

# ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

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Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

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## Chapter 1

The mid afternoon shadows were just beginning to fall across the ground on the east side of the cozy villa, which was sitting in the middle of a small, uncluttered valley. The single story abode's brown, wood siding had weathered charmingly over the years becoming another picture perfect puzzle piece connecting the culture to the land.

Jamie Sheridan reached over for the tall, cool drink on the table at her side. She sipped it, savoring the tangy snap of the fruity, alcoholic concoction. From behind her dark glasses, Jamie looked down and scratched an itch on the top of her bare left foot with the toes of her right one. Her normally olive toned skin was just beginning to lose its summer enhanced bronzing, which was acquired from long days in the sun tending to her horse ranch.

The tall woman chuckled at the total dichotomy of her current situation as she took in the splendid view surrounding her. She was sitting by a shimmering pool in a bathing suit with the sun streaming down over her. But with one slight tilt of the head a vista of snowcapped

mountains filled her vision through the floor to ceiling glass panels that enclosed the heated, indoor pool. The dark head fell back against the multi-colored cushion of the lounge chair, which cradled her long body. A smile drifted across her face as she looked backed down at the sleeping woman beside her. *My beautiful wife did choose a perfect spot to spend our first two weeks of wedded bliss*, Jamie thought silently.

Erin and Jamie had thought long and hard about a destination for their honeymoon. Ireland had been their original choice when they had first gotten engaged almost one year before. But then Jamie disappeared and was presumed dead. Six months later a grief stricken Erin went to her ancestral home, hoping it would help her get her life back on track. It turned out to be a fateful decision because there she met a woman with amnesia. They quickly became friends and when they returned to the states, they both discovered the woman's true identity. She was Jamie Sheridan. The difficult months passed with Erin and Jamie both desperate for the lost memories to return. Finally they did and the couple moved ahead with their wedding plans. Their mid October ceremony was perfection, leaving their family and friends shedding joyous tears in celebration of the love and happiness of the soulmates.

Jamie's blue eyes slipped shut and she just enjoyed the peace and quiet, thinking back thirteen days when they had landed at the airport to begin their honeymoon.

\* \* \* \*

Taking a quick look through the small airplane window they saw the bright sunlight glimmering on the wing. The flight across the seemingly endless ocean waters had been very smooth allowing for a nice meal, a rather long and energizing nap and some quiet conversation for the newlyweds. The plane soon came to a smooth landing at the busy airport, but with very little hustle they were off to the hotel.

One step outside the airport terminal and Erin pulled her lightweight jacket tight around her body. "Ooooo! That's different," she said as her hair whipped about her head from the strong wind.

"We ain't in LA anymore Dorothy," Jamie teased. She too felt the chill of the fall air, but her thicker leather jacket offered a bit more protection.

They had finally chosen Switzerland for their honeymoon. An odd choice some may think, but the author had visions of snuggling by fires after a long day on the snow and being tucked tightly behind Jamie's solid body as they rode across the fluffy white on a snowmobile. She had also wanted to test an observation she had once made about the color of her partner's eyes and an ice covered mountaintop. And Switzerland was home to some of the most scenic mountains in the world.

Jamie was at first a bit reluctant, but Erin assured her that there was much more to do in the European country than just skiing, which Erin knew how to do quite well. Jamie however, did not, but she was willing to try anything once as long as the lovely blonde was by her side. Her thoughts of cold weather soon also ran more toward cuddling by a fire, sipping hot chocolate and

nibbling...well nibbling tender delicacies of many varieties.

The dark haired woman sat down their burgundy and gray luggage, which was a wedding present from Erin's old friend Doctor Anne Carson. One flick of the wrist and a taxi pulled up to the curb and the driver hopped out to put their bags in the trunk. Jamie knew just a little German and the driver knew just a little English. Between the two of them and Erin's translation dictionary, they managed to reach their destination with very little trouble.

The Wellenberg Hotel was nestled in the center of the old section of the largest Swiss city. But the grand building offered some of the best accommodations in Zurich with up to date modern conveniences, including modern access.

A few hours later, once settled in and unpacked, they set out to explore the area. Erin had exchanged her light jacket for a brown, wool, waist length coat. While the temperature was still on the chilly side the wind had thankfully calmed.

They traveled at a leisurely pace down the cobblestone sidewalks of Augustinergasse. Erin was drawn to this area in particular after learning that the region's craftsman and artisans had lived there in the Middle Ages. Their influences were still on display today.

You could easily tell the tourists from the residents. The tourists were the ones with wide-eyed stares, stopping every few feet and pointing fingers at some new, intriguing sight. The locals, while very friendly with their interactions, held mostly neutral expressions as they went about their normal everyday activities.

Erin was a very normal tourist, appraising and appreciating the ethnic architecture. The three or four-level, wooden and stone buildings of mostly white and beige sat close together, leaving only narrow alleyways between them. Iron railed balconies and large bay windows prominently decorated the facades of the charming buildings. What struck her the most was that she could clearly see the slanted, shingled roofs of each one. Unlike the busy, obtrusive skyscrapers of the major US cities, these structures allowed the blue sky to smile down and the sun to cast friendly shadows.

A few of the buildings had beautiful round towers, jumping right from the pages of a fairytale. She could almost picture a lovely princess in the window, waiting for her prince...or princess to come galloping up on a white steed. Erin's mind pictured her own hero astride her strong, pale colored horse, riding across the meadow back home. She reached over for Jamie's hand and squeezed it gently, receiving a tender smile in return.

They continued on their journey, passing by smiling street vendors selling roasted nuts and other treats. Carts full of colorful blooms were pushed along the walkways and peddled to the more romantic tourists willing to part with their money.

While munching on a hand full of warm snacks, Erin peered into another window to watch a tall, thin man painting a landscape on a huge canvas. His meticulous attention to detail was incredible as was his flourish with the brushstrokes. As the minutes passed, her food was ignored and she

stood their barely taking a breath. Her strict focus on the artist amused and delighted her dark haired partner. Jamie reveled in the pure joy of watching her spouse watch the action inside the small artist's studio. The tall woman remembered just a year before being amazed at her sightless lover and the things she could accomplish despite her challenge. Erin had lost her sight in an accident and had been blind for four years, before a miracle surgery had restored her sight. Jamie once again thanked God for granting her spouse that gift and then she thought back to the time when all of her memories had returned and she finally realized Erin's sight had been restored.

It happened the day after they had been thrown to the ground by a bolt of wayward lightning. Jamie had tucked her slightly injured partner into the soft easy chair for some restful television viewing while she went about performing her daily chores around the ranch. The dark haired woman was testing the buckles on some worn leather horse halters. She gave a sharp tug on the brown strap while reviewing some of the renewed memories. She silently chuckled at a joke her partner had once made as they watched some old movie. Next came a picture of the two of them walking along a damp, silvery beach one summer evening, bringing a haze of loving tears to her eyes.

The memories continued and the smile they brought seemed permanently etched on her face.

She now realized these were her favorite memories, the ones made with Erin. There was a dance in the moonlight, which lead to their first time making love, a horseback ride across a meadow on that very ranch, but long before it belonged to the two of them. An evening spent babysitting Erin's niece popped up. She remembered the three of them sharing a delicious dinner and later listening as Erin told the tyke a story before... Jamie suddenly dropped the piece of tack as if it had burned her and took off at top speed for the house. She dashed through the back gate and across the yard sparing just a second to rip off her dirty boots before running into the kitchen and sliding across the tiled floor passed the round table and into the hall.

Erin jumped and dropped her book when the tall figure ran into the living room. "What's wrong Jamie?" the author asked as she was gently, but urgently pulled to her feet.

The tall woman gave no immediate answer as she peered through the glasses perched on Erin's nose and deeply into the beautiful, emerald eyes. "You can see," Jamie whispered thickly. "You can see."

Erin grinned widely and wrapped her good arm around Jamie's waist. "I can see," she confirmed happily. "And do you know what I see when I look at you? I see the rest of my life. I see just how much you love me. I see everything."

Jamie removed the glasses and slowly traced her thumb over the skin around the previously vacant orbs. She leaned closer and her lips touched the corner of each vibrant eye. The emotion of the past and the present hung heavy in her voice as she continued to caress Erin's face. "I should have realized this last night. I'm sorry. It's just so incredible and wonderful." Jamie paused as a smile lit up her face. "It worked and you can see."

Erin kissed the palm near her mouth. "Don't be sorry sweetheart. I know you never thought of me

as your blind lover, just as your lover who happened to be blind. Thank you."

And they stood there, green staring into blue and blue staring into green. It was a moment frozen in its pure perfection. A moment to be remembered and savored forever.

Jamie returned to the moment, still savoring. She saw that her wife's attention was still glued to the painter inside the small shop and her mouth curled in joy. Leaving Erin to her captive viewing, Jamie looked around and noticed an elderly woman with a heavy, woolen patchwork shawl around her shoulders and a white kerchief on her head, peddling flowers from a basket. The woman winked at Jamie and twitched her head, summoning the visitor to come closer. Jamie gave a slight nod and curiously walked the few feet down the sloping street.

The wrinkle faced woman held out a yellow flower. "For your lovely lady," she said in perfect English, but with a thick German accent.

Jamie stumbled with her answer, caught unaware at the woman's astute observation. "I...ah...."

"Don't worry dear," the white haired lady said. "Just because I was born seventy- eight years ago and have lived in this secluded land, far from a more sophisticated world, doesn't mean I don't recognize love. I praise love in every form."

Jamie took the sun hued bloom and smiled. "Thank you," she said, pulling out enough money for the purchase...and then some.

The woman accepted the currency and stuffed it into the pocket of her apron. "May I ask your name dear?"

"Jamie."

"And your love?"

Jamie took a quick glance back over her shoulder and returned with an even brighter smile. "Erin," she stated lovingly.

The woman reached out for Jamie's arm. "I wish you a long and happy life together."

Jamie felt the affectionate squeeze of the slightly arthritic hand. "Thank you..."

The peddler gave her an exaggerated wink. "My friends call me Didi."

Jamie took a long look into the woman's blue eyes. The orbs held a strange, somehow forever youthful quality. She broke from the gaze with a pronounced blink, thanked the woman again for the flower and turned back down the street.

Erin twitched slightly when the yellow bloom suddenly appeared in her vision. She took a sniff and accepted it with a grin. "Thank you sweetheart. It's beautiful," she said as they started on

down the sidewalk. "Where did you get it?"

"From that lady right..." Blue eyes scanned the area, but the vendor was gone. "I guess she went back inside," Jamie said.

"Huh. Maybe she went to eat," said Erin.

"Is that a hint darlin'?"

"When it comes to eating, I don't need to hint." Erin latched onto the leather jacket and pulled Jamie across the street into a small eatery and back out nearly an hour later to continue their sightseeing.

\* \* \* \*

The next day was much warmer and they took a tram to visit the local zoo. On Tuesday, at Erin's insistence, they took in the Swiss National Museum. The ever-present writer residing in her brain was always gathering information to weave into future tales. The story telling artist in her soul always sought out the world's beauty and searched for creative ways to relay that magnificence in words.

That evening they boarded a train, which glided through the lush countryside, passing by a mysterious, shadowy woods, which shrouded many a secret only to be discovered by those daring enough to seek them out. Perhaps that was an adventure for another day...but perhaps not.

The sun was dipping into the west and the fading rays gleamed like beacons across the rippling surface of a small, silver lake. Side by side, the couple watched as the sky evolved from sunny orange to a pale pink and finally to lavender just before the ride ended.

The Restaurant Omuetliberg was one of the city's best and always a tourist favorite. They dined on a traditional fondue. Having asked for a table in a secluded corner, they fed each other the smooth, cheese covered pieces of bread and vegetables. They complimented the delicious food with a bottle of sweet wine with which they toasted their happiness.

Jamie dunked a piece of thick bread into the gooey, white sauce and waved it in front of Erin's face, taunting her to come closer to receive her treat. The blonde watched it move inches from her mouth three times before the temptation drove her forward. At the same instant Jamie leaned in and met Erin's lips as they curled around the cheesy bit. Her fingers got just a little nip from a set of teeth, but she wasn't sure who's.

After the kiss Jamie smiled and swallowed her half. "You know," she said, "I don't think I've told you how glad I am that you chose Switzerland for our honeymoon." She looked out the huge window beside the table at the gurgling fountain spilling over into a tranquil pond, which was the centerpiece of a tree-lined courtyard. "I know I was skeptical at first," she said, returning her gaze to her lovely partner, "but it's wonderful here." The dark head nodded a bit to one side. "Although I probably would have said that about any place you picked. Being together is what

makes it perfect."

The twinkle in Erin's eyes spoke of her agreement. "I want to see the world with you," the author said.

"That's a great idea. Why don't we go to someplace new every year on our anniversary." A quick nod of the blonde head and Jamie could already see Erin's mind searching the globe planning out an itinerary. "But let's enjoy the rest of this trip first," the rancher added.

More food and wine was consumed as Jamie considered what she had just said. Her dark brows furrowed in concern and she downed the last of her beverage.

"What is it sweetheart?" asked Erin. "What's wrong?"

Jamie carefully set her empty glass back on the table. "Nothing," she assured. "I just thought that this time next year might not be a good time to go traipsing around the world."

"Why?" the writer wondered.

Jamie's expression hardened and her delay in answering built the tension. Erin suddenly reached out for the rancher's hand, deeply concerned.

A small sigh escaped Jamie's lips...then the frown instantaneously flipped into an enormous grin as she answered. "Because you will probably be pregnant."

Erin's relieved breath was released under the guise of a chuckle and her eyes slipped shut for just a second. She opened them again to see the happy gaze directed at her. She studied the joy in those eyes and held on tighter as if she would never let go. "You really do want a baby, don't you?"

Jamie was taken slightly aback by the question. "Absolutely! Have I made you feel otherwise?"

"No. No, it's not that. I'm just really glad that you're not doing it just for me."

"Well, I would do that...but I want a child just as much as you do." Jamie ducked her head, hesitant to make the next confession. "Maybe before I might have been doing it more for you. But since the accident, it has become very important to me. I think it'll help me to understand how my parents felt about me and my sister."

Erin agreed. "I think so too."

"I just wish I had some family for a child to get to know."

"You don't have any living relatives, even distant ones?" Erin asked.

The rancher started to nod, but switched it to a sluggish shrug. "Well, my Mom had an older

brother and my Dad had an older sister, but they were never close to us. I probably only saw them maybe twice in my life. I don't even remember their married names."

"You've never mentioned your grandparents. Did you know them?"

That brought a toothy smile to the sullen face. "Oh yeah! My maternal grandfather had died before I was born, but Gram was great. We saw her all the time. Mom would bring her to our house or sometimes I would spend the weekend with her. I remember these great lemon cookies she used to make, they were so soft they would almost melt in your mouth. And just the perfect balance of sweet and tart." Jamie paused, concentrating on those memories. "Actually, she was a lot like your grandmother."

"What about your other grandparents?"

"They used to take us on a special vacation every year. I think there might be some pictures in one of the other albums back home."

"What happened to them?"

"He died when I was almost nine. I didn't even know how. Six months later Grandma joined him. Mom said that after forty years together she died of loneliness. Just before Mom and Dad died, Gram had a bad stroke. She finally had to be put into a nursing care facility; that's why she couldn't take care of me. Maybe that was part of my problem," Jamie said. "All those terrible things happened within a two-year span. I lost so much...and then after I had been living with my foster parents for about a year, the social worker came by one day and said Gram finally passed on. She was the last link to my family." Jamie took a deep and still painful breath. "How did we get on this depressing subject anyway?" She smiled and took Erin's hand again. "You are my family now and when we do add to it I will have great stories to tell. The only thing that worries me is I don't know the first thing about caring for an infant. At least you've had some experience...twice over."

"But I didn't before Conner came along," the author said. "And believe me, the first time I sat with him alone, I was terrified. But by the time the night was over it seemed like the most natural thing in the world and it will for you too. You will be a wonderful parent. I believe that. You have to believe it too."

Jamie nodded skeptically. "I'll try. Just remind me from time to time."

\* \* \* \*

Returning to the city, they took in Zurich by night, including the beautiful opera house that was alight with the glow of a golden treasure aged over 400 changes of the seasons. The couple stopped in front of the wonderful old building and turned to one another, their eyes speaking a thousand choruses of I love yous. Erin adored the way her spouse's midnight hair cascaded across her shoulders, blending in with the black leather of the jacket she wore. The blue, high-necked sweater, under the coat, set off the shade of the tall woman's eyes. Erin knew that she



would revel in those orbs for the rest of her days on this earth.

They stood there just enjoying each other until a gust of chilly air blew across them. Jamie reached up a gloved hand and pushed aside the wayward strands of golden hair from Erin's green eyes. She wanted nothing to obstruct her incredible view. The tall woman then grabbed onto the collar of Erin's gray coat and gently pulled her forward until their lips met.

Another perfect moment followed.

A moment consisting of nothing but the two of them, which turned into an eternity where their love would dwell in a peaceful world.

\* \* \* \*

Thursday brought another trip down the quiet streets of the old town where Erin bought the most adorable handmade teddy bear. She managed to make the purchase in private when Jamie snuck away on an errand of her own. To the rest of the world, with the exception of their niece and nephew, Jamie was rather serious and quiet. But Erin knew the sentimental heart that lay beneath the surface. In private, her tall spouse loved playing with toys and children. She cried at sad and happy endings of movies. Erin could just imagine the expression she would receive when she presented small black bear to the woman she loved. When they returned home it would be a wonderful memento of their honeymoon.

Zurich had just as much modern culture as it did old world tranquility. The clerk at the hotel suggested that they might want to take in the nightlife of the nearby Neiderdorf. But club hopping wasn't really their thing and they chose to spend the night dining and dancing in the privacy of their hotel suite.

After every last morsel of food had been heartily consumed, Jamie turned off all the lights allowing only the candle flames and moonlight to illuminate the room with a soft glow.

Jamie raised a single dark brow upon seeing her alluringly dressed partner emerge from the bathroom.

Erin reached over and turned up the music. "Will you dance for me?" she asked.

The dark head dipped slightly to one side. "Maybe." Jamie crooked a finger at her beautiful wife, calling her forward.

They came together slowly in the middle of the room stopping well short of touching. Reading each other's mind, a sexy smile graced each face and they began to sway to the music, watching and enjoying the enticing movements that each body executed.

The arousing dance lasted a mere three minutes before their lips were drawn together and mouths joined in the tango. Honey tinted breaths mingled sweetly as the passion continued to move their bodies to the beat of their hearts, as well as the music. The kisses and the dancing continued on

as the current song faded into the next and on through a third before a pair of hands drifted to the hem of a sheer blouse. From months of rehearsals, the sensually choreographed routine soon had every stitch of clothing removed. The uncovered skin was visually praised as they leisurely moved the dance onto the bed.

Every caress down a lightly muscled arm, across a firm breast or over a silky thigh lingered deliciously as the grains of sand slipped one by one through the hourglass. Every kiss was slow and gentle like the drops of a spring shower landing upon a newborn leaf. They rose together steadily until the instant of release gave them a shared eon of incredible sensations.

Floating back to earth, bathed in love, they held tight to each other. Endearments were whispered and green eyes watched blue until both sets slipped shut only to open again shortly for not just one, but two tantalizing encores.

\* \* \* \*

The honeymooners awoke late on Friday morning. Their post dancing activities had lasted long into the night, leaving them both with just a touch of exhaustion. But the thought that they had more shopping planned for the day quickly rejuvenated Erin. And seeing the blonde happy was all it took to refuel Jamie's energy level.

Bahnhofstrasse was one of Europe's most beautiful shopping streets with store after store of necessities and luxuries waiting to be purchased. They had spent several hours buying souvenirs for the family and more gifts for each other.

They purchased beautiful, matching watches with engravings of their initials and the date. Erin insisted on buying a Swiss army knife for Jamie. The raven-haired woman protested mildly, even though she was dying to have one. She relented easily and they settled on a mid sized one that Jamie could keep in her pocket when she was out on the ranch. Erin smiled as she watched her spouse play with the gadget, discovering all the hidden parts, like a child with a new toy.

The purchase garnered Erin a big hug, but that wasn't enough for Jamie. As Erin listened to a street musician, Jamie ducked into a nearby candy store. She hurried back and presented the author with a five-pound box of famous Swiss chocolates. She also brought a sample, which she covertly slipped between the blonde's lips. The expressions that crossed Erin's face as the confection melted in her mouth came very close to other, more intimate one's Jamie had seen on many occasions. Erin slowly swallowed, savoring the lingering decadence.

"Can I try some of that?" Jamie asked.

"Sure honey." Erin fumbled with the box of candy. "Help me open this up," she said. Two hands stilled her motions.

"That's not quite what I meant." Jamie leaned in and kissed the soft mouth. She was very aware that they were in public, but she quickly reached between the parted lips and gathered up some of

the essence of left behind sweetness. She pulled back and licked her lips. "That's the way I really like my chocolate."

The satisfied, coral mouth curled in agreement.

\* \* \* \*

Erin had been such a shutterbug, wanting to capture all the beautiful sights. For every sight her eyes saw, she wanted a photograph that she could gaze upon for the rest of her life. Of course every other picture had the two of them in it. Many of those photos she had asked some other kind tourist to take and some were slightly askewed close-ups where she held the camera while snuggling next to her spouse.

Jamie had worked very hard to overcome her aversion to being photographed. The fact that it was a photograph that led to her regaining her true identity had helped immensely. And as long as she felt the safety of the blonde author by her side, she welcomed the Kodak moments. The dark haired woman even had a camera of her own. She had purchased a digital camera just before the wedding, in anticipation of their trip. Her photographs however concentrated mainly on one subject and that blonde haired person was mostly unaware of the clicking shutter pointed in her direction. Jamie had always thought that Erin was the most beautiful woman in the world, but she was also just damn cute in her tourist mode. Every night Jamie downloaded the day's pictures onto their laptop. Once she was back home, the beautiful photos would cover the walls of her office in the barn, creating her own personal shrine to the love of her life.

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Colleen's Scrolls  
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## Chapter 2

Since landing at the airport a week earlier their hands had never been far apart and had most of the time been firmly clasped as they shared the wondrous moments. It was no exception now as the locomotive sped along the tracks, climbing higher into the mountains for the next leg of their journey. Jamie squeezed their joined hands and placed a kiss to the back of the smaller one. "I don't really need to ask you this since the smile hasn't left your face for days, you were even smiling in your sleep last night, but are you having fun?"

Erin's grin widened. "Absolutely!" she said. "This has been a **perfect** honeymoon; beyond my wildest dreams." Her expression turned serious and she brushed the side of Jamie's face with her fingertips. "Thank you for coming back to me."

"There wasn't a choice. I should have died in that plane crash. But our connection gave me the strength to live. We both know that...but I don't think we should test that conclusion ever again. Let's just plan for a future of travel," she tapped Erin's button nose, "success and children."

Erin leaned into the strong body beside her. "But let's live for today," she said as their lips came together. It was just a brief touch, but that's really all it took for a spark of warmth to settle into their hearts and bring contentment to their souls. A spark known simply as love.

They took a taxi from the train station out to their home for the next five days. Erin had rented them a real Swiss chalet. The house was set well away from any neighbors giving them much privacy. A fresh snowfall of five inches had blanketed the valley overnight covering everything in pristine white. The ice crystals glittered like diamonds scattered about the ground beneath the sun's rays.

"Wow!" Jamie marveled, her eyes roaming over the landscape. "This is incredible."

Erin wrapped her arms around her wife's waist and tugged her close. "Yeah. It's even better than the photographs in the ad." She looked up into the pale blue eyes. "I think we're going to like it here."

"Oh, I'm sure of it," the rancher agreed.

The walkway and steps had been cleared in preparation for their arrival and a fresh evergreen wreath, on the door, welcomed them. An easy twist of a key allowed them entry to the five-room house. The couple stepped inside, deposited their luggage on the floor and stood there slightly stunned as they surveyed the beautiful interiors. The furniture, in leathers and plaids of rich, dark colors skirted the small living room. Deep hued hardwoods trimmed the door casings and matching heavy beams stretched across the ceiling. A tall bookshelf covered half of one wall holding many of the nation's finest literary work. Erin wasn't sure just how much time she would have for reading in the next week, but she definitely intended to check it out at some point. The enchanting dwelling was just right for the remainder of their stay in Switzerland.

Erin stepped to the back of the house and down a small hallway where she quietly marveled at the well-equipped kitchen, which would come in very handy for the romantic dinner she was planning for their last night there.

Jamie's attention stayed with the combined living room/dining room. She checked out the stereo equipment, pleased to find it technologically up to date. She had several CD's packed away in her luggage, some old favorites and one brand new one that she couldn't wait to play for her lover. And Saturday night would be the perfect time.

After their curiosity of those rooms had been satisfied they met coming down the hallway.

"Hewoooo," said Jamie, slipping into an Elmer Fudd imitation for some inexplicable reason.

Erin chuckled. "You must be expecting someone else," she teased. "I think all of the ski bunnies are over at the lodge."

Jamie leered down at her spouse. "Bunnies does seem to be the operative word when it comes to us. But instead of cotton tails, I prefer firm, round, pink flesh." Jamie squeezed the body part in question and kissed the upturned lips. "Shall we check out the bedroom?"

With a rapid nod of the blonde head, they ducked down another side hall.

\* \* \* \*

Jamie sat, somewhat dejectedly, on the side of the small hill. Her butt was freezing and her legs ached. Her cheeks were rosy, but not from the chilled air. She reached up and re-settled the dark goggles on top of her black, knit ski cap. Very slowly, blue eyes looked skyward. They came to rest on the face, whose lower half was hidden behind a thick red glove. Jamie knew that the mouth behind that glove was laughing. The twinkle in the green eyes was evident. "You think that was funny?" Jamie asked.

Erin shook her head, but didn't say a word.

Jamie used her discarded ski pole and pushed herself to her feet as she was taught at the beginning of the lesson. She very methodically reached down and unlatched her heavy boots from the long, polished skis. "Well, Miss I can teach to you ski Jamie, it won't be any problem at all, let's see how funny you think this is." She gathered up a hand full of wet snow and began forming it into a sphere.

The green eyes widened as Erin pushed herself back along the white ground cover. "Now Jamie, play nice," she implored.

Perfect ivory teeth shone through the evil grin. "I always play nice, sweetheart. You did promise we would have a ball here."

Erin quickly pointed her skis down the hill and with a little push, she slid away from her pseduo attacker.

"Sure, run away," Jamie called out after her. "Chicken!"

Erin skidded to a stop, sending up a spray of white flakes. She looked back up the hill with squinting eyes, ready to face the challenge. Two poles fell to the ground and two skis were quickly discarded. She marched back up the small incline, grabbing her own ammunition along the way.

Jamie just stood there tossing her weapon back and forth between hands, letting the intimidation ooze.

Erin stopped about ten feet from her quarry and they stared each other down like a scene from an old west shoot out. They each watched for subtle signs, movement of clothing, sliding of a foot, the twitching of the trigger finger.

Thirty seconds passed.

Just as Jamie was about to throw, a gust of wind blew across the mountain and a load of snow fell onto the rancher's head from the branches above her. She jerked as some of the freezing stuff slipped beneath her shirt. Spitting and sputtering, she dislodged the dirty flakes from her mouth and quickly brushed them away from her eyes. The first thing she saw was Erin, on her knees and doubled over in hilarity. The laughter slowly bubbled up from deep within her belly and soon Jamie mirrored the small blonde.

Erin's chuckles finally began to fade away, but for a very long time. "Now that...was funny," she said between some deep breaths.

Jamie nodded in agreement. "Yeah, it was...but so is this." Her arm jumped out and a perfect snowball flew from her fingertips.

The soft projectile hit Erin right in the middle of the forehead and slid down her face and behind her glasses. She brushed it away and opened her eyes to see Jamie on the ground, crawling toward her like a leopard...a snow leopard stalking its prey. Erin skittered backwards, scrambled to her feet and took off as she was pelted in the back with more snowballs.

She ran a few more feet and turned to try and reason with her playful lover. But Jamie was gone from sight. Erin had ducked into a small stand of trees and her head bobbed, looking for the tall woman among the thick evergreens. The fresh, clean scent of pine entered her lungs with every excited breath as her eyes darted around thick trunks and bushy boughs. The snow crunched softly under her heavy boots. That and the mild whoosh of the wind was the only sound Erin heard as she sought out her elusive partner. "Where are you Jamie?" she said quietly as she prowled along. "Come out, come out where ever you are."

Erin suddenly heard the cracking of a branch and something like a war cry as she turned and was bombarded with yet more snow. Ignoring what was hitting her coat she reached down grabbed a handful and tossed it haphazardly. Jamie continued to throw as they quickly advanced on one another. In a last ditch effort to win their little battle Erin launched her body at the dark haired woman and they both fell to the ground and rolled, clenching each other tightly.

After three rotations Jamie planted the tip of her boot in the ground stopping them, with her landing on top. She looked down into the sparkling, emerald eyes. "Have I told you how much I love you in the last hour?" she asked.

Erin pretended to check her non-existent watch. "No, not in the last hour you haven't. But you can tell me now."

"I just did," Jamie said teasingly.

"No that was a question not a declaration."

"My mistake. It's time for a little show and tell then. I love you." She gave Erin a brief kiss. "I love you." Another small kiss. "I love you." Jamie dipped her head and kissed Erin like it was the first and the last time.

\* \* \* \*

Erin set the two steaming cups atop the wooden tray then added the half empty bag of marshmallows and gingerly carried it into the living room. She stopped at the kitchen door, hitting the light switch with her elbow, not wanting the harsh fluorescence to compete with the soft, orange glow of the flames dancing across the logs in the fireplace.

Jamie had already thrown several big pillows on top of the velvety, woven area rug on the floor. She was stretched out with her back against the sofa, warming her feet by the fire. Her eyes were closed and her hands rested lightly on her stomach, but she was far from sleep. The stitches of pain jogging across the muscles in her back saw to that. She heard the sliding of socks moving

across the planked floor and opened her eyes just in time to see the sturdy, green mug hovering above her hands. "Thanks hon," she said before grabbing an enormous marshmallow from the bag and dropping it into the chocolate drink, where it proceeded to melt slowly. She took a careful sip and hummed her approval.

Erin eased herself onto a pillow beside Jamie before starting in on her own drink. The wind outside whistled its arctic tune and slammed against the slatted shutters on the west side of the house. But the cold didn't touch the snuggling couple.

Just in case though, the rancher reluctantly pulled from the embrace, crawled over and stoked the fire. While scooting back to her place she stopped suddenly and a groan escaped through clenched teeth.

"What is it?" Erin asked. The answer fired in her brain when she saw the shoulders twitch. "Oh sweetheart, it's your back, isn't it? I'm so sorry. I never should have asked you to go skiing today. Where is my head at; of course learning something like that was going to over tax your muscles? That was so insensitive of ..." Her self-abusing tirade was halted by a gentle kiss.

"Don't blame yourself," Jamie said when she ended the kiss. "First off, I had a lot of fun today." She smiled and placed a silly kiss on the tip of Erin's nose. "Second, it's not that bad; I have certainly had worse. Finally, and most important, I will most likely have to live with these little pains for the rest of my life and I certainly won't let that stop me from indulging in any sort of physical activities with you." Her leer told of the true intent of her last words and the fingers that ran down Erin's arms and onto the jean covered hips solidified the meaning.

Erin kissed her way to a tasty earlobe as she fumbled for something on the floor beside her. She pressed the cup to Jamie's hand and said, "Finish your hot chocolate and then meet me in the bedroom."

"I'm not thirsty anymore," Jamie said with a husky, lust filled voice. "Let's just go to bed."

Erin wiggled away, placing restraining hands against the eager shoulders. "No, no. I need just a few minutes to prepare," she said, before dashing off down the hall.

Jamie didn't quite understand what there was to prepare, but she was the obedient one and busied herself with several little chores. She doused the fire and turned up the furnace to warm the rest of the house as she waited impatiently. She downed the rest of her drink in three gulps, licking a bit of marshmallow from the corner of her mouth.

Jamie checked her watch.

It had only been six minutes, but that was plenty of time...wasn't it? Jamie had a quick thought and ducked into the small bathroom in the hall where she had left her traveling case. She filled a glass with water and swallowed a pain pill, not wanting anything to interfere with the rest of the night's activities.



Erin was placing a small towel and a bottle on the nightstand just as the door to the bedroom opened. But Jamie didn't particularly notice that as her eyes were riveted on the body she intended to devour. *But why is it clothed?*

Erin turned to find her tall lover leaning against the door casing, grinning widely.

The smile turned decidedly mischievous. "Times up," Jamie said as long fingers reached up to the buttons on her heavy shirt.

Erin skittered across the room in a flurry of protest. "Let me do that," she insisted. The author proceeded to remove the clothing in a most unsensual, almost clinical manner. Erin was already dressed in her sleepwear and Jamie's smile dropped when she finally realized that their thoughts were on very different tracks.

"Lay down on your stomach," the blonde instructed her naked partner.

The smile perked back up. *Then again.*

Jamie crawled onto the right side of the bed and snuggled into the fresh smelling sheets. She soon felt the weight settle onto the backs of her thighs and she sighed expectantly. Hands covered in a warm, slippery substance started at her neck and slowly began the process of loosening the drawn muscles.

Erin leaned over and placed a simple kiss to the small birthmark near Jamie's shoulder blade. She never failed to perform the loving gesture, whether attending to her partner's back in passion or comfort. The blonde grunted slightly as her hands moved on to the shoulders and the work became more difficult. "Honey, your muscles are really tight here. I'm going to have press pretty hard to relax them. Let me know if I hurt you."

"You won't."

It took some time, but when that goal was accomplished, the small, but strong hands slid across the middle of her back and then lower where her thumbs gently worked on either side of the long, but nearly faded scar. Erin knew from the past that Jamie often held a lot of pain in those particular muscles.

The massage continued on for several more minutes, the author taking great care while working around the tailbone. Erin's palms finally came to rest on Jamie's backside, further stimulating the rancher. Her arms were at her sides and as Erin worked her way back up, scooting higher to exert more pressure, Jamie tickled the inside of a silk covered leg.

The blonde jumped. "Hey!" She leaned over near an ear. "Sweetheart, this massage is medical. I want to end your pain." She smiled when the corner of Jamie's mouth drooped into a pout. Erin kissed her cheek. "When we get done and if your back feels better, I'll see what I can do about relieving that other tension."

The dark head nodded quickly and Jamie finally settled completely into the magic fingers against her back. "You know," the rancher muttered, "over at the lodge they have professional masseuses. I could have called and had one come over."

"Well, call me stingy," said Erin, "but I don't want anyone else's hands on your naked body."

Jamie gave a slurred chuckle.

\* \* \* \*

It was 8:30 in the morning before Jamie opened her eyes again. A thin line of dull light peeked between the heavy, gray and maroon curtains covering the two big windows. Jamie readjusted her head against the fluffy pillow as a brush of cool air fell across her arm. She pulled it under the covers with the rest of her bare body as she sleepily recalled the events of the previous night. An experimental stretch told her that her back was nearly pain free and she knew it was do to her loving partner. Turning over, she came to rest against the body of that partner and she maneuvered her hand up under Erin's top, letting it rest against a very warm breast. "Good morning," she whispered.

A similar reply was mumbled.

"I'm sorry I fell asleep on you last night sweetheart," Jamie said.

Erin's awareness rose just a notch. "I don't think there's a rule that says a couple has to make love every night of their honeymoon."

Jamie snuggled in closer. "No rule, but we have averaged twice a day and in case you didn't realize, I really, really wanted to. What do you say we spend the morning making up for it?"

"Let me sleep for another half an hour and then we can spend the rest of the morning in bed catching up," said the sleepy blonde.

"Deal. I'm gonna take a shower to get this greasy oil off me. I'll be back. Love you."

"Love you too."

Jamie smiled and tucked the covers tightly around her slumbering wife.

The hot water soothed away the last of the tiny spots of pain and Jamie happily dashed into the kitchen to see what she could come up with for breakfast. She started a pot of life saving coffee and took the last two, clean cups from the cupboard and set them on the tray Erin had used the night before. While the java was brewing, she decided to wash up the sink full of dirty dishes. Once that was done, her eyes fell on the breadbox on the corner of the cabinet. She grinned, remembering their trip into the nearby village the day before and the stop at the deliciously sinful, little bakery.

Jamie actually gave Erin forty minutes before she roamed back into the bedroom with the loaded tray. She was surprised to find her wife already awake, sitting up in the bed and running her fingers through her mussed tresses.

"You don't have to do that honey," said Jamie. "You're pretty darn cute just like that." She scooted onto the large bed and placed the tray between them.

"It's a curse, what can I say." Careful not to jostle the brimming cups, Erin reached over and accepted her proper good morning kiss.

While letting Erin start in on her first cup of coffee, Jamie picked up the wax-coated bag and rustled it with a smile. Peering inside, she took a few seconds before deciding on one of the icing and nut-covered pastries. Jamie pulled it out with two fingers, but just before it reached her lips it was pilfered by a wide-eyed and hungry Erin. The blonde took a healthy bite as Jamie chuckled and retrieved a duplicate from the bag.

Erin hummed and licked her sticky fingers. "I was just dreaming about eating something sweet." Her eyes darkened and flicked over to Jamie. "And just as soon as I finish this, I will."

\* \* \* \*

Ice-skating was on the schedule for the next day. An area where Jamie needed no lessons. She remembered how she and her twin sister Jordan had first learned.

*Michael Sheridan bent down to tie the strings on Jamie's brand new white skates. His wife did the same for Jordan. Five-year-old Jordan had mostly mastered the art of tying her shoes, but she tried to hide the fact so she wouldn't hurt her sister's feelings because Jamie was just a little behind in the new task. With hats pulled down over their ears and mittens pulled on tight, the girls were ready. They had sat and fidgeted all morning, waiting impatiently for the mid afternoon hour to arrive so they could finally try out their new Christmas presents.*

*"Okay girls," said Amy Sheridan, "Let's go."*

*The dark haired sisters grinned as their feet hit the slippery ice and went every which way. They giggled when strong hands grabbed them and the four of them took off across the silver surface.*

*After about an hour, the children were doing well in keeping their balance and as with all children they wanted independence.*

*"Can we go alone now Mommy?" Jordan asked. Jamie loudly echoed the request.*

*Amy was hesitant, but with a nudge from her husband she soon relented.*

*The red- cheeked girls held tightly to each others hands as they cruised around the perimeter of the frozen pond. "We're doing it Jordy, we're doin it," yelled Jamie.*

*With the cold weather, the twins had to be urged to leave the ice. But they were right back out there the next day and many more times the rest of that winter and then the next. By the winter of 1979 Jamie had to take to the ice by herself. But even then, she was never alone; the spirit of Jordan Michele Sheridan was right there by her side.*

Even during her darkest years, Jamie always managed to find a pond or a rink to go skating in winter. She preferred to go first thing in the morning or late in the evening so she could enjoy the solitude and the memories.

Erin and Jamie chased each other around the ice for over an hour, catching each other often and bestowing kisses as rewards.

\* \* \* \*

They returned home about nine from having dinner in town. And because it was an unusually warm evening they had taken a leisurely stroll around the ski lodge to walk off some of the delicious, but undoubtedly fattening food.

Jamie saw the reflections coming through the glass panes of the rear door and she turned to Erin. "I feel like a late night swim, care to join me?"

The author yawned. "Oh honey, I'm tired. I'd really just like to take a bath and lay down. Do you mind?"

"Of course not," Jamie said, kissing the blonde head. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Erin said and playfully pushed her spouse away. "You go on. Have fun."

"Okay. I'll be about twenty minutes then I'll join you."

The author watched as her wife stepped through the back door and reached for the bathing suit she had left hanging on the wall. Erin grinned. "Perfect," she purred.

After thirty or so relaxing laps Jamie peeled off her drenched suit and dashed through the chilly house into the small bath to change for the night. Once again warm and dry, she vigorously rubbed her damp locks with a towel as she strolled down the hall. The towel was down over her eyes when she stepped through the bedroom door and even though the room was silent, Jamie got the unmistakable feeling that something was different. She stopped for just a second before slowly lowering the towel. "Oh my...." Her eyes popped when she spotted her wife, standing across the room, looking both demure and sexy. "What do we have here?" Jamie asked as those eyes raked up, down and back again over the body stuffed into the short and frilly frock.

"You like what you see, ya?" Erin asked in a cute German accent.

Jamie took particular notice, not that anyone in the world could have missed the abundant

cleavage pushed nearly up to Erin's chin by the corseted dress. The bright, blonde wig atop her head had two long braids that draped down the sides of the accentuated chest, making Erin the perfect, if somewhat exaggerated, barmaid.

"Ohhhhh ya!" Jamie answered.

Erin gave her a saucy wink. "Good." She pulled out the chair at the small, round table in the corner. "Please have a seat," she said.

Jamie happily caught onto her partner's game plan and was more than ready to play her part. She tossed the towel aside, sidled over and pinched the barely covered behind. "I'll take this one," she said lasciviously.

The barmaid giggled and waited for her patron to sit down. She tipped forward at the waist giving the seated woman a face full of plump breasts. "What would Fraulein like...to drink?" she asked.

Jamie didn't need anything to wet her whistle; she was practically drooling down the front of the flirting woman's bodice. She cleared her throat, but the words came out gravely anyway. "What do you recommend?"

"Well, we have a very hearty and brash, dark ale on tap tonight. How does that sound?"

"Looks goo...sounds good to me." A few seconds later, a heavy glass mug brimming with an aromatic brew was placed before her. Jamie looked up at the pretty face and flashed her best smile. "Would you join me?" she asked.

The blonde lashes batted. "Ya. Thank you. But first I must clean up the mess you make." She clucked a disapproving tongue and crossed back toward the door. Making sure the blue eyes were on her, the barmaid bent over deeply at the waist and took her time picking up the discarded towel. The starched, white frills went with her, revealing some extremely luscious landscape.

Jamie choked on her beer when the bare, pink flesh came into plain view. Not that it was something she'd never seen before. It was just shocking, but pleasantly so, to see her lover's brazen behavior.

The blonde quickly scooted back to her customer, rubbing Jamie's back through the jerky spasms. "You must be more careful," she said, maintaining the accent. Reaching around the tall woman she suggested, "Perhaps this is too much for you, ya?"

The breasts tickling her ear and cheek sorely tested Jamie's patience. The game was afoot and she would not be the first to break. But that didn't mean she couldn't play the part of the lustful customer for all it was worth. "Sit," she said in a demanding tone.

The barmaid looked around and placed a surprise hand to her cheek, the one on her face that is.

"I'm afraid there are no more chairs Fraulein."

Jamie smirked and scooted back from the table. She patted her lap with both hands. "Here's a seat, ready and waiting."

The blonde hesitated. "I don't know if I should. I barely know you."

"What better way to get acquainted."

The barmaid giggled again and wiggled sideways onto Jamie's lap. The half empty glass was lifted to her lips.

"Share with me," said Jamie.

"Thank you, but I really shouldn't. Beer makes me very...hot." The last word was wetly whispered into an ear.

Jamie twitched once, then smirked. "I'm already hot baby. We'll share that too. Then maybe later we can cool off together." The woman in her lap drank down some of the dark beer. Jamie watched the lovely lips curled around the thick glass and the tongue that swiped away some errant drops from those rosy petals. Erin's disguise was nearly perfect save for one little detail, the two rings still on her left hand finger. She knew Erin would never willingly remove those. But since they were already pretending, Jamie just pretended not to see them for the moment. "So, how long have you been doing this?" she asked. Jamie let the question linger as her fingertips rubbed along the muscled thigh, creeping up under the white frills.

The blonde did her best to control her body's reactions as the adlibs formed in her mind. Her erratically beating heart was sure to give her away though. "Actually, this is my first time," she said. Erin didn't want to be the only one simmering with desire so with just the tip of her tongue, she licked a path up the side of Jamie's face, tasting the slight hint of chlorine. "I guess that makes me a virgin," she finally whispered.

Jamie's breath hitched and she covered it with a chuckle. The blonde snuggled closer to the solid body and snaked an arm around the rancher's neck. She gave a little push against the dark head.

Jamie ended up with her chin resting on a shelf of soft skin and it took all her control not to bury her face deeper. The next move was hers in this tempestuous little game. In just a short amount of time the tension between them had risen to an almost unbearable level and someone was soon to snap. "Tell me about yourself," she asked, making sure to exhale heavily between words.

The hot breath tickled in the most luxurious way as it slid into the valley between the blonde's cinched up breasts. "My...father is a dairy...farmer," she panted, barely able to keep up the disguise. "He doesn't know...I do this kind of thing. I sneak away at night."

The dark haired woman wrapped her arms around the curvaceous body and her hands fiddled with the laces holding the dress closed. "So, you might say that you are a naughty, farmer's

daughter."

The blonde began circling Jamie's ear with a single finger. "Ya. I'm very, very naughty."

"Perhaps I could set you straight...so to speak and take you away from all this. Show you the world's...immense pleasures."

The blonde head hovered closer, the tension stretched to its absolute limit. The accent suddenly disappeared and the plea was whispered. "Please, take me..." The mouth that commandingly closed over hers swallowed the rest of the words. Without parting their melded lips, Erin wriggled her way around to straddle Jamie's lap. The long, brown laces at the back of her dress were quickly loosened, as Jamie's ravenous tongue went on the prowl, searching out its mate.

The lovers soon broke apart, both panting and racing to find more flesh to taste. Jamie's kisses moved lower down a quivering jaw and below, where her tongue slipped into the hollow at the base of the silky neck. Finally, she traced a wet path onto the sweet smelling planes of flesh under her chin. With an index finger Jamie pulled the lacy neckline of Erin's dress down, even further. The dark, pink nipple that popped out screamed for attention, which she denied momentarily as she repeated the action on the other side of the dress. Jamie stared down the fleshy points and watched as they swelled before her eyes. She looked up to see Erin watching her with threatening eyes.

"Don't tease me, Jamie," Erin begged. "Please."

Jamie flashed her a half smirk. "Isn't that what you were doing, trying to seduce and tease me?" She wiggled her chin against the turgid bit of flesh. They both knew they could now longer keep up the pretense. As fun as their little pretend session had been, when Erin and Jamie made love, it had to be as themselves and only themselves.

Erin squirmed again hoping to quell the itch that was rapidly building between her legs. "Seduce you yes," she panted, "tease you..." She sucked in a breath when a warm mouth quickly descended and teeth tugged on her nipple. "...no," she finished quietly.

Jamie hummed her appreciation and Erin moaned her enjoyment as the heat in the room rose several degrees and the aching seconds slipped away. The dark haired woman had loosened the laces just enough to allow Erin to be able to breathe better. And she was certainly breathing heavily and quickly at the moment. But the dress was still snug enough to provide the support needed so Jamie could put her hands to other good uses. One of those hands slowly crept under the layers of crinoline, inching toward the moist heat. Her blunt nails scraped along the slick thigh at an agonizingly slow rate.

When fingertips barely touched the blonde curls, Erin lurched forward and grabbed the tall spindles on the back of the chair Jamie was sitting in. "Thank you," she said as she began undulating her lower half encouraging the exploring digits. Erin was riding out the power that was building beneath her skin, rippling through her muscles and nerves, looking for an outlet.

Jamie's mouth was full or she would have returned a verbal welcome. The response she did manage was to double her efforts, much to Erin's delight.

She soon left the throbbing points and trailed back up to nibble on a fleshy earlobe. Between licks and nips she whispered words that fueled the flames swarming inside the petite body moving on her lap.

Erin hissed and groaned as the sweet mouth and talented fingers loved her absolutely and not so delicately. But right now that is exactly the way she wanted it. With every spontaneous, but perfect movement, the spring coiled tighter in her belly, waiting to bounce back when the rapturous moment arrived.

Being the only coherent thing she could think of, Erin moved her hands to Jamie's head as the passion continued to escalate to its pinnacle. The soft, dark hair fell just to her shoulders and Erin loved that she could let it slide through her fingers over and over again without moving her hands. The rancher had promised that she would keep it at its current length.

Jamie's long finger made a tight circle in just the right spot and she spoke her feelings. "I love you Erin...eternally."

That was it. At that glorious moment of release, Erin's head flew back and her eyes snapped shut as the tremors vibrated through her. Jamie stilled her hands and mouth and simply watched the lovely sight before her. The black dots danced behind her lids and Erin lurched forward, resting her forehead against Jamie's shoulder, her breaths slowly settling into a more normal pattern. The rancher rubbed soothing hands down her lover's back, further untying the strings holding the brown dress closed.

Erin raised her head briefly. "God, you are so good at that," she slurred languidly as her muscles became jelly and she melted into the body supporting her.

Jamie wiped away a trickle of sweat from her wife's temple as she modestly accepted the compliment with more slow kisses. Her own need throbbed torturously, but she was a patient lover.

Erin's head fell against her shoulder again.

Another two minutes passed and she feared Erin had fallen asleep in her lap, because the near boneless woman hadn't made a move.

"You know honey," said Jamie, "I wish I could carry you over to the bed right now, but..."

The blonde shivered. "I know, I know." With great effort, Erin pushed away from Jamie and her feet started to slide to the floor. "I'm coming," she said.

"Again?" Jamie grinned rakishly. "And I'm not even touching you. I am good."



Erin cradled the smiling face between her hands and her expression suddenly turned serious. "You are. Sometimes I think I could just by looking into these eyes."

With that said, sweet and gentle kisses were exchanged, relaying the deepest of loves. The couple leisurely undressed each other and crawled into bed where they expressed that love long into the night.

Continued in Part 3

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## The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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# ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [colleen30@webtv.net](mailto:colleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

Or if you only want updates and special announcements please join [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens\\_Corner\\_Announcements/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens_Corner_Announcements/)

## Chapter 3

Erin blinked against the sun invading her eyelids. She turned over and stretched, immediately noticing that she was alone. Something scratched at her back and she rooted beneath the blankets. Coming up with the offending item, she smiled. Erin had finally discarded the braided, blonde wig a few hours after they had climbed beneath the sheets. She remembered Jamie's reaction when she had told her of her trip to the costume shop over eight days ago in Zurich. Jamie had chuckled and told her to test her imagination any time she wanted. The rancher even taunted that she herself might think of some inventive fantasies for them to play with.

Erin tossed aside the fake hair and after a quick trip to the bathroom she went in search of her elusive lover. She found Jamie snuggled down in the over stuffed love seat in the corner of the living room. The rancher was in deep concentration over the laptop screen. The blonde tightened the cinch on her robe and crossed the chilly floor, hopping from one small throw rug to the other until she reached her destination. The dark head made no move, which was strange; not much ever escaped the woman's attention.

"What are you doing hon?" Erin asked, as she quickly scooted in beside Jamie.

Jamie turned and gave her a smile. "Good morning," she said, following up with a kiss. "Actually, while you were sleeping in, I was doing some research on the insemination process. I didn't really know much about it."

"Well, I can help there. You see, the doctor will take this tube and put it..."

"Yes! That much I knew. I was talking about details, silly. I wanted to make sure it wouldn't be painful or dangerous for you."

Erin grinned softly. "What a wonderful partner you are," she said, laying her head on Jamie's shoulder. "I don't think there is any danger at all. And maybe just a tiny amount of discomfort." The big, green eyes tipped up through blonde lashes. "There will be much, much more in giving birth."

Jamie winched in agreement. "How long do you think it will take to find the right donor? From what I have learned there may be hundreds of names to choose from."

"Well, if they are cross referenced to dark hair and blue eyes that will probably narrow it down considerably."

Jamie looked shocked. "But don't you want a donor with blonde hair and green eyes so the baby would look like you?"

"No." Erin smiled. "I'd much prefer a combination of the two of us. That way it will be as close as we could come to creating a baby ourselves. I especially like the thought of seeing blue eyes in miniature."

Jamie gave her a slightly embarrassed smile and another kiss. "Thank you. Don't all newborns have blue eyes though?" she asked.

"So you do know something about babies," Erin teased with a pointing finger.

Jamie's blue eyes rolled skyward. "Bridgett told me that once," she said. "She had a picture on her desk of Caitlin as a baby and a more current one and I asked about the difference in her eye color."

"Well, I want a child that will grow up with baby blues."

\* \* \* \*

Much later that day, Jamie pulled up in front of the small house and killed the motor on her currently chosen mode of transportation. Pulling off the thick gloves, she pushed them into her deep pockets and strode up the walkway that had been recently swept from the day's inch of new snow. She knocked twice and waited.

Erin opened the door and grinned. "What are you doing?" she asked.

Jamie stared at the incredible beauty. Her temporarily tunneled vision disrupted the connection from her brain to her mouth, but a saucy little wink aimed in her direction suddenly jumpstarted her tongue. "I'm here to pick up my date."

The author crossed her arms in front of her and perused the tall body from the boot-covered toes to the top of her coal colored hair. "Didn't you just take her out last night?" she asked suspiciously.

"Yes, but she is so adorable and irresistible, I just had to take her out again."

Erin intensely eyed the bold woman once again. "Well...okay, I guess I can let her go out with you again. But I want her in bed by 9:00."

Jamie grinned devilishly. "Oh, I can promise that. Get your coat my ladylove. Our chariot awaits."

Erin slipped into her red parka and stepped onto the porch when Jamie scooted aside.

"Chariot?" questioned Erin, when her eyes landed on the vehicle parked below the drive.

Jamie took the blonde's hand and escorted her down the wet walk. "I checked and there isn't a horse within miles. This is the next best thing." The rancher tossed her leg over the big beast and settled in, bringing it to life with the switch of a key. Erin mounted and scooted up as close as she could to Jamie and still be in her own clothes. "Comfortable?" the darker woman asked when the hands closed over her stomach.

"Very. Let's go."

The engine revved, sending the snow mobile coasting over the crystalline banks of snow on the five-mile trek back to town.

\* \* \* \*

Two sets of boots stomped against the rubber mat, dislodging the caked on snow before stepping up to the entryway of the ski lodge. Their five-mile journey had turned into six as Jamie detoured through a field, leaving evidence of their visitation in the tracks that trailed behind them. They were having too much fun to stop.

At one point they sped across a snowy dell and through a stand of birch trees, when Erin tapped her partner on the shoulder and pointed to a particularly mature individual. Jamie brought the snowmobile to a halt and they dismounted and tromped through the white drifts over to the tree. Its winter branches rose high above their heads with not a leaf, bird or any other adornment in sight. Erin pursed her lips and placed a single finger against them in a shushing gesture. She didn't want to interrupt the flawless moment with words when feelings were so much more important. Erin grinned and sidled over to Jamie. She cuddled close and without a word, planted a kiss on the curious woman's lips. During the diverting action she wriggled her hand inside the tight pocket of Jamie's jeans, much to the rancher's surprise. Jamie went wide eyed and pulled back slightly as the blonde fished around. Erin made the quiet gesture again and soon found what she was looking for. The author smiled again and held the red pocketknife up between them. Pulling out one of the sharp blades, Erin turned back to the tree trunk. A few cutting motions later and she stepped aside to reveal the letters E. C. + J. S., carved into the bark. Jamie nodded her approval and smiled. She took the knife, kissed the back of the hand that held it and proceeded to enclose the initials in a heart.

Jamie held open the large, wooden door as Erin stepped under the outstretched arm. The warmth from the open pit fire in the center of the huge room caused them to quickly shed their coats. The round, stone hearth surrounding the fire allowed for a 360 degree view of the mesmerizing flames and the padded bench offered seating for at least twenty patrons.

Crossed swords and shields dotted the high walls along the hallway leading toward the dining room. The authentic weapons were dented and dulled from untold ancient battles in defense of the land and its people. Neutrality was not always the country's political stand. Paintings and tapestries told their own stories of generations gone by and of larger than life legends and heroes.

Jamie and Erin followed the hostess into the dining area and were seated at a table just big enough for two, among a dozen other quiet diners. Erin's satiny, black and gold colored blouse was a glistening backdrop to the two glass encased candles flickering between them. Jamie continuously peeked over the top of her menu and watched as the green eyes practically devoured the written words. The menu listed many tasty sounding dishes, and as they often did, they each ordered something different that they would end up sharing.

The waitress returned with the bottle of wine Jamie had ordered and one sip had Erin planning to order another bottle to take with them. Soon they were dining on a local dish called Pastetil,

which consisted of tender pieces of beef and mushrooms in a cream sauce ladled into a crusty bread bowl. Served with rice and peas the large portion easily sated their hunger. Jamie's choice of a spicy veal and noodle dish was left partially uneaten to leave room for dessert.

"We've got a pretty busy November coming up don't we?" asked Jamie.

Erin nodded. "Yeah, the movie's premiere, Thanksgiving and Mom's birthday. Not to mention finalizing the plans for the new clinic and my riding program for challenged children. You do still plan on going to Texas with Dad for that horse auction?"

"Yes...as long as you're going too."

Erin laughed. "I wouldn't send you off with Dad alone. As a matter of fact, Mom said she was coming with us."

Jamie hesitated. "Well, maybe your parents would like the time alone."

"No. Mom made a big deal about the four of us spending that time together."

Jamie reviewed all those things in her mind. "I'm thinking we've got too many things on our plate. You forgot to mention that we still have our appointments with Dr. Webber."

Erin sighed. "You're probably right. It might be better to wait on the riding program until the first of the year anyway and I can let Anne do most of the work on the clinic."

"Good. I don't think being stressed will help if you're trying to get pregnant."

Erin smiled brightly. "That's right and that is our most important goal."

"May I get you some coffee and dessert?" a voice asked.

Jamie looked up about to answer, but she choked on her tongue before a word could slip out. She brought the napkin to her mouth to cover the grinning, coughing spell that followed.

The new blonde waitress looked at Jamie in concern. Erin bit the inside of her jaw to keep from smiling at the memories the young girl suddenly invoked. But her reaction was definitely subtler than her convulsing partner's.

"We'll have coffee and two slices of the chocolate cheesecake please," the waitress said. The blonde waitress nodded and turned to leave. Erin waited until the girl was well away from the table before she turned an admonishing eye toward her wife.

Jamie cleared her throat with a several sips of water before speaking. "Sorry. That just took me by surprise. And don't look at me like that," she said. "She is wearing the G rated version of that sexy, little costume you had on the other night." Jamie reached over and took Erin's hand. "Right down to the blonde braids." She winked. "Can I help it if that vivid image will be with me for the

rest of my life?"

\* \* \* \*

Friday had seen them spending one final day on the slopes. Jamie had practically begged Erin to give her one more lesson, promising not to over exert herself or her back. Mostly she wanted Erin to have fun at something she was so good at. Jamie had effectively used her adorable little pout to its full advantage. And she felt not an ounce of guilt for the small manipulation as the grin widened on the author's face as the lift carried them high onto the snowy mountain.

It only took a little more than an hour for Jamie to finally catch onto the art of balancing her weight and keeping her butt off the ground. But she still had just a little trouble keeping the skis together. Most of the time she ended up doing the splits on snow or crossing the tips and coming to a complete stop. Although half the time she just did it for comedic effect to make Erin laugh.

But neither one of them laughed when Jamie hit a patch of particularly icy snow and went careening down the hill unable to control her speed or her direction. A large, menacing tree was coming up fast and getting larger by the second. She closed her eyes tightly, anticipating the impact. But when it came it wasn't nearly as painful as she had thought it would have been.

The next thing she remembered was resting on a sled, being whisked away to a nearby first aid station.

\* \* \* \*

The frightened woman ducked around the dark haired medical technician to be next to her wife. "I am so sorry honey," she pleaded with misty eyes. "We never should have been out there on that damn, slippery slope. How could I have been so stupid to think...?"

"Could you please step into the next room," the nurse asked gently, "so we can continue our examination? I promise you she is in good hands."

The exasperated skier looked over the nurse's shoulder and caught the faint wink and the weak smile directed at her. She took a deep breath and turned away, reluctantly moving through the door and into the silent waiting room. The brightly colored coat was ripped off and tossed onto a corner chair and the pacing began. She ran a hand through her damp hair and a thumbnail was nervously chewed.

An hour's worth of worry was packed into the fifteen-minute time span until someone finally appeared with information.

"You can see her now," said the tall, blonde haired doctor.

She wasted no time with amenities as she barreled past him into the examining room and over to the small bed which held her beloved wife.

The patient tried to rise, but insistent hands held her back. "Jamie, I'm fine," Erin said.

The rancher looked at the doctor for conformation.

"I wouldn't quite use that term," he said. "I'm sure you will be sore for awhile, but amazingly there are no breaks or other serious injuries...not even a sprain."

"I just got the wind knocked out of me," the blonde added. "I can go home now, right?" she asked the doctor, well aware of the still unresolved terror twisting in Jamie's belly.

"Of course." He held out a small brown bottle. "You might need these later today," he said. "And please call if you need anything else."

Jamie glanced at the label as she pocketed the bottle, recognizing the name of the muscle relaxant. "We will," she assured. Once he had left she turned to find Erin pushing herself up from the bed. Jamie reached out to support her. "Little at a time sweetheart. Just sit hear a minute then we'll think about walking."

