she finally looked up and pinned him with a glare. "You're right, she didn't do that. Would it help to know that it wasn't my choice to leave? That I've been just as miserable for all this time too, because I have...I have. It came as a big shock to me too that she offered to do this. I'd have thought she would have handed me off to the first doctor that walked by when she saw me lying there, but she didn't."

He threw his hands up again in exasperation as if she hadn't heard a word he'd said. "Wake up. Of course Harry wouldn't have done that. She loves you, stupid. There've been plenty of women who wanted to be in your shoes, but Harry has turned them all down gracefully. I asked her why once. Even considering my sexual choices in life I can still spot beauty when I see it. Some of these girls were real lookers. I asked, why not just pick one and get on with living her life? I know she loved you, but she should've gotten over you years ago. She deserves to have someone in her life who loves her. You want to know what her answer was as to why she couldn't move on?" asked Tony softening his tone.

"Yes I do." Desi's answer was so low Tony wouldn't have heard it if he hadn't been sitting so

close. She was nervously running her fingertips over the pattern on the comforter Tony had pulled over her legs.

"She said she couldn't in all good faith enter into a relationship, no matter how wonderful the girl, because she was damaged goods. 'You can't give away a broken heart,' is what she told me. I stopped asking after that because I felt like crying from the pain in her voice from having to admit that out loud. I care about her too much to keep reminding her of what she lost.

"Kenneth and I have finally gotten her to go out with us and cut up like we use to, but only starting about five years ago, and as much as we'd like to pretend, it's not really the same. Harry's changed, and while for some people change is a welcomed thing, in her it's been like a slow withering of her heart. And now like I said, here you are." Tony put his hand down on hers, making her look up again and stop fiddling with the comforter.

"Love, have you been rude to Harry's guest? I have to keep reminding him that our pal is bigger than the both of us, and I'm fairly sure she can beat me up, so I apologize on his behalf if he was," said Kenneth as he stepped into the room.

He had been standing out in the hall listening to the conversation, quietly cheering his lover on. Someone had to explain to Desi what she'd done and how wrong it had been. Leave it to Tony to rise to the occasion the first opportunity he got.

She wiped her face and tried her best to smile. "No, he was just explaining the choices he made in the house and why. It's nice to see you again. I know what Harry and Tony have been up to, now tell me what you've been doing with yourself since we last saw each other."

"I'm a pediatrician here in town. I actually do what Harry does in that I work and teach at the medical school. It's been nice and it reminds me on a daily basis why I don't want kids, but I love all the ones I see in the clinics. I leave all the blood and glory to our girl and I just deal with rashes and runny noses."

"Sounds like you enjoy what you do." Desi continued to smile for him, but Kenneth and Tony both could see it didn't go to her eyes.

"I do, but we'll have plenty of time to talk about that later. Right now it's time for you to get some sleep, after you take your pills. Get some rest, then Rachel, Tony and I'll bring you up some late lunch when you wake up." Kenneth sat at the edge of the bed and handed her three pills and a glass of water.

"Is Harry coming home soon?" asked Desi trying to sound casual.

"Don't miss out on getting some rest trying to sit up waiting on her. I heard about the accident on the way over here. My guess is her fingers will be cramped by the time they're done. It's days like this one that make Harry wish for a simple country practice I'm sure, but then she is addicted to the thrill of the operating room, so it's for the best we live in a fast town." He smiled as he put the glass back on the nightstand within reach in case she had need of it later. "Try and get some

sleep. It's the only way you'll start the healing process."

"Thank you both for everything."

The two left Desi alone with her thoughts and her memories for the afternoon. She wondered what it would be like to live here with Harry without the fear. Wondering if after a long day at work, Harry would come home in the mood to beat the one she supposedly loved, or was she the same sweet soul she had known once upon a time?

The answer really didn't matter, since any life with Harry was just a fantasy that would never play out. If life had taught her anything up to now, it was that fantasies were just dreams little girls had that were crushed under life's boots time and time again.

"I'll talk to you later, daddy, Byron should be home soon. It's our fifth anniversary and I still have plenty to do. His favorite dinner is in the oven but I just have a couple of other things I have to finish up before he gets here."

Desi was trying to get excited about the evening, but so far her efforts hadn't gotten her any closer to that feeling. Her life had become somewhat mechanical, moving from one chore to the next only because it needed to be done and not because she had a burning desire to do so.

"Desiree, you done good for yourself, girl. You got yourself a good man with a good job to take care of you, now you just need to make me a grandfather. Aren't you glad I introduced you to Byron and made you forget all those foolish notions you had?" The bar wasn't busy so Clyde had taken the time to call his oldest child in case she needed reminding of what her duties were. Now that Desi was settled it was time to start working on Rachel.

"Thanks, daddy, for everything and we're trying. Byron's just been so busy lately down at the garage we barely see each other. His dad's business is picking up since their main competitor, old man George, retired. Talk to you soon." She rushed through the string of lies, the same ones she uttered whenever he wanted gratitude for trading away her happiness.

Desi hung up the phone and sighed. The call came like clock work every year, even now when her father didn't have the same hold over her as before. There were days when she felt like she was just an actor playing out a role that was supposed to be her life, but that's all it was, an act.

"Five years of my life gone. Harry, do you still think about me? Would you think my life was as much of a joke as I do? I miss you, baby, and I love you," whispered Desi out the kitchen window. She spun around at the sound of his voice but it was too late.

"I didn't realize you thought of our life here as a joke, Desiree. I was the best you were going to get, you stupid bitch, so stop complaining about it or I'll give you something to complain about," screamed Byron from behind her.

When she'd turned to face him, he saw the tears on her face, which sent him over the edge. Having his father call him stupid all day, then coming home to a woman crying over someone she should've forgotten a million years ago, was more than a man should have to put up with. All the beer he had at the corner bar couldn't drown out those feelings.

"I work all day to give you a good life and this is the thanks I get?" he roared. "You fucking useless piece of ungrateful shit." The rage in his voice made her start running in fear but he was too fast for her.

Byron didn't remember too clearly when he balled up his fists and sent them into Desi's face repeatedly, but there was no denying it the next morning. He apologized and promised it would never happen again, but there was always his father and there were always those tears in Desi's eyes. How was he supposed to ignore that?

The house was dark when the blue Land Rover pulled in. It had been a long day that had culminated with Harry having to amputate a young girl's leg because the dash of the car she was riding in had crushed it beyond repair. Even with all Harry's skill she hadn't had a choice.

Why the very young had to sometimes to deal with such tragic circumstances so early in their lives was a question she never had an adequate answer to. Especially when it was asked by a distraught parent.

Grabbing a Yoo Hoo out of the refrigerator, Harry headed up to bed. The hospital staff promised they would cover rounds tomorrow for her, since the surgeon had been on her feet for sixteen hours straight.

Heading up the stairs, Harry forgot about her houseguests and started stripping, as was her habit, while climbing the stairs. Living alone did have some perks, or at least living alone on Sundays and Mondays. She was naked by the time she reached her bedroom, and headed into the bathroom.

"A hot shower so I won't feel so grimy then I can go to bed, and then I can dream about Mona's waffles," mumbled Harry as she stretched and moaned.

When the light from the bathroom illuminated Harry's sleek form Desi thought she would swallow her tongue. *Oh my God, what is she doing in here?* The answer came in its own form of illumination as Desi realized what room Tony had put her in. It was the only room she saw on her way up here that was the sole reflection of its occupant. This was Harry's room. *Tony you idiot, I'm going to remove some body part when I see you again,* thought Desi as she tried to figure out what to do.

When the light in the bathroom went out, a tired and sleepy body rolled into bed not noticing the woman already lying there. *Please God, let her be wearing pajamas* wished Desi. The breathing coming from Harry's side of the bed was already deep and even indicating sleep, giving Desi the

freedom to look. Seeing the stark white t-shirt and boxers was disappointing in a way to Desi, but the light coming in from outside gave her a good view of Harry's profile.

At thirty-four, Harry still looked like the girl Desi remembered. Taller than everyone else all through their lives, Harry stood at six one now. The only difference was the visible muscles that went up her arms and into the sleeves of the t-shirt. Lifting the blanket a little so she wouldn't wake her, Desi could see the continuation of muscle down the long tan legs.

The black curly hair was shorter than it was when they were together, and at the temples there was a sprinkle of white. Desi could remember Harry telling her that her mother's side of the family turned gray prematurely and her hope was that Desi would still love her when she looked a little older. Harry's eyes were closed but Desi didn't need them to be open to know what shade of blue they were, that color had been seared into her brain.

"I love you," Desi whispered as she moved one unruly curl off Harry's forehead.

In Harry's dreamscape she visited the girl who held her heart. There, Desi would always be waiting with open arms and a soft kiss. The sides of her face around the green eyes would crinkle when she smiled, and her hair was always soft to the touch. It was the one place that everyday of Harry's life she could hear Desi say, "I love you," just like now. The only sadness of the dream was when she turned and walked away just before it was time for Harry to wake up.

When Desi opened her eyes she noticed Harry was still sleeping, making her think she must've been exhausted from the day before, and she noticed too that they were holding hands under the blanket. Harry hadn't moved all night and was snoring softly next to her, so she decided to close her eyes again and just lie there enjoying the warmth she'd missed for so long. Another noise coming from the door of the room forced Desi to look, almost crying out when she saw an elderly African American woman picking up articles of clothing from all over the floor.

"If you think I'm going to be around to pick up after you for the rest of my life, you got another thing coming. I wonder if you're this messy when you're sewing people up? God only knows what you're leaving in there once you're done," Mona kept up her monologue as she picked clothes up off the floor. It was well rehearsed since she had been using the same one since she came to work for Harry six years prior. "Then she lets that fruitcake buy this big old house like I got nothing better to do than to pick up after her in thirty rooms instead of ten."

"Good morning, you must be Mona?" asked a clearly amused Desi from the bed.

"Sorry, miss, I didn't see you there. It's a wonder I can see anything in here through all the mess that one leaves around. I didn't mean to disturb you. Do you need anything?" Mona cocked her head to one side, sizing the girl up and knowing in a second who she was. The pretty face hadn't changed much from the picture on the mantle.

"I really need to go to the bathroom. Could you see if my sister is up? Maybe she could help me." If her leg hadn't hurt so much, Desi would've been squirming by now.

"Nonsense, girl, you got that big moose sleeping beside you. She can help you." Before Desi could protest Mona came over and slapped Harry in the head.

"Goddammit, Mona, what did you do that for?" cried Harry lifting her head up and squinting her eyes together to block out the bright light coming from the French doors at the side of the room.

"What have I told you about taking the Lord's name in vain in my house? Don't make me go get a switch from the bushes outside. Now get your lazy butt out of bed and help your lady friend go to the bathroom," ordered Mona with her hands on her hips.

"Lady friend? What lady friend? Have you finally gone off the deep end?" asked Harry as her eyes closed and her head hit the pillow again.

"For someone who has as many degrees as you do, you sure aren't too bright are you? No wonder you don't have anyone in your life if you can't even remember spending the night with a lovely girl like this. Get moving, Harry, the girl's got to go," ordered Mona making shooing motions from the foot of the bed.

The fog of sleep lifted enough for Harry to realize that she wasn't alone in the bed. The fact that the whole left side of her body was warm and there was a small hand pressed inside her own were her first two clues. "I'm sorry, Desi. What are you doing here?" asked Harry turning her head and facing Desi.

"Don't be sorry, that should actually be my line for intruding on you. Tony had them put me in here by what I'm sure was a mistake. I'm sorry I didn't realize this was your room before they left last night. After I go to the bathroom you can move me into one of the guestrooms. Could I bother you for a lift before I mess up your lovely bed?" asked a now frantic Desi.

"Get up, slow britches, and you aren't moving out of this room, Miss Desi. Tony put you in here because it's the only room in the house with the type of bathing facilities you'll eventually need. Doc, the girl's eyes are turning yellow," Mona reminded her.

"You know I could just call a maid service and be done with it."

"Yeah right, like anyone in their right mind would put up with all your shit."

Harry rolled out of bed and walked over to Desi's side and pulled back the comforter. Desi's leg was starting to look better, or so Harry told her. To her eyes it didn't look that pretty. There was the large incision running up the side and the angry looking bruise that covered her knee in black.

"Hold on to my neck and try not to move around too much, let me do all the work," Harry instructed. Getting into the bathroom was a cinch, how to get her ready to use the toilet was not.

"It's okay, Dr. Basantes, I'm sure it isn't anything you haven't seen before," Desi told her trying to make them both feel better. Setting Desi down on her good leg, Harry had the injured woman

keep her arms around her neck so she could pull the nightgown up so Desi could sit. Lowering her down slowly, Harry gave Desi some privacy by stepping back into the bedroom, after extracting a promise not to move until she got back.

Desi answered nature's call while looking around the big bathroom. There was a double sink set up with a glassed in shower in one corner. The one thing that got her attention though was the large claw-foot tub with the brass fixtures across from where she was sitting. The thought of sharing that with Harry flew into her brain causing a blush to crawl up her neck. After all she'd been through, having thoughts of that nature about her friend was the last thing she needed.

"All done?" Harry's voice floated through the closed door.

"All done," answered Desi. The ride back to the bed was as enjoyable as the first.

Settled, Desi watched Harry collect some clothes before heading back into the bathroom for a shower. "Once I'm done I'll have Mona come in and give you a sponge bath. I don't want you on your feet for at least another week, so get use to the idea of a little pampering." Desi smiled as an answer, not remembering the last time someone wanted to pamper her. "And as distasteful as it was in the hospital, if I'm not home there's no getting up to go to the bathroom, you'll have to use the bedpan."

"Aw, Harry." The whine made Harry remember all the afternoons trying to teach her complicated math.

"Aw Harry nothing, I mean it. You need time to heal, so lie back, relax, and we'll take care of everything."

"Harry, when you're done, Serena's here to see you, and she has Albert with her," said Mona from the French doors leading out to the balcony. She was opening them to let some fresh air into the room since it wasn't too cold out that morning. "What in the world was that girl thinking when she named that sweet child Albert? Might as well tape a note to his forehead the first day of school that says, 'Hi I'm Albert, please feel free to beat the crap out of me and steal my lunch money.' With all the names in the world why pick that one?" asked Mona shaking her head the whole time.

"Because it is her father's name, and he became a Federal Judge, so it can't be all bad. Besides you know we all call him Butch behind Serena's back. Somehow I don't believe she'd think Federal Judge Butch would have the same ring to it."

"Thank goodness for you and the two fruitcakes being in that boy's life. Without you, he wouldn't have any friends," commented Mona, grumbling again as the sleepwear Harry had been wearing came flying into the room.

"Mona, you do realize that I'm a fruitcake too, don't you?" Both women heard Harry over the sound of running water.

"Yeah I know that, bonehead, and I call you that too when you aren't around," Mona yelled back, offering Desi a wink before she left the room.

Coming out of the bathroom in perfectly pressed chinos and a button down shirt; Harry looked like all the other yuppies Desi had seen going into the better restaurants and stores in town. The only difference between them and the woman standing in the bedroom was that all of those others had been wearing shoes.

"I'll be right back. Want some coffee? Mona's a pain in the ass but makes the best coffee I've ever had the pleasure of tasting," said Harry smiling down at her.

"I heard that," yelled Mona from the stairwell.

"As I was saying, Mona is a pain in the ass but makes good coffee. Would you like some?"

"Yes I'd love a cup. Could I bother you for some toast too, I can't drink coffee on an empty stomach," requested Desi smiling back. "Only if it's not too much trouble." At the last minute the smile faded as she remembered her place was not to ask for too much. Byron had engrained that into her head one slap at a time.

"One toast and breakfast coming up, and since you asked so nicely, I'll bring Butch up and introduce you."

Leaving Desi to wonder who Serena and Butch were, Harry headed down the stairs. After a few moments Desi heard the delighted squealing of a child. "That must be Butch." Her eyes drifted back to the picture on the mantle, trying to remember what it was like to be that happy.

Daydreaming, Desi didn't hear her visitors come in and only looked up when she heard a sweet voice ask, "Uncle Harry, who's that lady in your bed?"

"That is an old friend of your Uncle Harry's, baby boy. Can you go and tell her hello? She has a big owie and I bet it would make her feel better." Harry pointed one of her fingers out from under the tray she was carrying as a way of letting him know it was all right to move closer.

Walking over with an outfit surprisingly like Harry's, only with shoes, the three-year-old Albert stuck out his hand and introduced himself to Desi. "Hi, my name's Albert Hubert Ladding the third, it's nice to meet you."

"Hello, Albert, my name's Desiree Simoneaux, and it's nice to meet you too."

"Miss Desiree, my friends call me Butch, would you like to call me that too? Just don't do it in front of mommy, it makes her upset then she yells at my Uncle Harry."

"Okay, Butch, but my friends call me Desi so how about you call me that instead of Desiree."

"Deal," Butch agreed then spit in his hand to seal the pact.

"Did your Uncle Harry teach you that too?" asked Desi smiling up at the uncle in question.

"Yep, my Uncle Harry teaches me all kinds a neat stuff." He turned in Harry's direction with a clear case of adoration on his small sweet face.

"I thought so," said Desi as she put less spit into her palm and shook his hand.

Harry laughed as she placed the large plantation tray across Desi's lap with her breakfast. Butch was trying diligently to climb up on the bed from the other side, failing until Harry came over and gave him a boost. "Now you promised, sweet boy, no jumping around. Desi has a hurt leg and it wouldn't be good for her to have you do that."

"I promise, Uncle Harry, I'll sit here and drink my coffee with Desi until you get back. Granny Mona made me some cinnamommy toast to go with it," said Butch as he picked up a glass of milk Mona had stirred a tablespoon of coffee into.

"Okay enjoy your cinnamommy toast while I go and get your mother to talk with Desi." Turning to Desi and offering her a smile, Harry told her, "I'll be right back so if my buddy here gets rowdy, you have my permission to whack him one."

"I'm sure we'll be fine, Uncle Harry. Go on so the two of us can enjoy our breakfast," said Desi with a smile.

"Serena, baby, how is it that you always manage to look like you stepped out of a glamour magazine every time I see you?" asked Harry when she stepped into the sunroom.

If there had ever been anyone who could have come close to being a permanent fixture in Harry's life, it was Serena. The blond hair and blue eyes had turned her head the minute she had laid eyes on the successful attorney at a political fundraiser four years prior.

Serena was getting out of a bad marriage when they had met, and only after her ex-husband skipped town leaving them in major debt, did she find out she was pregnant with Albert. Harry had seen her through her crisis, and together with Kenneth and Tony, got Serena's life back on track. Her adopted nephew loved her with abandon, and had from the minute he started talking called her Uncle Harry. He explained in his own way that Aunt Harry just didn't sound right to him so he persisted with uncle.

"It's my way of reminding you of what you're missing out on, honey. You could have this," Serena ran her hand down her body, "And Albert comes as part of the package."

"You never did fight fair did you, baby?" asked Harry bending down to place a kiss on Serena's lips.

"No, doc, with you it's all or nothing. That does tend to raise the stakes of the game."

"That is my one downfall, I was never a gambler."

"Cut the bull and tell me why you had me drop everything on a Wednesday morning, good doctor. I'll have you know I had a date last night and didn't get in until two, so this had better be good," said Serena with a playful scowl on her face. She was trying to ignore the tingle Harry's kiss had left on her lips.

"Thrown me over already have you? You are such the slut, Serena, but I love you anyway. I have to keep telling you that or you won't let me see my boy Butch." Harry tried to sound dejected as she plopped down on the sofa next to her friend.

"Stop calling him that, daddy has a perfectly wonderful name. I don't know why I'm the only one who sees it?"

"Of course, baby, that's why everyone calls your father Hubbie. Now stop complaining and listen."

Harry spent some time explaining the circumstances her houseguest found herself in, and what she was facing if something wasn't done about the idiot husband who had attacked her. Serena had heard the story countless times before from every shape and type of woman the city had to offer.

It was encouraging to her that Desi was willing to press charges, since it would make her life that much easier as a prosecutor if the victim wasn't spending all her time defending the perpetrator. Juries had no patience for women who didn't want to help themselves, much less the district attorney's office. People often saw this, not as a crime against society, but as something that happened behind closed doors that didn't effect them directly. The woman in that situation couldn't be seen as having any sympathy for her attacker or she would lose the sympathy of the jury chosen to pass judgment on her attacker.

"Stay here, Harry, I can handle this," said Serena. She leaned over and kissed Harry one last time before moving to stand up.

"Why don't I come with you?" she asked hopefully.

Serena shook her head and placed her hand on Harry's knee. With the intensity of Harry's protectiveness when it came to this woman it was the death knell of any relationship she ever hoped to have with her. "Harry, if this woman is a friend of yours, she might not feel comfortable talking to me with you in the room. You have to trust me on this one."

"But I don't want her to think I'm just deserting her."

"Honey, no woman wants to admit to herself she let some asshole beat her and treat her like the dirt on his shoes, much less to someone else she cares about. You wait here and I'll send Albert

down to entertain you until I'm done. You can pull out that insipid video game you think I don't know about and play something with him." Serena pressed her hand to Harry's cheek and smiled. "If she wants you there and asks me to come and get you, I will, I promise."

Watching from the hallway outside Harry's bedroom, Serena knew why Harry had left her son upstairs with this woman. Butch had a way of drawing a smile out of anyone. The foundation she had provided her son, with the help of Harry and her family, was one the boy drew strength from. No matter what came to pass in his life, he would always know he was loved.

"Have you been a good boy?" asked Serena. She stood leaning against the doorframe with her arms crossed over her chest.

Taking one look at Desi, she realized who this woman was. She was the winner, and Serena tried to bite back the bile rising in her throat because of that fact. As she had mounted the stairs the hope of this being just an acquaintance Harry wanted to help out for altruistic reasons was still alive, but the blonde was the woman Tony had described to her on more than one occasion.

"Yes, mommy, Desi was telling me a story. I ate all my cinnamony toast Granny Mona made me, so we had to find something else to do," Butch informed her, turning his attention in his mother's direction.

"That's my big boy, how would you like to go downstairs and play with your Uncle Harry? She said to tell you that she wants to play your secret game. You want to tell me what that is?" She combed his hair back in place with her fingers when he jumped off the bed and ran to her.

"No, mommy, I promised Uncle Harry, and if I tell, we won't be able to save the world together. You wouldn't want that would you?"

"No, Albert, I wouldn't want that, now scat."

"Remember it's Butch when she isn't here," he whispered to Desi. She gave him a thumbs up before he tore down the hall heading for the stairs.

"Don't run down the stairs, Albert, you're going to hurt yourself," yelled Serena after him. "I'm sorry, I'm not sure when it happened, but I seemed to have turned into my mother ever since Butch came along. I'm Serena Ladding, it's a pleasure to meet you, even under these trying circumstances," said Serena holding out her hand.

"I'm Desi Simoneaux, it's nice to meet you too. You have a beautiful son, but I thought it upset you to have him called Butch."

"Well there are a lot of things about me Harry doesn't know, and I like to keep her guessing," said Serena shrugging her shoulders. "We can't have her getting too smug on us, can we?"

"How do you know Harry, Mrs. Ladding?"

"It's Ms. Ladding, but please call me Serena, and we aren't here to talk about me, Desi. We're here to talk about you."

"I'm not exactly a fascinating topic of discussion, just ask Harry."

Serena laughed at Desi's blindness when it came to Harry. "I have actually so I guess the answer depends on who you ask, so don't sell yourself so short."

"Sorry, I didn't mean to come across as ungrateful."

"I didn't take it that way." Serena took a seat on the bed and smoothed out her skirt. "She didn't betray any of your confidences, but Harry told me a little of what's happened and I think this talk with you is a good idea."

"Why is that?"

"If I understand correctly, Harry informed you I work for the District Attorney's office. I'm here to help you get out of a bad situation, and make the process as pleasant as possible for you. I won't lie or try to sugar coat it; it's not going to be easy. Your husband doesn't want to go to jail. Your husband's family doesn't want him to go to jail. Face it, they're not idiots."

"No one *wants* to go to jail, especially in this state. His attorney will put you on trial, and if he's good, or if he were up against anyone else, the jury will want to break your other leg when he's done. But there isn't anyone that good in this city practicing law, Desi. Not to toot my own horn, but I'm the best at what I do, and what I want to do is send Byron Simoneaux to jail for what he did to you. What I need from you is a bit of information." Serena finished, sitting back to gauge Desi's reaction to what she had just said.

"That was quite the opening argument, counselor. What do you need to know?"

"First, are you still in love with this man? Because if you are this will be a waste of my time, Harry's time, and yours. Don't take this as my not wanting to help you, or me being rude, but if you are planning to go back and want to renege on the charges then it won't matter how good I am, we won't win. If that happens, then we repeat this process in six months tops, if we are lucky you'll still be here to testify against him."

"You're a very blunt person, Ms. Ladding, but in this case I'm thinking that's a good thing. I don't love Byron, I never did. Maybe that's why he beats me, who knows? I know you most likely don't like or understand women like me, and you probably think of us as weak and stupid." She looked down to the where the blanket came off her injured leg and sighed.

"You can't know what it's like to sit and wait for someone to come home and wonder who'll walk through the door. Will it be the guy who tried to romance you, whether you wanted him to or not on your daddy's front porch, or will it be the guy who likes to find new places to put bruises that no one will ever see? I'll do whatever it takes to get out of this, so don't worry about that," said Desi with conviction. She looked back at Serena and raised her jaw in a defiant pose.

"I can imagine and understand, Desi. I was married to that guy, and now I'm not. You're far from stupid and I wouldn't think to ever look down on you. I stand up everyday in court and defend women like us against men like the ones we married. I commend you for having the courage to at least try. Just don't squander this opportunity. Use it to get back on your feet. I want to be your friend here, please don't look at me as the enemy," said Serena softening her tone.

Desi studied the perfectly manicured nails when Serena laid her hand over hers. "I'm glad you think I have all these opportunities to look forward to. From where I'm sitting the picture doesn't look all that great."

"From where I'm sitting, it looks like you're in a place where you're wanted. Doesn't that count for anything?"

"Yeah right. Who's going to want me now? I don't have any skills, and my body looks like a roadmap of injuries. I used to have dreams, but even those have faded away. Byron saw to that didn't he?"

"Desi, you're only thirty-four years old. You've lost a few years to the hell you've been living, but you have so much to look forward to. Let me help you start your journey," offered Serena.

"You don't understand, you have a family, you have Butch and you have Harry. I made my choices, and now I'm just going to have to live with them." Desi gazed at the picture on the mantle again. It represented to her all the things she could have had if she had stayed with Harry. "The only good thing I have left in my life is my sister."

"Darlin', I don't know what gave you that impression. Harry doesn't belong to me. I wish she did, but she doesn't. Hell every woman who comes into contact with Harry wants her, if only for the night, if that's all she's offering. There's only one woman in her bed though, and since I'm sitting here talking to her, that would make it you. I don't know how you did it, cause I've tried for four long years, but you have snagged our Dr. Basantes but good. It's up to you to reel her in now." Serena patted her hand and laughed.

"I've done no such thing, I see you and know I don't have a chance."

"Desi, it would take me about one afternoon of shopping and I could have you looking just like me, if not better. It's not the clothes; it's that you were her first love, and I know Harry. She's loyal to the bone, so you have a better chance than anyone else to see a future with her standing by your side. You're the girl from high school aren't you?" The question was asked without Serena ever looking anywhere else in the room.

"Come on, you've seen the picture haven't you?"

"To tell you the truth, this is the first time I've been able to breach the inner sanctum so no I haven't," said Serena turning around to look at the picture Desi was referring to.

"You've never slept with Harry?"

"I didn't say that, I just said I've never been in her bedroom." She looked at the mantle, and any shred of hope of a future with Harry was lost. No matter how many times they'd been out together and how much fun they'd shared, Serena had never seen a smile that big and genuine on Harry's face.

She turned around to an expression of defeat on Desi's face. "Don't be jealous, we just met at a time in our lives that required the kind of relationship we had. When I decided I wanted more, Harry decided we should be friends for the sake of my son. You'd swear she was allergic to long term commitment. Mention it and she breaks into hives, but I've always known she was holding out for someone special. Took you long enough to get here. I love Harry though, so please promise me that you'll be good to her. Give her the chance she probably won't ask you for, and get to know her again. She's turned out to be the most extraordinary person."

"I'm glad she had such good people taking care of her all this time." Desi sighed and felt like she'd just finished a marathon. "It's not like I did such a great job."

"We were just stand ins until the headliner showed up. I'm going to do my best to get you through the legal part, but the rest - when it comes to your heart, leave that to Harry. Don't shut her out."

They heard the sound of running feet down the long hallway, bringing their talk to a close, but there was really nothing left to be said between them. "If you break something I'm taking it out of your hide," the two women heard Mona screaming from one of the guestrooms.

"I'm sorry, Granny," said Butch.

"I'm not fussing at you, baby, I was talking to that overgrown piece of trouble that's chasing you."

"Ha, Uncle Harry, she called you a piece of trouble," laughed Butch.

"I know, that's why she's going to go and live with you and your mother."

Serena and Desi laughed at the maid, and the fact she was able to get away with talking to Harry like that. Their short talk had opened doors for one, and dashed forever the hopes of the other forever. Serena knew now, with the dream Harry had held onto for so long living in her house, she could hang up the notion of her and the doctor sharing a happily ever after scenario.

"Thank you for talking with me." Desi smiled at Serena for taking the time to come and offer a solution for the future.

"It was nice meeting you and there's no need to thank me. Just remember everything I said, especially when it comes to Harry."

Serena smiled back knowing, and believing in her heart, what she had told Desi was true, Harry was loyal to a fault, and that was a good thing if you were the subject of that loyalty. Sure Harry was Serena's friend and they had been lovers, but the good doctor's heart would always belong to another and Serena wasn't willing to live with anything less than all of Harry. It was the one thing Harry had taught her after the breakup of her marriage - Serena was a special woman and should hold out for the person who would treat her as such. *Life is such a fucking bitch sometimes*, thought Serena as Harry's tall form crossed the threshold of the room.

"Need more time, or could I interest you in some more coffee out on the balcony? It's a beautiful day so we should enjoy it while it lasts," Harry offered along with the smile both of them found irresistible.

"Mommy, could we?" asked Butch.

"We've got to go, baby. Did you forget we're having lunch with Grandma and Papa?" Serena stood up and straightened her skirt after squeezing Desi's fingers one last time.

"No, Uncle Harry, we're going to eat at the place that has the pudding with the sauce we like so much. You're not coming though, so mommy won't let me lick the plate."

"Serena, life is too short to not let the boy lick the plate. Tell Papa, and he'll let you do it I bet," Harry said as she watched his face light up.

"Harry, by the time the child is twenty he won't be allowed in any of the restaurants in this town because of you. I swear between you teaching him to spit on his hand, and licking plates I'm going to have to stop coming over here."

"No way, mommy, Uncle Harry's the coolest person I know." Butch cocked his head back to look up at Harry.

"I'll be right back," Harry told Desi.

She walked Serena and Butch to the door, letting Serena take the lead on whether or not she wanted to tell her about her talk with Desi. Serena quietly walked the distance of the house to the door, keeping Harry in suspense, but did bring it up before they left.