Erin was more than capable of moving, but she allowed Jamie's assistance, knowing it was helping to ease the rancher's worry.

Jamie took a seat right in front of her and cupped Erin's cheek, careful of the red, raw scrape that ran across the pale surface. It was the only real injury she had sustained in the incident.

"That was a really silly move, putting yourself between me and that tree," said Jamie, as she allowed the memory to slink its way from her brain to settle painfully into her churning gut.

Erin's slightly weary, green eyes studied her for a moment. "Would you have done any different?" she finally asked, knowing full well the answer.

Jamie answered slowly and somberly. "No." She relaxed just a touch and the corner of her mouth lifted into the ghost of a smile. "We will always help and protect each other whenever we can." She topped off the vow with a curt nod of her dark head.

Erin got to her feet, pulled her wife into a slightly painful hug and whispered, "Damn right."

\* \* \* \*

Jamie let that last memory fade as she returned to the moment at poolside and reached over to stroke the hair of her snoozing and healthy looking companion. A night of TLC and about an hour soaking in a bubbling Jacuzzi had eased any and all aches...or so Erin had said. But Jamie suspected that they both would resort to little fibs when confronted with eyes full of worry.

Jamie lowered her dark glasses and peeked over the rim, slowly perusing the best sight, not only the country, but also the world had to offer. Starting at the adorable, slender feet that she loved to

rub between her hands, Jamie's eyes traveled up to the strong calves and inviting thighs. Her mouth ran dry at the thought of the treasures that lay beneath the tiny triangle of shimmering, purple material of the bikini Erin almost wore. *God, if she turned over and I got a glance at those perfect handfuls of luscious firmness, nothing in the world could stop me from pulling that tie and...* Jamie took in a silent, deep breath and gulped down the last of her cool drink. She debated running over and jumping into the cool water, but she was determined to handle her libido without resorting to such measures. She fanned a hand in front of her face as she continued the visual tour of the delicious flesh on display to her. Her tongue darted out to moisten her lips as her eyes landed on the ticklish navel. It wasn't the only spot on that body that elicited giggles, but it was by far one of her favorites. Because when she spent time there, she also received a little tickle. The insanely flat abdomen, whose muscles trembled under her touch, gracefully rose and fell with each slight breath. Jamie followed the little hollow up the center of Erin's torso, remembering the first time she discovered the baby fine, yellow hairs that grew there. *Lucky fuzz*, she thought. Next, the purple top and what was under it. *Oh yeah!* Her fingers twitched as her stare remained glued to the gorgeous swells. Something else swelled right before her eyes. Jamie took a quick glance up to the peaceful face. She detected the barely discernable jerk at the far corners of the soft, pink lips. But Erin's breathing remained calm. A look back at her chest. *Yeah, still there. I wonder.* Jamie leaned forward and inhaled, letting the very familiar aroma fill her senses. Again she looked back at the still face. *You little minx. You have been awake this whole time and you can feel my stare.* Just then the petite body rolled over on to her stomach. That wrenched a growl from Jamie's lips. *Yep. One glance is all it takes. So you are a mind reader too, huh?*

Jamie got to her feet and stood over the sturdy lounge, her shadow falling across the lightly muscled back. With a leer on her face, she wiggled all ten fingers then reached down and pulled the ties on the very small, bikini bottom. She repeated the task at each shoulder and very carefully lowered herself upon the prone figure.

Once a kiss was placed under her ear, Erin could no longer play opossum. She let out a moan that threatened an avalanche on the nearby mountain. "Last one inside is the last one done," she said in a sultry voice. She felt a tickle at her ear with the next whispered words.

"In either case darlin, we both win."

Jamie scampered back to her feet and the blonde quickly did the same. Erin took off at a slow run, her bare feet hitting the blue tiled floor. That wasn't the only thing that was bare however, as the two small pieces of dark material were left behind on the lounge.

Jamie followed even slower pace, leering at the retreating figure. "There are advantages to lagging behind."

\* \* \* \*

Much later, the two snuggled in the large bed, lazily caressing small patches of damp skin. Jamie had worshipped her gently, careful of the tender body and was in turn loved to complete satisfaction.



The crackling fire in the corner kept the chill from the air and Jamie watched the dancing flames, wistfully. "I wish we had a fireplace in our bedroom," she said. She felt a simple nod against her shoulder. "This has been an incredible honeymoon, but it will be nice to get back home...won't it?" she asked tentatively.

Two green eyes looked up at her with love. "Sure it will," Erin said as she squeezed the bare torso. "Home is one of the nicest words in the human language." They bathed themselves in more minutes of silence, but Erin had something on her mind and now was as good a time as any to discuss it. "Jamie, I've been thinking."

"About what?"

"Well, what you said about a fireplace in our bedroom." She pulled away from Jamie and leaned up on her elbow. She wanted a clear view of the reaction that was about to come. "Let's build a new house."

Two dark brows drew together. "What's wrong with the house we live in now? Except for no fireplace in the bedroom, that is."

"Nothing. It's a very nice house. But I've always had this idea of...of my dream home. I thought we could build down by the big lake. I picture a rustic, log house with lots of windows and a wrap around deck."

"You want to live in a log cabin?"

"No!" She lightly slapped Jamie's belly. "It's a full sized house," Erin said. "It's just built with logs. We can afford it, that's no problem. And I have some great ideas for decorating..." Her voice trailed off waiting for an answer.

Jamie brought one arm up and under her head as she lay there contemplating. Several faint emotions floated over her face as Erin looked on. She finally settled on a mini scowl. "What about the farm house?"

Erin smiled brightly, proud of the idea she had come up with. "You are always complaining that your office in the barn is too small and too hot. We could make part of the first floor into more office space where you could comfortably meet with prospective clients. And I was thinking that we could turn the second floor into a separate apartment with its own entrance. Then we could hire Chad as an on sight vet. He could convert the rest of the first floor for his offices and exam rooms. He said he wanted to get his own office, because his practice was growing so fast. You are always so worried that there will be an emergency and he is almost thirty minutes away. This way he would be there all the time and think how it would look to those clients."

Jamie's expression remained neutral. "Obviously, you have given this a lot of thought and haven't consulted before now."

Erin picked at imaginary lint on the sheet. "Well, it hasn't been that long...I just..." She looked back up at a beaming smile.

Jamie pulled the blonde back to her. "Sweetheart, I think it's a wonderful idea." She rewarded her love with a breathtaking kiss. "And I think you are incredibly smart to think of all the details. I guess we need to add one more thing on our November list of things to do."

\* \* \* \*

It was their last night in Switzerland and the couple had definite plans. Erin busied herself in the kitchen, cutting up vegetables, stirring things on the stovetop and tasting dishes to make sure they were just right. Jamie was lighting candles, setting the table, programming the stereo for a night of love song serenades and tasting things in the kitchen...although not a speck of real food had entered her mouth.

They had spent the morning outside, leaving behind a monument to their stay in the chilly, European land. Two snow ladies, with twig hands intertwined, sat in the side yard ready to greet the next visitors to the chalet. Beside the taller one was Erin's adorable attempt at a snow horse...a miniature snow horse...okay it looked more like a very small dog. With a roaring chuckle, Jamie dubbed it Artemis junior. They documented the event with plenty of photographic evidence for the family back home.

With the afternoon spent lazing by the pool and exercising in bed, the evening was being prepared for romance pure and simple. As the darkness was descending over the mountains, Erin carefully carried the last hot dishes from the oven to the counter where she prepared two plates and took them to the dining room table.

She had changed into a pair of platinum hued, satiny cocktail pants that flared like small wings around her slim legs. The matching jacket and camisole was accessorized with a pair of black, pearl earrings and her locket, which she had slipped onto a shorter chain making it more of a choker.

Jamie stepped from the hall and around the corner, stopping in her tracks to admire her wife who was standing by the candlelit table, waiting for her. The tall rancher walked slowly across the room and engulfed her spouse into a hug, careful not to crush her or the lovely outfit. "You are incredibly beautiful," said Jamie. "Can I tell you that for the rest of my life?"

"Only if you don't mind hearing the same thing."

Jamie had on a pair of light gray, linen slacks and a short sleeve, lightweight sweater the color of a spring sky. She gallantly seated her lady on one side of the small table and filled each of their glasses with the sparkling burgundy.

They talked about nothing of great consequence, but the dinner conversation was complimented with laughter and smiles.

Once finished, Erin sent Jamie off to relax, while she cleared the table. Normally, Jamie would have insisted on helping, but without protest she filled her glass again and changed the CD playing in the background.

The rancher finally wandered into the pool area, but swimming was not on her mind. Besides Erin, she wasn't sure what was invading her thoughts...but something was tickling at the corner of her brain and her heart. Jamie felt as if she needed just these few minutes alone. She didn't crave that very often since meeting Erin; the opposite was true in fact. It was hard being separated from her partner in every way.

She walked to the very back of the glass-encased room and peered into the night at the silhouetted mountains in the distance. Taking a healthy drink of her wine, Jamie placed her left hand on the door's support and placed her chin against her upper arm. She sighed a little, but not from unhappiness or boredom. Unconsciously, her eyes traveled the length of her arm and settled on the white and rose gold band on her finger. A smile slowly slid across her face and her eyes misted over. "I'm happy," she stated clearly, finally accepting what had long eluded her. "And I deserve it." Setting her empty glass on the nearby table, Jamie went to the corner and adjusted the telescope that had been left there by the house's owners. She rotated a couple of knobs and zeroed in on two bright stars. She studied them for a long time then walked back to the window and found them with her eyes alone. "I finally made it Mom, Dad. I know I started out kinda rocky, but...I think I've finally made you proud of me." She had another thought. "I've finally become the kind of person that I'm proud to be."

The author stood at the sink and watched as Jamie appeared to be talking to someone. The blonde brows wrinkled over her green eyes, but it didn't worry her too much.

Jamie continued. "Erin gave me the courage and the confidence to do that. I know you'd really love her." She paused and smiled. "I guess you do. I'm gonna do right by her and our children. I was born into our family and I thank you for that, but now I'm making one of my own. And I intend to follow your great example to make it a happy one. I love you," she told her family. Seconds later, Jamie felt the arms encircle her waist.

"Are you okay?" Erin asked kissing her cheek.

Jamie turned and pulled the smaller woman closer. "I am perfect." She made contact with the offered lips. "Now that you're here."

"It's beautiful out tonight isn't it?" asked Erin, as she looked over Jamie's shoulder.

"It certainly is."

Erin headed over to the telescope with Jamie still at her side. "Find anything interesting?" she asked, leaning down to look into the eyepiece.

"Many things." Jamie allowed Erin a good long look into the sky before gently tugging on her

hand. They ended up on the middle of the large room where Jamie asked a question. "Have you ever danced in starlight?"

"Yes. Down at the beach we danced under the star's light many times."

Jamie pulled a small device from her pocket. "No, I said danced in starlight." She pushed a button and the room came to life with silvery white stars reflected onto the walls, the floor and every other solid surface. A projector mounted in the corner provided the magic, but that didn't detour Erin from loving her wife's own personal brand of magic. The shimmer from the pool's water made the stars literally appear to twinkle.

Erin looked around and smiled as she passed a hand across one of the illuminated beams. "This is beautiful Jamie. You make my life perfect. I love you so very much."

The music drifted in and Jamie took her wife into her arms and began to sway to the melody as the night cloaked them in contentment. As they moved in a lazy circle, one of the stars fell across Erin's eyes. Jamie reached up and traced her thumb over the soft skin just under the emerald orb. She grinned and started a kiss that lasted well beyond any measurable amount of time. Time to them didn't matter. "I love you," she said as her forehead met Erin's. "Let's go to bed. I want to make love to you all night long. I will never get enough of you. In fifty years I will still want to pleasure you all night. And I will be thanking my..." Jamie flashed a half grin. "...lucky stars."

"That you'll still be able to?" Erin teased.

"That you'll still love me."

Erin kissed her again. "That, I will beautiful, that I will. But I better increase both our vitamins."

Jamie scoffed. "I won't need that. Just one look in these eyes will give me all the inspiration I'll ever need."

"You are the sweetest thing in the world," Erin whispered as reached for the hem of Jamie's sweater. "Let's make love in the starlight."

Continued in Part 4.

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**The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

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~ Blindsided ~  
by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

Or if you only want updates and special announcements please join [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens\\_Corner\\_Announcements/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens_Corner_Announcements/)

## Chapter 4

They were home. The place they lived. Erin and Jamie were always home whenever they were together, but walking through the door into the old farmhouse signified a brand new chapter in their life's story. There was a new house to be built...together and new branches to be added to the family tree...together.

Erin had no sooner dropped her luggage on the bedroom floor before she ran off to her office to get the plans started for that offspring.

Walking into the bedroom, Jamie plopped the first big bag onto the bed and unzipped it, grinning at Erin's enthusiasm. She herself was severely jetlagged, having been kept busy, but happily so, on the flight home. Even still, she volunteered to start the unpacking. She soon had her clothing, shoes and other items scattered about the room in a not so orderly fashion. Emerging from the big walk-in closet, Jamie covered a huge yawn and her eyelids drooped as she spied the comfortable looking bed. *A little nap won't hurt anything*, she thought. Pulling off her shoes she flopped back onto the bed. *Just five, ten...thirty minutes will do the trick*, she thought behind another yawn.

"Jamie, we've got an appoint...ment..." Erin's words drifted into a smile when she saw her wife

sound asleep across their bed. The blonde placed a kiss to the snoozing cheek and moved the largest suitcase over to a chair in the corner. As quietly as possible she set about putting her own things in order and gathering up a load of laundry. Absently, Erin began to hum as she worked her way around the room replacing items and dusting. The lullaby floated from floor to ceiling and across the bed before Erin grabbed up the dirty bundle and headed for the stairs.

*"Mama! Mama! Mama!"*

*Jamie heard the high-pitched chants as she approached the house after a hard day's work. Three little faces were glued to the screening in the back door as they continued the cheers, impatiently waiting for one of their two favorite parents.*

*She had to gently, but forcefully push the door open as the children each bounced on little feet, clamoring and jabbering constantly. One wanted to eat, another wanted to play and the third was just crying for some unknown reason. The three tow heads, ranging in age from five to three each grabbed at some part of Jamie's anatomy as she trudged through the kitchen and into the living room.*

*"Mama, I'm hungry!" said the oldest.*

*"Me too Mama!" "Play with me," the others shouted simultaneously.*

*"Okay, okay kids," Jamie said. "I'll take care of everyone if you just give me a minute. Where is Mommy?"*

*The five year old pointed toward the hallway just as a very pregnant Erin came waddling down the stairs. Her hair was disheveled, her face pale and dark circles filled the spaces below her green eyes. One hand supported her aching, lower back and she groaned loudly as her foot hit the last step. Child number four tugged on a handful of blonde locks as she was cradled in the author's left arm.*

*"I'm so glad you're here," Erin slurred. Dislodging her captured hair, she passed off the baby to her tall spouse. "Here," she said. "I need a nap." Erin kissed her wife on the lips and then each child on the head. Pointing to the baby, Erin informed, "She needs changing, badly. They all need supper and JJ is getting a cold."*

*Right on cue, the three year old sneezed sloppily on Jamie's pant leg as Erin disappeared back up the stairs. The rancher's eyes started to water at the toxic odor coming from the diapered tot in her arms. A tug on her shirtsleeve got her attention as she moved through the small bodies dancing around her, heading for the nursery. Jamie bent down and the three year old with the runny nose whispered in her ear. "I need potty Mama." Coincidentally, he just happened to wipe his messy face on hers while relaying the message. The baby in her arms started screaming in her ear and tugging on her hair. Hands pawed at her relentlessly and demanding voices grew louder and louder with each second.*

*"Eat!"*

*"Play!"*

*"Potty!"*

*"Play!"*

*Suddenly, laughter coming from a room upstairs joined the clamor.*

*From the corner of her eye, Jamie caught sight of the four-legged member of the family. She turned to the, clearly smiling, dog.*

*"I could have told you," Artemis said.*

*"Eat!"*

*"Eat!"*

*"Play!"*

*"Eat!"*

*"Play!"*

"Potty! I know," Jamie said, jumping off the bed, her breaths coming in heaves. The startled sapphire orbs darted around the darkened room. No laughter. No cries. No talking dogs. Jamie took a deep breath. "Okay. It was just a dream," she said to the empty room. She scrubbed her face and chuckled nervously. Releasing a very heavy sigh, Jamie shook her head and walked out of the room.

After a quick trip to the bathroom to splash some water on her face, Jamie followed her nose to the kitchen where she found her busy lover. Only then did she check her watch. "Why did you let me sleep so long?" she asked, taking the pile of dishes and utensils from Erin's hands. She proceeded to set the table and grab some drinks from the fridge.

"Because you looked like you needed it," answered Erin as she transferred the finished meal to the table. "Besides, fifty minutes isn't that long."

"Well, thank you. I did need it." Jamie raised a slightly accusing dark brow in her wife's direction. "How come you aren't that tired my partner in crime?"

A green eye winked. "More stamina?" she offered.

Jamie scooped a spoonful of food onto her plate and gave a sideways grin. "Yeah, that must be it."

Adding a fair amount of table spices to the food, both ravenous women dug in with gusto. The house was unusually quiet. Not that it was ever noisy, but with the dog still in her temporary home in L.A. her clicking toenails and playful barks were even missed.

"We have a doctor's appointment on Friday," Erin informed Jamie half way through the meal.

Jamie hesitated mid-chew, suddenly remembering her chaotic dream. She swallowed with a tiny bit of difficulty and took a long drink of her iced tea. "Honey, we've never talked about this exactly, but how many kids did you want?"

Erin took a moment to consider...and that worried Jamie.

"Well, I'd like to have a whole house full."

The blue eyes bugged out.

"But let's just take them one at a time and see how our life progresses."

The rancher released a very small, but relieved sigh. "That I can do."

\* \* \* \*

Artemis had returned the next day from her vacation with the Nelsons.

"You know, one of these days my children are not going to let that dog come home," Bridgett said as she sipped her coffee at Erin's kitchen table.

The author laughed, knowing it was true. Her niece and nephew adored her canine friend. "There is only one thing to do to remedy that. Get them a dog of their own."

The red head huffed. "I know it's inevitable, but I'm holding that off as long as possible."

Erin spent the next couple of hours chatting with her sister and showing her pictures from the trip to Switzerland. Brad and the children did a little horsing around with Jamie while the women did their gossiping. Because of the uncertainty of the insemination procedure, Erin and Jamie had agreed not to mention their plans for a child until they were well into a pregnancy. There would be plenty of time for excitement and celebrations when it happened.

Bridgett slowly perused the stack of 4x 6 inch photographs. She envied the trip as picture after picture of snow capped mountains and quaint, old world villages appeared. Erin got up to put on another pot of coffee, anticipating the return of the rest of the family from their little journey.

"I can certainly tell that you two had a great time," said Bridgett as she studied a photo of Erin and Jamie snuggled together in their winter gear, huge smiles covering their faces.

"We did sis. I don't think it could have been any better."



"Sounds like a good place for..." Bridgett's jaw dropped as the next photo came into view. "Oh boy," she chuckled. "Umm Erin, why is there a picture of Jamie wearing a blonde wig with long braids and...obviously nothing else but a bed sheet?"

Erin dashed back to the table. "Oops," she said with just a little blush. "That one isn't supposed to be in there. It's from my private collection."

The red head looked up. "Uh huh. Do I even want to know?"

Erin lifted both golden brows. "That would be no," she said. "Lets just say that I started out wearing the wig."

The older sister nodded briskly. "You're right, I don't want to know."

They laughed as the back door was suddenly opened and the children came running in.

"Slow down there," said Bridgett to her over exuberant offspring.

Erin used the distraction to covertly slip the racy photo into her back pocket.

Jamie noticed her lover's flushed cheeks. "What's wrong?" she whispered.

Erin gave her a little squeeze around the middle. "Oh nothing. I was just showing Bridgett our honeymoon photos."

"Okay." Jamie saw the twinkle in the emerald eyes and made a note to ask again later.

\* \* \* \*

Jamie sat in a corner of the waiting room tapping out a chorus with the tip of her brown boot. She'd already flipped through several three-month-old magazines and couldn't remember a thing she'd seen. *This office needs something*, she thought absently. *Maybe a big screen TV in that corner over there. They could show baby movies. Hollywood movies I mean. I certainly wouldn't want to see any of those real life documentaries.* She glanced at the other three people in the overly quiet room. One man and woman couple and a solitary man, who she assumed was waiting for his significant other. *Maybe an aquarium*, she thought abruptly back to the decor. Checking the clock on the wall, she realized that she had been sitting there alone for over an hour.

She tapped her foot some more.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock

Jamie cracked her knuckles then stood and did the same to her back. Grabbing a handful of pamphlets from a shelf in the opposite corner she proceeded to find out just about everything anyone could want to know about human conception. And some things she'd rather not have known. Jamie folded the brochures and stuffed them into the back pocket of her jeans, took her seat again, crossed her arms over her chest and waited some more. She hated waiting. Especially in a doctor's office. Yep, Jamie hated waiting.

"Ms. Sheridan," said a young, red headed nurse. "They're ready for you now."

"Finally," the rancher whispered.

Jamie nodded a silent thank you to the nurse and followed her down the hallway. As soon as the office door was closed she crossed over to where Erin was seated. "Is everything all right, honey?" she asked after kissing the blonde's cheek. "It was taking so long in here."

Erin smiled and took the nervous hand. "Everything's fine sweetheart. The doctor apologized, but he was running late."

*When aren't they? That's why I hate waiting.* The dark head nodded, but Jamie didn't have time to say anything else before the door opened.

"Well, now I believe we have everything we need." The fifty something gentleman finally raised his eyes from the folder in his hand. "Oh," he exclaimed when he caught sight of the new face.

"Doctor Hammond," said Erin, "this is my partner Jamie Sheridan."

The rancher took his hand and nodded cordially.

Erin took that hand back in hers and explained. "I told Doctor Hammond just how much we want to have a baby, sweetheart."

The man smiled. "Indeed she has and we will do our very best to make that happen." He did a quick run down of the chart on the desk in front of him. "Well, the exam was fine and I see here that everything on your blood work checks out as well. We pretty much have your cycle charted, but you have the means there," he pointed to the small box in Erin's hands, "so we will be able to exactly pinpoint our window of opportunity." Doctor Hammond pulled a large, yellow envelope from his desk drawer and handed it over to Erin. "Since there are no family members or friends to be involved, there is a list of current donors. Have your top three choices ready in case the availability changes and by my calculations we will see you back here sometime around the middle of the month. Do either of you have any questions?"

Erin looked to her partner. Jamie swallowed and thought hard. "I guess not," she finally said. "Right now anyway."

The doctor smiled. "Okay. There is also some literature in the envelope, explaining the

procedure." He quickly scribbled something across a small sheet of paper. Tearing it away from the rest of the pad, he handed it to Erin. "I'd also like you to start on this as soon as possible."

Now Jamie had a question. "What is it?"

"It's just a mild fertility drug."

"I thought you said she was in good health and able to conceive."

"Yes, she is as far as I can tell. This will just enhance the chances of a successful insemination." His gaze turned back to Erin. "And don't forget the vitamins I gave you. They are very important for a healthy baby."

"Oh, I'll remember. I will definitely do everything possible to have a happy and healthy baby."

\* \* \* \*

The previous tensions drained from Jamie's body just as soon as they stepped out into the daylight and a picture of Erin holding a tiny baby in her arms suddenly popped into the rancher's head. She smiled and turned to her smiling wife. "Are you excited?" she asked, opening the car.

"Very." Erin scooted into the car and laid her hand on Jamie's leg. "But I'm also just a little nervous."

Jamie pursed her lips and huffed with a little chuckle. She hadn't hidden a thing from her very perceptive wife. "Me too," she admitted. Jamie leaned over and gave Erin a long kiss then pulled back and tenderly cupped her cheek "But we're in this together. And nothing is going to stop us now."

\* \* \* \*

"What do you think of the designation 884-219?" Jamie asked. She was sitting on the bed with her back propped against the sturdy, oak headboard. A sleek, silver laptop was perched on her thighs and she was intently scouring the web page on the screen. Beside her on the nightstand was the stack of papers they had gotten at the doctor's office that afternoon. Earlier they had carefully studied the donor candidates, but methodically rejected every one for various reasons. With that list exhausted they had decided to go surfing on the next leg of their search for a donor. Erin was just finishing up getting ready for bed, but Jamie was so anxious she couldn't help herself from taking a sneak peek.

"It's got a nice ring to it," Erin chuckled, as she stepped from the bathroom. She climbed into bed next to her partner and settled against the pillows. "Let me see his stats." Erin took the machine and grabbed her glasses from the nightstand. "Mmm hmm. Honey, he does have blue eyes, but this says dark brown hair." Erin reached for a few strands of Jamie's shoulder length, coal colored tresses. "This is black...pitch; not dark brown."

Jamie shrugged. "Well, it may be as close as we can come." She tapped the screen with a single finger. "It also says he has some Irish heritage and he has a masters in engineering with an IQ of 150. He speaks four languages. I'd say he's pretty intelligent. He was also on an Olympic track team and he plays two musical instruments. He sounds like a really well rounded individual."

Erin glanced back down at the small screen. "I know he has lots of good points hon, but lets keep looking anyway. We really don't want to make a hasty decision on something this important." Jamie nodded and they snuggled closer, sharing a view of the current web site.

About forty-five minutes later, after a few little debates, Erin pushed the laptop away and rubbed her stiff neck. She sighed with just a hint of sadness.

Jamie took her hand. "So, I guess we go with 884-219 as a first choice."

"Yeah, I guess." Erin put her head back against the board of carved wood behind her. She had ordered a childhood picture and an audio interview of that particular candidate and she wasn't going to make an absolute final decision until she had all of that information, but she did yield on his physical attributes. "He does come closest in physical description to you," she said, "tall, blue eyes and dark hair. It's just brown, not black."

"That might not even matter," said Jamie. She shoved aside the little computer and wrapped her arms around Erin, drawing them both deeper into the soft bed clothing. "You could have a baby with beautiful blonde hair...and green eyes. I think that would be adorable. But no matter what the baby looks like, I don't think either one of us will love him or her any less."

Erin smiled and gave Jamie a quick peck on the lips. "You're right. Our baby will be perfect, no matter what."

\* \* \* \*

Jamie fiddled with the half dozen or so buttons on the black console at her side. She was actually fascinated with the fancy toys she'd never gotten to just play with before. She watched out the darkened windows at the passing city and tugged on the lapel of her jacket. It felt strange to her to be riding in the back of a limo, going down the LA streets that she knew so well.

Her right foot tapped on an invisible brake as the streetlight ahead turned yellow. The car did not slow however. It sped up, its back half speeding under the now red light. A hand restrained Jamie from jumping forward to admonish the chauffeur. In the two years that she had been a professional driver, Jamie always put the customer's safety above all else, including punctuality.

Erin tugged her partner back into the seat and rubbed a hand over her thigh, hoping to divert her attention. "Jamie, it was a judgment call," she said.

The rancher slumped with a huff. "Well, it was bad judgment." Jamie turned and saw the look on her wife's face. Those green eyes glanced down at the twitchy fingers and the dark haired woman

smiled sheepishly. "Sorry, I'm just not used to being here as a passenger. Feel's funny."

It was early Friday evening and they were on their way to the heart of Los Angeles for the world premiere of *The Noah Factor*, the major motion picture that had been made from Erin's popular science fiction novel. It had taken over a year and a half to make it to the big screen, but the final product had finally arrived.

"I guess it would," said Erin. She traced a finger down her partner's arm. "You didn't have to come tonight. I know you don't like that kind of attention."

The taller woman twisted and gave her a startled look. "I most certainly did! This is your big night sweetheart. I wouldn't miss it for anything." Jamie kissed Erin, careful not to smudge the coral hued lips. "You deserve this night and all the celebration that goes with it. And we are going to make the most of it."

The sleek, black limo pulled in line behind several others, undoubtedly carrying the movie's stars. Erin could here the clamor from the crowds of fans lining the street and her own nerves jingled just a little.

Once it came their turn, she stepped from the car to a chorus of cheers and a few flirtatious whistles. Of course she was sure that the adoration was much more directed at the celebrities, but she did accept that a fair share of the praise and attention was for her.

Although there was one aspect of the celebrity eye that she was not particularly fond of. A flashing of lights assaulted them as soon as Jamie closed the car door and took Erin's hand. They certainly didn't consider themselves the poster couple for lesbianism. Neither was ashamed of their relationship and they certainly didn't try to hide anything. But Erin was sure that by the time the next week's issues of certain, so called, magazines were published that they would adorn the pages maybe even the covers of some of those publications. Erin felt that their relationship shouldn't be any more closely scrutinized than any heterosexual couple there, celebrity or otherwise, but it surely would be.

Jamie self-consciously smiled and did her best to hang back, but still be supportive of her spouse as reporter after reporter approached them with questions.

A tall, mustached man with a microphone stepped up and introduced himself. "I'm Brandon Pierson from *That's Entertainment*. Could we get a short on camera interview?" he asked.

Erin smiled graciously. "Yes, as long as it's about the movie."

The brown-eyed man nodded his understanding. "How does it feel having your work make it to the big screen?" he asked.

"I'm very excited," the author said. "I have already seen a rough version of the film and I think everyone involved has done a wonderful job putting this all together. Blair Lawrence's direction is outstanding and the whole cast put their hearts into each and every scene."

He signaled the cameraman to cease filming and addressed the tall woman behind Erin. "Ms. Sheridan may we ask you a question?"

Jamie was suspicious of his familiarity with them, but then any reporter who did their homework would have certainly known of their relationship. They had never tried to hide, just remain private. But she was also impressed by his professionalism. He was not taking advantage of the situation to sensationalize them in any way. "Depends on the question," she said with a crooked smile.

He tipped his head and said, "Thank you." When the camera was back in place and running, he continued. "Ms. Sheridan, could tell us how you feel about this evening's event?"

"I have always been a great fan of the book and I can't wait to see the movie. My partner is a very talented individual and I am extremely proud of all her accomplishments."

\* \* \* \*

The last scene faded into the brilliant and familiar sunset and credits began to roll over the large screen. Jamie spontaneously rose to her feet and started a round of applause and the rest of the crowd followed, adding cheers and whistles to the accolades. The lights in the theater brightened and Erin reached up to take the hand that was offered. She was pulled into a loving embrace.

Jamie had noticed the faint coloring of her wife's cheeks. She whispered, "You deserve it sweetheart. That was beautiful. I love you."

Erin returned the sentiment with a wink.

Hand in hand they followed the crowd across the street where an empty lot had been transformed into the fantastical world that had sprang from Erin's futuristic vision. The film's producer, Joseph Hudson and the movie company had spared no expense to celebrate the release. Pink trees and red hills dotted the artificial turf that had been laid atop the cement, creating an otherworldly landscape. Visiting parrots and other exotic animals, including the chimpanzee that had featured prominently into the story, gave added life to the festivities.

Jamie had relaxed from her earlier bout of nerves and easily joined in as many of the guests engaged Erin and her in conversations throughout the evening. Studio executives, with dollar signs in their eyes, threw very unsubtle hints at Erin for a sequel. She gracefully dodged the comments with neither a refusal nor a confirmation of a second story.

At one point during the evening Erin had to leave her spouse for some photos with the movie's stars and some further interviews. She returned more than half an hour later expecting to find Jamie standing alone in a corner trying her best to blend into the background. But much to her surprise Erin noticed her wife talking with three other women. She didn't recognize the others, but was glad Jamie was mingling with the guests and not being bored. The author stood back and just watched as Jamie seemed quite comfortable, laughing and sparking topics of discussion. She

stood out from the small group, not only because of her height, but also her striking facial features. But then again, Erin was just a little biased. The emerald eyes hazed over with passion as she perused her lover from head to toe. The ends of Jamie's silken hair blended perfectly into the raven colored suit she wore. The soft, black blouse under the jacket was opened modestly, but tantalizingly at the neckline, finishing off her enticing monochromatic look.

Jamie laughed heartily and caught sight of her petite partner from the corner of her eye. She turned and shamelessly flirted, flashing lapis eyes and licking the coating of sweet wine from her lips. "If you'll excuse me ladies," she said. "I see that my date has returned. It was nice to meet you." Jamie sauntered the half dozen yards, stopping only to grab two refills of zinfandel from a passing waiter.

"Who are your new friends?" Erin asked with a smile, as she accepted her glass.

"Not friends," Jamie corrected, "potential clients." She shrugged and grabbed a cube of cheese from the plate of food Erin had brought back. "Or at least their family members might be. They were telling me some great stories of the Hollywood scene though." She leaned over and whispered. "I know where there is a great costume shop."

"It's the heart of the entertainment industry, I'm sure there are lots of nice costume shops around here."

Jamie's lazy smile became lopsided with a teasing twinge as images of their honeymoon played across her mind. "This one is in the back of a toy shop," she drawled.

"A toy..." Erin caught the wicked glint in the sapphire orbs. "Just what kind of conversation were you having?"

One dark brow bounced twice. "Actually, I overheard that one. There's a woman walking around here in leather from neck to toe. And if I'm not mistaken she had a whip coiled at her side."

Erin munched on carrot stick, a look of doubt in her eye. "Uh huh."

"You don't believe me? Come on, we'll track her down."

Erin tugged on the arm that was leaving. "That's okay," she said, "I'll take your word for it."

The author and her wife shared a sinfully delicious plate of earthly culinary delights and a few glasses of high spirits until the party began to wind down at about midnight. The celebrated couple ducked into their limo and was whisked away to one of L.A.'s nicest hotels, deciding to stay there for the night so they wouldn't have to take the long drive home.

They settled quickly into the luxury suite, discarding their fancy duds and slipping into the shower. The sudsy duo played under the warm spray far longer than was necessary for just cleanliness, but pruning skin and a yawn or two finally brought their playtime to an end.

Jamie crawled under the crisp, white sheets, turning to find her partner across the room instead of right beside her where she belonged. "What are you doing honey?" she asked, watching Erin rooting around behind the wet bar.

Twinkling green eyes appeared over the ledge of the black surface, but nothing was said. The petite blonde headed back toward the bed with an ice filled bucket and two tall, slim glasses. "We're celebrating," she finally said, placing the bucket on the nightstand. Seconds later, the cork popped out beneath the pressure of her thumbs and bounced off the wall above the bed.

The rancher ducked in reflex.

Erin giggled. "Oops."

Jamie turned back to her with a wary eye. "How much have you had already?" she asked.

Erin poured the tawny liquid until the bubbles reached the rim of the glass then handed it to her partner. "I only had the two glasses of wine," she said, "and that was spread out over three hours. Like I said, we're celebrating."

Jamie took an invigorating sip. "Far be it from me to turn down a good year and it certainly was a terrific evening, but I thought we already did this earlier."

Erin smiled slyly. "Oh, we're not celebrating the movie."

"What then? Let me guess, our love."

Erin sat on the mattress beside and facing her wife, whom she kissed just then. "Always," she said. "But in particular, this will be my last alcoholic drink for...quite some time."

The dark, puzzled brows drew together. "Why is this...?" The light bulb finally popped on. "Oh." Jamie smiled.

Erin took a drink of the vintage effervescence then nodded her head toward the half empty glass. "I will gladly give this up for our baby, but I do intend to enjoy this last one."

Jamie tipped her glass and touched it to Erin's with a toast. "Here is to our future child and the last drink **either** of us will have for a while."

Continued in Chapter 5



# ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

Or if you only want updates and special announcements please join [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens\\_Corner\\_Announcements/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens_Corner_Announcements/)

## Chapter 5

Erin pulled into the gravel lot and was careful not to park under any of the low hanging trees that lined the large, relatively square area. She turned down the volume on the CD player and leaned forward on the steering wheel, studying the old, single-story, dilapidated building that sat before her. "Wonder why someone hasn't torn down this old eye sore before now?" she pondered. A faded 'for sale' sign on the front door hung by one corner on a rusty nail and twisted in the breeze. Erin's eyes dropped to the watch on her left arm, noticing that she was about ten minutes early. With a shrug she stepped out of the car. "Might as well have a look around," she said. The loose gravel scraped together and turned uncomfortably under the soles of her boots. *Definitely gonna have to blacktop this*, she thought.

Over the summer Erin had discovered that the medical facilities of the surrounding area were sadly lacking. The one tiny clinic there was offered a staff that was morally insufficient and sadly intolerant, not to mention that it was ill equipped for emergencies. The nearest major hospital was over forty minutes away and she found that fact appalling. It didn't take much

thought for the author to decide to fulfill the town's need for upgraded health care by financially supporting a brand new clinic with a well educated and caring staff. Her motives were not totally unselfish though. Erin expected to live in the area with her family for many, many years to come and if the need should ever arise, she wanted to make sure they would be well taken care of.

The sun balanced out the cool, fall breeze that fell against her face as she walked the perimeter of the gravel lot. She tried to envision how the area would look when all the construction was finished. That point was seven or eight months down the line, but Erin looked forward to it with anticipation. *At least it will be done before I'm ready to have a baby.* That thought brought a happy grin to her face as she headed back toward her car.

Using her shirtsleeve, Erin buffed away a few fingerprints from the maroon colored finish on her brand new Jeep Liberty. She'd picked up the car with the gray, leather interior when she and Jamie were in L.A. at the doctors and she was still in that new car haze, wanting it to remain pristine for as long as possible. After all, it was her first new car in six years and she had the right to a little pride.

Erin looked up at the sound of a honking horn and she waved at the woman behind the wheel as the car came to a stop right next to her.

An appreciative whistle left the driver's lips as she got out and surveyed Erin's new vehicle. "Nice one," said Dr. Anne Carson. The doctor was Erin's long time friend and the author had asked her to head up the new medical facility. They were both very anxious to get their new project started.

Erin nodded. "Thanks. You know, if you're going to move up here, you're going to have to get something a little more practical." She patted the hood of her friend's little, yellow sports car.

The doctor got out of her vehicle and gently closed the door. "I know, I know," she said. "But I can't get rid of my baby. She's a classic."

Erin laughed and shook her head.

Anne gave her friend a hug. "So where is that spouse of yours today?" she asked.

"She's over in Carrolton getting some equipment for the ranch. She won't be back until late tonight."

"And how's married life treating you?" Anne asked as she slipped off her sunglasses.

Erin smiled as the 'm' word brought her an inner warmth and giddiness, which lovingly rippled through her insides. "Absolutely fantastic. I highly recommend it."

Anne, not so smoothly, changed the subject as she pointed to the old structure in front of them. "What do you think?"

Erin looked around again. "The location is perfect," she said, "right off the main road. It's pretty much central to the surrounding population. I think it'll work great."

"Yeah, that's what I thought. It's just the right size and plenty of available parking spaces. There's also a little side road right over there," said Anne. "I thought we could use that as the emergency entrance for the medi-van. That would put it right next to the lab. The only thing is the added expense of having to tear down this old thing and start from scratch. I was hoping to find some place that just needed remodeling, but I guess that was a lot to ask."

"Anne, don't worry about the expense. It's not a problem. I just want you to make sure you get everything that's needed to make this clinic the best it can be. What's wrong," she asked when her friend's curly head shook from side to side.

"I'm used to hearing from hospital admins," said Anne, "and that certainly isn't their attitudes. Oh they would always like to have the best, but I got so tired of hearing "not enough in the budget for that".

The two friends leaned against their respective cars and chatted for the next thirty minutes about the business venture. Anne said that she already had final blueprints and had hired a contractor. All that was left was for Erin to sign the final contracts since she was the principal financial provider. They had quickly decided to do that first thing Monday morning. Her lawyer had already signed for the purchase of the property when Erin was away on her honeymoon.

With all those immediate issues covered, the conversation turned to the future staff of the clinic, which they had decided to name Evergreen Medical Center. The name wasn't derived from any sir name, but rather the location. The building was surrounded by, elegant blue green firs that reached for the clouds and rustled melodically in the breeze, hopefully creating a peaceful atmosphere for future patients and their families.

"I've already put out feelers for a lab technician," said Anne. "I think we'll be fine with just one. I'm pretty sure one of my friends at the hospital is interested in the job. He likes the idea of getting away from the city as much as I do." Anne hesitated and cleared her throat before approaching the next subject. "Leah has mentioned that she would like to be head nurse." She watched for a reaction from the blonde author, but didn't detect anything out of the ordinary. "She's very qualified," the doctor continued. "She has experience in emergency medicine and as a surgical assistant...and of course physical therapy. I think we will work together really well."

Erin laughed softly. "Anne, you don't have to sell me. I told you that you could hire who ever you want. You know best."

"Well, it's just...she wasn't sure how comfortable you would be with her working so nearby."

Erin cringed. "Did I really appear that jealous?" The author had definitely had a knot in her stomach when she first met the thirty five year old Asian woman who had once slept with her wife. But Erin thought she had gotten passed that. "I think Leah is a nice person and I'm sure a very good nurse. If you think she deserves the job then it's fine with me. I will assure her of that

next time I see her. So how are the two of you getting along?" she asked with a sneaky smile.

Anne's brown eyes dropped, but she couldn't hide the grin that slid across her lips. She and Leah had felt an instant attraction when they had first met a month before. But she had been disappointed so many times in the past and while not afraid, she was very cautious about relationships. "We have been out a few times...a week," she added timidly. "She's really incredible and I have come to care about her a lot. But we're going slowly to make sure it's right before we get into that commitment phase. We've both been down that second date, I love you, but the relationship never lasts more than six months, road before."

Erin studied her friend's body language for a silent second then hedged her assumption. "But you're thinking it's gonna be right though, aren't you?" Their gazes met and Erin saw the truth.

"Yeah," Anne said. "I really want it to be. I want to have what you have with Jamie."

Erin stepped forward and gave the doctor a comforting hug. "I have every faith that it will work out for both of you. I want you to be happy."

Anne pulled back still holding on to Erin's hand. "Thanks. You are a really good friend Erin. I love you ya know."

Before Erin could respond, their attention was drawn by a muffled crash.

Both sets of startled eyes followed the sound. "That came from inside," said Anne. "I wonder what it was?"

"Don't know. Let's check it out." Erin grabbed a big flashlight from her car and they headed toward the door.

With Anne on her heels, Erin gingerly opened the door, which creaked on its rusted out hinges. Inside, the floor was littered with debris. They sidestepped old, nail-ridden boards, stacks of rotting paper and shredded burlap bags. Muted sunlight sprinkled bands of yellow across the floor through the broken windows and other holes in the crumbling walls. The musty air assailed their sense of smell and brought with it a reminder of what the old building had been used for. A fertilizer warehouse.

Anne rubbed a finger under her nose. "I'm really glad this isn't mid-summer," she said. "I'd hate to smell that stuff baked."

Erin nodded silently as they moved slowly forward. The eerie silence beneath the occasional creek and scurry of little rat feet was becoming unnerving...for the doctor.

"Are you sure we should be doing this Erin? Wonder if someone's in here, someone who doesn't want to be found?" The beam from the flashlight landed on her face.

"Like an escaped convict?"

The doctor shrugged. "Well, yeah."

Erin snorted a small laugh and walked on. "I thought I was the one with the creative imagination," she said. At the back of the building they eased into another room that appeared to have been an office. It was in the same state of disrepair with a broken chair lying on its side in the center of the small space. A long desk covered in inches of dust and more old office equipment lined the back wall. Erin ducked under some swinging black wires to move the chair aside. They didn't seem to be live with electricity, but she wasn't taking any chances. When the noise of her actions had quieted, a faint whimper caught her ear. She turned the light to the far corner and caught two eyes shining in the beam.

"What's that?" asked the nervous doctor.

Erin knew. "Move very slowly," she instructed as she cautiously approached, keeping her light just to the side of those eyes.

Reaching the back wall they both ducked down beside an old workbench and Erin shone the light into the dark space below it.

"Oh, it's a dog," said Anne.

"Those anatomy lessons did pay off," Erin commented dryly as she cautiously reached out with one hand.

"Be careful Erin."

"I don't think she's in any condition to hurt me," the author said as the beam of light illuminated the blood soaked fur along the dog's left front leg. The animal barely lifted its head and soulful brown eyes looked backward into the dark, toward its body.

Erin caught a slight movement at her side and moved the light. Her breath caught when she saw the four tiny puppies curled around the dog's belly, looking for a meal. The author jumped into action. "Don't worry sweetie," she told the injured mama. "We're gonna take care of you and your babies." She turned up to her friend who had done a fair amount of cooing at the young ones. "We have to get them to the vet," Erin said. "There is a box in the back of my car, Anne. We'll put the puppies in that."

The doctor nodded. "I've got a blanket in the back seat. We'll need to keep them warm." Her trepidation had suddenly vanished and Anne swiftly, but carefully navigated her way back through the old warehouse. She returned within minutes. "Here we go," she said handing Erin the soft brown cover. "What are we going to do about mama?" she asked as Erin gently placed each puppy inside the box on the warm blanket.

Erin dusted off her hands on the black fabric covering her thighs, thankful she'd worn her oldest pair of jeans. "Actually," she said, "I think she's helped us out with that." She flashed the light

around the edges of the big dog. "She's already lying on this piece of canvas. We'll just use it as a stretcher and carry her to the car."

"That'll work. I'll take these guys out and be right back."

Erin took the time to study the tan and black face. Her eyes misted over as she saw the fear and pain in the big dog's brown eyes. "You're gonna be just fine," she said. Erin wanted to lie on a comforting hand, but she couldn't tell for sure exactly where the animal was injured and didn't want to cause her any more pain.

This was one time that Erin didn't give a flying fig if her new car got messed up. With all the patients loaded into the SUV, Anne drove them to the vet's office while Erin rode in back. She kept one hand at the edge of the ragged, dusty tarp as close to the mama dog as possible and the other inside the box, constantly stroking a tiny puppy head or belly.

\* \* \* \*

Almost two hours later, Dr. Chad Benson walked into his office wearing rumpled and lightly bloodied, green scrubs. He ran a hand through his thick, blonde hair and sighed.

"How is everyone?"

Chad smiled to ease Erin's worried expression. "They're all going to be fine," he told her. "Mama has a broken leg. I had to do a little surgery to fully repair it. She also had a few other cuts that had to be stitched. A car probably hit her while she was out getting food. I'm surprised she was able to make it back to the puppies."

"Thank God she did," said Anne, who had patiently waited with Erin for word on the dogs.

The vet walked over to a corner and poured some three-hour-old coffee into a dark mug. He tipped the cup in the ladies direction in a silent offer. Both declined just as quietly. "She's also a little malnourished and dehydrated," he said, "but in time she will heal completely. The puppies are only about three weeks old so they will need to stay here with her for a little while, but they all look like fighters. I'm sure they'll be fine too."

"What will happen to them when she is better?" asked Erin.

The vet scratched the side of his stubbly chin and took another sip of coffee. "She wasn't wearing any tags, but I'll check around town to see if she has an owner. I'm kinda hoping she doesn't." Chad looked away, but smiled. "Actually, I think mama and I have bonded already. Before I put her under the anesthesia she looked up at me with such trust in her eyes and then she licked my hand."

"You are easy," said Erin. "Is that all it takes to win your heart?" The gentle teasing brought a slight flush to the tall vet's fair skin. Erin had realized some time ago that the sweet man had developed a crush on her and she wasn't above playing with him just a little bit. It wasn't a

difficult thing to live with because Chad had become a very dear friend to both she and Jamie and they both loved him as such.

The tall man cleared his throat, vanquishing the embarrassment. He met Erin's eyes and with a tiny smile and a nod he continued. "I'd like to keep her," he said of the dog. "She looks like a shepherd, collie mix and she's only a couple years old herself. I think she'll be a good friend."

"And the puppies?" Anne asked as she and Chad both eyed the author.

"I'm sure I can find them good homes," he said.

Erin finally grinned under the scrutiny of her friends. "Okay, okay. You know I want one."

Anne laughed and crossed the room, heading for the door. "Well, I'm thinking I may have to move up here a little sooner than I expected so I can have one too. Those little fur balls have a way of grabbing on to your heart don't they?"

\* \* \* \*

Later that evening, Erin stepped from the bathroom rubbing her short hair with a fluffy, white towel. Walking over to the window for a quick check out over the fields behind the house, she lowered the cloth to her shoulders and ran a brush through the damp strands. The night yielded just a few stars that sparsely dotted the black and she stood there for a few seconds thinking about her life. Things were good and she was feeling very blessed. There was a calm that had settled into her spirit and joy spiraled around her days. But most of all her partner was happy and as long as Erin could keep that a constant, she was happy. Looking forward to a future full of more of the same made her smile. Her eyes slipped shut and a contented sigh left her lips. The moment of contemplation over, Erin turned to toss her towel onto the bed. She jumped just a touch at seeing her wife standing in the doorway. But she immediately grinned. "Hi honey. When did you get home?"

Jamie walked into the room with her hands behind her back. She answered after a quick kiss. "Just a little while ago. You were enjoying your bubble bath so I didn't want to disturb you."

Erin settled onto the bed and with a nod, invited her partner to join her. "That was sweet," she said. Looking down at her wrinkled fingers she confessed, "I stayed in there a little longer than I intended. I kinda fell asleep."

Jamie sat down on the edge of the bed. One hand patted Erin on the leg, but the other remained mysteriously hidden. Her face held an odd grin. "That's okay," she said. "You must have had a hard day."

The author yawned slightly. "Not hard, but long." The curiosity finally got the better of her and she craned her neck to peek around the dark haired woman's shoulder. "What do you have behind your back?" she asked.

Jamie slowly revealed the item and giggled at the bug-eyed expression it garnered. The big bowl in her hand held one huge scoop of vanilla ice cream drizzled with butterscotch syrup, flanked on either side by two more mounds of chocolate ice cream slathered in chocolate fudge. The whole thing was topped with fluffy, white clouds of real whipped cream and sprinkled with chocolate chips. "It's a hero sundae," she explained. As Erin dug into her sweet reward, Jamie reclined next to her wife and explained further. "I took a call from Chad a while ago. He told me all about how you saved a life...five lives actually. Everyone's still doing fine," she said around the scoop of cold vanilla that was spooned between her lips.

"Thank you," Erin said as she licked a dab of chocolate sauce from the corner of her mouth. "But I didn't do anything special. I'm just glad Anne and I decided to meet there today." Soft green eyes looked Jamie's way and a rarely seen dimple that only appeared with certain expressions graced Erin's cheek. "You should have seen those puppies," she cooed. "Honey, they're so small and they were so hungry. They were sucking on my fingers all the way to Chad's office, trying to get something to eat. As soon as he checked them out he let us feed them with these tiny little bottles." Her voice climbed an octave or two and she almost squealed. "They're just so cute."

Jamie accepted another spoonful as she watched her wife's delighted expressions. She tried hard to hold the smile threatening her neutral façade. "Chad also wanted to remind you that it would be three or four weeks before you can bring one home, but you can come and visit them anytime you want."

Erin swallowed and her eyes met the twinkling blue ones gazing up at her.

The atmosphere was heavy with the pause that followed.

Erin cocked her blonde head. "Busted?"

A wide grin finally split Jamie's features. She quickly brought her lips into contact with the sweet, cool ones belonging to her partner. "I guess we're going to get the first new member of our family."

\* \* \* \*

The moment was so quiet that it buzzed in her ear like an annoying insect. Then there was a rustling of paper and a shifting of muscles...her own. A slight flinch of her jaw at the subtle intrusion and her breath evened out in just a few heartbeats. The gold around her neck was worried between two fingers as its owner counted tiles in the ceiling. The action, not from nerves, but anticipation kept Erin centered and her heartbeat calm.

Wheels rolled across the beige tiled floor and the voice rose again. "Time to put you to work Jamie," said Dr. Hammond

The tall rancher stepped up, took the implement from the older man's hand and delicately cradled it in one palm as her thumb rested on the handle.



Erin's gaze quickly shifted to where her spouse stood at the other end of the table she was lying on. A smile spread across her face as she caught the blue-eyed wink.

Jamie slowly depressed the plunger, sending the donated baby makers on their important journey. Her eyes never left Erin's as she handed the syringe back to the doctor and moved to sit at her wife's side. Another crinkling of paper sounded as Erin shifted into a slightly more comfortable position.

The doctor gave them some brief instructions before leaving. "Erin, I'd like you to stay right here for the next thirty minutes then go home and take it easy for the rest of the day. And I'll see you in a few weeks. Good luck."

"Thank you Doctor."

"Yes, thank you," Jamie echoed after she forced her attention away from her partner's happy face.

They joined hands across Erin's belly and continued to watch each other silently. The blonde lifted her golden locket to her mouth and kissed it for luck. Jamie did the same and then continued the kiss upon soft lips.

"I guess we'll be adding that third picture this time next year," the tall woman said.

Erin took a shuddery breath. "I hope so."

Nothing else was said as Jamie's thumb rubbed gentle, little circles over the skin just below Erin's navel.

\* \* \* \*

The mid November days were still pretty mild, but the nights were definitely getting chilly. Jamie threw her damp towel into the hamper and padded naked into the bedroom, shivering as goosebumps drew up across her bare flesh. She rooted around in her dresser drawer and pulled out a pair of long, light flannel pants. The soft material slid easily over her clean, shaven legs covering her in their warmth. The comfort felt nice, she realized, as she pulled the drawstring tight over her stomach. Anxiety caused that organ to twitch just a little. After donning the matching shirt, Jamie walked over and got into bed beside her wife.

Erin had her eyes closed, but she wasn't really sleeping. Just as soon as the long body settled in next to her, she turned and snuggled in. All of her nice curves and niches melted into their proper places, sheltering them both with love. Funny, they hadn't really spoken much since they returned from the doctor's office that afternoon. There had been plenty of love exchanged through affectionate touches and kisses, but no real conversation about the event. They didn't want to jinx their chances at success.

"How are you feeling sweetheart?" Jamie asked, as she kissed the blonde head.

Erin's eyes remained shut as her head rested against Jamie's shoulder. "Fine," she said. "I was just saying a little prayer."

"Mmm, I will too."

Comfortable silence allowed them their respective verses, but they held tight to one another all the while. The green eyes finally opened and peered up at Jamie.

They both smiled.

Continued in Part 6.

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The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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~ Blindsided ~  
by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

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## Chapter 6

It had been a few days since the insemination procedure and Erin felt wonderful, but not any different. Logically, she knew that even if she were pregnant she certainly wouldn't feel anything that soon, but she wanted to. She wanted any little sign that she was going to have a baby. But there was nothing...at least not yet. Waiting a few weeks was going to be maddening.

To try and distract herself from the anticipation, the author decided to get back to her writing, which had suffered over the last month and a half. The bright, sunny day had lured Erin to the back porch and she hoped that the fresh air would spark her lazy muse. She quickly typed out a couple of tentative pages and re-read them twice before changing at least a dozen sentences. Her newest work, a love story revolving around a modern day murder mystery was in its third chapter and a description of a crime scene was evolving under her twitching fingers. The author sat back as the details failed to present themselves to her satisfaction. She groaned as her suddenly stiff neck muscles protested the action. Erin hadn't realized how tense she had gotten leaning over her laptop. One hand went to sooth the rebelling muscles as the other one reached for the cup of peach tea on the table at her side. She took a couple of deep whiffs of the fruity brew before sampling it. Erin's gaze shifted to the grass beyond the open porch door as the tea settled nicely into her stomach, somehow grounding her to the task at hand. She absently sipped as her focus deepened, trying to visualize the scene she was trying to complete. The vista of blood and bodies, unfortunately, appeared all to graphically, but Erin wanted to stay on this side of that fine line, using more metaphors to describe the horror while still presenting the reader with the proper crime solving clues. A smile slid across her face as the right words began to flow and her fingers quickly did the same.

With perfect timing, a honking horn pulled her gaze from the screen as the chapter was finished. Erin waved as her tall, good looking spouse drove by on the way out to the new stallion barn with a load of hay stacked in the bed of the pickup she borrowed from one of the ranch hands. That barn didn't have any current residents, but Jamie hoped that their upcoming trip to Texas would change that. The author managed to tap out a few more sentences, but was once again distracted by the silly antics of Artemis, as the dog carried around a plastic pail, tossing it up in the air and watching it bounce on the ground. Erin suddenly tossed her computer on the swing beside her and ran through the house when she heard the front door bell ring. She opened the inner door to find a man standing on the porch with his back to her. "Can I help you?" she asked though the security of the tightly woven screen.

He immediately turned from surveying the yard when he heard her words. Clearing his throat loudly, he bounced slightly from one foot to the other. "Is...is this the home of Jamie Sheridan?" he asked.

Erin sensed his nervousness as she saw the muscles in his face twitch. The stranger was fairly young, no older than 25 she thought. His light brown hair was neatly cut, very close to his head and he was tall, over six feet and lean like a swimmer. "Yes, she lives here," the author said. "If

this is about ranch business she has an office out at the barn. Maybe you missed the signs..."

"Ah, no...this is personal. I have something very important to speak to her about."

Erin hesitated, but something about this young fellow seemed slightly familiar, though she was certain she had never met him before. "Okay," she said. "You can wait in here and I'll call her." Ordinarily she wouldn't have asked a stranger into the house, but something inside her brain triggered a feeling of trust. He took a step back as Erin opened the screen door and gingerly crossed the threshold, nodding and smiling slightly as he passed her. "Please have a seat," Erin said. He did, keeping his gaze to the floor. "I didn't get your name," she said.

He immediately jumped back up and extended his hand to her. "I'm sorry. My name is Jeremy McIntyre."

Erin returned the greeting and was just a little stunned. She studied his handsome face more closely and without the distorting barrier of the wire mesh, Erin knew right away what was familiar about him. In fact it was unmistakable. She didn't quite know what the explanation was, but she couldn't wait to hear it. "I'll go and give Jamie a call," she said. "Excuse me."

The young man sat back down, straightening the collar of the light blue sport shirt he wore under a darker jacket. Between that and his crisply pressed, dark slacks he definitely wanted to make a good impression. His arms then came to rest on his knees, where his fingers came together to do anything but rest as they drummed together somewhat rhythmically.

Jamie tossed the brush into the tack box on the wall when the phone in the office rang. She hopped a puddle of water, ducked inside the open door and grabbed her cell from the desk. A quick glance at the number of the caller brought a smile. "Hello gorgeous," she answered. "What can I do for you?"

"Jamie, there is someone here at the house who wants to see you."

The unusual tone of Erin's voice concerned the rancher. "Who is it? What does he or she want?"

"He says his name is Jeremy McIntyre and that he has personal business with you."

The rancher gave it a quick thought. "I don't know anyone by that name."

"I figured that, but Jamie I really think you should come and talk to him."

The tall woman fiddled with a paper clip as she spoke. "Okay. I'll be there in a few minutes."

Erin returned to the living room and offered the visitor something to drink. When she returned with the tall glass of water he quickly downed half of it in one gulp. She didn't ask him any further questions seeing as his nerves were already on edge. He fidgeted like a prom date being scrutinized by a demanding father. The author soon heard the back door open and she rushed to the kitchen. Her guest didn't seem to take notice as he reviewed his speech silently.

Jamie was washing her hands at the sink when Erin entered. "So who is this guy?" she asked as she grabbed a towel. "Does he look dangerous?" she asked, almost jokingly.

Erin chuckled as she grabbed a small bottle of water from the fridge and handed it to her partner. "No. No I don't think he's dangerous at all. I think he'd be very nice...if he wasn't scared to death."

Jamie gave her a questioning look over the bottle tipped against her lips. "This I gotta see."

The young man didn't make a move until he heard the loud clearing of a throat. He jumped to his feet again and his eyes riveted to the tall rancher's face.

Jamie threw her wife a look and Erin introduced the pair. "Jamie, this is Jeremy McIntyre."

The dark haired woman held out a welcoming hand, which was taken very slowly.

A small smile finally cracked his shocked expression. "Ms. Sheridan, it's a pleasure to finally meet you."

He flicked a blue eye to the author, but addressed Jamie. "I have something very important and personal to speak to you about."

Jamie took Erin's hand, clearly expressing their relationship. "Mr. McIntyre, Erin is my partner. Anything we have to discuss you can say in front of her."

His surprised, but tolerant mind quickly accepted the reality, but his still rattled brain took a few seconds to comprehend. "O...kay," he finally stuttered. "I didn't mean any disrespect." Jeremy's eyes darted back to make sure he was over the chair before sitting back down. That would be all he needed, to fall on his ass and make a complete fool of himself.

Erin and Jamie took a seat side by side on the sofa, quietly amused and a little confused about this stranger. But the evidence was mounting toward validating Erin's suspicions of the young man's true identity.

Jeremy took a deep breath and licked his parched lips. "I didn't know what to expect when I came here today," he said. "I had thought about this so many times over the past few weeks." He paused, taking in Jamie's expectant expression. *Here goes.* "There's no easy way, so I'll just say it." Jamie was getting more confused by the minute and her impatience was beginning to show on her face. His jaw moved once and twice before his eyes intently focused on Jamie's and the words finally came. "I'm your brother."