"Harry, that's a very special woman you have up there. The next few months are going to be hard on her, so I want you to make sure she understands you'll be there for her. I want to get us into court before she gets her leg out of all that stuff you attached to it. This asshole did it, so we might as well use it in our favor."

"Whatever it takes, I'll be there to help her through it. You're a good friend, Serena, thanks for everything. I'm sure whatever you told her made Desi feel better about what has to happen."

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath as a way of organizing her thoughts. "I can't believe I'm going to say this but here goes. I'm happy for you, Harry. You've waited a lifetime and I

think you're finally going to get the girl. You do understand though, that a part of me is throwing a major tantrum, but I'm happy for you both. Tell Desi I'll call her later on in the week with the details of the case and where we are in the process."

It was Serena's glassy eyes that made Harry put her arms around the woman who was being so generous. "I love you, you know that right?"

"Yes, baby, I know you do, and Albert and I love you too."

"Yeah, Uncle Harry, I love you," piped in Butch.

"Me too, big guy. Cut your mother some slack and don't lick the plate this time. I promise I'll take you back next week just the two of us, and we can indulge in a little plate licking."

"Deal," he screamed as he hugged Harry's leg. Harry let his mother go for a minute to give him a hug.

"Butch, how about you let me strap you into the car so your mama can finish up in here with your Uncle Harry?" Mona offered the boy her hand wanting to give the two friends the time they needed.

"Thanks, Mona," said Serena.

"You take your time, baby. I'll sit out there with him."

When the door closed and they were alone, Harry took Serena back into her arms and kissed her. It was an intimate kiss between two people who'd shared a relationship, but both were aware it was over for good. It was time for both of them to move on.

"If you ever need me, you know where to find me," said Harry, her lips moving against Serena's.

"What I need and what I want belong to someone else, darling, but don't worry about me. It's going to take some time, but I'll be fine. I love you." She put her hands on Harry's cheeks and tried to keep her voice from cracking. "And a little piece of me always will. Do you think you can live with that?"

"Only if you carry the same thought with you." With nothing else to add, Serena walked out, knowing Harry's eyes were still on her as she waved her thanks to Mona when she reached the car.

"Harry, you must have been burned at the stake or something in your past life," said Mona as she got back in the house and pulled her into a hug.

"Why do you say that?" Harry asked as she stared out the front window to watch Serena drive away.

"Because I've never in my life seen one person who was so blessed to be loved by so many special women. Serena was right in saying Desi's a good catch. I want you to promise me you won't go running scared, girl. Your mamma and I didn't raise you that way. It's time for you to settle down and start filling this house up with some kids. I'm tired of picking up after just you." Mona tried to sound menacing but when she lovingly patted Harry's chest over her heart she couldn't help but smile.

"Thanks, Mona, I love you too."

Desi and Harry spent the rest of the day relaxing out on the balcony off Harry's bedroom, each getting comfortable in the other's company again after so many years apart. She listened as Harry told her stories of her time in medical school and her residency, and how Kenneth and Tony had been there with her every step of the way.

Since she had told Harry that Serena had divulged the relationship they'd shared, Harry told her about that time in her life too. In all her time as a doctor Harry hadn't gotten as much satisfaction as she did the day Butch had been born, and she had been there to see it.

"He helped me see the good there is in the world from the first time I held him. I never really gave any thought to having kids of my own, but if I could have one like Albert I'd enjoy the chance. It's just with my lifestyle it would be hard on the child," Harry explained.

"Why because you're gay?"

"More because my work is so unpredictable. I wouldn't want to make a commitment that big then have a paid staff person raise the kid. It wouldn't be fair to either of us. The gay part is getting better, even a city like New Orleans that's proud of its religious roots would be tolerant to the idea of a gay person raising a child, I'd like to think. I mean it's not like being gay is contagious or anything. How about you, no thought to having children?" Harry asked turning her head to look at Desi again.

"No, I never told Byron, but I took my birth control pills faithfully. Ours wasn't the type of relationship to bring children into. I don't think I could've stood by and let him beat my child. Besides, it's too late for me."

"Nonsense, Desi, you're under thirty-five, more than capable of having children if you want them. I don't think I know a better person to be a mother."

"If you keep telling me stuff like that, I might just start believing it."

"That's an easy assignment."

Harry excused herself in the late afternoon. Changing into some running apparel she left to run her normal circuit around the neighborhood. Mona, who was finished with her dinner preparations, came up and kept Desi company while Harry was gone. She watched Harry run steadily down the street, in the smooth form she remembered from the track in high school.

"Penny for your thoughts," said Mona, sitting in the location Harry had just vacated. What Desi was thinking was written all over her face, but Mona was in the mood to play.

"I was just admiring Harry's running form, nothing you should have to pay money for." The explanation sounded reasonable but the heat of the blush she could feel on her face told another story.

"Uh huh, got a nice ass on her, don't she?"

"Mona!"

"Hey, I'm old, I ain't dead."

"Mona, how did you meet Harry?" She had taken a real liking to this outspoken woman who seemed, for all her bluster, to love Harry like a daughter.

"I've worked for the Basantes family since I was a young woman. Had all the weekends off though, and that's when I understand you and Rachel would come to stay at the house. Once Dr. Raul retired, and he and Maria moved to Florida, I came to work for Harry. She bought a house a couple of blocks from the one she grew up in, and then for some fool reason she decided to buy this place. I think it was a favor to Kenny to give that boy of his, Tony, something to do. I'll never admit it in front of him, but I love him because he takes such good care of my Harry. We're forever and a day going round and round about some of the things he picks to put in here, but he grows on you after awhile. It's my job to make sure he don't go over the top."

"I've known him forever, so I'm guessing that has to be a full time job," joked Desi.

"That would explain some of why I'm here then I guess, because frankly, I don't know why Harry keeps me around except to bother her into taking better care of herself, and to make sure the hired services do their jobs. I have Harry, my kids and grandkids, and that's what makes me happy," said Mona, shaking her head at the thought of Harry.

"You have a maid?"

"A maid service and a pack of gardeners too. The only thing I do now really is cook and wash Harry's clothes. The first time the new people did that, they ruined all of Harry's underwear. Ooh lord, she was fit to be tied because you couldn't drag that girl into a store if her life depended on it. Still can't, so that would be my other job. I shop for her. Stuff like socks and underwear, the rest I have to pull her by the ear to go and try on."

"I've known Harry for a long time too, and it's nice to hear some stuff about her didn't change."

Mona nodded and smiled. "All in all, it's a good life I got here. This is my home, and that's how Harry treats me. My family is here all the time visiting me, and catching up on Harry's latest antics. She thinks I don't know, but she helps both my daughters send their kids to private

schools around here. Tells them it's not safe to send kids to the public schools no more. Funny how life is, she went to public school, but my grandkids are going to class in those spiffy uniforms.

"Harry was a good kid, and that hasn't changed a bit either. She has a good heart." She clapped her hands together and stood up. "Enough about me, I got to go and finish dinner before the road warrior returns. After the run, she goes in that gym downstairs and lifts weights, so by the time she's finished, she could eat the whole pot of whatever I've cooked. Do you want me to have her come up and move you back before she starts pumping?"

"Yeah, that would be great." After Mona left, Desi wrapped herself in the blanket Mona had brought out, and then her thoughts turned to Harry. "Harry, how do I even begin to think of having a relationship with you while I'm still married, and then there are all these other issues? If only I could turn back the clock and make better choices than I did."

Desi fell asleep thinking about the future and the possibility of sharing it with Harry. It was so peaceful here under the ancient oaks that it was easy to drift off on a cloud of daydreams. The garden below her offered up some delightful aromas from the large trees of sweet olive planted throughout the property. They were Desi's favorites, and unbeknownst to her, it was one of the reasons Harry had decided on the house.

"Hey, sleepyhead, you ready to head inside?" asked Harry softly.

"Hey, yeah it's getting a little cold out here," answered Desi blinking her eyes open.

"Let me run in and put on a clean shirt first, I don't want to get you all sweaty." Harry tugged on her shirt starting to make her way inside.

"It's all right." The soft voice stopped Harry from taking another step. "You don't have to go through any extra trouble for me."

"Nope, Mona would never let me live that one down. Besides, you deserve to be fussed over more than anyone. Hang tight for a minute."

Returning a short time later with a t-shirt that said 'Orthopedic Surgeons Do It With Backbone,' Harry picked Desi up with little effort. The only tremor Desi felt was when she put her arms around Harry's neck. The reaction sparked the hope Serena had told her about. Maybe Harry did want her in her life.

After putting Desi down and getting her situated on the bed again, Harry disappeared into the gym, but not before sending Mona in to give Desi a sponge bath. She promised to help Mona change the sheets after her workout.

For dinner Rachel, Mona and Harry joined Desi in the bedroom, eating off TV trays so she

wouldn't have to eat alone. For the first time Mona heard some of the stories of their childhood she was certain Maria Basantes, Harry's mother, had never heard. With each moment Harry and Desi spent in each other's company, Rachel and Mona witnessed the spark return that had been there when their love had first blossomed return. Both women hoped Harry and Desi didn't blow this opportunity at their second chance. Rachel offered to help Mona carry down all the dirty dishes leaving Harry and Desi alone.

"It's getting late, so how about we give you your medicine and you hit the sack. Need a bathroom run before you turn in?" asked Harry.

Desi would force her kidneys to function if it meant getting another ride in Harry's arms. Sometime during dinner she decided it was the one place in the world she longed to be, Byron and the rest of the world be damned.

After carrying her to and from the bathroom, Harry put her back on the bed and fluffed the pillows so Desi would be comfortable. She put the small tent back in place and pulled the comforter up slowly since it was the last reason for her to be in the room. Done, Harry bid Desi a good night, much to her disappointment, because it appeared like Harry wasn't staying with her like she had the night before.

"Night, Harry, and thanks for all this. You may never get Rachel to leave at the rate we're going."

"You and your sister are welcome here for as long as you like. Mona loves having someone else to spoil besides me, and I'm taking a liking to having you here too. Don't think about that anymore and start concentrating on healing that leg. We'll take it a day at a time, and before you know it you might not want to leave."

When Harry left the room Desi whispered, "I don't want to leave, and I don't want to lose you."

In the early morning, long before dawn, Harry woke up in the guestroom next to her bedroom thinking her pager was going off. It was a low soft sound, but it wasn't coming from the small black square sitting on the nightstand next to the bed. Getting up to investigate, she came to the doorway of the bedroom that was usually hers.

It was Desi, and she was having a nightmare. Not wanting the woman to cause further injury to her leg, Harry stepped in and sat on the unoccupied side of the bed and reached over to wake her friend. When her hand touched the sleeping woman's shoulder, Desi visibly shrunk away from her.

"No, please get away from me, don't hurt me anymore," pleaded Desi.

Harry let go immediately thinking she had frightened Desi, causing her to think Desi was afraid of her. "Desi, it's me Harry. You're safe here. I'm not going to hurt you. I just wanted to wake you up before you hurt yourself."

"Harry?" said Desi in a confused voice. She slowly blinked her eyes open

"Yes, sweetheart, it's me. Are you okay now?"

"I'm sorry I woke you up, I was dreaming of Byron and I couldn't get away from him."

"That's okay, he's not here. No one here wants to hurt you, but you have to be careful with your leg. I know you're probably wild about hospital food, but I don't want to have to take you back to surgery. Do you think you could go back to sleep now?" Harry adjusted her blankets again and smoothed the hair away from Desi's face as a way to further sooth her.

The last thing Desi wanted was for Harry to leave her alone. It was one of her recurring dreams that all too often became her reality. The feeling of having her feet stuck in molasses while he moved closer, fists clenched tight, that crazed look in his eyes wouldn't release her. He won every night in that dream. She couldn't get away, and he was free to hit her as many times as he wanted, with no one to stop him.

"Could you sit with me for a little while? You can lie down if you want, I mean you don't have to if you don't want to, but I would appreciate it if you did," babbled Desi.

"I'll be happy to sit with you."

Harry lay down and reached under the blanket for Desi's hand. After wrapping it up in hers she felt Desi relax. They didn't need words between them, and soon Harry heard Desi's breathing even out. In her sleep, Desi pulled Harry's hand up onto her chest so she could hold it in both of her own. Harry was touched by the sentiment, but it made her worry Desi wouldn't be there when she woke up, and that this was all a dream.

"How can I get you back in my life? I think that it's time for us to have a long talk, Ms. Desi, the sooner the better." The wish was spoken softly and Harry felt Desi tighten her hold on her hand.

The next morning found them back out on the balcony, sipping coffee and eating pastries that Harry had gone out for as soon as she'd gotten dressed. "Do you treat all your houseguests this well?" asked Desi as she bit into her second croissant of the morning.

"No, no, I don't. Once you're well enough to walk, you'll be expected to pressure wash the house. Have to get a jump on that summer mildew build up, and now I won't have to call the usual guys I hire," said Harry with a straight face.

"Uh huh, I tell you what, I'll do it if you stand outside in a white t-shirt, Dr. Harry," Desi's face turned crimson the moment the words left her mouth. "I'm sorry, I don't know why I said that." The heat radiating from her ears made Desi want to cover them with her hands to hide the red.

"Don't look so spooked, sweetheart. Contrary to what my residents think, I still know how to take a joke." She put her coffee cup down and tried to sound as reassuring as possible.

"I'm still sorry. After everything I've done and put you through I don't have a right to tease you like that."

"Desi, if I ask you something, would you promise to be honest with me even if you think it'll hurt my feelings?" Harry swung her legs off the chaise lounge so she could face her while they talked.

"Yes, I can do that," answered Desi nervously. "At least I'll try."

"Was stepping out of my life your idea? It's okay if you tell me you fell head over heels for Byron, well it won't be okay but...well hell, you know what I mean." The usually confident Harry sat waiting for the answer as she ran her hand through her hair, afraid of what the truth might be.

Desi decided to just come out with the truth and not make Harry wait anymore than she had to. "It wasn't my idea, it was my father's. He threatened me with not being able to see Rachel again ever. He said he would take her and move somewhere I wouldn't ever find them. Somewhere he could shape her into the kind of person he wouldn't be ashamed of, even if he had to beat her to do it. Somewhere he'd be free to teach her what it was like to be with a man, even if it was him giving the lessons." The feeling of despair returned along with the tears that always fell when she thought of that time.

"It's all right, I'm right here, and I won't let anything happen to either of you ever again." Harry's voice gave her the strength to go on.

"I love you, Harry, but after mamma died, Rachel was my only family. The only family I cared about, besides you. She needed me. You know as well as I do that Clyde wasn't the best father in the world, and God only knows what would've happened to her if he'd made good on his threats."

"No one is blaming you for doing the right thing." It sounded inane to her own ears but Harry meant it.

"I don't expect you to forgive me," continued Desi, as if Harry hadn't spoken. "How can I, when I can't even forgive myself? But I know this; not one day has gone by in all these years I haven't thought about you. Not one single day when I didn't talk to you and tell you I missed you. I loved you with all my heart back then and I still do. It was like waking up from a nightmare when I saw you in that emergency room. I don't deserve it, but I want to be a part of your life again, even if it's just as your friend." When she finished speaking, Desi tensed up as if expecting a blow to her body, waiting for Harry's reaction.

Harry just looked at her from the chaise lounge she was sitting on, not saying anything. *Great you've scared her off now*, was the thought that was playing over and over again in Desi's head. Stuck there because of her injury, she had no choice but to wait and see what Harry would do next.

In typical Harry style it wasn't what Desi expected at all, but the soft lips on hers were familiar. Giving in to what they had wanted to do from that moment in the hospital, they deepened the kiss. It felt glorious to Desi to sink her hands into those thick black curls and to feel that talented tongue ignite her passion like only Harry could.

"Like I said, no one will blame you for doing the right thing by Rachel, least of all me. You don't need my forgiveness, Desi, because there's nothing to forgive."

Desi clung to her and buried her face in Harry's neck getting her collar all wet. "But I've brought you so much pain. How can you still be so giving?"

"Because anything worth having is worth any pain you have to endure to get it. Having you back here is what matters to me, but no walking out on me this time. You do and I'll be lost," whispered Harry in her ear.

"I missed you and I'm not going anywhere." Desi told her as she leaned in to kiss Harry again. "I may never want to stop doing this now."

"I don't want you to stop." Harry leaned back to look into Desi's eyes.

They were the one feature of Desi's that had haunted Harry for years. Those soft green orbs that reminded Harry of summer grass, that spoke volumes as to what was in Desi's head and heart. They had little flecks of gold sprinkled in them that Harry always thought held a sort of magic Desi had used to snare her love.

Expanding her line of sight out a little, Harry took in Desi's face. There were little lines around her eyes, but that was just from all the smiles that had creased Desi's face over the years. Desi's creamy skin hadn't changed much since the last time Harry had run her fingers over the surface. But every so often, she found small scars that were testament of Byron's brutality. For Harry, they didn't ruin or mar the image, only proved to her how brave Desi had been to survive the ordeal.

"What are you looking at?" asked Desi leaning into Harry's touch.

"I'm looking at you. Do you realize how beautiful you are to me? I've seen this face in my dreams for so long now, I think I have it memorized. But I find myself looking at you now, and falling in love all over again."

"Thank you for the sentiment, honey, but I think my time of beauty has past. I'm not eighteen anymore. I'm reminded of that every time I look in the mirror. It seems like every day something sags a little lower than it did the day before, and I'm so tired."

"Desi, honey, you're thirty-four years old, not exactly grandmother material. I love looking at you, so don't argue with me. And if you want my official diagnosis as to why you are so tired, it's because you were unhappy, sweetheart. Not to worry though, I have a prescription for that, guaranteed to perk you up permanently."

"Oh yeah, doctor, what might that be?" asked Desi. Her answer came in the form of a kiss and two strong arms that held her tight.

By making Desi happy it was a case of physician heal thyself for Harry. They would try and start over from the foundation they had built on a porch swing so many nights before. But after all that time, would it be enough?

[Continued in Chapter 3](#)

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~ How Do You Mend A Broken Heart ~

by Ali Vali
December 2005

Disclaimers: [See Part 1](#)

Comments can be sent to me at terrali20@yahoo.com.

Chapter 3

"All rise, the court is now in session, the Honorable Judge Rose presiding," said the bailiff, Rudy Thibodaux. The old courtroom was packed with lawyers and defendants ready to enter their pleas. For his part, Judge Jude Rose hated Mondays.

The filth of the streets oozed into his domain on that day of the week, ready to exclaim their innocence to all who would listen. The worst part of the whole ordeal was he couldn't tell the attorneys apart from their clients anymore. Jude had watched over the years as petty drug dealers and ambulance chasing young attorneys, waiting to carve out their niche in the law industry, had overrun the city.

From his perch high above the fray, he looked out of the big windows onto Tulane Avenue, remembering his first time in this courtroom. As a young law student he had come after classes to watch the trial of Clay Shaw play itself out in the national headlines. It had been a time of good lawyering and a fair debate of both sides of the law. Now the building was full of those who sold nickel bags of crack cocaine, rapists, the big lugs who liked to beat up on their wives, and the new breed of bottom feeding lawyers who defended them.

Seeing the beautifully dressed Serena Ladding with a pile of files on the table made him guess today would be 'She asked for it, your honor,' day. It was such a lovely way to start the morning. "Ms. Ladding, what do you have for me today? Do you think we'll be finished by noon?" asked Jude.

"Forty eight cases, your honor, all pleadings, so we should be out of here by ten if everyone is present and there aren't any unexpected surprises."

"Good, let's get started, shall we." He cocked his chair back a little and adjusted the pistol he kept on his hip. In his time on the bench he'd only had occasion to fire it once, and New Orleans legend had it that the whole building had come to a stand still for almost five minutes.

The first thirty defendants plead guilty after cutting deals with the district attorney's office. No jail time for their crimes, if they signed up for individual and family therapy. Serena wasn't a big fan of therapy, but it was the best they could offer with the jail-overcrowding situation the city faced.

In her opinion, after a few weeks with the shrink these guys came to realize it was all their mother's fault they did what they did. If only mommy dearest had had the foresight to leave dear old dad, then they wouldn't have learned their behavior. As one man had told her once, when she had met with him and his attorney, 'You see, Ms. Ladding, I'm an abuser but I've got a good reason, it's all my bitch of a mother's fault.' It was a crock then and it was a crock now.

"On the last case, your honor, we request the Court remand Mr. Byron Simoneaux into custody due to the vicious, unprovoked attack on his wife, Desiree Simoneaux. Mrs. Simoneaux had to undergo extensive surgery to repair the damage done to her person by Byron Simoneaux. It's the opinion of the District Attorney's office that Mr. Simoneaux would pose a threat to his wife if allowed out on bail. Our office plans to move forward with charges of attempted murder and assault with a deadly weapon." Serena finished and turned to Byron and his attorney to see what bullshit issued forth.

"Your honor, Mr. Simoneaux is a law abiding citizen who doesn't even have as much as an outstanding parking ticket. He works hard and is being unjustly accused by a woman who wants out of her marriage, and plans to stick my client with a large alimony tab," started Bradley Blum, Byron's attorney.

The chair creaked as Jude swung it around and looked at Rudy and cocked a brow at the man in question. After spending years working together the bailiff smiled in understanding and adjusted his utility belt. "Bradley Blum, your honor, defense attorney for Mr. Simoneaux."

"Mr. Blum, have I addressed you?" asked Judge Rose, his chair came back down, and he pinned the young man with his infamous glare when he looked down from the bench.

"No, sir," answered Bradley, swallowing hard.

"Then why are you talking?" The tone of Jude's voice, and the way he was now leaning forward showed his displeasure.

"I just wanted to explain our position, your honor."

"You're talking again. My suggestion to you, Mr. Blum, is simple. You should take your cues from Ms. Ladding here and speak only when spoken to. Do you understand me, Mr. Blum?" asked Judge Rose. The way Jude kept repeating his name made Bradley think the judge wouldn't soon forget him. If that were the case, it wouldn't bode well for future appearances in his court.

The courtroom fell silent, waiting for the explosion that would surely be coming from the bench at any moment. Jude was famous for chewing these young guns up and spitting them out, making their clients question the wisdom of their choice of representation. Two minutes ticked by with no sound breaking except the ticking of the clock over the door. "I'm waiting, Mr. Blum, do you understand me?" asked Jude again as he reclined back in his leather chair.

"I'm sorry, your honor, I thought you told me not to talk," explained the now sweating Bradley. From the prosecutor's table Serena was trying valiantly to hide her smile behind her hand. She had been in Blum's place only once, and it had been an experience she never cared to repeat.

"I asked you a question, you idiot," screamed Jude.

"Yes, your honor, I understand you."

"Good, now, Ms. Ladding, what's the extent of Mrs. Simoneaux's injuries?" He never looked at her, keeping his eyes glued to one of the light fixtures in the room.

Serena went on to explain the nature and extent of Desi's injuries, and what Harry had done to repair them. She also explained a baseball bat found in the Simoneaux home had caused the injuries, and currently was in police custody in the evidence room, covered in Byron's fingerprints and Desi's blood.

"Thank you, Ms. Ladding. Now, Mr. Blum, let's hear from you." After laying out the reasons for allowing his client to be released on bond, Bradley judiciously fell silent waiting for Jude to rule on bail. Feeling Byron fidgeting beside him wearing his bright orange prison jumpsuit, Bradley made a mental note to tell him that Jude Rose never heard domestic violence cases, so there would be no repeat of today.

"In deference to this being Mr. Simoneaux's first criminal charge, I here by post bond in the amount of three and a half million dollars in cash or property. Thank you ladies and gentlemen, we're adjourned." With that Jude got up, readjusted the pistol under his robes, and walked out. Serena felt confident that having to put up four hundred and twenty thousand dollars for his share of the bail would keep Byron sitting in city jail for many days to come.

She walked out of the courtroom, through the curses hurled her way by Byron's family, heading toward her office. She had noticed the Simoneaux clan when she had gotten there that morning,

thinking Byron and his brother Mike took after their father in looks. His mother looked like a small meek woman who was afraid of the large overweight man sitting beside her. Serena was sure his eldest son had learned how to deal with women from Byron, Sr.

From her office in the building where Jude's courtroom was located, Serena called Harry's house and spoke to Desi about the morning's proceedings. If Byron's attorney fast tracked the trial they could be back in court by the end of the month, which was fine with Serena. That would mean Desi would be sitting on the witness stand testifying with a cast on her leg, making what her husband did to her, that much more real.

"Thank you, Serena, I appreciate you calling me. Is it all right if I call Harry and let her know what's going on? She left early this morning, but I have her cell phone number in case I have to get in touch with her."

The explanation was longer than it had to be, but Serena understood where the need for confirmation was coming from. Women like Desi had learned, through violence, to never assume they could just do something without permission. When they did, it usually meant a beating. Hopefully with time and with Harry's loving guidance, Desi would find her self worth again. "No, that won't be a problem. Call her and tell her whatever you want. It'll be good for you to have someone to talk to during all this stuff. Because believe me, you'll have to deal with Byron's family, as well as your wonderful husband."

"Yeah, when Byron and Mike get together and start drinking, they are a force to be reckoned with. Add their father into that mix and it's total disaster for whatever or whoever gets in their way. Do you think Harry will be in any danger?" She bit her lip after asking, the thought popping into her head for the first time.

"If your in-laws know what's good for them, they'll stay the hell away from Harry. The Goddess of the Bones is a wonderful healer, but on the flip side, she can just as easily break every bone in your body. Harry studied martial arts in college, and when you combine that with her medical training, she knows all the places to hit you that'll count."

She studied her broken leg and thought about what Serena had said after hanging up the phone. Would Harry hurt her, and was she exchanging one bad situation for something worse? She couldn't fathom Harry ever lifting a hand to hit her, but she hadn't seen Harry in years. Sometimes things changed. She put the receiver down, deciding to wait to call the surgeon. There was no reason to disturb her if she didn't have to.

Harry wasn't expected home until eight or nine due to a back up in surgery, so when Desi heard the side door into the kitchen close, she wondered who it was. Looking at the digital clock next to the bed she noticed it was three thirty in the afternoon. She had slept longer than she had planned after her conversation with Serena, and now that she was well rested but still groggy, wondered what she was going to do with herself for the rest of the day.

"Hey there, sweetheart, how are you feeling?" Harry asked when she walked into the room carrying some shopping bags.

"What are you doing here?" She blinked repeatedly trying to focus after just waking up and looked to the clock again, thinking it had to be wrong.

"I live here," replied Harry, arching an eyebrow.

"I know that, wise guy. I just wasn't expecting you until late. Come here, since I can't come to you yet," said Desi crooking her finger toward Harry.

Harry walked over to the bed, leaned down and gave Desi a kiss hello. Having left even earlier than Desi suspected that morning, Harry was able to get through all of her more difficult surgeries by two that afternoon. What were left were cases the students could do with just a little supervision, so she had arranged for another instructor to monitor their progress. Stopping at one of the local medical supply companies and a few other places, Harry picked up some surprises for Desi, and planned on spending the rest of the afternoon enjoying them with her.

"Has anyone ever told you that you look sexy in green?" Desi eyed Harry in her surgical scrubs and smiled.

"Don't try to suck up to me, Thompson. I did bring home a surprise for you, but I don't know if I'll share it with you now." She threw the bags in her hands back out into the hallway.

"Aw, come on, Harry, I was just surprised to see you is all. That doesn't mean I didn't want to see you. What's my surprise?" She rubbed her hands together in anticipation remembering all the times Harry showed up with some little something she thought Desi would like.

"You're going to have to wait until I change before I give it to you."

Changing into sweatpants and a fleece top, Harry went out into the hall to retrieve her first set of surprises. Coming back in with the bags, she approached the bed to give them to Desi. "How'd you like to go to the park with me and feed the ducks? We could do it right after I run." Harry asked Desi shyly holding out the bags in her hand.

"I would love to do that with you, but I can't." She pointed to her leg in a way that showed how amused she was that Harry could forget her current state of health.

"I didn't ask you if you could, I asked you if you wanted to. Now do you want to?"

"Yes, I'd love to." Desi looked up at her in adoration and wondered what guiding spirit had brought Harry back into her life.

Handing over the first bag, Harry wiggled her eyebrows. Opening it while looking at Harry, Desi finally peeked inside. She found a sports bra and a nice fleece pullover similar to the one Harry had on. At the bottom of the bag was a pair of jogging pants with snaps all the way up the sides. They were the kind meant to be pulled off once you got to the track. In the other bag, Desi found several pairs of cashmere socks and a hat.

"Do you want me to help you put all that stuff on?"

"I think I can manage with the top part but I'll need you to help with the bottom. Now turn around, doctor." Desi twirled her finger in a circle as a way to get Harry to comply.

Harry turned around and waited for the grunting from the bed to stop. Getting the go ahead from Desi, she turned around to help her put the pants on. Harry pooled the sheets around Desi's waist before lifting her a little so Desi could pull the unsnapped pants around her bottom. Once she had the uninjured leg all covered up Harry folded the other pants leg so it wouldn't touch the site of Desi's injury. She then unpacked one pair of the socks and put them on her small delicate feet.

"Ready to go?" Harry was so excited she looked at her like a kid at Christmas.

"I don't know what you have in mind, but I'm ready to go," answered Desi. Harry picked her up and carried her out of the room down the stairs.

"Want a tour while I have you down here?" asked Harry.

"Sure, I didn't get to see much of the house when I first got here. Let's take a look at Tony's handy work."

"You can take notes so you can tell him what you like when they come over for dinner tonight." Harry carried Desi around showing her the main floor of the house, ending the tour at the side door where she had parked the Land Rover.

Putting her in the back seat so she could stretch out her broken leg, Harry jumped into the driver's seat and headed in the direction of Audubon Park. The park was one of the nicest spots in the city of New Orleans for a number of outdoor activities. It had a two-mile track around the park for the local runners and walkers, as well as cyclist and roller bladders. As you made the circuit around the park you could watch the golfers playing on the eighteen-hole course located in the middle of the park. Numerous ponds situated throughout the property were home to large duck, swan and turtle populations. Accustomed to visitors feeding them, the feathered inhabitants of the park were known to eat right out of your hand.

Pulling into the lot located at the back entrance to the park, Harry found a spot close to the track. She went to the back of the vehicle and pulled out her last surprise. Locking the brakes so she could retrieve Desi, she almost laughed at the shocked expression on her face. It was a variation of a racer wheelchair and Harry had picked it because it absorbed bumps better than the standard ones the hospital used. Now she could bring Desi with her when she came to the park to run.

"Want to go for a ride, little girl?"

"Harry, won't that hurt your back to stoop down and push me?" She eyed the chair with a bit of skepticism.

"Nope, I got the one with adjustable handles. It'll be like running holding on to the bar of a treadmill. Let me get your hat, your blanket and the bread for the ducks. You're going to have to hold those until we're done."

Running at a slower pace than usual, Harry pushed Desi around the track five times. From her vantage point, Desi relaxed into the chair and enjoyed the canopy of oaks that completely covered the wide lane they were on. She didn't worry about her leg since it rested on a firm support sticking straight out, knowing Harry wouldn't let anyone anywhere near them.