The atmosphere in the small room grew thick with the pause in every breath and the enormity of the stranger's words. Erin gave a small nod, acknowledging her incredible but correct assumption. She looked up into the timid eyes of blue sitting across the room...then into the matching pair sitting beside her. Jamie's expression was blank, almost as if she hadn't even heard

his declaration. Caring fingers closed over hers, but the dark haired woman didn't respond to the gesture. She just sat there stiff and still.

Jeremy's gaze darted between the two women, waiting for one of them to say something, but as the very uncomfortable seconds slipped by, he decided to continue. "I know..."

"Is this some kind of joke?" Jamie finally chuckled, dryly.

His eyes went wide. "No! It's not a joke, I promise you."

"Then you must have the wrong person," she said. "Because I've never had a brother."

He certainly could understand the confusion Jamie was expressing. He had tried to imagine this moment many times, often placing himself in her shoes and always coming up short at predicting a reaction. Jeremy spoke carefully. "I realize this is a shock, but Michael Sheridan was my father."

Jamie jumped to her feet, her eyes blazing with indignation. "Are you accusing my father of cheating on my mother?" she growled.

Jeremy blanched at the vehemence in her voice. "No! No, that's not it at all, I assure you." His eyes snapped shut and his head shook vigorously. "I'm making a total mess of this," he whispered.

Erin tugged gently on the rigid arm, pulling her partner from her imposing stance. "Jamie, please calm down and hear him out."

Jamie dropped her eyes to her blonde wife and the small smile she saw melted her angered resolve. She eased herself back down and took a deep breath when a loving arm curled around her waist.

The visitor finished his water, his hand shaking as he placed the empty glass back on the small table. "Twenty two years ago, when my mother reached the age of thirty five she decided not wait until she found the right man. She wanted to have a child so she went to a center where your father had...donated and became pregnant with me."

Jamie had remained still throughout the explanation with the exception of her jaw, which clenched tirelessly. The thought was ridiculous. This kid was not her... He was mistaken...or lying. And as soon as he had his say she would make sure that he didn't bother them again.

Erin decided to take the lead in the questioning since Jamie was not about to utter another word. "Just how did you find this out Jeremy?"

He couldn't meet the eyes that were staring him down, but he definitely felt the invisible daggers piercing his demeanor. He couldn't understand why she would be this angry. Jeremy suddenly jumped to his feet. "Look, maybe coming here was a mistake. I'm sorry if I upset you. I only

wanted to meet you."

"Jeremy wait!" Erin halted his exit and urged him to stay. "We really to want to hear this, don't we Jamie?"

The stoic rancher gave something between a curt nod and a shrug. The shock and the pain of the discovery spurred on the indecision. A dozen possibilities ran through her mind about this obvious imposter, but she thought the rest of his story might be worth hearing. Then she would decide exactly what to do with him.

Jeremy fumbled to retrieve a folded piece of paper from the breast pocket of his jacket. "My mother was always up front with me about the origins of my birth," he explained, "but there was one thing she never told me, until recently. She claimed that she didn't want this information to interfere with my studies because she knew what I would want to do. So she waited until I graduated recently. It was rather unusual, but she was given the name of a lawyer, at the time she became pregnant, with instructions on how to track down my father if or when the time came. I went to see the lawyer in Missouri, that's where I was born. Anyway, he informed me that Michael Sheridan had passed away shortly after my birth."

Jamie flinched silently.

Jeremy continued. "But he had left a letter for me. It seems to explain his reasons for..." He held out the letter. "Would you like to read it?" he asked hesitantly.

Jamie got up from the sofa, but instead of reaching for the paper she turned the other way to stand by the window.

Erin turned soft, apologetic eyes in his direction. "May I read it aloud?" she asked.

"Of course."

The author unfolded the letter, yellowed with age and glanced down at the neatly written words. "It's dated June 8, 1978 and it starts out: Dear son or daughter. I want you to know how proud I am of you even though I've never met you. Let me start off by telling you a little bit about your family. Eight years ago, my wife Amy and I had two daughters, our beautiful twins Jamie and Jordan. Tragically, our little angel Jordan was taken from us much, much too soon by a horrible disease." Erin quickly flipped away a tear that stole down her cheek. Her voice caught, but she continued. "Jamie became so much more special to us after that. I can't begin to explain how much love we have for her. We had always wanted to share that love by expanding our family and give them another sibling, but the doctors advised us not to have anymore children because of Amy's difficult pregnancy and birthing."

Jamie grabbed a handful of the cream colored curtain as those words were read. She'd never known about any of that and it was another shock. Not that she was willing to believe anything that was written on that paper or had been spoken from this stranger.

Erin continued. "My wife and I had many discussions and we came to the conclusion that we wanted to be able to share the thrill of parenthood with someone else. To that end, you were given life. And we sincerely hope it has been a glorious one. I would very much like to know you my child and should you decide to seek me out, my wife, my daughter and I will gladly welcome you into our family. It's signed, with your father's love, Michael Sheridan." Erin handed back the letter and went to Jamie's side. She clearly saw the pools of tears sitting in her wife's eyes as they stared out upon the cloudy day.

Jamie took a small sniff and cleared away tears with a few quick blinks. "Mr. McIntyre," she said, "I'm sorry you made the trip all the way out here for nothing. If you'll excuse me, I have work to do." She made a quick and painful exit as the knuckles of her left hand accidentally slammed into the door casing when she cut the corner to close.

Jeremy stood dumbfounded at the brisk brush off. His mouth hung open as he watched his newfound sister retreat up the stairs. He didn't realize how much it could hurt to be rejected by someone he didn't even know. It was much worse than the sorrow and disappointment that had brushed his soul upon finding out the father he went searching for was dead. His only other living, flesh and blood relative had rebuffed him without so much as a glance. His limbs became heavy weights and his head dropped to his chest, despondently. Erin placed a comforting hand on his arm and he thanked her silently for the gesture. "This day certainly hasn't turned out as I had hoped...believed it would," he said shakily.

"Jeremy, please give Jamie some time to accept this. Losing her family was extremely difficult for her to handle. This...surprising development has just re-opened some wounds. But don't give up on her," she urged, squeezing his hand. "Jamie is a very loving person, but do to some incidents in her life she's not an easily trusting one."

He sighed, but took the hope she offered to heart and gave her a wane smile.

\* \* \* \*

In their upstairs office, Jamie sat behind the desk with her back to the door. She had the phone to her ear, clutched tightly in a fist. "Are you absolutely positive?" she asked the person on the other end of the line. Erin leaned against the doorframe, hearing just the last of the conversation. The dark head nodded. "Okay. Please make sure it stays that way."

"Sweetheart."

Jamie swiveled the chair upon hearing her wife's voice. The lines of pain had vanished from her face, but were replaced by furrows of concern. But upon seeing Erin's lovely face, a smile hopped to her lips. She got up and wrapped the smaller woman in her arms, planting a kiss atop her head.

"Do you want to talk about it?" asked Erin.

"That was the police on the phone. I called them to make sure that Ethan Tyler was still in



captivity."

The wheat colored brows drew together over squinted green eyes at the totally out of left field subject. "What are you talking about?" Erin asked. She did get a little spooked by the mention of the man's name. It was almost one year ago that he had kidnapped and attacked her.

"He is still in a coma, so he couldn't have anything to do with this," Jamie rambled. "But it could be a family member wanting revenge or at the very least money."

Erin rubbed her aching temple. "I don't get it. Just what are you saying?"

"That guy McIntyre is obviously an imposter. He thought I'd actually buy that phony story. He only wanted to worm his way into our lives, maybe blackmail us. But you don't have to worry, he won't get anywhere near you again. I've got to get back out to the barn and finish up." Jamie moved quickly down the stairs calling out just before she disappeared around the corner. "Give me a buzz when dinner is ready."

Now it was Erin's turn to stare slack jawed and dumbfounded as she watched her retreating wife.

\* \* \* \*

The back door slammed behind Jamie and she practically ran through the back yard to her office in the barn. She willed herself not to think about him. About what he looked like. The things he said. *It was all a lie!* Jamie turned the corner the minute she stepped into the main barn and stomped over to the desk. She dropped down hard into the chair then jumped back up to shut the door. The lock snapped under her fingers. Taking the chair again, she grabbed her calendar and flipped through it, nearly tearing every page from the metal rings. The words and the dates blurred before her eyes, but she refused to let the tear fall, shaking her head violently. "I won't let him hurt me," she said then corrected. "I won't let him hurt...Erin. I won't let him hurt Erin. That's what he wants, her money, her father's money. I won't let him..." She threw the book aside and went back into the barn, heading for Teegan's stall.

The saddle landed a little harder than she intended and the butter colored horse snorted its objections. Jamie jumped at the reaction and stepped back, taking a deep breath. Seconds later she moved to the horse's head and kissed the pale, yellow nose. "Sorry," she muttered. "I'll be more careful next time." She quickly finished with the cinch, mounted the horse and took off through the backside of the barn. "I'm going to check the fences," she said to the ranch hand she passed.

"We did that yesterday boss," he yelled.

But Jamie rode on, not even hearing him...although it wouldn't have mattered if she had.

\* \* \* \*

The rider only slowed when her movements chased a deer from the nearby trees. Jamie let the

nice wind drift over her as she slowly circled the lake, swaying with the horse's gait. The peace was almost within sight when he suddenly popped back into her thoughts. She grimaced. "Why am I letting this get to me?" she said. "I shouldn't be angry. He hasn't done anything yet and he won't get the chance. No one will hurt my family." With that determination planted firmly in her brain, she easily finished the tour of the ranch boundaries and headed back home.

\* \* \* \*

Dinner that night was a silent one. Jamie quickly scarfed down the good food and hurried back to the barn, citing more things to do. Erin knew it was an excuse, but it wasn't the right time to push Jamie into talking.

Just before eleven that night, the rancher eased in the back door, sticky and sweaty. After dinner she had moved fifty bales of hay from one side of the barn to the other...for no particular reason other than she wanted to...or just needed to. She hopped in the downstairs shower and hurriedly cleaned her body then slipped into the robe that always hung inside the linen closet door. Scrubbing her hair until it was almost dry, Jamie looked in the mirror and growled at her reflection. She combed the dark strands into some semblance of order and headed upstairs.

Erin was still awake. She couldn't have gone to sleep with her wife still away from the house...hurting. The author pushed the glasses back onto the bridge of her nose and turned the page. The book in her hands wasn't very interesting, but it did keep her mind busy.

Jamie tiptoed down the hallway, coming to a stop when she saw the light coming from the open door to their bedroom. A lone eyebrow twitched and she licked her lips.

Erin felt the eyes on her and she looked up from the book. Jamie was standing in the doorway just watching her. She smiled. "Hey sweetheart. Come here," Erin said, reaching out a hand. With the other she closed the book and slipped it onto the nightstand.

The dark haired woman followed the command and slid into the bed onto her side, facing her beautiful wife. She smiled slyly and ran a hand over Erin's exposed thigh, dipping her fingers over the downy side and up under the hem of the sleep shorts she wore to bed.

The blonde pushed aside some of the damp, black hair and asked, "How are you feeling?"

Jamie continued to watch the leg she was caressing. "Oh, I feel fine and so do you." She moved her hand up under Erin's pajama top and onto the warm skin of her stomach. Jamie leaned over and followed the touch with a kiss.

Erin let the very nice sensation flutter over her, but as the lips moved closer to her chest in a defiantly sexual manner, she very gently pushed Jamie away. "Honey, no. I don't feel like making love tonight," she said. She watched the brief hurt flash in and out of the blue eyes. "I really don't think you do either."

Now Jamie really looked stunned. "Why would you say that?" she asked.

Erin glanced away and adjusted the blanket higher over her bare legs. "I don't want to be just a distraction and I don't think your dealing with what happened to..."

"No!" Jamie jumped from the bed and tightened the tie on her robe. "Don't even go there. If you don't want to make love that's fine, but don't start making me the excuse." She turned and headed for the door. "I'm hungry," she said. "I'm going for a snack. Can I bring you anything back?"

The blonde head shook. "No." Erin reached up to switch off the lamp by her side of the bed. "Oh Jamie," she whispered. "I'm so sorry. I don't understand why this is hurting you so much, but I know it is?" Removing her glasses, Erin scooted down onto the bed and pulled the cover up to her shoulder. About fifteen minutes later, just as she was about to drift off to sleep she felt a kiss on her cheek and heard the words I love you.

Erin woke at seven the next morning to find a note on Jamie's pillow. It read: I had to get an early start today hon. Lots to do before we leave with your parents the day after tomorrow. I won't be home for lunch. See you about six. Love you. J. Erin sighed heavily and tucked the note away into the drawer of the nightstand.

\* \* \* \*

A clear blue sky cradled the large, private plane all the way from California to Texas. Timothy Casey had personally checked the forecast, making sure there was no inclement weather before putting his family onboard. He trusted his crew implicitly, but he would not take any chances. Erin and her mother chatted on a number of topics all the way through the flight. They tried to engage Jamie into the conversations, but the rancher spoke few words, choosing to concentrate on the book she was reading. She did however have to cover several yawns that bubbled up through her sleep-deprived body.

The author kept a watchful if covert eye on her partner over the hours. Jamie had become suspiciously quiet and withdrawn over the last two days. Of course the rancher never admitted to her troubles and surely didn't seek any special solace from her wife. The past two nights Jamie had fallen exhaustedly into bed, kissed Erin goodnight and fell asleep immediately. Unfortunately, it was not a peaceful sleep. Dreams of death invaded her mind, inflicting pain and incredible sorrow. As soon as Erin heard the whimpers begin, she wrapped her fragile, six-foot tall wife within the comfort of her arms and soothed away the haunting images. And in the morning, it seemed as though Jamie never remembered the nightmares.

Erin kissed Jamie on the temple as she passed by on her way to the area in the back of the plane that held food and drinks. She quickly perused the cabinets and small fridge for a snack. Snagging two small cartons of milk and two apples, Erin returned to her seat. She set the items aside and waited until Jamie turned the page, then the author stuck the bookmark into the tight crease, gently closing the book with her fingers.

Jamie looked up and smiled softly when the food was handed to her. She took the apple, but gave

the milk back. "You drink both," she said. Leaning closer she whispered, "You may be drinking for two." She planted a small kiss on Erin's lips.

The blonde grinned. "I thought maybe you'd forgotten," she said.

Jamie's vacant eyes suddenly became focused and they stared into Erin's "How could I ever forget that?" Her fingertips brushed against her wife's belly, but she dropped her head in shame. "I know I've been distant these last few days." The blue orbs looked back up with sincerity. "I'm sorry honey. I won't let it happen again."

"But you still don't want to talk about it."

Jamie cupped her cheek. "There's nothing to talk about," she said and silenced anymore protest with a much longer kiss. The rancher heard the shuffle of feet approach. She looked and then pulled away from Erin's lips. "Sorry Mom."

Danielle smiled. "That's all right," she said. "I just finished one of those myself. Probably would have been better without the facial hair, but I'll never get your father to depart with that...or his smelly cigars." She sat down, shaking her head. "The compromises we make for love."

Erin got the sneaking suspicion that her mother wasn't just talking about putting up with a few whiskers. Her mother's actions and tone of voice had been very different lately, at times distracted and at others almost morose. Not one to let things go easily, Erin shifted her eyes from her troubled parent to her despondent partner and knew she had quite a task in front of her to try and help two of the most important people in her life.

\* \* \* \*

After checking in at the posh hotel, Tim had, he assured, a short business meeting to attend to and then he would have the rest of the day to spend with his wife, the birthday girl. While he was away, Erin and Jamie treated Danielle to a wonderful lunch and presented her with a beautiful amethyst pendant.

Coming back through the hotel lobby, Danielle spotted a line of shops and like a magnet she was drawn in. Jamie diplomatically elected to allow Erin and her mother to experience the thrill of the deal by themselves. She had walked away chuckling as the two identical sets of green eyes glazed over at the sight of the awaiting treasures.

As it turned out, Erin returned to their room just an hour later and with only one shopping bag draped over her arm. She teasingly hid her purchases, saying she preferred to give her wife a fashion show.

Jamie's smile grew as she rubbed her hands together expectantly, the thoughts running rampant in her lusty little mind. She poured two glasses of ginger ale, a good substitute for champagne in color at least and then draped herself across the big bed. Seconds later a bare arm sneaked around

the doorframe of the bathroom and the fingers waved tantalizingly. "Show me baby," said Jamie. "I'm ready." A bare foot joined the hand and wiggled. Jamie giggled at the thought of tickling cute, pink extremity.

Erin painted on a wide grin as she finally stepped through the bathroom door. "Well," she said, "what do you think?"

The rancher's mouth opened once, then again before the slightly disappointed words escaped. "It's not exactly what I was expecting."

Erin straightened the new, brown cowboy hat perched on her head and fiddled with the matching scarf fastened around her neck. "I kinda figured," she said, walking over to the bed and stopping in between Jamie's splayed legs. "I'm sorry for teasing you." She ran a finger down the side of the angular face. "But what did you actually think I was going to buy with my mother right there beside me?"

The rancher's hands fell onto the slim hips as she considered the question. The black head tipped to one side. "I guess I didn't think about that," she said. Her hands soon converged below the hem of Erin's shirt and worked the single brass button free. "But I was thinking about something else."

Erin was pulled forward and warm lips landed softly upon her stomach in a series of fluttery kisses. "Just...what were you...thinking about?" she asked, her breath catching twice.

Jamie pulled the zipper down and placed another kiss just above the band of the low cut, lacy panties. "Let's check off another one on our sex in the fifty states list."

Erin's hands went to work undoing the buttons on the tall woman's turquoise shirt. "I didn't know we had a list like that," she said as she uncovered a pair of lovely shoulders.

Jamie looked up and tapped her right temple. "It's all up here. Not that difficult to remember since technically this is only the second one. California, Texas."

One blonde brow rose. "Technically?"

"Well, there was that time on the plane coming back from our honeymoon. I believe that was in Illinois airspace, but I'm not going to count it. We'll try for that one again later."

Erin pushed her wife back onto the mattress and followed her down. They both landed softly and hands began tracing their favorite spots. "We definitely will," the blonde said, "but let's take care of Texas first."

Jamie happily agreed. "I love the hat by the way. Looks good on you. To bad it has to go." She removed the new Stetson and tossed it toward the corner of the bed. The hat made a perfect landing upon one of the tall bedposts, and spun once before coming to a stop. She adopted a cocky smile and shrugged a single shoulder. Jamie felt a kiss placed upon the swell of her left

breast as her long fingers dipped beneath the loosened jean material and came to rest on a pair of firm cheeks. "I like the scarf too," she said. "It can stay." Jamie began working that heavy material down across the small hips. "But it's the only thing."

Continued in Part 7

## The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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### ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [colleen30@webtv.net](mailto:colleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

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## Chapter 7

Since it was Danielle's birthday, Timothy was treating them all to dinner at a place of his wife's choosing. She had shocked the stogie right out of his mouth when she picked a Tex Mex steakhouse instead of an upscale, expensive restaurant. After much cajoling, Danielle had finally

talked her proper husband out of wearing his usual imported suit and tie. While shopping with Erin, she had gone into a men's shop and returned with a respectable blue, sport shirt and a jacket, knowing he'd feel absolutely naked without it. Tim had looked at the off the rack items with puzzled gray eyes, but didn't have much time to argue as his wife began undressing him.

As she was straightening the shirt's collar over the jacket, there was a knock on the door. Tim continued to grumble about the missing tie as she crossed the room. "Are you afraid to expose your neck to the night air?" she asked as she opened the door.

Jamie let her wife step inside first. They had come prepared with the proper attire. Both wore jeans, Jamie's in black and Erin's brown. A simple button down, cotton shirt adorned the dark haired woman's long torso. The shirt was split in color with the right side being solid red and the left half being black. The author wore a soft blouse of forest green along with her new scarf.

"Hello girls," said Danielle. "Keep your father occupied for a few minutes while I change." Having reserved a large suite, she slipped inside the bedroom.

Tim absently scratched at the skin on his throat as he stepped over to the bar in the corner. "Would you girls care for a drink?" he asked, reaching for a small bottle.

"No Dad, we're fine."

Twisting the secured cap, the executive poured the amber liquor over a pair of icy cubes. "So, did you enjoy the day?" he asked innocently. "See any good sights?"

Blue eyes met green and small smiles were privately exchanged. "Yes, I saw some lovely things today," the rancher said, covertly winking at her flushing spouse.

"Wonderful. I'm glad you had a good time," he said before lifting the glass to his lips.

Danielle stepped back into the room, at that moment causing Tim to do a perfect spit take as his eyes landed on her attire. Fortunately, the spray of scotch missed Jamie's head.

"Danielle," he said, wiping his agape mouth with a bar towel, "you're wearing jeans!"

She looked down at her new pants. "Yes dear, that is what they're called." He had obviously seen her in slacks over the course of their courtship and marriage, but blue jeans had never been part of her wardrobe. "Why shouldn't I?" she asked. "Our daughters are."

"But they..."

A pointing finger whipped into the air right in front of his face. "Timothy David Casey, don't you dare say because they are young."

His graying whiskers bristled as those exact unsaid words caught in his throat. He cleared the stuffed passage with a rough cough before abruptly spitting out, "No! I was going to say..." he

paused uneasily, "...they are used to doing so."

Erin winced and patted her burly father on the arm. "I think you need to work on those face saving techniques Daddy." She turned to the other woman who was just her size. "I think you look great Mom."

"Thank you dear."

Tim tugged on his own unfamiliar clothing again. "I just don't understand all this I guess."

Danielle busied herself, transferring her things from one purse to a newer more casual one. "Tim," she said, "I just thought a little change would be nice. Why do we always have to be so..." Danielle paused wanting desperately to say stuffy, but tactfully decided on another word. "...formal all the time. Jamie dear would you help me with this lovely necklace that you gave me for my birthday?"

As they busied themselves at the mirror, Tim motioned his daughter aside. "Can you explain to me what is wrong with your mother?" he asked. "She has been doing things like this for over a month. I never know what she is going to come up with next. One night a few weeks ago she didn't come home until 1:30 in the morning."

"Did she tell you where she was, what she was doing?"

"She was playing bridge with some new friends of hers, friends that I have yet to meet. Obviously they have been influencing this new attitude of hers."

Erin chuckled silently. "I really doubt that's the case Daddy. She was probably just having fun and wasn't paying attention to the time. I don't think you should jump to conclusions."

"Well, that's not all. Last week she wanted to go dancing, but I had had a very frustrating day and I was just too tired." Tim suddenly adopted an astonished expression as he finished the story. "But she went out with them anyway." A tiny flash of jealousy then darkened his gray eyes. "I just want to know who she danced with."

"Daddy, you don't really believe she was doing anything wrong, do you?"

Tim blew a huff of air through pursed lips and caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror across the room. He didn't like the look of jealousy he saw there. He also realized that those feelings really had nothing to do with her dancing partner. "No," he finally admitted. "I guess I just wish I knew what is going on with her."

"To tell you the truth Daddy, I have noticed some changes in Mom. But I don't think it is anything bad. It sounds to me like she is just spreading her wings a little. Think about this, today is Mom's fifty-fifth birthday. She got married when she was twenty. She's been Mrs. Tim Casey and mom for thirty-five years. She has spent all of her time and energy on us and I really think



she's just beginning to discover herself, discover who Danielle really is inside. It's our turn to support her now."

\* \* \* \*

Timothy Casey saw the shine fading from his polished, black shoes as he walked across the hardwood floor, which was scattered with bits of straw and crushed peanut shells. Always accustomed to the best five star restaurants, where the staff catered to his wealth, Tim just didn't see the appeal of this barn like atmosphere. He wasn't really a snob, he had just gotten used to a certain lifestyle at an earlier age. "Don't they bother to sweep the floor?" he mumbled as he slipped his bulky form into the brown, cushioned booth. Danielle sat at his side and the ladies across from them. He gingerly touched the plastic coated menu and peered through his glasses at the spicy selections. "I don't suppose they have a wine list?" he asked.

Jamie bit back a smile at his awkwardness. She knew Erin was getting a real kick out of seeing her father's fish out of water impression...and she was too, although she would never disrespect the man by laughing. "I think beer is probably the hard beverage of choice around here," the rancher said.

Tim scratched at his neck again. "Well, I suppose that won't be too bad."

A few minutes later, a red headed waitress stepped up to their table and pulled a pencil from the pocket of the half apron she was wearing. "Hi. My name is Lacey," she twanged. "I'll be your server today. Can I get ya'll somthin' to drink to start off with?"

Tim nodded for his children to go first.

"We'll just have colas thanks," said Erin.

Danielle chuckled softly. "You're both over twenty one," she said, "you don't have to be afraid to get something stronger. I know I am."

Erin's smile was two fold. She was giddy over the reason why she didn't want a beer and because she was just loving her mother's sudden assertiveness. "That's not it Mom," she explained. "I just don't feel like having anything else right now." She felt the hand land on her knee under the table.

Jamie gave one of her usual minimal answers. "Me neither."

Thick steaks, peppered chicken and sizzling fajitas were slowly devoured in between topics of humor and wisdom. The totally relaxed atmosphere made for a surprisingly wonderful family evening, even though the accompanying electronic serenades from the likes of Garth Brooks and Alan Jackson may have been just a touch too loud.

As they waited before having dessert, Erin watched her mother as she watched the activities around them. It was almost as if she were a sponge soaking up the sights, afraid she might not

see them again. But there was also just a hint of sadness or perhaps envy in those eyes. Danielle had lived a very comfortable, although somewhat sheltered life with all the material possessions she had ever wanted. She had fulfilled her hopes of motherhood with two beautiful daughters that she was very proud of. Her two lovely grandchildren filled her heart with joy and her many volunteering opportunities kept her busy...but still there was something missing.

Tim's cell suddenly rang and he stepped outside to take the business call. Danielle watched him go and threw a mild apologetic look to her children.

With her father gone, Erin took the opportunity to do a little exploring. "Mom, did you ever have a dream when you were younger?" she asked. "Something just for you, something you loved with a passion and expected to incorporate into your life."

The question took the older woman by surprise; no one had ever asked her that before. "I'm not sure I know what you mean Erin."

"Like my writing or Jamie's love of horses. Those things were ingrained on our souls from a very earlier age and we knew we needed to be involved with them to be satisfied."

"Those are your careers dear. I think it's a bit late for me to start thinking that way."

Jamie decided to join in the conversation. She certainly loved this woman like a mother and she too saw the emptiness in the older woman's demeanor of late. "Why?" she asked. "Mom, you are far from old. You are in excellent health and you have the time and resources. What's to stop you from doing something you love."

Erin smiled brightly. "Right. We just have to figure out what that something is."

The topic was put to a temporary rest when Tim returned. But the spark was definitely lit in Danielle's heart. And she did have some idea of what she wanted. But did she have the confidence to seriously pursue it.

Tim had returned from his short call, craving something sweet. Erin and Jamie ordered something chocolate, only this time they had a few birthday candles added, knowing that Tim wouldn't have bothered with, as he called it, the silly tradition. Danielle easily extinguished the small flames and told a story of Erin's third birthday, which involved the precocious child and some pilfered icing. The birthday girl had snuck into the kitchen and had, not so neatly removed every bit of icing from her cake, a great deal of it ending up on her face. Refusing to be cleaned up when she had been discovered, Erin proceeded to blow out the three small candles, nearly turning blue in the face when she had taken such a huge breath. She then turned down the piece of naked confection that was cut just for her, but soon half a bowl of vanilla ice cream had joined the chocolate already on her face. Danielle had a way of spinning a humorous tale and had Tim laughing at the memories and Jamie vividly picturing the adorable scene. And wondering if their child would inherit their mother's mischievousness.

With her stomach more than full, the rancher sat back and took a deep breath. She slightly raised

both arms and felt a satisfying crack in her back. One of those long appendages came to rest on the back of the booth behind Erin's head as Danielle launched into another story. As the tale continued, Jamie's hand unconsciously dropped to rest on her partner's shoulder and just as absently, Erin snuggled into the touch.

Some raucous chatter suddenly irrupted from a table somewhere behind them. "Hey Joe," a tall bearded man said, as his beer glass landed heavily on the table. "I didn't know the pervert train stopped here, did you?"

Erin and Jamie both stiffened at the sound of the raised voice, but Jamie didn't remove her hand; she refused to acknowledge his idiocy. The dark head gave just a little shake as her eyes dropped to her empty plate.

"Shoot no," the other man responded, "We're gonna have to do somethin' about that."

"Yeah, can't have our city corrupted."

It was a bad combination. A couple of good ole Texas boys with a bad ole case of phobia and an overdose of the house's special brew. Their humiliating mumbles continued, outraging, not only their intended targets, but the surrounding diners as well. Unfortunately, none of the other patrons had the courage to intervene.

Although Erin did her best to ignore the comments, Tim Casey could see the disappointment in his daughter's sad eyes. He cleared his gravelly throat as stood to his imposing six foot two inch height, his disgust planted in the clenched jaw beneath the graying whiskers.

"Daddy."

"Tim."

The chorus of protests from his family gently assailed his burning ears. He turned stormy gray eyes upon his wife. "I can handle this Dani," he said. The orbs softened just a touch when they landed on his blonde haired princess. "Don't worry sweetheart, I won't do anything foolish. You go on outside and call for a cab. I'll join you in a bit."

The author laid a hand on his coat sleeve. "We won't be chased away Daddy. We'll wait here for you and we will all leave together."

The tall executive pulled on the lapels of his jacket as he approached the obnoxious duo. He stopped at their table and sized up the pitiful excuses. "Do either of you have a problem with my daughter and her partner?" he growled.

The larger of the two took a long swallow of his golden brew and belched loudly before answering. "No," he said, "we don't have the problem, they do."

The other man gave an exaggerated tremble. "Are you gonna beat us up?" he asked with an

irritating chuckle.

Flashes of the violence Tim had witnessed as a teen cause his fists to flex and churned his gut upside down. "No," he said, "that wouldn't really solve anything."

"Damn right." The red headed, self-proclaimed cowboy looked around Tim's body and his eyes landed on the back of a golden head. "But you know, we could solve your...daughter's problem. I always liked blondes," he said with a leer. "You know what they say is true, things do grow bigger here in Texas." He spoke loud enough to be sure she heard.

"Yeah," said the other one, "big enough to toss someone back over that fence, real quick."

Erin shuddered at the sickening suggestion and Jamie started to rise. "No!" the author said. That's all she needed to say. Jamie relaxed back into her seat and listened as the confrontation continued.

Tim placed a heavy hand on both of the Texans, squeezing the shoulders beneath his thick fingers. "You know," he said with a sneer, "one of these days, those attitudes and big mouths are going to get you boys in some real trouble. And on that day I just want you to remember my face and how lucky you are that I didn't do to you what I really wanted to do...because I promise you that no matter how bad that incident may be...mine would have been much worse." While pulling his hands away, he not so accidentally tipped both hats down over their eyes, and then dumped their remaining suds in their laps. "Oh, that's gonna be embarrassing when you leave here tonight," he said with a grin. As Tim turned and walked away, he got a short round of applause for his intervention as well as his restraint. A smile and a hug from his daughter followed.

As Tim escorted his family from the restaurant, a suited gentleman, whose agitation was evident in his down turned brows, approached them. He looked into each set of eyes as he spoke. "Sir, ladies, I am Thomas Hutton and this is my place. I am so sorry for the interruption of your meal. I had to step away or I would have taken care of the situation myself. I assure you I do not allow intolerance of any kind in my restaurant. Your meal is on the house and once again, accept my deepest apologies."

Erin spoke up. "We understand that you cannot always control the actions of your patrons and we do accept your apology."

He nodded gratefully. "Those...gentlemen will be banned from here. I only wish I could do more."

\* \* \* \*

Erin and Jamie somberly returned to their room at the hotel and silently undressed. A few affectionate kisses led them into bed where they just held tight to one another. They weren't subjected to that type of intolerant treatment very often, in fact it was very rare. But when it did

happen, the slap on the soul still tended to sting and only the other's love would provide the soothing balm.

The small clock on the bedside ticked off the minutes in the other wise still room. A yawn or two escaped, but eyes remained open. Muscles shifted and crisp sheets rustled under the weight of the restless duo. Neither one was really sad or upset, but sleep just didn't seem to be arriving anytime soon. There just seemed to be a nagging tick of emotion that wouldn't release its grip.

A few lazy caresses brought a faint line of goose bumps as the long fingers of Jamie's right hand inched under the soft material of Erin's shirt. Warm skin rippled beneath the slightly callused hand and separate I love yous were spoken into the night air. A long torso turned silently and the digits suddenly wiggled wildly, breaking the quiet with squealing giggles. A very long and comforting tickle fest ensued as ribs, armpits, knees and feet were taunted mercilessly. No body part was left untouched.

A long day's weariness finally crept in and clothes were twisted and bed clothing was left askewed as two sets of lungs calmed in between leftover chuckles. It was just the thing to erase the earlier tension. A pair of bright grins illuminated the way as lips landed softly upon one another, yet again reinforcing the shield that protected them from the world's ills and reaffirming the love that was never ending.

\* \* \* \*

It was 2:13 in the morning. Erin knew that because she caught sight of the fluorescent numbers when her eyes snapped open at the muffled sounds coming from behind her. She turned and placed one arm and one leg over her partner, cooing into her ear. Jamie soon calmed and fell back into a deep and hopefully dreamless sleep. The author propped her head on one hand and studied the drawn lines in her wife's face. *Nothing to talk about, huh?* Erin knew there was so much to talk about and she knew just whom Jamie needed to talk to. Unfortunately, Dr. Webber, the psychologist they had been seeing, was away on family business. She had recommended another doctor in her absence, but Erin knew that Jamie wouldn't talk to a stranger about the issues at hand. Erin kissed her temple. "We'll work this out sweetie," she whispered. "We'll find a way."

\* \* \* \*

On Friday, Jamie, Erin and Danielle headed for the convention center where the horse auction was being held. Timothy had a day of meetings so Danielle had asked to join them. The event was one of the most prestigious in the country and Jamie felt confident that she would come away from the day with exactly what she wanted.

The three women traveled up and down row after row of stalls, studying the horseflesh on display. Jamie was sure she was boring the older woman to tears, but Danielle never complained as they milled through the crowds of men, women and children of all ages. There were 4H

members, families looking for a gentle, easy ride for the kiddies, athletes looking for a good mount to train for barrel racing and farmers in need of working animals. Mules, donkeys, Clydesdales, Percherons and more were there to be bid on. There were even some adorable miniature horses, which delighted the wide-eyed children.

Currently the trio was looking at ponies of all breeds and sizes. "What exactly are you looking for dear?" Mrs. Casey asked.

"I need a stallion," said Jamie, "to breed with one of the horses back at the ranch. If I can find one with a good lineage and maybe a string of proven offspring, I can offer his stud services all over the country."

"I see," she mumbled, sidestepping an unfortunate accident on the floor. Danielle discretely rubbed a finger under her nose, but a complaint would never leave her lips. She just relished the time she was spending with her daughters.

Erin flipped through the yellow pamphlet in her hand. "The stallion auction doesn't start until 3:00," she explained. "That still gives us plenty of time to just look around and admire all the animals."

They turned the next corner and started down an aisle featuring broodmares, some with offspring and being sold together.

"You know, I haven't been on a horse since I was a little girl," Danielle said as she stopped to peer into a stall.

Jamie put an arm around her mother-in-law's shoulder and smiled. "That can be remedied Mom. Come on out to our place anytime and you can take your pick of any of our girls. Erin and I would love to show you some of our favorite spots. I should have invited you to go riding a long time ago."

"That's very sweet of you Jamie. And I just might take you up on that. I used to sit a horse quite well in my much younger years."

Jamie chuckled happily. "I believe you."

"Ohhh! Jamie come and look." Erin had bellowed from three stalls down. She had drifted ahead to give Jamie and her mother a little bonding moment.

The rancher recognized the tone in her wife's voice. *What else are we going to be taking home*, she wondered with a small smile. In just a few steps Jamie was towering over the petite blonde who was knelt down, rubbing the white nose of a young foal. Behind the baby was its mother, who watched the scene with a critical eye. The tri-colored paints were beautiful with smooth coats and bright eyes.

Erin looked up with a huge grin. She just couldn't resist babies of any species: human, canine or

equine. "I want them," she said then took a quick glance beneath the small horse's back legs. "He's adorable and she's a proven breeder." The blonde stood and took Jamie's hand. "In a few years you'll have another fine stallion."

Jamie chuckled, put her arm around her happy partner's shoulder and gave her a little hug. "Hon, you don't have to convince me. If you want them, go for it." She paused before adding, "But let's get off this aisle before I have to build a whole new barn." The three laughed and quickly moved on.

At straight up noon they left for a bite of lunch at a café across the street. Returning an hour later, Jamie still had plenty of time to check out her best prospects for a breeding stallion. The couple, once again, asked Danielle if she wouldn't like to return to the hotel to rest or maybe go shopping. But she assured them that she wasn't the least bit tired and was finding the day enjoyable.

"Painting." Danielle had blurted out the odd statement as they had stopped to watch a mule being hooked up to a little cart. The half horse powered vehicle was providing rides for the children around a dirt-covered coral.

"What did you say Mom?" Erin asked as the scene before them brought a smile to her face.

"You asked me last night what my passion was. When I was in high school, an art teacher introduced me to painting and I loved it. She said I had a lot of talent. I even won several local competitions. I was all set to go to a prestigious art school in Chicago."

Erin turned her attention to her mother. "I never knew any of that. What happened?"

"I met a dashing young man that quickly swept me off my feet." She smiled which quickly saddened as she continued to speak. "My father said that I should marry as soon as possible and when I did that my place would be in the home, taking care of my husband and not running around a college campus studying that foolishness. I naively believed him. I threw out all of my art supplies and never thought about it again until you mentioned it last night."

"I can believe Grandpa had that kind of attitude, he always did. But to make you give up something you loved, that's terrible." Erin linked arms with her mother. "First thing when we get back home we're going to get you some new supplies and I'll bet you could also take some classes."

Danielle chuckled. "I don't think I would be comfortable doing that, but I really would like to start painting again." She sighed happily, as if a heavy weight had fallen from her shoulders. Something inside suddenly sprouted wings and her soul took flight at the thought of returning to her abandoned craft. She'd forgotten what joy and freedom she had felt with a brush in her hand, watching the colorful images take shape in front of her eyes. The empty space she had been recently trying so hard to fill now swelled with anticipation. Smiling, she fiercely hugged her daughter. "Thank you for this wonderful birthday present," she said with an emotional catch in her voice. "I don't know just how you knew what I needed when I didn't, but I'm so glad you did."

I really admire your intuition and your incredible heart. You are going to be a wonderful mother."

Erin felt a little hitch in her breath. *Talk about intuition.* "I only hope I can live up to your example Mom."

\* \* \* \*

Five rows of stalls, totaling almost fifty horses waited the rancher's close inspection. She had done her research well and had found that a lot of owners were looking for not only a fine physical specimen with a good lineage, but they were also leaning more toward vivid coloration and not just brown on brown. Simeron, the horse she intended to breed first was snow white with black mane, tail and legs. A regal beauty.

Out of the first twenty horses, Jamie found one or two animals she might be interested in bidding on. She only intended to buy just one, but she wanted several choices in case she was outbid.

At the end stall of the third row, a small crowd had gathered to look at the lone occupant. The muscular horse inside stood 15 hands high. He repeatedly pawed at the straw covered cement appearing almost haughty as he thrust his backside to the viewing crowd, not allowing much of his face to show.

Jamie almost by passed it, but as the crowd dispersed, she stepped up and looked between the bars. Her breath caught at his magnificence. The three-year-old horse was a rich, caramel color with hints of gold highlights dispersed throughout his luxurious coat. The sheen from the jet-black mane, tail and fetlocks shimmered like a shadow on a dark night's rain covered pavement. The fancy wooden sign above his head stated his name as Cooper's Courage. Jamie felt the presence of her two companions appear at her side, but her eyes remained glued to the animal inside. The horse suddenly snorted and whinnied loudly. Turning within the confines of the wood and iron stall, he gently nudged Jamie's shoulder. Not fearing the gesture, Jamie chuckled softly and ran a hand down the dark strip on his velvet like nose. Erin gave a knowing smile and scratched the animal's neck.

Danielle stood by wide-eyed. "Well Jamie, seems as if you've found a friend. I guess you have your first choice."

The blue eyes flicked to the paper fixed to the stall door and took in the astonishing figures. "This is an incredible horse and I would surely love to have him," she said. With a sigh of resignation, she continued. "But I can't afford him. His bidding starts at 10,000. He will probably go for at least 14 or 15, maybe more." She continued to give the horse attention as she spoke. "Although the ranch is doing well, I don't have that much to spend right now." Jamie gave the animal one last pat and stepped back.

"Okay, I can understand that dear, but Erin..."

"Mom. Jamie keeps the ranch's finances separate from our personal ones. She wants to run the



ranch on her own and I respect her wishes." Erin saw the look of disbelief in her mother's green eyes. "If there was an emergency," Erin continued, "of course I would help out, but this is a basic business decision."

Danielle looked to the tall rancher. Seeing the look of gentle pleading, she dropped the subject with a nod.

\* \* \* \*

At 2:40, the three of them found vacant seats in the second row and settled in for the two-hour event. Erin had already met with the owners of the mare and foal she wanted and offered him three thousand over his asking bid. He gladly accepted and they shook on the deal, leaving Erin quite happy with her purchase.

The crowd for this particular auction was surprisingly small, consisting of maybe one hundred people and Jamie felt more comfortable with her chances of actually getting the horse she wanted. Her choices were near the end of the list so they watched and waited as the event carried on in quick fashion. A typical fast-talking, Stetson wearing Texan severed as auctioneer, doing his best to drive up the bidding with comments about the specimens on display. Halfway through, Jamie realized that every horse was getting from between five hundred to a couple of thousand over starting price and that fit her budget perfectly. Finally, item number 475, a dapple gray with white mane and tail and blue eyes was led into the arena. The animal was pranced around and put through his paces with a variety of movements, showing off its fine muscle tone. Jamie flashed her card and opened the starting bid at 3,800 dollars. Within a minute it was upped to forty-four hundred and Jamie bid another fifty. A gray haired man sitting next to Danielle tipped his number making it forty-five hundred. A few more cards in the upper aisles were raised, but by the time the auctioneer yelled his last sold, Jamie was the proud owner of Dusty Moon, paying the respectable price of 4,900 dollars.

Erin knew her spouse was more than satisfied by the large smile on her face. Even though her business was concluded, the rancher wanted to stay until the very end, knowing that Cooper's Courage would be out last. She knew it was a little punishing, but she wanted to see what lucky person would end up with the wonderful animal.

When his turn finally came, the horse marched out with his head held high, showing off his prowess as he circled the arena. His clear, dark eyes surveyed the onlookers, just as the audience was judging him. Numbers were flashed through out the crowd faster than paparazzi at the Oscars, driving the price up to fourteen thousand dollars almost before Jamie had time to blink. She nearly got whiplash trying to keep up with all the bidders, but by the time 16,000 was called out, every card stilled and it was over. Jamie hunted through the sea of faces, but couldn't seem to locate the winner. She had a thought in the back of her mind that she might someday at least be able to purchase one of Cooper's offspring or use his stud service. But for now she lamented the missed opportunity and carried on with a smile.

Jamie, Erin and Danielle went back to Dusty Moon's appointed stall to complete the paper work

and pay for her purchase. The rancher quickly wrote a check and she and Erin spent some time with her new horse. The tall woman ran her hands down the animal's legs. "What do think?" she asked her spouse, "will Simeron like her new boyfriend?" Jamie and Erin always anthropomorphized their animals. They were all part of the family.

Erin sized up the stallion with a critical green eye. Over the months she had learned well from the knowledgeable rancher just what to look for. "If I were a horse, I'd approve." Seeing the evil grin, Erin wagged a finger in her wife's direction. "That was not an opening for any smart remarks from you."

Jamie kept smiling and slowly advanced on her, long fingers wiggling in memory of their tickle fight of the night before. She was about to say something most wicked when Danielle returned from the restroom. "Oh, hi Mom," she spoke over Erin's shoulder.

The older woman tipped her blonde head, noticing the amused expressions on the younger faces. "Hello." Her eyes slipped from blue to green. "What's going on?" she asked.

Jamie patted the horse's muscular side to cover her silly antics. "Nothing, just visiting Dusty."

The very corners of Danielle's lips turned up knowingly. *Oh to be so young and uninhibited.* "I see," she said simply. "I called your father and he says we can't leave tonight because of bad weather. So he's rescheduled for tomorrow and he has already taken care of another night's stay at the hotel."

Jamie and Erin both stepped from the stall and Jamie secured the door's heavy latch. "Okay," said the author. "We're all through here." She looked to her wife and mother. "What should we do now?"

The dark haired woman's eyes absently drifted down toward the last stall as she listened to Erin. "I...uh...kinda wanted to find out who bought the other horse down there. Maybe I can make a business deal in the future." She scratched the back of her neck and scuffed the tip of her boot against the cement in an almost childlike manner.

Danielle rummaged around in her bag. "I can help you with that dear. I stopped and talked the officials while I was away."

Jamie perked up, shedding at least some of her disappointment. "Did you get the name?" she asked.

The older woman pulled something out and handed it to Jamie. "Here, this is the new owner of Cooper's Courage."

The rancher looked down at her hand, but instead of finding a piece of paper she saw her reflection in a small mirror. She looked back up in astonishment to find Danielle holding out the owner's certificate.

"All you have to do is sign," the older woman said.

"Mom, you didn't."

Danielle turned to her daughter. "Now you just hush Erin. This is a business transaction between myself and Ms. Sheridan." She moved her attention back to the rancher. "This is not a gift and not charity. If you agree, you will take physical ownership of the horse and utilize him in whatever way you see fit. We can draw up a contract if you so wish, stating that you will pay me back in yearly installments. I believe you mentioned that his stud service price tag would be quite high."

Jamie was still dumbfounded. "Uh, yeah. I could probably get a thousand dollars per. Not to mention selling the offspring that is born on the ranch, but..."

The older woman held out a hand. "Is it a deal then?"

Jamie caught Erin's twinkling eyes, the tiny smile and nod. She then met Danielle's piercing gaze once again. "It's a deal," she said happily. It was sealed with a shake then all the business façade was dropped for a group hug.

Continued in Chapter 8.

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### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact

of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

Or if you only want updates and special announcements please join [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens\\_Corner\\_Announcements/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens_Corner_Announcements/)

## Chapter 8

Two days later, just the day before Thanksgiving, Jamie sat on the front porch of the farmhouse, anxiously waiting for the new arrivals. The day had dawned with a very strong, chilly wind blowing down from the north. A mug of hot coffee was held tightly in her right hand as she thought about it all. She had gone to Texas in hopes of returning with just one nice horse to add to her growing herd and here she was waiting for the arrival of four new animals. The two stallions and the mare and her foal were more than welcomed additions and even though the latter two were technically Erin's, it was still Jamie's job to manage them. The rancher smiled as she thought about an added benefit to come. She knew her wife would be visiting the barn more often to watch her new baby grow. Another sip of the strong brew slid down Jamie's throat as she distractedly watched the tall, wild grasses at the edge of the woods shimmy in the wind. A heavy sigh left her coffee warmed lips as a picture of her parents suddenly flashed across her mind. She'd been thinking about them a lot more than usual lately. She assumed it was because of the photo albums and other childhood mementos that she had been enjoying looking at since Erin arranged their return. Jamie's mother Amelia, always called Amy by her husband was a beautiful brunette with amber eyes. Warm eyes that always held love when ever she looked upon her daughters. Blessed with a lovely singing voice, Amy would cradle her young daughters and serenade them with lilting songs from her own childhood as a father strong and tall loomed nearby, watching over his beloved family. The melody of one of those cherished tunes unconsciously began to drift between Jamie's grinning lips. But the humming stopped suddenly when the visual changed faces. A heavy pressure in her chest expanded and tightened around her heart. *No. No. He doesn't belong there. He's not...*

Crash!

Jamie's head whipped around when the wind knocked over a large plant stand at the far end of the porch. Thankful for the diversion, she trudged on long legs to clean up the dirty mess. Two of the three plants were salvageable and Jamie gingerly scooped up the fallen dirt and repacked it around the exposed roots inside the sturdy container. The rancher repositioned the stand and its greenery to protect it from the current display of nature's temperament. Just as she reached for her coffee again, the screen door behind her squeaked slightly. Jamie turned and a smile graced her face when the petite blonde stepped from the house.

"Whoa," Erin said, wrapping her arms around herself. "That wind is really something."

Jamie set her cup on the small table beside her and crossed the porch, stepping in front of her wife. "Let me help with that," she said. The tall woman opened her jacket and wrapped it around Erin. Nestled closely within the confines of the coat, Erin took the opportunity to thank her spouse with a kiss. Jamie raised a finger and wiped away a smudge of flour from a blonde brow. This year Thanksgiving was being held at their house and Erin had been in the kitchen baking since eight am. One cake was already in the oven and a perfectly formed deep-dish pie shell was waiting on the counter to cradle a host of apples and brown sugar within. "Can't wait to taste the finished product," said Jamie.

A cute retort was on the tip of Erin's tongue, but it was pre-empted by the long trailer that came rolling up the rocky drive. Both women smiled and eagerly hopped down the steps to greet it.

The tall driver removed his hat so he wouldn't lose it in the wind before climbing out and walking to the back of the vehicle. Pulling back the handle with one hand, he handed Jamie a clipboard with the other. "If you're Miss Sheridan, I need your signature here," he said. "Got four fine looking animals in here. Congratulations."

"Thank you," Jamie said as he pulled open the back door and pulled out the wide, rubber covered ramp.

Erin jumped up inside the trailer first and went straight for the youngest horse. "Hello cutie," she said, nuzzling his white nose. "Welcome home." Attaching a lead rope to his small halter, Erin stood and addressed his mama. "Hi Mystic. We got the best stall in the barn all ready for you two." The previous owner had left the foal unnamed and Erin would get the pleasure of bestowing him with a title...as soon as she thought of something appropriate. With a rope in each hand, she slowly led them out of the vehicle and over into the yard to wait for the others to be unloaded.

Jamie carefully brought out the first big horse and after a quick examination handed his lead to the driver, asking his help. He took it with a smile and proceeded to make small talk with Erin as Jamie disappeared back inside the big, white and gray trailer. A few minutes later she appeared with the caramel colored stallion. The proud animal trotted down the ramp and Jamie ran him around the yard once. When they stopped, Cooper reared up, kicking his hooves high and whinnying loudly. It wasn't defiance, just a gesture relishing the freedom from the small stall he had been in on the long drive from Texas.

The four legged and two legged creatures stretched their respective limbs as the delivery vehicle departed. Taking the long way around the house, the couple led their equine friends out to their new homes. Dropping Erin and her charges off at the front barn, Jamie proceeded on to the new stallion barn she had had built over the summer. She easily settled them in with fresh hay and water, removing the halters and draping them over a couple of convenient hooks on the wall. Grabbing a brush from the tack box she entered Dusty Moon's stall and gave him a good brush down, removing some tiny knots from the white hair attached to his head. He snorted and munched on a mouthful of sweet hay, obviously enjoying his new surroundings. Once the task

was finished, she fished out a big, juicy apple from her jacket pocket and gave the well-behaved animal a deserved treat. She whispered in his fuzzy ear. "Don't tell my wife I snatched this from the sack in the kitchen. Maybe she won't miss'em."

"You better not tell her then either, she might just give you a spanking."

Jamie dropped her forehead against the animal's gray one as she heard heels shuffle across the cement floor. She finally looked down at the pursed lips and gave Erin a toothy grin. "Hi honey. It was just two. Missing two tiny little apples won't hurt, will it?"

Erin had her arms firmly crossed over her chest and her green eyes squinted sternly. She hesitated, staring down the puppy dog eyed woman. Her lips parted slightly and she made one false start before confessing with a grin, "Three apples."

Jamie laughed and pulled her into a hug. "Maybe we should spank each other," she suggested.

Erin pulled back with a leer. "We'll discuss punishments later," she said. The author scratched Dusty Moon's nose and stepped over to the next stall. "How are the boys faring?"

Jamie puffed out her chest and unlatched the half door. "How could they not love this state of the art barn?" she asked, running the soft brush over Cooper's deep tanned coat. "Cool in the summer, warm in the winter. Hi tech insect control. It's a five star hotel."

"I'm glad you like it," teased Erin. "The next time we have a fight, you can bunk out here."

Jamie snickered. They had yet to have a serious argument that wasn't settled by bedtime. She tossed her wife another brush. "Help me out here and I'll go back in the house and cut up those apples for you."

"I'll hold you to that." Erin was only slightly intimidated standing beside the large horse until he stomped a heavy foot as she neared his hind end.

"Stop that!" Jamie admonished the horse with a very small thump on his muscular rump. She certainly didn't believe in inflicting pain as a form of punishment, but this spirited beast had to learn some manners while being attended to. The dark head turned and he spotted her with a glassy eye. "Yes, I'm talking to you," she said, running the brush over his leg. "Those scare tactics aren't going to work on me. This relationship is going to be built on mutual respect."

Erin smiled. "Like ours?"

Jamie's head popped up over the horse's back. "Yes darlin, but that's where the similarities end. Our relationship is also based on devoted love and..." Jamie leaned forward to meet the waiting lips. "...unbridled passion."

\* \* \* \*

Erin begrudgingly pulled herself out of bed at six am on Thursday. She asked her tired self, *this was my idea, wasn't it?* Forgoing a shower for now, she threw on some sloppy, gray sweats and dragged herself to the kitchen to stuff the twenty-eight pound turkey sitting in the refrigerator. She tried unsuccessfully to stifle a yawn as she retrieved the big bird. Her night's sleep had once again been disrupted by Jamie's nightmare and on this day she wouldn't even have a chance for an afternoon nap. But that was fine if she could provide at least some small amount of comfort to her troubled partner. The tall woman had tossed and turned, yelling out in the darkness for her parents until Erin covered the writhing body with her own and whispered soothing words. After Jamie had finally settled down, Erin had stayed awake for another hour trying desperately to think of something she could do to end her wife's inner torment.

Sleep arrived before a solution however.

Jamie soon found her way into the kitchen, looking somewhat disheveled with her wayward, raven locks and dark circles under her eyes. Erin was nearly up to her elbow in turkey flesh when Jamie planted a chaste kiss to her cheek. "Mornin honey," the rancher said. After pouring herself a cup of coffee, she pulled the toaster from its spot under the cabinet and proceeded to add four pieces of thick bread. Resting her backside against the counter, she waited for it to acquire a deep tan. "I'm going out to the barn first thing," she said. "Then I'll be back in to help you with the rest of the cooking. When is everyone supposed to start arriving?" she asked as the crusty slices popped up behind her.

Erin pushed back an errant strand of hair from her eyes with the back of her wrist. "Officially I said two o'clock, but I know Mom and Bridget will be here earlier." They were expecting nine guests for Thanksgiving dinner. Besides Erin's family, they had invited Anne, Leah and Chad to join them because it was a day to embrace family and friends. Erin wondered sadly what Jeremy was doing on this day, since his mother was still in St. Louis. But for all she knew he had already gone back to his hometown after having been rejected by his sister. If that were true, then her job to settle Jamie's turmoil would only be more difficult. Deep in her heart Erin knew that the stubborn rancher really wanted to know her only living blood relative, but with every day that passed, the higher those bricks of fear and anger were erected around the tall woman's heart. Erin was confident that she would always have access, but she feared for her lover's peace of mind. Until Jamie accepted Jeremy as her brother and began a relationship with him, that was in jeopardy.

Jamie slathered a piece of the toasted bread with strawberry jam and proceeded to feed Erin, whose hands were still busy. After one slice had been consumed, Erin lifted the heavy pan and walked over to the hot oven, sliding the stuffed main course inside. Once her hands were washed she accepted the offered cup of coffee and then a solid kiss.

The tall woman pulled away and licked her lips. "Sweet." After another quick peck, Jamie headed back up the stairs to dress. Returning just five minutes later she hurried to the back door with Artemis on her heels. "I'll be back in about an hour and a half," she said before ducking onto the back porch.

\* \* \* \*

Despite the persistent wind, Jamie was down to her tank top within twenty minutes of mucking the stalls. The job was hers alone since it was a holiday. Filling one wheelbarrow, she pushed it out to the compost pile near the edge of the trees, grunting at its weight. *Boy could I use some help*, she thought. *There just had to be a holiday this month didn't there*. She dumped the load and stopped, chuckling to herself. *It's not even Christmas and you're sounding like a scrooge. The hands deserve the day off to spend with their families*. She had in fact given her newest ranch hand, Brittany two days off so she could fly home to visit her family. The woman had a sister and a brother that she was very close to and whom she hadn't seen in two years. Brittany had gushed with pride over her siblings. Recently Jamie had indulged the young woman for over half an hour, listening to the tales of her mid-west upbringing, much of it remarkably similar to Jamie's own early years. When Brittany had started in about her younger brother and how great he was, Jamie had politely ended the conversation with the excuse of work. The rancher remembered the bright smile the girl had had when talking about her sibling. A mask of anguish fell over Jamie's face as she suddenly thought about the stranger and his incredible story, but with a brisk shake of her head, Jamie hefted the empty wheelbarrow and trudged back inside the barn to finish the job.

\* \* \* \*

The table was piled with Thanksgiving dinner, including a juicy, golden bird stuffed with bread, cranberries, nuts and a secret mixture of herbs and spices. About a dozen other steamy, delicious looking dishes, some prepared by the hostess and others by guests set inside a circle of fine china on the linen covered long, pine table. Nine adults and two children each stood behind a chair holding hands and offering a grace to God for the wonderful bounty. When the group prayer was finished each individual spoke of their own personal blessings. Jamie felt a comforting squeeze on her hand as each person mentioned family in their speeches. The tall woman took a quick glance at her wife and winked. When the last person had finished speaking, Jamie bent to whisper in Erin's ear. She said simply, "Next year."

Erin grinned and nodded.

\* \* \* \*

Once everyone was delightfully stuffed, Jamie was sent off to entertain the guests while Erin, with the help of her sister cleared the table, packing away enough leftovers for a week. The rancher soon found the children heavily involved in a game of Go Fish and all the other adults having a spirited discussion. Notably absent though was the tall veterinarian. It wasn't like Chad to avoid her friends and family; he was one of the most outgoing people she knew. After waiting five minutes she went in search of her friend. A quick check of all the first floor rooms turned up nothing and a peek out the window confirmed that his car was still in the driveway. *Maybe he went out to the barn*, she thought. Jamie crossed through the kitchen catching just a little snippet of Erin and Bridget's chat, which brought a cocky smirk to her face. She flashed a quick wink at her blonde partner before reaching for the handle. Letting the back door close gently behind her, Jamie spotted her quarry at the far end of the enclosed porch. Chad was turned away from her,



staring into the gray sky.

"Hey buddy, what are you doing out here all by yourself? Something wrong?"

The handsome, smiling face turned up to her as she took the seat next to him. "No," he said with a little headshake. "I...just feel kind of out of place. Everyone in there has a significant other."

"Yeah, Erin told me that Katie declined dinner with her family to have a beach picnic with some of her new friends. I don't think she quite has her priorities straight. Are you two still seeing each other?" Jamie asked.

Erin's cousin Katie had moved to the states from Ireland just a couple of months earlier. She was a huge flirt and had latched onto Chad the minute she had laid eyes on him at Erin and Jamie's pre-wedding party. The Irish lass was now attending school in L.A.

The vet leaned forward resting his arms on his knees. "We've seen each other a few times," he said, "but I know she's dating other guys. She's very nice and fun to be around, but Katie is a long way from wanting a committed relationship." He paused and met Jamie's concerned eyes. "But I'm not. I'm lonely. A lot of guys probably wouldn't admit that and maybe it isn't very manly, but I want someone to love." His shaggy, yellow head hung low at the admission.

"Chad. I think you are one of the nicest and most caring men I have ever known. You deserve that love and you will find it, probably when you least expect it. I can attest to that. Let's go back inside. I hear a slice of pie calling my name."

Chad got to his feet and followed her to the door. "Yeah, dessert sounds good," he said. "Wallow time is over." He smiled as he gallantly reached for the handle. "Speaking of wallow, do you think I'll look like a pig if I have two pieces?"

Jamie chuckled. "No more than me."

Pies of all varieties from traditional pumpkin to deep-dish apple along with a big chocolate cake were sliced and laid out with various toppings. Thanks to a loaner from Bridget, two pots of rich, dark coffee finished brewing right on time.

"Anything I can do to help hon?" Jamie asked after escorting Chad back into the animated living room.

Erin pulled a handful of silver forks from a drawer as she answered her spouse. "Yeah. Put the cream and sugar on the dining room table and get nine cups out of the cupboard."

Putting them on a tray along with two trivets, Jamie carried them from the kitchen. Erin liberated one of the cups before the tall woman left the room and filled it with boiling water. Once all the necessary items were delivered, everyone set about helping themselves to dessert and coffee.

The tall, Asian woman picked up a slice of apple pie, but bypassed the dark brew. Erin followed

Jamie's friend back to her place on the love seat next to Anne. Leah's brown eyes widened when a steaming cup on a china saucer was placed before her. She immediately recognized the delicious aroma of chamomile and her finely sculpted brows crinkled. "How did...?"

Erin nodded to her old friend. "Anne brought it. She wanted to be sure you had your favorite, since you don't drink coffee."

Leah met the doctor's smiling eyes and took her hand, touched at the small, but special gesture. "Thank you," she said to both her girlfriend and her hostess.

Once everybody was promptly stuffed for the second time that day, Erin rinsed and slipped the small plates and cups into the nearly full dishwasher. The machine was quietly humming along when she heard footsteps behind her. Erin turned to find the one person she didn't expect. The author smiled. "Leah. Can I get you something else?"

"Oh no thank you, but everything was delicious. Actually, I was hoping we could have a few minutes alone to talk."

Erin nodded, wiping her hands on a yellow striped towel. "I was going to ask you the same thing. Shall we go on the back porch?"

The sun had broken through the clouds just in time for a short light show before setting on another Thanksgiving. The tall grasses danced in the evening breeze, their tips aglow like candlelight. The uneasiness carried on both sets of shoulders made for some soft footsteps on the proverbial eggshells littering the floor. The two women took chairs on opposite sides of a small wooden table.

"I need...."

"I just want..."

They both laughed at the simultaneous statements and the action helped to lesson the tension between them.

Erin leaned forward, her features soft and apologetic. "Leah, I need to say I'm sorry again. My behavior on the day we met and since then, even though unintentional has been rude. I'm not usually that way. I could say my actions were due to the stress of the time and while that is true, it's no excuse. You are a special friend to Jamie and I have no right to be jealous. So please accept my apology."

The nearly onyx eyes regarded Erin with warm sincerity. "I do accept," Leah said. "Although it was understandable, seeing as you walked in to find me hugging your fiancé and her shirt was half unbuttoned."

Looking back now, they both saw the humor of the situation and giggled soundlessly.

Erin took a breath. "I just want you to know that I respect your friendship with Jamie and with Anne and you are welcome into my home and to my life."

Leah took the offered hand. "Thank you. I'd like you to understand what happened between Jamie and I when she was recovering. I'm sure she has explained it to you, but I want you to hear it from my prospective." After Erin nodded, she continued. "She was, above all my friend and my only motive for deepening that friendship was out of compassion. She was so alone and I couldn't help her with those lost memories, but I thought perhaps I could let her regain a part of her true self. I had picked up on some subtle hints, things that only another lesbian would probably notice. But I certainly didn't set out to seduce her. We came together out of compassion and caring. I won't lie and say I didn't or still don't think she is a beautiful woman. But I do not lust after her. I never intended to have a long lasting, romantic relationship with her. I don't regret that it happened and it is a sweet memory...but that's all it is."

"I do understand that now," Erin confessed. "You know, when Jamie first told me about you and what you shared I wasn't the least bit jealous. In fact I told her I should thank you. So thank you for being there for her when I couldn't."

Leah smiled and nodded. "I'd like to be here for you both if there is ever anything I can do for you in the future."

\* \* \* \*

Erin decided to take her niece and nephew out to the barn to see her new baby before the evening became too dark.

"Can I ride the pony, Aunt Erin?" asked four-year-old Caitlin.

Erin was holding the youngster in her arms so she could see over the stall door and she brushed aside some curls that had fallen in front of the small face. "Sweetie, that's not a pony, that's a baby horse. And he is still too young to ride."

"What's the difference?" asked Conner. He stood by her side with his hands in the pockets of his dress slacks as he peered through a small opening at the little equine. He had loosened the tie around his neck just as soon as the family photos had been taken, but now he had to be careful of his best dress shoes so he had to watch where he put his feet.

Erin thought about how to answer him. "Well, a pony is a pony," she said, but realized that it was pretty lame. *You'd better brush up on all these questions. You'll be answering all kinds of them in a few years.* "Ponies come in all sorts of sizes," she explained further, "but they will always be ponies no matter how old they get. This little foal will grow up to be a big horse." *This is harder than I thought.* She chuckled to herself.

He still didn't really understand what she said, but decided to accept her explanation...at least for now. "Can we have a pony out here for us to ride then?" he asked, looking up at her with

expectant eyes.

"We'll see sweetheart. I'll have to ask your Mom and Dad." *I think Bridget will go for it. After all it will be staying here and she won't have to worry about taking care of it.* Erin had spent an hour on the phone, the week before, convincing her sister to take one of the puppies that were staying at the veterinarian's office. With Erin and Anne each taking a puppy and Bridget agreeing to take the third that only left one little dog to find a good home for. Chad was keeping the mother and Erin wanted to find a home with someone they knew so the family of dogs could at least see each other from time to time. She felt they deserved it after all the trauma they had already been through.

Long after sundown the group bid each other goodnight with several rounds of loving hugs and kisses. One by one, Erin and Jamie watched as the cars pulled away from the house, some having long drives ahead and others just a few minutes. With the last wave, the tired couple trudged back inside their cozy home, bypassing the messy kitchen all together and heading up the stairs to their even cozier bed.

Erin flipped on only one bedside lamp as Jamie pulled two, almost identical sets of pajamas from the oak dresser. Fumbling, unsuccessfully with the zipper on the back of her dress for almost a full minute, Erin breathed a sigh as her fingers were replaced and the dark material separated, soon baring her shoulders to the warm room air and to a pair of soft lips. "Oh, that feels sooo good, but I am sooo...ti...red." The last word was delivered beneath a prolonged yawn.

"Me too," Jamie mumbled, resting her chin on one of those shoulders. As the dress dropped to the carpet, she proceeded to unhook Erin's lacy bra and rub away the slight marks left behind that marred the satiny skin. Slipping one of the long sleeved pajama tops over the blonde head, she then left her wife to take care of the rest while she discarded her own rumpled clothing. "We have to do this all again on Christmas Eve, don't we?" the rancher asked, after redressing and climbing into bed.

"Umm, hum," Erin mumbled, snuggling into her pillows, the one under her head and the very long one beside her. "With one more too. I told Katie I wouldn't scold her for missing today if she showed up for Christmas. That should make Chad happy."

"Maybe, maybe not."

"I'll have to ask you...about that...again...tomorrow." That was the last muttered word of the night.

\* \* \* \*

The little yellow car pulled into the lot of the bed and breakfast and stopped next to a sleek, black automobile that nearly dwarfed it. Leah had driven up from Los Angeles early that morning so the two could spend some time alone together. They had talked about the clinic and other important things in their respective lives, but most of all they had just wanted to be together. Although the little inn was lovely and the older couple that owned it was extremely friendly and

considerate, Anne looked at the building with slight disdain. "I'll sure be glad when I find my own house," she said. "I don't know how many times I've gone to look for something and then remember that it's still stored away back in L.A."

Leah covered the hand that was still resting on the gearshift. She brought the appendage to her lips and kissed away the tension. "Hopefully by the beginning of the year we'll both be settled here for good. It's hard to be so far away from you."

Anne smiled at her girlfriend and moved the short distance for a kiss of her own. Neither had ever felt the kind of passion that ignited between them and even though they stilled vowed to build their relationship slowly there were some things that were nearly impossible to deny. "You are staying the night, aren't you?" she asked, slightly breathlessly. Anne adored the moonlit smile that greeted her question. *I wish I didn't even have to ask.*

Leah ran her hand through the chestnut waves atop the doctor's head and stared into the similarly hued eyes. "I thought you would never ask." *Maybe some day neither one of us will have to ask,* she thought as the driver's side door was shut. After her eyes lingered on the trim figure passing in front of the small auto, the Asian beauty finally unfolded her long legs from the small sports car and took the offered hand. It was the end to a perfect day and the beginning of what would definitely be the perfect night.

\* \* \* \*

"So what do you think of this one?"

Anne flashed a cringed expression then a totally goofy one in Erin's direction before she answered the real estate agent's question. The author, not so smoothly, giggled behind a hand. "I really didn't want to have to make **that** many repairs," Anne said rather diplomatically of the too small and too dilapidated shack like structure.

"But the price is a steal," he countered. He had been trying to unload the property for two years and always showed it to a new customer first. His favorite adage, one man's trash is another man's treasure.

"Yes, but I think I'll let someone else commit that crime. Besides, like I told you I would like a minimum of three bedrooms and much more space. It may be just me, but I like to think ahead. Who knows what might be in my future," she mumbled with a soft smile.

"Okay," he said stepping over to his car. "There's still some of those others I think are good possibilities." Anne waved the stack of printouts, he had given her, in the air. "I'm sure you will find something to fit your needs. You can follow me to the next one."

The doctor cleared her throat nervously as her mind raced for an excuse to escape. Her manners stopped her from telling him what he could do with the sheets of useless paper. "Umm, yeah."

Erin tugged on her friends arm as they headed for the author's car. "Anne, I'm not really feeling

very well," she said loud enough for the real estate agent to hear. "Could we continue this later?"

"Of course. I'm sorry Mr. Silverman I need to see my friend home. I'll give you a call later." They climbed into Erin's SUV, waiting until his old, green car was well down the road. The duo finally burst out laughing. "Thank you," Anne stated emphatically. "I can't believe I got his name as a recommendation."

"Well, even then you can't be certain. I know someone who may be able to help." Erin grabbed her cell and dialed the number she knew by heart.

Later that afternoon, Anne and Erin were standing in the middle of a three bedroom, 1800 square foot, impeccable ranch style home. "This is perfect," Anne said as she took in a 360-degree view of the sunny, yellow kitchen. "This whole house is perfect. I can't believe it. I want it," she said before slipping out onto the covered, flagstone patio.

Erin grinned at her friend then turned to the middle-aged lady standing unobtrusively in the kitchen doorway. "Thanks Mrs. Frasier."

"You're welcome dear. I've known your mother for fifteen years and when she called me earlier, I promised her nothing but my best."

"I would say this is definitely it." Erin chuckled as she watched her friend through the large, kitchen window. Anne was checking out the built in wooden benches lining the patio for the best views of the mountain range far off behind the incredible house. "I think Dr. Carson might come back to earth sometime tomorrow evening."

After all the proper paperwork was signed, they bid the agent goodbye and climbed back into Erin's car. "I can't believe how easy this was, especially after this morning's fiasco," said Anne, the smile never leaving her face. She was having a hard time peeling her eyes from the brick covered structure.

"Shall we go visit the puppies?" Erin asked, as she pulled away from the curb.

"Huh...oh yeah. Sounds like a good idea. I think I'll finally have a home to bring one to now."

"You're not too happy, are you?" the author asked.

Anne rubbed her hands together then tapped out a little tune on the dashboard. "Very," she said. "Why shouldn't I be? I'll have a great new job in the near future, I just bought my first house..."

"And?"

"And what?"

Erin kept her eyes glued to the road ahead and the knowing smirk on her face.

"What?"

"Isn't there something else making you happy...or is it someone? You just seem to have a certain glow today. Somehow I don't think a new house put it there."

"Okay, okay. Leah and I took our relationship another step last night."

"And?"

Anne slapped her friend's arm. "I am not going to give you details. We are not in high school."

Erin's cheeks pinked up a bit as she admonished her friend. "That's not what I meant and you know it. What is with you? I've never seen you in such a playful mood."

Anne sighed joyously and the chestnut waves around her head danced as she could hardly keep still. "Well, I guess that's what being in love does to you."

Erin grinned as she spared glances between the road and the silly doctor. "Really! That's great Anne. I'm so happy for you. I assume Leah feels the same."

The smiling woman nodded quickly. "Yeah, she does." The giddiness suddenly settled and Anne became serious while still happy. "I'll tell you Erin, we both still want to go slowly, but I had such a hard time letting her leave this morning. I've honestly never felt anything like this before. It actually hurt watching her drive away."

"I've been there and I do understand," Erin said. "But when you think about the possibility of having the rest of your life with them, the temporary pain is all worth it."

Continued in Chapter 9.

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

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## Chapter 9

The somber mood draped over Jamie's soul the minute she stepped through the back door. The dog was lying on the kitchen floor with her golden head resting on her crossed paws. Jamie bent down and rubbed the long ears. "What's up girl?" she asked. The animal licked her hand, almost apologetically. "Something wrong?" She gave the dog a few more pats. "Maybe you ate something that didn't agree with you, huh? Where's your Mommy?" Jamie washed her hands in the sink and took a small bottle of water from the refrigerator. She walked from the room calling out for her wife. She heard no reply, but soon found Erin sitting in the dining room. The small woman had her back to Jamie and gave no response to her at all. The rancher took in the dark room and her wife's posture. A stinging shiver went down her back as she approached her. "Honey, what's wrong?"

Erin couldn't meet her eyes. With a shaky finger, she continued to trace a pattern of lace on the table before her. "I'm not..." her voice caught. "I'm not pregnant," she whispered.

Jamie felt the small jolt to her mid-section and she took a long drink of the water hoping to swallow the lump that had suddenly formed in her throat. "Oh. Are you sure?" After catching the nod, she pulled over a chair to sit beside the despondent blonde. "Well... honey we knew that chances for a successful first procedure were slim."

Erin just nodded again. She had cried herself out when she came from the bathroom earlier that afternoon. Then she had dropped into the big, lonely bed, hugging a small black teddy bear to her chest. She hadn't expected it to hit her that hard, especially knowing the odds were against them. But it did. Erin felt a warm hand under her chin and she was soon looking into the caring, blues.



Jamie's thumb rubbed over the soft skin as she held back her own tears. She looked straight into the weary eyes and forced the corners of her mouth to lift. "We'll try again in a few weeks, right?"

Erin forced a very weak smile of her own. "Right," she agreed. Soft lips touched hers and she fell into the kiss, putting her sadness aside for the moment.

Jamie pulled back and nuzzled her nose against Erin's. She took both of the smaller hands in hers. "How are you feeling, physically I mean? Any cramps, your back hurt?"

Erin gave a confusing combination headshake and shrug. "It's not too bad," she finally confirmed.

Jamie kissed the backs of those hands and held them against her chest. "I'll tell you what, why don't you go and put on something baggy and comfortable. Don't worry about making dinner. I'll jump in the shower real fast and then go out for a pizza. We'll snuggle up in that big bed upstairs and eat and watch a movie. How does that sound?"

"Good," came the simple reply.

Just about an hour and a half later, long after the sun had bid goodnight, the couple sat side by side with a half empty pizza box between them. They were both dressed in their warmest, coziest pajamas. Erin had even added a thick pair of socks to her outfit, but it didn't seem to help against the chill that was skimming her body. Instinctively, she knew it was the stress of the day lending to her incredible discomfort, but no matter how hard she tried she just couldn't shake the sense of disappointment.

Jamie refilled Erin's glass with the dark cola and handed it over. The blonde was just nibbling on her second piece of pepperoni, mushroom and extra cheese while Jamie had finished her third and reached for another. The comedy movie playing on the television had garnered very few laughs from either one of them. Although Jamie had squeezed a few out, hoping to infect her spouse and lighten her mood. Jamie had expected Erin to be upset if she hadn't gotten pregnant, but her withdrawn reaction tore at Jamie's heart and she didn't know what to do to make it better. A thought suddenly popped into her head. "I heard from the architect earlier," she said. "He has all the blueprints for the new house drawn up and said he has time at 3:00 tomorrow afternoon for us to go and give final approval. Do you want to go? I know how anxious you are to see our new house get started."

The author paused only a second, picking at a small piece of lint on the blanket beside her. "Yeah, we can go," she said. "I don't have anything else planned."

Jamie sighed silently. *Okay that didn't help.* "Good," she said. "I'll give him a call first thing in the morning."

The rest of the movie was watched in silence.

At ten o'clock, Jamie cleared away the remnants of their dinner and did a final check of the doors downstairs. She returned to the melancholy room, flipped off the one light beside the bed and climbed under the covers. Erin had already settled in with her back to Jamie. The rancher waited for a few seconds, but Erin made no move to say goodnight.

She approached gently and put a hand on her partner's shoulder. She was heartened when it didn't twitch. "Sweetheart, I know you're sad, but are you mad at me for some reason?"

Erin quickly turned over and they lay there face to face. "I'm not mad at you," she said with conviction. "I could never be mad at you." Her eyes drifted away and she gave a little shiver.

Jamie pulled the blanket up over Erin's shoulder and asked, "Don't you feel well?"

"It's not that." Erin was quiet for a few more seconds as Jamie rubbed her arm under the blue blanket. "I'm sorry," she finally whispered.

"What is there to be sorry for?" Jamie asked.

A sob escaped the trembling lips. "I heard the disappointment in your voice when I told you I wasn't pregnant."

Jamie smiled very softly and caressed Erin's soft cheek, sliding her thumb over the drooping lips. "I was disappointed honey...but not in you," she was quick to add when her wife cringed. "Erin, getting pregnant...it either happens or it doesn't. There isn't one thing that you could have done differently to change things."

"I just thought...I felt..."

Jamie pulled her closer. "I know sweetie. Like I said before, we'll go back in a couple of weeks and this time it will work." Jamie stopped short of promising as she directed the sad eyes toward hers. "Do you believe me?" she asked.

Even in the pale light, Erin looked deeply into the sapphire orbs and she saw the truth. She had always seen her future in those eyes, but now she saw the gleam of happiness that a child would bring. "I believe you."

Jamie reached forward the scant few inches and kissed the soft lips. "I love you Erin, more than anything in the world."

Erin sighed, this time in contentment. "I love you too."

\* \* \* \*

Early the next morning, drowsy, emerald eyes fluttered open to find Jamie staring back. Jamie smiled. Erin blinked once. Then she smiled...a true one full of peace and joy. The dark haired woman's expression grew and her insides settled into a state of ease. She knew that if Erin could wake up and smile like she did, that the blues of the previous evening had disappeared. And if

Erin was happy then all was right in Jamie's world.

They were still in almost the exact same position that they had fallen asleep in. Jamie reached up and traced a single fingertip down the side of the face so close to hers. "Good morning," she said.

The blonde head snuggled a little deeper into the fluffy pillow as she answered the greeting. "Good morning." A lovely little kiss followed. "What time is it?" Erin asked.

"It's about eight."

"Aren't you running late?" the surprised author asked. "You usually like to be out in the barn by seven."

Jamie's eyes twinkled. "Nope," she said. "Not going to work today. Brittany and the guys can handle it."

A pair of golden brows converged. "Why?"

The rancher paused just a second, staring into Erin's eyes. "I woke up at seven," she finally said. "But I saw my wife, so beautiful in slumber and I stayed here just watching her. I want to spend the entire day with you. We can go down to L.A. early, have some lunch...and who knows what other trouble we can find to get into." She contemplated a second as her spouse stretched. A wicked idea invaded those thoughts as some delectable skin peeked out from underneath the blonde's shirt. With a mental shrug she decided to go for it. They both needed a fun little diversion. "Maybe we can even investigate that costume shop," she suggested with a naughty giggle.

The author immediately recognized that sound and the accompanying look. "Oh no. I don't think so," Erin said, rolling over onto her back and stretching her taught muscles some more.

"Why?" asked Jamie. She got out of the bed and scooted into her slippers to protect from the chill of the wood floors as she moved to pull open the curtains.

The small blonde rose up on both elbows, appreciatively watching the lanky form cross the room. "The one I went to in Switzerland was legitimate," she said under a yawn, "the one you're talking about is hidden in...well that one is hidden..."

Jamie turned and cocked her head, the morning sun flowing like a waterfall through the panes behind her. "Where is it hidden?" she teasingly asked.

While Erin was not shy by any means when participating, when it came to discussing more erotic, sexual matters, she was quite reticent. The blonde eyed her sideways and finally spit out, "In an adult shop."

Jamie shook her head, giggled again and headed for the closet. She returned just seconds later with a pink colored box. Pitching the lid aside, she held up the enclosed item and cleared her

throat loudly. It had been a few months after they had finally gotten together, the rancher remembered, when her partner had first introduced her new purchase. With rosy cheeks, Erin had slipped into bed one night with the box. She had verbally danced around the subject, nibbling nervously on her lower lip for five minutes before unveiling the new, sex toy. She was quick to assure Jamie that she adored the way they made love, but she had wanted to expand the horizons of their love life. She told Jamie that it had arrived almost three weeks earlier, but she had to build up the courage to bring it out. Jamie suspected that the shyness had stemmed from Erin's inability to see. The dark haired woman had quickly abated those fears and together they had shared a wonderful evening, discovering new and exciting sensations. After her initial inhibitions, Erin had quickly gained her confidence with eroticism...in private that is.

Erin's eyes darkened a shade when they fell onto Jamie's. She pulled the inside of her jaw between her teeth to stave off throwing her cocky lover a smirk. In defiance of the moment, she threw off the bed covers and marched over to her wife. A tinge of scarlet rimmed her ears as she grabbed the item, which was in a lovely shade of lavender, and stuffed it back inside its container. Erin looked her smiling spouse straight in the eye. "I don't mind using them..."

"You certainly don't," Jamie interjected.

"...but I won't go browsing for them or anything else like it in public," finished the blonde. "That's what the Internet is for."

Jamie suddenly grabbed her and pulled her in for a most wanton kiss. "That's okay," she said. "You can stay in the car and I'll go inside and look around." The rancher ducked into the bathroom before the words really registered in the author's lust hazed brain.

"Oh no you don't," Erin finally called out. "I'm not letting you run rampant in a place like that. There might be more of those pesky salesgirls who want to demonstrate the merchandise." Erin picked up the dropped lid and stepped into the closet. "And if you don't behave," she said to herself, "We won't be using this for awhile." A hefty pause filled the small space before Erin smiled. "Oh who am I kidding?"

\* \* \* \*

They climbed into bed that night, happy with what they had accomplished that day. A few kisses, laughs and soft caresses lulled them into an easy sleep. But as with most of the previous nights, their peaceful slumber soon revolted and became unconsciously tumultuous for one and gave the other a waking round of pain that centered around the heart.

But the pain on this night suddenly became all too real for the blonde bedmate.

"Nooooo!"

Erin jumped, her brain trying its best to recede from the deep, murky sleep she had fallen into. Her eyes were still plastered shut as she blindly reached out for her lover. Suddenly, a hand flew between Erin's and smacked her in the face. Propelled backward, she grabbed onto the edge of

the bed to stay atop the mattress and off the floor. Ignoring her swelling lip, she quickly turned back to her troubled partner. "Jamie, it's okay," she said. "I'm here. You're not alone." She pulled the thrashing woman close to her body and that's the way they stayed for the rest of the night. "You're not alone," Erin whispered one last time before they both fell back to sleep.

\* \* \* \*

Jamie woke the next morning and carefully untangled her legs from the shorter ones of her partner. She stretched, feeling drained instead of restful. A small smile drifted across her face though at the sight next to her. Erin had pulled the blanket almost over her head; only her tousled hair peeked out. Jamie kissed the yellow crown and quietly got up to start work.

After finishing a small amount of paper work, the rancher headed back to the house for breakfast. The smell of bacon greeted her at the door. "Morning baby," she said as she stepped inside to find Erin standing at the stove.

The small woman returned the greeting and presented her cheek for a kiss. She knew she couldn't hide her face from her wife all day long, but she tried for just a few more minutes.

Jamie poured herself a cup of coffee and took her seat at the table. "That smells great," she said as she buttered a hot biscuit. Biting off a fluffy chunk, Jamie reached up to take one of the plates Erin had carried to the table. They both settled back down and only then did Jamie see her spouse's injury. "Honey, how did that happen?" she asked, moving to her wife's side to examine the puffy and bruised lip.

"It's nothing sweetheart. It was just an accident." Erin smiled painfully and gestured across the table. "Eat, before it gets cold."

Jamie took her seat again, curious about her partner's behavior. She took another drink of her coffee, watching closely as Erin gingerly took a sip of orange juice. The acidic liquid stung, but the author did her best not to flinch. "Why won't you tell me what happened?" Jamie asked quietly. "You didn't have that last night." A tingle ran across the back of her left hand, not exactly spurring a memory, but raising a strong suspicion. "Please tell me honey." The green gaze finally shifted her way.

"It was just an accident," the blonde reiterated. The tone of voice sent a shiver down the tall woman's spine. "Last night," Erin continued, "you had a nightmare. I didn't wake up fast enough and I got in the way of your...hand."

Jamie didn't even take a breath for the next few seconds as the thought absorbed into her head. "I did that to you?" she finally uttered under a strained and heavy inhale of air.

"Jamie, I said it was an accident. I just didn't get to you soon enough before the nightmare took hold. As soon as I held you, you calmed down and went back to sleep."

A napkin twisted between the rancher's long fingers and her sapphire eyes grew impossibly sad.

"It has happened before hasn't it...the nightmares?"

Erin nodded. "A few times...since..."

"Since Mr. McIntyre made his visit." Jamie moved back to Erin's side and reached down to tenderly kiss the bruised area. Her forehead rested against Erin's. "I'm sorry. I won't let this happen again," she whispered. "I won't bring you any more pain." Warm hands settled against her cheeks and she looked into the concerned face.

"This doesn't hurt nearly as much as my heart hurts for you," said Erin. "I just want you to be able to resolve your feelings so you can be happy again."

Now that it all had come so vividly to light, Jamie could no longer deny the truth of what she had been feeling. The nightmares, the pain, the old resentment and now the guilt...it all poured over her like flood waters. She no longer had a choice; it wasn't just disrupting her life any more. The dark head nodded. "I'll try."

\* \* \* \*

A timid knock on the front door brought Erin from the kitchen. It didn't take her long to make the short trip, but she opened the door to find her guest retreating down the stairs. "Jeremy?"

The young man turned and nodded. "Hello Ms. Casey."

She held the door and motioned for him to step inside. "Call me Erin," she said.

He peeked inside and muttered. "I...I don't want to disturb you...I just..."

Erin boldly took him by the hand and led him into the living room. "Jamie isn't in here right now," she said easily.

His head dropped despondently. "And she still doesn't want to see me," he said.

"As I said before, Jamie is still working out some things from her past. Give her some more time. If you have a few minutes I'd like to talk to you and get to know you. We could be friends...if you'd like."

That brought a tiny smile to his handsome face. "I would like that."

Erin smiled back and said, "Good. Have a seat. Can I get you something to drink?"

"No, thank you."

They went on to talk a little about his childhood and as the minutes slipped away Erin's charm eased his nerves and she saw Jeremy's true personality. The twenty-four year old said he never

resented not having a father. His mother had enrolled him the big brothers program and he was matched up with a really great guy who took him to ball games and fishing and taught what being a man really meant. And it had nothing to do with brawn or machismo and everything to do with heart and courage. They had always had a wonderful time together, but still there was always that question. The question about the man who had given him life. Jeremy had been a very good student in grade school and an even better one in high school. His mother was always proudly raving about her honor roll student. He smiled when mentioning his mother. She sounded like a great woman and Erin hoped that she would someday get the opportunity to meet her.

"Where did you go to college?" Erin asked.

"Here in California. I have a degree in Environmental Engineering and a minor in Business Management. I've always loved the outdoors. I had this great idea that someday I'd have my own company that worked to preserve nature in all its glory. Right now I'm working over in Bedford, for Redding Development as an environmental advisor." Erin knew of the logging company and their good reputation among the, so called tree huggers. "I'm not totally naive," Jeremy said. "I know that wood is an important resource, but there are definitely right ways to go about harvesting the forest without causing irreversible damage."

As he continued to speak, Erin found herself loving this young man's determination and his passionate spirit for life. He had a lot in common with his sister, she soon realized.

Artemis trotted in and flopped down at Jeremy's feet. "Well, hello there," he said. Without even thinking he scooted from the sofa to the ground and began scratching the dog's belly. Arte's tongue shamelessly drooped out the side of her mouth and she laid her head on his leg.

"Once you get started, she won't easily let you stop," warned Erin.

Jeremy laughed. "That's okay. I love dogs." A hint of sadness flew over his eyes. "I never got to have one when I was a kid; mom was allergic." His smile then returned. "My best friend down the street let me share his dog though. He was a beagle and he could run us both ragged during a long afternoon. Bucky had more energy than the two of us put together."

Erin watched fondly as he continued to lavish attention on her dog. "So Jeremy do you have a significant other?" she asked.

"Yeah, her name is Rachel. We've been going together for two years. We've talked marriage, but not until after she graduates next spring. We can only see each other on weekends since I got this job. That's not easy, but at least she gets to spend more time on her studies." He was quiet for the next few seconds as he continued to play with the dog.

The sadness in his voice returned when he spoke up again. Only this time he was much more subdued. "I want you to know, that I applied for my job before I knew my sister lived here. I don't want her to think I'm a stalker or anything."

Erin squeezed his shoulder. "I understand. I know this is hard for you too."

"Why doesn't she like me?" he asked pitifully.

A pain gripped Erin's heart after hearing the despair in his voice, "Jeremy, it's not you," she said, "it's the situation. It's not really my place to tell you this, but you deserve to know something. When she was just a child, Jamie lost her identical twin sister, her grandparents and her parents all within three years." Erin saw his dark brows furrow and she could read the sorrow in those familiar eyes. She hoped this little bit of information would help ease his hurt. "She's only recently really begun to start dealing with that deep seeded pain. Your appearance has...

He gave the dog one final rub and struggled to his feet. "You don't have to say anymore. I'm sorry if I've hurt her. I never wanted to do that."

Again, Erin laid a hand on his arm. "I know you didn't Jeremy."

He gave her a very weak smile. "I think you're a really great person Erin and I'm really glad she has you in her life." Jeremy sucked in a deep breath and took, what he was sure would be the last look around the room. His eyes found a picture of two small, dark haired girls that he assumed were his sisters. They were standing in front of a carousel and grinning as they had their arms around one another. He wistfully wondered what it would have been like growing up with those siblings. He had no regrets of his childhood; at the time he didn't know any better. But now... "I'd better go," he said. "I don't want to upset Jamie anymore."

"Jeremy all I can say is please don't give up hope. Can I have your phone number? I'd like to keep in touch."

The young man pulled out his wallet and handed Erin a white business card. "Actually I just got these," he said with a touch of pride. "It kinda makes me feel like a real adult now."

Erin smiled, causing him to echo her after just a few seconds. She walked him the short distance to the door and they said so long. She refused to make it a permanent good-bye. The author stepped back into the house and she heard the footsteps rush up the stairs. She didn't know how long her spouse had been there, but Erin crossed her fingers, hoping Jamie had heard something that would finally spark her interest in Jeremy McIntyre.

\* \* \* \*

Erin walked into the bedroom that evening carrying two cups of hot chocolate. It seemed more and more that they used that particular beverage as a comfort. But she wasn't sure it would scratch the surface on this night. Erin felt the tension the moment she crossed the threshold. Jamie was standing at the farthest window staring into the evening, the dark sky matching her mood. It was a heavily clouded night, blocking out even the smallest dot of starlight and the moon's glow. Jamie had always liked to watch the stars. She saw her parents there. But tonight they were hiding from her. The taught muscles flexed in her arms as her fingers unconsciously grasped at the wood trim around the panes of glass. Her clenching jaw matched their rhythm.



The author placed the hot mugs on the nightstand and moved to stand behind her tall spouse. Jamie felt her presence, but made no indication of it. Erin stood there for several seconds, not touching, not talking, just breathing.

Finally, the dark head moved, but no more than an inch. "I have this pain in my gut," she said hoarsely. "And I can't figure out why?"

Erin moved forward and slipped her arms around the aching middle. She kissed the cloth covered back. "I know sweetheart. I know." Gently, she rubbed little circles over her wife's stomach, but said nothing more. And she would remain quiet until Jamie opened up and addressed the issue that loomed in the wake of her personal peace.

Jamie went on to talk about inconsequential ranch business for the next five or ten minutes as Erin continued her silent support, stroking a lock of onyx hair now and then. Through clenching muscles, she did feel the outburst that was about to come.

"I should probably keep Thursday and Friday open for the next insemination right?" Jamie asked. She felt the positive nod against her back and continued. "Then I can make some appointments tomorrow and Wednesday if I need to. I think the word is spreading about Cooper and as soon as I can get the Internet site up and going, I should have more business than I can keep up with. I might have to hire someone to help me in answering those requests...but that's okay. I can do that." She stopped and took a needed breath. "I'm thirty years old Erin, I don't need a...him. What does he want from me?"

Erin took Jamie by the hand and led her to the bed where they sat on top of the folded down blanket. "Honey, I don't think he wants anything from you," she said. "He just wants to get to know you, to talk to you. Laugh with you and maybe cry with you. That's what siblings do. Jeremy is a wonderful young man. I know you heard us talking this afternoon and I know you see that too." Erin watched the gradual change in Jamie's expression, whether from her words or from exhaustion, she wasn't sure. The skin around her eyes loosened, but the blue orbs still held on to that thread of resistance. Erin knew she couldn't push, but she had to gently prod her wife along this path she had started down. "And," she drawled, "he would probably like to hear about the father he never knew." Jamie finally glanced up as Erin continued. "As short as it was sweetie, you had him for ten wonderful years. You have those precious memories. Perhaps you could share some of those with your brother. I think he'd like to hear about his other sister too. I know that twins have an incredible bond and I know you still miss her...and maybe you're feeling just a little guilty because she can't be here to know him."

A film of saline developed over her tired eyes as Jamie sat there in total silence for almost five minutes. Erin anxiously watched the trancelike state her wife had fallen into. She thought the conversation was over for the night until Jamie sighed and threw her head back. "My head is kinda figuring all that out that," she said. "But my heart..." Erin pulled her in for a long hug. The outside tears never fell, but inside they consumed that small place inside Jamie's soul that she had long ago reserved for those three people that had been the most important things in her young life.

Erin pulled out of the hug and kissed Jamie's cheek. She took her hands and gave a small, supportive smile. "Perhaps you're afraid," she said, "that if you get close to Jeremy, that would leave you like they did." There was a small, almost imperceptible nod. "But you took that chance with me sweetheart. You can do it again. Deep inside, I know you want to." She squeezed the hands entwined with hers "And you know it too. Don't cheat yourself out of all the great times you could have with your brother."

Jamie swallowed once and bolstered enough courage for a hopeful bit of a smile.

\* \* \* \*

She was afraid to fall asleep. Not afraid of the nightmares that would surely have come in slumber. The unfriendly visitors had graced her nocturnal hours for many years. After falling in love with Erin they had abated...until recently. What frightened Jamie the most was the thought of hurting Erin again. A fleeting thought of sleeping in another room had crossed her mind, but never left her lips. Her stubborn spouse would have had a few choice words on that suggestion. So her busy mind and fearful heart had kept her awake. Jamie had looked down at the peaceful face beside her as had Erin lay sleeping. The bruised lip was barely noticeable in the dim light, but to her it was painfully clear.

Those damn nightmares.

Subconsciously, Jamie had known what was happening. She just wasn't aware that it had been affecting her so strongly, physically. While she hadn't really remembered seeing the horrible visions, she had certainly felt them the next day. Every morning they had left that lump in her stomach. More vague images had also come to her during the waking hours when she had allowed her mind to drift. It was like watching through a wall of stretched cotton webbing. Tiny holes here, a paper-thin section there. Beyond that hazy barrier flashed the most painful moments of her life. Her seven-year old eyes saw a hospital bed and inside lay her sister, pale and still. A coffin that was just her size was lowered deep into the earth and the dirt that was tossed in after, suffocating the scared little girl. The same little girl still lived inside the thirty-year old woman. Then there were two larger coffins side by side in a church on the day she had lost it all.

Lying awake that night, she had thought a lot about what Erin had said. She couldn't go to another funeral, could not see another dead body of a cherished relative. She shared blood and a heritage with Jeremy, but could she afford the price of that emotional investment.

The answer was slow in coming, the pros and cons weighing in heavily. But once it had, the thick cloak around that part of her heart slowly dissolved, leaving her in a state of apprehensive acceptance instead of sheer denial.

About three thirty in the morning, the blue gaze had drifted over to the window, back to the dark sky. She suddenly recalled something she had said just a few months earlier. Jamie whispered in the darkness, addressing the hidden stars. "Guess I was wrong. You can't be proud of the way I've acted toward...my brother." It was the first time she'd referred to Jeremy by that title. The

two, unfamiliar words rattled around inside her brain before traveling southward and scarcely settling in the vicinity of her heart.

\* \* \* \*

Erin and Jamie held hands and each placed a wishful kiss upon the gold locket that hung around the smaller woman's neck. It was a repeat of the action they took just a month before. This time they took an extra few minutes and doubled their prayers to be blessed with a child, but I love you, were the only words exchanged.

The optimistic couple took the long drive home from the doctor's office without any stops and once they had arrived home from the doctor's office, the author was pampered for the rest of the day. The positive changes in Jamie's behavior over the last two days had been extremely subtle, but Erin saw them. But she had been the only one who had seen the discomfort as well.

At lunch, Jamie made two of her extra special sandwiches with three kinds of meat and cheese and all the garden fixings on thick, crusty bread. She carried them and a bowl of leftover coleslaw into the den where they had an impromptu picnic on the floor in front of the fireplace. They toasted with tall glasses of cold milk and just enjoyed their time together. At one point during the meal they had a friendly intruder, when Artemis trotted into the room and plopped down between them, shamelessly begging for a snack. She got a slice of meat, but also the not to welcomed news that a bath was in order.

Sometime later, Jamie took on the task of dog washing after showing Erin to a recliner with a well-worn book and setting a plate of cookies beside her. Up to her elbows in soap and wearing a water soaked t-shirt, Jamie scrubbed the surprisingly cooperative beast. She already rued the day the animal would tangle with a skunk. It was really inevitable since Artemis spent a great many hours scrounging the woods that surrounded the house. "You know girl," said Jamie, "I hope you don't get jealous, but you are going to be sharing this house and our attention very soon." The dog sniffed the air and Jamie laughed. "No not yet. And don't worry, you won't have to share your bed."

Once she and the dog were dried, Jamie grabbed a brush and headed for the den. Erin had apparently finished her book, at least for the moment and sat staring into the twisting flames. She finally noticed her visitors when a wet nose nudged her hand. "Hey sweetie," she said to the dog. Sniffing the drying fur, she added, "Well, that's much better. I promise not to neglect you so long next time." She looked up and smiled at Jamie. "Thanks hon. Here," she held her hand out for the dog brush, "I can do that."

Jamie complied easily. "Oh, okay. Actually, I do have to run out for a little while. Anything you need?"

"Nothing that I can think of."

The tall woman bent to kiss the golden head, Erin's that is. "Don't worry about dinner," she said. "I'll take care of it. I won't be too long. Bye."

\* \* \* \*

Jamie walked into the quiet office and nodded to the receptionist. It was slow on this Friday evening. But that was always good news here. "Hi Sheila," she said with a smile. "How's it going?" She had become friendly with the middle-aged woman through her repetitive visits to the Kingdom Clinic.

"Just great," the woman replied. "My son is coming to visit for Christmas break. I might bring him over to your place to do some riding, if that's okay?"

"Sure. Come on over any time. If I'm busy, I'll get my new hand Brittany to take care of you."

"Yeah, I'd heard that you hired the Smith girl." The blonde rolled her eyes in a motherly way.

"I'm sure Robert will enjoy his time there," Jamie said with a little laugh.

"No doubt. Chad's in his office; you can go on back."

Jamie stepped through the doorway and headed down the long hall. "Thanks, Sheila. Talk to you later."

Knock, knock.

"Come on in. Hi Jamie," the vet said as she walked into the room.

"Hey Chad."

"Have a seat." The tall doctor walked over toward a small refrigerator tucked away in the corner. "Can I get you something to drink?" he asked.

"No thanks. I've got to pick up dinner and get back to Erin soon. The Erickson's gelding is off his feed and a little sluggish. I called and they would like for you to go ahead and have a look at him, tomorrow if you can."

Chad took a seat back at his desk and scribbled himself a little note. "Sure thing. I'll be over about ten."

The dark head nodded. "Say, while I'm here can I get a look at the newest member of my growing brood?"

The blonde haired man laughed out loud. "Absolutely."

Jamie followed him to the opposite side of the building and to the back of the mostly empty kennel area. Not having an enclosure big enough for all five of them, Chad had improvised. Four plastic gates had been secured together blocking off one corner of the room. Near the back wall

sat the multi colored, mama dog. Her formerly battered, but now healthy body was cushioned in a thick, brown blanket donated by Dr. Carson. The cast on her leg remained, but that was the only reminder of her ordeal. Her eyes were bright and clear and her happy tongue went to work when Chad reached over to pat his new friend.

"Wow," said Jamie. "She's beautiful."

"Yep. I'm sure her puppies are going to be just the same."

Jamie looked down at the smaller versions of the adult dog. The four pups jumped and tumbled over each other as they played. The excited high pitched yipes had started the minute their mother was alerted to the visitors. They were easily identifiable to the vet who had been taking care of them for more than three weeks. A large hand reached down and scooped up one of the two larger babies. The dog licked Chad's chin in a flurry of motion as he cuddled it close to his body. "This is the lucky little girl who will be going home with you," he said. The vet held the pup right up next to Jamie's face, doing a little comparison. He bounced back and forth between the similar sets of blue and clucked a tongue. "I can't understand why Erin chose this one."

Jamie's face developed a shade of embarrassment as she took the pup from him. "Yeah, she told me." Her head shook, not understanding the fascination. But then she herself had perused at least thirty different paint samples in shades of green, when fixing her office in the barn. "You are a cutie," she said to the animal who had immediately settled down in her hand, enjoying the warmth. "But then again they all are."

"Yep." He pointed to a mostly tan colored one that was standing up on the fence stretching to get some attention. "She chose this little girl for her sister and Dr. Carson picked that male over there. Everyone has a home except for that little guy over there by mama."

The pup in question turned from his snack and looked up at the two humans. Jamie noticed that he was the only other pup with blue eyes. The other two had deep brown.

Chad scratched the small black head resting on Jamie's shoulder. "Erin was determined to find homes for all of them with someone she knew," he said. "Even said something about all the owners and dogs getting together at your place at least once a month. She said they're a family and they shouldn't be separated forever." Jamie unconsciously leaned down and kissed her puppy's dark head as the tall man got back to his feet and dusted off the knees of his jeans. "You can take her home now if you want. She's at a good weight and ready to be weaned." Jamie didn't say anything. "Or," he said. "You can wait and let Erin come and get her."

Her gaze finally re-focused and met his curious one. She smiled slightly. "No, we'll go back home together."

\* \* \* \*

Erin listened to the soft strains of the Irish flute as she rested in the den. She had put on the CD when her eyes had become tired from reading. Her stomach rumbled and she checked her watch.

Jamie had been gone for over two hours and dinnertime was approaching. With that thought, Erin heard the front door open. She waited, but her spouse didn't immediately appear. So she waited a little longer.

A smiling face poked around the door a few minutes later. "I'm back," Jamie said. "I put dinner in the fridge for a little while. I have a surprise for you." Erin uncurled her feet and started to rise. "No, no. Stay right there. And close your eyes."

The author did as she was requested and soon she heard the footsteps walking over the hard wood floors. She sensed her wife kneel in front of her and soon felt a tongue on her face. *It's too small to be Jamie's*, she thought. Erin reached up to grab the puppy even before her eyes opened. "Welcome home sweetie," she cooed as the animal continued to lick her face.

Jamie smiled at the scene of affection and explained how the dog came to be in her possession. "It must have been love at first sight," she said, scratching the pup on the belly.

Erin looked into Jamie's eyes. "It was. I would have loved any of them," she explained, "but there was just something about this little one that called to me."

That same chagrined expression floated over Jamie's face, but quickly disappeared. "Uh huh. What are you naming her?"

Erin held out the squirming pup and scrutinized the tri-colored body. But her eyes soon fell back into those bright pools of blue. "How about Sky?" she said.

The little tail wiggled at an incredible speed just under Jamie's nose causing her to almost sneeze and definitely laugh. "Sound's good to me," she agreed. "I'll call Arte and you can make the introductions. I guess the back porch is going to be too cold for her, so I'll spread the puppy papers in the kitchen," Jamie said, stopping in the doorway to watch Erin and the puppy. She smiled, gladly willing to share her wife's affection with the baby canine...as long as the author didn't bring it to bed.

\* \* \* \*

Later they crawled into their bed...alone. The puppy had been retired to the kitchen with just a little sadness lingering in the shiny eyes. But Artemis quickly came to the rescue snuggling up in her own bed and allowing the soft pup to curl up in her long, warm fur.

For a change, Erin was lying on her back and the tall rancher was cuddled against her side, running gentle fingers over the author's belly. Several contented sighs broke the darkness as sleep was still keeping its distance from the lovers. Baby thoughts danced inside heads, fair and dark alike. A good life involved change; nice ones that would bring joy and sometimes sad ones that would at the very least hopefully impart lessons for the future. These changes tended to affect behavior, but it was up to personal perspective as to whether that behavior was good or bad.

Erin's fingers traced the back of the ones on her middle. "Do you wonder if they ever think about what they've done, about what the future holds?"

Somehow Jamie was able to decipher that somewhat cryptic statement. Her eyes stayed glued to the movements of their joined hands in the dim light. "The donors you mean?"

"Yeah."

Jamie paused. "Like my father. I guess that proves that some of them do at least." She shifted, bringing her right arm up under her head. "If I were a man, I don't think I could do it. I would have to wonder every time I saw a child."

"I was thinking that too," said Erin, rubbing a hand down Jamie's side. "But I think we have to be grateful to those who can give that gift."

The muffled sound of a hooting owl drifted in through the closed window beside their bed, but soon faded as the bird took flight hunting for an evening meal. A far off puppy whimper sounded three or four times before it quieted once again returning the house to silence.

"You know," Jamie said in a voice just above a whisper. "Ever since I met you I have envied your relationship with Bridget. You're close not just because you are sisters, but because you're friends and because of all the memories you share."

Erin's head nearly spun with the drastic turnabout in subject matter. But then again maybe it wasn't. She reached beside the bed, flipping on the muted light, wanting Jamie to clearly see her face and vice versa. "Jamie, it was the day to day building of those memories that was most important. That hasn't stopped and hopefully it won't for a very long time. It's not too late to start making those kinds of memories with Jeremy. But you have to take the first step."

Jamie's expression remained indifferent, but Erin saw the wheels turning behind those silvery blue eyes.

**Continued in Part 10.**

**The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

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~ Blindsided ~  
by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

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## Chapter 10

How had it snuck up on them? Christmas was only two weeks away with not one present bought, not a wreath or a Santa in sight in Erin and Jamie's house. How had it snuck up on them? Perhaps it was the baby plans, new house plans, a new relative to deal with, a new puppy in the house. No perhaps about it, that combination of life's activities had conspired to almost rob the couple of the joy of the holiday.

So now the rush was on to make their second Christmas together as happy as their first had been. After an early trip to a near by tree farm, Jamie spent almost an hour on Friday morning rummaging around in the attic looking for the clearly marked, but obviously not stacked together boxes of holiday decorations. Jamie's back started to protest by the time the last one was deposited on the floor in the den. But after seeing the smile that greeted her after every trip down the stairs, she was not about to complain or give in to the pain.

Using her handy dandy new knife, Jamie sliced across the brown tape holding the first box closed. After quickly, but carefully repeating the action on each of the other eight boxes, Jamie found the tree stand and after a small debate, placed it in the corner opposite the fireplace. Grabbing Erin's hand, she led them out to the car, where they struggled together to wrangle the seven-foot evergreen up onto the porch and inside the front door. It didn't help that Jamie was cracking jokes along the way, sending Erin into fits of giggles. At one point she dropped into a chair and crossed her legs, threatening to leave a spot that she wouldn't even be able to blame on



the puppy.

Finally, they got the recalcitrant, green flora through the door of the den and into the stand before collapsing onto the floor, where one very rambunctious little dog immediately pounced on them, assuming that it was playtime. But then again she always assumed it was playtime.

After lunch, the duo got down to some serious decorating. The task was rather slow going because Erin had to study each and every ornament before she placed it on a bushy bough herself or handed it off to her partner. This was the first time she was actually seeing the pieces that she and Jamie had shopped for the year before. That alone made it a most sentimental task. "It would be great to have snow for Christmas," Erin said wistfully as she shook a small globe full of white flakes. Jamie smiled sadly, knowing the odds of that happening. By the end of the long day, they had a house full of Christmas cheer and kisses for each other over a job well done.

\* \* \*

Jeremy nervously turned onto the road that led down to his sister's house. Even though Jamie wouldn't acknowledge the fact, he still thought of her that way. A dozen possibilities had crossed his mind when Erin had called earlier and asked him if he had the time to stop by on the sunny Saturday. Of course he jumped at the chance, but without getting his hopes too high. He had agreed when Erin had asked him to give his sister time to deal with his sudden appearance in her life. He actually had no choice, but that didn't make it any less difficult. Especially as the holiday was approaching and with his mother so far away, Jeremy longed to connect with his new family and hopefully bring peace to both of their souls. Shutting off the engine, he grabbed the wrapped package from the seat beside him and took a deep breath.

Jamie paced the floor along the back end of the kitchen, absently sipping from the mug in her hand. Erin was typing on her laptop at the table and their children...their canine children that is, were nearby. Artemis was lounging on a red and blue rug in front of the pantry door just leisurely watching the activities, seemingly unaffected by the tension in the room. Sky divided her time between shadowing the tall woman on the move, nipping at the strings on her shoes and climbing over her big, golden sister and exhibiting her brash puppyhood.

With the ringing of the doorbell everything suddenly stopped. The puppy yipped once and Arte silenced her with a nudge as Erin locked eyes with Jamie. The blonde stood, giving her agitated spouse a quick kiss and a pat on the belly before heading for the front of the house. She heard the back door close as she entered the hallway and released an apprehensive breath. Sky took off as fast as her short, little legs could carry her to follow her new Mommy; she didn't want to miss out on anything. However, she was abruptly scooped up and cuddled into gentle arms. "Oh no you don't little girl," said Erin as a tiny tongue licked her chin. "I'm not going to spend another two hours on the cold, hard ground coaxing you out from under the front porch." After a quick check through the side window, Erin pulled open the front door and smiled. "Hi Jeremy. Come on in."

The young man politely returned the greeting and the smile as he stepped inside. Just as soon as

the door was shut, the pup was released and shamelessly begging for attention from the new visitor. "Well, who do we have here?" he asked, running his fingers through the soft fur and allowing the playful nibbles.

"This is Sky," Erin answered. She noticed his eyes scanning the room, silently asking another question. "Jamie is out back," she said. He nodded, still not quite sure what to make of the situation. "How are you doing Jeremy?" Erin asked cheerfully.

"Fine. Kinda busy getting my new place in order and settling into the new job." Handing over the present he said, "Merry Christmas. I'm not sure if it is appropriate, but I wanted to give you a little something." He paused for a moment before adding, "It's for...both of you."

"Thank you Jeremy. Of course it's appropriate, you're family. But you didn't have to. I'll wait to open it until Jamie is here with me," she explained, setting the brightly colored box on the coffee table.

As if on cue, a noise came from the hallway followed by the clearing of a throat. Three sets of eyes looked up as Jamie entered the room. Nerves and guilt ganged up to pound on the inside of her head, not allowing her to quite hold the gaze from the other set of human, blue eyes. She did nod in his direction and with some effort, relaxed her features. "Hello, Jeremy."

"Hi Jamie." Just a touch of a smile crossed his lips at that tentative first step. He glanced at Erin as she lifted the puppy into her hands, her much larger gesture and the small nod inspiring his hopes. "Um...I...I'm not quite sure what to say," he nervously giggled.

Jamie took a step closer and bolstered her courage to look into his face. "Let me say this first. I'm very sorry Jeremy. I've acted very rudely and while I still can't totally explain everything to you about why I was having trouble with this, I...well it's still no excuse." Jamie stepped back into the hallway and returned with a large, wrapped box. "Please accept my apology...and this."

His eyes widened and his hand slightly shook as he reached for the ribbon holding the flaps closed. Erin stepped into Jamie's side, put her free arm around her waist and they both watched as Jeremy finally looked inside. A shocked expression froze his face as he reached to pick up the gift and brought it level with his face. That didn't last long however as a quiver radiated over his jaw. "You...got me a dog?" he asked in a little boy voice.

Jamie nodded. "He needs a good home and I know you'll give him one," she said as she took Sky from Erin's hands. "They're littermates," she explained. "The two of you will have to come and visit us...once in a while." The matching blue eyes met. "Siblings shouldn't be separated forever."

The black and brown pup was tucked into Jeremy's arm and he stepped toward his sister, wrapping a single arm around her back. The hug was genuine and warm and it broke the last barrier, finally uniting a brother and sister. "Thank you," he whispered.

Jamie was suddenly overwhelmed by the enormity of those two simple words and their meaning

on so many levels. Though still a little scared, for the first time she felt the ties that bound them together. She also felt her father's comforting presence and a clear picture of his handsome face and bright smile flashed into her mind. Jamie knew that she had made her father...their father happy.

Erin had stepped aside to give them the private moment of healing and took the opportunity to wipe away the tears that had slid down her cheeks. She then silently slipped away to the kitchen to begin dinner with the hopes of Jeremy joining them for the evening.

With the emotional meltdown slowly passing, brother and sister put both pups down on the floor where they immediately started to tumble and bounce over each other. Jamie and Jeremy continued to watch the dogs in a somewhat comfortable silence. Each was still letting that little bit of nervous energy settle before they delved into any serious conversation.

Jamie gently wrestled with her pup over the soft chew toy lodged firmly in the small set of doggie teeth. She was having trouble looking her brother in the eye, but it was more from her embarrassment than anything else. The puppy finally let go and stumbled back landing on her bottom before bouncing back up and jumping over the outstretched legs. She heard Jeremy sigh beside her and she matched it silently. Knowing that he was waiting for her to take the lead, Jamie briefly closed her eyes and drew strength from Erin's words to help push down the trepidation still racing around in her head. "So Jeremy, I heard that you just started a new job; how do you like it?"

"It's great. This job is a good first step for where I want to go with my career."

"It sounds like you have the confidence to achieve your goals. I look forward to being around to see those achievements."

"Really?"

Jamie finally met his beseeching eyes. "Really," she said with commitment. The corners of his mouth lifted triumphantly and hers mirrored, as yet another hurdle had been cleared. "So have you found a place to live yet?" she asked.

"Yeah. I found a nice apartment just about ten minutes from work. I'm gonna wait to get a house until I get married...which hopefully will be in about a year." He picked up his new puppy and scratched behind one ear. "I can't tell you how much I have always wanted a dog."

"An apartment?" Jamie said. "Oh gee, I didn't even think about that. Can you keep the dog?"

"Oh sure. I think I even have someone next door who can keep him company during the day. There's this older couple and they have sort of adopted me already. I've been over for dinner twice and she made me some homemade cookies the other day." He shrugged shyly. "It's kinda nice not being so alone in a new place."

Jamie nodded and smiled as some nice memories resurfaced. "I lived in a building full of people

like that before I met Erin. I thought of them as my surrogate grandparents. In fact..."

It may have taken a lifetime for them to discover each other, but this was the start of another lifetime to share the special moments and create the lasting memories. But Jeremy's family hasn't grown by just one. He would soon learn that his good fortune was indeed bountiful.

\* \* \*

Much later that day, after a fine meal and a lot of conversation, the couple walked Jeremy to the door. The dark of night was just beginning to take to hold and the cool breezes swept into the open door as they stood there, still finding things to talk about. Once the window of communication was opened along with Jamie's heart, she found herself quickly becoming fond of her new sibling. His level of intelligence and kind-heartedness was very much like the father she remembered. They'd talked just a little bit about Michael Sheridan and Jamie's twin Jordan. She'd shown him some favored family pictures, but they didn't delve too deeply into the subject. Neither was ready for that. The emotions of the day were more than enough to deal with so they stayed mostly with their present day lives.

Jamie retrieved the unnamed pup from the rag rug he was currently gnawing on. The human trio had reached a mutual conclusion that the dog should stay with Erin and Jamie until Jeremy could properly puppy proof his apartment and get all the necessary supplies. Earlier in the evening he had pulled Erin aside and asked, "Do you think it is disrespectful to name a pet after a person...a family member?" His brow was furrowed with definite concern.

Erin bit back a grin at his question and the seriousness of his expression. "No Jeremy," she said softly, "I certainly don't think it's disrespectful. Are you thinking of Jamie and how she might react?"

"Well...sort of, but not exactly."

After that, Jamie had stepped back into the room and the subject was put on hold.

"So Jeremy," the rancher said, as her brother slipped into his jacket and stepped onto the porch, "I guess you are going back home for Christmas to see your mother."

He took the pup and said the temporary good-byes as he answered her. "Yeah, but I have to work half a day on the twenty fourth so I'll be heading out on Christmas morning."

"Good." Jamie turned her head slightly and caught the tiny green-eyed wink aimed at her heart. She grinned, returned her attention to Jeremy and said, "We are going to have a family party on Christmas Eve." She put just a bit of emphasis on the word family. "If you'd want to, I'd like you to join us."

The smile that split his face radiated pure, childlike joy. "That's sounds great," he said, "I really would like to come and meet...the rest of...your family."

Jamie reached for the pup and threw her other arm around Jeremy's shoulder, giving him a little squeeze. "We'll look forward to having you here," she said. "You've got our number. Give us a call if you need anything."

Still smiling he said, "I will. Well, goodnight Erin." He hesitated, flicking his gaze to the blue eyes that mirrored his own. "Sis."

Jamie acknowledged the new moniker with a warm half grin and a nod. She quietly closed the door after they had both watched until his car was out of sight.

Erin took the pup and set him gently to the floor then hugged her quiet partner around the waist, pulling Jamie in close as they walked through the living room. "You all right?" she asked. A slow nod was her only answer. Erin didn't want to push; she still felt a little tension in the body next to her, so she made a suggestion instead. "Why don't you go on upstairs and take a nice, hot bath while I finish cleaning up in the kitchen." She kissed Jamie on the cheek before they parted at the bottom of the stairs. "I'll meet you in the bedroom."

\* \* \*

Jamie stepped into the steaming water, sinking into the tub's depths until the soothing liquid caressed her chin. She put her dark head back against the cushioned pillow and a sensualistic moan left her lips as the warmth turned her stiff muscles to jelly. *I'm glad this day is over.* The fleeting thought flew in and out of her mind without any analysis. In fact she was determined to make her mind void of any further ruminations, at least for a little while.

After a fifteen-minute nap, she heard Erin moving around in the bedroom and reluctantly removed herself from the water that was just turning tepid. After a thorough drying, she slipped into her freshly laundered nightwear and brushed her teeth. Stepping into the low-lit bedroom, Jamie happily spied her spouse, who was dressed in her most adorable pajamas. Early on, Jamie had started categorizing the author's sleepwear and she very generously added to each of them every few months. Besides the currently donned cute pair, Erin had a few that Jamie had quickly deemed seductive, one that was downright naughty and then there was the absolutely beautiful one, which was of course the blonde's birthday suit. Jamie agreed that on this night she had chosen wisely.

Erin walked over and ran a hand down Jamie's arm. "Give me ten minutes to finish up and I'll be back to snuggle."

Again Jamie just nodded. She proceeded to turn down the bed and climbed in, folding the blanket neatly across her waist. With forty-five seconds to spare, Erin flipped off the light in the bathroom and settled in beside the tall, stoic woman. Turning on her side, a hand softly fell upon her shoulder and in turn Erin burrowed her hand up under Jamie's top and began to gently rub the soft skin on her tummy.

"Aren't you going to talk to me at all?" Erin asked when it was clear Jamie was going to continue her muteness.

"Sure I'll talk to you. What do you want me to say?"

"Tell me how you're feeling."

Jamie took the time to consider. "Better. Lighter. I really like him and I want him in my life." She hesitated again, carefully choosing her next words. It was really hard for her to fully understand everything that she was feeling, let alone try to explain it. "But I just don't know if I'll ever be able to let him all the way in. I'm afraid I'll always keep him at arms length...emotionally anyway. I think I'll always have to protect..." The words finally failed her and she settled for a sad shake of the head.

"Honey, you let me in."

"That's different. It wasn't a choice; you are a part of me."

"So is Jeremy. Maybe in a different way, but still."

Jamie sighed heavily. "I don't know."

Erin reached up and kissed her. "That's okay if you can't," she assured. "I understand. You don't have to analyze it any more right now. You took the first and most important step. Just let your relationship build naturally as long as you feel comfortable."

Jamie stared deeply into the green eyes of her supportive partner and it finally brought a joyous smile to her face. "How would I ever survive without you?" she asked. The question was rhetorical because the unspoken answer was always clear to her heart. "I love you," she said before capturing the mint-flavored lips. The soft, loving kisses soon carried them both into what was sure to be the first truly peaceful sleep they had known for weeks.