The cold weather of February had killed off most of the vegetation around them, but Desi still enjoyed being out in the crisp air. With her hands holding the bag of bread and blanket on her lap she was warm and content, letting Harry do all the work.

In the middle of their sixth circuit around, Harry slowed and pulled them off the track and down to the edge of one of the larger ponds. Before the chair rolled to a stop the ducks were heading out of the water anticipating a treat. The winded runner took the blanket off Desi's lap and spread it on the ground, then pulled Desi out of the chair and sat her down so she would be closer to the water.

Sitting side by side they took their time in tearing the loaf into small pieces and tossing it to the now boisterous crowd they had attracted. As the sun was setting and the temperature dropped with it, Harry put her passenger back in the chair and headed to the car. As she leaned down to put Desi in the back seat, Harry paused when she saw the tears steaming down Desi's face.

"Are you hurting?" asked Harry, already cursing herself for this stupid idea. Desi just shook her head but wasn't saying anything to allay Harry's worry.

After the afternoon spent with Harry, and having her think of everything to make her comfortable, made Desi realize something. Her fears after talking with Serena were unfounded. Harry would never raise a hand against her, more likely she would spend the rest of her life protecting her and making her happy if given the chance. Desi felt ashamed for even allowing the thought to cross her mind.

Feeling Harry pick her up and cradle her against her chest, Desi clung to her as if she were afraid Harry was going to disappear. "It's okay, honey, whatever it is, it'll be okay. Just tell me what's the matter?" Harry's voice was low and right next to her ear.

"Please don't let me go," sobbed Desi. How could she have traded anything for this? Harry had always been so good to her, and Desi's gratitude had been abandonment. She should have tried harder to find a better solution for them and not wasted all those years apart.

"I won't let you go, but let's get you in the car, I don't want you adding a cold to your list of woes."

Sitting in the back seat together, Harry put Desi on her lap making sure her leg was clear of getting bumped on anything. Holding the still crying Desi, Harry just ran a soothing hand along

her back trying to get her to calm down. "I talked to Serena today about Byron and their appearance in court," started Desi in a small voice.

"Did something happen that Serena wasn't expecting?" With a gentle hand, Harry wiped away the tears that were still falling.

"No, she got the judge to go along with all the charges she filed against him and got a really high bond posted."

She put two long fingers under Desi's chin and slowly lifted up so she could look her in the eye. "Am I wrong in thinking those are good things?"

"You aren't wrong, it's just that when we finished talking about Byron, we started talking about you..." Desi didn't know how to begin this conversation much less end it.

"Is there something I did to upset you? Did Serena say something?" The last question was asked in shock since Harry couldn't believe her friend would say something to make Desi lose faith in her.

She shook her head and squeezed her eyes shut in an effort not to see the hurt on Harry's face when she confessed her fears. "No, she would never do that to you, Harry, you know that. We were just talking about you and she told me you took these martial arts classes and I thought..." Again she stopped, the shame of her thoughts too big a burden to bear.

"You thought I'd come home one day and use you as a punching bag?" asked a surprised Harry. "That's it, isn't it?"

"Yes, but then you did all this and it made me feel like a real moron for thinking that. I know you. I may not know what you've been up to for the past few years, but I know you. Now I feel like an idiot for not realizing how improbable it would be for you to change your basic nature. Can you forgive me for thinking that?"

"Honey, with the experience you've lived through I don't blame you for being afraid and for having your own self interest at heart. In the future if you have any doubts or questions about anything, do you promise to share them with me? If you aren't comfortable talking to me, then just ask Serena or maybe Mona. You might not know them as well as you do me, but I can promise they'll always be honest with you. We have a history, but in reality, we're starting fresh here, so the more we talk, the less chance there will be of getting off track."

Desi reached out a tentative hand and stroked the side of Harry's face. "This is just all so new to me. I have so many memories of you, but I had to bury them so deep for so long that I find myself lost sometimes."

"You take all the time you need and never be afraid to talk to me." The smile Harry was wearing made Desi mirror the action. "And just so you know, I took those classes after Tony, Kenneth and I got to LSU. We were coming home one night when a carload of jocks passed us and saw

the guys holding hands. They didn't get out and they didn't throw anything at us, we were lucky in that regard. But it made me realize that because of our choices, we might not always be so lucky. By learning and training, I've at least given myself a fighting chance if that should happen again. I haven't hit anything in a while except the bag in the gym, and the only fights with people I've been in have been in the ring with an instructor near by."

"Harry, you don't have to justify or explain your reasons to me, I know you'd never hurt me. I just wish I could go back and change the past, then maybe I wouldn't be such a wreck." Desi moved closer and sighed when Harry's arms held her tight.

"Nah, you would've hated to be around me in med school, I was a bitch to live with, just ask the boys. You now get to enjoy the mellow Harry."

"I would take you in any state, Harry, I love you," confessed Desi. Harry pulled back and looked at Desi after the words had come out of her mouth. *Oh shit that's not a happy face*, thought Desi.

"What did you just say?" asked Harry, the words coming out slowly as if she were savoring each one.

"I would take you in any state."

"After that."

"I love you."

"That's it. Do you mean that?"

"With all my heart. I always have you know, since that first day you rescued Rachel and me from those bullies. It's been the one constant in my life."

"I love you, Desi. God, that feels good to finally be able to say out loud. Now there's just one thing left to do."

"What's that, Dr. Harry?"

"You need an attorney, the quicker the better."

"Why in the world do I need an attorney for?"

"You need a divorce, and pronto."

"Did you have a nice time, sweetie?" Mona tapped a large spoon on the side of a rather sizable pot simmering on the stove then bent down to check the fire. "Though somebody should've known better than to keep you out there so long in this awful weather."

"It was wonderful, Mona. I promise, it was fine." Desi's hands were folded in her lap enjoying the ride as Harry pushed her further into the warm kitchen. "My doctor took very good care of me."

Mona noticed the large smile the comment caused on Harry's face and if the doctor in question had walked out right then, Mona would've kissed Desi for putting it there. "Kept you warm, did she?"

A blush colored Desi's cheeks as she nodded. "She did, and it was nice being outside again, especially there." She cocked her head back so she could see Harry. "Do you remember all our afternoons in the park?"

"I think I remember every day I spent with you, darlin'."

The blush deepened making Desi want to cover her ears they felt so hot. "It was one of the first times in my life I started to notice how incredible you look when you move."

The group was still huddled together as their opponents stood waiting across from them. At the center of the closed circle knelt Harry going over the play one more time. When she stood, they all clapped their hands and yelled, "Break!"

"Blue twenty-two. Blue twenty-two," the center readied himself to hike her the ball. "Hut, hut," she paused before the third trying to gauge which way the defense was going to move. "Hut."

With the ball in play, Harry rolled right looking for her friend Joe. He was as tall as she was and had great hands for catching anything she threw his way. She let it fly and it almost stung when he reached up and snagged the perfect spiral out of the air. Since there was no one around him, Joe sailed easily past the two oak trees they were using as goal posts. The first one there to congratulate him was Harry.

"It's a shame you can't be there every Friday night, buddy. You sure would be better than that butthead Byron," he commented as they ran back to where they had dropped their gear.

"Nah, I just like the occasional pick up game. If I had to go to all those practices I wouldn't have time to help Desi with her math homework." Harry winked at the girl she was talking about then frowned when she got no reaction. Desi was sitting on a blanket in the sun with a far off look in her eye as if she were daydreaming. "You in there, Des?"

The snapping fingers made Desi look up then blush when she noticed both Harry and Joe staring at her funny. "Fine, I'm fine." She ran her hand over her face a couple of times before moving to her knees to start picking up her stuff. Lately it had been torture sitting on the sidelines watching Harry show off her athletic abilities and not jump up and kiss her every time she made a good play.

"Are you sure?" asked Harry when it was just the two of them.

"Nothing's wrong, I promise." Her math book got crammed into the book bag followed by her notebook.

"Are you in a hurry to get somewhere?"

Desi stopped. "Not really. Why?"

"I just thought we could sit here for a little while now that it's quiet." Harry offered her hand to her and was pulled down for her trouble. From the corner of her eye, Desi spent the afternoon watching Harry's profile as she looked up at the sky and smiled.

"I remember this one day when we were out there just laying and looking at clouds. If we exchanged two words that afternoon it was a lot, but it's a day I think of often," said Harry. She moved next to the chair and dropped to her knees.

"Why that day?"

"Because it was a perfect day with a perfect girl, and it's a good memory to revisit when I need to relax."

Desi's eyes turned glassy and she tried to turn away from Harry, feeling embarrassed by the emotional display. "I'm sorry. You must think you're living with an emotional wreck, but sometimes I can't help it." She wiped her face as if exasperated with herself.

"Hey, you take all the time you want to get all those feelings out." She took hold of Desi's hands and lovingly kissed each finger, tasting the saltiness of whatever had upset her. "It may not register now, but one day the tears won't come as easily for the sad days because eventually your head and your heart will realize you're safe." Harry lowered her head and kissed Desi's palms. "You're safe here with me and you always will be, I swear it on everything I believe."

Mona stepped away to give them the privacy they needed and spotted Kenneth and Tony's car on the front drive. She opened the door and waved them in, wanting Harry and Desi to finish maneuvering whatever emotional landmines they had stepped into without interruption.

"I know that, and I'm sorry," continued Desi. "It's just that it's funny to hear you still think about days like that."

"I love you, sweetheart, so of course I would."

Desi dropped her head until her chin hit her chest. "When we spent that last night together on our swing, it was the last time until now that I've known true peace. The last time I felt desirable to

someone who I wanted that kind of attention from."

"Honey, you don't have to do this."

Her head didn't really come up, but Desi shook it. "I want to. I think it's important for you to understand it isn't because of you when I get like this."

"I just don't want you to think you owe me any explanations."

"Please, Harry..."

She ran her hand along the side of Desi's head before bringing it down and linking their fingers together. "You can tell me whatever you like and I promise to listen."

"At first he tried to be nice." She took a deep breath and looked at their hands, which lay on her lap. "Byron I mean. He talked about playing football in high school and how he gave up any future in the game to help his dad at work."

When Desi paused it took effort on Harry's part not to ask why Byron needed his father and Desi's to arrange a marriage for him. She vaguely remembered him and how he almost preened around campus with that all coveted letterman jacket. He didn't seem the type to need help with women.

"He took my silence as interest in what he was saying, but the whole time I was thinking about you and Rachel. My fear damned all of us."

"Oh, honey," Harry leaned forward and did her best to wrap her arms around her without hurting her leg. "You weren't even eighteen yet and you did the best with the situation you were dealt."

"Don't make excuses for me, Harry. I think I can handle anything but that." With an almost guilty satisfaction, Desi leaned against Harry and pressed her nose against her neck. The moment's reprieve allowed her to finish what she'd started. "The first time he hit me, I tried to run, and I tried my best to fight back. It was a mistake I quickly learned not to repeat. Byron was then, and still is, a very angry man, and most women figured that out about him before it was too late."

"He's never going to touch you again."

The conviction in Harry's voice was so definite that Desi believed her without a hint of doubt. "Thank you, sweetheart. I don't want you to think it was all bad though. For weeks at a time he'd leave me alone, and that's when I spent time walking around the shops on Magazine or spent time with Rachel and some of her friends. Then I found that if I thought long and hard enough about days like that one in the park with you, when the beatings started again, they weren't that bad. I wanted to survive them if only to find you again so I could apologize."

"There's no need for that."

"Yes there is, and I'm just happy we have a chance at so much more than I realized." Her head finally came up without prompting and Desi gave Harry a relaxed smile.

"What do you mean?"

"I thought you'd be sharing your life with someone wonderful and have a bunch of little cute kids running around by now, and my chance at apologizing would be the last thing we did together. That would be the end of our story and I'd have to face the rest of my life alone with just the satisfaction that I'd said I was sorry for hurting you." She shook her head as if in amazement that wasn't the case. "I don't think I'll ever figure out why you waited all this time, I'm not that..."

She pressed two fingers pressed against Desi's lips not allowing her to finish the sentiment. "You're incredibly special, don't ever think otherwise, and you aren't someone easy to forget."

"But why?"

"Because you were an essential part of my life from so very early on. Do you realize what an honor it's been to share so much of my life with the woman I want to share the rest of it with?" Harry held both of Desi's hands and looked her in the eye. "I'll never be able to change these past years, no matter how much I want to, but I can help you heal those hurts. Just like no one will ever be able to erase the time starting on the day I met a little girl with pig tails and offered her a ride to school. I didn't forget you because to my heart, you were unforgettable.

From the doorway connecting the dining room to the kitchen, Tony wiped his face. He felt like an ass for listening in, but his feet were glued to the floor. As much as he wanted to dislike Desi for causing Harry's pain, she deserved his compassion and friendship. When he heard the backdoor open and close, he did his best to compose himself.

"Are you two at it again?" asked Rachel in a teasing voice. The kiss she'd walked in on seemed charged with something new and for once she wished she'd come in the front.

"Don't you have someone else you could be bothering?" Harry shot back. The doorbell interrupted her from saying anything else. "That must be the guys."

"That must be someone else, sunshine," said Tony as he made his way over to Desi. "You look fabulous and I'm glad to see the tyrant has you up and around. That means you're ready to go shopping with me." He kissed her cheek and winked at her.

"Can I come?" Rachel asked before receiving her own hello kiss from the affectionate man.

"We'd love to have you. Right, Desi?"

Harry kissed Desi quickly on the lips before standing. "I speak from experience when I say, just give in and go with whatever he wants. You'll be a happier person for it."

"Funny, doctor, now get out of here and see who's at the door," ordered Tony.

"It's just us," said Serena walking in on Kenneth's arm. A small rocket streaked past her on his way to Harry.

From her chair, Desi watched and enjoyed the rest of the evening as everyone gathered in Mona's kitchen for a meal of Shrimp Creole. She watched her sister charm Butch into sitting on her lap for most of the night, and the way Serena's eyes would sometimes linger on Harry when she wasn't looking her way.

The one constant through the whole evening was Harry and how she made Desi feel. It was a peaceful sense of belonging, not with the group of old friends, but with Harry. For the first time Desi felt as if she belonged with someone, and from that came the courage to try again. The courage to try living, loving and sharing her life with someone who saw her as someone worth something.

"Who's the cute redhead?" Serena asked Harry when the doctor got up to get Desi's medicine.

Across the kitchen Rachel leaned closer to her sister. "Who's the blonde in love with Harry?"

"Not now," answered Harry and Desi almost together.

"Here you go, baby," Harry dropped two pills in Desi's palm and handed her a glass of water. "One more day and you're done with this part."

"It's this part I'm ready to be done with," Desi pointed to her leg.

"Don't rush it, sweetie," Tony piped up. "Harry doesn't know squat about window treatments or fashion, but bones are another matter. Besides, you'll probably be more comfortable having me wheel you around the stores until you develop some shopping stamina."

"Any more stamina on your part and I'd have to start working double shifts at the hospital to cover the bills," said Kenneth.

"You're complaining about my stamina? Since when?"

The group laughed at the guys' antics as Butch fell asleep on Rachel's lap. It was a little after midnight before everyone was ready to leave, making Harry extremely glad she didn't have an early morning.

"Harry, go on and carry Desi upstairs and I'll help her get ready for bed," offered Mona. "It'll give you a chance to grab a shower."

"I'll help you, Mona." Rachel placed her hands on her sister's shoulders and bent down to kiss the top of her head.

When Harry was done in bathroom, she walked out to find Desi alone. "Do you want me to go

and sleep in the guestroom?"

She looked at the object of her desire and for once took a chance and put voice to what she wanted and would make her happy. "Unless you want something else, I don't ever want to spend another night of my life without you, Harry. I love you."

Harry slid into her side of the bed and opened her arms so Desi could snuggle as close as she could. "Then you'll never spend another night alone because I love you just as much."

Two weeks later, Rachel found herself sitting with Desi in Harry's waiting room after Tony had met them at the house to help Desi downstairs. Harry's private practice was in the clinic building attached to Mercy Hospital and compared to some, was rather impressive in size. Desi and her sister looked around the room taking in the wood paneled walls, dark brown leather furniture, and the long glass case bordering the ceiling full of football helmets and baseball caps that had been autographed by the owners. Obviously people broke a large number of bones in the area and were grateful to the person who'd put them back together.

A nurse came out of the door that led into the exam rooms and wheeled Desi in, inviting Rachel to come along if she wished. "Can I get you ladies anything? Coffee or a soft drink perhaps?" Both sisters shook their heads and smiled. "Then I'll leave you alone. Dr. Basantes should be back from rounds in a minute, so make yourselves comfortable, and ring if you change your minds."

Desi scanned the exam room, noticing that one wall was covered with pictures of Harry, all taken with different people. From the youngest to the oldest, every single person in the pictures had their arm around Harry and was smiling like they had won the lottery. When the next nurse came in to check her vitals, she noticed Rachel and Desi looking at the wall of pictures.

"The wall of fame for the Goddess of the Bones," she commented as she wrapped the blood pressure cuff around Desi's arm.

"Why do people call her that, the Goddess of the Bones, I mean?" asked Desi.

"Because our good doctor has shown a remarkable talent for orthopedic surgery from the moment she picked up a scalpel. Dr. Basantes is known throughout the country for the miracles she's able to perform on a regular basis. All of the people you see up there, and in every room of this office, are old patients that have had their lives salvaged by those talented hands. The nickname came from her professors in medical school, and it just stuck. Ask anyone of those people though," she pointed back to the wall, "and I'm willing to bet they'd agree with the title." The nurse finished up and put Desi's chart in the bin attached to the door.

When the door opened again, Harry walked in wearing the whitest, most pressed lab coat Desi had ever seen. "Remember I told you how sexy you looked in green?" asked Desi.

"Yes, I believe I recall that conversation." The skin around Harry's eyes crinkled from the size of her smile as she answered.

Rachel looked from one to the other, thrilled to see their playful personalities had returned. Harry was good for her sister, and if there was one person who deserved some good luck for a change it was Desi. All she had to do now was provide some more helpful nudges to get the flame between them up to a roar.

"I've changed my mind, I'm thinking white's your color, doctor," said Desi.

"Once you're on your feet you'll have to take me shopping for things in the colors you like. Are you ready for those stitches to come out?"

"Kiss me first then you can do whatever you like." The request proved that some of Desi's shyness and skittishness was disappearing and Harry loved it.

She walked to the exam table and kissed Desi like she hadn't seen her in months. They hadn't taken it any further than the kissing and hand holding stage, due to Desi's injury and marital status, but they were still enjoying themselves. Rachel smiled watching her sister act like a teenager again and could see from the movement through the coat where her hands were located on Harry's body.

"Tell me, Dr. Basantes, is this how you treat all your patients? Because if it is, I might just fling myself down the stairs just to get an office visit," said Rachel as she arched a brow when their mouths finally came apart.

"This is an experimental treatment I'm trying on a test group of one, actually. Next time, you'll have to notify me in advance if you're interested in my work," teased Harry before she gave Desi another small kiss.

Harry kidded around with them while she removed the numerous stitches she'd put in Desi's leg. She cut through the small, precisely placed, black sutures, pleased with the results left behind. There would be hardly a scar left, and if Desi wanted, Harry would recommend a plastic surgeon to remove what there was of one. After checking Desi's latest x-rays, she informed her patient that everything was healing nicely.

"In another week or so, I'll take you out of the brace and put you in a cast, so you can move around easier. For now let's leave you like this so your incision can heal up. You want to be past the itchy stage before I encase it, trust me. See, all that forced bed rest is paying off for you and you're ahead of schedule on your healing process. You should kiss your doctor for being so smart." Not one to ignore her requests Desi leaned over and kissed the top of Harry's head.

"Can I take you lovely ladies out to lunch?" Harry asked, taking off the lab coat and draping it over her arm.

"You have time?" asked Desi.

"Barring any medical disasters, I'm all yours for the next couple of hours."

"Just for the next couple of hours?" asked Desi.

"For as long as you want me in this lifetime, but I do have to work this afternoon. We're teaching the residents some new surgical techniques, so I have to be there."

She put Desi back in her wheelchair and escorted her and Rachel out to the parking lot. Her staff had made reservations for lunch at Commander's Palace uptown. When they were young, Harry's parents would take Harry and Desi there for Sunday brunch in the second floor garden room at least once a month, and it was one of Desi's favorite memories.

Harry was doing her best to bring back those happy times whenever she had the opportunity. She couldn't make up for the life Desi had endured without her, but Harry would do everything within her power so Desi wouldn't have another painful day for the rest of her life.

When Harry parked in front of the restaurant and turned to face the back seat, she knew it had been worth the effort of rearranging her schedule. Desi's eyes were misted over, telling Harry she remembered their times spent here. The valet opened the door and greeted Harry by name.

"Hello, Charlie, how's school?" asked Harry.

"Okay, Dr. Harry, I could use some extra tutoring sessions in chemistry but besides that, it's going all right." He opened the back door as he answered, surprised to find a reclining blonde.

"Charlie, could you or one of the guys carry the chair that's in the back upstairs for me?"

"Sure, but who's gonna carry the person who needs it?"

"Don't worry about that, I can use the workout."

Harry greeted the maitre' d with Desi in her arms and asked to go up the stairwell located in the kitchen. The famous restaurant had another set of stairs in the main dining room but they were steep and narrow, and Harry didn't want to take any chances with her passenger. Going through the kitchen they had to stop and talk with the staff for a minute since they all knew and loved Harry especially when she brought Butch with her. They also greeted Desi, and promised to send up some special treats in honor of her return to the New Orleans landmark.

"It is so beautiful up here," said Desi as she gazed out the floor to ceiling windows that overlooked the courtyard outside. Harry had requested a corner table so Desi would be out of the passing traffic of service staff. They were surprised to find Serena arriving as well to have lunch, accompanied by a beautiful young woman.

"Harry, Desi... what a pleasant surprise." Serena felt the brunette she was with press her hand into the small of her back as if to remind her she was still there. "I'd like you to meet Brenda

Bourgeois. Brenda is a local law student at Loyola."

"Student? Helping her brush up on torts and what not?" The question was asked in jest, and Serena could tell Harry was just warming up from the mischievous glint in her eyes.

"She's surviving quite nicely without my help in the academic arena," Serena fought the urge to walk to her table. This was a new relationship and she was hesitant to expose Brenda to Harry's brand of teasing just yet.

"I see," said Harry, getting a pinch under the table from Desi as a warning. "Brenda, it's really nice to meet you. This is Desi and her sister Rachel," she then stuck her hand out. "I'm Harry by the way, an old friend of Serena's."

"Oh yes, I've heard all about you from Albert. Can't seem to get him on any other subject but perfect Uncle Harry when I'm around," said Brenda sharply as she shook Harry's hand.

"Perhaps Albert thinks she's perfect because Harry treats him like the special little guy he is," added Rachel. "I had the pleasure of meeting him the other night and thought he was adorable." Rachel looked Brenda up and down, and from her expression, found her lacking. "Maybe he's figured out you really don't like kids."

"How special for you, Dr. Spock." Brenda turned her displeasure on Rachel.

"Maybe if you stop looking at his mother's..."

"Desi, have you heard from Byron or his family since the hearing a couple of weeks ago? I understand he's still in central lockup so you shouldn't have any problems." Serena interrupted before Rachel could finish or anyone else could chime in after the biting sarcasm her date had uttered.

"No, they haven't bothered me, but that could be because they don't know where I am. Harry introduced me to a good attorney who started divorce proceedings for me, so I'll at least know where to find Byron when it comes time to serve him with the papers," said Desi smiling up at Harry's friend.

"Call me if you need anything or if you have any problems. Harry and Rachel, it was nice seeing you both again," said Serena as Brenda took her hand and they continued on to their table. Harry had to laugh a little when they departed, thinking that maybe Serena had found someone worthy of her, since Brenda seemed somewhat possessive.

"You're bad, Dr. Basantes," said Desi. She had noticed the mirth playing in Harry's eyes and the panic in Serena's when she'd walked up.

Knowing Harry had shared a relationship with her caused a streak of jealousy to course through Desi every time she saw Serena, but Harry was always good about reassuring her. The comforting hand over hers was doing wonders for her insecurities.

"I'm only bad when provoked, sweetheart, don't ever forget that. And I'm thinking I'm no where close to being in Rachel's league."

"Duly noted, doctor."

They enjoyed the lunch served with the usual Commander's flare and the atmosphere of the restaurant. Desi was amused by the number of people who came to their table and thanked Harry for fixing some ailment or another. She had never seen so many pantomimed golf strokes or tennis serves in her life. Harry took it all in stride, listening to what they were saying, all the while holding Desi's hand.

Desi couldn't remember ever being the center of so much attention, or being regarded with such respect as Harry gave her whenever she introduced her. Harry was proud to have her sitting there, she could tell by every single action and word. In the total of their married life together Byron had never shown this much interest in her. To him she was the person who kept his house clean, cooked his food and was the body he could use for sex whenever the urge hit him.

Desi noticed the envy in some of the women's eyes as Harry swept her up into her arms again when it was time to go. It was as if they knew by some secret tally that the name of Dr. Harry Basantes was taken from the available roster and moved over to the taken side.

The car was waiting for them when they got downstairs, allowing Harry to get Desi situated while the valets put the wheelchair in the back. As she tipped the guys for their assistance, neither Harry nor her two passengers noticed the man down the block attaching a car to the tow truck he was driving. He had stopped what he was doing when he saw the person carrying a woman out of the restaurant thinking that it wasn't a common sight. That's when he noticed who the person being carried was.

Dialing the portable phone in the cab of the truck Mike called the local jail and asked for his brother Byron. Forgetting about the car he had been sent to collect, Mike jumped up into the truck and drove off following the Land Rover while waiting for Byron to come to the phone. Missing the traffic light once the SUV turned onto St. Charles Avenue, Mike had to wait hoping the driver would get stopped at one of the other lights along the way. He at least knew she was headed uptown.

"Yeah, this is Byron," a gruff voice said into the phone.

"Byron, this is Mike, guess who I found?"

"Please tell me, little brother, that it's the bitch I'm married to."

"Yep, just saw her and some tall bitch coming out of that fancy restaurant Commander's. Rachel was with them too." Mike kept talking as he turned in the direction Harry had headed in.

"Don't lose them. I want to know where she's staying. Daddy said he has the bond almost raised

so I should be out of here by the end of this week. I want to pay my dear wife a visit so I can see how's she's doing since her tragic accident of falling in the kitchen. Didn't think you could get hurt that bad tripping over a chair." He hung up after getting Mike to promise he'd get all the information Byron would need to find Desi once their father posted bail for him.

Talking to his brother, Mike never noticed the SUV turn off before reaching Harry's house in the direction of a specialty store in the uptown area. Harry had promised to cook dinner so she made a detour to get some of the ingredients she would need to make what she had in mind.

"When did you learn how to cook?" asked Desi. She was suspicious since Harry hadn't known how to boil water all through school. She had never seen anyone so inept in a kitchen in her life.

"Tony and I took a class in college, so we wouldn't get rickets from eating each other's cooking. Kenneth, lucky bastard, grew up with a set of parents that were gourmet cooks and made it fun for him to learn, so he didn't need any help. Don't laugh, I bet I can debone a chicken better than you can." Harry shook her finger at both sisters.

"I bet, considering you're a surgeon. It's the whole fire and seasoning concepts that I'm worried about," explained Desi.

"I could always just go and buy a pizza."

"I'm sorry, honey, if you want to cook for me, I'll eat it no matter what it tastes like." Desi used her index finger to make an x over her heart to seal the promise.

Harry left them in the car while she ran into the store. Rachel had taken the day off so she could bring Desi to her appointment, and was enjoying her time with the two. "Desi girl, don't you do anything to mess this up this time. That woman loves you like there's no tomorrow, and I won't sit and watch you walk away again. Hell if you do walk away, I might just make a play for her myself. Just so you know, I love you for wanting to stay with me way back when, but this is the here and now. Let me help you build some happiness for yourself this time," said Rachel. She had turned in the seat so she could look Desi in the eye while she said what she needed to.

"Don't worry, they'll have to remove me from Harry's life kicking and screaming now. There's a God and He loves me, because after all this time, she waited for me. There've been some love affairs along the way, but none of them have stuck. This one will, I just know it."

"All set my beauties?" asked Harry when she got back in the vehicle.

"What'd you buy, Dr. Harry?" asked Rachel.

"Something that'll show my insensitive side, squirt, but I'm such a hedonist that I really don't care." A medium sized bag came to rest on the floor behind the driver's seat.

"What in are you talking about, honey?" asked Desi, confused as she eyed the innocuous brown container.

"Veal. I bought veal, and I'm gonna enjoy every milk fed moment of it."

Turning back onto St. Charles again, Harry was singing with the radio when she noticed her passengers stiffen. She didn't think her singing was that bad. "Hey what's wrong?"

"That's the tow truck from the Simoneaux garage," said Rachel pointing to the truck right in front of them. Given that the driver was going very slowly, Harry gave him the benefit of the doubt, and figured that he was searching for the address of his next pick up. That notion quickly died when she noticed him look in the rearview mirror and suddenly slam on his brakes when he noticed who was following him. It became obvious to Harry, the Simoneaux's weren't known for their subtlety.

"Hang on, ladies, let's go home the back way, shall we?" Harry turned on the next cross street, making sure the truck ahead of her had passed it already.

Glancing into the rearview mirror, Harry could see he had put it in reverse and was able to make the turn. Making a quick decision after noticing where they were, she pulled into the driveway and put the Range Rover in park. Getting out of the car and slamming the door shut, Harry stared at the tow truck as it slowly pulled passed the house. Mike just glared back at her and took careful note as to the address on the house so he could tell his brother.

She followed him with her eyes down the street to make sure that he was now out of sight before she got back in the car with Desi and Rachel. "He was looking for us wasn't he?" asked Desi. Half of her was scared, and that half was warring with the half that was really pissed. *What if they do something to Harry*, thought Desi.

"Looks like it, honey, but none of the Simoneauxs will ever get anywhere near you, that's a promise. Come on, let's get you two home, and make a phone call to Serena and Detective Landry," said Harry.

Serena promised them she'd meet with Desi's divorce attorney and start the process of getting a restraining order against Byron and his family to keep them away from Desi and Rachel. From the beginning of the conversation it had taken some calming maneuvers on Serena's part to get Harry to stop screaming at her on the phone. She agreed that there should be something else they could do, but legally their hands were tied.

"Does it make any sense to you that we have to wait for these crazy assholes to do something before you can do anything about it?" Harry was standing in the middle of the bedroom holding the phone trying to keep her voice down. The last thing she needed was to add to Desi's worry.

"I just work for the DA's office, Harry, I don't get to make up the law as I go along, though what a great concept that would be. I'll meet Jerry and get him to start drafting a protection order to go along with all the other divorce stuff he's writing up. Then I'll see about getting Desi as much protection as we can right now. Trust me, if we do this by the book and Byron screws up, he's going away for a very long time."

"If any of those idiots show up here, I won't need the police."

"Harry, could you put Desi on the phone please?" Serena pinched the bridge of her nose and closed her eyes trying to stop the headache she felt coming on.

Harry handed the phone over without another word. "It's Serena."