\* \* \*

Before bright and even earlier than early on Monday morning, the ladies set off for L.A. on a serious mission. A Christmas shopping marathon. Teaming up, they checked off the family list in relatively short order at the crowded, noisy mall, spending a little...okay a lot of extra time in the toy store. After sharing a mid afternoon, ice cream snack the ladies parted ways to shop for their gifts to each other. Erin already had plans underway for one very special gift for her wife, but a few more ideas had been germinating in her creative, little mind. Her green eyes twinkled with mischievous delight as she spied item after item she would loved to have taken home for Jamie. But, biting her lip with restraint, as she perused store after store, Erin kept to her side of the deal and chose only three of the most special gifts she could find. Guarding her secret purchases carefully, Erin rushed to meet Jamie at the designated spot.

Just as she expected, the author spotted her spouse looking bored and just a little impatient. Jamie sat on a metal bench with one ankle resting on the opposite knee and her fingers were tapping out a rhythm accompaniment to the Christmas song playing in the background. Erin

laughed to herself as she stopped for just a minute to admire the gorgeous woman from a far, before coming to her rescue. The boisterous shoppers continued to mill about, each in their own little world, but she and Jamie spotted the trouble at the same time. A very small child, no older than two, toddled from a storefront, obviously mesmerized by the twinkling lights of the toy land display next to where Jamie was sitting. No parent followed as the child moved farther out into the crowd, totally oblivious to the surrounding dangers. Erin gasped as she watched him get tousled around, causing him to lose purchase on his sailboat covered sippy cup. She moved in his direction as fast as she could, never taking her eyes off him. Just as his tiny hands reached for the dirty floor, sure to be stepped on, two arms scooped him up and rushed him to safety. The author breathed a sigh of relief and removed herself from the crowd to find her way over to where Jamie was waiting. Of course her thoughts were still on the scene she had just witnessed. *The child is safe, but how frantic must the parents be? To lose sight of your child...not knowing where...* Her ruminations stopped as abruptly as her feet did. A few yards in front of her sat Jamie with the child in her lap. Erin hadn't been spotted yet because the dark haired woman was busy, drying frightened tears from the little boy's ruddy cheeks. Her actions were tender and compassionate and Erin let the sight fill her with incredible warmth and a giddy anticipation. Jamie suddenly stood and plopped the now giggling tot on her shoulders, hoping his mother or father would be able to see him. It worked. Not fifteen seconds later the frenzied grandmother pushed her way over and was happily reunited with her grandchild. After waving goodbye to the young one, Jamie found herself on the receiving end of a very exuberant hug. She turned within the circle of arms and stared down at the beaming face.

"Do you know how wonderful you are?" Erin asked.

"No," Jamie laughed. "What brought this on?"

The blonde continued to grin. "I saw what you just did."

Jamie quickly glanced after the child and his grandmother. "It wasn't anything special." She shrugged. "Anybody would have done it." That got her a playful poke in the belly.

"But you were the only one who did it," Erin said. "That and so much more is what makes you so wonderful."

\* \* \*

After a late supper that night, Jamie pulled out her box of childhood treasures from the closet in the den. The trip to the toy store had put her in a mood to seriously explore some of the old favorites. Lying on her stomach on the floor, she was soon surrounded by a dozen horses of all different sizes and colors. Some were dressed with the appropriate black or brown tack and a few were left unadorned. Right in front of her sat the My Little Pony her grandmother had given her one birthday. Jamie ran the tiny plastic brush, almost too tiny for her large fingers to maneuver, down the bright turquoise mane and she laughed, remembering feeling sorry for the poor animal. She was sure that the other horses had been making fun of its jeweled eyes, garishly colored hair and the rainbow on its butt. Once the vivid pony was well coiffed, she put it back in the lineup and picked up a beautiful, spotted, fully articulated figure. This equine representative had no

saddle and needed none. Jamie had always pictured this free spirit galloping upon a high, sunlit ridge with an attentive herd following his commanding lead.

Although unknown to Jamie, an hour had slipped away and her presence was being missed in another part of the house.

"There you are," a voice called from the doorway.

Without looking back Jamie replied, "Here I am." She grinned, feeling the eyes on her well displayed, although covered backside as she continued to fiddle with the tiny buckles of the small saddle that was now in her hands.

Erin leaned against the doorframe, crossing her arms over her chest. After a few more seconds she cleared her throat...loudly and with a very annoyed inflection.

Jamie played on.

The clock ticked on.

"Okay," the impatient, but good-humored blonde said. "Playtime's over. Put those toys away and come in bed...to bed."

Jamie slowly rolled over and her grin turned decidedly mischievous as she pinned her adorable wife with a sapphired glare. Their eyes locked for many long minutes, speaking the same silent thoughts. Jamie was the first to break the stand off with words. "There was certainly nothing Freudian in that slip...of the tongue, now was there?" She pitched aside the piece of plastic in her hand and gracefully rose to her feet. Swaying her jean clad hips, Jamie sauntered across the room and planted herself toe to toe with the blushing blonde. She reached for the ties of Erin's sheer robe. "Perhaps there is another toy you would like to help me to play with?" she asked.

A single fingertip traced down the center of her torso and the blonde's green eyes suddenly acquired a fiery depth, the likes of which Jamie had never quite seen before. Since Erin had started this, she wasn't going to back down now and quickly drafted a plan of action. "Now that you mention it," she said, and followed up the suggestive sentence with an exaggerated lick of her unpainted lips. She spoke no further words as the zipper on her lover's pants parted under her hand. The fingers on that hand searched inside the while she tugged on Jamie's shirt with the other, ravaging the lips when they came close. The kisses were needy and long and wet. Their cravings of the flesh escalated by the second, driven by their soul deep love for one another. Erin commanded and Jamie complied. The petite blonde clearly led the first round of seduction with a gentle fierceness and a confidence born from their months of sharing passions. Jamie got a thrill out of experiencing this side of her lover, but hadn't seen her this aggressive since their honeymoon. Erin executed a most effective move with the pad of her index finger and two palms suddenly slammed against the wall on either side of her head. Jamie needed the support when the erotic touch zapped the strength from her legs. They pulled apart, each sucking in a lung full of air. Still breathing heavily, Erin whispered just a few words in Jamie's ear before they were drawn back together with magnetic force. Erin then latched on to the belt loops at Jamie's waist



and she shuffled backward, down the hall, the passion propelling them toward the bedroom, where sleep would be hours away.

\* \* \*

A chilly Christmas Eve welcomed the family and friends that traveled to Sheridan Stables and the home of Erin and Jamie for an evening of spiritual reflection, good food, good fun and new discoveries. The day had been sunny and beautiful, but active. Hands were kept busy cooking goodies and pilfering a few, wrapping several last presents and tending to the everyday chores, caring for all the animals residing on the ranch. Jamie had spent almost half an hour on the phone with Jeremy in the afternoon. Both were still a little reserved with each other, but every time they spoke, the trust seemed to be building. Erin had walked into the office while Jamie was on the phone and she had started to retreat for their privacy, but Jamie had emphatically gestured for her to stay. Just from the short tail end of the conversation Erin had learned two things. Jeremy still held a little trepidation about attending the party. And she was sure his reluctance was from fear. Fear that Jamie may be acting out of obligation. He didn't want to push things and ever have her regret letting him into her life. Erin had talked to him briefly, earlier in the week and thought she had eased his worries, but apparently he needed his sister's reassurance. And to that end, Erin had once again witnessed an example of her enduring faith in her partner when Jamie had said, "Of course I still want you to come tonight Jeremy. I want you to meet the rest of my family."

And the family was there in abundance. Aside from the regulars of Erin's parents and her sister and her family, the author's uncle on her mother's side had been invited. It was his first Christmas since the death of his wife and no one wanted him to be alone. Erin's cousin Katie also managed to make the trip up from L.A., fulfilling her promise from Thanksgiving.

Jamie had taken special care not to overwhelm her new brother, introducing him to just one or two people at a time. Erin tried to be there for most of those introductions, but here attention was divided with hosting duties. Everyone was charmed with Jeremy's intelligence and humble, but witty personality. There was one exception however.

Late in the evening, after dinner and the gift exchange, Danielle, Tim and Erin's uncle were playing with the children in the den and Erin and Bridget had slipped into the kitchen to clean up. Pretty soon, Anne and Leah joined them and the cleaning had been forgotten and they were all having a final cup of eggnog as they chatted away. Jamie, Jeremy and Chad were heavily involved in an environmental discussion in the living room. Of course all were nature lovers and the emotions became heated when accompanying political issues were brought into the fray. Katie didn't have much to say on the subject and a lot of what was mentioned eluded her understanding. She was an intelligent girl, but only if and when she was challenged to fully engage her brain. Sad to say, but none of her friends in L.A. fit that need. A few of her professors recognized her potential and were trying their best to inspire her to choose a direction for her life, but they understood that only time and maturity was going to spark this young woman's fire.

Katie grew bored with the conversation and even though she didn't want to leave her boyfriend, she went in search of other activities. Before leaving she kissed Chad on his smooth cheek and whispered her excuse in his ear. The vet had certainly been enjoying her company throughout the

day, not to mention the many times she had managed to maneuver him under the mistletoe. He just wished that her intentions were a little more on the serious side. He sighed briefly as she walked away, but immediately returned his attention to the discussion.

The red headed college student visited her uncle and aunt and the children before strolling into the kitchen, where the laughter and words abruptly came to a halt. She stopped and looked at every guilty looking face before helping herself to some of the eggnog. Katie took two sniffs and a small sip. "Okay," she said in her lilting Irish accent, "who spiked the nog after the kiddies were done?"

Every female at the table pointed to someone else before they all erupted in laughter once again. "Uh huh," Katie murmured before savoring another sip.

"Oh, Katie me dear," Erin echoed her cousin's brogue, "there's not a drop of liquor in here, trust me; it's just rum flavoring."

The petite red head begrudgingly accepted the explanation as she finished off the cup and dipped out some more. "Oh, you must have been talking about sex then."

Two of the women nearly choked on the creamy beverage and the two others on their tongues alone. Erin finally brought her hacking under control and grabbed a napkin to wipe her chin. "We certainly were not talking about sex," she said staunchly then winked at her sister, "and even if we were, yes we would have stopped when you walked in."

Now it was Katie's turn to be outraged. "Oh really. I'm not a child ya know. I'm sure I could give all of you some pointers. The inventiveness of youth ya know."

Eight bugged out eyes joined a chorus of questioning ohhhhs. Then, after a beat, Erin and her sister shared a questioning glance. "Yes," Katie said, pointing to the three lesbians, "even to you. But I'll just let you wonder why."

There was more laughter before Erin brought about a change of subject. "Oh, I forgot to tell you I talked to Grandma this afternoon. She's fine and she sends her love. I'm going to arrange for her to come for a visit later this year. I miss her." Bridget and Katie nodded their agreement.

"Yeah," said the red headed cousin, "I bet she wouldn't be ashamed to talk about sex with me."

"Katie," Bridget warned.

Erin chimed in. "Yes, this is not the time." She paused a moment before remembering something from the long distance conversation. "But, speaking of...", she suddenly grimaced, scrunching her eyes tightly. "No, scratch that. Grandma met a new friend, a widower who just moved down from Dublin. They went to a senior dance at the church just last weekend."

Bridget smiled. "Good for her; she's been alone too long."

Katie offered her age appropriate opinion. "Cool, Grandma has a boyfriend!"

Erin wagged a finger in her cousin's direction. "Don't let her hear you say that. She has a gentleman caller." Even though Kathleen Casey was a very outspoken and modern thinking woman, when it came to her own personal life she was determined to conduct herself like a proper lady.

Katie rolled her green eyes. "Well, I have a boyfriend and I'm damn proud of it."

"That would be Dr. Benson?" Leah inquired.

"Absolutely; that would be the hunk!"

The other three women nodded with the same, although less enthusiastic assessment. Even being gay and married they could appreciate an aesthetically handsome man.

Ann decided to test a theory of an earlier observation. "Jamie's brother is quite good looking too, don't you think?"

Katie made an almost comical, disapproving face. "You're joking right; with that cocky attitude?! I swear he thinks every woman..." she looked around the table, "every straight woman would just fall at his feet and worship him like a god. As if all he has to do is flash those perfect white teeth and those oceanic blue eyes. Oh yeah he's something." Her over exaggerated sarcasm was not lost on the rest of the room.

Erin was the first to speak in his favor. "Jeremy is definitely not cocky. He is one of the sweetest young men I have ever met." The others quickly ratified her opinion.

"Yeah, well I think he's got all of you fooled. Unless it's just me he doesn't like." She looked at her blonde cousin. "But he had to make a good impression on you, now didn't he."

Erin saw the signs and hoped to head off any hurt feelings. She informed her gently, "He has a girlfriend."

The feisty lass gave a very unlady like snort. "Why would I care about that?! Poor girl," she mumbled.

"And you have a boyfriend," Bridget reminded her.

Katie produced a huge smile. "That I do," she said cheerfully, "and I think I'll be gettin back to him now."

\* \* \*

The last pair of taillights didn't disappear beyond the trees until near midnight. Jamie took in a

deep breath of the cold, night air and an idea popped into her head. Pulling it solidly shut, she flipped the lock on the front door and turned to go in search of her partner, who was, undoubtedly in the kitchen cleaning up the last of the coffee cups and desert plates. The floor along the way was dotted here and there with just a few discarded bows and some ribbon that had been dragged from the trash by the mischievous doggie duo of Sky and JJ. Jeremy had christened his pup with the name, but he only told Jamie and Erin that the twin Js honored Jeremy's twin sisters. Jamie responded with a slightly puzzled and surprised expression, but then flashed him a good-humored smile. Inside she was very touched and recognized the meaningful gesture as another step toward their sibling bonding.

She had escorted Jeremy to the door when he was leaving. "I had a good time Jamie," he said, "Your family is wonderful. They really made me feel welcomed. I look forward to getting to know them better." He chuckled. "But that cousin of Erin's; she's a little...well she's got some issues. Unless she just didn't like me."

Jamie laughed soundlessly. "Yeah, I noticed she a...did seem to have quite an attitude...where you were concerned. She's twenty-one, she has some more growing up to do."

"Maybe. But you introduced us. Did I say one rude or inappropriate thing to her?" He didn't wait for an answer before rambling on. "I mean I just looked in her eyes, nice eyes, but that seemed to set her off on a rampage. I caught her staring and sneering at me several times over the evening. I thought maybe I had met her before, maybe in L.A. and had insulted her, but I don't think that's it. I think we had a major personality clash and she just doesn't like me."

"Maybe."

"Oh well," he shrugged. "I guess we'll try to avoid each other in the future."

The rancher puzzled over the conversation with her brother and intended to ask Katie more about it later. A stunning thought suddenly jumped to the forefront of her thoughts. *Don't tell me I'm getting protective of my brother at this late stage. He's a man; he doesn't need me butting into his business. Maybe I'll just ask Erin what I should do.* She stopped to grab a couple of things from the hall closet before heading into the kitchen.

Erin felt a kiss pressed to the side of her neck. She smiled and set the remaining dishes in the sink before turning and wrapping her arms around her tall spouse's neck. They communicated with just the brush of a hand and a twinkle of an eye until the antique clock in the hall chimed the arrival of the new day. The dark head nodded toward the party clutter. "This can wait. Are you very tired?" she questioned.

Erin gave it a moment's thought, taking stock of her physical condition. "No. I should be, but I'm doing okay." Instead of the expected why, she merely raised her tawny brows.

Jamie extended her arms out to her sides to reveal a heavy jacket tossed over each limb. "Wanna

go for a walk with me?"

Erin smiled. "Hmmm, what a grand idea."

They pulled on the winter wear and one glove each. Willing to brave the chill, they clasped hands, insisting on the direct contact. The exhausted dogs had already dug themselves a cozy little nest in their respective beds in a kitchen corner. A pair of puppy heads popped up as the couple passed through the door to the outside, but with a second's contemplation they decided to skip the temptation...just this once.

A clear sky of inky velvet cradled a thousand diamond lights plus one. A single pulsar among, but set apart from the rest by a familiar brilliance. The season, the night, the stillness of the silvered trees in the shadowed woods, it would all surely inspire a poet to verse. The only poet present at this moment in time gave nature's beauty a respectful nod, but it was the person at her side that kindled her creative passions. Erin held tighter to the hand in hers as they strolled across the bristly grass, around the small corral and on toward the big barn. They stopped near the door to Jamie's office.

"This is so beautiful," Erin said softly as she looked around, up and finally stopping on Jamie's face. Beyond the love that was always directed at her, what she saw in those expressive blue eyes settled a joyful warmth in her heart.

Jamie realized right away that she'd been discovered. She allowed a tiny smile to shape her lips as she confessed. "This is the most at peace my spirit has ever been." She pulled Erin's hand to her chest. "That cyclone that always lived inside here has calmed to a March wind. And it's all because of you. You gave me your love and your patience...and that courage I asked for on that night not so long ago. You shelter my fears and hold my hand to ease me passed them. You brought me home and gave me a family...and soon to be a bigger family. Thank you." Jamie hugged her beloved spouse, sharing the tranquility with her soulmate. The rancher then reached into her jacket pocket and retrieved a small wrapped box. "Merry Christmas," she said as she held it up.

The moon and the nearby security light provided just enough illumination for Erin to appreciate the colorful paper. She drew a finger over the tiny golden bow on the top of the box. She smiled and her lips parted as she started to say something, but they snapped back shut as her brain switched gears. "Sweetie, if you're worried about our having privacy in the morning, Katie told me she was going to sleep in. So that means we've probably got until noon to open presents."

Jamie chuckled. "I know. I just wanted to give this to you now, out here."

"Okay!" Erin peeled away the small square of wrapping and lifted the lid. Her eyes studied every intricate detail as she lifted the gift from the bed of velvet.

Jamie watched her lovely face and the expressions that evolved. "I wanted to give you snow for Christmas, but this is the best I could do." A silver snowflake on a chain twirled between them, the moonlight glistening on its smooth surface. The stylized and entwined letters E and J was

etched in and among the pattern of the flake.

The simple, but elegant piece was more priceless to Erin than all the precious gems left in the earth. "I love it honey. It's absolutely beautiful. Thank you."

Jamie fastened the pendent around Erin's neck and settled it against the creamy skin. Slowly they came together, surrounded by the night, sharing tender kisses and a never-ending love.

Continued in Chapter 11

### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [colleen30@webtv.net](mailto:colleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

Or if you only want updates and special announcements please join [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens\\_Corner\\_Announcements/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens_Corner_Announcements/)

## Chapter 11

A pair of small feet scampered down the carpeted hall, through the open French doors and onto the red-bricked patio. Not stopping among the family filled chairs and food-laden tables, the child made two circles around the cluster of furniture, squealing her innocent delight. After a third round, the precocious girl left the stonework for green lawn and out into possibly dangerous territory. A long arm suddenly swooped down and hooked the giggling girl around the waist, tossing her up and into a protective embrace.

"You know you're not supposed to run near the pool," the tall woman admonished.

The little, blonde head cocked to one side and threw her dark haired rescuer a properly chagrined look, knowing that if she batted her pretty green eyes there would be no punishment. She threw in a kiss on a tanned cheek to seal her fate.

Jamie smiled and set the girl on her feet, pointing them back in the direction of the rest of her family. She obeyed and ran back to safety, deciding she now desperately needed another piece of the big, chocolate cake that sat prominently in the center of one table. With half of the confection already devoured, the remaining yellow letters spelled out HAP on one line, BIRTH on the next and simply the letter J at the bottom. The mid-April day was pleasantly warm, but the full sun was hard on the eyes, especially where it glared off the shimmering water. Jamie walked back under the protection of the covered pergola and stood, towering over the small girl, who was now stuffing her face with cake. A finger full of chocolate icing was snatched from the child's plate and the mildly outraged face looked up. A grin quickly transformed the scowl.

"Oh. Happy Birthday Aunt Jamie," she said for about the fifth time that day.

Jamie lovingly ruffled the straw colored curls. "Thank you Caitlin."

The Casey's had gathered at the palatial estate in Brentwood for a family dinner, as they did once a month. The month of April had brought with it two additional reasons to celebrate. Although it wasn't the exact date, Jamie's 31st birthday was honored with presents, the traditional candles and a chorus of the appropriate song. Jeremy wasn't there on this day. Jamie had convinced her brother to spend the weekend with his girl instead of coming to her party.

Brother.

In some ways it was still difficult to think of him as that. It sounded funny every time she introduced him to someone, but she expected it would become more natural with time. They shared a lot in common and she was becoming fond of him, but more as a friend, like Chad Benson. That sibling connection just hadn't clicked yet...at least for her.

After the first of the year, Jamie and Jeremy had spent some time together, but his new job had kept him too busy to visit as often as he would have liked. But they tried to talk on the phone at least once a week. More than anything, Jeremy was afraid of losing touch with his new sister,

still remembering the rejection Jamie exhibited at their first meeting and her hesitations at times there after. But Jeremy had tried very hard to make the most of the time he could spend with his new sibling. They had spent most of the day together near the beginning of February when the new puppy owners had gotten together for a doggie jamboree. Though the brother and sister bonding time had been a little restricted due to the unexpected presence of Jeremy's girlfriend, Rachel, the day had been fun...but not totally without its tense moments. Katie had also chosen that unfortunate day to visit her cousin Erin, or more precisely Chad Benson, her self proclaimed boyfriend. Her immediate animosity toward Jeremy McIntyre still bewildered most members of the family. Her attitude upon their second meeting proved just as bitter, if not more. All Erin had to say was, "Family, gotta love'em." And, surprisingly Jamie couldn't have agreed more.

Donning her dark glasses, the rancher looked out over the inviting, cool water of the luxurious swimming pool at the Casey estate. The sun shimmered on the calm surface, the tranquility almost hypnotic. Then a breeze stirred up tiny ripples, disturbing the serenity, but after a few seconds the water returned to a peaceful state. The biggest part of Jamie's life had been spent in turmoil of every kind, with the placid moments few and far between. But now, thankfully those odds had reversed. But even the stormy times were easier to endure with Erin beside her to help navigate those waves. Jamie now understood that's how life worked and accepted that no matter how hard the times might get, it wouldn't last forever. She glanced up at the bright, blue sky and smiled, knowing that the best part of her life was still ahead, storms and all. Suddenly, Jamie longed to be with her own personal sunshine. She found the love of her life, looking awfully lonely all by herself in a two-person swing. Erin was avidly engaged in a conversation with her father and as Jamie approached, the businessman said something to light a big smile across his daughter's face. It was a beautiful thing and Jamie stopped to just soak in the sight. A few minutes later, Tim excused himself and left Erin, patting her leg affectionately as he went. The author removed her glasses, setting them aside then rubbed her eyes. Jamie pushed off the post she was leaning against and quickly headed for her spouse. She slid smoothly into the cushioned seat beside Erin.

"You okay Rin?" she asked, slipping an arm around the woman's shoulder.

A pair of dull jade eyes looked at her, but immediately perked up. "I'm fine. My eyes just burn a little." Jamie brought her hand up and massaged the muscles at the back of her lover's neck while placing a kiss to her temple. A lazy smile slowly lifted the corners of Erin's mouth. "Mmmm, that feels good. I didn't get much sleep last night," she explained. Erin continued to enjoy the attention as a pair of soft lips touched the shell of her ear.

"I thought that only happened when we make love," Jamie said, adding a nibble to a tasty earlobe.

Erin chuckled with a bit of a sensual tone. "Usually, yes. But I got an idea for my book and once I got started writing, it was hard to stop."

Jamie continued the massage, moving down onto her tight shoulder. "Good to hear it, but I'm sorry too. I'll make sure you get to bed nice and early tonight."



"I can't wait. I'm glad we stopped by the beach house this morning, to get it ready." Erin finished the thought with a kiss. They sat back, hands clasped as the swing gently swayed under Jamie's leg power. The family activities surrounding them gave them plenty to watch. Grandma and grandpa played with Conner and Caitlin with Tim passing on some pointers to mastering the game of croquet. The older child sent a striped ball rolling across the lawn, just missing the wire target. Nearly entranced, Conner watched his burly granddad smack a green ball nearly ten feet and right between the small posts. The boy cheered. Waiting her turn, Danielle knelt on the carpet of green, straightening the bright yellow sundress her granddaughter wore. She said a few words to the little girl and promptly received a big hug. She held onto the little body for a long time, her smile never fading.

"Mom really looks happy, doesn't she?" Jamie observed.

"She's always happy when she's with her grandchildren." Erin paused and smiled as her mother laughed at Caitlin's sudden antics. "But I know what you mean," she added. "She's more content with herself. Getting back into art was just what she needed. Mom told me she has three requests for paintings, including one from her church." Danielle's very first paid commission had come from her daughter. Once Erin had seen her mother's natural talent, she wanted something very special for her partner. On Christmas morning, Jamie had been presented with a Danielle Casey original. The painting was of a dark haired rider, dressed in full western garb, surrounded by a spectacular herd of horses, fronted by the very steeds that permanently occupied the Sheridan Stables. The handsomely framed art piece was waiting patiently to be hung in the den of Jamie and Erin's new home, which was progressing in a steady order. The land had been cleared and all underground work completed. The foundation was to be poured within the next few weeks and then their dream house would start to take shape. It would be a home easily warmed by love and a house with five bedrooms that needed to be filled with toys and children's laughter.

Besides the birthday, the Casey's April get together was the perfect setting for one couple to make a special announcement. Late in the day, after all the food and dessert was gone and a rousing game of Monopoly had been played, the two joined hands and walked to the front of the room. They smiled, almost giggling with anticipation as they looked upon the anxious family members knowing what a shock their words would be. Their secret was just that, but now they were ready to share. The smaller woman looked up at her spouse and receiving a wink she declared, "We're pregnant!"

The room was suddenly filled with surprised gasps and one high-pitched squeal. Tim and his wife were totally thrilled at the idea of a new grandchild. Danielle jumped to her feet and enveloped the couple in a great bear hug. She pulled back from the embrace, barely able to speak with such emotion. "I didn't even...I thought..." She finally just gave in and said, "Congratulations Bridget. And you my favorite son-in-law."

The pregnant red head was pulled close to her mother again and over her shoulder, she locked eyes with her sister. Erin was stunned, frozen in expression and stance. Her heart had dropped to her feet at hearing the announcement and only now did the emotions register. She burst into anguished tears and quickly backed out of the room. Jamie had taken her lover's hand knowing the sadness would rise in Erin's soul, but she wasn't prepared for that hand to be wrenched away.

The blue eyes saddened as Jamie watched Erin flee up the grand set of stairs. She started to run after her, but Bridget was headed her way.

"What's wrong with Erin?" the red head inquired. Her mother immediately joined them, asking the same thing.

Jamie didn't quite know what to say. Their own secret plans were now in jeopardy. "She'll be fine. Just let me go and talk to her. Give us a little time alone," she gently pleaded.

The rancher took several deep breaths before entering her wife's childhood bedroom. The room was darkened, with dusk just peeking through the open curtains, but Jamie could clearly see Erin on the double bed, constricted into a fetal position, her arms curled around a beloved, old stuffed bear. The sounds of sobbing gripped Jamie's heart. She slipped in behind and drew the smaller woman into her arms, just cuddling her while the emotions played down. After some very long moments, filled only with the silent sounds of tears, Jamie finally began to speak.

"Sweetheart..." Jamie was shocked as Erin violently pulled away and jumped from the bed.

"It's not fair!" Erin yelled. "Five months Jamie. We've been trying to have a baby for five months." She stopped to take an almost disgusted sigh. "Bridget didn't even want another child, she told me they were stopping at two and now she's pregnant. It's just not fair!"

Jamie walked around the bed and pulled her into a hug, knowing she wouldn't be rejected. "Honey," she said softly, "it has nothing to do with fair. You're not in competition. I know five months feels like a long time because we are the ones waiting. But logically you know that it's a very short time with inseminations. Even if it wasn't planned, you know it was easier for Bridget and Brad to get pregnant since I'm pretty sure they did it the old fashioned way." Her humor didn't play well to the disgruntled audience of one.

Erin pulled away again and moved to stand by the window. "You're making jokes?" she spat. "I'm hurting and you think it's funny."

"Of course I don't think it's funny, but I don't know what else to say. We know the odds; it just takes time."

Erin stared at the rustling tree right outside, its long fingered branches almost touching the glass pane. She remembered a time when she was about eight and she would sit on the built in bench below the window with her arms on the sill and her chin planted firmly on both fists. She would stare intently, boring her vision in and around the leafy branches to find it. There was a bird's nest cradled tightly against the tree's trunk. The mother bird had taken great care to construct a safe haven for her babies. There were two. Erin would giggle as she watched each baby squawk and open its tiny beak, vying for the food mother bird brought back. One morning Erin stepped out the front door, getting ready to leave for school. There was a big truck in drive and four big men milling around the yard. They wore hard hats and gloves and were busy working with some heavy ropes. Little Erin wondered what was going on, what were they going to do. Her mother tried to hurry her into the car so they wouldn't be late. Just then a chain saw started up, the noise

startling her. But what she saw next really scared her. The man with the loud tool headed right for her tree. Erin dropped her books and ran across the lawn, yelling at the top of her lungs for him to stop. He didn't hear her and narrowly missed hitting her as she ran past him. She threw her tiny arms around the massive trunk, crying and screaming, causing the workers to back away immediately. Once Danielle finally got her calmed down, Erin explained about the baby birds in the tree and they went to see Erin's father. The young blonde's hysterics started once again and only after an hour of her anguish did Tim relent, even though it ruined his plans to add on a grand room where he could host parties for his important business clients. Allowed to stay home for the rest of the day, Erin sat and watched as the mother bird fed her offspring when they were hungry, sang to them when they were bored and protected them when a squirrel tried to invade her territory. They were all happy and safe. Erin ran in from school the next day and the first thing she did was check on the little family. She did this every day until one Saturday morning she watched as the young ones flew away, now old enough to be on their own. The mother bird had done a wonderful job, her parenting skills a resounding success. That was the moment that had sparked Erin's anticipation to become a mother. Those feelings had been simmering inside of her since that day. Now the need was intense. But she could never give it words. It just was. Was she alone in feeling this way? Erin turned, revealing her full, shadowed profile to her partner. "Sometimes I don't think having a baby means as much to you," she said, her voice dull and graveled.

The verbal slap knocked Jamie for a loop and it took her a few seconds to really believe what she had heard. "Having a baby doesn't mean as much to me?" The very words tasted vile on her tongue. It hurt, but she had to explain what she thought Erin already knew. "I know that any baby we have won't be physically related to me. You'll always have that connection that I never will. I accept that. But please don't ever tell me that it's not as important to me." Jamie took another few seconds to organize her thoughts, trying to shake the bands of pain that constricted her chest. She had to make Erin understand, but she wouldn't let the anger escalate. She inhaled a shaky breath before continuing. "I smiled and laughed all day long when we found out you were pregnant on New Year's Day. It was one of the happiest moments of my life. And later, when you...miscarried, I held you all day while you cried. I had to be strong for you. But when you had finally cried yourself to sleep, I stayed up all night, because then it was my turn to cry." Her voice cracked. "It was my baby too."

The tears broke free again and Erin turned in the dark and ran into Jamie's arms. "I'm sorry," she gasped. "I shouldn't have said that. I know it's not true. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." Her apologetic chant continued as she clung to her life support.

Jamie administered her healing touch, kissing the golden head and wrapping her in comfort. "Easy honey. Shhh, it's okay. It's okay. I love you. We'll get through his. We get through everything...together."

The blonde head nodded rapidly, but she wouldn't let go. Erin just kept crying, now angry with herself. Her fingers clenched around handfuls of Jamie's shirt as she declared, "I didn't mean it; it was just the frustration. I love you so much. I do."

Jamie lifted the drooping chin with two fingers and smiled softly. Her loving gestures continued

as she brushed away the last tears with a gentle swipe of her thumbs. She then soothingly kissed the red rimmed, puffy eyes and continued wicking away the remaining wetness on Erin's cheeks with more kisses, finally landing on the lips, which trembled slightly beneath hers. "Come on," she whispered. Jamie led her over to the bed and sat back against the headboard. Erin snuggled down sideways in the v of the long legs, with her head on Jamie's chest. They spent just a few quiet moments, catching their breath...and touching. Always touching. Jamie flipped on the small, bedside lamp as she combed through the soft, yellow strands on her partner's head. Erin relaxed against her, but Jamie could still feel the tense muscles bunching beneath the blonde's warm skin. She didn't know if her words would be enough to soothe and reassure her troubled spouse, but right now it was all she had to offer. Only time would do the rest. "We will have a child Erin," she stated, "one way or the other. But we won't give up on you getting pregnant. We won't give up hope. We can never do that. That's what you taught me."

Erin entwined her fingers with Jamie's, playing with the long, but strong digits and clinging to her words. "Yeah." Her response was physically weak, but emotionally confident.

"I know something else," the rancher said. A silent pause drew the green eyes up. Jamie's returning gaze shone with the brilliance of the love she had for this woman. With her lover's full attention, Jamie finished her thought. "Your heart is so big and you are so deserving. You are going to be a wonderful mother and God will not let your arms go empty forever." Erin gave her a tiny, tired smile, but a fierce hug full of gratitude and devotion. Jamie spent just a few more lazy minutes calmly rubbing her lover's arm and dropping more protective kisses to her head. She knew there was a concerned family waiting downstairs and she didn't want to subject Erin to any more stress, but they wouldn't wait forever. "Are we okay now?" she asked.

Erin looked up again, this time into genuinely concerned eyes. "Always Jamie, always," she affirmed. Erin initiated the next kiss, which lingered with indescribable tenderness. The cherished caress bonded them not only in body, but in soul and time as well.

The kiss ended and Erin's head dropped back onto Jamie's breast. The ache behind her eyes increased and began to spread, aggravated by the fatigue that had assaulted her earlier. She was no longer despondent, but a touch of melancholy remained. She buried it in a place deep inside and vowed to only let it out in the privacy the night allowed. For Jamie's eyes she would only be positive and cheerful.

Jamie let the peace pass between them and the quiet cradle them. She caught a quick glimpse of the clock and thought she heard someone in the hall, but figured it was the maid. She knew Bridget and Danielle would grant her earlier request, no matter how frustrating it may be for them. "You do realize everybody's wondering what happened to us," Jamie finally said.

"I'm sure they are."

*Okay, Jamie thought, let's try something else.* "I know Bridget may have said they weren't going to have any more children, but they seemed pretty happy about being pregnant, don't you think? I know you'd never begrudge your sister that happiness."

The author sighed. "No, of course I wouldn't." She listened to the heartbeat under her ear, letting it center her and help bring things back into perspective. "I'm just not ready to go back down there and face a lot of questions," Erin said sluggishly. "In fact, I'm getting a headache. Could you explain things to Bridget and send her up here so I can apologize."

"Are you sure you want her to know what we've been doing...everything?"

"Yes. I ruined her moment. She deserves the truth."

Jamie extracted her long body from Erin's grip and stood, but leaned back down for another soft kiss. "I will," she said, taking a second to rub noses with her. "And I'll get you something for that headache." Jamie stopped at the door and looked back with a twinkle and a happy little grin. "I will bet you that by this time next year, baby Nelson will have a cousin just a little younger than him...or her." She was pleased with the smile that sent her off on her mission.

Jamie was besieged by three feet of giggling energy when she reached the bottom of the staircase. "Aunt Jamie where did you go?" The child didn't wait for an answer before she was on to another question. "Did you hear; I'm gonna have a baby sister? I knew before, but it was a secret."

Jamie couldn't help, but chuckle as she had a seat on the bottom step. "I heard sweetie. But it could be a baby brother. We don't know yet."

A flash of disappointment hazed the joy in the green eyes. "Really?"

Jamie nodded. "But that's okay. You like your brother Conner, don't you?"

Caitlin gave a typical five-year-old answer. "I suppose."

Jamie saw the girl's mother turn the corner and approach them. Bridget quickly sent her daughter off to play and motioned Jamie into her father's office where she closed the doors for privacy. From the look on Jamie's face, she knew something serious was going on and it scared her. "Jamie what is it; is Erin sick? Please tell me."

"No, no Erin is fine." She took the anxious woman's hands and gave them a reassuring squeeze. "Let's sit down and I'll tell you what happened."

Once Jamie had laid it all out, she saw the pain Bridget held for her sister. It was written all over her face and in her furrowed brow. "I'm so sorry," the red head said. "I didn't know. If I had, I never would have made such a big deal out of today."

"No Bridget, don't think that. You had every right to make this a celebration. Your sister wasn't expecting it, but we are happy for you. We've been keeping our plans a secret because we wanted to surprise everyone. And we'd still like to keep it secret."

"Of course, of course. I wouldn't have it any other way." Bridget hugged her sister-in-law and

said, "You're both going to be great parents."

\* \* \*

After a relaxing soak in a hot tub, they climbed into bed and switched off the lamp, which then bathed the room in delightful moonbeams. They kissed goodnight and let the sounds of the evening surf encircle them. The night smelled of brisk seawater and cooling sand. Refreshing breezes pleasantly brushed across a cheek and an arm. It was a lovely night. There had been a difficult few hours, but by day's end, Erin and Jamie had re-established a positive outlook for the future.

Erin watched the smooth surface of the white ceiling, now gray in the dark. Nothing changed. All the shadows in the room danced across the bedding and the floor. The blankness allowed her to reflect on an idea that had been sparked by something in Jamie's earlier words. Carefully considering all the possibilities, Erin knew without a doubt it's what she wanted. It might not necessarily make their quest for a child any easier, but she felt certain it would be the final detail to creating a real family. Would Jamie agree to it though was the big question looming in the forefront of Erin's brain. All she could do was ask...and a maybe little careful convincing. "Jamie, are you asleep?" she asked, almost shyly.

Two eyes blinked open and Jamie readjusted her head to better see her partner. "No. You want to talk about something?"

"Yeah." Erin gave her a little grin. "How did you know?"

The tall woman flipped to her side and propped her dark head against her palm. She returned the smile. "I could hear the wheels turning," she said as she caressed Erin's cheek. "And I love you."

The author turned the bedside lamp back on and scooted herself up against the headboard. Her expression became very serious. "I'm so glad you do," she said as Jamie matched her move. "Ever since my little breakdown this afternoon, I've been giving the situation a lot of thought. I really think we haven't had a successful pregnancy for a reason. It hasn't been...right yet."

"What do you mean, right?"

Erin took Jamie's hand. "I think God has been trying to send us a message."

The rancher considered with sincerity. "Okay. Do you know what that message is?"

Erin smiled sweetly and carefully watched her partner's eyes. "I think our baby is supposed to be...related to both of us."

Jamie released a patient puff of air. "Honey, you know that's imposs..." She then caught the sparkle in the emerald orbs and the slow nod of the golden head. "You... you want...Jeremy?" Jamie hesitated as a little ripple of something clenched her stomach. She sucked in a huge breath. "You want me to ask the brother I've only recently discovered...the brother I at first

rejected...the brother I am just beginning to form a friendship with...you want me to ask that brother to be the father of your child?"

Erin tugged on Jamie's hand, pulling it to her chest. "No," she said gently. "I want you to ask him to be the biological donor for **our** child."

Jamie's eyes fell shut as her head sank back into the pillow. She knew Erin was waiting for an answer, but she needed the time to wrap her thoughts around the possibilities. It had certainly never occurred to her, not even for a second. It would require absolute trust. Jamie wasn't really sure she could have that much faith in anybody, except Erin. But if she agreed to this, maybe that's exactly what she was doing. She gazed back at her love and truly saw the hope that had been missing earlier. Jamie wouldn't see that fade again. She smiled her agreement then the breath was knocked from her lungs as the small, but solid body lunged at her, squeezing her with excitement. Jamie hugged back and basked in the praises of love being whispered in her ear. She hesitated to disengage the embrace, but a problem still nagged at her. "What if...?"

Erin had anticipated the questions and had the answers all ready. "Considering the way that Jeremy was conceived, do you really think he'll have a problem with this?"

Jamie adopted a thoughtful expression. "With the method...probably not. But...with me?"

Erin had to laugh. "Honey, you've got to be kidding. He idolizes you. He seems to think you hung the moon."

"No he doesn't."

Erin gave her a look.

Jamie rolled her eyes and pounced, tickling some very sensitive ribs. Erin squirmed and constricted her body, doing her best to pry off the iron like digits, while she screeched her protests. But even the slightly painful sound of the loud laughter was welcomed to Jamie's ears. This was her most important job in the world. Making Erin laugh. Making her smile. Healing wounds. Supporting her. Loving her.

Jamie eased off just a bit, but left her fingers in the ready position. "Is he the only one who thinks that?" she asked the disheveled blonde.

Erin looked her straight in the eye and announced very seriously, "Yes." It wasn't the answer Jamie expected. There was a very prolonged pause as Jamie sought out the depths of the sage colored eyes. The twin lips below the bright orbs twitched once before they declared, "I know you did."

The fingers went wild again, but only for a short time as Jamie soon eased her body down over the giggling woman and let her lips trace a path that quickly turned the torture into pleasure. The session never escalated beyond the kisses, but more than satisfied their needs.

They just needed to love.

The couple finally separated just enough to settle into perfect sleeping positions, but sleep wasn't quite ready to visit just yet. Erin studied, in detail, the angular planes of her lover's face, noting, not for the first time, that the bone and muscle structure was very similar to Jeremy and their father, Michael. Wonderful genes. She smiled and brushed back some of the luxurious, ebony hair. "Our baby will be a part of you," Erin said, "but he or she will also carry on your father and your sister too."

"You sound awfully sure that this is the answer."

"I'm positive. I have faith that this was the decision we needed to make. It was just waiting on us."

Jamie kissed her one last time before Erin's eyes drifted close for the night. "I have faith in you," she whispered. Once she was sure Erin was fast asleep, the rancher turned onto her back. The dark ceiling above her became a view screen for Jamie's thoughts and feelings.

She was scared.

But she wouldn't let that stop her from asking Jeremy this tremendous, but most important favor.

Doubtful.

Despite what Erin had said, would he really consent to giving up rights to his own flesh and blood? He never had a father. Would he allow that same fate to befall his child?

Happy.

Having a son or daughter she would love that also shared her blood. It was more than she had ever dreamed for her family. And it was those dreams that carried her until first light.

Continued in Chapter 12

**The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

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~ Blindsided ~  
by Colleen



**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way. Copyright 2003-2004

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

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## Chapter 12

"So."

"So?" Jeremy echoed his painfully nervous sister's statement.

The stalemate continued as one set of blue eyes waited anxiously while the other looked everywhere, but into the matching pair. Erin and Jamie had arrived, unannounced at Jeremy's apartment on Saturday afternoon. The young man had been working on his hobby. The reason for their visit was momentarily forgotten as the couple marveled over the small woodcarvings. None more than six inches tall, but all were finely detailed versions of forest creatures. Squirrels, rabbits, a raccoon and a deer family filled the shelf over the gray sofa in his living room. The sunlight, streaming through the large window, bathed the unpainted art works, adding to their natural beauty. Jeremy's small dining table currently held a pile of wood chips, a few knives of different sizes, all with delicate but sturdy blades, and an electronic tool with a tiny grinding wheel. Atop the mound of woody bits sat a half completed figure, which was obviously going to be a mighty steed rearing on its hind legs with its mane blowing in the wind. Jeremy had adopted a coy smile when they had noticed his work in progress. The humbleness continued as he played down his talent upon hearing their glowing compliments, but he secretly beamed hearing his sister's high praise. He had welcomed them into his modest apartment, where the couple spent a few more minutes playing with his nearly full-grown pup, JJ and making small talk. But Jeremy suspected an underlying reason for the surprise visit. They politely declined his offer of refreshments and now the trio sat, two opposite one.

Jamie opened her mouth to speak again, but without much more success than the first time. She sucked in another deep breath as her hands continued to twist in and around each other. "Jeremy, I...we...well it's a... we're here..."

Erin couldn't stand seeing the palpable pressure her spouse was under. She tucked her arm around Jamie's bent elbow and leaned in to whisper in her ear. "Sweetheart, it's okay. We don't have to do this. I'm sorry for..."

"No," Jamie spoke softly, turning her head to meet Erin's gaze. "I want this for you...for us. I really do. I just didn't think I would freeze like this."

Erin rubbed her back and instructed Jamie to take another deep, soothing breath. In that instant a picture flashed into the rancher's mind and the tension began to fade. When Jamie opened her eyes again, she took one look into the twin pools of emerald and her nerves steadied to a slight tremble. She gave her a tiny grin and a peck on the nose.

"You're really starting to scare me here," Jeremy said, his own nerves tingling a bit. "I get the feeling that you want to tell me something."

Erin turned and flashed him a reassuring smile. "No Jeremy, it's nothing bad, I promise. But there is something we'd like to ask you."

The way was opened and Jamie finally got the words formed into a good sense of order. "Jeremy, Erin and I...we want to start a family."

Jeremy's brows drew together in a confused manner. "Well, that's great you two. You'll be great parents. But what else did you want to say? I know there was something."

"Thanks," Jamie said, a little bit of her giddy anticipation showing through in the twinkle of her eyes. "We do have a very big favor to ask of you." She took Erin's hand. "We would very much like for the baby to be blood related to both of us. So that's why we would...like you to help us. Would you be the donor so Erin can carry our baby?"

Jeremy was struck mute. He definitely didn't see that coming. His mouth went dry and the thoughts ran rampant inside his head.

The vacant, unreadable expression didn't bode well and Jamie's heart dropped at her brother's reaction. Even though she expected it, it was still disappointing and she knew how much it would hurt Erin. The little blonde, however, wasn't ready to give up so easily. "Jeremy, we understand how big of a decision this is. We realize it may impact your relationship and your future. Of course you wouldn't have any legal responsibilities for the baby, but we definitely want uncle Jeremy to be a very important part of our child's life. So please consider this," she beseeched. "We think you are the best choice and we both really want you to be a part of this." All returned to quiet in the room as they waited for an answer.

After a few more anxious seconds Jeremy rose to his feet, his face still not giving anything away. He crossed the small space and stopped in front of them. "I'm really flattered that you think enough of me to ask," he said then paused. "I would be honored to be a part of this miracle."

Erin was the first to jump up and hug him. Jeremy was touched at her emotional words. He cared for Erin almost as much as he cared for his sister. But Jamie's embrace and simple thank you meant the world to him. His decision wasn't meant to ingratiate himself to his sister, even though he still felt her emotional distance. Very grateful for his mother's courageous choice, Jeremy had always intended to be a donor so someday some woman who longed to be a parent could achieve that dream. A tiny bit of ego had allowed him to anticipate the benevolent act to be something just a little special. And this was it. His sisters would be proud parents and he would be around to contribute, even in some small way to the child's upbringing.

It would indeed be a blessed child.

The trio visited a while longer to explain the plans and timetable for the procedure. Jamie was much more relaxed at this point and even managed to laugh a few times as Jeremy passed along a slightly embarrassing story of his infancy that his mother was very fond of telling. As the hour was approaching, Jeremy accepted their invitation to dinner. Erin went on ahead to answer her phone, leaving the siblings to follow. Jeremy quickly cleared away the mess and put away his tools. Jamie watched, thinking about everything she had learned about his childhood, knowing his mother had done a good job raising him. Since meeting him, Jeremy had exhibited his intelligence, kindness, creativity and generosity. He had a clear and ambitious outlook for a successful future. He was a fine young man. *Why can't I find that connection with him, Jamie questioned? I guess if I had grown up with him it would be different.* With only a second's pause Jamie realized, *Dad wouldn't have needed that though. They would have bonded right away.*

Jeremy said goodbye to his dog and joined her at the door, but just before they stepped into the hallway Jamie stopped him with a gentle touch. "Jeremy, there's something I should have told you a long time ago. Dad would be proud of you."

A comforting feeling of warmth spun unexpectedly around Jeremy's heart. Just a few words. But those particular few words spoken by that particular person, suddenly connected him to a man he would never meet in this life. But Jeremy finally had a Dad. He gave his sister a curt nod and a strangled thank you.

And Jamie felt as if, just maybe she had taken a step toward that sibling bond.

\* \* \*

Life continued on in a normal fashion in the Sheridan-Casey household over the next few weeks. While they still remained anxious over a possible pregnancy, they didn't spend every minute of the day ruminating over it.

Erin had plenty of diversions to fill her days. She was just one chapter away from finishing the first draft of her latest book. She had also spent a few hours helping Ann and Leah organize the

new clinic and prepare for its grand opening. She and Jamie also had dinner twice with the medical couple and they all decided it should be a biweekly event. Third on Erin's busy schedule was arranging plans for her riding program for physically challenged children. That was coming together, but with all of the permits and insurance issues that were involved, it was still a few months away. All of Erin's nights were pleasantly occupied with loving Jamie, whether with acts of intense physical intimacies or just sleeping next to her, smelling her freshly shampooed hair and listening to her breathe.

Jamie had the ranch running smoothly even with the busy season now upon them. She hired a local high school boy to help out. He was devastated when his family had fallen into some financial difficulties and they could no longer afford to board his horse at Sheridan Stables, so Jamie was letting him work in exchange for keeping the animal there. She also paid him a fair wage because he was such a dedicated worker. There were two mares ready to foal within the month and she was working with three new horses, determining their suitability for Erin's program. Still, Jamie found the time, determinately so, to spend more than a few hours watching and sometimes participating in the construction of the new house.

It was one of those days in June, a Friday to be exact, that Jamie came home that evening with dirt smudges all over her jeans where she had wiped her sweaty hands. She also had sawdust all in her ebony hair, a few bloodied nicks on her hands and a bruised thumb. She stopped at the back porch to pull off her boots and dislodge as much of the topical dirt as possible, which wasn't much. Jamie then washed from fingertips to elbows in the kitchen sink, careful of the sore, discolored digit. She grabbed a bottle of cool water from the fridge and guzzled down at least half before two enthusiastic canines welcomed her home. Laughing as they vied for her attention, Jamie said, "I love you girls too. We'll go out and play after dinner." She looked around the kitchen and saw no sign or detected any aroma of cooking food. "Where is your Mommy anyway? Maybe we'll run down to the inn for dinner. Give her a break from cooking huh?" After a quick woof in agreement, the dogs slipped out onto the back porch while Jamie headed on into the house. She literally ran into her wife as they turned a corner, one coming down the stairs and one going up. "Funny meeting you here," the tall one said, adding a kiss.

Erin ran a hand through the dark strands and came away with a palm full of dust. "What have you been into, as if I didn't know?"

Jamie grabbed the offended hand and gave it a good brushing and then a kiss to prove its cleanliness. Sheepishly, she explained, "I went over to the new house..."

"Again."

"Again." Jamie hitched up the drooping tool belt around her waist, a few loose screws jangling in one of the large pockets. "They let me use the power saw." She quickly waved the back and blue thumb. "And unfortunately a hammer. But it was still fun."

Erin couldn't help but grin at Jamie's childlike glee. She gave the dirty woman a long perusal from head to toe and back again. "More like you wallowed in sawdust," she said. "Go take a shower and I'll start dinner."

"I thought we could go out to eat, maybe the inn."

Erin bit back a secret smile and pretended to consider. "I really feel like staying home tonight. Do you mind?"

"Absolutely not." Jamie gave Erin another peck on the cheek before heading up the stairs. She stopped on about the seventh step, feeling the eyes glued to her body. Looking back over her shoulder she asked, "Like the belt huh?"

The blonde puckered pink lips, still staring at the caramel colored, leather tool holder and the surrounding area. "Well it does accentuate your perfect..." Erin finished the saucy statement by letting her hands do the talking.

A single blue eye winked and Jamie slowly finished her climb.

\* \* \*

Forty-five minutes later, they were finishing up a light, but tasty meal. Jamie had been filling Erin in on the progress of the new house.

"I suppose Carly was there?" Erin asked with an edge of distaste.

But the sarcasm was lost on the tall rancher. She just smiled and answered, "Yeah. I actually get to do a lot more when she's there."

"No doubt," Erin grumbled as she grabbed the empty plates.

"What do you mean?"

Erin turned back to the seated woman and wagged a finger in her direction. "If I catch her undressing you with her eyes one more time, I'm gonna stick her hammer..."

"She doesn't do that!" Jamie protested

"She most certainly does."

The rancher took a moment to consider the possibility as her spouse finished putting the dishes in the washer. She still didn't think it was a serious matter, but she always trusted Erin's observations. "You were the one who wanted to hire a female contractor," she reminded Erin. "The one who always wants to help out women who own their own business, especially ones in the more male oriented areas."

"I know," the blonde said as she brushed a towel across the kitchen table. "And I still believe in that. But I didn't realize you were going to be so...hands on with the contractor. Especially one who is a lesbian."

Jamie adopted a soft expression and stood, taking her troubled spouse into her arms. "You are only one who gets to feel these hands on her body." She did some tactical maneuvers to prove her point. The moves drew some very interesting sounds from the woman in her arms and put a crafty smile on her own face. Jamie placed a tender kiss on Erin's lips, but didn't give up the topic of conversation just yet. "No to be stereotypical," she said, "but didn't you think it might be a strong possibility that she would be gay?"

"No, because I don't think of people that way."

Jamie pulled her in even closer. "Well, she can look all she wants, but you are the only one who gets to touch and get touched by me."

Erin conceded the point with a sensual hum as talented lips sprinkled kisses all along the side of her neck. "And touching is so much better," she finally decided. Erin wrapped her arms around the tall woman's neck and grinned. "Actually I was just joking...mostly."

Jamie laughed.

After finishing in the kitchen, the couple went into the back yard to keep Jamie's promise. The late spring day had been full of sun and the season's typical heat. From peak afternoon the temperature had dropped ten degrees, now making for a pleasantly warm and comfortable evening. A breeze lazily whistled through the tall greenery that bordered the open field, adding a soothing sound and stirring the aromas of newly budded flowers and freshly cut grass.

The dogs chased down two tennis balls over a dozen times as the humans shared a piece of refreshing lemon pie.

"So the house is coming along?" Erin asked easily.

"Yeah, but there's still a long way to go; it's a big house."

"Do you think it will be done in, oh about seven months?"

The dark head shook vigorously. "No, I seriously doubt it. It might be close but..."

"Is there anything we can do to push it up to seven months?" Erin asked

Jamie gave it some quick consideration. "Maybe, if we had double crews to work from sunup to sundown, seven days a week."

Erin licked the tangy tines of her fork as her lips twitched, fighting the urge to giggle. "Well, I don't mind paying the extra money," she said. "So I think that's what we should do."

Jamie was caught off guard just for a second. As generous as Erin was, she was always very careful about wasting money and she hadn't worried about the building schedule before. "Okay,"

she conceded. "I'll talk to Carly on Monday."

Erin nodded exuberantly and threw the ball one last time. Lifting her eyes, the orange glow of the setting sun once again reminded her of the day they met just two years before. It was also an early June day. It was the day her future had begun. With a slight turn of her blonde head, her beautiful wife graced her vision. There was peace, hope and happiness in the smiling profile. It was a nearly perfect moment. And it was **the** perfect moment. Erin moved over to sit on Jamie's lap. "Good," she said, "cause I'm really on a strict time table and I really want to be able to move in at least seven months, since it will take us a few weeks to settle in and do a little decorating. So seven months is good."

"What is it with you and seven months anyway?" the perplexed rancher asked. "I guess you'd like to be in by Christmas huh?"

"Yes, but that's not the main reason." Erin stared into her eyes, challenging her wife.

"Okay, you want me to guess huh? December, January. Not our anniversary, not a birthday. Seven months." Jamie thought harder. "Seven..." A flicker. "Eight...nine." Full ignition and the brilliant light of realization illuminated the crystal blue eyes. "You're...are you...?" The ear-to-ear smile told all. "My God, you are pregnant." Jamie pulled Erin to her in a crushing embrace. "You were right," she whispered. "Thank you. Thank you."

Erin pulled back, but remained well within the circle of loving arms. She cupped Jamie's face, watching as a tiny tear slid from her eye. "You don't have to thank me Sweetheart."

Jamie gave her a soft kiss and joined in the smile. "I do thank you, but I was praying to someone else."

Erin agreed, resting her forehead against Jamie's. "Yeah, I did a lot of that this morning when that test was positive."

\* \* \*

The old farmhouse was dark except for a single nightlight in the kitchen and half a dozen low burning candles in the master bedroom. All was silent within the walls at half past ten. The two canine members of the household, exhausted from the late evening play, slept in their comfy side by side doggie beds, dreaming of forest creatures to chase and old bones to chew.

The two humans, sharing the same big bed were still wide-awake, but quiet for the moment. They had held onto one another, basking in the glow of love and the setting sun as dusk had slowly drifted down around them. Their silent communication spoke joyously through the stroking of an arm and a head perched on a shoulder. The couple finally came indoors when the pitch of darkness finally locked down the night. They went straight to bed where a long celebration of lovemaking brought them to where they were now.

Skin to skin, Jamie rested with her head against Erin's middle. Their racing hearts calmed with a

few languid caresses as the flames flickered all around them. Erin quietly giggled as she noticed the head on her stomach shifting, an inch to the left and seconds later a few inches to the right, slightly up and then down. "I don't think you can hear anything yet," she said.

"I know, but it's never too soon to start listening." Jamie placed a tiny kiss to the soft skin below Erin's belly button and then trailed a line of more kisses up over her breastbone, around her throat and neck, over her face and finally landing on her lips. She stared intently into Erin's eyes, seeing everything in the world that was important to her and never wanting to see them hollow with disappointment. "Honey, you know how happy I am about this baby, but we..."

"I know... I know."

"It's not that I expect anything to happen, but I think we need to be prepared. Last time it never even crossed my mind that we could lose..."

"Mine either. Now we both know it's a possibility."

"A slight possibility," Jamie added.

Erin smiled. "Right." She turned suddenly pensive as she combed through Jamie's soft hair. "You know, I've done a lot of thinking recently," she said. "In hindsight, I realize that something felt off, wrong inside, even before I knew for sure I was pregnant. I ignored it, but there was something."

Jamie's hand drifted down to rub Erin's still flat belly. "And you don't feel that now?" she asked with a slight tremor.

"No. Honestly."

"But you would tell if you do?"

"If anything feels out of the ordinary I will tell you. Right now I feel nothing but joy, here." Erin touched the spot over her heart. "And peacefulness here." She entwined her fingers with Jamie's and they both sheltered the tiny life inside. Just as sleep was about to overtake, I love you was mumbled sleepily and returned just the same.

\* \* \*

With the exception of Jeremy, they had agreed not to tell anyone else the baby news until after Erin's first trimester. Erin continued to feel pretty good, more tired than usual, and the bathroom visits were a bit of a nuisance, but then she knew that was normal. And with everything normal about this pregnancy, she relaxed just a little more each day. The other bodily changes taking place were...interesting. Morning sickness finally arrived very early on a Wednesday. Unfortunately it hit the nonpregnant partner first. After the second morning, and realizing that Jamie wasn't really ill, Erin met the situation with a loving touch, knowing just how deeply they were connected. She also gave it just a bit of a compassionate giggle. That is until it was her turn.



Thankfully, it punched with a surprisingly delicate blow. One slightly unpleasant bout each morning and she was fine for the rest of the day. Food soon became her very best late night friend, nearly edging Jamie out of the coveted spot on a couple of occasions...until one night when Jamie earned her gold medal in friendship.

Erin's eyes shot open from a deep sleep. It was 2:43 AM. She knew what had happened. It was there. That unending yearning, gnawing at her like a starving being. She wanted it, needed it. But what could she do about it? Not much. Erin tried to will herself back to sleep. Nothing. She needed a diversion, so she tried reading, using a very small book light as not to disturb her slumbering partner. It was an intriguing storyline and mildly distracting. But then the characters started in with gusto and the urge returned. And this time it just wouldn't leave. Erin finally tossed aside the book and sighed heavily.

"What is it Honey, what's wrong?"

Erin smiled, hearing the slurred speech from somewhere under the blanket beside her. "I'm sorry Sweetie, go back to sleep."

The bedclothes rustled and the mattress shifted as the tall rancher twisted around. Blue eyes blinked several times before the owner could get the heavy lids to stay up. "No, I'm awake. What's wrong?" Jamie asked again.

Erin sighed again, a little softer this time. "I'm fine. I just want something I can't have."

Now a little more alert, Jamie took Erin's hand and kissed the back. "What do you want?"

"It's nothing, just one of those silly cravings. But it's something that it totally out of the question."

"Rin, please tell me. I'll do whatever I can to help."

Erin smiled softly. "You need a haircut," She said, smoothing down some unruly black locks that had fallen down over the sleepy eyes. "I know you would help Honey, but I seriously doubt that what I want is within fifty miles of here. Maybe I can find a substitute downstairs."

"You never know," Jamie said. "I can work magic sometimes."

"Okay, whip me up some butterscotch coated pretzels. That's what I'm craving." Jamie threw off the covers and headed for the door. "I was kidding!" Erin cried.

The rancher turned back, gesturing the pregnant woman to stay put. Jamie returned in just a few seconds with a silver coated box with a painted on red ribbon. Erin took the box and saw the label. "Ellison Sweets." Well, it fit, but how? Looking inside, her eyes popped. She grabbed one of the orange colored knots and munched happily. "How could you possibly have known?" she asked around a mouth full of sweet and salty bits.

"Last week, I came in one afternoon and you were taking a nap and mumbling in your sleep. This is one of the things you mentioned. I found these on the Internet. They came yesterday morning." Jamie smiled at the obvious joy and satisfaction the candy was bringing to her partner, but she declined one when offered.

Erin had scoffed down four pretzels, but before she bit into another she stopped to say, "Thank you Sweetheart. I love you so much and not just because you got me this, but because you are everything I need." She leaned in and kissed Jamie for several heartbeats...then popped another pretzel.

Jamie snickered and licked her lips. Butterscotch was never a favorite flavor for her, but this new delivery method might just wet her appetite for the new treat.

\* \* \*

As with many first time parents to be, their life quickly came to revolve around babies or to be more precise, baby things. An ordinary trip to the grocery store became an education in baby food...and more.

Erin pushed the shopping cart down the aisle, needing just a little more effort than normal. The basket was almost overflowing with most of a month's worth of groceries. Meats, fresh vegetables and fruits, food staples, breakfast items and household supplies stacked up in an orderly fashion to fill the cart. There was only one thing she had forgotten and she had sent Jamie back to the other end of the store for laundry detergent. Almost ten minutes had passed and Jamie had yet to return. Erin went in search, checking each aisle she passed, looking for the familiar dark head among the other shoppers. There, on aisle eight Erin spotted her elusive spouse. As she approached, calling out quietly, Jamie just stood there staring at the display, a large blue bottle dangling from her right hand.

"Jamie, what are you looking for?" Erin asked, not yet noticing the items on the shelves.

"Look at this," Jamie mumbled.

Erin turned and smiled, always enchanted by the picture of the cute infant on the jars.

Jamie pointed to the foods. "Ten different kinds of cereals, half a dozen fruit juices, all these vegetables, creamed spinach, squash, sweet potatoes and corn. And those peas just look horrible."

"They usually aren't a favorite," Erin added.

"I never knew all this existed for babies. Applesauce, peaches, pears...prunes." Jamie grimaced at the last one. She reached for a small jar. "They've got to be kidding, mango," she pointed to more, "papaya, guava. I've never even had guava."

Erin saw a couple she didn't even recognize. "Turkey and rice dinner, spaghetti with tomato

sauce and beef." Plus there was a very mushy looking macaroni and cheese. "Babies deserve as much variety as adults," she decided.

"I guess," the rancher agreed. "They even have desserts. Blueberry Buckle, Hawaiian Delight, Peach Cobbler, Vanilla Custard."

"That one's pretty good actually," Erin said. Jamie gave her a raised brow. "I tried some once or twice when I used to feed Conner," the blonde explained. "There was one called Cherry Vanilla that was really good, but I don't think they make it anymore." Erin gave a quick mental count to all the different foods. "I think the baby is going to need its own pantry. Good thing we'll have a big enough kitchen." She pointed to the aisle behind them. "Wait until we get into the diapers, shampoos, lotions..." She took the large bottle from Jamie and placed it on the bottom rack of the cart. "Let's go home, I'm starved."

Jamie followed, quietly.

And she remained that way the rest of the day.

\* \* \*

After dinner Jamie had gone out to the barn, giving no particular reason why. But now it was well past dark and Erin was worried about the sullen woman. If Jamie was still in the barn, she wasn't answering the phone. Erin knew from experience that sometimes Jamie just needed a little solitude to work out things that were on her mind, but she never stayed out long after dark without calling. At almost ten, Erin wasn't going to wait any longer, so she headed out to the barn to check for herself. Sensing her distress, the dogs followed along, flanking their human. The night was always just a little spooky with the black forest looming all around and you hoped that the movements in the shadows were just the normal nocturnal inhabitants. Hurrying her steps, Erin headed to the far building, where Jamie's office was. She was even more concerned upon seeing every window darkened. Flipping on a low light so she wouldn't scare the horses, Erin softly called out. "Jamie, are you in here?"

"I'm back here Rin."

The dogs nosed around, chasing some scent or another as Erin followed the voice and found her partner sitting atop several bales of hay. The author leaned against a wooden support beam and studied her thoughtfully. Not noticing her presence yet, Jamie absently braided several dry pieces of golden hay and tensely scuffed her booted feet against their tightly compressed companions. Erin knew Jamie's moods very well. When the tall woman was angry about something she paced from room to room, doing a lot of stiff lipped muttering. When she was sad, Jamie wanted to sit and cuddle quietly. It was when Jamie was pondering a personal decision or doubting herself that she retreated to a dark corner somewhere. But almost always, when she was given the time, Jamie would eventually talk to Erin and work out the problem. "What are you doing?" Erin asked as she climbed the small mountain and perched next to the rancher. "I was waiting for you and getting worried."

Jamie looked at her watch for the first time in over two hours. She gave herself a mental slap. "I'm sorry Rin. I really am. I just lost track of time."

"It happens. I'm just a worrywart I guess. Just like I've been worried about you all afternoon, every since we got back from the store." She playfully nudged the tall woman's shoulder. "Wanna tell me about what's bothering you?"

Jamie was silent, staring unfocused at the twisted piece in her hands. "I'm sorry," she finally said.

"Honey, you all ready said that."

The dark head shook slowly. "No. I'm sorry because I'm a terrible partner and I'm going to be a worse parent."

Erin threw an arm around Jamie's waist. "Sweetie, what are talking about?"

Jamie couldn't look her in the eye. She continued to stare at the blades of hay, which she was now stripping apart with her fingers. "I realized today that I don't know anything about taking care of a baby. I'm pathetic. How can I be a good partner and leave everything up to you, not do my share? I wanted a child, but I just didn't consider the realities of taking care of an infant. I don't know how or what to feed a baby, I don't how to bathe, dress, diaper or even hold a baby."

"Oh Honey," Erin sighed. "First of all, you are not pathetic and you are a wonderful partner, the best." Jamie still wouldn't meet her eyes so Erin went for logic. "When you wanted to start taking care of horses or when you wanted to start your own business, what did you do?"

Jamie shrugged. "I read books and did research." The prolonged pause begged the question. "But I'm a woman, shouldn't this stuff be instinctual...it just isn't for me."

Erin pulled Jamie's hand to her belly. "Loving this child comes naturally to you." She lifted the drooping chin and smiled into the sad blues. "I know that. No woman in the world, including me, was born knowing how to take care of a baby. We all have to learn. I don't know everything. What I do know is only because my sister had two."

Jamie let the words soak in and finally cracked a tiny, half grin. "I'm being silly huh?"

"No. You are being a good parent because you are so concerned." Erin put her head on Jamie's shoulder and her hand came to rest along the tall woman's thigh. They sat in silence for just a few minutes, each with their own thoughts. "Do you know how sexy I think that is?" Erin asked.

Jamie snorted. "What, my insecurities?"

Erin jokingly slapped the leg under her hand. "No, that you love us so much."

"I do. And you know what I find so sexy about you?" They came face to face as she explained. "I love how beautiful you are. I love how smart you are. I love how you smell and how you taste."

Jamie nipped at Erin's mouth. "I love that you're carrying our baby. I just love you."

Erin kissed her soundly and kept kissing her. One hand wrapped around the back of Jamie's neck, giving it a slow, sensual massage. The other hand drifted to the buttons on Jamie's brown shirt and it soon fell apart under her ministrations. She slid inside the loose garment, trailing over the warm, bare skin with her fingertips. Jamie eased her lover down onto the surface beneath them, careful not to put pressure on Erin's mid-section. She sunk her fingers into Erin's muscled behind as the kisses became deeper and the passion escalated. They were both so in love with kissing that they spent many long moments doing just that, getting lost in the softness and the warmth. Jamie was savoring the sweet hint of the peach tea Erin had sipped after her meal. Aside from some happily placed hands, their attention was tunneled to the enjoyment of lips and an occasional tongue. Lusty moans bubbled from deep in Erin's throat...but a desperate yawn suddenly beat their release. Jamie tumbled onto her back and they both fell into fits of laughter.

"Off to bed with you," Jamie said between the giggles as she hopped down to the barn floor. She helped her spouse down and arm in arm they headed for the house. All the self-doubt in her spirit had been chased away by the encouragement of the special woman by her side. "I need some sleep too," she said. "Tomorrow I'm hitting the Internet...or the library. Hmmm...both."

\* \* \*

A couple of nights later, Jamie walked into the kitchen to quite a sight. Erin was standing at the counter cutting vegetables for dinner. She had flipped on the radio and was enthusiastically shaking her hips to an upbeat tune. Jamie crossed her arms and stood there watching the exciting show, her eyes dancing to the movements. But her self-control quickly waned. She stealthily crossed the room and grasped the twitching hips, hugging her tall form tightly against the more compact one. Erin gave just a tiny gasp, instantly recognizing the hands on her body. She slowed her movements to a much more sensual pace and they moved together as teeth nipped her earlobe and words were whispered.

"Look at you, wearing my favorite outfit and shaking this ass like you know how to use it." It was simple enough attire. A pair of close fitting faded jeans and a tucked in plain white, long sleeved shirt. But Jamie thought the combo was hot...as long as it was wrapped around her wife's equally torrid body. Jamie had gotten the garments for Erin for Christmas. Buying clothing for one another was a favorite thing for them, but not just on special occasions.

Erin looked back over her shoulder and flashed a saucy wink. "Check back with me after our friends leave and I'll show you just how well." Erin put down the sharp utensil and turned, slinking her arms up and around Jamie's neck. "And this time I promise no yawning. I took a long nap this afternoon. As far as the outfit, this will probably be the last time I'll be able to wear it for quite a while." Jamie stuck out her bottom lip in a mock pout. Erin kissed it and its twin in a promise of things to come.

Anne and Leah had come over for dinner and the four friends laughed and told stories over a meal of spicy baked chicken and freshly sautéed vegetables. They had opened the clinic to a rousing success on the previous weekend, hosting a four-hour preview with refreshments and

behind the scenes tours. The turnout was astounding, attesting to the need, a need that had been satisfied above and beyond with the creation of the Evergreen Clinic.

When Erin and Jamie had returned with after dinner coffee and tea, they spied their friends in a conspiratorial huddle, whispering and grinning, obviously sharing a secret...and ending with a sweet kiss.

"Still in the honeymoon phase, I see," Jamie said as she placed the serving tray on the coffee table. Erin soon joined them and snuggled in next to Jamie on the love seat.

Anne giggled. "Now that you mentioned it." She glanced toward the woman tucked into her side. "We have a favor to ask." She nodded for Leah to continue.

The nurse nearly laughed at the anxious expressions on their friend's faces before she asked, "Would the two of you stand up for us at our commitment ceremony?"

There was a squeal of surprised delight and all four jumped to their feet for hugs and kisses. "Of course we will!" Erin said.

"We would be honored," the rancher added. "We're so happy for both of you."

Anne explained, "We were thinking about three weeks from Saturday. We want it to be very simple. Just the four of us and a minister in our back yard at sunset."

Erin took her wife's hand and gave it a little squeeze, knowing they both had the same thought. Neither Anne nor Leah had parents or siblings close by. They were both fairly reserved people and this was the right choice for them. "It sounds perfect," she said. "And it will be beautiful."

\* \* \*

The big day finally arrived. Both Erin and Jamie woke up in a fabulous mood on the morning of the first day of Erin's second trimester. They had a big day planned, telling family and friends the good news.

Surprised, but very thrilled was the general reaction.

Danielle cried.

Seven months pregnant Bridget, laughed joyously.

Then she cried.

Then she laughed again. Then she warned Erin of the great hormone war that was waiting down the road.

Tim, needless to say was absolutely shocked. He had written off the notion of his youngest ever

giving him a grandchild, due to her choice of a spouse. He didn't quite understand how it had happened and they didn't offer any explanation at the time. But after a bit of pondering he happily accepted the fact and had a celebratory cigar, teasing Jamie that he would pass out the stogies after the birth since it really didn't seem like her thing.

\* \* \*

As Erin's belly began to grow round with life, they really started to think of the baby as a real person. And real people need names.

Early one evening, Jamie found Erin reading in the family room. She took a seat on the ottoman in front of her, noticing the title of the book. It was one on child rearing that Jamie had ordered over the Internet and had already finished reading herself. She chuckled silently, removing the blonde's uncomfortable looking footwear and adding a little massage. Erin wiggled her toes. "Thanks hon." Jamie smiled and moved over to the window, which looked out into the dense woods where the night was already invading. Erin peeked over the top of her glasses and noticed that her spouse seemed to be waiting for something. "Just let me finish the last two pages of this chapter and I'll stop for the night," she said cheerfully.

Normally, Jamie wouldn't disturb her spouse's leisure activity, but there was something she wanted to discuss. Erin kept her promise, gave a stretch and a little rub of what they affectionately referred to as the baby bump.

Even though it was only eight thirty Jamie asked, "You're not tired are you?"

Erin smiled. "Nope. I'm into that smooth sailing phase."

"Good." Jamie closed the curtains and started to move back toward the big chair Erin was using. "I know we've got a few months to go," she said, "but do you think we could start discussing names?"

"Oh, I all ready know, without a doubt what name I want," Erin stated emphatically.

Jamie stopped in her tracks and with a jerky movement, altered her path. She ended up by the unlit fireplace, her hands stuffed into the pockets of her jeans and her shoulders drooping with disappointment. Her attention got lost in the painting hanging above the mantle, but the mountain scene faded to blurred, colored swirls as her vision shifted inward.

"It's a unisex name so it will fit for a boy or a girl."

Erin prattled on, but Jamie didn't really hear any of the words. *Okay, she thought. I guess it is technically her baby and she has probably had a name chosen for years. Maybe we'll have another one someday and I'll get to have a say in the decision then.*

"Jamie. Jamie?" Erin spoke louder.

The rancher blinked and turned from the wall. "Yeah."

"Don't you want to know what name I want?" the author asked as she moved over to the larger the sofa and gestured for Jamie to join her.

Jamie mustered up a smile, hoping the quiver of distress wouldn't show. "Sure." After Erin held out her hand and wiggled her fingers, Jamie took the appendage and a seat next to her.

"There really was no other choice," Erin explained. "Our baby's name will be..." she took a dramatic pause, "Jordan."

Jamie's mouth fell open slightly and her unfocused eyes blinked in rapid succession. It was a nearly overwhelming moment for her. She would never have suggested it, even though it had crossed her mind when they first started to discuss getting pregnant. She had once overheard Erin telling her sister that she believed that babies needed their own identity and shouldn't be named after anyone else. But something had obviously changed her mind.

Erin continued grinning at her, waiting for a response, but when none was forthcoming she cupped Jamie's cheek. "Honey?"

The clear blues finally sharpened and settled deeply into her spouse's eyes. "You want to name the baby Jordan, after my sister?"

"Of course. I can't imagine anyone I would want to honor more. Our son or daughter will be proud of its namesake. You do agree, don't you?"

The dark head nodded and Jamie pulled Erin into a gentle, but solid embrace. "Yes, she whispered. "Thank you." She pulled back with slightly teary eyes. "From both of us."

Continued in Part 13.

**The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

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## ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It



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**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

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## Chapter 13

"So."

Erin stepped from the shower, gave her wet body a quick rub and went to stand in front of the full length mirror on the back of the door. Standing sideways, Erin ran her hand down over her protruding belly. "This is definitely not how I had envisioned looking being almost six months pregnant," she said to her reflection. "Not bad, just different. I think I look pretty good actually...and Jamie always tells me I'm sexy." She paused just a second then added, "I don't know if I'd go that far, but if she insists." Erin giggled at herself and reached for the stack of clothing on the shelf next to her. Pulling up the large, unglamorous pair of panties, she finally turned from the mirror and finished dressing in her soft sweats and oversized t-shirt. Before throwing a towel over her damp head, she caught one last glimpse of her herself. "Yeah," she muttered, "that's a sexy look." But Erin didn't really care how she appeared and she knew the dogs didn't mind. And they would be her only companions for the day. She was comfortable and that was what was most important.

Leaving the bathroom, Erin briskly rubbed her short hair with the towel, stopping short when she heard a low moan from somewhere in the room. She knew the house wasn't haunted so she lowered the towel to her shoulders, surprised to see her wife still in bed with the covers pulled up over her head. "Honey, are you all right?" she asked. Not understanding the mumbled answer, Erin sat beside her on the edge of the bed and lifted the covers. Jamie's eyes were squinted in obvious pain and her nearly six foot body was curled up to nearly half that length. Erin automatically felt for a fever, even though she suspected the cause of Jamie's discomfort. She continued to comb through the raven strands as their eyes met. Quietly, they held the moment and Jamie found comfort in Erin's touch.

"Not going out there today," Jamie finally muttered.

Erin glanced out the window and it was rainy and gloomy, but that never stopped Jamie before. Erin believed that her partner secretly loved to play in the mud as much as any ten year old. The rancher groaned again and Erin needed no further explanation, even though Jamie very rarely complained about cramps and had never taken to bed. She figured that her wife, subconsciously just needed a little extra TLC since everyone's attention was currently focused on Erin and the pregnancy. "I'll get you some medicine," she told her suffering wife.

"Took some while you were in the shower." Jamie scooted closer, ignoring her pain for the moment and lifted Erin's shirt to whisper a morning greeting to her offspring. The ritual had begun shortly after the baby bump had appeared and was strictly performed every morning and night since. Erin thought it was a very sweet gesture and couldn't help but smile every time. "You're lucky that you don't have to worry about this for a few more months," Jamie said as she constricted back into her fetal position. Her eyes slipped shut once again, but unfortunately not in sleep.

Erin bent down to kiss her and offer a teasing suggestion. "You could always get pregnant next time."

Jamie shuddered just a bit from another wave of pain and gave a small shake of her head. "No can do...doctor said my back wouldn't take it very well." Not hearing a response after a few minutes, she looked up to find herself pinned with an adoring expression.

The green eyes were just a bit teary. "You asked?"

"Yeah."

"I had no idea that you thought about having a baby."

Jamie reached for Erin's hand. "It's not that I physically desire to give birth," she said, "but I thought if we wanted to expand our family in the future that you shouldn't have to do all the work. I know it's not easy."

Erin clutched their joined hands to her chest. "I love you."

Jamie smiled. "Enough to climb in here with me and cuddle until I feel better?"

And that they did, staying long after the pain had disappeared.

\* \* \*

Jamie cracked the seal on a bottle of water and took a long swallow, letting the cool liquid coat the inside of her mouth before it slid down her throat and settled soothingly into her stomach. "Now that was some lunch," she said, replacing the screw top and wiping an errant drop from her

chin. A delightful shiver went down her spine as a few fingers skimmed across the bare skin of her back, writing a racy message. Jamie released a longing sigh. She threw a glance over her shoulder before bending out of reach to pull on her boots. She had come back to the house a little after noon when Erin called and said something special was waiting. Erin was quite the cook and having assumed it was lunch, Jamie's mouth watered at the possibilities. She was slightly shocked, but pleasantly so when she was greeted by her wife wearing a kitchen apron...and nothing more. The meaning was clear and no words were spoken as Erin had taken her by the hand and led her up the stairs. An hour later the rancher reluctantly began the process of redressing; unfortunately she had more work to do back at the barn. Erin had no such concerns, however and she lazed about in the rumpled bed, currently perusing the ceiling, avoiding further tempting glances at her lover's tantalizing body. A satisfied smile was firmly planted on her face and the aqua colored sheet was draped haphazardly across her lower half. One leg was bent at the knee preventing anything vital from actually being hidden. Jamie finished dressing, leaving her shirt and jeans unbuttoned for the moment. She leaned across the bed and nibbled her favorite pair of lips. "As delicious as you are sweetie, I really need something more food like to help me through the rest of the day. I'll grab something on the way out."

Erin tried her best to look ashamed, but the proper expression never totally formed on her glowing cheeks. "Sorry, but you are the main focus of nearly all the horny little hormones racing around in my body right now." Many things were surprising to her about this pregnancy, not that she had anything but her imagination to compare it to. Erin was smart enough to know that no two pregnancies are exactly alike, even in the same woman, but after three, Bridget had mentioned nothing about a sex drive which seemed stuck in high gear, but leaving the wheels spinning

Jamie took another taste of her inclined lover's lips. "Lucky me," she whispered. Then suddenly she pulled back with narrowed eyes. "What do you mean nearly all? Who else has have you been focusing on?"

Erin's brows drew together in confusion. Finally realizing how that must have sounded, a beautiful, rosy blush spread across her face. "No one honey, I promise. It's just that there have been times in the last few weeks...well you know how I've been. And I knew you were really busy, I couldn't just call up and say come home and take care of my needs." She shrugged a shoulder and her right hand slowly drifted to the apex of her legs where she was about to give a vivid demonstration. "Soooo, I had to take care of it myself." A soft moan slipped from her parted lips. "But believe me, your sexy face and body filled every one of those fantasies."

"No, no." Jamie grabbed the busy hand, lifted it to her mouth and gave it a quick sniff and a tiny lick. "I can't witness that and go back to work...which I have to do." She gave Erin a wicked grin and another kiss before strolling out the door.

"I love you," Erin called out.

Jamie stopped in the doorway and looked back, her expression soft and easy. "I love you too." She gave a final wave and took off.

"Jamie." When the dark head reappeared with questioning features, Erin suggested, "Have an extra sandwich...and come home early."

A touch of exhaustion slightly stooped the rancher's barely visible shoulders. "You're kidding?"

Erin grinned.

Jamie winked.

Erin kept grinning and thinking of her soon to be tuckered spouse until a well placed kick rattled her back to reality. She rubbed her belly. "Whoa! Did your mommies make too much noise and wake you up?" she asked. "And no, that was not your first earthquake...in case you were wondering." She took a deep, relaxing breath. "Sorry, but you are just going to have to get used to that...for a little while longer anyway. Then I'm sure...well I'll probably take a drastic turn in a month or so. But I'm certainly going to enjoy it while I can." She continued the soothing caresses and after another pleasant tumble or two, everything settled back down. Contentment was hers once again. Erin glanced over to the window, her eyes landing on the shelf above the window seat and in particular on a picture of the two of them on their honeymoon. They were bundled up in their heavy coats, snuggled together in a horse drawn sleigh. Jamie's arm was wrapped around Erin, pulling her as close as possible, cheek to cheek. She could see Jamie's crystal eyes twinkling, even from half way across the room. Next to it was one of their wedding photographs. It was a classic black and white photo and still those eyes flew off the paper and pierced Erin's soul, not with the color, but with the blissfulness of the moment. So many times had Erin caught sight of those eyes and cherished what she saw there, excitement over a new horse, a mischievousness glint when Jamie got into her best teasing mode with one of their friends or their niece or nephew, laughter at their playing canines...passion for her. But none had grabbed Erin's heart and stole her breath as much the moment that she witnessed recently. She drifted off to sleep remembering.

They had gone to the doctor for a regular visit and they learned that it was time for the first ultrasound, the very first picture of their baby. This was always an incredible moment in the lives of parents, but for first timers especially. All was quiet in the soothing room as the doctor maneuvered the necessary equipment into place. Erin reacted to the inevitable chill that spread across her belly, but the sensation was quickly forgotten as the image came into focus on the screen. The doctor explained a few things and then spoke of normal progression, strong heartbeats and perfect formation of limbs and everything else vital. Erin heard every word, relieved at the positive report, but her attention was riveted to the screen as she strived to put the pieces together. Once the initial shock had passed she did register the gentle squeeze of her hand and she returned the gesture. "Is that a foot? Look how tiny," she marveled. "And there, a nose and look at the fingers." She continued to stare at the miracle as her heart fluttered with excitement. Erin soon realized that she hadn't heard a word from her wife and turned to look at the woman by her side. A tiny gasp escaped her lips when she saw the tears streaming unhindered down Jamie's face. But Erin had never in her life seen such happy tears, tears that fell from eyes full of an amazing combination of pure joy and astonishment. Erin raised their joined hands and kissed the back of Jamie's knuckles as Jamie done to her at the conception of their miracle. Their gazes finally met and the look in the blue orbs transformed to one so simple and

yet so complete...with love. Jamie sniffed and her jaw clenched as she tried to speak, but the words couldn't navigate around the lump in her throat. She mouthed the sentiment that was so clear in her eyes. It was another perfect moment.

\* \* \*

Erin finished sorting through the half dozen shopping bags, removing one extra special gift for their upcoming first anniversary. She promptly hid it in a closet, away from her curious partner. Erin had gone to LA to go shopping with her mother and sister, a quick trip by way of her father's helicopter. With two very pregnant women and a doting grandmother, most of the stops and subsequent purchases had been for baby paraphernalia. While Bridget was using a few sentimental items passed down from her first two babies, this tot was treated to all new clothes and all the other infant necessities. She was only a couple of weeks away from delivering her third child, which they already knew was a boy. Erin, of course, needed everything new and even though she expected to have a baby shower she knew everything would be used well. After a nice lunch, the three had said goodbye and Erin was whisked back to the ranch. She would show Jamie all the cute baby things that night and would later pack them away in boxes for transport to the new house and nursery, which she couldn't wait to decorate. The nesting syndrome had taken a strong hold, but for now Erin had to settle for packing and unpacking the tiny clothing, blankets and essentials.

Both dogs came running up the stairs and into the bedroom. "Hello ladies," Erin greeted. "I guess you want to go back outside now huh?" As two tails wagged excitedly, she glanced at the clock. "Want to go with me out to the mailbox first? Let's go."

Out in the barn, Jamie had just finished a meeting and was seeing the client off when she saw her wife and canine children heading down the drive in front of the house. The dogs were trotting along side as Erin maneuvered the electric golf cart along the nearly quarter mile distance to the main road and the mailbox. Erin didn't notice her, so Jamie just smiled, as she seemed to be doing quite a bit these days. Returning to the office, Jamie made a quick phone call and finished updating a few files. After the tasks were finished her stomach loudly reminded her that she had worked through lunch. Grabbing a candy bar from her desk drawer, she contemplated dinner. Figuring that Erin would be tired from her day of shopping, Jamie quickly decided to take her out to eat. Unfortunately that would be at least an hour or more away, so she slipped her cell phone into the pouch on her belt and headed out into the barn. She took in a deep breath, the smell of fresh hay always pleasant. Most of the horses were out in the field enjoying the early fall day. Only one stall was occupied at the moment by a pregnant mare, due long before Erin. She stopped to plant some affection on the horse's white forehead and offer some words of encouragement about the impending birth. She pulled a small apple from her pocket and treated the mother to be before heading outside.

Propping a boot onto the lower rung of the fence, Jamie watched as her prized stallion, Cooper strutted around the small coral, his large nose sniffing the air and the nearby females. *Yeah buddy, you and Erin*, she thought and then chuckled. Her musings were interrupted by one of the ranch hands who joined Jamie at the fence.

"Do you still intend to put Teaberry in with him tomorrow?" he asked.

"That's still the plan," she said. "I might not be here till mid-morning, so we'll wait till then. As usual I want them monitored."

The ranch hand nodded and went back to his work.

Jamie let out a sharp whistle and called out the horse's name. The shrill was noticed, but arrogantly ignored. Not that it was unexpected. She retrieved another apple and tossed it between her hands, teasing the stubborn animal. The dark, glossy eyes caught sight of the shiny fruit and a mighty snort left his snout. He took two steps forward, caught her eye and then looked away. Jamie laughed at his princely pretense and snatched a bite of the crisp Granny Smith for herself. It was Jamie's turn to look away casually as she savored the juicy morsel. A few more leisurely steps brought the large steed close enough that Jamie could touch him if she just reached out. But she didn't. One demanding hoof stomped the ground. "No," she said nonchalantly. "You know what I want." One more pause and he drifted even closer. One final shuffle and he gently nuzzled her shoulder, his breath ruffling a few strands of her hair. "Good boy," Jamie praised as he gobbled the treat from the palm of her hand. Both human and beast enjoyed this game they played several times a week. She wrapped her other arm around his neck and spoke into his dark ear. "Now I want you to be good to Teaberry tomorrow. Treat her like a lady. No biting. She'll give you another good looking son or daughter." Jamie had worked hard over the previous year developing a relationship with this very independent animal. Cooper would let just about anyone see to his grooming, but it was only Jamie he would show any kind of interest in and only Jamie he would allow to climb aboard his back. She gave him a final brisk rub and headed back in to the barn. Suddenly, Jamie flinched and her eyes snapped shut. She reached out to steady herself against a support post.

"Are you all right Miss Sheridan?" the ranch hand asked from his place inside the tack room.

A strange sensation flooded her stomach, but she knew it wasn't another hunger pang. This was more like nausea, the kind that comes with dread or fear. The intense feeling abated, leaving behind a nagging tightness. "Uh...yeah," she finally answered. "I think so. But something..." She looked back toward the house. Everything looked normal. But somehow she knew something, somewhere was wrong. Jamie pulled out her cell, hitting a single button and she paced back and forth as the annoying ring played in her ear, unanswered. Snapping it shut, Jamie took off toward the house once again. Both dogs were playing in the back yard and spying the golf cart, she knew Erin was in the house. Jamie called for her wife as she marched through the kitchen, but hers was the only voice sounding out. The fear was starting to rise and as she came to the living room it surged into full blown terror. Erin was unconscious on the floor, a scattering of mail beside her and a single piece of paper still clutched in her hand. "Oh God!" Jamie ran to her side. "Erin, honey, can you hear me?" Stuffing the paper into her pocket, Jamie made a quick check for a pulse and then for any sign of blood. Not seeing any, she had to make a split second decision that could mean life or death.

She couldn't wait for an ambulance.

As a surge of adrenaline coursed through her blood, Jamie achieved a nearly impossible task. With a deep breath, she hefted her five and a half months pregnant wife up into her arms, hustled out to the car and headed to the clinic. One hand on the wheel and one on her cell, Jamie alerted Dr. Carson, who promised to have a gurney waiting out front.

\* \* \*

Jamie paced the small waiting room as her lover was being treated, for what she didn't know. Luckily, the clinic was empty and Erin was receiving their exclusive attention, allowing Jamie to feel bit...a tiny bit better about the situation. Jamie strode to the door once more and slammed a frustrated fist against the wall, rattling the two paintings that hung there. A huff of breath forcefully left her mouth followed by a strained, "Damn." A pain shot up her back, but a deep breath, a growl and a strong will pushed it away. There was no time for that. Jamie flexed her sore knuckles and stared back to the area where they had taken her wife.

Still no sign of Anne or Leah.

Turning back into the annoyingly quiet room, Jamie rubbed her itchy, tired eyes and a memory flashed. She pulled the crumpled paper from her pocket, merely glancing at the letterhead, barely registering the address of a legal office.

"Jamie." The letter went unread for the moment as Anne stepped through the door. "Come with me."

\* \* \*

Jeremy came through the door of his apartment, trailing behind his panting pup. A bit winded himself, Jeremy cracked open a large bottle of water and poured a good splash into the dog's bowl then chugged the rest himself. They had been for an evening jog through the park, which was something they did at least four times a week. Giving JJ a quick rub down, Jeremy then sent him off to rest as he headed for the shower. Ten minutes later, dried and dressed, Jeremy was heading into the kitchen to fix himself some dinner. A demanding knock caused him to detour and quickly ponder the reason behind the pounding fist. He opened the door and only caught a glimpse of a dark head before his visitor spun around. Jeremy didn't see the fist headed toward him, but he damn sure felt the impact on the bone right beneath his left eye. Instinctively covering the injury, he stumbled back, but kept his footing.

"You son of a bitch!" Jamie yelled. Grabbing two handfuls of his shirt, she shoved him onto the sofa where he backed away as her tirade continued. "I knew I couldn't trust you! I won't let you do this, you bastard! No one gets away with trying to hurt my family. No one!" Her graveled voice snapped off every word with a bitter vengeance as the muscles in her forearms bunched to strike out again at anything that might venture near. Her restraint was powerful, but sorely tested.

The eyes that matched his in color, flashed with an intensity of anger that Jeremy had had never before witnessed. Even though the rage was directed at him, Jeremy could sense the pain that was causing the outburst. He wasn't afraid of her, but for her. "Jamie, please calm down and tell

me what's going on. What is it you think I've done?"

She fished inside her pocket and came out with the letter. "My wife is in a hospital bed because she fainted after reading that." She tossed the crumpled up trash onto his chest and turned away. She knew she had to cool the raging ire burning in her belly before she did something she could never forgive herself for. She hadn't even meant to hit him, but when the door opened she imagined the fear that Erin must have felt when she read those words and she just lashed out.

It took a couple of seconds for Jeremy's still rattled brain to realize what Jamie had said. Extreme concern shaped the tone of his voice as he asked, "Erin, the baby..."

Jamie turned back to him and took one deep breath. "They're...okay. She just has to take it easy till the birth, stay off her feet. No thanks to you," she accused.

"I still don't...I haven't done anything to Erin or you. I haven't even seen you in weeks."

"Don't give me that crap," she spat. "Read the damn letter and then look me in the eye and say you haven't done anything to hurt us."

Jeremy shook the last of the fuzziness away and began to read, his throbbing and swelling eye not aiding the situation. He didn't recognize the name of the law office in the letterhead, but he read on. Basically it was a letter informing Erin Casey of Jeremy McIntyre's intent to sue for full custody of his biological child at the time of its birth. Jeremy was totally shocked, but he met her challenge and eye to eye he confessed. "I don't know what this is all about. I don't know who this lawyer is. I have never been to see him or any other lawyer. I wouldn't betray you; you're my family. I love you and I love Erin." He paused as the tension clung to the air around them like a dense, morning fog. His one eyed gaze filled with pain, both physical and emotional. "Jamie," he continued, "I do love that baby...but only as an uncle and that's all I will ever be. I will never seek custody of that child. That baby is Erin's and yours. And I could never hurt any of you." A tear fell from the corner of his eye as he looked down. Jamie watched its progression down his bruising cheek and onto his shirt. It was no pretense.

His battered face sent a ripple of guilt across her equally battered spirit. Jamie's heavy lids fell shut. She had to think, push aside the hurt and anger. Think with her head...and then with her heart. *I want to believe him. Why would he lie about it now, what purpose would it serve? In all these months he has never been anything but honest about what he wanted, never given me any real reason to doubt him. All the problems were mine. What is going on here?*

All evidence was carefully considered.

Finally, a unanimous decision.

Stepping into his small kitchen, she opened the freezer and retrieved a few items. Moving back toward the sofa with slow, heavy steps, Jamie tossed her brother a cold pack. "Put that on your eye." She flopped down into a nearby chair as the feel of the lead weight in her stomach hit bottom. Their eyes locked again. "I believe you," she said softly. "And I'm sorry I hit you."



He nodded painfully then stared at the letter with disgust. "I understand. I would have been furious too."

Jamie winced as she put a makeshift ice pack on her knuckles. Her hand was already sore from punching the wall at the clinic, now discolored and swollen, the pain traveled up into her wrist. Her pains were many indeed, but inconsequential at the moment. Jamie's head fell back. "I am so tired," she muttered. "But I still have to find out who did this, if this somebody's idea of a sick joke. How many people know about the situation anyway? Maybe somebody at the fertility clinic...maybe they want to blackmail me." She sighed long and low. Thinking she had had it all figured out, now her brain was torn between relief, concern and solving the insensitive mystery that still threatened her family and their happiness. "Did you tell anyone else about this besides your mother...and your fiancé?"

The question was momentarily unanswered. The dim light of an autumn evening that had strained to identify objects in Jeremy's apartment now drown the space and faces in soft darkness.

A stinging black eye, the end of a workday and his own distress sent Jeremy's drained body sinking into the soft sofa cushion behind his back. His voice was as haggard as his muscles when he finally answered. "No of course not; we agreed..." Suddenly he sat up ramrod straight. "Oh my God!"

The exclamation got Jamie's attention. "What? Did you think of something? I need your help Jeremy, Erin needs..."

"It was me," he said in truth, but with an undercurrent of disbelief.

Jamie suddenly tensed. "What do you mean it was you? You said..."

"Jamie, wait. Let me explain." Jeremy knew their young relationship was on very shaky ground; the details of his explanation would be critical to its continuation. He quickly flipped on a lamp, looked her squarely in the face and shook the letter. "I didn't do this...but I think I am responsible."

Jamie waited, his cryptic answer beginning to stir her anger again.

"A few weeks ago, Rachel told me that she had been to see a doctor. He told her that it would be just about impossible for her to conceive a child. I tried to hide it and be positive, I told her it was okay and there were other ways for us to have a family. But I was disappointed and she knew it. Seeing you and Jamie reveling in this pregnancy, the joy on both of your faces... I did begin to get excited about becoming a father, having a family..."

*Not with my family,* Jamie subconsciously thought.

"...with the woman I love. Watching our baby grow would have been..." Jeremy tossed aside the

cold pack; his pain was now bolder and deeper than any amount of ice would sooth. He walked over to the window and looked out into the empty night. "Anyway, I accepted it and it was fine." His pause and strangled body language told Jamie that the worst part was about to be revealed. "The next Friday she was here when I got home. It had been a bitch of a day at work and I had a hell of a headache. All I had wanted was a handful of aspirin and some sleep. But she was all excited about something and was going on and on about our future. I listened without much response, not that she gave me much of a chance. You know what she suggested. I told her no immediately, but she argued on about how the baby would be better off with us. My head was about to explode and then she threw in her ace. She reminded me that I grew up without a father and how could I subject my child to that fate. Only when I couldn't take it anymore did I say I would think about it." He turned and pinned his sister with his one good eye. "I never for a second was serious. I just knew that would get her to stop. And it did. Obviously, she went behind my back. I never would have thought she would do something like this, but I guess I don't really know her as well as I thought I did. Tell Erin not to worry, I will straighten this out Jamie. As I said before, I am not now nor ever going to take any legal action." His last words left upon an exhausted breath. "I'm sorry."

Mystery solved.

Jamie's stony expression remained as she stood. Her back popped, but barely a twitch showed on her face. She was just about at the end, her body being drained by the roller coaster ride of the past hours. She just couldn't muster up much more emotion of any kind. "I'm sorry all of this happened too," she said. "But it's not your fault. I don't blame you." He gave a small nod of understanding. Their relationship had been salvaged it seemed, but not totally unscathed. He was hopeful that given time and a little work it would mend. Jamie moved toward the door. "I need to get back to Erin before she wakes up." Her hand twisted the knob and she looked at her brother again. "You'll always be welcomed in my home Jeremy, but Rachel won't." He had no reaction. Jamie hesitated another moment before suggesting, "Maybe you should come back to the clinic with me and have Ann take a look at your eye."

"No, it'll be okay; it's just a black eye. You've got a hell of a punch...for a girl."

Jamie cracked a tiny, weary smile, which Jeremy matched. Another sign that they were going to be all right.

\* \* \*

Rain splashed softly against the smooth pane of glass. The streaks, trailing down the window, reminded Jamie of all the tears that had been shed on this evening. The drops had begun to fall just as she was leaving Jeremy's apartment building and had followed her all the way back to the clinic. And they still continued three hours later. It was now after ten and Jamie was exhausted, but too much so to even sleep. She sat in the dark, watching the water patterns painting the glass with colorless, but shimmering patterns. Every so often her eyes would drift to the precious figure in the bed, watching for any twitch of discomfort. But Erin slept on peacefully, thanks to the sedative Dr. Carson had administered. Erin had been nearly hysterical when Ann had called Jamie back to the exam room. That's when Jamie had learned what caused the dangerous fainting

episode. But no words, no matter how reassuring, was going to calm Erin's panic attack. Ann had assured Jamie that a single dose of the tranquilizer was safe for Erin's condition, but Jamie was determined to finally be able to quell Erin's fears when the drugs would finally wear off.

A single finger trailed down the cool glass, mindlessly chasing the wind blown rain. After five and a half trips, Jamie stopped and some serious thoughts settled in. The situation could have been so much worse, Jamie realized. She could have lost her entire family. But even though things were working out positively, it didn't diminish the pain that they all had felt and the damage that had been done.

But they would move forward.

Still, Jamie could have even lost her brother, lost his presence in her life. His possible betrayal had hurt almost as much as the threat to her immediate family. Now, she realized there was only one reason for that...she loved him. Her cautious self had taken the big risk and had let him in all the way. He now shared that place in her heart that before was reserved exclusively for her deceased twin sibling. But now it has expanded to accept both equally. Jeremy was the only other person in the world that shared her blood and heritage. And that was important to her. And thanks to her brother's generosity, soon he would no longer be her only blood relative.

With that thought she glanced to the bed and specifically to the bulge under the blanket. She gave a prayer of thanks that the life inside still thrived. She also repeated her promise of lifelong protection and devotion. Her love was something that needed no specific declaration; it was there with every breath from the first second and would be there until her last moment on earth. Erin once said that a mother doesn't need time to fall in love with their child. That kind of love is born in an instant, no matter how the child comes into your life.

From time to time Jamie still gave herself a little mental slap that she almost didn't get to experience all of this love. She had resisted anyone's love, due to the events that had shaped her early life. But Erin's patience, gentle persistence and courage had literally changed her life, had given her a life. With Erin, came a built in family: mother in law, father in law, sister in law, niece and nephew. And Jamie had come to love them all. But without Erin's guidance, Jamie wouldn't have a brother, she wouldn't have allowed it. A night like this only made her appreciate everything she had all the more and to anticipate an even better future.

A barely discernable whimper slipped from Erin's lips. But to Jamie it was a shout in the silence. She leapt the short distance to the bedside and soothed her wife's increasing distress with caresses and soft words. The green eyes fluttered open and for a few seconds all was calm, but then just as quickly the fright flew into those eyes and distorted her features. Erin clutched her middle, not in pain, but just to make sure it was still there.

Jamie quickly eased the desperate grip. "It's all right!" she said. "It's all right! Everything's okay."

"But Jeremy..."

"Honey, please calm down," Jamie besieged. "I promise you everything is going to be all right."

The fear still lingered. "You trust me, don't you? Don't you?" she asked again, hoping the hesitation was just an after effect of the sedative.

"Of course," Erin said sluggishly. The rancher was softly ruffling the golden bangs on Erin's forehead, quickly chasing away the stark panic. "Of course I do Jamie," she said stronger as she studied her wife's face. Those compassionate eyes. That reassuring smile. The incredible love. Her hero. "I do trust you...with our lives. But how..."

"This whole situation with Jeremy has been a misunderstanding. He is not going to sue for custody."

Erin sighed and smiled. "He's not?"

The dark head supplemented the answer with a firm shake. "No. I'll explain it all tomorrow, but right now I want you to sleep. I'm not going to leave your side." Jamie kissed her tenderly.

Erin fought the lethargy and watched Jamie a while longer. "You're in pain," she stated with concern. "What's wrong?"

Jamie, of course tried to brush it off. "I'm fine, sweetheart."

"I can see the muscles in your jaw clenching. It's your back, isn't it? What happened, and please tell me the truth?"

Jamie wouldn't lie. She finally relented, not wanting to cause Erin any further worry. "I had to carry you to the car when I found you passed out." Jamie shrugged and averted her eyes in embarrassment at the next admission. "I...ah also got into a little fight with Jeremy." She looked back into the tired eyes, but there was no disappointment, just an odd understanding and near numbness. "I hit first and asked questions later," Jamie finished.

The blonde head bobbed. "But you'll explain it all tomorrow."

Jamie gave a faint chuckle. "Yeah, I will. Just sleep now. It'll all be better in the morning. I'll be right here all night. I'll always be right here, because I love you."

Erin's eyes finally fell closed as she mumbled, "Love you too."

Jamie held her place as sentry of the night. And of the life that made hers worth living.

Continued.

## ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

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I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

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### Chapter 14

One week later and Erin was on the last day of her strict bed rest. Actually, no matter how hard, she would have done whatever the doctor asked for the sake of a continued healthy pregnancy. The confinement had been relatively painless due to her very supportive spouse. Jamie had stayed home with her for each of those seven days. She didn't worry a bit about her business; Jamie trusted her ranch foreman implicitly and even if there had been a problem all he had to do was pick up the phone and she could be at the barn in five minutes. But no such call ever came. Instead, Jamie spent the time doting on her wife. She made sure Erin got plenty of sleep and she saw to it that her wife had three nourishing meals a day. When Erin was awake, they spent the time watching movies, playing games and doing crossword and jigsaw puzzles. They also had long, quiet talks about everything from future family vacations to furnishing their new home. They both enjoyed these times the most, no matter what the topic and even though it didn't seem possible, their bond became stronger and their love even deeper as every day brought them closer to having the family they craved.

By way of a well placed kiss, actually three or four...or maybe more, she had lost count, Erin had coned her way onto the plush recliner in the den. There was a low, flaming fire across the room, warming the outside chill of the gray, misty morning. An empty cup sat on the table next to her chair; it still held the aroma of the peach tea Erin had finished some time ago. She sighed contentedly as she turned the page of the engaging mystery novel she was reading. The two dogs quietly flanked the chair, performing the stealthy guard duty their dark haired human had asked of them.

That particular human was in the kitchen cutting up vegetables for a simple, but healthy salad for lunch. The oven door was opened and after a quick check on the warming breadsticks, shut tight once again. The doorbell rang. "Don't even think about it," Jamie called out to the den as she turned off the heat.

Erin shook her head, gave a tiny, half grin and finished the last paragraph on the page. Just minutes later she heard voices heading in her direction and she closed the book and set it aside in anticipation of welcoming their guest. Jamie appeared in the doorway first followed, not so closely by the visitor. Erin smiled warmly when she finally saw the handsome, but still slightly bruised face. "Jeremy, it's good to see you," she said. "Come in and have a seat."

He did, barely able to look Erin in the eye. "I...I don't know what to say, accept I'm sorry. I wasn't sure I should even come here yet, but I needed to do this...to see if you were all right."

"I'm fine." Erin rubbed her swollen middle. "We're fine."

He momentarily closed his eyes in relief and prayer. "Good. I don't know what I would have done..." He couldn't even finish the horrible thought.

"Jeremy, I know Jamie told you this, but it wasn't your fault. You have to believe that and forgive yourself."

"I know that can be hard," Jamie said. She'd spent half of her life wallowing in guilt over some horrifying events, even though no one else placed the blame on her shoulders. She surely didn't want to see her brother head down that painful path. "But you couldn't control Rachel's actions," she continued. "This whole incident is in the past for us. Now we all have to look to the future." She reached over, took her spouse's hand and smiled. "Erin showed me how to do that."

Jeremy watched the loving gesture, feeling both happy and sad. "I am trying," he sighed. "But my future is looking kind of lonely right now."

The room grew uncomfortably silent for a time and Sky decided to take a break and welcome her brother's human. The dog reveled in his ongoing attention as Jamie cautiously asked the looming question. "Jeremy, I know you have to do what is best for you, but are you sure you can live with that decision?"

He nodded sadly. "I had to end it; that wasn't the only thing she lied about. When I confronted

Rachel, she admitted that she lied to me when she said she could never have a baby. She's perfectly healthy; she said she's just too scared to ever give birth." Jeremy jumped up and shoved his hands deep into the pockets of his jeans. His anger and pain propelled him to the window where he saw nothing of the gloomy view. "If she had only explained that, I would have understood. We could have worked through it together, but she tried to take the easy way out." He turned back and glanced first to Erin and then to his sister. "And in doing that she hurt my family. And I hurt you by bringing her into your lives."

Erin reached out, beckoning the pained, young man. "Come here, Jeremy." She took his offered hand and placed it against her rounded belly. He felt a powerful thump against his palm and his blue eyes went wide. "If you hadn't come into our lives," she said, "we wouldn't have this miracle." She brought Jamie's hand to her other side. "We all played a part in this miracle. There will be no regrets. The past is the past. Everything has to be forgiven before we can have a future."

He felt another amazing kick. *My child*. He quickly realized though, that that was the first and the last time he could ever have that thought about this baby. And he was content with that. His chance to be a father would come one day. "Okay," he said. "No more guilt. But is there anything I can do for you, either of you?"

Jamie moved a few steps forward, bringing her face to face with her brother. "Yes there is," she said. "Be the best damn uncle you can be." She hugged him. "And stay for lunch."

They all had a good laugh, tinged with just the hint of a happy tear or two. And Jamie showed off her culinary mastery of the tossed salad.

\* \* \*

Erin burrowed into the thick, soft pillow under her head as the silliness playing in her head faded to black. Her waking senses barely registered the change from ebony night to the soft, pre-dawn glow seeping in the windows. She was alone in the bed; this she knew for certain...at least the only one currently breathing air.

Yawn.

Stretch.

Snap.

Crack.

Pop. Her current skeletal condition was a chiropractor's dream.

Another snuggle against satin. Quiet once again.

Soundless and blissful, Erin was almost lulled back to slumber, but her live in had other ideas.

*Yes, I'll wake up now*, she thought with a bit of a grump. *If I have to*. The protest, however, died away as something scarcely, but pleasantly tickled her nose. *Mmmm, coffee and...ummm, cinnamon. Yum!* Erin knew there were eyes were fixed upon her, seeing her inside and out, good and bad, past and present. She blinked four or five times, waking at last to see the radiant sapphires focused directly at her. "Morning," she mumbled, her mouth a bit dry from her long sleep.

"Good morning," Jamie returned as she continued kneeling next to the bed.

Erin moved her head just a touch and noticed a glint on Jamie's cheek. "You're crying sweetheart. What's wrong?"

The rancher brushed across her face and stared at her damp fingers with bewilderment. "I didn't even realize I was," she muttered. Her gaze flicked to the worried face. "No honey, nothing's wrong." Jamie smoothed out the wrinkled brow with her thumb and flattened some wild, but silky strands of golden hair. "I was just watching you...and seeing how beautiful you are and how much I love you...it just gets overwhelming sometimes."

"Oh Jamie, that is so sweet." Erin carefully wiped away the remaining tears, kissing her own fingertips and the precious gesture of love. "Is that my first anniversary present of the day?" she teasingly asked.

"First of many." Jamie kissed her lightly on the lips. "Happy Anniversary."

Erin smiled brilliantly. "Happy Anniversary. But what are you doing up? I thought we were going to sleep in."

Jamie nodded in the direction of the kitchen. "Well...I was..."

"Oh no, I'm making you breakfast in bed."

"But I got some pastries yesterday."

"Well, that sounds good. We'll have those too." Erin pushed away the covers and struggled for just a second to sit up. She didn't miss the look. "I can do this honey. Anne gave me the all clear."

"As long as you stay off your feet as much as possible," Jamie reminded her.

"And I will. I can have breakfast made in twenty minutes and then I will be right back here where we will, decadently, feed one another." A couple of extra hands helped Erin to her feet and to gain her balance. She wrapped her arms around Jamie's neck, her belly leaving a fair amount of space between them. But with another tiny move they met in the middle and kissed leisurely as Erin continued their day's itinerary between the passionate joining of lips. "Then I will rest until we have our picnic this afternoon, down by the lake, in front of our new house."



"And then I am making you a romantic dinner." The dark head cocked, doubtfully. "At least I'll do my best."

Erin rested her hands on Jamie's sides, giving them a little tickle. "I have total faith in you."

Jamie's heart swelled. "I know."

\* \* \*

By high noon, Erin and Jamie were seated on a blanket, at the top of a small hill, under a towering tree, its partially covered branches providing them some shade and a visually stunning show of dancing shadows. Mother Nature had offered up a beautiful October day for their first anniversary. The sun's rays flashed like a thousand tiny diamonds on the water's surface below. A moderate, cool breeze carried clean woodland scents to the picnickers and serenaded the surrounding meadow with subtle melodies from the swaying reeds at the water's edge.

They were leisurely munching on various saucy poultry parts and pasta salad, and chasing down the delicious food with ice cold milk. Erin was looking totally adorable in her comfortable and casual jean overalls. A pumpkin colored turtleneck completed her fall ensemble. Jamie had donned her usual jeans, although in black this time, and finishing up her monochromatic look was a raven hued t-shirt, the long sleeves pushed up to her elbows.

Once their appetites were sated, the rancher offered herself as a backrest for her very pregnant wife. Snuggled between Jamie's slim, but strong legs, Erin drew two long arms around her and settled them just above the active swell. A chin rested on her shoulder and they quietly watched the ducks playing on the pond. Occasionally, Jamie would whisper endearments, promises and secrets into the semi ticklish ear. Erin would giggle. Then she'd offer her own thoughts and feelings, her voice sometimes stumbling with emotion. It could have been hours or just minutes or even days, but time didn't matter as they sat there making love in their own, very special way.

An urgent, energetic chattering suddenly brought their glance skyward. High above them two squirrels scrambled around the tree trunk in a frantic game. A large acorn was firmly clenched in the jaws of the chased, but after several dizzying rounds it jumped to the ground and scurried off to the woods in a flash of fur. The pursuer, however, did not follow. He...or she suddenly halted its pursuit of nutty delights in favor of studying the two humans perched at the bottom of its home.

Three sets of eyes exchanged curious stares.

"What do you suppose he's thinking?" Erin finally whispered.

"Don't know. Probably smells the food." As she spoke, Jamie slowly snaked an arm into their picnic basket and retrieved a cracker. With snail like movement, she lifted the tidbit high above her head. Held between two fingers, she wiggled it enticingly. The small animal eyed the golden round object and inched down the trunk, stopping well away from the prize. Jamie stilled the movements and four powerfully clawed feet advanced a little more, but the hunger warred with

the danger instinct and it stopped again, still far from the morsel. After three more false starts, Jamie's patience finally paid off as the squirrel threw caution to the wind, snatched up the cracker and dashed off. Erin and Jamie laughed out loud as they watched the creature retreat to a high branch and using its bushy tail as a balance, it sat on its haunches, took the food in tiny front paws and quickly nibbled the snack as crumbs rained down on the generous benefactors. Jamie offered three more crackers before the squirrel was full and ran off into the woods to resume stocking its winter pantry.

"You feel like going for a little walk?" Jamie asked. "There's something I want to show you."

"I feel fine. Let's go!" Erin's enthusiasm was dampened just a little when gravity and her current bulk conspired to keep her glued to the ground.

Jamie smiled warmly and carefully helped her family to a standing position. Arm in arm they strolled the short distance over to their new house. The stone covered, two story structure was complete on the outside. A large porch, whose roof was supported by matching stone columns, greeted its owners and future visitors. It had been quite a few weeks since Erin had been to check on the progress and she was pleasantly surprised to find every room now separated by complete walls instead of just wood studs. Each room's color scheme had already been chosen, but the paint had yet to be applied. Light fixtures, still packed in boxes and plastic wrapped moldings were stacked in the entryway. There was still only a basic sub-floor under foot, but that would soon be covered with selections of hardwoods, stone and carpet throughout the house.

They slowly climbed the slightly curved, split staircase, taking a right turn down a long hallway. There were two bedrooms without doors and in the same half completed state as the downstairs rooms. Next was what would be a bathroom as soon as the actual bathtub was installed. At the end of the hall, through the double door frame, Erin saw into the master bedroom and she thought that's where they were headed, but Jamie took her hand and they stopped in front of the only closed door in the house. "Close your eyes," Jamie instructed. Erin knew this was to be the nursery. She heard the door open and grinned with confused anticipation. Jamie pushed aside the sheet of heavy plastic and guided her wife inside. "Okay, open your eyes."

The breath caught in Erin's lungs as she did a full turn, taking in the completely finished room. A lush, light honey colored carpet, perfect for sensitive baby feet, covered the floor of the large area. Three walls were painted a bright and playful creamy tangerine color. The fourth wall was left curiously bare. A bank of three, large recessed windows allowed a wash of sunlight into the room. Below them, the window seat she had requested for story time. Erin hugged Jamie. "Oh honey, it's perfect, better than I had imagined. I love the color. But I don't understand..."

"I made sure they completed this room first so you can work on the furniture and the finishing touches. I know you've been itching to unpack all those boxes of baby clothes and toys and the lotions, shampoos..."

"I get the point and yes I guess I am. But you do want to help me with that, don't you?"

"Of course! This is for us to do together. I'm not going to let you have all the fun. We'll work on

this on the weekends. All of the really dirty and dusty work is done in the rest of the house, so with the plastic barrier and keeping the door shut, I figured it would stay pretty clean. I'll have everything steam cleaned before your due date just to be sure. Plus the air purifier is already running. I think it will be fine."

Erin grinned and swung their joined hands with childlike glee. "You thought of everything huh?"

"I tried." Jamie paused, staring into the entrancing, spring green eyes. But before she lost herself completely, Jamie pulled her gaze away and toward the empty wall. "I bet you are wondering what's going on with that." She walked them over to take a seat on the window bench. "I know this is something we never discussed...but I already spoke to your mother and if you agree, I thought she could paint a mural."

Erin considered for just a second. "I think it's a great idea."

Jamie smiled with a tiny sigh of relief. "Thank you." She kissed the blond crown. "I'm sure the three of us can come up with something imaginative and stimulating."

*Ah, she did learn something from those books,* Erin thought. She watched as Jamie went silent, staring at the blank wall, but obviously seeing something else. Erin eased her head onto Jamie's shoulder. "There is another reason you want a mural, isn't there?"

The rancher took a deep breath. "Yeah."

Erin sensed the apprehension. "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"No, I do. It's just... We had a mural in our childhood room. A friend of my Mom's was an artist and she did it one summer. It was sort of a storybook setting and she wanted to put us in the picture, so Jordan and I each got to choose what we would be doing."

"Let me guess," Erin said, "You wanted to be riding a horse."

Jamie chuckled deeply. "Oh, you know me so well. Yeah, I got to ride a black, shiny coated steed."

Erin ran a hand down Jamie's arm as she asked about Jordan.

Jamie remembered the visual and wondered if that brief wave of pain and loss that brushed her heart would ever leave. "Jordan said she wanted to be an angel. Daddy called her that sometimes. So, up in the corner she sat on a cloud with her sil...silver wings. Just a few months later... It was almost like she knew." Erin continued her comforting caress as Jamie quickly whisked away a tear. "You know, she's always in my thoughts, but I've really been thinking a lot about her lately. I don't know why."

Erin brought Jamie's hand to her middle. "This is why."

Jamie rubbed her thumb across the denim, savoring the movement beneath and silently agreed.

\* \* \*

Jamie was successful in preparing their evening meal. With the help of a slightly frantic phone call to their friends Anne and Leah, she recreated, as close as possible at least, a fondue meal they had had on their honeymoon. They dressed in their finest clothes and dined by candlelight, each set of eyes never straying far from the other as they chatted leisurely. After the fine food, they toasted each other with sparkling cider and exchanged gifts.

Jamie presented her wife of one year with a European, handcrafted stuffed bear, reminiscent of the ones they saw on their honeymoon. This one had pitch black fur and was dressed in a cowboy hat and boots. A tiny, stuffed horse was clutched in one paw and stuck to the other, with the help of a little Velcro, was a small, square box wrapped in shiny red paper. Inside, was a beautiful Opal necklace, set in platinum. It just so happened to match the set of earrings Erin had received on her birthday earlier in the month. That jewelry was also presented on an adorable stuffed bear, which was fair furred, had on wire rimmed glasses and held an old fashioned quill in one paw and a scroll in the other, paying homage to the blonde's talent.

Jamie was totally surprised and definitely thrilled when she was presented with tickets for an Alaskan cruise, although the exact date was yet to be determined due to the impending birth. Over the summer they had watched a travel program on television about the Alaskan wilderness. Jamie had been captivated and off-handedly expressed a desire to visit. Actually, her exact words were, "Wow! I have got to see that in person some day." Erin started her research the very next morning.

After a short, impromptu dance the couple moved to the bedroom, where Jamie set to work lighting several tall, scented candles. After turning off the bedside lamps, she reached for the first button on Erin's plum colored, silk blouse. "I have loved every minute of this day," she said, "but I couldn't wait to have you in my arms, naked and awe inspiring, but first..."

A full body massage started off the final hour of the night. Keeping the task medicinal, however, was slightly difficult since the masseuse was equally as naked as the patient. Dousing her hands with a lightly scented lotion, Jamie started at the bottom with all ten finely shaped toes. Very responsive to the relaxing treatment, Erin closed her eyes and began a soft, contented humming. Gently manipulating each petite digit, Jamie enjoyed the lazy grin that floated over the blonde's face. Soon, the aching arch of each foot began to melt under the dark haired woman's determined ministrations. All around each leg, long fingers traveled up and over hips and a behind, just slightly more padded and even more alluring than before. Arms and hands met the same care, ending with a kiss to each palm. "Turn to your side," the velvety voice said. Jamie then spent a long time on the always bothersome back, digging deeply to release the ever present knots. And if the moans and pleasant whimpers were any indication, she was doing a five star job. Jamie kept her touches firm, but tender and strictly soothing until she was sure that every over taxed muscle in Erin's body was loose and relaxed. Only then did her movements become more sensual as she peppered kisses along the back of Erin's thigh as she easily maneuvered a pillow between her lover's legs. The kisses lingered across the shapely butt, before slowly trailing up the silky

skin along her spine, the slight taste of citrus pleasing to her tongue. Jamie eased her long frame onto the bed, curling in behind Erin, where full skin to skin contact completely ignited the previously restrained passions. Pale hair was gracefully swept aside, allowing access to pulse points and that particularly sweet spot at the back of her neck. Licks, nips and whispered words as Jamie kissed her way across a creamy expanse of shoulder, stopping to peer over with a heated gaze. The candlelight cast swaying silhouettes across Erin's pristine, alabaster skin and Jamie watched with lidded eyes as she cradled a heavy breast, gently thumbing a plump and highly sensitive nipple. She nuzzled the ear beneath her lips and sighed heavily. "Oh my beautiful Erin. More of you, less of you, I hope you understand that it's all perfect to me. I want you all the time, every time. You are the only woman in the world that can make me feel this way."