Desi smiled and patted the space next to her. "I figured that much, honey." She ran her hand up Harry's arm until she reached the back of her neck. "We're going to be fine, and I'm sure Serena's going to do her best to see that we are."

"God, you're good, Desi," said Serena in her ear after only silence came through the line. "Anyone who can make her calm down that quickly and give up the phone is a miracle worker. But I can see her point. Harry's just worried about you."

"I know and I love her for it." Desi smiled again and squeezed the skin under her fingers. "Is there anything I can be doing to help?"

"Just sign the papers Jerry is drawing up with Detective Landry's help, and I'll take care of the rest. You have to remember you aren't alone in this anymore, so don't hesitate to ask for help when you feel the need."

"Thanks, Serena. That means a lot to me." She ended the call and gladly accepted a hug from Harry. "You okay, honey?"

"I just want these people to leave you alone and I feel helpless in getting that accomplished."

"Harry, none of this is because of you. I know you're going to keep me safe no matter what, but we can't let Byron and his family overshadow our lives. I'm ready to go on with mine and be happy here with you."

"I just love you so much and I don't want any of this to hurt you anymore."

"Hearing you say that makes me strong enough to face anything."

Changing into her scrubs, and waiting for the security guard she ordered, Harry finally left the house after Desi promised to check in every so often throughout the day. Harry had thought the jail time Byron already pulled would be enough to convince him to back off, but she had underestimated him. Bryon cared much more about revenge than he did about his freedom. That's what scared Harry the most.

"She's got a big house off the avenue, daddy. I don't know who the big bitch is but she stared me down as I drove by, so now they know we are after them. It might be a good idea to lay off the

plan for now," explained Mike. He had come back all full of bravado and told his father he had found Desi. But he quickly deflated when he had to confess she'd acquired a new watchdog who looked fairly scary in her own right.

"We have to teach that little slut a lesson, and you're part of this so show some balls and shut the fuck up. I had to put up my business to get your idiot brother out of jail, so the sooner we get Desiree back here, the sooner this will all be over. If you two listened to me more often, and treated your women accordingly, then we wouldn't be in this mess in the first place," yelled Byron, Sr. He wanted his son out of jail, his daughter-in-law to drop the charges, and the bail bondsman to give him his deed back. Hell for all the trouble she had caused, the old man thought about whacking Desi a couple of times himself.

"I'm sorry, daddy, it's not that I don't want to help out, but there's no telling who this woman is, and what relation she is to Desi." Mike was reluctant to face the fact there would be no way he could tell his father no when it came time to go and collect Desi.

"You're going to do whatever the fuck I tell you to do, when I tell you do it, boy, so stop sounding like a weak piss ant. Come on, let's go and see about getting your brother out of that place. Lord knows what'll happen to him if he's stuck in there much longer. And keep your mouth shut once we get there. I'll do all the talking."

They left and drove over to the city jail, located right behind the courthouse on Tulane Avenue. Father and son waited in a very plain, beige room as the police finished processing Byron's paperwork. They shared the area with some other beleaguered appearing people who were either waiting for the release or visitation of their loved ones. No one in the room made eye contact with anyone else, and if a vote were taken, no one would be there given the choice.

When the door clanged open everyone looked up to see if it was the person they were waiting for. Byron stepped out, having traded the orange jumpsuit for the clothes he had been wearing the day he had been arrested. Besides Mike and their father, one other man got up and walked toward the newly released prisoner.

Holding out his hand, the young man wearing the suit asked, "Are you Byron Simoneaux?"

"Yeah," answered Byron.

"The Byron Simoneaux who's married to Desiree Simoneaux?" The young man's smile never faltered as he waited for Byron to nod. "Then these are for you, sir. Have a nice day."

"Wait, what the fuck is this?" Byron held the envelope the guy had given him out in front of him as if he wanted to give them back.

"You've been served, sir. Those are divorce papers and a restraining order from Desiree Simoneaux. You and your family members are ordered to stay a minimum of five hundred feet from Ms. Simoneaux or face legal consequences." That was the only explanation the runner for Desi's attorney was willing to provide.

While getting the file ready for the judge's signature he had gotten a look at the pictures of the young woman's leg, and the thought of this guy spending more time in jail didn't bother him in the least.

"That fucking bitch. That lying, cheating piece of shit," screamed Byron when he realized what the guy had handed him.

There was no way Desi was leaving him, no fucking way. All he needed was some time to explain to her that he was sorry for what he'd done and remind her that they had made a commitment to each other. One he had no intentions of breaking.

"Either keep it down or go back in," warned one of the guards. The reprimand made all three men start for the door.

Byron listened as his brother explained what he had seen the day he spotted Desi, Rachel and their new friend. That night Mike took his brother by the house he had followed the trio to the day before. Byron saw the upstairs lights on and someone moving around.

"Ready or not, Desi, it's time to come home. I'm your husband and there isn't anything in this world that'll make me give you a divorce, baby. Until death do us part is what the guy said and that's how it's going to be, so either you come home willingly or in a pine box. It makes no difference to me."

He motioned for Mike to get moving before any of the neighbors spotted the parked car. "We'll wait until we're sure she isn't expecting us, then we'll come back and take Desi home. What's a couple of weeks more to wait," said Byron looking up into the window as the car started slowly up the street.

Harry moved around the room getting ready for bed. It had been a long day in surgery trying to get the residents to get their minds around what she was trying to teach them. They could cut up on those cadavers all day long, but it was a different landscape when you had living tissue under your fingertips. She was glad the patients were unconscious during those little learning sessions, if they had been alert they could have added a nervous condition to their diagnosis.

"Come over here and lie down, honey. You're making me nervous. I can't wait until this leg heals and I can kneel down again. Once that happens, on nights like tonight I can give you a nice massage," said Desi patting the bed beside her.

Mona had just left after bathing her and changing the bed linens. Her sister and Mona had come up earlier and had dinner with her since Harry had called and said she was running late. Desi had laughed when, while waiting for Harry to come to the phone, her surgical nurse Sam had told her that if one more resident asked Harry a stupid question she was going to stab someone in the neck with a scalpel.

Sinking into the warm, good smelling body next to her, Desi sighed with contentment. "I just brushed my teeth, want to take my mouth out for a spin?" The question finally got a smile out of Harry.

"Desiree, are you making a pass at me?"

"Well if I have to spell it out for you, then no, I'm not." Desi told her, pouting.

Harry pushed the bottom lip back in with her index finger and leaned over to finish the job with her mouth. She had wanted to come home for hours so she could hold her in case there was any residual fear from what had happened earlier in the afternoon. After all their telephone conversations, and the new security guard Harry had hired, Desi finally seemed to be relaxed and content.

Pulling away from the kiss she had started, Harry closed her eyes and enjoyed the closeness. "I missed you today. I'm thinking one weekend soon we should go somewhere special. How'd you like to go and visit my parents then maybe do a couple of days at a nice resort, just the two of us?"

"That sounds great, but I don't know, sweetheart. Won't they be mad that you're with me again? I can imagine I'm not exactly their favorite person." As she tended to do when she was nervous or unsure about something, Desi twisted her fingers into Harry's shirt.

The thought of facing Harry's parents again raised her stress level, since the one thing she remembered about them was how they felt about their daughter. Overprotective and extremely proud of their children were the first two things on a very long list that described Maria and Raul Basantes.

"Don't worry so much, they loved you before and they'll love you again." Harry kissed her nose before moving back down to her lips. "You make me happy, and that's all they'll care about."

"Okay, if you think it'll be all right, I'm game. Now, doctor, why have you come to bed with a wet head?"

"Because your darling sister is going to cut her hair," answered Rachel from the doorway with a pair of shears and a towel in her hand. "I'm trying to build a new clientele in the medical community and I'm starting with that one there," Rachel informed her, pointing Harry who was now under Desi. She just smiled at both of them and relaxed back into her pillow.

"But I like her hair just the way it is," complained Desi.

"Sorry, sister, I called dibs, so unhand her and let me get started. Come on, Desi, would you want your surgeon's hair falling in her eyes when she was giving you a spine transplant or something?"

"No we wouldn't want that. Your knowledge of new and innovative medical procedures is astounding by the way," said Harry as she got up from the bed and headed into the bathroom with Rachel following closely behind.

"I want to come too. Just to make sure she doesn't cut off too much," cried Desi. That made Harry double back and pick her up.

For the next hour Harry sat in a chair in the middle of the bathroom waiting for the three women around her to decide just how much of her hair should go after Mona joined them. At one point she thought she'd have to separate Mona and Rachel when she had suggested Harry color away the white hair. Mona won the argument only because Desi said she thought the way it was looked sexy.

"There you go, Desi. I'm sure you'll find this much more comfortable and it'll allow you to move around better. If you wait a moment, I'll run and get you some crutches to go with the beautiful brace you got today," said Beth, one of Harry's private practice nurses.

It had been two months since the accident and the fracture had healed fairly well so Harry was cutting down the size of the removable cast Desi had to wear, giving the young woman her freedom for the first time in what seemed like forever. Harry had been a mother hen with Desi, making sure she didn't take any unnecessary chances that would extend her recovery time. Desi was grateful now, since the report she had gotten that afternoon was that the bone in her leg was almost completely healed. Just a few more weeks and her amorous doctor would let her put weight on it.

"Thanks, Beth, is Harry around?"

"Yes, ma'am, she is. She's filling out your paperwork in her office. I made her go do something else before she drove me and the rest of the staff to drink with all that hovering."

"She is good at that, but you have to love her for it, at least I do. If you get those crutches ready I can go in there and surprise her."

"That, my dear, sounds like a wonderful idea. The girls and I want to thank you." Beth enjoyed the talk as she adjusted the walking aids to Desi's height.

"Whatever for?"

"Well it's not that Dr. Harry wasn't nice before, but being in love has sure mellowed her out. Believe me, she needed some mellowing out." Desi felt her face heat up at the complement, and felt the warm glow that had settled in her chest because of it.

"I'll try my best to make it permanent."

Beth helped her off the exam table, holding her until Desi found her balance. "If I'm not too out of line, I have to say you both look adorable in love."

Life was so good, but Desi hated that she was always waiting for the bad news to come around the corner and blindside her. She hadn't heard from Byron since his release, nor had they seen him and his family in the neighborhood again.

Jerry Castle, the attorney Harry had gotten her, had called to tell them the divorce was going smoothly and Byron had not put in a counter claim. The only slow down was that Jerry was having trouble getting the other attorney to return his calls. It wasn't as if he had bad news for the man, as much as Jerry wanted to ask for spousal support, knowing Desi was entitled to it, she had with Harry's guidance refused to ask for any.

After a long talk together, one night while they were in bed, Harry had explained that she made more than enough to support all of them, even if she had to support Rachel as well. It had taken some doing, but she finally got Desi to agree with her and accept her help. What she wanted more than anything was for Desi to take time to decide what she wanted to do, without any ties to Byron or his family. Desi had to agree it would make the divorce go faster, and it would torpedo Byron's defense at trial that Desi was only a disgruntled woman wanting a lot of alimony out of him.

Her intention had never been to ask for or accept anything long term from him, only something to get to a point where she could take care of herself. With Harry, Desi could now take her time getting to that place, and with Harry her plans had changed. Desi didn't just want to be able to care for herself but for Harry as well. She wanted a full life and a partnership with the only person she'd ever loved, and Desi wanted to start as soon as possible.

The only thing missing was the intimacy she wanted to share with Harry. Because of her injury and her marital status, they had put the breaks on their love life, but after some of their late night make out sessions Desi was about to explode. With a clean bill of health, the lighter cast she had been given, and the fact she was now legally separated, Desi set out to seduce Harry that night.

"Hey there, doc, can I come in?"

Harry looked up from the files she was writing in and smiled at her visitor. She knew Desi would take immediate advantage of walking around, even if it was with the assistance of the crutches. She had a surprise waiting for her at home too; one Mona promised would be set up before they got home.

"Hey you, I see Beth set you up." The leather of the chair creaked as Harry leaned back in her chair and put her hands behind her head.

"She sure did. You have the nicest people working for you, honey. Give me a few weeks and I'll demand a night on the town. A little dinner, a little dancing and you would be my idea of heaven."

"You need a little more than two weeks before you get to go dancing, but I promise as soon as you can, I'll fill up your dance card. To make it up to you, how about I take you out to dinner tonight?" Harry wiggled her brows and gave Desi her best smile.

"As in you're taking me out on a date?" For a woman in her thirties, Desi had never experienced much of what most people considered normal courting rituals. Those few weeks with Harry, once upon a time, when they'd finally admitted their feelings for one another, was it.

Harry heard the excitement mixed with wistfulness in Desi's voice and swore she'd do her best to always try and sweep her off her feet. "As in I'm taking you out on a date. I don't date much and I might be a little out of practice, so if you can stand my company I'd be honored to escort you tonight, Miss Desiree."

"It would be my pleasure."

She rested her crutches on the side of Harry's desk and took a seat on her lap. Desi had been asleep when Harry left that morning so she missed out on her good morning kiss. The more time they spent together, the more she missed the Harry when she left for the day.

To fill up her own day, Desi had been helping Tony finish the few rooms left in the house and shopping to add to what Tony felt was missing from her wardrobe. Harry had left instructions with their moody decorator that if Desi wanted the rooms already finished redone, then to go with whatever she wanted. Leaning over to kiss Harry, Desi ran her fingers through the thick curly hair making Harry instantly relax. Maybe Beth was right, Harry was more content since they had gotten back together.

"Any requests on where you would like to go?" asked Harry as she pulled back to look at Desi.

"It doesn't matter, as long as I'm with you, that's all I care about. I know this isn't the best time to bring this up, but Jerry called today." She pulled softly on Harry's neck so she could kiss her again. "I'd rather kiss you or talk about fun places to go, so forgive me for ruining the mood by bringing up my divorce attorney."

"It's not a mood killer, baby. Just think of Jerry as the guy helping you to the finish line when it comes to the Simoneauxs." Harry went back to kissing Desi's neck, ready to hear what Desi had to say.

Desi's champion had bullied Jerry into looking into every divorce law in the state of Louisiana to see if there was any way to speed up the process. Harry figured if you married an abuse asshole there should be some sort of fast track to get out of the relationship, but there wasn't. The only good news they received on the subject was that the law had been changed from a year and a day of living separate and apart, to six months. Four months to go, then Desi would finally be rid of the bastard she had been saddled with.

"What did he want?"

"He said Byron's attorney still isn't calling him back about all this because Byron in turn won't return any of his calls. He keeps telling his attorney we're working all of this out and there won't be any divorce. I'm getting kinda worried, Harry. What if he decides to come after you and hurts you? I can't stand the thought of something happening to you." It was true that she hadn't heard from her soon to be ex-husband, but it didn't mean Byron had forgotten about her.

She knew Byron well enough to know he wouldn't walk away without a fight, literally. Byron understood only one thing. If he didn't like something he balled his fists and beat it until it either surrendered or died, and every threat he'd ever made was forefront in her mind.

"Trust me, sweetheart, you've seen the last of Byron and his clan. The next time you lay eyes on him will be either at his trail, or your divorce proceedings. I'm getting pissed that this whole thing is taking so long, but Serena tells me his attorney has filed everything he can think of to keep this out of court. I promised her if he gets away with what he did to you, I'd teach him a lesson with a baseball bat he won't soon forget. I just want you to promise me you'll be careful until this is all resolved. Don't go anywhere without the security guy I hired, and stay vigilant of your surroundings." Harry's hands framed Desi's face as she issued her warning. It was an exercise in willpower to leave the house every morning now and not stay to take care of the woman she loved.

"I promise." She kissed Harry once more before moving to get up. "Are you ready to go, or do you have more patients?"

"As a matter of fact I have one more patient for today, then I'll treat my best girl to dinner. Want to come meet him? He's one of the players for the Saints. They had bad luck with broken ankles this past season that ruined their playoff hopes, but we'll always hold out hope for next year." Harry helped Desi onto her feet then stood up to join her.

"That sounds fun. Are you sure he won't be upset if I'm in there with you?"

"Unless he's modest about showing off his foot I don't think so." They entered the exam room nearest the waiting room where one of the largest men Desi had ever laid eyes on was sitting up on the table. It was exciting meeting one of the players she saw on television quite often, but it was a bigger thrill when Harry introduced Desi as her girlfriend.

Assuring Desi they didn't need to go home and change to go to dinner, Harry headed in the direction of one of her favorite restaurants. Before arriving she asked Desi a serious question. "You do like Chinese food don't you?"

"It's one of my favorites actually. Why?"

"I'm just checking. I'd hate to have to end this relationship before it got off the ground if you found it offensive. I love you but I'm not giving up Chinese food for you." The teasing explanation made Desi laugh as Harry pulled into the parking lot of the Five Happiness Restaurant.

The owner, an attractive oriental woman, came out from behind the podium and hugged Harry the minute she saw her. The woman's actions made Desi wonder if there were any women in the city who didn't find themselves comfortable within the circle of Harry's embrace. After seeing the arched eyebrow on Desi's face, Harry introduced her to the woman and her husband, who was still behind the desk. Before they were even seated at their table, Desi noticed an assortment of appetizers awaiting them. It was obvious this was one of Harry's favorite and frequent haunts.

After swallowing the piece of eggroll in her mouth, Desi decided to start the conversation she'd been putting off with Harry. She didn't want to assume anything about their future, but she was afraid of the answers she might get to the questions she had.

"Harry?"

"What, don't you like your food?"

"I love the food, honey, I just want to talk to you."

"I'm all ears, so shoot."

"Harry," Desi started again taking a deep breath before going on. "When do you want Rachel and me to move out? I don't want to overstay our welcome but I need some time to find a new place and a way to pay for it. Now that I have a little mobility back I can start looking for a job. It just might take a while since the only job I've ever had is working as a cashier in grocery store, but I had to quit when Byron decided no wife of his should be working," Desi fell silent as she thought about the door she had just opened. Harry had been quite candid up to now, and she expected she would be so on this topic as well.

"You aren't moving out and neither is Rachel. Well, Rachel is free to go whenever she finds someone special she wants to live with, but you're stuck with me." She put her hand up as if she'd thought of something else. "What I mean is, if you don't have any objections to staying with me, you aren't moving out. In the mean time if you want to find a job because you're bored sitting at home, and want something challenging to do, then go for it. I just ask that you wait until your leg is completely healed, especially if it's something that would require you to stand or move around at all."

"But I just can't stay with you and live off you forever. It isn't right, and I can't ask you to do that for both me and my sister."

"God you're stubborn, Desiree, that hasn't changed one bit since we met. You didn't ask me, I offered and there aren't any strings attached. I want to live with you and I know your sister comes as part of the package. That's why I bought a big house. Don't you want to live with me?" She pushed her plate away a little and dropped her fork.

Desi noticed Harry running her fingers through her hair and knew Harry was worried about their leaving. "You know I do, but I want to contribute something to this. You took care of us growing up and it shouldn't always fall to you to do that, honey."

"What are you talking about? You and Rachel do plenty for me, then and now. In school you were both there all the time cheering me on when I was playing whatever, and you took care of me all the time."

Desi blushed and shook her head. "I didn't do all that much."

"Are you kidding? My mother always got a kick out of watching you serve me dinner. I'm not sure where you picked up that little Spanish custom, but it made her happy to know I was in good hands, but not just because of what some might consider a subservient act. In our culture it just means you love the person you're doing it for, and that's how you always make me feel. You made sure I took care of myself then, and you're doing it now. But most important of all is that you love me. That was always payment enough for me and it would be no different now."

Desi held out her hand and Harry took it without hesitation. "I do want to take care of you and I want to build a life with you. After all that's happened, and all the years that were stolen from us, I just ask that you're patient with me. If you are, I promise to do everything I can to make you proud of me and happy that I'm a part of your life."

"I love you, Desi. I'm already proud of you, sweetheart. Now all I want is for you to be happy and find the things in life that'll keep you that way. Just lean on me when you need, and that'll make you strong enough in the future for me to be able to do the same in return. Think of it as a loan, not a monetary loan, but an emotional one. And I plan to collect on it for the rest of my life, if you'll have me. Life has been cruel enough to us, don't make it any harder by trying to separate us again. Unless you find my company horrible, I want you to stay. Besides, Mona would never forgive me if you left. She'd find some way to blame it all on me, and I know you don't want that." Harry reached over and placed her other hand against Desi's cheek, trying to convey the truthfulness of what she was saying.

"You're right, I don't want to leave, but I don't want you to think I was taking advantage of you. Did you really mean that I could get a job?" She felt selfish, but she leaned into the warm hand and soaked up the affection Harry was offering.

Harry could tell it was going to take some time for Desi to come to think of herself as a useful person. To see herself as someone who had something to offer the world, instead of an animal that was beaten when it did something its master didn't like. Her self worth and esteem was something that son of bitch had obviously taken away from her, one beating at a time. No matter how long it took her, Harry would try to build both back in the young vibrant woman.

"Honey, that's up to you. Just because you live with me doesn't mean I own you. If you really want a job, then go out and get one. What do you want to do?"

"I don't know, I don't have any experience doing anything," said Desi in a dejected voice. Besides graduating from high school, she hadn't taken any other form of training or continuing education because Byron wouldn't allow it. He always told her it was a waste of time and money.

"Why don't you give some consideration to going back to school? It would take some brushing up on the basics, but you could do it if you really wanted to. That way I can brag I'm going out with a coed. It doesn't even have to be college if that's not what you are interested in. You could go to work with Rachel for instance. Just think about it, you don't have to decide this very minute," said Harry.

The more they talked the bigger the smile on Desi's face got. That fact lightened Harry's spirits knowing the Desi she remembered was still buried under the abuse Byron had heaped upon her. As much as that thrilled her though, she was looking forward to getting to know the woman Desi had become, and would eventually grow into.

The drive back to the house reminded Desi of their days in Harry's old two-seater. With the new brace on her leg she was able to ride up front with Harry, and they took advantage of the fact by holding hands. They had made plans to fly to Florida the next weekend to visit Harry's parents and her brother, Raul, who was practicing medicine in Fort Lauderdale. Having Raul live so close made Harry's mother, Maria happy, since she got to see her three grandchildren all the time. Desi was apprehensive about the trip, but Harry had assured her that her family held no ill will toward her in any way.

Holding the door for Desi to enter the house, Harry led the way to the stairs and the newest piece of equipment she had Mona install that afternoon. It was a motorized chair that would carry Desi to the second floor so she wouldn't have to maneuver the steps with her crutches. "You do think of everything, don't you, honey? Are you tired of carrying me up the steps?"

"That would be one of my most favorite parts of the day, but when I'm not around you can use this. I promise one more month tops, and you'll be getting around just like before, it's my money back guarantee. I just didn't want you to feel trapped upstairs when I'm not home."

Leaning Desi's crutches against the banister, Harry lifted her up into her arms and started the trek up to their bedroom. It had become just that in the past month, with the changes Tony and Desi had made. Tony explained to the doctor that since Desi was living there now, and it would be technically Desi's bedroom and she was allowed to redecorate.

The blue walls and comforter on the bed were gone; replaced by light cream walls and matching silk bed linens. They had added an antique dresser for Desi, and with Mona's help, rearranged the closet to accommodate the room's new occupant.

Harry had taken the changes all in stride, not caring what they did, just as long as Desi was happy with the outcome. Passing in the hall in the morning Harry noticed their room wasn't the only one that had been redone. Rachel's was sporting a new look that suited her better, and giving Harry the impression Rachel was in for the duration.

"Sit for a minute and I'll run down and get your crutches. Do you need anything while I'm downstairs?"

"Why don't you bring back a bottle of wine and two glasses? We could relax a little and talk

some more before we go to sleep." Desi was done with the regimen of antibiotics and painkillers Harry had prescribed so she felt safe in asking.

"Excellent suggestion. I'll be right back."

Harry walked out of the room and headed down the stairs into the kitchen, where she found Rachel eating a sandwich. "Rough night, squirt?"

"Actually the night's looking up, it's just been a bitch of a day. If I have to look at one more strand of hair I'm going to scream. What are you doing down here?"

"I'm getting some wine for your sister and I to finish off our evening with. We're retiring for the night, so unless you fall in the tub and break your leg, I don't want to hear from you until the morning. Good night," teased Harry as she removed one of the bottles from the rack in the wine cooler.

"Just one thing, Harry."

She stopped and turned around. "Is something wrong?"

Rachel took a deep breath and held it as she shook her head. "Nothing's wrong, I just want to talk to you for a minute."

"Whatever it is, it's all right, just tell me."

"I just want you to be..." she blushed losing her usual bravado.

"You just want me to be what?" Harry wrapped her arms around Rachel's back and felt the her breath through her shirt when Rachel buried her face against her chest. "It's all right, sweetheart, tell me what's on your mind."

"You promise not to be mad?"

"I promise."

"Desi's never had a pleasant time with intimacy, so I want you to be gentle if she's willing to try. With Byron, sometimes I wanted to stop what was happening, but it would've only made it worse for her." Harry held her tighter when the tears started from the memories. "But now I see how happy she is and how her confidence is slowly coming back. Please don't do anything to ruin that for her."

Harry placed her hand on Rachel's cheek and looked her in the eye. "I love her, sweetheart. That means if I only get to hold her, for as long as it takes for her to get comfortable with more, I'll be happy. I promise I'll be gentle and I promise I'll cherish her for as long as she'll let me.

"I didn't tell you because I don't believe in you, Harry."

"I know, you said something because you love your sister," Harry finished for her, wiping away the tears on Rachel's face. "I'm glad you were there for her, keeping her whole until we found each other again."

"Thanks for not getting mad at me, and could you not..." Rachel stopped again not knowing if she had the right to ask any more.

"Just between us, sweetie." Harry kissed her forehead and hugged her one last time.

"Thanks, you're the best, Harry. Good night, and good going," said Rachel as she laughed at the retreating back.

Walking back into the bedroom, Harry almost dropped the wine bottle when she saw Desi sitting on the bed. Their latest shopping trip had obviously taken Desi and Tony to other places besides the paint and fabric store, if the nightgown she had put on was any indication. The navy blue silk material hugged all of Desi's curves in just the right places, and the thin straps that held it up where begging to be pulled down.

Although Harry had been waiting for years to come into a room and find Desi in this position, it seemed as if her feet were glued to the floor and her brain had seized up, rendering her immobile. Standing there opening and closing her mouth like a trout out of water, Harry was frantically trying to get her feet to cooperate with the part of her brain that was screaming at her to run over to the bed. Her talk with Rachel was still fresh in her mind though, so she went slowly.

Desi sat there amused at the reaction she was getting. She was fairly certain the look Harry was giving her was one of wanting and not of repulsion. It had taken some persuasion on Tony's part to get Desi to purchase the sleepwear, but now she was glad he had been so persistent.

"Come closer, honey," said Desi. Harry could only nod her head and stare. If she raked her eyes over Desi's body one more time, she was going to get dizzy and fall on the floor.

With one quick shake of her head, Harry was able to move forward until her knees were butted up against the mattress. Desi never broke eye contact with her as she removed the bottle and glasses from Harry's hands. "Sit with me for a minute?" Harry was now grinning and nodding like an idiot, making Desi want to break out in a deep laugh.

"I think we've waited long enough for the things we really want. Don't you? Those nights spent on my front porch swing were nice, but I think it's time we took things a little further. Would you like that?" As she had been talking Desi had been running her nail along the fabric of Harry's shirtfront, listening to the scraping sound it was making on the cotton material. When Desi reached the collar she slipped her fingers into touch the skin on Harry's neck, she watched for any reluctance on Harry's part, but Harry's eyelids only fluttered closed at first contact. She pressed her lips to Harry's and then pulled away as her hand continued to massage the strong neck.

"Are you sure, Desi? I don't want to hurt you, you're too precious to me," said Harry in a whisper. The look in Desi's eyes was driving her libido into overdrive, but she needed to be sure. There was no way she would ever treat her like Byron had for all those years. When they made love, if they made love, it would have to be by mutual consent.

"Touch me, Harry, I want you to touch me. I want you to erase the memory of the time we've been apart, and I want to start on the life you promised me." With each word Desi tugged Harry closer, wanting more than anything to feel like a desirable woman who was loved.

The touch of their lips, after Desi's request, was electric, so different from all of the other kisses they had shared up to now. Harry scooted closer, making sure not to bump Desi's leg as she went. She ran her fingers across the skin exposed by the low cut negligee watching as Desi's nipples hardened.

"Your hands are so soft, honey," said Desi in a low voice.

"No manual labor will do that for you."

Slipping a finger under one of the straps and pulling it gently off Desi's shoulder, Harry watched it fall, exposing more of Desi's chest. For a split second a flash of fear crossed Desi's face, and Harry stopped all of her advances thinking she had changed her mind.

"What's wrong? If you want to stop it'll be all right. Hell I waited all this time, I really don't mind waiting until you're sure. Don't think you owe me this, I want it to be good for both of us."

"I don't want to stop but I'm just afraid of what you'll find once you take this off. I'm not a young girl anymore, and I don't want you to think I still look eighteen." Desi's face turned red at the admission. She had never thought of herself as beautiful, but if she had given herself to Harry back then, she would have gotten the best she had to offer. Not to mention the small reminders of Byron that now marred parts of her body.

The willing new lover thought the best way to handle the situation, and put to rest Desi's fears, was not through words but through action. Taking her eyes from Desi's for a moment, she lowered the other strap and exposed, to Harry's eyes, two perfect breasts with rosy pink nipples now standing at attention. Easing Desi back onto the pillows lying against the headboard, Harry took her time and looked at Desi's half naked body.

Slowly she dragged one hand over the skin of Desi's abdomen finding it as soft and smooth to the touch as it was easy on the eyes. Leaning over her with a straight arm, Harry took her other hand and ran her fingers down from Desi's throat to the undersides of her left breast, leaving goose bumps in her path. Before she went any further, she silently requested for Desi to lift her bottom a little by tugging on the nightgown so she could slide the garment all the way off. Getting the full picture, Harry was anything but disappointed.

Standing next to the bed Harry pulled her shirt out of the waistband of her pants and slowly started to unbutton it. When she went for the button on her pants she started talking to Desi

again. "Love, you're so beautiful. I want to touch you and have it feel good to you." She stepped out of her pants as they hit the floor, and bent to pull her underwear off. With the last of the clothes she had on now on the floor, Harry stood there giving Desi the same opportunity to look at her.

"Make love to me, Harry." Trying to be confident, Desi raised her hand and offered it to the woman who held her heart and her future.

Lowering herself slowly to the bed, Harry felt the flood between her legs intensify once the length of her body pressed down on Desi's. Holding her weight off of her by her forearms, Harry ducked her head down and pressed her lips to Desi's. They kissed for a long moment, giving them the opportunity to get comfortable with the fact they were pressed skin to skin. Harry was the first to pull away, drawing a disappointed moan from Desi.

"Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere." Harry promised as she carefully nudged Desi's legs apart with her knee, pressing their sexes together. She could feel the heat and wetness coming from Desi's most private area, and she took a moment to relish the effect she had on her.

"You feel so good, honey, I've dreamed of this for so long. I'd given up on ever having you on me like this, except in my imagination. I thought you would've found someone else by now," admitted Desi. She ran her hands up and down Harry's back, loving the feel of the firm smooth skin.