Erin reached up and gently grabbed Jamie's wrist, happily trapping the hand between the engorged glands. She then reached back and pulled Jamie even closer, needing to feel the twin points against her back with every expanded breath. "And I can only feel this way for you," Erin panted. "I love you. I need you. I am bound to you, not just in vows. You are my life."

Jamie resumed her attention to the soft, voluptuous body. "God I love your voice and your poetic soul. Everything about you drives me wild." Every touch was languid, but intimate, intense in emotion if not actions as fingertips grazed well acquainted paths along places generally hidden from view in the daylight, making the darkness desired and blessed. Jamie prolonged the exquisite torment until she heard the groaned plea.

"Please."

Jamie was well acquainted with the simple request and she complied with a slightly naughty and knowing grin. With more declarations of love she slipped inside, touching her wife's soul as well as her body. The quaking muscles pressed against hers guided Jamie's gentle, but unwavering actions.

Testament to her rising pleasure, Erin gripped the sage colored, satin sheets and great gasps of air nearly muted the moaning exclamations leaving her lips. And when she finally reached her peak, it was her wife's name that rang out in tones of ultimate delight.

Oh the taste of love...as sweet as the world's finest confections...as intoxicating as the most potent of liquors...smooth as liquid silk.

Jamie, however, was not satisfied with just a sampling. A quick move of her sinewy, highly aroused body and she drank her fill from the source, bringing one more small shiver of bliss.

Another shift and they were face to face, smiling, trading kisses and breaths of apples and laughter.

Midnight drew near and the official end of a first anniversary, but their love and passion needed no time markers. From the first day they met, till they meet again in heaven and beyond, Erin and Jamie love and live for each other with an unrivaled devotion.

\* \* \*

The phone rang. The exhausted lovers made no move to answer it, remaining entwined in each others arms, in a dreamy haze, just about to drift off to sleep. It must have been a little after one in the morning, Jamie guessed. She had glanced at the clock just after her last, incredible orgasm and it was just before the hour.

A man's excited voice began the message. "Hi ladies, it's your favorite brother-in-law. I know you probably won't get this until morning, but my wife wouldn't wait to tell you the news. Your new, bald headed, but healthy nephew was born about half an hour ago. He's a little porker at nine and a half pounds, but he's beautiful. I guess we'll hear from you in the morning. Goodnight."

Two sleepy smiles in the darkness.

Sweet dreams until morning.

Continued.

Colleen's Scrolls  
Main Page

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## ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

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Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

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## **Chapter 15**

Jamie spotted a parking area for expectant mothers in the hospital lot. She pulled the car into a slot near the main entrance and rounded the front of the vehicle to help Erin. After retrieving a vase of flowers, a stuffed animal for Caitlin, a card game for Conner and a present for the new baby, from the back seat, they headed in the front door and up to the maternity floor. They had left home very early, on the way to Los Angeles, but it still took them a bit longer to make the normally two hour trip because of a breakfast stop and two more bathroom breaks along the way, due to the extra poundage currently sitting on Erin's bladder. But it was still just before noon and they had already decided to stay the night at Erin's parents, so they had the rest of the day to visit with the family.

Erin rounded the corner, carrying only the baby present; it was all her protective spouse would burden her with. They found room 341 and the blonde stepped slowly through the door so she wouldn't startle anyone. "Looks like we got the right place," she said with a grin.

Bridget smiled back from the bed. "Yeah, come on in sis."

The kids had been watching cartoons on the small television attached to the ceiling, but they quickly abandoned it. "Aunt Erin, Aunt Jamie!" they both yelled and ran to hug their favorite relatives.

Erin set her package down on a nearby table just in time, before she was tackled by the two excited youngsters. Her hugs were abbreviated and the ever blunt Caitlin pointed out, "You're still fat. Haven't you had your baby yet?"

Erin took the observation in stride. "No, honey, not yet."

The older and wiser brother reminded his little sister. "Remember what Dad said, you don't call pregnant women fat. It's rude."

Caitlin tossed back her blonde curls and looked up at Erin. "Sorry."

"That's okay sweetie." Jamie took that moment to give the children their gifts and Erin went to see her sister and new nephew. The not so tiny tot was asleep, of course, since he wasn't eating. Wrapped in a comfy cocoon of blankets, his face was the only thing visible. Erin ran a finger along a puffy cheek and stated her opinion. "He's adorable." Jamie stepped up beside Erin,

wrapped an arm around her shoulder and agreed with the assessment.

"Got room for one more in here?"

All eyes turned to the door, where a cheerful chorus of 'Mom' and 'Grandma' rang out. Danielle had already been there first thing in the morning and was now back for a second time to see her expanding family. There was another round of hugs and kisses before Erin asked about her dad.

"He picked a fine time to be out of town on business, but he said he'd call this afternoon." Danielle placed her hand on her younger daughter's belly. "Look how big you've gotten," she exclaimed. "And get that grimace off your face Jamie Shea, before it freezes that way. My daughter knows I didn't mean it that way." She moved over to the bassinet and placed a kiss on the infant's forehead. "It just means she is going to have a big, beautiful, healthy baby, just like my grandson here." Her head snapped back up. "You still don't know if it's a boy or a girl, do you?"

Erin rolled her eyes before catching Jamie's gaze. "No Mom. We want it to be a surprise."

Jamie pulled up a chair for her wife as Brad returned from his walk, to yet more greetings. They were a very happy family today. He promised to take them all out to lunch, minus his wife and youngest of course, before whispering something to Bridget. She smiled, nodded and kissed him before addressing the family. Brad put the baby in her arms. "I suppose you're all wondering what this little guy's name is," he said. Nodding heads all around.

Bridget settled the baby with a little rocking as he began to wake. "Well, I want you to know that his big brother and big sister helped choose his first name."

Erin winked at her niece and nephew, who were standing at her side. A couple of wide grins showed the pride at their part in their new brother's life.

Bridget tipped the baby so his chubby face was visible to all of the family. "We'd like to officially introduce you to Matthew Jerin Nelson."

Everybody clapped...softly, before Bridget continued. "Jerin is a combination of the two people, who we hope will agree to be his godmothers, in addition to being his aunts."

Jamie and Erin clasped hands, the taller woman giving her acceptance, but her face clearly showing her surprise. Erin was already godmother to Caitlin and Conner, but she felt it was extra special being asked to share this responsibility with Jamie. They jointly accepted. "We would be honored."

\* \* \*

When the group returned from lunch, little Matthew was just finishing his meal. Jamie guided her wife to a chair at Bridget's bedside and Erin happily accepted the baby into her arms for a private moment with her nephew. She kissed his cheek and welcomed him to the world and to



the family with whispered promises. A few minutes later Jamie pulled up another chair to get an up close look at her new godson/nephew.

"Would you like to hold him Jamie?" his mother asked.

An instant of panic quickly softened to one of apologetic sadness. "I...I don't want to insult you, especially since you asked me to be godmother and I do love him, but um, I want the first baby I ever hold, to be ours."

Bridget smiled. "I understand Jamie. I know you'll be a wonderful godmother; you already are a wonderful aunt."

Erin's lips trembled once and then the emotional dam burst.

"Oh sweetheart, I didn't mean to make you cry." Jamie wiped away the big tears. "You're getting the baby all wet. Here, I'll hold him if you really want me to."

Erin gently pulled Matthew out of reach. "No, no I'm not mad." She sniffed and caressed Jamie's face. "I think that's one of the sweetest things I've ever heard. I can't wait to see you holding our baby for the very first time."

\* \* \*

Dry straw rustled noisily. A torn pants pocket flapped in the brisk breeze. Unblinking, blank eyes stared off into the dark, thick forest. A permanent smile painted the face with mirth...despite having a pole stuck up its backside. The merry, six foot scarecrow, three equally happy brothers and one decidedly more sinister looking one were hanging out in Erin and Jamie's backyard. Erin had been planning this day for over a year, but events, the most important one being her pregnancy had kept pushing back the date. This program was very dear to the author's heart and despite the unavoidable delays, Erin was very excited for it to begin. To kick off this children's horseback riding program, she had devised a day long celebration of riding, food, games and other fun activities. Since it was near the end of the month they had decided to go with a Halloween theme. She had only recently made the invitations and at 11:30 on this Saturday morning they were expecting fifteen disabled children, ages seven to sixteen and their families. In addition, another seven children and guardians were coming from a group home for special needs orphans. Just so there wouldn't be any problems later on or cause any disappointment to any child, Erin explained that she and Jamie were a lesbian couple. She was pleasantly surprised that there wasn't one objection.

Erin and Jamie recruited as many of their family and friends to help out as possible. A group of volunteers, seniors from a local high school, had arrived at seven a.m. to begin decorating and setting up the rented tables and chairs. Later, they would be riding buddies for the children. Soon there were ghosts and bats hanging from tree branches and fence posts. Pumpkins and carved jack-o-lanterns were scattered across the ground and on table tops. Jamie had borrowed an old buckboard from a neighbor. She draped it with spooky webbing, perched a life-size skeleton in the driver's seat and another one, wearing a cowboy hat and boots leaned against the big wagon

wheel. This would provide a backdrop for the professional storyteller they had hired. A few dozen bales of hay provided seating for an audience.

The ranch hands set about cleaning stalls and feeding the horses extra early, so they could relax and enjoy the festivities along with everyone else. Jamie had double checked all the tack the day before, for possible wear and tear. Safety was always upper most in her mind, but with these delicate lives it was extra important. Each child would wear a helmet when riding and no one would ride alone.

Erin was restricted from lifting and most other activities, so she stayed inside to prevent temptation, but she checked out the window from time to time during the morning, watching as the back yard filled up. About ten thirty she finally stepped outside to peruse the finished product. A big smile brightened her face and she got a hug from her spouse. "It's great honey," she told the rancher, adding a kiss to the embrace. "This is going to be so much fun."

"I think so too. I'm glad you thought of it." Hand in hand they walked around, looking at all the eerie details. "Everything out here is all set," Jamie said. "The horses are ready to do their job."

"And all the food is in the kitchen just waiting for the cooks to arrive."

As if on cue, a car pulled into the designated parking area and honked. The pair of backyard chefs, dressed in comfortable jeans and soft shirts, got out and headed toward the couple. Hugs were exchanged and Anne and Leah expressed their enthusiasm for the event. As did their baby boy, Tanner who ran to meet his four legged sister, Skye and buddy, Arte. Before long the three canines would be joined by three more, for a doggie reunion. "Emeril and Wolfgang reporting for duty," the doctor said.

Jamie snorted. "Okay Ms. Lagasse and Ms. Puck, your grills are up by the house. And the burgers and hot dogs are inside."

Within the next half hour all the helpers had arrived. Brad brought along his oldest child, leaving Bridget at home with the new baby. Caitlin was spending the day with friends from school. The brother in law, Chad Benson and Jamie's brother Jeremy would be lending their considerable muscles, helping the children on and off the horses. Jamie was going to oversee everything, but of course her specialty was handling the horses and also acting as a riding buddy.

Erin was the people person. When the guests started to arrive, she greeted them cheerfully and made the introductions to the rest of the crew. By noon, the children, some in wheelchairs and some aided by crutches, and their brothers and sisters were playing games and already having fun, filling the air with joyous laughter. The parents were scattered about at tables and benches, talking amongst themselves while keeping an eye on their children without being overprotective. The aroma of grilling food was enticing everybody's appetite.

\* \* \*

Erin was returning from a trip to the bathroom when she passed the food table, snatching a

handful of potato chips. She was washing the salty bits down with a sip of soda when a voiced purred in her ear. "Care to share?" Erin popped a large, barbeque flavored chip into Jamie's mouth, following it up with a very quick kiss.

A large, blue van rolled to a stop beside the other dozen or so parked cars. The driver turned to speak to the passengers, before stepping from the vehicle and looking around for their host.

Erin approached the woman, she assumed to be from the group home. "Mrs. Gibson?"

The fifty-something woman smiled. "Yes. Miss Casey?"

"It's so nice to meet you in person. Please call me Erin. This is my partner Jamie."

"It's wonderful to meet both of you. Thank you so much for arranging for us to be here; you have no idea how much this means to these children. With our current financial situation...well, they've been talking about this special trip all week."

Erin and Jamie waited as two other adults and the children began stepping from the van. One of the guardians stopped to give two boys and a girl some instructions in sign language. The last child, a girl no older than five, was lifted from the vehicle and set gently to the ground. Erin studied the dark haired child for just a second before a soft, but painful gasp burst from her suddenly tight throat. She recognized the signs, the blank, unfocused stare, the cautious movements and the clincher came when a small cane was placed into the girl's little hand and she swept it from side to side in front of her, checking for obstacles. Mrs. Gibson held onto her other hand and they stepped forward.

"Sarah, I want you to say hi to Miss Erin and Miss Jamie. They invited us here today."

She grinned brightly, with just a hint of shyness. "Hello."

Erin was still a little emotional, but Jamie was right by her side, supporting her with an arm and a little hug. "Hello Sarah," Jamie said.

Erin struggled to swallow the lump, but her strong will finally managed the task and she shook off the shock, insisting on happiness in her voice. She leaned forward a bit and swept aside a few deep hued curls. "Hi Sarah. I sure hope you're going to have fun today." The little smile widened, revealing an adorable dimple. "Are you hungry sweetie?" A quick nod. "Okay. Would you like to come with me and get a big, juicy hot dog?" Erin looked for permission from the care giver.

She hesitated only momentarily. "I think that would be fine. If that's what Sarah would like."

"Yes," she spoke clearly and enthusiastically. "Do you have ketchup?"

Erin took the girl's hand. "We sure do."

Jamie watched the two walk away, her mixed emotions tumbling momentarily before she smiled

and continued her hosting duties.

"Anne, can I have a hot dog...with ketchup for my new friend here?" Erin asked, once they arrived at the food table. "You like macaroni and cheese?" she asked Sarah.

Affirmative.

"Potato chips?"

Another yes.

Anne quickly filled the request. "You got it; one full plate coming right up. And who is this cutie?"

\* \* \*

More food and drink was munched, crunched and sipped. Games, organized and impromptu played out as the afternoon carried on. Three horses, in the mid-sized corral, patiently began carrying their passengers, giving the first timers an easy and safe ride. Each child was getting a twenty minute ride on this day to introduce them to this new activity. The length would increase on subsequent, individual visits.

An unexpected, but welcomed visitor came shuffling up to Erin with arms crossed and a pronounced frown on the otherwise attractive face.

"Katie," Erin said, gingerly hugging her younger cousin. "I'm glad to see you, but I thought you weren't going to be able to make it today."

A shoulder shrugged. "My plans fell through. We weren't really going to do anything exciting anyway."

A quiet moment passed as Erin studied her normally jubilant relative. "Do you feel alright right Katie? Are you sick?"

A huge sigh. "No, I'm not sick...physically anyway."

The author nodded. "You miss your folks."

A silent affirmation. "It's more than just that though. All my friends at school...there just...all they want to do any more is play around and do stupid things. That was okay last year...but now it just isn't fun for me anymore."

Erin smiled compassionately, tossed an arm over her cousin's shoulder and walked her over to get some food. "Well Katie, I think you're doing some maturing," she said, "really starting to think about life and your future."

"Had to happen sometime, huh?" Katie chuckled listlessly. She looked across the yard and saw the wave tossed in her direction. She signaled back to Jamie then turned to see the elated glow on Erin's face. She knew the one and only thing that could inspire that kind of complete heartfelt expression. Katie was envious. "Does growing up have to be so lonely though?"

"Of course it doesn't have to be. Chad's here."

"Oh. Didn't he tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"We decided not to see each other anymore...except as friends. He's a great guy, but we always knew it wasn't serious; we both saw other people."

"Well, what about those other guys, could any of them become serious?"

Katie answered immediately. "No." But she didn't elaborate.

\* \* \*

At about two, the slightly tired cooks were finally able to sit down to their own meals. They were joined for a second round by Brad and the blonde veterinarian, the two men giving their backs a time out. The foursome chatted about the day's activities and the generosity of their friends Erin and Jamie.

"Where's your boy at Brad?" Doctor Anne asked. "I haven't seen him since you arrived."

Nelson looked around and spotted his elusive offspring across the field, tossing a baseball with a young boy in a wheelchair. "Looks like he made a new friend," he said. "Those two have been together since lunch."

They continued to watch as the boys played. After a few minutes the kids were approached by the boy's mother and Chad was instantly mesmerized by the beautiful woman. She was about 5'7 and slender, but with definite female curves. Her coal colored, straight hair and copper tinted skin, boldly told of her native heritage. To the amusement of his friend's, Chad soon left the table without a word. His swift gate carried him across the grass to the trio and he gallantly introduced himself. After some incidental small talk they left the children to their game and moved to a secluded table for a much more personal conversation.

Minda Hale told Chad about growing up in the Navajo nation, leaving at eighteen to attend a university where she earned a teaching degree and where she met her future husband. She returned to Arizona and taught for two years before following her new spouse to California with his career. A year later she had given birth to a beautiful and healthy baby. The move was to have been a temporary one, but everything in her world had changed one rainy night. She explained. "Three years ago Scott and his father were in an automobile accident. My husband was killed instantly. Scott's legs were crushed in the wreckage and he was in the hospital for over

a year. He was only five. He's had four surgeries and there will be more as he continues to grow. Although he will never be completely out of the wheelchair, he can walk with forearm crutches for short periods of time, but it makes his legs ache. He's my pride and joy and I have devoted all my free time to making his life as happy as possible."

Chad looked to the youngster, who was giggling at something. "He seems to be a wonderful boy with a great attitude, despite everything he's been through."

Minda smiled at her son. "He gets depressed sometimes," she explained, "when he can't run around like his friends, but it never lasts long. He has a picture of his grandfather in his room and that inspires him. My father was a great rodeo rider. That was always Scott's ambition before the accident. He's crazy about horses and when I heard about this program I knew he'd love it." Working as a second grade teacher and a personal tutor supported them well, but wouldn't allow her to buy her son a horse of his own.

"Would you mind if I rode with him when it's his turn?" Chad asked.

She smiled at the tall man. "I think he would like that. And so would I."

\* \* \*

Erin returned from the house with a light blanket and covered Sarah, who had fallen asleep in a chair. It was only mid-afternoon and the little girl had had a busy day already, discovering some things for the very first time. Her new friend Erin had introduced her to a dog. Artemis was quite a patient subject, letting two tiny hands map out her body and stroke her golden, silky hair. The canine was rewarded when her big human showed this little human how to throw the orange tennis ball, which Artemis retrieved with a minimal amount of slobber. Sarah giggled loudly and joyously as she played with the dog for almost half an hour. Sarah also got a simple lesson in biology as she felt Erin's big, rounded tummy and the movement inside. Perched atop a big hay bale, Sarah had held the author's hand as they listened to some slightly spooky stories. Now tucked out, the girl slept on as Erin kept her warm and safe.

Erin joined Miss Gibson at the nearby picnic table, where the children's guardian once again praised Erin and her kindness and generosity. "Believe me," Erin said, "I'm having as much fun as they are. And I'd like to arrange a schedule for them to return every couple of weeks to go riding." They discussed a few more details before Erin's eyes drifted back to the sleeping child. "She's such a sweet little girl. Can you tell me a little of her story?"

"Sarah was orphaned when she was two. Her mother was a single parent and they lived in a dangerous neighborhood, because it was all she could afford. Late one night she went to a local convenience store; there was a robbery and she was killed. The mother didn't identify the father on the birth certificate and the state couldn't find any other relatives. Sarah came to us about a year ago. She had been in a few foster homes, but ultimately they didn't work out. As good as most foster parents are it's hard to find any who have the time to devote to a special needs child. Technically Sarah is blind, but she does have ten to fifteen percent vision. She can recognize very bright light and sometimes she can see blurry shapes, but nothing in the way of details."

Miss Gibson was called to help one of the other children, leaving Erin with her thoughts. Her silent questions were, of course, left unanswered, but they were many. Why? How? I wonder? Maybe?

"Miss Gibson?"

Erin didn't have much time to ponder the questions or possible answers before a sleepy, squeaky voice caught her attention. "She's nearby sweetie," Erin told Sarah as she moved to help her from the chair. "I'm here though. Did you have a nice nap?"

Still waking up, Sarah just nodded. Erin took both little hands in hers. "I think it's almost your turn to ride a horse; are you ready?" There was just a slight hesitation. "What's wrong honey; don't you want to ride a horse?"

"I do, but I'm a little..."

Erin hugged the tiny body. "It's all right if you're a little afraid sweetie. But I promise you it's really safe and really fun." She gave her a little tickle.

When the giggles subsided, Sarah asked. "Can you go with me?"

"I'm sorry Sarah, but I can't because I'm going to have a baby. But I know a very nice lady, someone I love very much, who would like to ride with you. She'll take very good care of you. Would that be okay?"

Another slight waver, but finally, "Okay."

\* \* \*

By six o'clock, every one of the invited guests was headed home after an extremely fun and satisfying day. Jamie instructed the ranch hand to give the horses, who had performed admirably, a special treat with their oats, after their brushing. She then placed a covered crate in the middle of the table where all the slightly fatigued helpers sat slumped in their chairs. "Now that all the kiddies have gone," Jamie said with a grin, "I thought you might like this." She uncovered the box full of dark, beer bottles buried in white ice, to a round of quiet cheers. Honoring her previous pledge, Jamie pulled out two bottles, of the root variety and passed one to her spouse, who accepted it with a weary smile. The seven adults toasted themselves and to a job well done. Jamie eased an arm around her unusually quiet partner as she listened to and studied her friends.

Katie sat at the far end of the table laughing. She seemed in much better spirits than when she had arrived. Jamie was glad there hadn't been a confrontation between Katie and Jeremy like in past family gatherings. She just couldn't understand the personality conflict between them. *Maybe they just avoided each other all day*, Jamie thought. Looking down to the opposite end of the long table, her brother was also smiling, and she was glad to see that. Jeremy finally seemed to have gotten hope back and was moving on after his broken engagement. Still very much in the

honeymoon phase, Anne and Leah were holding hands as they listened to Chad's story. He was being extremely animated as he regaled the group with a few jokes and a tale of some college antics. After one particularly embarrassing story, he had nearly everyone shedding tears with the laughter.

Nearly everyone.

Jamie gave her wife another sideways glance as she sipped her drink, after calming her own absurd mirth. But her eyes were not the only detectors in action. Sitting close together, Jamie felt the anxiety in Erin's body when they touched. She heard the barely audible sigh, which was laced with sadness. And Jamie had been watching. The corners of Erin's mouth lifted from time to time...but it wasn't the smile Jamie knew and loved. A blonde head nodded with a chuckle at the appropriate times. But still the sound didn't warm Jamie's heart like a genuine laugh usually did. In fact, no one else at the table probably even noticed Erin's somewhat passive reactions. But Jamie saw beneath the feigned merry mask. The jade eyed gaze swept away from the group now and then, seeing another face, thinking of a different laugh...worrying about another. Some spouses might attribute the mental distance to hormones and just brush it off, and even though now was not the time to investigate, Jamie would not ignore it. She would discover the problem, although she already suspected the cause, and she would do her very best to make things right.

Erin absently picked at a deep gouge in the well used, wooden table. A waxey, golden leaf landed in front of the author, catching her elusive attention. She picked it up, quietly examining its veined surface before releasing it again into the gentle gust that blew across the yard. Green eyes tracked it as the wind carried the foliage along its autumn journey. The rancher ran a hand down Erin's back, giving it a little scratch, then a more thorough rub. She leaned over and whispered, "I love you." Erin looked around and that quick reminder triggered a warm and completely loving expression, transforming her face and momentarily lifting her gloomy mood.

That was the smile that lit up Jamie's world. *Yeah...I'll make things right.*

Continued.

Colleen's Scrolls  
Main Page

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~ Blindsided ~  
by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead



characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way. Copyright 2003-2004

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

Or if you only want updates and special announcements please join [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens\\_Corner\\_Announcements/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens_Corner_Announcements/)

## Chapter 16

Jamie stepped from the bathroom after a relaxing, hot shower. She flipped the light off, sending the adjoining bedroom into total darkness. Her bare feet automatically headed for the lamp by the bed when her eyes caught sight of the window. More precisely the moonlight beaming through the window, which lusciously silhouetted her beautiful wife, where she stood staring into the night. Erin's pensive stance gave Jamie a start for just a second before she remembered the developing mood. Erin turned, bringing her protruding belly into sight. She ran a hand over the bulge and whispered some inaudible message. Jamie slowly moved across the room, joining her partner in the moonlight.

"Are you tired?" she asked, rubbing Erin's lower back and kissing her cheek.

The mother to be nuzzled the face next to hers. "Mmm, tired, but not sleepy," came the languid reply.

Jamie noted the hint of pre-occupation in her voice. "It was a good day," the rancher said. Erin agreed with a murmur. "I think everybody had fun, children and adults alike," Jamie added.

The author concurred again. "There sure were a lot of smiles and laughter." One particular smile filled Erin's memory.

"I think our friend Chad is smitten with little Scott's mother."

The blonde chuckled softly. "Yeah, I noticed."

"It's good for him. I know he's been lonely." Another mumbled agreement and Jamie continued her light massage as they stood in easy silence for the next little while. Finally, Jamie guided them to sit at the padded bench below the window. "I bet I can tell you what you've been thinking about all evening."

Erin cracked just a tiny grin. "Okay, amaze me," she said.

Jamie dramatically placed her hands on Erin and with squinted eyes pretended to peer inside the curious and intelligent mind. "You are thinking...umm...thinking about...about another woman." A blonde brow hiked. "Okay, a female," Jamie amended. "A young female about three feet tall with dark curls and the most adorable dimple when she smiles."

Erin nodded, a mixture of delight and sorrow shaping her features as she looked out the window again. A thick cloud mass had shaded the moon, throwing the night into deep darkness. She remembered the darkness. It was frightening. Lonely. "Oh Jamie, she was the sweetest thing. Did you see her playing with Arte?"

The rancher nodded. Silently she thought, *"Yeah, I saw her playing. I saw her touching your stomach and sitting with you during the stories. And eating with you. I saw that you spent nearly the whole day with her. And I saw the look in your eyes when you brought her over to the corral. And as I rode with her. I saw it all."*

A heavy sigh. "It's just not fair Jamie. She has no sight. She has no parents."

"I know honey," Jamie said, "she touched me too."

"I know her Jamie...I've been her. But even when I was blind, I had family with me. I had people who cared. There will be no miracle operation for her; she will be blind the rest of her life. She should not have to be alone also."

"Of course she shouldn't," Jamie agreed. "I've been her too, honey. I know how she's living, how alone she feels."

Remembering the stories of Jamie's childhood, after she lost her family, Erin felt the added pain. She caressed Jamie's cheek. The strain of sadness sounded in her voice. "I know."

The dark head nodded. "No child should be alone." Jamie pulled Erin in for a hug and they sat quietly, breathing and heartbeat in sync as they processed their thoughts and feelings. Jamie pulled back and brushed aside a few loose blonde hairs. "Should I amaze you with my physic ability some more?"

Erin smiled softly. "Sure."

Jamie took both of Erin's hands. "You are thinking that we could adopt her."

Erin sucked in a breath. "Your powers are astounding."

They were quiet again, just holding hands.

Jamie broke the silence, cautiously. "Okay, I'm not saying no, but let's talk about this. This is a very difficult and important decision and we need to make the right one. Sarah is a beautiful, sweet little girl and any parents would be very proud of her." Jamie studied Erin's eyes as the author waited for her to continue. The green orbs were at once soft with sincerity and intent with expectation. "I would assume that a child Sarah's age, and one facing her...challenges needs almost constant supervision." A nod of agreement. Jamie rubbed the soft swell of life and received a thump of a greeting. "In just a short while now, you...we are going to have our hands full." She paused. "Do you think that would really be fair to put Sarah into that situation...or us?"

Erin thought about it. Would it be too much? She knew they could easily hire a nanny to help out. But she also knew that it would ultimately frustrate her not be able to personally take care of everyone's needs. Someone would be left out. Young, vulnerable children with constant needs, a spouse, animals, a job; it would be too much. The realist in her pictured the inevitable struggles. Jamie and Erin both had an unending supply of love to give, but Sarah needed and deserved more time and attention than they would be able to provide. "Believe me," she spoke quietly, "my head knows all of that. My heart...is resisting every word." Erin closed her weary eyes tightly for a few very long moments. When she opened them again, she immediately caught the concerned stare of the warmest blue she'd ever seen. "But it will have to," she conceded. "I know it's in her best interest. And it wouldn't be an easy or comfortable situation...for any of us. But Sarah needs someone special to love her."

"Aw sweetheart, after today she has that." Jamie touched her forehead to Erin's and let the love pass between them. The calm silence gave them both the time for further reflection. Erin's heart was still hurting, no matter how logical the facts. She did not regret her pregnancy for even a second; it meant **everything** to her. The timing of her meeting little Sarah just could have been better. Jamie was able to accept the decision a little easier, although she still felt the sadness. But at the moment it hurt more to see her wife's pain. *Can I keep my promise and make it right?* "You know," she said with a hopeful lilt, "just because we might not be the right family to adopt her, doesn't mean we can't find the one who is."

Erin pulled back suddenly, jade eyes flashing...but was it resentment or approval. Jamie wasn't quite sure for those few tense seconds. But the resounding answer finally came when Erin placed a kiss on Jamie's lips that nearly removed the rancher's fillings. "That's brilliant!" Erin shouted. "I knew I loved you for more than just your gorgeous face and sexy body. Of course we can do this; we have lots of contacts. Mom has her friends at church and Dad knows people all over the world. We can do this, can't we? Sarah will have a family." A slight trace of sorrow glazed her expression once again. "I just hope her new parents will let me call her...maybe even visit sometimes. Even if I can't be her mother, I still want to be her friend."

"Honey, I'm sure you will know Sarah for a long time to come. And you will continue to be a

positive influence in her life."

"I hope so."

"I know so." Jamie gave her a quick kiss. "You are incredibly loving and kind hearted. Compassionate." A kiss. "Devoted and thoughtful." A kiss. "Persistent."

A double laugh.

Another kiss.

"Generous and gentle." A longer kiss and Jamie's train of thought diverted to a slightly more passionate track. "Enchanting. Irresistible. Beautiful." A much longer and slower kiss. "So beautiful. Do you know just how much I love you?"

Erin panted a few times. "Oh yes I do. I love you just as much. But will you still love me the same when you're covered in baby spit up, changing messy, stinky diapers and listening to hours of endless crying?"

With exaggeration, Jamie's nose wrinkled in mock odorous aversion and she tugged on an ear in future auditory distress. Erin giggled at her antics. And she smiled. Jamie's heart danced with joy. *Yes!* "I'm afraid not," she answered. "I'll love you more, because I always love you a little more every day."

\* \* \*

Erin was onto the task bright and early the next morning...well not too early; she did allow the sun and her parents to rise for the day before making the calls. Erin excitedly explained to her mother the story of the adorable little girl and her need of a family. She trusted her mom to pass on the urgency to Tim and all the other necessary parties.

Several hours later, when Erin had finally scratched off the last name on her list, she felt satisfied that she had done all she could do...for the moment anyway. Her thoughts then turned to Sarah and the other orphans at the children's home. She wanted to do more for all of them and jotted down some ideas, which included finding out more about their living arrangements to see if anything needed done to make improvements.

Erin glanced at the calendar on her desk. It was only the end of October. November was only two days away. "I'll make sure they have a great Thanksgiving dinner," she said. "And then Christmas. What can I do to give them a very special Christmas?" She thought seriously on that for the rest of the day. And for the next several days, until she had at least half a dozen plans to execute in the coming weeks.

Thanksgiving came and Erin and Jamie knew that they had everything in the world to be thankful for. They had their love, good health, good friends and a wonderful family, current and future. They were also thankful for each new day and since they were reunited after Jamie's

disappearance, tried never to take it for granted.

Just days after Thanksgiving, Erin and Jamie moved into their new home. Jamie and the hired movers actually did most of the physical moving. Erin did good to move her bulky body from the car up the stone stairs and into the new family room, where Jamie had placed her comfortable recliner. There she sat...and napped...and ate, and watched a movie while everything bustled around her. Most of the rest of the furniture stayed at the old house, where Chad was going to be moving into and adding his own veterinarian office. So even after everything was moved, the new house was still largely empty. Their master bedroom and the kitchen were the only fully furnished rooms. Other furniture was on order, but the rest would have to wait until long after Erin gave birth. The nursery was their only immediate concern. Erin had her furniture choices narrowed down to three styles and the bedding down to two. She promised Jamie that if she didn't make a final decision by Christmas they would draw the winners from a boot.

Heading into the final weeks of her pregnancy, Erin felt mostly content. One of the things that brought her any kind of sadness was knowing that after a month, Sarah was no closer to finding a family. Erin kept in touch with Miss. Gibson, from the children's home, and although there had been some inquiries, no one was seeking to adopt the precious little girl Erin had fallen in love with. But Erin would not give up hope. The author had been pleased to hear that two older boys were now being fostered and would probably go on to be adopted.

While Erin had been busy on her many plans, other people, her mother and sister to be exact, were busy with some plans of their own. A baby shower. It didn't make much sense to make the party a surprise since it would have to be at Erin's new house; it was just too uncomfortable for her to make the long drive to Los Angeles. But that was okay, Bridget and Danielle had arranged a much better surprise for Erin.

\* \* \*

It was the second Saturday in December. Jamie had taken Erin to the nearby town for breakfast and then to visit the children's home, while Bridget, Anne and Leah decorated the family room with equal amounts of pink and blue streamers, balloons and other banners. Oversized baby blocks, miniature rocking horses and even more balloons created an appropriately festive centerpiece on the large table that would hold the coming presents. Danielle was busy in the kitchen, preparing food and her special fruit punch for the mid afternoon celebration.

The guests of honor returned to the house a little before two o'clock. Jamie was helping her wife from the car when they heard another vehicle pull up behind them. Jamie turned and recognized her brother's car. For obvious reasons he had not been invited to the all female shower, so she was surprised to see him. She was even more astonished when she noticed his passenger. This particular young lady was to be a guest, but her chauffeur was totally unexpected. So was what happened next.

Erin finally got to her feet and glanced back to the other car. "What's Jer...?" The question was cut short as her jaw fell open. Jamie was also struck mute and goggle eyed at the sight inside the vehicle. After several seconds, the rancher struggled to kick start her brain and asked in a totally

dumbfounded tone, "Did you see what I just saw?"

Erin rubbed her tumbling belly. "If you just saw your brother kiss my cousin, then yes." She waved to the young woman who was now approaching them, carrying a brightly colored package.

Jamie acknowledged her brother, while mentally scratching her confused noggin. "But I thought they couldn't stand each other."

Her blonde wife giggled. "We'll talk later hon. Hi Katie." The smiling cousins hugged. "I guess you've got something to tell me," Erin said.

Katie's smile widened. "Oh yeah! But later; this is your afternoon."

\* \* \*

Before long, twelve of Erin and Jamie's family and friends, including Chad's girlfriend, Minda Hale, were chatting, laughing and getting a bit hungry. Or maybe it was just the expectant mother who was hungry. Everyone was conspiring to keep Erin out of the kitchen, causing her curiosity to soar, wondering just what kind of present they were hiding in there.

As the latest round of laughter subsided, Bridget addressed the small crowd. "Before we officially get this baby shower started, mother and I have a very special surprise. Close your eyes Sis."

Erin glanced at her spouse who gave a shrug; Jamie didn't seem to know what was going on either. A pair of green eyes closed and Erin took in a deep breath of anticipation.

"Mom, we're ready," Bridget called out.

A shuffle of feet across the new hardwood floor, the clearing of a throat and a familiar, but immediately unidentifiable aroma put Erin's senses on high alert. Suddenly, the hand across Erin's shoulder gave a loving squeeze and Jamie gave a happy, breathy chuckle.

Jamie gave the word and Erin blinked open her eyes to a most unexpected, but incredibly wonderful sight. A few tears sprang from those eyes as Erin sprang to her feet. Her spring was a little rusty, but Jamie gave a boost.

"Grandma!" Erin gave her beloved, Irish relative a long hug. And everyone applauded the touching reunion. "I can't believe you're here," she whispered.

"I wasn't going to miss the birth of your first child."

"You're staying for a while then?"

"Long enough to see this wee one's first smile...and maybe then some."

Erin hugged her again and then let loose with rapid fire questions. "How are you? How's everything back in Ireland? Did your gentleman friend come with you? You look great."

Kathleen let out a hearty laugh. "We will have a long visit tonight, darlin'. Right now I believe these nice folks would like your time."

Three hours later, games had been played and food and cake enjoyed. The floor was littered with pastel shaded paper pieces and ribbons. On top of the table were piles of the cutest clothes, shoes, blankets and toys. The parents to be, properly praised each and every thoughtful gift and added their thanks to the giver.

A cry pierced the air from the monitor at Bridget's side. "I think my son needs a change," she said, as she grabbed for the green bag by her chair.

"Can we take care of him Bridget?" Erin asked, as she took her wife's hand and moved across the room.

"Umm, sure...be my guest." With a tiny grin, Bridget handed the necessary paraphernalia to Jamie, who gave it a glare of momentary panic.

Erin caught the look. "Come on scout, you need some real life practice." She pulled Jamie into the next room where Matthew had been sleeping in his portable crib. "Hang on buddy, help is here," Erin soothed as she performed a preliminary inspection. She turned to Jamie and smiled. "You're lucky; it's just a wet one."

The dark head shook uncertainly. "Are you sure I should do this by myself?"

"You have to do it sometime Jamie. Unless you expect me to change **every** diaper for two years."

"No, no I don't expect that. But he's not mine; what if I hurt him?"

"It's a diaper change Hon, not major surgery. I'll give you some pointers."

The hesitant rancher managed to get his one piece outfit unsnapped between his slightly flailing legs. His wailing had calmed to sobs and teary eyes as Aunt Erin spoke to him, telling him to go easy on his virgin diaper changer. The last tab was pulled free and Jamie went to pull away the wet covering.

"Aaaahhh."

Jamie stopped. "Oh right, the outdoor plumbing." She gave a running commentary as she continued. "Keep him covered. Take out a new diaper and unfold it." She took a second to orient it. "Turn it in the right direction. Backwards won't work too well. Lift the legs and slide it under." Jamie tossed aside the old diaper.

"Check for diaper rash," Erin suggested.

With a puzzled brow, Jamie quickly examined the delicate skin. "What does it look like?" she asked.

"It's red," Erin explained. "If it's there, you'll see it."

"Okay. All clear...I guess." With diaper secured, tight but not too tight, she refastened the legs of his dark red clothes.

"What do you think Matthew?" Erin asked, placing her ear close to the baby's mouth. She listened intently, nodding twice during the short, imaginary conversation. "Are you sure?" She paused as Jamie chuckled a bit. Their eyes remained locked. "Okay. I agree. Well," she announced, rising and snuggling up to her wife, "we have tabulated our votes and give you a score of nine and a half."

Jamie gave a suddenly confident, cocky, little grin. "Not bad for a first time, huh?"

Erin kissed her soundly. "Not bad at all since only one of your first times will ever get a perfect ten...plus extra bonus points." She gave a saucy wink and grabbed Jamie's perfect, denim covered behind.

"Hmmm, feeling frisky?" Jamie kept her tone neutral as she asked, not wanting to sound deprived.

"Thinking about it, yes. Wishing for it, yes." Erin let slip a huge sigh. "But feeling it...I'm afraid not. I'm sorry."

"You have nothing to apologize for. It's okay Honey. I won't melt if I go without for a while."

"But three months ago I was attacking you at every turn."

Jamie let out a low, deep chuckle. "Believe it or not, even that had it drawbacks. Don't get me wrong, I was lovin' every minute of it. But I was always exhausted. And there were a couple of mornings when I could not sit in the saddle." She grimaced, comically.

Erin laughed and then smiled lovingly. "I guess everything will be back to... No, it won't be normal again, will it?"

The rancher's hands came to rest on Erin's shoulders. "What is normal? It's true, things won't be the same as they were before, because it will no longer be just the two of us. We're gonna have to create a new normal."

Erin nodded and thoroughly enjoyed the impromptu massage she was receiving. "That feels so good."



"Look forward to even more of it tonight." A high pitch squeal broke their intimate moment. "I think someone wants more attention," Jamie astutely pointed out.

Erin wound up the musical mobile above his head and pulled a nearby chair beside the canvas crib. She sat down and began rubbing his belly, lulling him back to sleep within minutes. Jamie had quietly watched the tender scene, greatly anticipating many more in the future. When Matthew's eyes had slipped close in slumber once again, Erin moved to the window without a word and Jamie sensed a sudden sadness. She went to Erin's side, seeing the faint trail of tears on her face.

"Honey, what's wrong?" Jamie asked, wicking away the wetness with her thumb.

Erin smiled at her own silliness. "One of those pesky mood swings." Just recently, her soul was like a new sports car, racing from peace to chaos in seconds. She buried her face in Jamie's neck and took in the warmth and comfort as she thought about what she was feeling. She wasn't really sad; she had everything that really mattered to bring her happiness. She was a bit disappointed that her special little friend Sarah was still without parents. She just couldn't understand why no one wanted that precious little girl. But a smile always came to Erin's face when she talked with or visited the child.

Erin was never alone, yet somehow there was a spiraling kernel of something inside that she could only describe as loneliness. But that was ridiculous. Her spouse was wonderful, giving Erin all the necessary attention. But something was still... She didn't know what. It was so difficult for the author to understand this odd feeling. And she couldn't discuss it with Jamie, fearing that the rancher would feel guilty for failing to do something, since she was supposed to be Erin's complete support system. *What a frustrating hormonal smorgasbord*, she thought. Erin chuckled at her own word selections and was suddenly in a better mood once again.

She smiled and kissed Jamie's cheek. "This has been such a great day, hasn't it, with our wonderful, generous friends? And Grandma being here." Erin couldn't say she had a favorite relative... blood relative that is. She loved them all. But there was no denying her very special bond with her paternal grandmother. They were soulmates of a different kind and being so far apart all the time was distressing. She talked to her dear grandmother on the phone at least once a month. But it was never the same as being able to look into those eyes, eyes that despite their advanced age still danced and twinkled with glee and wisdom. And sometimes a bit of mischief. Erin planned on having a long conversation with her grand grandmother later in the evening. She had many questions to ask and much advice to seek. "It is just so fantastic having her here," Erin said. "Did you know she was coming?"

"No. Surprised me too. Why don't we ask her to stay here, at least for a while? I think you could use the company during the day."

The green eyes brightened. "That's a great idea Sweetheart! Thank you."

"For what?"

"Everything." Erin hugged her tightly. "Could you do something for me?"

"Name it."

"Would you go out and make my excuses; I'm kinda tired. I'm just gonna sit over here and take a little nap. I know the family will stay, but I'm thinking our friends are ready to leave."

Once Erin was on the plush, copper colored chaise, Jamie tossed a very soft throw over her, whispering, "I love you." After a tender kiss, she left the room and quietly closed the door, leaving the two sleeping souls in peace.

\* \* \*

Erin awoke an hour later to a dark, quiet room. The winter evening brought her a little chill and a little hunger. She rubbed her arms and got up find Matthew's crib empty. Opening the door, Erin heard voices in the family room and walked in to find her younger nephew having dinner and her mother removing the baby shower decorations.

"Hey sis, have a good nap?"

Erin yawned and massaged her lower back. "Any nap is good one lately," she said. "Where is Jamie?"

Danielle stuffed some crumpled wrapping paper into a trash bag. "She said she had some things to check on in the barn. Do you want to call her?" she asked, slightly alarmed.

"No; I just wondered where she was."

"Well, I was about to put together a casserole for dinner," said Danielle. "You have about an hour before it'll be ready."

"Okay." Erin paused a moment, thinking what to do. "Well...I'll be in the sun room."

Their new house consisted of five bedrooms on the second floor and a large, open play area between two of the bedrooms. Over the three car garage and accessible through the master bedroom and from the hall, was a large room divided into two sections. At the far end was a fitness area, which Erin planned to take full advantage of, after giving birth. Closer to the bedroom was a home theater, which, after the holidays, would house a large screen TV and plush, recliner seating for six. On the main floor, tucked into a back corner was a large and airy kitchen decorated in sunny yellow and sage green. A cozy breakfast nook and a sizeable, but relatively informal dining room took care of their eating needs. A spacious great room with a vaulted ceiling and exposed dark wood beams would host large family gatherings. And their family was growing larger by the month. A substantial, river rock fire place added to the rustic, yet charming feel of the room. Next to that was a smaller den that doubled as Jamie's home office. Of course it was predominately decorated with paintings and sculptures of horses and other old west memorabilia that she had collected through the years. Across the hall was a large

library, already well stacked with books of varied topics, many of them personally autographed by some of Erin's acquaintances. At the other end of the house was the lovely sunroom, its glass walls allowing an unobstructed view of the yet to be fully landscaped backyard. In the summer, a natural shaped, underground swimming pool with rockwork and a hidden slide would be installed. Jamie helped design the pool and was quite proud of it. Erin had decided to use the cheery, inspirational sunroom as her office. Her files were cleverly hidden beneath large blooming plants, leaving only her laptop computer on top of the small, glass topped desk in the corner.

Erin flipped on the light, momentarily watching the shadowy, mysterious trees along the back, swaying to a winter wind. She sat down at the desk and jotted down a few reminders on a yellow notepad. Scratching out a final sentence, she heard a knock on the door case.

"Are you busy?"

Erin smiled. "No, come on in." She walked across the room to the colorful, jungle print sofa. "Have a seat."

Katie couldn't keep the giddy expression from her face as she accepted the offer. "I guess you're a little curious why I was kissing Jeremy."

"Well, yes. But you don't have to talk about it if you're not ready."

The younger woman giggled. "After our little display this afternoon, it's no secret. Jeremy and I are dating."

"Okay. I guess it's a good thing...isn't it?"

"It's a great thing!" Her outburst startled them both. And they laughed. "Sorry. I'll start at the beginning. When we were here, just before Halloween, Jeremy and I talked. We discovered the reason we always had such...conflict. From the moment we met, there was an...attraction, at least a subconscious one. But we agreed it was more than that even. It's hard to put it into words, but it was like there was a pull...a connection between us. Does that make sense?"

Erin grinned fondly. "Perfect sense."

Katie studied the twinkle in her cousin's eyes. "You felt like that?" she asked. Still smiling, Erin merely nodded. "Wow!" The young, strawberry blonde paused to consider that revelation. She vaguely remembered her big sister saying something similar about her first meeting with her future husband. But Katie had been a clueless teenager at the time and had laughed it off. But now she had cause to believe and hope. Continuing their discussion, Katie said, "I think we were both kind of mad, again subconsciously, that we were already with someone else. I was dating Chad, even though there was no commitment. And Jeremy was engaged. He told me that he never would have betrayed his fiancé. But I always knew that. And I never would have expected him to."

"Jeremy is very honorable," Erin interjected. "That's one of the qualities I like best about him."

"Yeah. He's so much more mature than any man I've ever dated. Well, except for Chad." Erin nodded, knowingly, as Katie went on. "He honestly told me that if Rachel hadn't lied to him, he would still be with her. He was in love." She was silent another moment. "When we talked that day, it just felt so natural...so right. Jeremy asked me to give him a little time for his heart to begin to heal and then we could see what we might have. I agreed. But I knew the day would come, and it did. About two weeks ago, he called and asked me out. After that first date, I knew he was something very special. We are taking things slow. We want to really get to know each other, not just have fun, although we do. And not just jump into bed. But I'm really hopeful that we can have a special relationship. You and Jamie have been one of my inspirations. Your phenomenal love defied the odds and brought you back together. And now you're having a family together. That's incredible."

Erin thought about Jeremy's part in that family. She knew Katie should be aware of the truth, but it would be up to him to tell her. *But I can give him a little encouragement.* "I really hope it works out for you Katie. I wish everyone could know the love and devotion of an extraordinary partner like mine. Jamie is and always will be the best thing in my life. My hero. My dream maker. My passion."

A mumbled interruption sounded in the doorway.

"Well Jamie, your ears must be burning," Katie said, preparing to make a graceful exit.

Erin walked...waddled over to her spouse. "Her face is burning too by the looks of these cheeks." She kissed each crimson side and finally landed on her lips, where the kiss lasted long after the cousin's departure.

Jamie caressed Erin's face, her eyes soft and glowing with love. "You know I feel exactly the same...right?"

"I know. That's the second best thing about being married to you."

\* \* \*

Erin never got the chance to have that long conversation with her grandmother that night. After a nice family dinner, Danielle, Katie, Bridget and Matthew said goodnight and went to spend the night at a nearby bed and breakfast, since only one of the guest bedrooms was furnished and that had been reserved for Kathleen. She had turned in early. Only having been in the country for a few days, she was still adjusting to the time difference and was tired.

Erin checked in on Kathleen about ten o'clock, placing an extra blanket across the foot of the bed. "Good dreams Grandma," she whispered.

Tomorrow would come soon enough.

\* \* \*

The next morning, the three of them had a hearty Irish breakfast, which Kathleen insisted on cooking. After helping with the clean up, Jamie excused herself to start on her day's chores. Erin and her grandmother took a pot of steaming tea into Erin's office for some quiet time alone and to enjoy the bright morning sun.

They chatted about their respective lives, the ordinary happenings on the ranch, and the farm across the ocean. Life was treating Kathleen very well, as she sailed into her golden years. She and her gentleman friend, Shamus had been spending a lot of time together, going dancing and to movies or just spending quiet evenings together, eating good meals and enjoying each other's company. With a charming smile, she admitted how nice it felt to find love again and to have someone to share with.

In the past months, Kathleen had attended two weddings of children she had delivered in her midwife duties. And sadly she had to pay her last respects to another. A young man she had helped into the world in 1982 had been serving in the United States military and had lost his life in the Middle East. He had been brought to his mother's homeland for his final rest. Kathleen's pride in the courageous young man poured through in her voice as she told of her conversations with his aunt, who was a life long friend. He had been an honor student and was expected to have a successful career in law.

There were minutes of silence as each reflected on his fate and added prayers for his family. Kathleen sipped half a cup of her fragrant tea before insisting that the conversation turn to more pleasant things. So Erin told a couple of cute tales in which Kathleen's grandchildren, Conner and Caitlin, were the shining stars.

Kathleen laughed. "Oh the precious and precocious. My granddaughter is a good mother." She reached for Erin's hand. "As you will be." The hand in hers trembled slightly and a haunted expression appeared. "What is it Dear?" the older woman asked. "I've felt yer distress since I first laid these old eyes on ya yesterday."

"I didn't know it was that obvious."

"I'm sure it's not ta everyone else. Ya even seem to hide it well from yer Jamie."

"I just don't want her to worry. But it's not there is anything wrong." Erin caressed her belly. "We're healthy. Everything's fine. I guess it's just hormones. But I hate to blame everything on that."

"I remember when I was heavy with yer da. His arrival was just weeks away. He was me first and I was very confused and scared. And no matter how many stories ya hear, ya still don't know what ta really expect. I'm sure yer mother and sister have offered their knowledge on the subject." A nod and a roll of the eyes. "But ya still don't know how it's gonna' feel, how ya are gonna' feel about it. And ya worry so much because ya care about the innocent and dependent life within. It is a big, scary deal. And no matter how many people are around ya, no matter how

much Jamie loves and supports ya, in the end, ya have to do this alone. Given birth is a task for one."

Erin turned toward the floor to ceiling windows, watching some birds fluttering around the backyard, impatiently waiting as Jamie refilled the various feeders. The rancher's muscles bunched beneath her shirt as she hefted the large bag of seeds across the grass. She judiciously cleaned the Old West saloon shaped feeder and replaced the avian food. Jamie took care in everything she did, from the most mundane to the most exciting. The dark haired woman caught the blonde peering at her. She blew a kiss and then a second one that Erin knew she was supposed to pass on. And she did, brushing her hand along the swell of her belly.

Jamie was a very proud parent to be.

Her partner.

In all things equal.

But one. Erin implicitly trusted her elder's incite. Beyond their emotional bond, they also shared a secret, a special ability to sense some future happenings. They revealed their secret to very few; most people wouldn't understand or believe it possible. It wasn't considered a psychic ability at all, more like a very strong intuition. Kathleen had enchantingly called it the leprechaun's whisper. And so far it had never failed either of them.

In the past, as now, Kathleen had given her excellent advice and Erin only hoped she would be able to pass on that kind of guidance to her own children and grandchildren. A push against her ribs and another kick reminded her of those possibilities. "It is lonely... and scary," she mumbled to herself. "That's exactly what I've been feeling," she said, returning to her grandmother's attentive gaze. "But I couldn't figure out why? Consciously, I know I've done everything I was supposed to. I have confidence in my doctor. And I thought I had confidence in myself."

"Ya do dralin'. Ya do. Nobody's gonna question that. Just remember, whatever yer feelin', it's all valid. Whether it comes from the heart or the head...or the hormones, now that ya know what it is, ya can handle it. And ya will never be without someone who loves you. Of that I'm certain."

Erin nodded with a recaptured self-assurance. "This part will be over in just a few weeks." She chuckled ironically. "Then I'll have a whole new set of things to worry about."

"Yes Darlin'; I'm afraid the worrin' never stops."

Erin tossed her arms around Kathleen's neck. "I'm so glad you're here Grandma. I love you."

Continued.

## ~ Blindsided ~

by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way. Copyright 2003-2004

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

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### Chapter 17

"Chestnuts roasting on an open fire." Nat was croonin' the tune, but there weren't any chesters on the fire. There was, however, a bowl of macadamias on a tray with other finger foods sitting next to the cuddled couple. Keeping warm on Christmas Eve, Erin and Jamie had made a little nest in the corner of the sectional sofa in the great room. A nice fire added to the comfy atmosphere. They quietly fed each other the tasty treats as a host of holiday songs, accompanied by the twirls of orange, yellow and blue, entertained them. Erin had made their excuse, early that morning for not joining the family celebration; she just was not up to traveling the distance. Her father had offered to send the company helicopter for them, but she didn't think that was such a good idea. Katie, who had been renting a small cottage in the area, no doubt to be near Jeremy, had taken Grandma Kathleen with her, down to LA to be with the family. The elder Kathleen would be staying the night so, as she put it, the youngsters could spend Christmas morning alone, their last opportunity for a long time, she added.

Jamie reached for a piece of fruit from the bowl as she nuzzled the soft blonde hair beside her face. She remembered that just an hour before she was gently running her wet fingers through those sudsy locks, giving a massage as well as cleansing. It was not meant to be erotic or arousing, just very comforting, although Jamie did hear a low moan under the sound of the running water, which brought her a smile. She dunked the chunk of pineapple into the creamy, white dip and held it to a pair of ruby lips. Erin snipped it in half, savoring the tart and sweet combination as she devoured it. Jamie recoated the second half and offered it; they didn't worry about double dipping since they shared far more with every passionate kiss. Erin accepted the last of the fruit piece, licking the juice from the generous fingertips. It was as sensual an act as she could perform lately. Just as she was sadly mourning that fact, a pair of long arms gently wrapped around her and a single sentence was whispered in her ear. "I love holding you." Erin smiled and her thoughts turned and happily settled on that truth. She soon chose a plump strawberry, glazing it with honey and feeding it to her hungry spouse. And so it went on like that until every last morsel of food had disappeared and the fire shrank to a mere glow.

The next morning they exchanged presents on their third Christmas together. After each box was opened, Jamie had one final gift. It wasn't something to be unwrapped or anything Jamie had purchased. The rancher took Erin by the hand and led her to the corner of the family room where she pulled aside a chair. She pointed to a spot near the floor. There she had carved, into the wood wall, their initials and enclosed them inside a heart. Jamie told Erin she had etched the same design on some hidden spot on a honey colored plank in every room of the house. Erin melted at the romantic gesture, bestowing her thanks with a few kisses. She said she wanted to discover all the others on her own. Each one would be a new gift.

\* \* \*

It was a little after two that afternoon when the doorbell rang. Erin had been near by, and not sure where Jamie was anyway, she detoured to the front door. She opened it to a very surprising visitor. "Sarah! How did you get here, sweetie?" Erin glanced around for the children's home van. "Did Miss Gibson bring you for a visit?" Not seeing it or her, Erin took the child's hand and led her inside, out of the chilled air.

"Are you happy I'm here Erin?" Sarah asked with a little quiver of concern.

"Oh honey, I'm very happy you're here." Erin gave her a hug and helped remove her warm, winter jacket. "I just don't understand how you got here."

"It's a surprise," Sarah said gleefully. "I got the bestest Christmas present Erin."

"Well tell me." Erin tickled the little ribs. "What present did you get?"

After the giggles subsided, Sarah proclaimed loudly, "I got two mommies!"

Erin was stunned and thrilled. "Two mommies!" She hugged Sarah again. "Sweetie, that's great!" *They must've brought her here, but where are they? What's the big secret?* "You've got a family, Sarah; I'm so happy for you. Where are your new parents?"



"Mommy, Mama."

Erin's brows drew together in wonder. *How did they get in the house?* She didn't have very long to ponder as her jaw soon dropped with absolute astonishment. Erin was, momentarily, too stunned to move at the sight of the two very familiar faces as they stepped into the room.

"Did somebody call for a couple of proud mothers?"

"Anne, Leah...you...Sarah..."

Dr. Carson walked over and lifted her small daughter into her arms and they both hugged the speech deprived author. Over her friend's shoulder, Erin caught the wink from her spouse right before Jamie embraced the other new parent. After a phone call, Jamie had agreed to be a co-conspirator to this surprise, letting the pair in the back door. Soon, there were happy tears all around and they moved to make themselves comfortable. Erin couldn't wait to hear all about this wondrous event.

Anne and Leah began their tale as the little girl sat between them. She had one hand on each of them, as she quietly listened. "After we first met Sarah that day," Anne explained, "we couldn't get her out of our thoughts and our hearts."

"I know the feeling," Erin said. She sat beside Jamie, across from the new family and heard all of the love being spoken.

"It was a couple of days before we realized that we both were thinking the same thing," Leah said. "We had talked about having a family after we got married. We both wanted one, but agreed that we didn't necessarily need to have a baby. We knew that when the time was right, a child would come to us." Leah ruffled the dark curls on her daughter's head. Sarah looked up at her and smiled. "And she did," Leah said, tweaking a nose. "And we agree; it is the bestest Christmas present ever."

"We've been visiting her a few times a week and we finally brought Sarah home with us three days ago," Anne said. She locked gazes with Erin. "I can't tell you how hard it was keeping this a secret from you, when you were lobbying so hard to find her a family. But I also knew how disappointed you would have been if we had been turned down."

Erin's heart was so full now that this bright, beautiful girl had the family she wanted and deserved. And Erin knew that would never be taken for granted by child or parents. She had heard the unbridled joy in Sarah's voice when spoke of her new mommies. And the same emotions clearly showed on the faces of Erin's compassionate friends as they had entered the room...and still remained. Everyone was happy. And just as important, Erin would get be an integral part of Sarah's life, for every birthday, every holiday and each milestone, great and small that would happen to this child.

Anne stood and lifted the girl to the floor. "I think Sarah has something to ask you," she said and

helped her over to stand in front of the author and the rancher. She whispered something in the girl's ear. The little head nodded in response.

"Erin, will you and Jamie be my aunts?"

They each took a small hand. "We would be very happy to be your aunts," Erin said. "We love you sweetie."

Sarah held her arms out to her sides. "Wow! I got a big family now!"

\* \* \*

Erin struck a long match and lit a fire in the corner fireplace. She then ignited the tips of two tall, burgundy colored candles in the middle of the small table sitting in their bedroom. It was New Years Eve. Jamie had been gone all day on business, but she had promised to be home by eight o'clock.

Erin was so grateful to have such an adoring and attentive partner. Jamie had done so many romantic things for her lately and she really wanted to do something in return. In her current condition she couldn't do much, but she could pick up a phone. The Eagle's Nest Lodge, just a few miles away, did great catering and they had just delivered a beautiful meal for two, including a warming buffet so the couple could eat at their leisure.