"No one else was you, my love." She sucked Desi's bottom lip into her mouth, cutting off any other conversation for the moment. Harry had waited almost twenty years, and she was anxious to give herself over to loving the woman in her arms.

She pushed the top part of her body up a little so she could bend her head and look at Desi's chest. All the while they had been kissing, Desi's nipples had been pressing up into her chest driving her mad.

"Please, baby, let me touch you," the want in Harry's voice made Desi arch her back up to feel Harry again so intimately.

"I'm yours, Harry. No one else will ever touch me again." Having Harry ask for the right to touch her broke down the last of Desi's fears. She didn't really need it but it was verification that her life would never be the same again.

When Harry pressed up on one arm, the muscles along her chest and arms stood out in relief catching Desi's attention to the perfection of her body. Before she could continue to admire Harry's physique, a persistent mouth latched onto one of her nipples and the instant sensation of pleasure made her eyelids flutter closed. Harry wasted no time in giving both breasts equal attention, before her explorations turned to points further south.

She moved her fingers slowly down Desi's body until she reached the very top of Desi's sex. "I love you so much," said Harry.

"Please, honey, please make me yours." Desi reached down and ran her fingers through Harry's hair, and looked into her blue eyes, the mere memory of which had gotten her through the beatings, and everything else life had thrown at her.

Harry smiled for her, her eyes showing the sincerity in her heart. "Tonight, we'll give ourselves to each other, and it'll be that way forever," she promised before the need to touch Desi won out.

Hearing the hiss of pain mixed in with the pleasure made Harry stop and get a pillow for Desi's injured leg before moving back to the end of the bed. With her two index fingers she spread the wet lips of Desi's sex, noticing right off that she could have taken Desi's pulse by putting her finger on the protruding clitoris.

Not making her wait any longer Harry closed her lips around it and sucked, almost falling off the bed when the exclamation came. "Holy Mother of God!" was wrenched from Desi when Harry's lips closed around the point of her need, and Harry wasn't the only one who heard it. Small hands came down and grabbed two fists full of hair keeping Harry in place, so even if she had wanted to come up and make a smart comment it wasn't going to happen now.

In her room a couple of doors down from the master suite, Rachel smiled and pumped her fist in the air. "You go, Harry," Rachel said in a soft voice. She had never heard that kind of passion in Desi's voice.

Placing her hands under Desi's bottom, Harry made it easier for her to move her hips to the suction she was creating, without Desi having to put stress on her leg. "I need to feel you inside me, Harry, please. Please make me yours," panted Desi. Harry was taking her up so high and so fast that she didn't want to come without feeling everything Harry could give her.

Without breaking her mouth away, Harry pulled one hand free, and slid one long finger in slowly. "Uh, yes, baby, yes. That feels so good," Desi was able to grunt out. Harry kept moving her finger in slowly as she changed what she was doing with her mouth trying to extend Desi's pleasure. As Harry started to move her finger in and out she formed a point with her tongue and circled the hard clitoris with it, coming close but not touching it.

"Baby, please don't tease me," begged Desi.

"Relax, honey, and go with it. Feel me loving you," Harry said as she moved up the bed to lie next to Desi. Putting her thumb where her tongue had just been, she started whispering in Desi's ear. "Let yourself go, you're safe here with me. I love you, and that's never going to change. You belong with me, Desi. You own my heart and my love."

Desi grabbed her by the hair again and pulled Harry's mouth down to hers, kissing her in a way that would show Harry how much she loved her. Tasting herself on Harry's mouth sent her flying even higher. When the feeling welling up in her was too great, Desi let her head fall to the pillow as she grabbed onto Harry's shoulders to keep herself anchored to the bed. It all felt so good, the hand between her legs, the feel of Harry's breathing in her ear and the feel of her solid body

pressed to hers. Desi did what the doctor ordered. S
She relaxed and let go.

The orgasm took her by surprise, and she just stopped moving for a second to let the sensation wash over her. Desi had never felt something so intense, and so good. Harry had given her something Byron had never even come close to. It seemed to be over too fast, yet when the tremors stopped, they were both covered in a light coat of sweat, Harry was sporting a fresh set of nail marks down her back and Desi felt she could repeat the whole thing with little encouragement. Reduced to a mass of panting quivering flesh, it took her a long while to get her ability to form coherent sentences again, and Harry was happy just to hold her.

"That was, well I don't really know how to describe it."

"Did it feel good?"

"Yes, doc, it felt good, but I think we need to try it again as soon as possible just to make sure it wasn't a fluke," teased Desi. She had turned a little so that she could lie on Harry, and felt the strong arms hold her tight.

For the moment her own need was sated, but there was something else Desi had a burning desire to try. She never moved from her comfortable perch, considering it left her in a position where she could run a hand down Harry's body reaching the wet heat waiting for her. She was dying to try and please Harry, and Desi only hoped she could deliver the kind of bliss Harry had.

Sex had never, before this night, been one of her favorite things. It was something Byron expected of her and not something she looked forward to or savored. After what had just happened between them, Desi was seriously contemplating buying some handcuffs and keeping Harry prisoner in the room.

Feeling brave, Desi slid her hand further down and parted the wet folds she found. Sucking on the strong column of throat under her lips, Desi started a steady stroking motion from the top of the curly patch down to the opening of Harry's sex. Her stroking got more concentrated until her fingers were only on the hard point that signified the center of Harry's want. Desi's fingers were so slick from the wetness that her fingers slid downwards as she pressed down on it making Harry's hips rise off the bed. She realized she would have to move with Harry so she could keep her fingers where she wanted them.

"Does that feel good, honey?"

"Please don't stop," Harry panted. Desi kept her hand in place but moved so she was lying on top of Harry, wanting to feel the heat of the doctor's body under hers. Without missing a beat Harry latched onto one of the breasts swaying in front of her face causing Desi to jerk her hips dragging herself along Harry's hip. The sharp intake of breath told Harry all she needed to know, Desi's libido had awakened again, and this time they would come together.

"Move your hand a second, baby," Harry requested.

When Desi looked up with a sad face, thinking she had done something wrong, Harry quickly remedied the situation by sliding a long leg in between her thighs doing the same with Desi's leg. Bending her leg up took the pressure off Desi's knees and with a quick thrust Harry pressed up and encouraged Desi to come down. It didn't take much stimulation to reach their goal, and they swallowed the sounds of their climaxes in the kiss they were sharing.

When Desi went to move off of Harry, she kept her in place with the hand she had on Desi's back. Not really wanting to move, Desi sunk back into Harry's embrace and relaxed as Harry drew figure eight's on her back.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Desi.

"That I need to turn down the heater if this is going to become a habit."

"Do you want it to become a habit, or was this a one shot deal?" The way she had asked, Harry got the impression that she was afraid of the answer.

"Yes I want this to become a habit, and yes this was a one shot deal." Harry's answer only confused Desi more. "We are going to engage in this behavior every chance we get, and now that we have, there's no turning back for me, Desi. You're the one I've always wanted, and now you're stuck with me so I hope you liked it. You aren't going anywhere now."

"Oh, trust me, baby, I'm not going anywhere. I love you, Harry."

"I love you too, baby, now go to sleep."

[Continued in Chapter 4](#)

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~ How Do You Mend A Broken Heart ~

by Ali Vali
December 2005

Disclaimers: [See Part 1](#)

Comments can be sent to me at terrali20@yahoo.com.

Chapter 4

Across the street from the now darkened house, Byron and Mike sat in the car biding their time waiting to go in and get Desi. Since his release from jail, Byron had been a model citizen awaiting trial, lulling Desi and whomever the woman she was staying with into thinking he'd given up and forgotten about his wife.

It was now time for Desi to come home and forget about the charges she'd filed and drop the divorce proceedings. There was no way he was going to give his wife her freedom without a fight. She belonged to him and it was time she started to realize that meant she wasn't going anywhere until he said so.

"Looks like everybody's finally down for the count," said Mike. He had a bad feeling about what they had planned but his father had sided with Byron on this issue and he had no choice but to help his brother collect his wife or start looking for a new place to live and a new job.

"Let's wait another hour and then they should all be asleep. I don't want that tall bitch calling the cops until we're back home and I've had a chance to talk to Desi. Once I'm done with her, I won't have any more legal problems, and she'll forget about whoever her new friend is.

"It'll take me awhile to forgive that stupid bitch wife of mine for the days I spent sitting in jail with all those animals, but I've got something special in mind for that." Byron had yet to see either Desi or the woman his brother had described coming or going from the house, but from the movement inside he knew they were there. It was a given Rachel was probably staying there too, but he hadn't seen her either and for the moment he wasn't interested in her.

"Okay, it should be all right to go in now. Just follow close behind me and get ready to carry Desi out once we find her. Don't stop to ask questions, just grab her and get moving before the cops get a chance to respond to any calls anyone in the house makes. Got me?" Mike nodded in understanding as the acid in his stomach increased. Even though he'd done some stupid shit in his life, none of them had landed him in jail, but this just might prove to be the one that did.

Cutting the main electric feed going into the house, Byron waited until he saw the green light on the alarm panel near the back door go out, signaling it was all right to enter. Breaking one of the old leaded panes of glass in one of the downstairs windows, he reached inside and unlocked it and slid it open. Listening for any signs of life coming from anyone in the house, Byron motioned for Mike to follow him once he crawled through the window.

Looking around he noticed they were in a study of some sort from the books lining the shelves in the room. *I always wondered what the inside of all these big houses were like*, thought Byron as he moved from one room to the next looking for the stairs.

Upstairs, one of the sleeping bodies rolled over hearing something out of place deep in her subconscious. "Was that the sound of breaking glass?" The woman was groggy from sleep so her question came out mumbled. She cleared her throat and tried again. "Honey, wake up. I think there's someone downstairs," the small woman said a little louder in an effort to rouse her

sleeping companion.

"There isn't anyone downstairs, sweetheart, I set the alarm myself before we went to bed."

Before heading up the stairs, Mike made a quick detour into the kitchen to open the back door for a quick getaway once they found Desi, getting a thumbs up from his brother for his quick thinking. Stepping onto the first step he prayed the old staircase didn't creak and wake someone up before they found their prey.

Reaching the second floor, they paused to let their eyes adjust to the minimal light in the long darkened hallway, and tried to figure out what room Desi was in. The easiest way, they figured, was to start at the end and work their way back toward the stairs. The two brothers moved quietly to the door on the end and opened it as slowly and as quietly as they could.

Standing in the middle of the room, Byron looked down on the bed and let his anger wash over him. Any plan they'd talked about before breaking in flew from his mind as rage swept through him. From the outline under the blankets and the bare shoulders peaking out, he could tell there were two naked bodies lying there and it became quite clear why Desi wanted a divorce. She'd found some rich sugar daddy to keep her in style so she didn't need him anymore.

"You fucking bitch!" The scream caused a flurry of motion to come from the bed.

Without another thought to keeping quiet, the furious man stepped forward and threw the sheet over the small woman on the bed. He tried to ignore the obvious smell of sex that wafted up when he pulled it from the bed. There would be plenty of time to think about that later once he had his wife back under his heel.

Throwing her over his shoulder, Byron headed toward the door, shouting a threat as he crossed the threshold, "Stay the fuck away from my wife, asshole." The older man was right behind him so Byron gave into the urge he'd had since walking in. Without remorse, he cocked his fist back and punched the guy in the face. "I fucking mean it. Stay away from her."

"What in the hell are you talking about? Come back here you idiot. Do you know who you're dealing with?" The man shook his head as if to clear it of the blow before running naked after the two men screaming the whole way, but neither of them stopped.

None of the lights in the house would work as he flipped switches and he ran after the two down the stairs, desperately trying to reach them before they ran out of the house with his wife. Passing the tray where he put his wallet, keys and cell phone the man grabbed the phone as he ran out of the kitchen into the night. Not stopping to realize he was naked and shouting outside of his house, he switched the phone on and called 911.

"911 operator how can I help you?" asked the tired voice on the other end once the call went through.

"This is Judge Jude Rose, I need the police sent to my residence immediately. Two men just broke in and kidnapped my wife. Their license number is NIC 224. It's a late model blue Buick I

think and they are driving away now. Tell them to step on it, they're headed toward St. Charles Avenue!" He could still hear his feet slapping along the pavement as he yelled into the phone. The car he'd described was getting further away with no traffic to slow it down because of the late hour.

"Judge, what is your address?"

"4534 State Street."

"Okay, sir, there are units heading toward you now and the units cruising the area have been dispatched toward St. Charles in search of the vehicle you described. Do you have any idea who the two men were?"

"I have no idea, but one of them sounded vaguely familiar." Realizing he was now about a block and a half from his house, Jude turned around and headed back to get dressed.

Every fiber in his body wanted to jump in his car and go after the two morons who dared to come into his home and do this, but would wait by the phone for the officers dispatched to his house. Allowing the police to do their jobs would assure a successful prosecution, and in that arena, he felt he had some say in what happened to them.

"Can you send someone out from the utility and phone company as well, I think the two idiots cut through some of the wires outside. I don't have any power or phone but my neighbors lights are on." Jude watched as the lights in more than one home popped on as he made it back. Figuring they must have heard him screaming as he ran down the street he rushed to make it back and get dressed.

"Sure thing, Judge Rose, there are two units just a block from your house but I'd like for you to stay on the line with me until they arrive."

"I'd be happy to since you're going to give me an update if any of the units call in with a progress report. What's your name?"

"Lee Smith, sir."

"Thank you for your help, Lee, I'll make sure to call your supervisor once this is all over." He remembered the manners his mother had pounded into him as a child even in the face of a crisis.

"Thank you, sir, that's not necessary, I'll let you go since the police are in your driveway. Good luck and I hope Mrs. Rose is all right."

"Thank you and good night."

Byron turned the wheel and skidded on to St. Charles Avenue, but only for a block before he

turned off onto one of the smaller side streets. "I said shut up or I'll pull over and make you shut up," he screamed. He still had the image of Desi in bed with that old creep and it was making him madder by the moment.

"What in the fuck were you thinking, Desi? Did you think I wouldn't find out you found some old geezer to shack up with uptown? Start praying now that I don't kill you when we get home." Byron gripped the steering wheel of Mike's car and tried to fight the urge to pull over and pummel the crying woman, still covered in a sheet, sitting in the back with his brother. A couple of his knuckles were already swollen and bruised from the punch he'd delivered earlier. "What, he offered to buy you a new dress so you spread your legs for him?"

"Who's Desi?" asked the muffled tear-wracked voice from the back seat. Victoria Rose was trying to figure out who these two men were and what in the world they wanted with her. After agreeing to marry Jude after clerking for him out of law school five years prior, she was afraid the day would come when one of the nuts he sentenced would come after them, but she wasn't prepared for the actual event.

"Don't play stupid, you're coming home and there ain't nothing you can do about it now. We're going to have a little talk about the charges you filed against me and the divorce papers they hit me with before leaving jail." With some effort he pulled his foot back off the accelerator and slowed down. The last thing they needed now was to be pulled over for speeding.

"Sir, I'm sorry you're having trouble with your spouse, but I can assure you I'm not her. My name is Victoria Rose and I'd appreciate if you were to stop and let me out of this car before this situation gets any worse for you than it already is." She was trying to sound calm and confident hoping this guy would listen to reason and not just kill her once he figured out the extent of his screw up.

"Holy shit, Byron, we grabbed the wrong woman! We're going down for this I just know it. Pull over and let her out. We need time to about what we need to do next. I'm sorry, lady, we didn't mean any harm," said Mike. *I should've listened to that voice in my head that said this was a bad idea*, he thought as his brother made no attempt to pull over.

"Get a grip, brother, before I shove you out of the car too. Let me just think." Byron made a quick decision and headed back to St. Charles so it would be a clear shot to the interstate. "I know there's some fancy hotel up here on the left, we'll leave her there and head home. She doesn't have any idea of who we are and Pop will be our alibi we were home all night," Byron concluded, as he made a U-turn and pulled up in front of the Ponchatrain Hotel yelling for her to get out. Looking in the rearview mirror he noticed no one was following them, and slumped in his seat with relief.

"Sir, there's a call for you from your wife," said the police officer standing in the judge's den. He handed the man the phone and stepped back to give him some privacy.

"Sweetheart, is that you?" Relief washed over Jude when he heard her sweet voice answering him. She was all right and she was coming home.

"I'm okay, honey, just hang on there and one of these nice officers will give me a ride home. Seems this was all a big misunderstanding on the part of our two kidnappers."

When Jude finished talking to her, the police captain standing in his den started explaining what they had found out so far. "The license you reported to the emergency operator is registered to a Michael Simoneaux residing in the Ninth Ward. We tried to ascertain why Mr. Simoneaux would want to break into your house and kidnap your wife, the only connection we could find, sir, is his brother."

"His brother? Who is his brother, captain?"

"That would be Byron Simoneaux who was recently before you in a domestic abuse case. After speaking with the officer who took a brief statement from your wife, the only thing I can figure is that he somehow got the idea that his wife was staying with you, so he decided to break in here to get her back. I have units waiting to apprehend him and his brother when they get home and they're also under orders to look for his brother's car along any route back to either his or his brother's house. The brother, Michael, still lives with his parents so it's my guess that's where they'd be headed," explained Captain Simmons.

When he heard over the scanner who was calling in a kidnapping he had headed out to the scene immediately. The mayor would have his head on the chopping block in a minute if the police department didn't appear to be doing all it could to get Mrs. Rose back. To top it all off, they'd also had reports of a crazed stalker in the neighborhood, he just knew it had to be a full moon.

"Thank you, captain, now if you would excuse me, I see my wife is back." Jude walked out of the back door to greet Victoria, pulling her into a hug while trying to keep the sheet in place. The officers at the house tried not to notice how beautiful she was and that there was nothing under the designer sheet except skin. If Judge Rose was a legend in the law enforcement circles before because of his tough sentences, this would only add to the mystique.

"They didn't touch you did they, sweetheart?"

"Don't worry, love, they just took me for a little ride then dropped me off at the Ponchatrain Hotel down the street. The one named Byron kept calling me Desi, and thought I was having an affair with you."

Now that Victoria was home the reality of what happen hit her and she broke down into choking sobs when Jude explained who Desi was. He tried to remember all the facts as Serena had relayed them to him in court, and the passionate way she had presented them.

If Serena was that involved in this case considering her workload, and this idiot thought his wife was staying with him, taking into consideration where their house was, he came up with a plausible explanation. After getting Victoria calmed down, Jude picked up the phone in their room and dialed the number without having to look it up.

"Hello," the sleep rough voice answered. "This had better be good because I'm looking at my clock and it says four thirty in the morning." Harry's gruff voice was a little more coherent after she rolled over to her side and scrubbed her face with her other hand.

"Good morning, sunshine. I have only one question for you," said Jude. Even though he was furious, his voice sounded deceptively calm and sweet.

"Uncle Jude, is everything all right? Are you or Victoria hurt?"

"Funny you should ask me that, Harry, because no, I'm not all right, and I have a sinking feeling I have you to thank for that. Is there someone there with you, Harry?"

Not realizing the consequences of her answer Harry just responded honestly. "Actually I do have someone staying with me. My houseguest's sister is staying with me too if that's important. Is there a crime against that I don't know about?"

"No, honey, there isn't, but I do have some news for you. Tonight Byron and Michael Simoneaux broke into my house and kidnapped Victoria..." Jude started, only to be interrupted by a now wide awake Harry.

"Oh my God, Uncle Jude, is she all right?" Ready to go their house if Victoria needed medical attention, Harry sat up and swung her legs over the side of the bed. That woke Desi making her roll over and rub Harry's back in a soothing motion.

"Calm down, Harry, she's all right and she's back home. Vicki's just a little shaken up, but they were smart enough to let her go and not harm her in anyway. There'd have been no escape for them if they had. For some strange reason though, Harry, they thought Desi was living in this house. Care to enlighten me?"

It took a minute for her to figure out the answer, but Harry remembered the afternoon of their lunch and explained why the brothers might have mistaken his house for hers after she had pulled into his driveway when trying to get away from Michael.

She apologized, thinking Byron might only go over and scream at them from the front yard. She assumed that the idiot would figure out Harry had tricked him, and it was the judge who had arraigned him who lived there, he would have just left them alone. She had no way of knowing he would try something so stupid.

For a brief second she felt ashamed from the relief of the ordeal happening to someone else and knowing Desi was safe. Her parents would never forgive her for putting their dearest friend's spouse in danger. Jude and Raul had known each other since college and he was godfather to both of the Basantes children.

Jude couldn't stay mad at Harry long. He never could look into her mischievous blue eyes and hold any animosity toward the girl he had cradled as a baby and watched grow into one of the most respected surgeons in the country. Hell, she had even done his knee replacement surgery,

which let him enjoy his golf game every Tuesday afternoon with his wife.

"Harry, don't worry about it, I understand why you did it. You might just have to take Victoria to lunch and introduce her to this wonderful girl you're so eager to protect. I might come along so I can tell Maria I had the pleasure of meeting the one who finally managed to capture New Orleans' most eligible bachelor and take her out of circulation. Tell Desi I'll take care of this in the morning and she won't have to worry about the Simoneaux brothers for long while. Good night."

Harry had to take a to think of the best way to tell Desi of Byron's latest stunt. Desi was awake and rubbing circles on her back. It was so comforting it made Harry very aware of how hard it would be to live without Desi in her life now. The mere idea of someone like Byron harming Desi made her nauseous. She turned to face Desi and figured blunt honesty might be the best course of action given the circumstances.

She lay down again and gathered Desi into her arms and started explaining in a low tone. Desi winced when she got to the part about Byron and Mike actually taking Victoria out of the house. Desi could only imagine what Byron would have done if he had walked in and found her naked in bed with Harry. Knowing his bigoted views, she was certain he'd have killed both of them for engaging in what he considered perverted acts against nature.

"I'm going to have to leave you, Harry." The way Desi said it made it impossible for Harry not to hear the sadness in her voice, but if Desi had to give up her happiness to keep Harry safe, that's what she was willing to do. It was better to go back to the life she'd shared with Byron than to take the chance of losing Harry to the maniac she would never be rid of.

"Do you want to leave because you don't love me, or do you want to go because you're afraid?"

"You don't know him like I do, I couldn't live with the fear that I'd be responsible for getting you hurt. I love you too much for that. Don't you see it's the only way? How could I ever possibly find happiness again if something were to happen to you?"

Harry stared at Desi's back after she rolled over and faced the bathroom wall. All she could do was to be honest and speak from her heart. "You live one day at a time, Desi, and before you know it, you've built a life. I never thought you'd come back to me so that's what I did. I got up every morning and I went to class, I studied and before I knew what was going on I was standing on a podium in Baton Rouge and they were handing me a diploma. Afterward came medical school, and then a career, but in all that time I couldn't stop thinking about you. There was always the hope in the back of my mind that I'd run into you one day and you'd explain what happened, and maybe if enough time had gone by you'd be willing to give us another chance. That has always been my hope, and for the sake of my own sanity I refused to let it go."

"Oh, honey, I'm so sorry." The shoulders Harry was looking at slumped in apparent defeat.

"I don't want you to be sorry, I just want you to believe in that same hope. Do you know that after I passed my boards, I went to your house thinking that maybe you'd come and celebrate

with me? That perhaps enough time had passed for you to have forgiven whatever I did."

"What happened?" Desi rolled back over and looked at the hurt expression on Harry's face. She was shocked to hear Harry had made the effort to contact her even after all the unanswered pleas that had come before it.

"Your father explained to me you were married and happy with your life. He told me I should just leave you alone and get on with my own. I sat there with him on our swing as he slapped me on the back and congratulated me on my accomplishments. He said your aspirations weren't so grand with that small laugh of his. You just wanted to be a good wife and mother."

She reached out and placed her hand on Harry's cheek. "Oh, honey, I really am so sorry."

"I asked him if you had kids, and he told me no but you did have one on the way. That statement, delivered with such a straight face, put a knife through my heart. I left there and just buried myself in work. I worked, I built up my body and I fucked around. That was my life, Desi, and that's what you are asking me to go back to." For the first time since they had found each other, Harry's head dropped in shame. "The truth of who we are, is we're better off together than apart. We're happy because the love we share is real. All I'm asking for is that you not throw it away. Not again." She reached out and ran her fingers along Desi's jaw. "Take a chance this time. We've paid our dues and it's time to collect for our suffering."

Harry finished and bent to kiss Desi, praying she wouldn't move away. The lips Harry touched opened immediately drinking in what she had to offer.

Desi pulled Harry on top of her, trying to remind herself of what she had to lose. She wanted this, and Harry was right, it was time to put fear aside and take the things she wanted out of life. Desi wanted to be happy, and Harry was the one who brought her happiness, but the most important thing was that Harry loved her. She welcomed the kiss and encouraged the hand that had found itself back between her legs awakening her desires. As long as they were together it would always be this way, Desi was certain of it.

"Yes, Harry, touch me, honey. I want you, only you," Desi said as her hips started to buck. Harry wasn't interested in finesse nor in going slow, she wanted Desi in the worst way and she was going to have her. If she'd said it wasn't what she wanted Harry would have stopped, but Desi was as turned on as she was. She could feel it in the way Desi was getting wetter and her movements were becoming more frantic. "God, make me yours," said Desi already losing control.

Harry shoved two fingers inside the wet canal and latched onto a hard nipple sucking in with gusto. As Desi crested, a new set of scratch marks graced Harry's back and Desi was left panting. When Harry pulled out she painted Desi's breasts with the proof of her desire sending Desi into overdrive.

Forgetting about her leg Desi pushed Harry onto her back and maneuvered around so she was facing in the opposite direction. Lowering her head between Harry's legs, Desi had to pause a

minute to concentrate on what she was supposed to be doing because of what Harry was already doing to her. Once she grabbed hold of the slick nub with her mouth, Desi gave Harry the same pleasure she was receiving. Desi had to stop as the second orgasm raced through her. When the after tremors started she went back and brought Harry over with her.

Back in Harry's arms she laughed as the deep voice in her ear told her, "I think we should discuss your leaving at least once a week from now until I die. If these are the results I'm going to get, then I'm all for it."

"But, doctor, we have so much lost time to make up for, just once a week is all your willing to commit to?"

"Thank God I work out and I'm relatively healthy, or you could kill me if we did this every night. On the other hand, what a way to go." With a tired sigh, Harry kissed the top of the blond head before she flopped back down to her pillow.

"You really want me to stay?"

"I really want you to stay, Desi. I love you and your little sister too."

"Isn't that supposed to be your little dog too?"

"Well I happen to think Rach is cuter than a dog, but you're the one related to her." The banter had been the main thing Desi had missed over the years. No matter what they had done growing up, Harry had a talent for making her laugh.

"Harry, I sure have missed you."

"So have I, baby, now go to sleep, tomorrow's a school day for me, literally."

Desi rolled over to find the other half of the bed empty, put out that Harry had gotten up without waking her after the night they had shared. She noticed it was still dark outside and was about to call out for her lover when she felt the bed move with Harry's return. "Where'd you go?"

"I had to pee, sorry I woke you up, go back to sleep."

Desi moved until she was lying on top of Harry, loving the feel of the skin under hers. After the phone call from Jude she had a hard time drifting off feeling terrified that Byron would go through all that trouble to get her back. Trying to take her mind off of what he'd done, Desi turned her thoughts to what she wanted to do with the rest of her life if she was going to stay with Harry. She really didn't want to just stay home and wait for her to get back from work, and she hoped her partner wouldn't laugh at what she had come up with.

It was a craft she had learned as a child, and after browsing through some of the shops on

Magazine Street she knew there was a market for it. Sprinkled throughout what was known as New Orleans's miracle mile of antique shops, was designer pottery. The shop owners told her they were always on the lookout for new artists since they couldn't keep what was on the shelves very long, no matter what the cost. Taking a deep breath she decided to broach the subject with Harry.

"Baby, are you sleeping?" asked Desi in a soft voice.

"No, just enjoying holding you. Something on your mind?" Harry asked in a deep voice as she ran her hand up and down Desi's naked back.

"I've decided what I want to do." *There that wasn't so hard, just remember, Desiree, this is not Byron,* she thought.

"Well that's a good thing." Another kiss dropped onto Desi's head. "That's a good thing isn't it?" Harry asked when the silence became prolonged.

"I want to be a potter."

"A potter?"

"You know a potter, as in a person that makes pottery. Why? Do you think that's a stupid idea?"

"Nothing you want to do with your life will ever seem like a stupid idea to me, sweetheart. We should clear that up right off. I happen to think that's a great idea and I'm guessing Tony will be your biggest customer once you get started." Harry had lifted her head a little so she could see Desi's face.

"Are you sure? I could always go back to school like you said."

"I'm happy for you, because I think it's something you'll be good at. Just don't forget about me once you become famous and your stuff is collectable. We'll put our heads together and think of the best way to get you started," Harry promised. She rolled Desi over onto her back and spent some time just slowly kissing her.

The slow affection never materialized into more than an affirmation of the love they shared with small caresses and kisses. They talked until it was time to get up, discussing how best to get Desi started on her new career and what they could do to make it successful. One thing they both agreed on was that it was something Desi could do from home.

Across town the sun started to rise over a dumpster that contained two wet and tired brothers as the police continued their search. They had driven up the back street to their parent's home the night before thinking they could sneak in and shore up their alibi. What they found was a number of police cars parked along the block with the officers sitting and waiting. They had abandoned

Mike's car and set off on foot, deciding on their current hiding place because it was full of just cardboard boxes, until they could figure out what they were going to do.

"Wake up, Mike, we gotta get a move on and find a way back into the house without the cops seeing us." Byron was trying to stretch out his back from the uncomfortable position he'd slept in.

"We are so fucked. I told you that was a stupid idea." It was about the fifth time that Mike had said that same sentence.

"You were the asshole who got the wrong fucking address, so just shut the hell up before I do it for you."

"Don't forget, brother, I'm not Desi. You try and hit me and they'll have to scrape you off the floor." With a hard shove, Mike slammed Byron's back into the other side of their hiding place before he got up and jumped over the side.

Walking back the way they had come, Mike was the first one to notice the group of uniformed police officers surrounding his car. This would effectively cut off any chance they had of getting back into the house where their alibi was waiting. "Fucking great, there goes my ride since there's no way we're getting past all those cops." The whisper still dripped with menace as Mike stepped behind a large group of bushes in a neighbor's yard.

"Don't panic, we'll just say we were out late last night with friends. It's not like I'm jumping bail or anything. I'm not due back in court until the end of the month according to my attorney, so we'll just lay low for a while and let things cool down. Come on let's call Pop and see if he'll spot us some money and lend us a car."

Byron was betting the people they had broken in on last night wouldn't have a clue as to who they were. The only reason the cops were looking at his brother's car was the old guy had gotten lucky with a couple of letters off the license plate. They had left behind no evidence of their identity, so the only mystery left was where Desi was really staying.

By ten that morning they were headed toward the Florida panhandle with a borrowed car and five hundred dollars their father had given them. They would stay in one of Pensacola's cheaper hotels for a couple of days and then return to answer any questions the police might still have for them. Byron was glad that he, unlike women, did not panic in any given situation leaving him open to find reasonable solutions to any problem.

They agreed to not call and tell their father where they would be staying, only saying they were taking a couple of days off, in case the police questioned him. The only thing Byron, Sr. would tell the police was that the boys had left two days prior, making it impossible for them to have been the two the police were looking for.

At ten thirty, Jude's clerk informed Bradley Blum he was expected in court that afternoon. He was to appear with his client so the judge could rule on all the motions Bradley had filed with the

court. The order came after the police informed Jude that the Simoneaux brothers were nowhere to be found.

After their stake out of the night before and throughout the morning, the only thing they had come up with was the car the two had been driving. More than a little miffed over the abduction of his wife and his now very black and swollen eye, Jude knew the two would not resurface anytime soon without motivation. He figured making Byron a fugitive from justice would be a good start.

"Let me get this straight. Your godfather is Judge Jude Rose?" asked Serena.

Jude's clerk had made two phone calls that morning, one to Bradley and the other to Serena. He informed her that Jude was ready to rule on the motions the defense had filed and the trial would be set for the following morning. She had put her phone down and driven uptown before Harry left for work to find out if she knew what had happened that put this trial on a super fast track.

"It's not something I like advertising especially now with all that's going on, but Uncle Jude and my parents are old friends. This won't be a problem will it? It's not like he's going to hear the case is it?" Harry was free for the morning after a Herculean effort to clear her schedule so she could be there for Desi when Serena said she was coming over.

"No, he plans to pass it on to one of the other judges with directions on how it's going to go down no doubt. Only, you didn't hear that from me. Justice is blind after all." She pointed a finger at Harry before going on. "He doesn't want to compromise Desi's safety by allowing this guy to go free on some technicality, but nonetheless, he is taking a personal interest in this process. After hearing about the stunt Byron pulled last night, Jude Rose will be one of his problems, but not his biggest. I'd be a wee bit more concerned with Victoria Rose and what she has planned. She is after all a partner in one of the most ruthless firms in the city when it comes to civil litigation, so he'd better pray he doesn't own tons of property."

"Everything is in his father's name so she might be upset," added Desi.

"Trust me, honey, she'll find the deep pocket." Serena took a sip of her coffee and flipped open her appointment book.

"What happens now?" asked Harry.

"That's why I'm here. I just wanted to brief you both so you know what to expect. This afternoon after consulting my crystal ball, all of Bradley's motions will be shot down and not worth the paper they're written on. Tomorrow morning bright and early we'll go to trial on the charges Desi filed against this asshole, and when said asshole fails to appear, his problems will multiply.

"Unless his father is lying and really does know where he is and can get him there, Byron Simoneaux will have officially jumped bail. For his father who posted his bail with a property

bond, this will translate into having one of the local bail bondsman crawling into his back pocket until Byron resurfaces."

"That sounds like justice all the way around to me." Harry squeezed Desi's hand and smiled for Serena. "Nothing like life giving them tons of shit for a change instead of the other way around."

"Truer words, Harry. What lesson should Byron and his family carry away from this you ask? Never, and I mean never piss off one of the most powerful people on the bench in this city. Unlike all the famous witches and voodoo priests New Orleans is famous for, Jude Rose can really make it rain misery in your life with a nod of his head and a rap of his gavel." Serena smiled at the couple sitting across from her and took another sip of her coffee.

Something had changed since the last time she'd been over and she wasn't leaving until she knew what it was. The clues were there in how they sat close together and that Desi couldn't keep her hands to herself any more than Harry could. Serena's smile only faltered a little when the pain of knowing Harry would never look at her that way popped into her head, but for the most part she was happy for her friend. She only hoped Desi realized just how lucky she was. To Serena, from the day she had met her, Harry had epitomized everything she had wanted in a partner.

"So tomorrow it will all come to an end?" asked Desi.

"I wish that were true, but not really. Tomorrow we'll begin again in a way, but for Byron it'll be the beginning of the end. After the smart move our friend here pulled off in front of the judge's house," Serena pointed to Harry. "There's no way possible I see for Byron to get anything but a long jail sentence. That may not be fair, and as an officer of the court, if you repeat what I just said I'll deny it. That's the reality of the situation. Then again, you didn't ask to be brutally beaten with a baseball bat, but it did happen and he deserves to be punished for it."

"I just don't want anything to happen to Harry because of this."

Serena reached over and put her hand on Desi's knee. "This isn't just about you anymore, Desi. The fact that Byron decided to compound his stupidity by dragging a naked Victoria Rose out of the bed she shares with Judge Rose in the dead of night then punching said judge in the eye is just what's called lagniappe. You know, a little something extra. From what I hear, if Victoria asked Jude to stand on his head for a whole trial he'd do it because he's that crazy about her, but you didn't hear that from me either. I can only imagine having Jude's ear in the most intimate of ways does not bode well for Byron's future if Victoria has any say in this. Well, ladies, enjoy your breakfast and I'll call you this afternoon with the details." Serena kissed them both before following Mona to the door. Mona gave her a sympathetic pat on the back as she saw Serena out to her car.

"Not much longer now, honey, then you'll be rid of these people forever," said Harry as she leaned over and kissed Desi. With still a few hours of freedom, Harry decided to try and get Desi's mind off the upcoming events.

"I guess. Harry, I just want to apologize again for dragging you into all this. You shouldn't have

to be made to suffer for all my past mistakes. And believe me, honey, Byron was one big mistake. I hope God has forgiven Clyde for getting me into this marriage, because I sure in hell am not going to anytime soon. But you know something?"

"What's that, love?"

"Even after all I've been through, I'd do again in a heartbeat if at the end of the road I knew you'd be waiting for me. I love you." Desi leaned further into Harry's embrace and kissed her back.

"No more long hard roads for you, my love, come on grab your crutches and walk with me. It's come to my attention you've lived here close to three months and you still haven't seen the whole spread. And since you're going to be the lady of the house, it seems only fitting the house meets with your approval. If not, we sell it and find one that does." Harry stood up from the table and bowed deeply from the waist.

She had wanted to show Desi something on the property ever since she had told her what she wanted to do with her time. Slowing her gait down to accommodate Desi's pace, Harry showed her parts of the garden that were coming to life with the onset of spring, or what passed for spring in the humid city.

As they continued their leisurely stroll, Desi realized the house actually took up almost a whole block along the avenue it faced. In addition to the house and gardens, the property had a pool with an outdoor kitchen, a bathhouse, and a large hot tub. Harry walked them in the opposite direction of the pool to where another small building stood. It seemed ironic to Harry now that the wife of the couple she had purchased the house from was an artist.

The place she was walking Desi to was the studio her husband had built for her as an anniversary present after the sale of some of her paintings. The woman had given Harry one of her canvases as a housewarming gift after she had admired it. Harry had been drawn to it when she went out to look at the studio when she was considering purchasing the house. Because the vivid watercolor brought back a flood of memories, she'd had it framed and left it out in the studio. From then till now she hadn't looked at it again.

When Desi stepped through the doorway it was the first thing that caught her eye. The painting in the old cypress frame Harry had gotten for it was a depiction of the front of a house in New Orleans and its small yard. It could have been any house really, since so many of them shared the same characteristics, but this one had a big swing hanging from the end of the porch in front.

If you replaced the azalea bushes the artist had put in front of the railing with daylilies it could have been the house Desi grew up in. She knew immediately why Harry had kept this out here and not in the house where it really belonged. Looking at it everyday would have made it impossible to forget what they were on the cusp of all those years ago and then lost.

"The lady who spent so many days out here creating things like that told me this part of the garden was home to a special muse that was her friend and companion for all the work she created. Her hope was I find someone who would keep this special spirit happy and give it

company. The only reason she left her behind to inspire the next artist to grace this space was because of her age. Arthritis wouldn't allow her to hold her brushes long enough to finish anything else."

Desi leaned into her crutches so she could bring her hands up to her mouth. "You're like a dream, Harry."

"From now on I hope to be your reality, baby. Consider this is my gift to you. Whenever you're ready you can work out here and create whatever Francine's muse will help you with. It needs a little work but I happen to know a good decorator who'll help you make it your own space. May you be as happy here as Francine was, and for just as many years." Harry walked up to Desi and wiped away the fat tears rolling down her face. For once the doctor joined her in a good cry and they just held each other in the sunny room that overlooked the back garden. It felt good to just be happy.

"All rise," said the bailiff as Jude took the bench. They had gotten through most of their business that morning so the courtroom wasn't as crowded for their afternoon session.

For a brief moment a brilliant smile broke out on Jude's face, but it disappeared before anyone really took notice of it. The thing that had brought Jude such pleasure was the sight of Bradley Blum sitting alone in the first row of seats just behind the low railing that separated the attorney's table from the courtroom's spectators. Bradley appeared a tad bit red in the face as if his tie was pulled too tight.

"Your honor, we're set to hear the defense motion filings for docket number LA6689. There are twenty-eight in all unless Mr. Blum has anything else to add," said the bailiff, Rudy. After working for Jude for years, Rudy could tell this was one of those moments that made all the long hours and low pay worth it.

"Mr. Blum, are you and your client ready?" Jude leaned back in his chair and glared at the bumbling idiot from over the rim of his glasses with his one good eye.

"I was unable to get in touch with my client, sir. His father has informed me he's out of town on vacation for a couple of days and can't be reached. If your honor would be so inclined, we'd ask for a couple of days delay so we can be better prepared." Bradley smiled at Serena when Jude leaned forward and didn't say anything for a long while. To Bradley's untrained eye the judge seemed to be contemplating his request, and he was certain the old bulldog would grant his motion.

"Mr. Blum, are you aware that because Mr. Simoneaux is out on bond, the court has a right to know where he is at all times? Or did you miss the day when they taught that in law school?"

"No, sir, but..."

"It wouldn't be my problem or concern that he's facing charges today and has decided to take a vacation despite all that. Most intelligent folks would sit at home and think of the error of their ways. You know, act contrite and such."

"Sir, Mr. Simoneaux is innocent until proven guilty," added Bradley.

"Thank you for pointing that out, Mr. Blum, but unlike you I actually showed up for all my classes in law school and was already aware of that. Again you might want to follow the rule I set before and speak only when addressed." Keeping his mouth shut, Bradley simply nodded. "Another point for you to keep in mind is that it's a courtesy to your client to be here for all proceedings that take place in his case. A courtesy he's forfeited by not appearing, I might add, so we shall just add that to his list of charges for ignoring my order to appear today. What does all that tell you, Mr. Blum?" asked Jude who was now pinning the man with a deadly one-eyed stare.

"That we'll proceed without him?" Bradley stated it more as a question than a response. Despite the air-conditioning in the room sweat was trickling down his face, and Bradley kept sticking his finger in his collar to try and loosen his tie.

"That's correct, Mr. Blum, we're proceeding without him. If Mr. Simoneaux doesn't agree with me there's always the state appellate court. They might be more compassionate towards his plight. The thing about that avenue though, if you are familiar with my record on the bench is what, Ms. Ladding?"

"In twenty-two years his honor has only been overturned on appeal once," supplied Serena.

"And why was that?" prompted Jude.

"His honor was on his honeymoon and someone else was filling in."

"Thank you, Ms. Ladding, superb as usual. Now, Mr. Blum, twenty-eight motions on this case, I'm impressed. Shall we begin?"

Bradley mopped his brow with his handkerchief and nodded. Remembering in a panic his courtroom decorum he weakly added, "Yes, sir, the defense is ready to proceed."

"The last motion is denied," Jude said ten minutes later.

As Serena had predicted, all of Byron's motions filed by Bradley were shot down in short order, with sound case law to back him up. Now came the killer, and she had another premonition Jude's clerk hadn't shared with Bradley this next little tidbit of information. *Jesus loves me this I know because I'm not Bradley*, kept ringing through her head with more delight than she should be feeling for the poor man's plight, but hell, it wasn't her.

"Ms. Ladding, I want to thank you for appearing here today on such short notice. I take it the people are ready to proceed with their case against Mr. Simoneaux?" Jude's demeanor

completely changed when he turned away from Bradley and looked at Serena. He never could figure out why his goddaughter never ended up with this beauty. Rising out of her chair Serena graced him with a smile of her own.

"Yes, your honor, the people have been ready for weeks now. In my opinion, had it not been for the mountain of filings brought forth by Mr. Simoneaux's attorney, we'd be finished with the trial by now. Whenever your honor would like to put it on the docket we'll be ready to proceed." Serena finished by batting her eyelashes in Bradley's direction. She swore if the man pulled on his collar anymore they would have to call in paramedics when he passed out.

"Due to some 'pending police matters' let's call them, I'll be recusing myself from the case forthwith." Jude flipped his book open as if to look up another date, making Bradley smile over at Serena.

"Thank you, your honor, I'm sure my client..."

"You're talking again, Mr. Blum, when no one of importance has asked you to do so. As I was saying, I'm recusing myself but have made arrangements for this case. You're set for trial starting at eight tomorrow morning in Judge Carleton Reaper's court. If there's nothing further we're adjourned. I trust you have nothing further, Mr. Blum?" The expression on Jude's face warned Bradley to just say 'no sir' and get the day over with. Any other motions or requests for delays would surely land him next to Byron in central lockup with a contempt of court citation.

"No, sir, we'll be ready," answered Bradley with a confidence he didn't feel.

"Good, remember eight tomorrow morning across the hall, Blum. Don't be late, and if you can stand any more of my advice, have your client with you, Mr. Blum."

When Jude had cleared the door that led to his private offices, Bradley turned and glared accusingly at Serena. "The Grim Reaper is going to hear this case? What did you have to do, sleep with the old bastard to get that?"

"Why, Bradley, haven't you heard? Judge Rose is married and I'm gay so it was the sheer force of my personality that got me the Grim Reaper. But the next time I'm having lunch with Jude, I'll make sure and mention to him you think so highly of his sexual prowess. See you in court," said Serena in a sugar sweet voice.

"You wouldn't dare."

She looked at him and just laughed. "Just a heads up since I like you so much, Bradley. You might want to pull the police reports for last night then up the retainer you charged for representing Mr. Simoneaux."

"Why?"

"Like I said, just a heads up." Serena gave no further clues and all Bradley could do was watch

the sway of her butt encased in the sleek black suit as she left the courtroom. Now all he had to do was find Byron before eight the next morning, and find out what the irritating ADA was talking about.

"You know, anymore days like today and I might find myself unemployed," said Harry from the floor of the studio. After giving Desi her surprise, Desi had decided to thank Harry in a way only she could deliver. They were both naked on the floor by the big windows overlooking the gardens and both were smiling despite the hard wood floor beneath them.

"Then I could spend all day with you, so that's not an incentive to make me let you go, Dr. Basantes." Harry rolled over and hovered over Desi a moment looking at her face before kissing her. She would never get tired of looking at Desi's beauty and took every opportunity to do so.

"I think tomorrow you should call Tony and go shopping for all the stuff you're going to need to get started. Then Mona will have to get the cleaning service out here, there has to be two inches of dust on everything in here, including me." Harry pecked Desi's lips one more time before getting to her feet and walking across the room to retrieve her pants. Desi just sat up from where they had been lying and admired Harry's naked form, and let a bit of pout form on her face when she saw the cell phone materialize in Harry's hand. Maybe this is what it meant to be a medical widow.

She punched one of the numbers on the memory pad and spoke for a few minutes looking back at Desi's miffed expression. "Yes I realize there were surgeries scheduled for today but I had something come up, and besides nothing was earth shattering enough that I can't take care of it this afternoon. Just make sure the OR is ready to go when I get there, which should be in about fifteen minutes, so go ahead and work up Mr. Benson. He wants to get back to his golf game and needs some new knees to hit the greens, so I'll see you in a few."

Harry walked back to where her lover was now glaring at her, but with the sun streaming in from the window Desi still looked like an angel. "I'll only be gone for a few hours, my love. Only two patients and they're right down the street, so no catastrophic emergencies waiting for me today. Come on, Des, don't look at me like that. Cut me some slack and I promise to make it up to you." She walked around Desi and came to sit behind her making it easier to pull the smaller body against her.

"I just want to spend time with you. Is that selfish of me? I mean I have you to thank for my own recovery." Desi reveled in the feel of Harry's skin behind her. It was so easy to be intimate with Harry, so easy to get lost in the passion she had awoken in her.

"That's not selfish, honey, since that's how I feel about you. Now that you're here with me maybe I'll even consider early retirement. Don't you want to hear how I'm going to make it up to you?" asked Harry as she folded her body around Desi's and felt her nod. "I'm going to take you out to dinner tonight with no beeper, no phone and no distractions. I'll get someone else to take my calls, and that way, you won't have to share me for the evening. How's that sound?"

"Like heaven, and I was just kidding, no early retirement for you, baby. I owe you for my recovery like I said and I won't deprive anyone else of that. Too many people need you. Get going, the sooner you start, the sooner you finish." They shared one more long kiss before getting up and getting dressed. Walking back to the house Harry bid Desi goodbye before jumping in the Land Rover and leaving for the hospital. She was planning on a quick shower in the doctor's lounge before heading into surgery.

While waiting for Harry to come home, Desi decided to try out that big claw foot tub in the bathroom upstairs. Her date for the evening didn't tell her where they were going but she did say jeans were out. Sitting in the hot water Desi mentally went through her wardrobe and tried to pick something Harry would like. The soft knock on the door broke her thoughts away from her closet and Harry to Mona. She was the only other person in the house and she hoped everything was all right, knowing she wouldn't disturb her without a good reason.

"Yes, Mona, what's up?"

"Sorry to bother you, sweetie, but Serena's downstairs and she wants to talk to you. Said to tell you it's important."

"Thanks. Tell her I'll be downstairs in a few minutes." She was already regretting having to cut her bath short, but if Serena came over it must have something to do with Byron and his legal troubles she guessed.

Desi threw on her jeans and a shirt Harry had tossed across one of the chairs in the room and headed downstairs on the electric lift Harry had installed. Serena was waiting for her in the sunroom with another visitor Desi didn't expect, but was happy to see.

"Desi, hey, is my Uncle Harry here?"

The little boy came over and hugged her good leg looking up at her with his big blue eyes. *If I didn't know any better I'd have to say Harry fathered this kid*, thought Desi as she smiled down at Harry's biggest fan. "Sorry, Albert, but Uncle Harry's working today."

Serena looked on with great amusement. Desi appeared different every time they talked, it was as if someone had removed a large weight off the young woman's shoulders making her look lighter and younger. She was starting to show more confidence and the fear in her eyes that had been there before was gone. Serena could see that Desi was beautiful inside and out and it definitely softened the pain of losing.

They sat together while Serena told her of the day's events and what had been scheduled for the next morning. The relief in Desi's eyes now that this nightmare was perhaps coming to an end was more than evident. "You do realize though, that Byron and Mike have skipped town. My guess is they're trying to formulate some sort of alibi clearing them of what happened last night. But if Byron fails to appear tomorrow morning, then he has officially jumped bail."

"What will happen then?"

"His bail bondsman will send some big goons to find him and bring him back kicking and screaming to face trial. If he doesn't show it'll also mean he'll become a fugitive in the eyes of the law, and if I had to guess, I'd say that's what Judge Rose had in mind all along. I heard through the grapevine Jude is still pissed about your ex dragging his naked wife out of bed and into the night, and using him as a punching bag."

Desi nodded as well as shivered. "Byron was always good at making his point with his fists."

"Something you wont' have to worry about again, sweetie." Serena reached over and rubbed Desi's knee in sympathy. "The other plus to having him not show tomorrow is, when he does come back he'll most probably go back to jail while the court proceedings are taking place. Once Judge Reaper gets a hold of him, I'm sure he'll want Byron someplace he can keep tabs on him."

Desi had been thinking about what would have happened to her and Harry had Byron and his brother found the right house last night. She shivered again and jumped when the phone next to her rang. "Hello," she said, hearing the music in the background told her who it was before the deep sexy voice came over the line.

"Hello, beautiful, just wanted to tell you we're heading into our next surgery so I'll be home in about two hours." Harry tried to hold the phone and change scrubs before starting on Mr. Benson's right knee replacement.

Desi filled her in on what Serena had come over and explained. Considering the upcoming court date they both realized they would have to postpone their visit to Harry's parents that weekend but there would be time enough to discuss that later. Harry could hear Desi needed a hug just from the sound of her voice and wished she could just run home for a moment and deliver.

"You want to stay in tonight, honey?" asked Harry.

"Not really, but I have someone here who's dying to see you, so would you be opposed to company at dinner?" Desi smiled at the excitement on Butch's face at the prospect of spending the evening with Harry.

"Is my favorite person under five there with you?"

"That he is, love, and he misses you, so call and up our reservations for two more." Desi hung up and offered Serena and her son an invitation to join them for dinner that evening. Accepting, much to Butch's delight, Serena promised they would be back as soon as they went home and changed.

Sitting in the Palace Restaurant on Canal Street downtown, Harry tried to hide the smile threatening to come out in full force once she noticed that Serena was developing a crush on

their last minute addition to dinner. Rachel had arrived as Desi was getting dressed and waiting for Harry to come home, so she had asked her sister if she wanted to join them. The siblings had had a long talk about Serena and her part in Harry's past as Rachel fixed Desi's hair and makeup.

"Doesn't it bother you that she slept with Harry?" asked Rachel as she put Desi's hair in a twist. Experience told Rachel that you shouldn't tempt the fates by having dinner with one of your partner's old lovers. It was going feel funny enough sitting at the table knowing you were the only one in the group who hadn't seen Harry naked.

"Yes it bothers me. Have you seen her? The woman is gorgeous, and everything else I'm not, but Harry loves me not her. Even Serena is quick to acknowledge that fact, but it doesn't change me wanting to gouge her eyes out if she looks at Harry a little too long. Butch just loves Harry to death though, so I couldn't deprive her of that relationship. It's too important to the both of them." Desi lifted the linen dress Tony had helped her pick out on one of their shopping excursions over her head then slipped into one flat shoe. It would be nice to finally be rid of all her medical equipment so she could go back to wearing matching footwear.

"Well if you want, I'll keep an eye on her too. I've waited as long as you have for you and Harry to get back together and we don't need any wrinkles now."

"Uncle Harry, can we order our special dessert now?" asked Butch from his seat next to hers. He had been a perfect gentleman all night sitting quietly with his blue blazer and slicked back hair. Desi had looked at him often, thinking that maybe she was ready to have children now that she had a loving partner to help her raise one.

"Yes, my man, we can do that. We have a special tasks before us, Butch," said Harry seriously. She lifted Desi's and kissed the knuckles before putting it back on the table. Desi smiled at Harry's affectionate side, amazing herself in how quickly she had come to crave it.

"What?" asked Butch just as seriously.

"Let's go to the bathroom and I'll explain," said Harry noticing, that while Butch was well behaved, he was also squirming a bit in his booster seat. Excusing themselves from the table Harry escorted him to the bathroom after they had made a detour to seek out their waiter to talk to him a moment.

Back at the table Desi watched Harry walk around the room with Butch by her side as they made their way to the restrooms. She wished now she'd gone with them, not because she had a need to go, but because with all the flirting going on at the table, her tablemates didn't know she was even there. It seemed obvious to Desi, that while it bothered Rachel that Harry had gone out with Serena, it didn't bother her enough to prevent her from flinging herself at her. *If she keeps any closer an eye on her, they'll be sharing a chair,* thought Desi.

Entertaining herself by looking at the murals of famous musicians adorning the walls, Desi waited for her date to get back. It had been a pleasant evening so far with good food and good company, but she was looking forward to getting home and spending some time alone with the

good doctor.

Noticing the object of her desire coming out of the restroom with her little charge, Desi was temporarily distracted from watching them with the arrival of two of the wait staff. They placed before everyone at the table the specialty of the house, a white chocolate bread pudding drenched in a creamy sauce. Desi looked up from the delicious looking plate in front of her when she heard Harry putting Butch back into his seat.

"Now, ladies, Butch has something very important to tell you," said Harry as she tapped her water glass with her butter knife. The look in Harry's eyes told Serena her friend was getting ready to have a good time and her son was part of the plan. "But before he can explain this very important thing, you must first pick up an eating utensil and finish this little piece of heaven they have placed before you."

Harry and Desi exchanged looks as they continued to watch the interaction between Rachel and Serena. The bread pudding was wonderful and once everyone's plate was empty Butch started with his instructions. "This is the best part, Desi, Uncle Harry says so. Watch me okay?" Picking up the sides of the plate with small hands, Butch lifted it and gave it a healthy lick.

Serena just dropped her head into her hands as Harry picked up her plate next. The other diners seated around their table had to laugh at the strange behavior going on at the table of laughing adults and one child. In the end Desi could see the pride in Butch's eyes that he had introduced her to the fine art of plate licking.

They offered to take Butch home with them so Serena could accompany Rachel to a small jazz club Rachel liked, hearing no complaints from the two as they waited for Harry to settle the bill. Desi promised they would leave Butch with Mona in the morning and they would meet her in court. Kissing her sister goodnight, Desi got into the elevator with Harry and Butch.

They both told him a story before putting him down for the night when they got home, then retired to the comfort of their own room for the evening. Harry helped Desi with her dress, then kneeled down to take off her brace. "You know, honey, I think you can start to walk a little without this thing on now if it doesn't cause you any pain. Now that the weather has warmed up you can start working out in the pool to help with your recovery." Harry was looking at the leg with a physician's eye noticing the way Desi balanced without the brace.

"I owe it all to my brilliant surgeon. I plan to run away with her you know," said Desi. She stood before Harry without anything on and waited to see what the reaction would be. Any fear about her body was swept away by the fact that she was being carried to the bed in Harry's arms. They spent the night just holding each other and sharing a series of long kisses. There was no need for anything else.

"You don't seem to understand, Mr. Simoneaux, if he's not there tomorrow morning at precisely eight you stand to lose a lot. If you have any idea where he is then it'd be in your best interest,

not to mention your son's, to be there," said Bradley into the phone.

He had been home for over an hour and his wife didn't look pleased that he'd brought his work home with him. She had been stuck in the house all day with a twenty-month-old and a three-month-old, both of whom had been screaming their heads off all day for some reason or another. So the fact that Bradley didn't seem keen on the idea of taking care of them was working on her last nerve.

Bradley was aggravated himself that his wife couldn't understand his mushrooming dilemma. The simple truth was if he managed to piss off two judges in such a short span of time, he could kiss his budding career goodbye. And that's exactly what was going to happen if the stupid grease monkey he was talking to didn't come up with any better answers than he had given him so far.

"I keep telling you, you goddamn idiot, I don't know where Byron is, so how in the hell can I call him. If I did, I'd kill him myself and save the court the trouble of having to deal with him, and believe me, Bradley, that's what's gonna happen if I lose my garage. What's got this judge all in an uproar all of sudden anyway?" asked Byron, Sr.

"Your sons broke into Judge Rose's house last night and kidnapped his wife thinking it was Desiree Simoneaux." He was beginning to believe the missing link theory of evolution the more time he spent on the phone with his client's father. The only talent the old man seemed to possess was knowing his way around an engine. "Then in a moment of pure genius, Byron physically accosted the judge before making off with his wife."

"What in the hell does that mean in English?"

Bradley looked at the receiver as if to verify he'd heard the man correctly. "If you want it in simpler terms, I'll give it a shot. Last night your boys broke into Judge Jude Rose's house...with me so far?"

"All right, smart ass, get on with it."

"They broke in, dragged the judge's *naked* wife out of her bed then punched the judge in the eye." He pulled a copy of the captain's report from the night before so he wouldn't miss out on any of the details. "Before they could make their getaway, the judge was able to read the license plate off and call it in. If that wasn't enough, they called each other by name while they rode around in their car with the judge's wife. They wanted to make sure the one witness who could testify to the whole thing could verify their identity so that could be added to the mountain of other evidence they left behind. Did I leave anything out?"

"They did what? Those fucking idiots! I am going to lose my livelihood over this I just know it," screamed Byron Sr. into the phone. Now it didn't seem like such a good idea to not demand to know where his two sons were going.

They had failed to mention this interesting bit of information when they asked him for the car

and money to leave town. They had told him they had broken into Desi's new house and the cops were on to them, not that they had kidnapped some judge's wife then attacked the guy. The only thing he did know was they were in Florida somewhere, but there was no way he could call every dive hotel in Pensacola before the next morning.

"Just try and get in touch with them before tomorrow, and if you do, tell Byron to meet me in the morning," Bradley told him before hanging up. Once the receiver was back in the cradle his wife handed him his youngest son who promptly spit up on him. Life just sucked sometimes.

"Mike, I think that chick over there is giving you the eye, man," said Byron from his barstool. They had spent the majority of the money their father had given them bar hopping since they had gotten to Florida. The sun and sand made it easy to forget the trouble that awaited them once they got home. The drunken man only hoped things had calmed down since their departure.

"Forget that, Byron, don't you think we should call the old man and see if the police have come by and questioned him about what happened? Maybe things are all right now and we could kick back and enjoy ourselves." The thought of a long prison sentence was killing Mike's need to be with any woman who might be interested in him, and driving his need to drink.

"Let's wait a few days, little brother. I mean, what could happen before that? If the police are looking for us it won't make any difference if we keep them waiting. Because trust me, this little vacation is our ticket to staying out of jail. That loser old man and his young play thing have no idea who it was in their house, so relax and have a good time." He lifted his hand to get the bartender's attention and ordered another round of drinks.

"I guess you're right. What could happen in the next couple of days to make things worse?" agreed Mike as he took a large gulp of the drink placed in front of him.

Back in New Orleans, a night clerk started compiling names for a grand jury to weigh in on the new charges being filed against the Simoneauxs. The police had finished their investigation and felt they had enough evidence to hand over to the District Attorney.

Serena's boss offered to second chair for Serena if she needed assistance, which was a miracle since once he was elected he rarely stepped foot in the courtroom. But in this case, the DA thought there was no way officers of the court were going to tolerate the insult and injure Jude and Victoria had without handing out severe penalties, so he was pulling out all the big guns.

[Concluded in Chapter 5](#)

Comments to: terrali20@yahoo.com

~ How Do You Mend A Broken Heart ~

by Ali Vali
December 2005

Disclaimers:[See Part 1](#)

Comments can be sent to me at terrali20@yahoo.com.

Chapter 5

They walked into the courtroom side by side displaying for all who looked a show of strength. Harry was wearing a navy blue suit with a crisp white shirt underneath, and Desi had on another new dress she had picked out recently. Tony had definitely opened up a whole new world to her in the past few months and Desi was enjoying the attention and the new friendship.

As his anger toward Desi faded, Tony had found a confidant and friend he'd come to depend on. Desi was grateful to him for helping her to find her own style that would help ease her into Harry's life. She found it amazing Tony was not only knowledgeable about clothes and decorating, but he seemed a virtual fount of information when it came to makeup as well. She was so transformed that Byron's parents almost didn't recognize her when she and Harry passed them on the way to the front of the courtroom.

"You're coherent enough to function aren't you, Serena? Or did you have a late night last night?" asked Harry, arching an eyebrow. She wasn't above tweaking her friend a little even in light of why they were there. Harry figured it might lighten up the situation and bring a smile to Desi's face, which it did.

"My night is none of your business, Harry, and yes I'm coherent enough to get through the next two seconds. Cause believe me, ladies, after the pep talk I'm sure Jude gave the Grim Reaper this morning, that's how long it'll take for him to revoke Byron's bail. And rumor has it; both Byron and his brother are wanted for questioning in the Rose kidnapping case. Not to mention my boss has a grand jury almost ready to go. Translation, they's in some deep shit," said Serena a bit too gleefully. She crossed her arms over her chest and sat back on the table behind her. Life was so sweet sometimes when people like Byron found out there was a bigger bully on the block.

"Desiree Simoneaux, you should be ashamed of yourself, girl. Look at you, flaunting yourself like some common whore while your husband is being accused unjustly. It's time you start to remember your place and it starts with you coming home with us right now. I think you and I have a lot to discuss while we sit and wait for your husband to get back," said Byron, Sr. after he realized who the woman in the brace was. He had moved to the front where they were standing and grabbed Desi's upper arm in a vice like grip before Harry could stop him.

"Let her go," the voice sounded like it had been chilled on ice.

"Fuck off."

"Sir, I'm not sure who you are but if you don't let the lady go, I'll be forced to rip your arm out of the socket and stick it in your pocket for you." Harry's voice got lower and more menacing. She stepped closer to the two in challenge of Byron's father.

"Is that so, I don't recall asking for your opinion on the matter. This is family business and doesn't concern you so back off."

Harry placed her body between Desi's and the elder Simoneaux. Before the bailiff could make it over to them, she grabbed his wrist and squeezed. The action compressed on a few nerves and an instant shooting pain went up his arm. "Sir, I asked you nicely didn't I? But I find sometimes it takes a little action to get the perpetually stupid to catch on. From now on I want you to remember some very important facts. Desi is very much my business and if you come anywhere near her or put your hands on her it's going to make me really angry."

"Are you threatening me?" His voice came out in a whisper as he tried to break the hold she had on him. He stopped when it became clear that the more he tried to pull away, the sharper the pain got.

"No, I'm promising you I'll break every bone in your hand and name them as I do so if you touch her again."

"Harry, it's okay," pleaded Desi. She reached out just to make some contact with her trying to calm her down. The last thing they needed was for Harry to have any legal problems because of all this.

"It's not okay, Desi. No one is going to treat you this way again, especially this fat asshole who never learned any manners. Now back off." She pushed him back making him stumble into a small woman behind him.

Something in Harry's eyes told him she wasn't kidding about anything she had said so he stayed back. Byron wasn't sure who this woman was, but it was clear she was Desi's attack dog and he wasn't about to find out if she could back up her threats.

"Desiree, you know I'm right. It's time for you to stop all this craziness and come home where you belong. You know how Byron is, he didn't mean anything and he's sorry if he hurt you. You're a Simoneaux now, girl, so let's go," said Byron, Sr. trying a sweeter approach this time.

Desi stepped next to Harry and felt the comfort and safety of an arm drape around her waist. Just like at that bus stop all those years before, Harry would keep her safe. "No, I am home now and I'll never go back to the life I had before. Your son is an animal, an animal who'll never get the opportunity to hurt me again." She jutted her jaw out a little and felt wonderful for having the courage to stand up to this man she had feared as much as her husband.

"Don't count on it, Desiree, life is funny like that sometimes," was Byron's only response before he went back to sit with his wife.

From there he took in the actions of the two women at the front of the room. He watched the way Desi leaned into her companion and the way the bitch talked to her softly trying to comfort Desi. There was more to this relationship than he was willing to admit at the moment, but before he gave it another thought he had to find out who the intimidating woman was.

They all stood as Judge Reaper walked into the room and quickly called the court to order. He wasted no time in motioning to his clerk to call forth the first case, with any luck the asshole Jude had told him about was still out of town. Looking at Serena and Bradley before him the judge broke out into a smile. Serena returned it with one of her own and Bradley only managed to break out into a sweat. He really needed to ask his wife to loosen the buttons on his collars before they choked him to death in court.

"Good morning, Ms. Ladding. Are the people ready to proceed this morning?" asked Carleton. He focused solely on her waiting for her answer.

"Yes, your honor, the people are ready to proceed and in the interest of time and justice we have a jury trial if the defense is so inclined." She glanced over at Bradley who was tugging on his collar again and seemed to be turning a sickly shade of red. She then looked behind her for a moment to offer Desi a comforting smile letting her know everything would be all right.

"Thank you, Ms. Ladding the court will take that under advisement. And you, Mr. Blum," the leather chair creaked a bit as Carleton turned to Bradley. "Are you ready to proceed?" He waited a beat before adding, "Wait, you look so lonely, Mr. Blum. Where's your client?" It was the second question that deepened Bradley's red shade.

"Your honor, we beg the court's indulgence, but my client is out of town and couldn't be reached with the new court date. I tried explaining this to Judge Rose yesterday, I'm sure he mentioned it to you. I'd like to renew my request for a delay until Mr. Simoneaux can be reached." Tugging on the collar one more time he waited with fingers crossed for the judge's answer.

"I see, is he away taking care of a family emergency perhaps?" offered Carleton.

"No, sir."

"A business engagement he couldn't get out of maybe?" Carleton tried again.

"No, sir."

"Could it be that Mr. Simoneaux is wanted in the questioning of another unrelated matter and thinks the judicial system in New Orleans is as stupid as he is?" Carleton's voice raised until he could be heard out in the hallway. When he was done he was leaning forward in his chair with his hands flat on the desk before him. "As the terms of Mr. Simoneaux's bond states, he's not to

leave the area without a means in with which the court can contact him. The reason we put those stipulations in place, Mr. Blum, for future reference, is for times like this. Everyone is ready to proceed and your client is nowhere to be found. Do you know what that means, Mr. Blum?" asked Carleton one last time, making it apparent he had also memorized Bradley's name.

"He is to be remanded back into custody as soon as he is apprehended."

"Precisely, Mr. Blum. He has until nine o'clock this morning to report, if not, bail is revoked. We're adjourned, ladies and gentleman," Carleton said as he wrapped his gavel once and stood to leave the room.

Ignoring Desi and Harry for the moment, Byron's parents went to the front of the room to intercept Bradley before he left. "What did all that mean?" demanded Byron, Sr.

"As I tried to explain last night, it means your son has precisely fifty minutes to report back to this court or he'll be considered a wanted man. That's not going to help his case any, and it will add some more charges to the mountain he's already facing." Bradley picked up his brief case and started walking to another courtroom to meet another client, but seriously considering heading to a local bar instead.

"But they can't do that. He didn't even know he was suppose to be here today," complained Byron, Sr. Everything he had worked for was in danger of going to some guy named Al who had secured his son's bail.

"They can and they will, Mr. Simoneaux. That's what happens when you break in and drag some judge's naked wife out of her bed in the middle of the night. You screw with the law and sometimes it'll stick it to you without benefit of lubricating first. My free advice for you this morning is to drive to where ever Byron is and drag his ass back here. If not, be prepared to ride out the storm until Jude Rose calms down, and this new judge well, let's just say they don't call him the Grim Reaper for nothing." Bradley had already made up his mind he'd tell Byron to find himself a new lawyer as soon as he resurfaced. No retainer was worth these kinds of headaches.

"But he's only on vacation, they can't charge him for that," persisted Byron, Sr.

"If you'll excuse me, I have another client waiting for me across the hall. When you hear from Byron let me know, we have a lot to talk about before he turns himself into police." Bradley gave Byron's mother a small smile before heading out of the courtroom. The woman always looked so sad that, if she had asked, Bradley decided he would do her divorce free of charge. Despite the fact Byron had paid his retainer, he was glad to see his wife Desi had found a new life for herself. Maybe there was hope for his mother.

As Byron Sr. argued with Bradley in front of the courtroom, Harry and Desi made their way out to the street. Since they were supposed to be in Florida for the weekend, Harry had taken the day off so they had the rest of it to kill now that they were finished with the legal proceedings. Holding the passenger side door opened for Desi, Harry helped her inside then put her crutches in the back seat. They had yet to talk about everything that had happened, and the way Byron's

father had treated Desi that morning. She could see the tenseness in Harry's jaw. It was the only outward sign as to how pissed Harry truly was.

"Harry, I'm sorry again for all this," Desi started. She reached for Harry's hand as soon as she got into the vehicle. Part of her was angry too for not letting Harry loose to beat Byron Sr. to within an inch of his life. Maybe it would have taught him a lesson about how sometimes women fought back.

"Please stop apologizing for the behavior of other people. Your husband's father is an idiot, and that, my love, has nothing to do with you. He was raised by idiots and in turn raised two of his own. You just had the misfortune of hooking up with one of them, but that part of your life is over now. This may take a little longer than we planned, but in four months, you'll sever your ties with these people once and for all."

She was taking deep breaths trying to fight back the urge to hit something after the confrontation with Byron's father in the courthouse. After their exchange of words she found that her palms hurt from the tight fists she had balled her hands into, but she was glad she had controlled her temper. Desi had had enough violence in her life, she didn't need to add to it.

"Will it truly ever be over? I have a feeling Byron and his family will be a shadow over our happiness forever." She turned her head to look out the window so she wouldn't have to see the disappointment in Harry's eyes.

"Desi, you'll find money can't buy you happiness, but it can buy isolation from people like Byron. Whatever I've earned in my life is half yours now, and with that comes the security of knowing you never have to return to what those people put you through. I also don't want you to think of it as charity or pity. It's my gift to you freely given, and it's yours even if you don't stay with me. The only way the Simoneaux family will ever bother you again is if you invite them back into your life," said Harry with conviction.

She wanted to get her point across to Desi so that she could start to let go of some of the pain in her life. After her declaration, Harry slowly ran her fingers through Desi's blondish hair with light red highlights in an attempt to get her to look at her.

When she did turn around, Desi's eyes were watery with tears yet to fall. Harry expected an argument over why Desi couldn't take what she was offering, so she was pleased when she just smiled at her. "Thank you, Harry. I promise I'm not going anywhere and I'll spend the rest of my days at your side making you as happy as you make me. One day hopefully I can be just like you and you'll be proud of me."

"I'm already proud of you, honey. Look at yourself. You're a young, beautiful woman who has so much to offer. I'm not only proud of you, I'm honored you picked me to share your gifts with," Harry said as she leaned over and kissed Desi softly on the lips. Desi welcomed the kiss and threw her arms around Harry's neck to pull her close. It was a special moment witnessed by the older couple coming down the front steps of the courthouse.

"Clyde told me about some friend Desiree had in school he put an end to her seeing. Seems like she might be back and causing trouble between Byron and his wife," Byron, Sr. told his wife.

Looking at the two women holding each other, Monique Simoneaux's lips turned up into a ghost of a smile. It was too late for her to start fresh, but not for Desi. She too had heard of Desi's childhood friend from the girl's father and she had thought it a sin for Clyde to separate the two.

Desi was always as sad as she was, and Monique knew the reasons why. Her husband had taught his sons many things, and the lesson on how to treat women came in the form of watching him beat his own wife. In that arena, Byron Sr. had taught by example. The way the tall woman stood up to her husband told Monique she would fight anyone who hurt Desi, but she would never turn that anger on the woman at her side.

"Maybe it's time to let the girl be, Byron. She ain't ever gonna come back to our boy now, even if she wasn't with her friend. I think there's been enough trouble over this so let's concentrate on trying to work our way out of it instead of adding to our plate." She stepped away from him as she had her say, her hands working the leather strap of her purse nervously.

"There you go thinking again. You know it gets you into trouble every time. There ain't no way I'm going to live with the fact my son's wife threw him over for a woman. What'll people think? I'll tell you what they'll think, that we raised Byron to be some sort of fruit or something who can't keep his woman satisfied. No, Monique, Desiree is coming home even if it has to be in a pine box." With that said he grabbed Monique and pulled her down the remaining steps.

If only he could remember the bitch's name. He was sure Clyde had told him when they were making wedding plans. He did remember with sickening clarity when Desi's father told him about the night he saw his daughter on the front porch with that pervert. Byron had promised Clyde his son would handle the situation and make Desi forget she ever knew the woman.

Harry and Desi went home after court, with Harry looking in the rearview mirror to make sure they didn't have any unwanted tagalongs. The security guard would be making a come back until the situation settled down and Harry felt comfortable leaving Desi and Mona alone in the house. When they walked through the door they heard Mona and Butch in the kitchen together having breakfast. Rachel had yet to make an appearance and Harry had a feeling she was sleeping the morning away in the large duplex Serena owned in the garden district.

"Hello, little buddy, what do you have there?" asked Harry.

"Uncle Harry! You're home and it's the daytime," screamed Butch. His face broke out into a big smile and he slammed his hands down on the table for emphasis of his joy.

"That I am, bud, and I'll be home all day so what would you all like to do?" She went over and picked him up so she could kiss him hello and leaned him over so Desi could do the same.

"Let's go swimming," said Butch without hesitation.

"Sounds like a plan, but before we do that, how would you like to go shopping?" As soon as the words left Harry's mouth, Mona jumped up and pulled a thermometer out of one of the cabinets and stuck it in her mouth.

"You better put that child down with you being delusional and all," Mona said in a serious tone. Harry did many things, but she knew shopping was not one of them.

"Come on, Mona, get dressed you can come with us," said Harry putting the thermometer back and handing Butch back to Mona. "Let's go change and we'll meet you both back down here," said Harry as she scooped Desi up into her arms.

They all left the kitchen laughing as they made their way upstairs to get ready. The only hints Harry would give was that they were to change into some shorts or jeans, and they had thirty minutes to do so.

"What are you up to, Basantes?" asked Desi as she wrapped her arms around the strong neck for her ride up the stairs. The unpleasantness of the morning was washing away under Harry's helpful guidance, and she was anticipating whatever adventure Harry had in mind.

"You're going to have to bear with me here and wait. No more hints or it'll ruin the surprise, but I promise when we're done, you'll think I'm wonderful and you won't be able to live without me," said Harry with a smile.

"Too late on that one, I already think that." She whispered softly into Harry's ear, then sucked her earlobe into her mouth and waited for the moan she knew was coming. Harry, God love her, was never one to disappoint, and feeling the warm mouth sucking gently made her not only moan but made her knees go weak.

"You need to behave and work with me here, honey, before I drop you and break something else," pleaded Harry. That made Desi move her lips from her ear to her neck. Mona just shook her head as she heard the giggles coming from Desi as Harry slammed their door shut.

Forty minutes later Harry and Desi made it back into the kitchen and announced they were ready to go. Both tried to ignore the knowing look Mona was giving them, but Desi couldn't help the blush that ran up her neck to her cheeks. Harry just wiggled her eyebrows at Mona making Desi's cheeks turn that much redder.

"Okay boys and girls we're here," said Harry as she turned into Dixie Art Supplies fifteen minutes later. The announcement got Desi to jump in her lap, a cry of delight from Butch and a confused look from Mona. "Come on, baby, let's go shopping," she said as they got out of the car.

Two hours later they finished making arrangements for the supplies Desi would need to be delivered that afternoon, and loading up the easel and finger-paints supplies they had gotten for

Butch. Desi thought it would be a good way for the little boy to get to know her when he came over if she shared a part of her new haven with him so he could create his own art.

For the rest of the afternoon Harry and Mona worked as a team to clean up the studio so the deliverymen could install Desi's equipment when it came. They decided to leave the painting Harry loved so much hanging right where it was, since Desi had a feeling Harry would be spending more time out in the airy building. They left the guys to their job of putting in the wheel and kiln when they did arrive and took Butch swimming.

By nightfall the studio was ready for Desi's new career, they were grilling steaks for dinner, and there was a for sale sign on the front of Simoneaux's Car Repair. The only good news for everyone was that Vito, Al the bail bondsman's bounty hunter, was headed for Pensacola. After a heart to heart talk with Byron Sr., Vito was headed in the right direction since Al didn't want to be in the car repair business anymore than Byron wanted to lose what he had built, so it was in both their best interests that Byron and Mike be found.

Once this was all over and they had recovered the two Simoneaux brothers, Al was going to have to have another long talk with the elder Simoneaux to explain something would have to be sold to cover his cost of the bail. Byron Sr. had to understand Al wasn't doing this out of his kindness for his fellow man, and the way he saw it, the business was the only thing that would bring in the amount owed.

In Byron Sr.'s opinion, it was one more thing he blamed on his son's wife. Things were starting to unravel and only a show of force could upright his world again. Until that opportunity presented itself though, there was only Monique to take his frustrations out on.

When he came back into the house after telling Al and his people all he knew, Byron found his wife in the kitchen fixing dinner. He started taking deep breaths as she started to roll up his sleeves feeling the anger well up inside him.

To Monique it sounded like a wild animal getting ready to attack and it made her shoulders hitch in fear. She gripped the butcher knife in her hand and didn't move thinking he would just walk away. Silent tears started to fall because she knew Byron wasn't one to walk away.

The first blow knocked the knife loose and it went clattering across the floor. She ran as best she could still woozy from the blow, making it as far as the living room. There was only ten feet between her and freedom but Byron caught her before she made it to the front door.

"What have I told you about running you stupid bitch?"

It was an instant satisfaction to the animal inside him when his fist connected with the side of her head. The force of it arced her body backward giving it the appearance of a rag doll. A merciful blackness overcame her before her head hit with a sickly crack.

"Answer me," screamed Bryon as he picked up the first thing in his line of sight and threw it at her.

It was the blood pouring from her head that finally woke him from the frenzy.

Rachel and Serena showed up hand in hand just as Harry was pulling the meat off the grill and Mona was coming out with the salad. They were enjoying after dinner drinks by the pool when Serena's phone starting ringing. Apologizing for the interruption, she stepped a few feet away to answer it seeing from the caller I.D., it was the police precinct in the ninth ward.

"This is, Serena Ladding," she answered, pressing a finger into her ear to drown out her companions.

"Hey, Ms. Ladding, this is Roger Landry. I was the detective sent to interview Mrs. Desiree Simoneaux the night of her attack. I'm sorry to bother you but I thought you should know Byron Simoneaux Sr. beat his wife to death tonight. He called 911 after she stopped breathing but the paramedics couldn't save her when they arrived. The bastard crushed her skull when he pushed her into the coffee table in their living room and dropped some sort of doorstop on her. We have him in custody and are still looking for the two sons. Would you like for me to call Desi and tell her what happened?"

"I'm with her now, Detective Landry, I'll tell her. Thanks for letting me know." She had to lean on a chair to keep from falling over. Serena never had a conversation with Monique but she's seen her in court that morning. She looked depressed and beaten by life, but she was alive and breathing nonetheless. Serena felt Rachel step up and hug her and found herself crying over the death of someone she didn't know.

"It's okay, Serena, whatever it is we're here for you," cooed Rachel into her ear as she tightened her hold on her new friend. She looked back at Harry for help knowing that she'd known Serena longer than any of them there.

Harry just motioned by nodding to let Rachel know she was doing the right thing. Once she recovered her composure, she would share what had upset her so much. They were all thankful Butch had gone to sleep in Mona's lap and she'd left to go and put him down for the night. Seeing Serena so upset prompted Desi to sit in Harry's lap for her own comfort. Harry was also like sitting on a heating pad and the night had turned cool and windy.

Taking a shuttering breath Serena told them what the detective had informed her of and it was Desi's turn to cry. She and Monique weren't really close, but she did feel a kinship with her in that they were in the same situation. The silver lining here was that Desi had gotten out before she shared Monique's fate.

Harry led them all inside and up the stairs. She hugged Serena and Rachel goodnight and told them to go to bed. It would be better in the morning and none of them needed to be alone. Serena was about to protest when Harry told her Butch was already sleeping and Rachel needed the company. Walking Desi to their room, Harry undressed her lover and put her to bed as well. It

was unfortunate that such a wonderful day had to be marred by the tragedy that ended it, but maybe Monique had finally found some peace in a life that had had so little of it.

"Harry, in case you don't know this by now, I love you," whispered Desi in the dark. She was finally relaxing feeling Harry's hands rubbing her back. They were the same big hands that would sooth away all her troubles for the rest of her days, and at that moment it was the most wonderful feeling in the world.

"I love you too, baby, now try and get some sleep. We can just bum around tomorrow and do whatever you want," Harry promised. In her head, as strange as the logic was, she recited a silent prayer of thanks for Desi's broken leg. Had it not been for that pain and suffering, she might have lost Desi to the same fate that had befallen Monique that night.

The weekend passed without incident and the girls stayed together at Harry's house much to the delight of Butch, who considered it to be a camping trip of sorts. They all helped Desi get settled into the studio, and on Sunday, Tony and Kenneth came over to help with the cleaning and painting efforts so by Monday, Desi was ready to start using her creative juices. It had been a cleansing time that had started with Desi shedding the brace from her leg around the house, and Serena opening her heart to new possibilities with Rachel.

Roger kept them informed on the search for Mike and Byron and what was happening with their father. The detective had taken a liking to Desi and wanted to see the young woman stay safe and out of the clutches of Byron and his brother. Harry called the security company and hired a new guard to come and walk the grounds when she was at work, to give her peace of mind.

On Sunday afternoon they all gathered in the kitchen and worked together to cook a late lunch since Mona was off visiting her family. They had to convince her to leave and spend some time away from the house and not stay and take care of all of them.

"Do we have any cheese?" Desi asked Harry. She had just finished grating a piece for the fajitas they were making but it wasn't enough. Harry was heading out to the grill to cook up the meat, chicken and shrimp they had marinated for the dish.

"Look in the bottom drawer of the refrigerator, I'm pretty sure that's where Mona hides it," said Harry putting the platter she was carrying down. Walking up behind Desi she pulled her out of the refrigerator door and onto the kitchen counter so she could kiss her. There was just something about Desi in shorts and a thin-strapped tank top that was driving her crazy.

"Baby, everybody is waiting for us," said Desi without making a move to get down from her perch. Harry had been in a romantic and affectionate mood all day and there was no way she was going to put the brakes on that.

"Let 'em wait. I have an incredibly beautiful woman in my kitchen cooking me dinner and I'm supposed to just sit on my hands."

"No, but I'll be happy to sit on your hands," said Desi in a low sexy voice.

"We're hungry, love birds, so let's get with the program," complained Tony from the doorway. He had pulled the short straw and was sent to collect the missing two in their group. Actually, he and Kenneth were the only two not making out at the moment and he hated standing next to the hot pit.

"Get your own girl, Tony," yelled Harry.

"Bite your tongue, Harry, that would be just sick." Tony clutched his chest and made retching noises.

"That would be my job thanks. Anything to do with Dr. Basantes's tongue should be referred to the short blonde." Desi finally made a move off the counter but made a point to slide down Harry's body.

The motion made her nipples stand rigid against the fabric of the shirt she had on making Harry eyes zero in on the area. Desi slipped her hand into the front of Harry's shorts and pulled her out of the house, stopping by the platter so the now frustrated cook wouldn't forget it. Tony loved the look on Harry's face, finally seeing the light missing for so long. It was almost funny to him that the person who had put it out, was the person who had re-lit the flame.

"Uncle Harry, if my mommy marries Rachel will we be related?" asked Butch as soon as they made it outside.

"We're already related, buddy, so it doesn't matter who your mommy marries, that won't change."

"Really?"

"Yep, you're my family in my heart and nobody can tell you otherwise. Come over here and let me teach you how to cook some meat like a caveman." The comment caused Serena to break away from Rachel and roll her eyes.

"Harry, don't teach him anymore bad habits. Just wait until you have children, we'll have a standing appointment every week so I can impart some of this wisdom you're teaching mine," said Serena with a mock glare on her face. It had been so long since they'd had a good time that she was really enjoying the weekend.

"You think I'm going to raise ours any differently than my boy Butch here. Hell I think he's perfection just the way he is," teased Harry.

That got Desi's attention, it had been the first time Harry had ever mentioned wanting children, and the our was the most important part of what she had said. Just because she and Byron had never had children didn't mean she didn't want any, and she would give anything to share that

experience with Harry. Desi walked over and leaned on Harry finding she missed her touch when they were apart.

"I think you're perfect too, Uncle Harry," said Butch holding a long fork like the one Harry had in her hand.

"Me too, baby, I think you're just perfect," echoed Desi. The two laughed as Tony stuck his finger in his mouth and continued his retching noises.

"Keep it up, sugar pants, and you're going in the pool," threatened Harry.

That night, the police car cruising in front of the Simoneaux home missed the two figures entering through the back door by seconds. Careful not to turn on any lights Byron and Mike wondered why there was police tape along the front of the house, and why there were no sign of life.

After checking their parents' bedroom they figured they must have gone out for the evening and by not turning on the lights they missed the large bloodstain still on the living room carpet. It was the last reminder Monique Simoneaux had lived there, and had given her life to satisfy her husband's anger.

After their conversations on the trip to Florida, Byron vaguely remembered a tall dark haired girl who was friends with Desi when they were in school. He had graduated a few years before them but his yearbooks should have a picture and name of the person who was giving Desi her hiding place.

So instead of heading for bed, Byron pulled the attic stairs down in the hall and spent the night looking for the books that contained the memories of a time in his life when he was a winner. Inside those volumes would forever live the good looking football player all the girls were crazy about. The allure ended when he was pumping their gas after graduation day.

Finding Desi's class he started at the beginning of the alphabet praying the face jumped out at him so he could finally just go and get his wife. "Ah ha, I got you now, bitch," he said putting his finger over the picture of a young Harry. Coming down the steps with the book under his arm, Byron went to wake his brother to confirm if that's who he'd seen Desi with.

"What? Leave me alone." Mike tried to roll away from the persistent hand shaking him awake. Didn't Byron understand he was tired and scared of what came next for them? His life was far from perfect before but now Mike was dreading each coming day.

"Look at this picture, Mikey, and tell me if this is the woman you saw with Desi?" Byron turned on the small lamp on the nightstand and held the book up. Mike squinted and rubbed his eyes for a minute before focusing on the picture his brother was pointing out.

"Yeah, looks like her," he said to Byron's back as he ran out of the room. The phonebook only gave Harry's office address and number; no home address. All he had to do was sit and wait for the doctor to drive home then he would get Desi back.

"No you can't get up," complained Desi when the alarm went off.

It was Monday and Harry had to get back to work. They had bid everyone a farewell and spent the night trying to kill each other from forceful orgasms. The result being Harry's doubting she could stand for any length of time today her legs were so wobbly, and it was Charity surgery day.

"Unhand me, woman. We both have dates with some unshaped clay today and it's time to get to it," said Harry as she tried to move to the side of the bed. No matter what position they fell asleep in, they always woke up in the middle of the bed with Desi lying on top of her.

"You're giving up medicine to make bowls, baby?" She moved with Harry trying her best to convince her to stay in bed a little while longer.

"No you have big globs of clay waiting to be bowls and vases, and I have big blobs waiting to be surgeons. Some days I think you might have better luck with your blobs than I have with mine. Don't get too carried away out there today, and I'll try and finish up at a decent hour so we can go out to dinner. Cooking once a week is my limit, and yesterday was it." Harry put her hands over the ones on her middle and turned her head for a kiss. "There's that and the fact I love taking my girl out."

"You have a date, baby." Desi got up after Harry and put on a robe so she could downstairs and make some coffee and breakfast. While she enjoyed having Mona around to cook for them, it was nice to take care of Harry's eating needs at least once a week. It made her feel like she was contributing something to their budding partnership. "Any requests for breakfast, love?" she asked before heading down the stairs.

"Surprise me."

"I'm sorry but Dr. Basantes won't be seeing patients here this morning. If you'd like, I can make you an appointment for Wednesday afternoon if you can wait that long," the receptionist informed Byron over the phone.

"But I just have to talk to her today. Is there anyway you could tell me where to find her?"

"She's staffing surgery at Charity today, sir, so she'll be unavailable for most of the day, I'm sorry. Dr. Vargas is available if you absolutely need an appointment today." Before Irma, Harry's receptionist, could say anything else the man hung up leaving her wondering what he really needed.

After parking across the street in the Tulane Hospital parking garage, Byron sat on the steps of the medical school, which faced the entrance to the doctors parking for Charity Hospital. He figured Harry wouldn't remember him from school, and she had never seen him with Desi.

Once he got a look at what kind of car she drove he would go and get the vehicle his father had lent him and follow her home. He looked disgustedly at all the vendors that had begun to setup in front of the large structure. The world was full of freaks and perverts, so Byron thought this was the perfect place for Desi's friend to work.

He saw the Range Rover pull into the drive and the electric window start to go down. It was her and she was motioning to the guy selling bags of mixed fruit over with a five dollar bill.

"Hey, Dr. B, how's it hanging this morning?" asked the tall African American man with long braids in his hair. He was a recovering drug addict who had found a job hawking fruit in front of the hospital, and Harry was one of his most regular customers on the days she worked. Always paid with a five, and always told him to keep the four she had coming in change.

"A little low and to the left, Henry. How's it going with you?" She held up her usual crisp bill with one hand, the fingers of the other drumming on the steering wheel.

"Okay, doc, I just have twenty bags to go."

"Good luck, and stay clean, buddy," answered Harry as she put her keycard into the meter making the wooden barricade blocking her path rise.

"Thanks, doc."

Byron was right, she never noticed him in the crowd of colorful characters that always seemed to adorn the outside of the medical facility. Harry was more concerned with maneuvering the SUV in the tight parking lot. She had always thought it had been easier becoming a doctor than it was to try and get around in the parking facility built by some state engineer. *Maybe I'll get a motorcycle and give Desi this thing*, thought Harry as she backed into the first space she found.

The lot was close to empty when she pulled out at six that evening, punching the speed dial to the house from the car to talk to Desi. "Hey, honey, how was your day?" she asked when Desi answered the phone.

"Hey, you, it was great. I have a present for you. It's still cooling but I made my first vase and it's all yours." She was happy but didn't want to go into all the clay that had collapsed on her throughout the day, but the more she did it the more it came back.

"Too late, I already have your first creation. It's in my office uptown sitting on my desk," said Harry pulling into traffic.

"What creation is that?" Desi was standing in the closet in her underwear trying to figure out

what to put on.

"It was an ashtray you made in the fifth grade that has your finger imprints on the bottom along with your name. I guess you had to add the name so I wouldn't get confused in case some other cute girl gave me an ashtray with her finger impressions on the bottom. I keep candy in it and it's a constant reminder of my favorite cute girl in the world." She was enjoying the conversation on the way home and it was grounding her to hear Desi was all right. Her last case of the day had been a broken jaw that had been a result of domestic violence, and it had thrown Harry for a loop.

"I see, well, baby, you get my second creation too. While you're waiting for it to finish creating would you like to share with your girl where we're going tonight so I can get dressed."

"You're naked?"

"Why yes, Harry, I am, and I'm waiting to get dressed so spill it."

"I don't know. It may take me the whole drive home to decide where we're going. How's this, if you are naked when I get home I'll even buy you dessert?"

"If you bring home dessert you could lick it off of me now that I am an expert in the field," Desi bantered back. All she heard was a growl over the line and the sound of the front gate opening up. Putting her robe on she went out to the balcony with the phone and bent over the side to get a look at Harry. Waiting for the scrub-clad woman to bid the guard goodbye Desi smiled down at the one person who made her world spin.

"Are you still naked under there?"

"Come on up here, doc, and find out," said Desi as she disconnected her end of the line.

Running back into the bedroom she stripped off the robe and lace bra and panty set she had put on and jumped on the bed. She laughed when she heard Harry running up the stairs taking them two at a time from the sound of it. Not seeing Rachel's car in the driveway Harry reverted back to her old ways and started stripping on the other side of the door. She opened the door and made it to the bed in three big steps.

"I missed you today, baby. Would you like to see how much?" asked Desi.

Seeing Harry naked at the door and heading toward the bed made it apparent that another shower would be needed before heading out to dinner. Feeling Harry roll them over so Desi was on top doubled the wetness between her legs when Harry's hands closed over the cheeks of her butt and squeezed. Getting back to what she had in mind before Harry shot her concentration Desi broke off their kiss and moved down Harry's body.

"I've been thinking about you all day. Thinking about how you look when you're turned on, and how you taste. Running my fingers through all that wet clay had me thinking about running my

fingers over you, baby," Desi told her in a low voice.

The whole time she had been talking she had been running just her nipples over Harry's body making Harry's breathing speed up. The late afternoon sun lit the room enough for Desi to see the effect of her actions on Harry as she came to rest between the muscular legs.

Running blunt nails up from Harry's feet, Desi finally used her two index fingers to part wet slick folds. Taking one finger she put it just under the hard, slick spot and pressed down making her clitoris protrude even more. Desi decided to try something on Harry her sister had told her about and said it would get her great results.

Spearing her tongue, she started to write out the alphabet on Harry's point of need. Deciding on the lower case letters because it involved more swirling motions made her realize Rachel did have good advice every so often. By the letter 'g' Harry's hips were moving trying to increase the pressure Desi was applying, and the letter 'i' earned her an "Oh shit, baby."

She didn't make it passed 'k' before the urge to suck it into her mouth won out over Harry's education. Sliding two fingers into her, Desi sucked until she felt the walls around her fingers contract signaling Harry was coming. Desi knew Harry was enjoying what she was doing when the pressure from the fingers threaded through her hair keeping her mouth in place turned slightly painful.

Desi hadn't made it all the way back up to the head of the bed when she was flipped over and pinned to the comfortable surface. It was Harry's turn and having studied Latin, she knew a whole new alphabet Desi hadn't experienced yet, but just as she was about to return the favor Desi held her in place.

"No, lover, I want to look in your eyes when you make love to me tonight so don't move."

Harry shifted to be able to slide her right hand between their bodies and started to carry out Desi's wishes. Holding her weight off Desi with her other arm, she started with some slow kisses on Desi's neck moving quickly back up to her lips. Long fingers stroked between Desi's legs softly at first but turning hard and determined when she wrapped her legs around Harry's back. Harry rocked her hips in time with her hand giving her strokes an extra push into Desi, her thumb slamming into the hard nub every time she came down.

"Yes, baby, just like that. Oh God that feels so good, look at me, Harry, look at what you do to me," screamed Desi as her pupils dilated and she clamped her sex around Harry's fingers.

Once was not enough, so after she came, Desi lifted her leg until it made contact with Harry and started them rocking again. Harry was primed after all the talk Desi had provided while she had been making love to her. Desi dug her fingers into Harry's butt when she heard the grunts in her ear telling her Harry was close again. At the last minute Harry pushed up with her upper body so that she could speed up their thrusts getting them to their destination.

"Baby, you're very good at that. Maybe that early retirement you talked about wouldn't be such a

bad idea," said Desi. She was shifting around under Harry trying to find a comfortable spot after she had collapsed on her after they came in one big grunt.

"If I did that all day I'd be dead in a week," said Harry rolling over to her side. She was still mostly on Desi trapping her with spent appendages. This was the best way she could think of to come home.

"Okay, baby, now you have to take me out to eat. You really know how to build up an appetite in a person, so get moving." She slapped the closest butt cheek she could reach with one hand and pushed up with the other. "And you have yet to tell me where we're going." She followed Harry into the bathroom intent on sharing a shower.

"Gosh, Desi, where's your sense of adventure."

Harry leaned into the shower stall and adjusted the water to a tolerable scalding temperature before jumping in. She felt the warm body press up against her back the moment she put her head under the stream of water. "Do you think I'm dirty?"

"Yes and you're incorrigible too, so hands off me or I'll never get anything to eat." Desi continued to run soapy hands over Harry's body knowing she was a sucker for the sensation.

"How about if I bought you a Port of Call burger, would you let me touch you then?" asked Harry as she turned and faced Desi.

"Honey, for one of those suckers with the baked potato, I'll have your baby."

"Deal." It came out quickly before Harry lost her nerve.

The answer left Desi stunned for a moment and Harry thought she had crossed the line. They had never really talked about it, Harry always thinking it was too soon in their relationship. But the fact was it would have to be brought up eventually if it were to be a healthy pregnancy because of the age factor.

"Okay...did you mean deal in the sense of you want to have a baby with me, or deal you want to buy me a burger?" asked Desi. She crossed her fingers so Harry wouldn't chicken out and give her an answer she thought Desi would want to hear. "Before you answer, I want you to do me a favor."

"Name it."

"Remember that you own my heart because I gave it to you freely, so if you love me, tell me what's in yours." Desi kissed the spot over Harry's heart when she was done.

"Both. I want to have children with you soon, and I want to buy you a burger tonight. If you don't want kids it's okay, I'll just live vicariously through Butch." Harry leaned her cheek on the top of Desi's head nervous that she may have given away too much of what her dreams were too soon.

"Nope, I want my own and they have to be a part of you so my suggestion to you, Dr. Harry, is you call your brother and ask him for a favor. No beating around the bush and no long waits, I think we're ready and we're entitled to our own little bundle of joy. Now move that fine ass out of the shower and feed me," demanded Desi. She didn't move until the water cooled a bit since she was soaking up the wonderful hug Harry was giving her. They were finally getting it right, and all it took was complete honesty and open lines of communication.

Dressed in jeans and sneakers the girls headed out to their old haunt, never noticing the old car that kept behind them for the length of the ride. Byron had waited outside the gates to see if they were staying in for the evening and formulating his plan on how to get into the house.

He followed them to the restaurant and stayed long enough to watch them go inside then left, figuring they'd head back to the house once they were done. It was making him sick to watch the way Desi threw herself at this woman she was with. When she was with him she had never reached for his hand, and never leaned over to initiate a kiss. All this time he should have known there was something wrong with her. It had nothing to do with him.

He parked his car on one of the side streets and then jumped the fence to Harry's property staying in the shadows until he reached the house. Armed with a pair of bolt cutters, glasscutter and another surprise he waited for the lovebirds to get home. He wasn't going to spend time in jail over a fucking freak.

Coming out of the eating establishment that looked like a hole in the wall dive, Desi asked, "Do you remember the last time we ate here together?" They had just finished and were walking back to the car holding hands.

Since their last venture to the restaurant that served mostly natives, the area around Esplanade Avenue had become the mecca of gay bars and restaurants. No one really gave a second glance to two people being affectionate in the area since it had become such a common sight.

"Of course I do, my love. I had that old two seater that was perfect for getting you to sit close to me. God I loved that car. We had the squirt with us and just like tonight you socked away that huge burger and even bigger baked potato. The only difference would be the addition of two beers to go with the meal," said Harry. She deactivated the alarm when they reached the Range Rover, then pressed Desi to the side so she could kiss her before she opened the door.

"That's different too, baby, though I would've welcomed it back then as well." Desi looked up at Harry with a dreamy expression on her face then moved so her chivalrous date could open her door for her.

They drove back to the house in a companionable silence just enjoying each other's company having already talked about their day over dinner. When the gate at the front of the house slid open after Harry pressed the key attached to her visor, nothing looked out of the ordinary.

Harry walked around and let Desi out of the car, then fumbled with the door lock since Desi was draped over her back tickling and trying to distract her. It was as if Desi didn't want to lose the playful mood they had been in since their call on the way home. Desi was already planning many more nights like the one they were finishing up, since they had been able to cover a multitude of topics without difficulty.

Harry walked up the stairs with Desi's legs wrapped around her waist. The fact she had made this trip so many times it had become rote, helped in that she didn't have to break the kiss they were sharing. When they got to the bedroom Harry sat on the bed with Desi still on her lap and leaned back so she could feel Desi's body press into her own. It was the uncommon noise coming from the closet that broke their kiss.

Looking at the clock on the nightstand and seeing the usual digital read out was missing, Harry knew the electricity was out. Having what had happened to Jude fresh in her mind, she eased Desi off of her and looked at the closest house noticing their upstairs lights were still shining. The blip from the closet alarm panel was still working because of the battery backup and it indicated a breach through the kitchen doorway.

Walking back to the bed, Harry put her index finger to her lips as a signal for Desi to keep quiet as she retrieved something from the under the bed. With a duffel bag draped over her shoulder Harry brought Desi with her through the balcony doors where she dumped out the bag and whispered in Desi's ear what she wanted her to do.

"Baby, I want you to climb down and make your way over to the studio. The electric feed comes to that building first before it comes to the house so there should still be power in there. Call the police and tell them there's been a break in and the guy is still in the house. Whatever you do don't come back until I come out to get you or the police do and tell you it's okay. Now go and I love you."

"Harry, you're coming with me aren't you?" She watched as Harry unrolled a small ladder that fell to the ground below. They were common in the old houses made mostly of wood, making it easier to get out in case of a fire.

"No, I have a feeling I know who it is and he and I have some unfinished business, now come on, baby, get moving," said Harry with urgency.

She kissed Desi quickly on the lips and helped her over the side of the railing watching as she made it to the ground and ran off in the direction of her studio. Harry turned and headed back into the room and stood in the center for a moment to get her bearings. Listening to see if Byron would give her a clue as to where in the house he was, she used the time to let her eyes acclimate to the darkness.

Glad that they hadn't undressed yet, she headed for the hall and down the stairs using the outside edge so they wouldn't creak. At the bottom she paused before heading to the sunroom knowing Desi's estranged husband would have to come through it to get to the main part of the house.

Marshalling all her calm, Harry sat on one of the couches in the room and waited. Listening hard, she could hear the man panting in the kitchen.

He sounded as if he was afraid and was trying to decide what to do next. *What you do next, asshole, is serve a very long prison sentence unless I decide to beat you to death before the cops get here*, thought Harry. She had pressed the police key on the alarm pad before leaving the bedroom, which quieted the blipping noise. Harry didn't want anything scaring Byron off before she had a chance to get her hands on him.

Okay, Byron, this is just like the last time. You make your way through the house and grab Desi. Only this time I know it's her. He stood in the kitchen a minute and went through his plan one more time before moving. After looking through the windows while the women were out, Byron saw the doorway through the big glass room was the easiest way to get into the main house. There he was positive he would have no trouble finding the stairs and his wife.

Even though it was a full moon and a clear spring night, he never saw the figure staring holes into him. When he made it to the middle of the airy room Harry's voice broke the silence that had prevailed until that moment.

"Hello, Byron, it's been a long time. Welcome to our home, though most people use the bell and the front door." He pulled the gun from the waistband of his pants and pointed it straight out making a circle in place trying to pinpoint where the sound was coming from.

"I don't want to hurt you, I just want Desi then I'll be on my way."

"There in lies the problem, old pal, Desi doesn't want you," said Harry as she moved further into the shadows. She hadn't planned on the idiot having a gun, and it was not in her plans to get shot that evening.

"Well you lost, you sick fuck. Desi married me and that's the way it's going to stay. I'm not going to let some fancy attorney, that you paid for I'm sure, make it otherwise. Now where is she?" screamed Byron. He was sweating now and the gun was getting slippery in his hand. Why had it been so much easier the first time?

"Put the gun down, Byron, and let's talk about this like two adults. Desi's not going to leave with you tonight, or on any other night for that matter. Don't you want what's best for her?" Harry sounded almost reasonable. She was watching him and it wasn't a comforting sight.

"I tell Desi what's good for her, I'm her husband goddammit. That's the way it works."

"Your daddy tell you that one, sport? If you were a real man you'd put the gun down and deal with me the way he handled your mother. You are a man aren't you, Byron?" Her voice had taken on a sarcastic edge figuring the only way she was going to prevail was to push all his buttons.

"I'm the one who's normal here, and yes, I'm a man. My father is a real man who taught my

brother and me how the world works, so don't you go insulting him. You got me, bitch?" The sweat was dripping into his eyes now and he was having trouble seeing anything in the room.

"I'm sure that's what he was doing last night when he beat your mother to death in his living room, teaching her how the world works. Only problem with that is, who's going to do his laundry and cook his meals? Come on, little boy, put the gun down and deal with me the way your old man dealt with your mother. He was a real man because he let his fists do the talking for him. You're nothing but a fucking coward hiding behind that thing in your hand. No wonder Desi picked me over you. God you're pathetic, losing your woman to another woman no less." Harry kept up her taunting until he yelled at her to stop.

"You're nothing but a pervert and a liar. My parents are just out of town."

"Sorry, pal, your mother is lying on a cold slab down at the morgue, and your daddy is playing hide the soap with some big bubba down at central lock up. I know it doesn't seem fair to you but it's against the law to kill your wife, even if it seemed like a good idea at the time. Come on, Byron, you afraid of me or something?"

He pulled the trigger and shot. Hearing her hit the ground made him feel better. She kept talking about his family, so he was justified in his actions. Now all he had to do was find Desi.

Desi was out in the studio still on the phone with the emergency operator when she heard the pop come from the house. The phone slipped from her hand as she sunk to her knees in tears. "Harry!" was the scream the operator heard from the other end. She raised her voice from her end trying to get Desi to pick up the phone again so Desi could tell her what was happening. After hearing the name Harry screamed a couple of more times, the only sound the operator heard was the sound of running feet and the slam of a door.

Desi ran to the house as quick as she could ignoring her promise to Harry not to do so. She just knew Harry needed her and she wasn't going to leave her lover alone in the house with that animal. As she made it through the kitchen door, Desi heard the crash of broken glass coming from the sunroom. Not thinking of her own safety she moved in that direction.

"This if for that broken leg you gave her you bastard," screamed Harry as her fist connected with the side of Byron's jaw. They were in the yard and Byron was trying his best to land his own blows, which Harry had no trouble sidestepping.

"This is for all the other times you laid a hand on her," Harry continued, this time aiming for his nose. When he swung out clumsily she grabbed his hand and folded all his fingers back until she heard the crunch of bone.

"Hurts like a bitch doesn't it?" asked Harry, not letting go of the hand. Sending a punishing kick to Byron's side, she added to the bone breaking total with two ribs. As he stood there swaying she continued her monologue not noticing Desi was watching them.

"Let me explain something to you, pal, Desi belongs here with me, not because I own her, but

because here is where she wants to be. I'll never let anyone especially you hurt her again. I love her too much for that." She paused a minute and delivered another swing that broke his jaw. The scream of pain he released shook Desi out of her trance. She yelled to Harry, as she was about to hit him again.

"No, Harry, that's enough. He's not worth it, baby, please stop," she walked through the broken window out to Harry. When Harry let go of his hand, Byron fell in a heap on the grass. Not caring that Harry's hands were full of blood, she just hugged her and pulled the strong arms around her in a plea for Harry to hold her.

"What are you doing here, honey? I thought I told you to stay in the studio until I came and got you?" asked Harry not letting go of her.

"I heard a gunshot and I couldn't stay in there knowing you might be hurt. Harry, what in the world is the matter with you? You could have been killed in there. Next time just leave if the person has a gun. I swear you make me so mad." She pulled away from their hug and hit Harry gently in the stomach. "You're all right aren't you?" she thought to ask as she started checking every square inch of Harry's body.

"Yes I'm all right, the picture on the far wall of the sunroom didn't fair so well though. Come here you," said Harry pulling Desi back to her. This was finally over.

"Thank you, Harry. No one has ever stood up for me the way you do and I love that about you, even if you are an idiot. You've been my savior since I was in pig tails, and I have a feeling you'll still be filling that role when I'm old and gray."

The police found them in that exact position when they finally arrived. After answering their questions, they were assured Byron had been brought to the hospital to have his injuries tended to with an armed escort. As soon as he was done he was headed to central lock up where he would join his father and brother. Mike had surrendered peacefully when the police surrounded the house after a neighbor called and said they had seen movement.

Roger Landry left a unit at the house over night so the girls could stay there even with the broken window in the back. He was glad to see this case end on a high note and not with the dragging off of body bags. The Desi Harry led up the stairs that night was so different than the one he had interviewed all those months ago. Now she appeared to be happy. Roger figured Harry who held her hand throughout the night had a lot to do with that.

"Baby?" asked Desi. They were lying down in the middle of the bed relaxing and trying to calm down after the night's events.

"What's on your mind, Des?"

"Can things get back to normal now?" She propped herself up a little so that she could look at Harry. The smile that creased her lips couldn't be held back when she saw the love staring back at her from those incredible blue eyes.

"Count on it, lady. From here on out it'll be family dinners, pottery, medicine and two point five kids. I'll teach them to throw their clothes on the floor to keep Mona on her toes. You'll become rich making little expensive bowls so you can keep me in my old age, and we'll all live happily ever after." Harry sealed her predictions with a kiss.

Epilogue

Harry walked up to the old house and noticed the two little girls playing on the porch next to the old swing. "Hello, is your mom at home?" she asked when they turned her way. The smaller of the two ran in the house and yelled for her mother, leaving Harry to look at the condition of the place she remembered.

"Can I help you?" asked the tired looking petite woman who came out. The front of her shirt was covered in baby drool, which Harry assumed came from the infant she was holding and she released a long sigh after she asked the question.

"Yes, ma'am, my name is Harry Basantes and I'd like to buy your porch swing."

The woman shifted the baby to her other hip and stared at Harry like she had lost her mind.

"What is this, some kind of joke?"

"No, ma'am, I'm serious. See my girlfriend grew up in this house and I fell in love with her sitting on that swing," said Harry pointing to the swing hanging at the end of the porch. "Today's her birthday and I'd like to give it to her as a gift, so name your price." She brought her hand up to her forehead and smiled as she shielded the sun from her eyes.

"Your girlfriend's birthday huh?" She studied the swing as if appraising how much it was worth before giving her answer. "A thousand dollars," the woman said seriously.

If some nut came to her door and wanted to play games, she would oblige her. It was a good way to break the monotony of her day anyway. Harry looked at her and the smile grew bigger. After seeing the worn toys strewn about the small yard and the condition of the house she thought she would do this woman a kindness.

"I won't pay a penny over five."

"Five dollars." The outrage was evident in the woman's voice when Harry counter offered. "This is an antique, and supposedly you fell in love sitting on it. Five bucks is all you think it's worth? Maybe this girl of yours should reconsider, since you're so cheap and all."

"No, ma'am, not five dollars, five thousand. I got the money right here," said Harry as she pulled the wad out of her front pocket. She fanned the hundreds out and held them up. "Desi's worth a lot more to me than this, but that's all I got on me."

"Look, lady, I was just kidding, but if you're serious I sure could use the money. My son has to have surgery for a birth defect on his legs and I don't want it done at that charity hospital. That place is full of quacks and nuts from what I hear, and he deserves better than that."

"Do we have a deal?" asked Harry.

"We sure do. Enjoy," she said moving aside so Harry could join her on the porch and claim her purchase.

She put the money in the pocket of her shorts and watched as Harry unhooked the swing that had hung on the porch for years. Maybe her mother hadn't been full of bull when she always said that God works in mysterious ways. This was after all the last thing she'd expected to happen to her today.

Harry carried the swing to Land Rover and then came back into the yard. Pulling a small leather card case out of her back pocket she handed a card to the young mother. "My girlfriend Desi thinks I'm a little quacky but I'll be happy to look at junior there for you. Just give my office a call and I'll see him in my private clinic uptown, that way you can do something else with the money. With the new baby I'm sure there's some things you need."

The young mother dropped her eyes to the heavy linen card with raised ink and then looked up at Harry. All she could think to do was lean over and kiss her on the cheek. "Thank you, I don't know why you came here today but thank you. You're like an answer to my prayers in more ways than one. I take back what I said, that girlfriend of yours must be the luckiest woman on the planet."

"Nope, that would be me. Don't forget to call my office and set up an appointment. You get a free vase with every surgery," said Harry before closing the car door.

She didn't quite know what that last part meant, but she put the card in the same pocket the money had gone into. In her head, she was already planning a trip to the store to buy the kids some new shoes. It was possible now after the visit from their angel with beautiful blue eyes.

Desi walked slowly back to the house thinking about the past year as she admired the multitude of flowers blooming in the garden. In that time she had come to think of the big house as her home, and Harry as her partner for life.

Gone were the security guards, and the fear that Byron was lurking behind every corner. He, his father and brother were all locked up in Angola State Prison for many years to come assuring them peace. Judge Carleton Reaper had seen to that by handing down the maximum penalty after the jury came back with a guilty verdict in all the trials they'd sat through.

"Byron Simoneaux, a jury of your peers has found you guilty of attempted murder in the first

degree. It is with extreme satisfaction I hand down a sentence of thirty years in the state prison system. This court is now adjourned. See you next week, Byron, have a nice day you hear." Carleton had told him as he left the courtroom with a smile and wink for Desi and Harry.

Between that trial, the one for kidnapping and the one for breaking and entering, Byron would leave Angola only in a body bag. Mike got off easier with a sentence of fifteen years for his part in the kidnapping of Monique Rose by confessing. He cut a deal with the District Attorney's office to avoid a trial and possibly a longer sentence, after he agreed to testify against his brother since Byron was still denying the whole thing.

For Desi it had been a moment of relief and justification when they walked out of the courtroom for the last time. She and Harry had stayed long enough to watch the deputies take Byron out in handcuffs.

They hadn't attended Byron's father's trial but they knew from Serena that he had also been found guilty in the beating death of his wife, and it would be unlikely that he would, considering his age, get out of jail alive. Carleton had joked at one point the state should get a family rate after having the parade of Simoneauxs through his courtroom.

After all that was done, Desi had been able to concentrate on her pottery and Harry. They had settled nicely into their relationship with Desi doing as much as she could to take care of her partner and the home they shared. On most mornings she still felt the urge to pinch herself her life was so different now, especially when she woke before Harry and just watched her sleep.

The person she had fallen in love with so many years before had changed and grown into a remarkable woman, but for all that had changed there was still so much of what had attracted her to Harry still in her heart. She had discovered that one of the biggest changes in Harry was that she'd become the sweetest romantic. The past year had been sprinkled with presents, candle lit dinners and romantic evenings in front of the fire in their room. Harry was always affectionate, gentle and kind and Desi had soaked up the attention she lavished on her.

The passage of time had also eased the fears of everyone in Harry's life that Desi would walk out on her again, and now Desi enjoyed a good relationship with all of them including Harry's parents. Visits to Florida had opened their hearts to her, and it had been another source of support for her.

And Mona, bless her heart, had become the mother Desi had never known. She was one of the main reasons this felt like home to Desi. When Harry left for work in the mornings they spent time together cooking or talking, but most of the time just laughing and enjoying each other's company.

"It's about time you called it a day, baby," said Mona. A glass of milk was placed in her hand the minute she walked through the door of the kitchen, and the look in Mona's eyes told her not to argue about drinking it.

"All I do is sit behind the wheel, Mona, so don't worry so much. Did Harry make it home?"

"She came in about forty minutes ago and went up to take a shower. I warned her to be ready and out of your hair by the time you got up there. So go on and get bathed and call me if you need anything." Desi took her glass and waved before heading upstairs to get ready.

With time her art had become sought after in the shops in town because of its uniqueness, so Tony had arranged for one of the larger art galleries in the city to mount an exclusive show for her that would open that night. It was something she had been working on for months and was really looking forward to. In her own way Desi felt like she had become someone Harry could be proud of and it motivated her to keep improving on her skills.

That morning Harry had promised she was only going to work the morning, and as always, she'd kept her word. She was standing in the middle of their bedroom slipping into her shoes when Desi walked in and she had to stop and lean against the door for a minute to admire the view. The black suit draped magnificently over broad shoulders, and the black silk shirt under it brought out Harry's tan and made her eyes look that much bluer. She swept her eyes over the tall sturdy body and the dazzling smile aimed at her and sighed. Sometimes she did pity the poor women who looked at her like they hated her for taking Harry out of circulation, but only sometimes.

"I'll be the most envied woman at this thing tonight. Know what I mean?" asked Desi. The smile on Harry's face got bigger and she chuckled softly, which told Desi something was up.

"Are you kidding me? Anyone in their right mind would do whatever they could to get close to you. You, my love, are a beautiful and extremely sexy woman." Harry ignored the specks of clay that were splattered on the front of Desi's shirt and moved closer with the intent of kissing her. She was until Desi put her hand up stopping her from coming any closer.

"I don't want you to mess up that great suit so stay put."

"Come on, honey, I just want to give the birthday girl a proper hello. Did you have a good day?"

"I have great days all the time now and it has nothing to do with turning a year older."

"Well today you are turning a year older, but you're still beautiful so go take a shower so we can get on with the festivities of the day."

Desi put her hands on her hips and tried to sound scolding. "Harry, you've already done enough today."

"Okay, I've done enough. Go take a shower, we don't want to be late," Harry gave in quickly.

It was too quick for Desi. "Okay, spill it. What are you up to?"

"Do I have to be up to anything just because I want you to go take a shower? I just want the love of my life to enjoy her night. Go on, get cleaned up and I promise I'll be waiting when you're

finished. Once you're clean maybe I can collect on that kiss."

Desi took a quick shower and donned a simple black dress so she would look like she was with Harry. She was putting in the diamond earrings Harry had given her that morning for her birthday when she noticed Harry leaning against the railing out on the balcony. Sitting next to her were two champagne flutes, full and waiting to be enjoyed.

"Are you ready for tonight?" asked Harry. Desi had walked out and stood in between the long legs.

"Ready as I'll ever be. My agent tells me most of the stuff is sold already, so this will be more of a chance for people to see what I've done rather than me begging them to buy something." Desi pressed her face into the front of Harry's shirt to get a whiff of the familiar cologne she had always worn. It was a clean woody smell that Desi had missed for years. Only Harry smelled like this wearing it, no one else even came close.

"Before the your admiring fans get a hold of you, I wanted to tell you how proud of you I am, honey. You're the best thing in my life and I'm just happy that I get to share this with you." Harry told her as she ran her fingers through Desi's hair and kissed her. "I have a feeling this is going to be one of many openings we're going to be attending through the years. You found your passion, baby, and you're going to be a success." She kissed Desi one more time before running her hands down to her hips. "So I want to ask you again, are you having a nice birthday?"

"I did have a nice day and thanks again for these great earrings. They're the nicest gift I've ever gotten next to waking up next to you." She gave Harry a kiss on the chin.

"Those aren't your gift. That is." She pointed to the right and to the end of the balcony. At the edge of the wide space hung the swing they had spent so much time on in their childhood. In the morning it would get scraped then a fresh coat of paint, but for tonight it would have to do as it was.

"How in the world..." Desi started as she walked toward it. Leave it to Harry to play with her already wrecked emotional state. There wasn't a day that went by lately that something didn't mist her up. It could be a commercial on television or a collapsed bowl, but it was always something.

"Come on, honey, this is suppose to make you happy not make you cry. Wanna try it out and see if it still has any magic left in it?" Harry helped ease her partner down then went and retrieved the glasses on the railing.

Handing Desi hers, Harry put her arm around her and clinched their glasses together. "Here's to more happy birthdays and to the best girl anyone could ask for." She took a sip and noticed Desi not drinking. "It's okay, honey, it's just sparkling grape juice. You won't be killing any of my kid's brain cells if you take a drink."

"Your kid missed you today, I guess that's what all the kicking was about. There was no one

around to sing any sappy songs." Desi rubbed her swollen midsection and took a sip of juice.

She laughed when Harry immediately put her glass down and joined in the rubbing. It was getting harder for her and Mona to push Harry out the door in the morning to go to work. Given a choice Harry would follow Desi around all day finding some excuse to touch her midsection.

Desi was due in a month, and if everything went according to plan they would have a healthy baby with dark curly hair and big blue eyes. Once they did they would have Raul, Harry's brother, to thank, and after seeing his kids it was a distinct possibility.

From the moment they had found out she was pregnant, Harry had become a big mother much to the amusement of Desi, their friends and family. She had been so gentle and protective with her it cemented in Desi's mind what a wonderful parent she was going to be. As a partner she was already perfect so it was only natural to Desi that Harry would be the same when it came to their family.

After their announcement at the beginning of November, Serena volunteered to have Thanksgiving dinner at her house. The reason she gave was there was no way she was eating any turkey that had been basted at their house. Tony had put aside his agent duties and helped Desi decorate a baby's room next to the master suite. It had been Rachel's room until she moved in with Serena and Butch. All the new relationships she now shared that she could count on had also been responsible for her letting go of the past.

"We love you, Harry. Me and baby Basantes," whispered Desi from the circle of Harry's arms. "This has been the best birthday ever. I have you, a baby on the way and all these people who love me. It's just been a miracle for me. And now you brought our swing. Thank you for always thinking of the things that mean so much to who we are."

"I love you too, and I wanted to give you a little bit of your past that carried good memories with it. At least I hope it's good memories, and it gives us a chance to make new ones out here just the two of us. Well for a month more anyway." There was a swift kick under her hand reminding Harry that they'd soon have company.

"We can come out here and swing the baby when it's fussy and tell him or her how special this swing is. Like I said, this has been the best birthday ever. Thanks for all my gifts."

"I have one more thing for you. My mother will be there tonight, so it makes this gift imperative."

"Really, baby, you've already given me too much."

Harry pressed her hand to the side of her face and kissed her. "Between us there can never be too much. I was teasing about my mother, that's not the reason I wanted to give you this."

"Are you all right? You look kind of nervous," said Desi before she pulled Harry's head down for another kiss.

She slipped off the swing and down to her knees. Harry took Desi's hands into hers and laughed when she noticed how hers were shaking. "I've known you all my life, Desiree Thompson. You've given me love, pain and redemption. All I can give you in return is my love. I pledge to you my love and my promise to always be here to take care of you and our family for as long as you'll have me." Harry pulled the small velvet box from her pocket and opened it. Sitting inside was a large emerald cut diamond ring. "I want you to wear this as a sign of that promise, and hopefully it'll remind you everyday that I belong to you. Will you marry me?"

The tears she had tried to fight after seeing the swing finally won out but Desi was nodding. "Yes," she was finally able to choke out when she pulled her left hand free and held it up to Harry.

Before slipping it on Desi's finger Harry read the inscription on the inside of the band. "Thank you."

"Thank you?" It seemed like an odd thing to inscribe. She looked at Harry as she rubbed her thumb on the bottom of the band Harry had placed on her finger as if to convince herself it was real.

"You're the only way to mend a broken heart, so I wanted to thank you," said Harry. They finished the commitment with a kiss before they got up to leave.

When Harry closed the back door and locked it she missed the news report that played on the small set in the kitchen. The anchorman read the news teaser as Harry helped both Mona and Desi into the car.

"Stay tuned to the ten o'clock new for more on the jail break earlier today. Ten inmates are still missing including the Simoneaux clan from here in the New Orleans area. The father and two sons, as well as seven others, were last seen heading into the marsh surrounding Angola State Penitentiary."

The End

Comments to: terrali20@yahoo.com

Continued in "All It Took Was You"