Jamie came through the back door five minutes later and Erin met her there with a kiss. She quickly sent her to the downstairs shower, so the surprise in their bedroom wouldn't be revealed until they were both ready to eat. Erin was wearing the peach colored, silk robe Jamie had gotten her for Christmas. While Erin thought it was very pretty, she had wondered how practical it was since she would only be able to wear it for a few more weeks. But her clever spouse explained that she would have the maternity robe altered after Erin gave birth. The blonde had added a hint of makeup and a touch of perfume, something she hadn't bothered with in a while. But she felt like adding the extra touch on this special night.

Jamie emerged from the bathroom in a pair of deep red, silk pajamas. It had a matching, Asian inspired jacket, but even in winter Jamie never chose to don it. Much to Erin's pleasure, the sleeveless top allowed the hard working rancher's defined muscles to be on delightful display.

"You look very nice in that."

Jamie smiled. "Thank you Ms. Casey. So do you." She hugged her gingerly. "Smell nice too. Now what's the surprise?"

Slowly, they climbed the curving staircase. Hand in hand they moved down the hall, tiptoeing past grandma's room and stopping at the double doors to their bedroom. Erin turned to Jamie. "I wanted to give us a special night. I love you very much and I wanted to show you." She opened the doors, revealing the cozy setting. The fire, two candles and very dim lamp light provided the only illumination, creating a lovely, intimate mood. Jamie approached the table for two,

romantically set with their best china and silver. A pair of crystal flutes completed the setting.

"Honey, this is wonderful. Catered?"

"Of course." Erin giggled lovingly at Jamie's continued protectiveness. She did, after a small disagreement, convince her spouse to let her serve them. Jamie pulled a bottle from the ice bucket and filled the flutes with a golden, bubbly liquid of the non-alcoholic variety.

They sat down and enjoyed a meal of parmesan encrusted chicken atop a grilled portabella cap, artichokes and lightly spiced pasta with a variety of roasted vegetables on the side. A double chocolate cheesecake waited in the refrigerator for later. They toasted the New Year that was just hours away. Between bites of the delicious food, they reminisced about the past twelve months. They were having their dreams come true. Now they would have to think of some new ones and most of those would be for their children. Erin was truly hoping for at least four or five offspring, although she hadn't shocked Jamie with that news yet. But she would be deliriously happy with however many children that would come into their lives.

Jamie cleaned up after they finished eating. Then they climbed into bed and Jamie read aloud from the novel Erin had started reading a few weeks earlier. Erin drifted off to sleep about 11:45. As soon as Jamie noticed, she set the book aside and just watched her beautiful wife until the stroke of midnight. It was three years to the moment when Jamie had first asked Erin to marry her. And it was the absolute best thing she had ever done. "Happy New Year, sweetheart."

\* \* \*

The January wind storm was full blown. There was no rain, no thunder or lightning, just wind...colossal gusts of wind. Erin watched out the large windows as the bare trees bent against nature's fierce force. Bits of twigs, pinecones and evergreen branches battered the glass and the sides of the house, leaving green and brown scuff marks behind. The howling noise was, at times, terrifying as it roared through the forest and across the grassy pastures. The water in the small pond, below their new house, undulated erratically, splashing heavily against its small shore. The area hadn't seen a storm like this in twenty years.

The dogs were safe inside and lounging by the fire in the family room. They tended to be near Erin when they were in the house. Earlier, Jamie had secured everything in the yard that might have been carried away...probably into the next county.

So, only two things worried Erin. Jamie was out in the storm. And she was in labor.

The rancher had been out for hours, searching for three horses that had bolted in fear when a corral gate had torn from its hinges. Jamie didn't own those animals, they were just boarded there, but she felt a personal responsibility to see that the horses were safely returned.

Erin had been hurting for most of the day, not even realizing what it was for the first few hours. But she had kept quiet all along, hoping Jamie would walk in any minute.

Grandma Kathleen, however, was much too wise to be fooled for long. She didn't need a leprechaun to whisper in her ear to recognize the signs of a woman in labor. Her thirty plus years of experience as a midwife was more than enough. "How are ya feelin' dear?" she asked.

Erin grabbed for her back and her belly as the next contraction hit. "Well Grandma, I think the saying, no pain, no gain is most appropriate in this situation. And I think I'm about to gain something wonderful. I'm going to try Jamie's cell again." But of course the weather conditions were still interfering with the signal. She had gotten through on the land line to the clinic, but was told that Anne, Leah and the medivan were on the site of a major accident with about forty-five minutes traveling time between them. But the receptionist assured that she would send them to the ranch as soon as possible. "I'm sorry to put you in this situation Grandma."

"Tis not yer fault, Erin. Tis nobodies fault. Not ta worry darlin'; ya know that I have delivered hundreds of babies through the years. Today I'll just add one more name ta that list...and a very special one."

Erin smiled as best she could against the weariness and pain, having every faith in her grandmother. "I know. And I really am glad you're here. But...umm...have you ever...umm...delivered twins?"

The ivory haired head shook with conviction. "No. I always recommended a doc..." The two locked eyes through their respective spectacles. "Erin love, are ya sayin' that ya are havin' two little babes?"

"Umm, surprise?" Erin and Jamie had agreed, the day they learned of the twins, to keep it a secret and surprise the family. It worked.

"Praise the good mother," Kathleen said, crossing herself in prayer. She then smiled and took her granddaughter's hand. "Then we'll all be twice blessed."

Erin assured her that the doctor expected no complications; everything had gone smoothly...until now. Another contraction tore across her midsection; each one coming a little closer together.

"Ya know I'll do my best ta bring these children safely into the world." Kathleen's grin glowed with joyfulness. "My great-grandchildren."

"The doctor did warn us that sometimes a cesarean is needed with twins," Erin said. "I want you to promise me that you will do **whatever** it takes to save my babies." She saw the hesitation; her point had been made. "I mean it Grandma. If it comes to that, take them whatever way you have to."

The possibility terrified Kathleen. "But I don't..."

"Please Grandma; promise me!" The Irish, green eyes pleaded.

"All right; I promise. But it won't come ta that, I'm sure. In fact don't even think about that right

now. Yer doctor friend is gonna be here any time."

Ten minutes went by.

No doctor.

No Jamie.

Kathleen couldn't wait any longer, so she went through the house collecting the items she would need to deliver the infants. She was just a little concerned, but would never let it show. Kathleen had never lost a child in all her years as a midwife and she vowed, with God's help that today would not be the first.

With all of the horses now securely housed inside the sturdy barns, Jamie headed home. Entering the mud room, she removed her long, butter colored duster and sat down to pull off her filthy boots. It had rained all day, the day before, leaving mud everywhere. Catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror, she scowled. Her face and hair were liberally coated with dirt and her skin bore a few superficial scratches from blowing debris. "Whew, I need a shower." Jamie moved down the back hall, stopping at the linen closet on her way to the downstairs bathroom. But the cupboard was empty. "Where are all the towels?" she mumbled.

A scream suddenly echoed through the house. And it was a voice she knew.

"Erin!" Jamie took off running down the hall, toward the sound. Through the kitchen she dashed, around the island, knocking over a stool. Down one more hall and around a corner she sprinted as another shriek reverberated off the walls. *We just had to build such a big house, didn't we?!* Jamie's socked feet slid across the hardwood floor when she tried to stop at the family room.

Erin saw her spouse for just an instant as she sailed past the doorway. "Jamie?" she called out.

"Here." The dusty rancher reappeared and ran to the couch where Erin was supine and panting. "I'm here. You're in labor?"

"What gave you a clue?" Erin asked, through clenched teeth, clearly, though unintentionally annoyed.

"Why didn't you call me?"

"Tried."

"We couldn't get through on yer little phone," Kathleen explained.

"Where is Anne?" Jamie asked.

"Gone."

"She's at the site of an accident, but she's comin' as soon as she can," Kathleen clarified again.

Jamie took Erin's hand and kissed her clammy cheek. "I'm so sorry sweetheart. This is all my fault," she confessed. "We should be in LA, in a hospital."

They had once decided to go to Los Angeles in plenty of time for the birth. But Jamie had made an important business contact about a month before and he was insisting on a meeting on the tenth, although that was still five days before the due date. Jamie was going to forgo the opportunity, no matter how important, but Erin urged her not to do that. After an involved discussion, Jamie proposed a compromise; Erin would go on to the city, settle into a hotel room near the hospital and Jamie would join her after the meeting. But Erin didn't agree.

"No Jamie...my decision."

"But I should have insisted."

Erin was too busy breathing to argue.

Kathleen soaked a clean towel in the pan of warm water she had prepared and then twisted it, removing the excess. "Jamie, can I speak ta ya for a minute?" she asked.

The rancher kissed her wife's sweat soaked forehead. "I'll be just a second," she said before joining Kathleen in the corner of the room. "I guess she told you about the twins; is there a problem?" Jamie muttered, worriedly, never taking her eyes from Erin's grimacing face.

"Everythin' is progressin' normally so far. But Jamie..." Kathleen paused when she suspected her words were falling on deaf ears. "Jamie, look at me." The concerned orbs finally turned her way. "Here," Kathleen handed her the towel, "clean yer face and hands. Dear, I know ya are scared; Erin is too. Right now, she does not need yer guilt. Ya need ta be strong and project a positive attitude. Now go and give her that support."

Jamie sucked in a deep breath, shaking off the negative anxieties, resolved to do her part in seeing her children into the world. "Right." Erin groaned and Jamie scampered back to her side. "It's almost time honey," she said soothingly, as she brushed the backs of her fingers along her wife's cheek. "We're gonna see our little Jordan soon. And then her or his brother or sister."

Erin managed a weak grin and held tight to the hand wrapped around hers. "Very soon."

Kathleen concurred excitedly. "Oh, I can see the head!" She patted Erin's bent knee. "That's very good. This one's not a breech. Be ready ta push."

"Two boys, two girls or one of each," Jamie continued her distracting chatter, "they're gonna be beautiful because they're gonna look just like you."

Erin shook her head adamantly. "Like both of us. You and your brother...share some great traits.

He's as handsome as you are beaut... ahhhh!" Another pain.

"Push now Erin!" Kathleen instructed. "Good...good!"

And she did, every time she was told over the next few minutes.

"You're doing great Rin," Jamie praised. "I love you so very much."

"One more and yer first little one will be here," Kathleen urged. Erin let out a mighty scream, which was soon echoed just few decibels lower as a tiny life slipped into the world. Kathleen turned the squirming infant in her hands and suctioned the small mouth and nose. "I know little love," she crooned, softly, "This part isn't too pleasant...but there now, it's all over."

Erin and Jamie were clinging to one another and shedding happy tears, waiting to be introduced to their first child...to their Jordan.

Kathleen held up a pair of scissors. "I think you'll be wantin' ta do this part."

Jamie took them in a trembling hand and after taking a quick glance at the baby, she snipped the cord, setting the infant off on its own separate life.

Grandma's sure hands cleaned off the tiny babe and wrapped it in a clean towel. "Well lass, tis time ta meet yer mommies." She placed the bundle on Erin's chest and set about finishing her professional tasks, leaving the three a small amount of privacy.

"A girl," Erin sobbed, as she cupped the baby's delicate head. "My God Jamie, just look at her. Look what we did."

Jamie was looking. She couldn't pry her eyes off the rosy, little face if she tried. Anything Jamie wanted to say momentarily caught in her throat. She could only place her hand on the little belly and smile at the now silent infant. *God, she's so perfect*, Jamie thought. *I love her*. But she wondered if what she was feeling was maternal. She loved this baby and the one yet to come with all her heart and soul and she would die to keep them safe. But she felt that way for Erin too, so that wasn't maternal. Would these children ever completely bond with her? These concerns had gone unspoken, but worried her soul over the past few weeks. She knew Erin would have the automatic attachment, having given birth to them and nursing them. *I want that kind of connection too*, she bemoaned silently. *Wow. I wonder if fathers or adoptive parents worry about this...or is it just my insecurities*. Though quiet, the baby's little legs lashed out, hitting Jamie in the arm. The watery, unfocused eyes swept over the strange faces as the baby pondered her sudden change of residence. "She's so tiny," Jamie finally said, her voice soft as a whisper. "But strong. And I was right; you've given us a beautiful daughter."

"I bet you were this tiny," Erin said. Jamie grunted her skepticism. Suddenly, Erin realized there should be another baby. "What's wrong Grandma?" she asked, panicky. "Where's the other one?"

"Nothin's wrong dear. It happens sometimes with twins. There can be a little time in between."

She grabbed a paper and pen. "Now let me record the information for the official certificate. Date of birth: January 9, 2003. Time of birth: 6:46 PM. The doctor can add the weight and length," she figured. "Did I hear that yer namin' her Jordan?"

"Yes," Erin answered, her attention returning to the little one resting on her chest.

"After yer sister?"

Jamie nodded; her expression was full of mixed emotions.

With a compassionate smile and a comforting touch, Kathleen told her, "Nice choice. Have ya picked a middle name?"

Erin deferred to Jamie, per their previous agreement. The rancher had made two choices, one for each gender, but she didn't expect the child to be born under these circumstances. This called for something very special. She whispered her final decision in Erin's ear and an immediate grin brightened the blonde's fatigued features.

Jamie proudly proclaimed, "Her full name is Jordan Kathleen."

Taken by surprise, Grandma Kathleen was deeply touched. "Oh my!" A tear ran down her cheek. "I do have several namesakes back home," she said, "other bairn I've delivered. It's always an honor, but none as great as this, none so very special. Thank you." She kissed all three females on the cheek.

The touching moment was interrupted by a ringing phone.

Jamie answered it, wiping her own tears from her face. "Hello... Anne, where are you? ...Okay, I'm on my way. I can't wait for you to meet my daughter." Replacing the phone, she looked to find Erin giving her a strange glare. "Sorry," Jamie said sheepishly, "our daughter. The medivan is out by the main road. There's a tree down, blocking their way. I've got to take a chainsaw and clear the path." She kissed Erin. "I love you." She gently kissed the baby's head. "I love you." One more kiss for Erin's, still swollen belly. "I love you too, but stay put until the doctor gets here. No offense Kathleen."

"Don't worry. I agree completely."

Luckily the saw was already in the back, so Jamie jumped in her truck and sped off, splattering everything in her path in a mud bath. It wasn't until she was halfway down the drive that Jamie realized she had no shoes on. *Oh well, no time for that.* She finally brought the vehicle to a screeching halt, spinning it half way around, coming to a stop far off in the grass. Jumping out, she saw the red and white vehicle on the other side of the medium sized tree and she screamed, "I'll have this out of the way in a minute!" Jamie attacked the fallen foliage like a crazed monster with serrated claws, rotating at a blurred speed. Buzz. Crack. Plop. Whoosh. Stripped branches and logs flew through the air like villainous henchmen from the caped crusader's fists.



When the way was finally clear, Anne got a good look at the frantic rancher. She looked like a wild woman who had just stepped from a ten year stay in the jungle, with a filthy face, tangled, wind blown, twig laden hair and ripped clothes. "What happened to you?" she asked.

"I became a mom," Jamie said with a moment of absurd calmness.

Anne and Leah found that hilarious and they shook with laughter as they boarded the medivan and hurried up to the house.

Once at the house, there was no time for greetings as Jordan's twin was now eager to make his or her appearance. Leah took Jordan and grabbed a blanket to protect the delicate one from the cold wind and Jamie ran by her wife's side as Erin was swiftly wheeled into the traveling clinic. Grandma stayed behind to clean up, saying she would catch up with them later.

"Are we rolling Dr. Carson?"

"No Derek," Anne told the driver. "No time, we're doing this right here."

Leah gave the baby a quick exam, checking her breathing and heartbeat, noting that she was alert, but calm, perhaps sensing the urgency around her. She then placed her in the infant incubator and adjusted some controls on the front panel.

"Okay, there's the head!" Anne announced. "Good. Push, Erin! I know you're tired honey, but only you can do this."

"I'm trying," she huffed. With pinched eyes and puffed cheeks, Erin did her best to force the necessary muscles into duty.

"Harder Erin! Here come the shoulders!"

"I...I..."

"Look in my eyes Erin," Jamie pleaded. "I wish I could help sweetheart. All I can do is say I love you." She brought their joined hands to her lips. "Take my strength and bring us this baby."

Maybe it was the words, maybe it was their love...or maybe it was something else. But Erin used it, pulling up some deep buried power and gave a final, mighty push.

But they didn't hear the cry that should have followed. "Anne?"

"I'm working on it! Leah, finish up here." Anne quickly tied off the cord and cut the motionless baby loose, then moved to a side table where her healing hands went to work.

Erin panicked, clinging to her spouse in terror. "Jamie!"

The rancher wrapped her arms around Erin's heaving body. "Oh God," she muttered. *Mom, Dad,*

*please help.* The horrified new mothers could only wait. But every second was a deafening eternity as no sound came from their second child. Every painful breath they took followed the tightening grip around two desperate hearts.

Anne vigorously rubbed the diminutive body. "Come on little man," she implored, "let's hear you. You're scaring your mommies."

Jordan suddenly let out a wail, as if calling her brother to life.

And he answered.

His lungs sucked in the oxygen and his beautiful cries filled the air. Everybody grinned, ear to ear. Erin and Jamie kissed, flooding each other with tears of relief. They would never complain about him crying in the future...because now he had a future.

After giving him an examination and determining that the incident had passed without any immediate, harmful effects, Anne bundled him up and presented him to his mothers. "As far as I can tell right now," she said, "he's just fine. The cord tightened around his neck at the last minute."

Erin and Jamie cuddled him, providing comfort with their whispers and touches. "Hello son," the blonde mom said, before kissing his cheek.

Jamie was careful with her touch, since she was still quite filthy from her horse wrangling and lumberjacking. "Hey little buckaroo, we're so glad to see you. We love you." She anointed his other cheek with a kiss.

"Let's get going Derek," Dr. Carson instructed. "Let's get this happy family back to the clinic." She turned back to her friends. "I hate to break up a love fest, but I'd like to put him in with his sister. Jamie would you like to do the honors?"

"I...umm...you'd better do it; I'm still a little shaky." The rancher vividly demonstrated by raising a trembling hand. This time Erin took the hand and kissed it.

Both babies were still awake, calm and snuggled close, glad to be back together. Erin fought to stay awake as she and Jamie watched over their children.

\* \* \*

Erin had lost her battle just as they pulled up to the emergency door of the Evergreen Clinic. Leah and Derek wheeled the snoozing mother inside and Dr. Carson took the twins down the hall for a more thorough examination. Jamie stood there, looking just a little lost, not sure what to do as her energy deflated. Leah walked over and put a hand on her shoulder. "How are you doing friend?"

Jamie couldn't help but smile. "Well, this isn't exactly how I had envisioned this day, but my

family is safe...and that's the best thing in the world."

"I'm really happy for you Jamie. You have two beautiful children."

"Thanks."

Leah's expression turned somber. "Can I be totally honest with you?" she asked.

"Yeah," Jamie said, a little fearfully.

"You're a mess."

The rancher laughed. "Guess I can't argue."

Leah opened a cabinet door and pulled out a new pair of large scrubs. "Go down to the end of the hall, to Anne's office. There's a shower in our bathroom. When you're done go on to room four." She nodded toward the snoozing woman. "I think Erin would appreciate a little bath too. We'll meet you there."

\* \* \*

Jamie couldn't remember when she had been so pleasantly exhausted or so happy to be clean. She tugged on the navy blue pants and pulled the top on over her head, her shoulders and back protesting loudly at the movements. Out of fear, one of the runaway horses had knocked her down when she tried to grab its halter. She had noticed some bruising on her torso when she was in the shower, but she knew it was nothing serious so there was no need to mention the incident. Bundling up her dirty clothes, she trudged down to room four. It was a pleasingly decorated area in shades of blue and green with a Caribbean flare, including several sunset prints hanging on the walls. Jamie dropped down into a cushioned rocker in the corner of the room and her eyes slipped shut. She only had a sixty second nap before Erin was wheeled in and transferred to the double wide bed. She was in a clean gown and still sleeping. Jamie combed out the damp hair with her fingers and Erin mumbled something incomprehensible then smiled slightly. "That's it sweetie, you just rest; you certainly deserve it."

"And you deserve this." Leah pulled a small bottle of water from one pocket of her scrub top and two pills from the other pocket. "Take these. I know you're hurting."

Jamie accepted the pain relievers without argument. "So, how are my kids?"

"I just came from them and they're doing fine," Leah said as she dabbed some antiseptic cream on the scratches on Jamie's face. "Like both of their parents, they are now freshly scrubbed...easy on the scrub, and resting. Anne's still working on the physicals. All routine," she clarified when Jamie's brow wrinkled. "Why don't you climb in there with her and get some rest."

"I have one phone call to make and then I'll take your advice. Goodnight," she said as her friend walked out the door. Jamie made that call to Grandma Kathleen, who was thrilled and relieved

beyond words to hear of her great-grandson. It was a little before eight and they still had time to call the rest of the family after Erin woke up.

Once Jamie was in the bed, Erin gravitated closer to the place she belonged...at Jamie's side.

\* \* \*

Anne let them sleep for an hour, before gently waking them. "How are you feeling?" she asked Erin.

"Physically tired, but not bad."

"Good. Well, there are two little ones here who are missing their mommies. I'm sure they're just about ready for a meal too." She pulled a portable crib into the room. The twins were sleeping soundly so no one disturbed them while Anne finished her report. But the happy couple didn't take their eyes off the tiny bundles all the while Anne spoke. "I've been in contact with the pediatrician you chose down in LA. Doctor Fielding and I conferred and he's pleased with the results, even after the little guy's rough start. Their breathing and heart function seem normal. He would like to see them in about a week. But you can make that appointment tomorrow or the next day. Oh, I supposed you'd like to know that your little man here weighs five pounds even and his porky sister tips the scales at five pounds, one and a half ounces. That's a good size for twins." She paused and gazed at the topics of discussion. "I know you are anxious to get acquainted with them, so we can do the paperwork tomorrow." She pointed to a shelf below the basinet. "There are some diapers and a couple of sleepers down here. You've had the nursing lessons, but if you have any problems send Jamie to the room next door. I'll be bunking down there for the night."

"Aren't you going home?" Erin asked.

"Leah went home to be with Sarah. We both agreed that I should stay...just in case. But I don't expect anything to happen, so I'm gonna get some sleep."

"Thank you Anne, for everything."

"You're welcome my friends. Goodnight."

After Anne left, Erin swung her legs over the side of the bed, giving herself just a minute to gather some strength and adjust her balance. "I have been waiting nine months for this," she said, as she reached into the crib and lifted a baby.

Jamie smiled brightly. "I guess after feeling them moving inside you, you can't wait to hold your baby...babies in your arms."

"That's true, but I wasn't talking about that." Erin held out the little girl. "I've been waiting to see you to hold our first child."

Jamie lassoed her nerves, reaching out slowly and taking her daughter into her arms for the first time. Settling the slight figure against her body, Jamie stared in awe at this brand new, little person, counting every little breath and marveling at each wispy lash above the sleeping eyes. The reddened and creased skin Jamie had seen earlier on the baby's face was now peach toned and silky. As the blanket fell away slightly, Jamie ran a finger across an adorable wrinkle she discovered on the side of her neck. She thought she would be feeling much more stress about now, but as the second ticks away, she was so fascinated that instinct just took over. "I know you're gonna get tired of hearing me say this, but I love you Jordan."

Erin snapped a sequence of mental pictures of these two great loves of her life and she would review them often, until her final breath.

Two drowsy eyes, the color of a clear, tropical ocean and coincidently the exact same shade as the two looking down at them, blinked open. "Oh, hello little girl," Jamie intoned in a low, melodic voice. She gently rubbed her thumb over the slight cleft in the sloped chin beneath the baby's lips. Jamie was astonished by the sudden need to touch the newborn...experiencing the softness of her flawless skin and the warmth and weight of her tiny body. The puckered lips parted and the tip of a little pink tongue poked out. When this happened three times in succession, the new mom finally got the idea. "I think...we have a hungry little girl here." Jamie looked up and smiled at her daughter's other mom.

"Oh, yeah?" Erin said. "Then I'd better take care of that." She checked on the young man, who was still sleeping soundly inside his velvety cocoon, before climbing into bed. Pulling down the left side of her gown to expose her breast, Erin accepted the ravenous babe and soon gasped, more in surprise than pain, when she finally latched on to the nipple after several tries. Jordan enthusiastically sucked down her first meal as the parents watched, spellbound at the miracle. Not a word was spoken and no other sound, but the steady cadence of four breathers, disturbed the perfect silence. Reading each others minds, Erin and Jamie leaned in and kissed...a silent thank you and an I love you forever.

Jamie finally broke the quiet a few minutes later. "I'm hungry."

"Don't even think about it," Erin drawled.

The rancher laughed. "No. I mean I'm really hungry. I haven't eaten since about eleven this morning."

"Oh honey, I guess you are."

"Think Anne has anything around here to eat?"

"It's possible," Erin said, "but I doubt it. I'd rather not wake her anyway; she looked wiped out." She gave it a quick thought. "Order a pizza."

"Ya think?"

"Yeah, they deliver until midnight." Erin checked the clock on the nightstand. "That's still a few hours away. Do you have any money; I didn't think to bring my purse?"

"Gee, I wonder why." Jamie looked to the pile of crumpled clothes in the corner. "I think there might be a twenty in my pants pocket." She stiffly stood, heading for the cash, when a squeak quickly turned to a cry of hunger. "Guess who decided to join the party?" Jamie went to the bassinet and gingerly lifted the irate infant. He did have good timing though as his satisfied sister had just drifted back to sleep. "Come on buckaroo," Jamie said, "one order of yummy milk coming right up." She gave Erin a funny look as the author put her daughter on the bed beside her. "That didn't sound right, did it?"

Erin giggled and prepared to feed her son.

\* \* \*

Nearly an hour later, Jamie was devouring her third piece of pepperoni pizza. She had pilfered a couple of cans of soda from the small refrigerator in Anne's office and she shared that and the pie with her wife. Her grumbling tummy was very thankful for the late night repast.

The wind storm had finally subsided, leaving a clear, fresh smelling, but chilly night. Jamie's favorite celestial stars were visible, high overhead, looking after the new family.

Jamie put away the empty box and cans and rejoined her family in the bed. Erin was cuddling the little boy and Jordan was on the bed between them. Jamie had asked for one more night's sleep before settling on a name for their son. Because Erin had pulled a joke on Jamie about the naming of Jordan, she had promised her wife the exclusive opportunity to choose Jordan's middle name and the first name for the second baby. Erin would pick the second one's middle name.

They would reveal both children's full names when the family came for their first visit. And they were both positive that visit would happen quite early the next morning.

Continued.

**Colleen's Scrolls**  
**Main Page**

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~ Blindsided ~  
by Colleen

**General Disclaimer:** This is an alternate uber story. The physical descriptions of the two lead characters may remind you of two others we all know and love, but all characters in the story are from my own imagination. This story is an original work and is copyrighted by the author. It cannot be sold or used for profit in any way. Copyright 2003-2004

**Love/Sex Disclaimer:** This story depicts a loving relationship between two consenting, adult women and contains scenes of intimacy, but nothing too explicit. If you are under 18 years of age or if this type of story is illegal in the state or country in which you live, please do not read it. If depictions of this nature disturb you, you may wish to read something other than this story.

**Author's Note:** This is the third story in the Jamie and Erin series. You might want to start at the beginning with **At First Sight** and **Seeing You Again for the First Time** to get the full impact of this story.

Feedback can be sent to [coleen30@webtv.net](mailto:coleen30@webtv.net)

I have also created a group for discussions of this, past and future stories. Maybe some sneak previews as well.

Join us at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens\\_corner](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/colleens_corner)

Or if you only want updates and special announcements please join [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens\\_Corner\\_Announcements/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Colleens_Corner_Announcements/)

## Chapter 18

"They slept like newborns and we slept like...the parents of newborns." Jamie answered Anne's question with a yawn.

"Ahh, awake every two hours."

In fact, the twins were in perfect sync, hunger wise. So every time Erin fed one baby, Jamie would sit beside them and rock the other, cooing and humming, doing her best to pacify. Then they would make the exchange and Jamie would coax a burp.

Erin remembered the night before when she had just finished feeding Jordan for the first time and their son was ravenously devouring his initial meal. "*Honey, could you try and burp her so she doesn't get a tummy ache?*"

*"Me? Umm...I'll try."* Jamie lifted the baby girl as if she were made of the finest porcelain. At a snail's pace, afraid of jerking the tiny infant, she raised Jordan to her shoulder, gently guiding the delicate head with her hand. Once the baby was settled with her face nestled in Jamie's neck, the rancher tapped her back...with two fingers.

*"You're going to have to do it a little harder than that,"* Erin said, holding in her amusement at Jamie's excessive cautiousness.

*"But I don't want to hurt her."*

*"You're not going to pound on her, but pat just a little firmer...with all four fingers."*

*Once, twice and a third time expelled the necessary air...rather noisily. Jamie made a startled face that Erin had to laugh at. "Was that normal? Is there something wrong with her?" the nervous mother asked. "I mean it was so loud to come from something so tiny."*

*"I'm sure it was normal," Erin said. "Sometimes it might be loud, others more subtle. And sometimes they might not burp at all." Jamie shook her slightly befuddled head. "Don't worry," Erin assured her, "you'll get used to it all."*

After many minutes and another burp, the four would slumber once again. And it had continued all night long, until Anne greeted them good morning at seven thirty AM...with much needed coffee. They chatted for about fifteen minutes, until Jordan and her brother demanded breakfast.

"Well, Leah and our daughter will be here shortly," Anne said, "and I'd better open for business. I'm sure Sarah will want to meet her new 'cousins'...if that's all right with you."

Erin grinned. "Do you even have to ask, Anne? Of course we want her to meet the twins. She was almost their big sister."

Anne winked and grabbed the door handle. "Later."

"Oh, when can I take my family home?" Jamie asked.

"Well, since it won't be twenty four hours until late tonight, let's just plan on tomorrow morning."

Jamie nodded her agreement and Anne left as Erin settled the little boy against her chest. After both babies were fed and back to sleep, Jamie went back to the house for clothes and then returned to the hospital with bagels and orange juice.

The family, all nine of them arrived about nine thirty. Only Grandma Kathleen knew there were two babies to welcome into the family; Jamie hadn't said anything on the phone to the others.

A knock on the door. "Are you ready for visitors?" Danielle asked.

"Come on in Mom."

"I want to see my...." Danielle stopped and the line of eight behind her collided, like a sight gag from some old comedy movie. She walked on into the room slack jawed and everyone piled in behind her, carrying presents, flowers and balloons. Several sets of bugged eyes joined the bevy of shocked expressions when they saw Jamie and Erin each holding a wrapped bundle.



"Surprise!" Jamie yelled, happily.

There was a rush of simultaneous replies of amazement as the bodies surrounded the big bed, all vying for a peek at the infants.

"Two?"

"Twins?"

"You kept a secret?"

"Wow!"

"I don't believe it."

Erin laughed. "Everyone, we'd like you to meet your grandson and granddaughter...niece and nephew...and cousins." The family greeted the babies and then spruced up the room with the colorful flowers and tied the helium filled balloons to table legs and chairs. Since her arms were full, Erin asked her niece and nephew to help open the presents... a couple of outfits, suitable for boy or girl and a new musical toy. Grandpa Tim had been flashing pictures and Uncle Brad was taking video of the joyous event while holding his own young son in the carrier strapped to his chest.

"What do you think of your cousins?" Erin asked Caitlin and her brother.

"They're cute, but how come they're so small?" Caitlin had remembered her baby brother being born much chubbier. "They're the same size as my baby, Stephanie." The six year old had started playing mommy and carrying her doll around everywhere since her little brother had arrived.

"That's because there were two of them growing inside me," Erin explained simply. "They had to be small to both fit in there."

"What do you think big guy?"

Conner had been playing peek-a-boo with his baby brother, but he turned to answer the question. "My brother is cuter. They're all wrinkly and they sleep too much."

"Conner Thomas Nelson!" Bridget used that certain motherly tone. "My son has been forgetting to sensor himself, lately. Is that anyway to talk about your new cousins?" she redirected to the young man. "Apologize please."

"I'm sorry. I guess they're cool, but Matt's the best." He went back to hiding behind his hands and making Matthew laugh.

Bridget hid behind her own hands in chagrin.

Tim couldn't wait to light up a cigar to celebrate, but he would wait until he was far away from the babies. "So, do my grandchildren have names?" he asked. "Or should we just call them himself and lassie."

"Not even if we were livin' in the heart of Dublin," Erin spoke in her best Irish brogue. Everyone laughed. Erin smiled down at the little one in her arms. "This beautiful young lady is Jordan Kathleen Sheridan-Casey." One and all approved. "Honey," she said, turning to her spouse, "have you chosen our son's name?"

"Yes I have. We gave our little girl two names that have great significance to us and our little boy deserves the same." She glanced lovingly at Erin. "I chose a name that signifies our very first connection, which happened long before we ever met, but as I've told you before, changed my life. So this handsome little guy is...Noah." Jamie kissed his forehead and then her wife's smiling lips.

Erin cried. "That's perfect," she choked out. "Because I've always known the middle name I wanted. What do you think, Noah James," she asked the boy, who chose that moment to open his blue eyes, "do you like your name?"

Of course he had no further reaction, but his mother did. "Is that...?"

Erin cupped Jamie's cheek, looking at her through a hazy curtain of tears. "After you...yes? Our very special twins are named for another set of very special twins." She leaned in and gave her another tender kiss.

A chorus of awws and sniffles followed the precious declaration.

With the naming ceremony over, the great grandmother, grandparents and aunt each took their turn holding and cuddling a very cooperative Jordan and Noah.

And the rest of the morning passed in fine fashion.

\* \* \*

Later in the afternoon, little Sarah came to visit with the popular twins. Anne had helped the five year old up into the bed where she snuggled tight against her aunt Erin. Very carefully, a baby was placed partially into the blind girl's lap. Sarah had giggled when tiny fingers gripped hers and when Noah wiggled, signifying his impending hunger. Even more pictures and video were captured for posterity, before the dark haired girl began to yawn, prompting her parents to bring an end to the visit, but not before she kissed each baby and both aunts.

After nursing each infant, Erin succumbed to the exhaustion that had been slowly seeping into every pore of her body and she fell right to sleep as soon as her eyes closed. Jamie was just as tired, but for some reason sleep evaded her. She sat in a nearby chair just watching the three great loves of her life as they slept on. *How did I end up with all of this?* She seriously asked herself. *Just a few years ago I was alone in my small apartment, full of guilt and self pity. And I*

*was willing to stay right where I was for the rest of my life. And if Erin hadn't broken down those walls with her courage and love, I'd be sitting right there this night. But now I can finally say that all of that guilt is gone; she has helped heal my soul and she ended the loneliness. I still regret some of the things I have done, but that heavy burden has vanished. I love life again. And I know now just how much she loves me, unselfishly and unconditionally. She made my first dream come true, even though she thought I was dead. She has given me the best companion anyone could ever hope for. And now I have, in my opinion, two of the most beautiful babies that God ever put on this earth.* She paused her internal dialogue, relaxed her soul and let a new belief sweep over her heart and mind. She then gave a staunch nod of her dark head. *And damn it, I deserve it! I deserve to be happy!* Jamie smiled and turned her gaze to the starry night, expecting sleep to overtake her at any moment.

Before that could happen though, there was a quiet knock on the door. It opened slowly just as Jamie got there. She put a finger to her lips. "I don't want to wake Erin," she whispered to her brother, as they stepped into the hall.

"Oh sorry; I'll come back later."

"No, no!" Jamie grabbed his retreating form. "Wait here just a minute."

Jeremy felt like he was intruding. But he had a special delivery of his own to present to his sister; something that shouldn't wait any longer. The door opened again and his brows rose in question at the sight of his sister backing out of the room. But the answer was soon clear as the white bassinet came into view.

"Oh Jamie, I don't want to disturb them."

"Nah, they can sleep through anything. Let's go in here," she said, indicating the next room.

Jeremy nodded and followed them inside. He was the only other person, except Erin's doctors, who had known about the twins. But even that had only been a recent development when Erin and Jamie had encouraged him to tell Katie the truth that he was the biological father. He still hadn't done that because the timing had never been right. But the time was going to have to be right and soon. He was falling in love with Katie and this kind of secret wouldn't help to build a strong foundation for a lasting relationship.

He peered intently at the small duo. "Jamie, they...they're so cute. Perfect." The last word was choked out around the lump in his throat.

There was a very long pause as brother and sister watched brother and sister.

"Thank you." They both knew Jamie's reply was for the compliment and so much more.

Jamie scooped up a bundle, now a little more assured in handling the babies and handed it to Jeremy, who took it carefully and cradled it securely against his body. "This little sleeping beauty is your niece Jordan." He was just a touch surprised at the name, but his smile belayed his

overwhelming endorsement. "And the little prince is Noah." Jamie just couldn't help herself and picked up her little man, shushing gently when he whined just a bit. She held him close so Jeremy could clearly see his face, the only thing visible within the protective, wool wrap. "I know they're both going to count on their uncle J to be around a lot as they grow up...teaching them all about nature and respect of the land."

He rocked the girl in his arms. "I'll be here," he stated proudly. "Uncle Jeremy has a big family now and I don't ever plan on being that far from them." He met his sister's eyes. "Jamie, I do have one favor to ask."

"Sure Jeremy; anything."

"I'm bringing my mother out here to live."

"That's nice; I can't wait to meet her."

"Would you and Erin allow her to have a relationship with them? I know she can't be their grandmother, that would be confusing for them, but maybe she could be a special friend."

"I think that is a fine idea," Jamie said. "Children can never have too many people to love them."

Jeremy placed Jordan back in the bed and Jamie followed with Noah. She adjusted the blankets as Jeremy reached for something in his back pocket. He handed Jamie a folded piece of paper.

She took it, not exactly registering what it was until she opened it. The legal document, relinquishing Jeremy McIntyre's parental rights was now signed and delivered. It was a necessary and expected, but oddly somber moment.

Jeremy was certain he would have more children in the future, children that he would be a father to all the time. But he could never forget the fact he had biologically fathered these two precious babies. He would set that fact aside and be just their uncle. But in a secret place in his heart, they would be his first son and his first daughter and he would love them as such. And somehow he knew Jamie and Erin would never deny him those feelings.

Jamie acknowledged the certificate with a nod, but no words. None were needed.

It was over.

And it was just beginning.

\* \* \*

With the day's visitations over and the sun long gone, Erin stepped under the pounding stream of water. The heat loosened the few muscles that were still a bit stiff and she gave her short tresses a thorough cleaning, using the fragrant shampoo Jamie had given her for Christmas. Although it hadn't been just shampoo; Jamie had put together an entire kit of self pampering products,

including an entire day at a rejuvenation spa. And not just one day either, but twelve of them; with twins she had figured Erin deserved one day a month just for herself.

The babies were with Dr. Carson, getting their final physical and tests. Jamie had taken the opportunity to run out and get them some dinner, while Erin showered. Enjoying the fact that a few pounds were now gone from her body, and that she could move around a little easier, the blonde spent an extra few minutes under the soothing spray. Pulling a towel from the suitcase Jamie had retrieved from the house earlier in the day, she gently rubbed her clean, glowing skin and then pulled on a pair of dark green sweats, choosing comfort over fashion. She looked at her fleece covered self in the mirror and smiled when she remembered that Jamie had told her over and over again that she would look sexy wearing a trash bag. Erin had tested that theory one night, when she had created herself a two piece, green, plastic ensemble...accented with a string of pearls. Jamie had come home and laughed herself silly at first and giggled the rest of the evening as Erin went about serving and eating dinner in the trashy fashion. But when bedtime arrived, Jamie had proved her earlier declarations by slowly stripping the plastic from Erin's body and loving her a total of four times. Erin fanned herself at the memory. "Let's hope this little number doesn't earn the same reaction. I'm afraid I'm not quite up to that kind of exercise...yet." Her reflection giggled back and Erin gathered up her things and returned to the room.

Jamie walked in carrying a cardboard box and inside was half a dozen or more smaller, white boxes with foreign writing across the sides. Erin took a huge whiff. "Mmm, Chinese! You went all the way to Livingston?"

Jamie shrugged. "It's only seventeen miles; the traffic wasn't that bad. Thought I'd risk it," she said, before kissing Erin. "You're worth it."

Erin pinched her wife in a delicate place. "That's so nice to know. I thought you said you would go to the ends of the earth and all eight planets for me."

Jamie began unpacking the rice, ribs and egg rolls. "Oh, I still would," she said, "but I'd have to take you and the kids with me; I'd miss you too much."

"Ooo, good answer. Did you get me Hot and Sour Soup and Almond, Cashew Chicken?"

"Don't I always get all of your favorites?"

"You do," Erin said. "Leave that a minute and come here." She threw her arms around Jamie and hugged her, melding herself all along the length of the tall, slim body. "I'm so glad I can do this again. It really bothered me when I couldn't be this close to you." Erin uttered more words of affection and peppered kisses across Jamie's jaw line.

They proceeded to hug and kiss languidly for a few more minutes, taking pleasure in each other in an old familiar way. "Not that I'm not enjoying this," Jamie said as she pulled back, "but I have something to tell you. Jeremy came by, when you were napping earlier."

"Oh, I'm sorry I missed him."

"He said he'd come by the house sometime next week."

"Good," Erin said as she returned to the food. "What did he think of our children?"

"I think his exact words were, so cute and perfect."

The author pointed a crispy egg roll in Jamie's direction. "I knew the man was intelligent," she said, before biting into the fried concoction.

Jamie's grin fell a bit. "He brought us the signed paper."

"What paper?" Erin asked. "Oh," she realized, "he gave up his parental rights. Sometimes I had almost forgotten that he... To me, it's always been you."

Jamie's smile popped back, bright as a summer sun. "Now I can adopt Jordan and Noah, and they'll really be mine."

"Honey, they're already yours. This just means that nobody in the world will ever be able to tell you they're not."

\* \* \*

By the time they had finished eating, the babies had returned after earning glowing reports from both of their doctors. The parents were elated.

A while later, Erin had finished with Jordan and was well into Noah's feeding. The baby girl had been burped and was awake and resting between her mothers. Jamie was watching Erin nurse, with a soft, contented smile gracing the corners of her mouth. The newborns had come back unclothed, but clean from their examinations and would soon be falling back to sleep, since that's just about all they did. Erin had handled all of the diaper and clothing changes up until now, but Jamie had watched intently each time and Erin could see her taking mental notes. She knew Jamie was afraid of disappointing her and she wanted Jamie to get used to the idea of physically caring for the babies before actually doing it. But she had to start sometime. "Honey, please change Jordan's diaper and put her in the yellow sleeper."

Jamie panicked for only about half a second. She took a deep breath to calm herself. She'd been doing that a lot lately. *I can do this*, she thought. Jamie lifted the baby carefully then parted her long legs and put the girl back on the bed between them. Unfolding the securely bound blanket, Jamie took a moment...a few of them actually, to study more of her daughter. She patted the bare belly, careful of the navel area, eliciting a tiny shiver. Jamie grinned. *I wonder if she'll be ticklish like her mother.*

Erin copied her wife's posture and proceeded to change baby number two. She did her share of touching along the way...his teeny fingers, which curled around her pinky, his dimpled elbows...the shell of an ear. *My beautiful baby*, she thought. *My handsome son*. She glanced over

at his sister. *My beautiful daughter.*

With both babies unclothed, she began to notice the physical differences between them. While both had the same shade of dark blonde hair, which she was sure would grow even deeper as they grew older, Jordan's was a bit thicker, but she was far from having a head full. Noah seemed slightly longer and so were his toes and fingers. She had a cleft in her diminutive chin, which he lacked. Aside from those variations, they looked very much alike...like Jamie and herself...and a little bit of Jeremy.

Jamie kissed a right foot then started to do the same to the left, but was startled by a discovery. "Why is there a band-aid on this fragile foot?" she demanded.

"That's probably where Anne drew blood." Erin lifted their son's foot. "He has one too."

Jamie was only slightly outraged. "She stuck a needle in them!"

"Calm down honey, it's done on every newborn; it's necessary for their health."

Jamie released a heavy sigh as the flash of anger dulled to a new pain, heavy on her heart. "I know, but that had to hurt," Jamie mumbled around the tender heel she was kissing. *Maybe this is a maternal feeling*, she thought.

Erin leaned over and kissed Jamie's cheek. "I know how you feel. Everything that ever hurts them will hurt me too. And unfortunately this is only the first of a lifetime of pains. God willing, most of those pains will be temporary and superficial...but some won't be."

Jamie let a tear slip. "I can't even think about that right now."

"Let's don't then," Erin said, more cheerfully. "Let's just enjoy this moment with our happy and healthy children. We'll worry about the rest later."

Jamie proceeded to pull away the tape and easily discarded the slightly damp diaper. Drying the bare bottom, she put on a new one and secured it. Erin watched as she double checked the fit. *Thank goodness she's going to get a lot of practice before she tries changing babies that can actually move and want to flip over and squirm away*, Erin thought with a mental chuckle. Jamie laid out the one piece sleeper and put the baby on top of it. Erin reached under the bassinet and tossed something white, Jamie's way. "Put those on her too," she instructed, "under the sleeper," she added for good measure.

Jamie picked up the items. The tiny things barely had a shape, but she did recognize them. "Socks?"

"Uh huh."

"Her feet will already be covered by the clothes and the blanket; isn't that enough?"

"No," Erin said as she continued to dress Noah. "Babies, especially one's this small, can get very cold. You have to trust me on this one."

"Okay. Mother knows best." Jamie put the tiny socks on the tiny feet, then carefully tucked the legs and arms into the proper holes and snapped everything closed. She then put her on a clean blanket and wrapped it over and under, just the way she had seen Erin do it. "There you go," she said, nuzzling Jordan's cheek, "snug as a... Ewww. Where did that saying come from anyway?"

"I don't know, but our children will not be referred to as bugs. Been there, done that," Erin mumbled with a touch of mock crankiness, about her own childhood nickname.

Jamie leaned over and whispered into her ear. "I love this little E-bug."

Erin giggled.

\* \* \*

Both babies were sound asleep...of course, snuggled together in the small bed. Both mommies were wide awake, snuggled together in the big bed. But they knew it wouldn't be that way for long, for both duos. Erin was on her side, facing the infants and Jamie was spooned up behind her with her arm wrapped around Erin's middle. There had been some lazy conversation and a yawn or two before Jamie reached into her pocket and pulled out a small black box. She handed it to her spouse. "Happy Birthday."

Erin looked over her shoulder as she took the gift. "What? You know my birthday is in October."

"That's when you were born; this is for giving birth to our children. I know technically it was yesterday, but things were a little hectic last night."

The case gave a little squeak as Erin pried open the tight lid. The twin pieces inside twinkled at her, as Erin studied the garnet studs. "Oh honey, they're beautiful; Noah and Jordan's birthstone." She turned over, face to face with Jamie. "Thank you. I'll wear them with pride." Their lips met and danced to a private melody composed by their hearts. "I am so proud of you," Erin announced with quiet fervor, "but not for the things you can buy me. I am proud of the wonderful person you are in here." She laid her palm on Jamie's chest. "And for the fantastic parent you'll be everyday for the rest of your life."

"I wouldn't be good at either of those things without you. I love you."

"I love you."

\* \* \*

The babies had been home for a few weeks and everyone was falling into a good routine. Jamie was staying home, equally sharing in the parenting duties and loving every minute of it. Grandma Kathleen was lending her well practiced hands for a diaper change or a bath here and



there when one or both tired parents needed some rest. The family had been back for more baby time, including Jeremy who smiled the whole time he held his nephew. Jordan had decided to show her diva side during that visit and wasn't happy with anyone else's attention, but her mommy Erin's.

It was decided at their first trip to the pediatrician that the babies would benefit from part time bottle feeding, since they may have to switch to formula at some point in the near future. Jamie had fed her daughter for the first time on a Friday afternoon. The insecurities had returned and she was a little apprehensive, but mama and baby survived the event unscathed. Jamie was quite proud of herself.

They found that all four of them thoroughly enjoyed bath time. Jamie was already imparting the importance of a properly buoyant rubber ducky to play with, but right now the kids were in their sit and soak mode. Bedtime consisted of a story, either original or from the dozens of children's books Erin had been compiling. Jamie had done a fair share of shopping for the babies too and had purchased a few CD's of music for tots. She had even started humming along with the tunes during which, Jordan would kick her tiny legs or swing her arms, her closed fists sometimes tapping together. Jamie encouraged the applause...dancing...whatever her daughter was doing and devised more forms of musical entertainment.

Both parents were learning, early on, that even though Jordan and Noah were twins, they were developing distinct personalities, likes and dislikes.

There were exciting discoveries being made by all four of them.

\* \* \*

It was the middle of a bright and cheery afternoon, but the shades in the nursery were drawn, dousing the room in a gray, peaceful hue. Jamie had just given Noah his bottle and having cleaned up his milky mouth, she was rocking him back to sleep. She mumbled, fleetingly, that she couldn't wait for the time when they would be awake more during the day so she could play with them. But then she had a sudden, frightening second thought. "No, little buckaroo," she said and kissed his forehead, "you just take your time growing up. You know, I was so excited waiting for you and your sister to arrive; now nearly a month has gone by...wow. Before long, you'll be walking and talking, going to school...leaving home." Noah's little body wiggled, drawing her attention from those impending events. His face snuggled deeper into Jamie's chest and thinking he was still hungry, she said, "Sorry buddy, the bottle's empty...and so are those," she chuckled. He cuddled some more and then gave a little sigh, finally settling into the sweet spot. His tiny fingers loosely clutched her shirt, finding security in her arms.

Elation. Divine and absolute elation. That's what Jamie had been feeling since becoming a parent to ten pounds of adorable perfection. Only her love for Erin had ever created a stronger sensation. Oh, Jamie knew there would be parenting trials in the future. She could just picture, even if she didn't exactly remember, the kinds of issues her own parents must have faced...including the worst thing imaginable...losing a child. *I don't know how they did it*, she thought as she looked down at her son. *I know I would never survive*. Determined not to go down

that morose thought path, Jamie concentrated on the years with her sister. One particularly funny memory...at least it seemed funny to a pair of six year olds, came to mind. She and Jordan had tried to trick their mother one summer afternoon, each pretending to be the other one, including switching clothes and favorite toys. They had gotten the idea from some TV comedy show and had actually pulled it off for quite awhile. *Hmm, I wonder if Mom really knew and was just playing along.* Jamie grinned slyly. *I bet she did. She was really a great Mom.*

"At least you and your sister can never play that joke on us," she told Noah as she rocked back and forth. Jamie studied his angelic face and the serene state he had achieved. She realized now that he hadn't been seeking nourishment. He was just totally content, basking in her warmth and comfort. He was right where he wanted to be. Jamie was suddenly blindsided when it dawned on her as bright as a dozen new day suns. Her face contorted and a line of steady tears began pouring from her eyes.

Erin stood in the doorway of the nursery, patting Jordan's bottom. The same tears made happy tracks down her cheeks as she had witnessed the last few tender moments and the transformation of her wife's features. Jamie turned to her, wearing the sweetest smile she had ever seen. Erin walked into the room, her eyes never leaving Jamie's. She stopped next to the rocking pair and caressed the wet face.

Jamie glanced again at her snoozing son, then back to Erin. "He loves me," she said with an emotional tremble. "My son loves me."

Careful of her precious cargo, Erin leaned down and kissed Jamie's quivering lips. "Of course he loves you...so does your daughter." Erin took a seat next to the rocker, on the window seat. "They both love you...almost as much as I do. You are their mother. And we are a family."

## Epilogue

Jamie awoke and a brilliant grin immediately spread across her face. She looked out the window to see a beautiful, sunny day then over at her beautiful, sleeping wife. *I hate to do this, but I'm too excited to wait.* Jamie nuzzled her way through the good smelling, yellow hair and rested her lips against an ear. "Erriin. Sweetheart." She gave the flesh a little nibble. Erin shivered and mumbled something incomprehensible. Jamie ran her hand over Erin's hip as she tried again. "Honey, I know it's early, but please wake up."

"Hmm...what is it?"

"Do you know what today is?"

Erin smacked her dry lips. "Well, yesterday was...umm...Tuesday...so I think today would be Wednesday." She had yet to open her eyes.

"No!" Jamie said, exasperated.

Erin turned her tousled head, pried her sleepy eyes open and blinked several times. "No? What world are we on?"

Jamie tossed off the light covers, kicking her long, bare legs in a tiny tantrum. "Well, yes it is Wednesday, but that's not what I meant and you know it. What special day is it?" Erin continued to stare blankly at her excited spouse. "What is the month?" Jamie tried again.

Erin yawned around her answer. "Ju...ly."

Jamie dramatically flopped back onto the bed. "You're not going to make this easy are you?" She sighed. "And what is the date?"

"Theeee...ninth."

"And what happened six months ago today?"

Erin scratched her blonde head. "Oh, that was the day of that terrible wind storm."

A pair of blue eyes squinted tightly in frustration...and then she pounced. "Erin, do I have to tickle you!?"

"No! No!" Erin squealed and twisted under the teasing fingers. "I'll wet the bed!"

Jamie halted her torture. "It wouldn't be the first wet bed I've changed in the last **six months.**" The tormenting digits started in again.

Erin grabbed the flailing arms. "Okay! Okay." She took several deep breaths. "Today our children are six months old."

Jamie pumped her fist in triumph. "Yes! Now I know you said I couldn't give them a party...but I did buy them something special and you did say I could do something special with them on this day."

Erin remembered vividly what she said... and what Jamie wanted to do. The blonde head started shaking gently. "Jamie, I don't know..."

"Honey, you know how much I love our children and that I would never do anything if there was even a chance of them getting hurt."

"There is a chance of them getting hurt every time we take them somewhere in the car."

"Exactly." Jamie turned and put her arm around Erin's waist. "So there is no more of a chance of them getting hurt with this."

Erin stared at the ceiling, knowing Jamie's argument was logical. But she was thinking with a mother's heart. She finally sighed. "Okay."

"I'll be very careful..."

"I said okay."

"I've already..." A hand clamped over Jamie's mouth.

Erin looked her right in the eye. "I said it's okay; you can do it." She quickly moved her hand and replaced it with her lips. "I do trust you with our children."

Jamie's face softened with love. "Thank you. Thank you, honey. And I promise that you'll love this too."

"I do have two conditions."

Jamie looked skeptical, but knew she had to consent. "Okaay, what are they?"

"First, you have to take them one at a time." The rancher nodded an amiable agreement. "And..." Erin whispered the final condition in Jamie's ear, taking time after to thoroughly explore the delicate spot. The erotic investigation soon moved on to other areas and led to some heated kisses...until Jamie heard a sound on the little monitor beside the bed.

"The babies are awake!" The tall woman jumped from the bed and ran down the hall.

Erin was left mid pucker as her lover fled the room. But she couldn't really be disappointed. She looked over at the little white box and smiled as she heard mama greeting their twins good morning and telling them about their exciting day ahead.

"I know this is really more about me than you and I'm glad that your very generous mommy understands how important this is to me. You know how much I love her, don't you? I want you both to always know that, and how much I love both of you too."

Erin heard a baby giggle. A rancher's giggle wasn't far behind. *I love those sounds.* Even though she had given Jamie a hard time about the half birthday, she loved how her wife got so excited with just about everything involving the twins.

Parenthood was awesome. Marriage was awesome. Love was awesome.

\* \* \*

Erin was sitting on a bench near the front door. While she was waiting for Jamie's big surprise, she was taking the opportunity to update the baby books. Noah's album, which of course had the ark theme, lay beside her as she began with her first born. Erin opened the book with old fashioned Pooh on the cover. From Jordan's sonogram picture and birth information on the first page to the family tree, Jordan's first official picture, the date of her first smile, her first laugh and more, the first six months of her life was well documented. The final two pages were for a

current portrait and a letter that Erin was about to compose. Noah's book was identical in content, but of course with his own individual statistics. There were two more blank books in the nursery, waiting to be filled with the exciting details of the next six months of the twin's lives.

Erin picked up a piece of light pink paper and began writing. Dear Jordan Kathleen. She stopped as the name sparked a memory. Erin looked up the staircase and her mind's eye saw her grandmother come down those stairs for the final time on that bright May morning. She had been visiting for five months, most of that time spent at Erin and Jamie's, but, reluctantly so, she decided that she needed to return to Ireland.

Erin and Jamie were each holding a baby and Kathleen stood there just looking at the four of them for a long time. The four month old twins were dressed in cute summer outfits. Jordan had on tangerine colored shorts and royal blue pair for Noah. They wore t-shirts, one with butterflies and the other with a sailboat. Tiny sandals were strapped to their feet, allowing their adorable, pudgy toes to show through. Kathleen tweaked one of those toes and Jordan giggled. Both babies loved spending time with Grandma Kathleen.

Erin had tried her hardest not to cry, but the sadness could not be kept at bay for long.

"Erin, love," Kathleen said, "I'm not gonna tell ya not ta cry, because sometimes that's just something we have ta do."

The blonde nodded and she kissed her son's head, hoping that her joy for him would balance out her emotions. "I know Grandma...I just...I'll miss you."

Kathleen stepped forward and engulfed her grandchildren in a hug. "Oh, and I'll miss you. But somehow I think these new little ones will keep ya quite busy; ya won't have time ta think a lot about me."

"No matter what is happening in my life, I always think about you. I love you. You're just so far away...and what if..." Erin buried her head in Kathleen's shoulder, unable to complete her thought.

But Kathleen knew. "Erin, don't put me in my grave just yet," she joked. "I may be 82 years old, but aside from a little arthritis, the doctor says I'm as healthy as a forty year old. Ya know my mother lived ta be 96. I intend ta be around for a long time ta come. And I'll try ta come back for another visit next Christmas."

Erin sniffed. "Maybe on your honeymoon," she teased, letting a smile dry her tears.

Kathleen was far too old to blush, despite her modesty concerning romantic matters. "Perhaps," she said, "but only if you come ta Ireland fer the wedding." She winked and reached for her grandson. "Little Noah, my handsome great-grandson, even though I won't be here, I'll always be around. And just as soon as ya learn to talk, tell yer parents to call me at least once a week. I love you my little bairn." She handed the boy back and took her great-granddaughter. Being a very tactile baby, Jordan poked Kathleen's cheek and grabbed for her moving lips as the elderly

woman said her good-byes. "I love ya wee one." She finished and the tall mama reclaimed her girl.

A wrinkled hand landed gently on the rancher's face. "Jamie, you are my family too and I love ya. You are a great wife and mother and I'm proud of ya. Take care of my three lovelies."

"I promise Kathleen; they are my life."

"I have seven grandchildren and thirteen great grandchildren," the elderly woman said. "I love them all equally...but the ones in this house hold an extra special place in my heart."

The grand, Irish lady gave one more round of hugs before departing through the front door to a waiting limo, courtesy of her prosperous son. All four waved goodbye, two with a little help, all wearing identical lipstick prints on their cheeks.

Erin left the past memory and returned to her letter. "Today you are six months old, my daughter. The joy you have brought to me since your birth is... well, indescribable and your life is just beginning. The day you laughed for the first time, my heart nearly exploded with happiness. I don't know how old you will be when you read this, but I bet you are going to laugh...again and then wonder just how something so simple could garner such a strong reaction. Well, I can't give you an answer for that. I can only say that when you become a parent, then you will understand completely. And that is one of my greatest wishes for you...if you choose parenthood, of course." Erin wrote a few more paragraphs before signing her love, folding the letter and tucking it away in a matching envelope.

"Are you ready mommy?" came a voice from the top of the stairs.

Erin chuckled and set aside the book. "Yes."

"Do you have the video camera on and ready to record?"

"Yes Jamie. Come on already; I'd like to see our children again sometime before midnight."

"And the still camera?"

"Jamie!"

"All right; here we come."

Three bodies descended the stairs as Erin watched through the small screen on the video camera. "Oh no!" Erin exclaimed with a smile as they came into full view. Jamie carried a baby in each arm and all three of them were dressed exactly alike, from the top of their chocolate colored cowboy hats to the tips of their shiny, brown boots. In between were triple two-tone, denim shirts and stonewashed jeans. Jordan reached over and knocked off her brother's hat. Erin laughed at the antics as she continued recording. "Where on earth did you get these outfits?" she asked.

"I had them special made. I ah...got you one too...if you wanted...for a few pictures."

Erin leaned in between her children and gave Jamie a lovely kiss. She only pulled away when Jordan made a grab for her glasses. "What am I going to do with you...big goof?"

"What you've done since the day we met...just love me."

"There's no chance of that ever stopping."

After snapping more pictures, Erin took her daughter and nuzzled her neck, making her giggle. Jamie re-settled Noah in her arm and reached for his missing hat, which she promptly returned to his dark blonde head.

"Okay," Erin said, "let's get this going."

\* \* \*

The author walked along at a slow pace, holding a set of reins in her hand, leading the gentlest horse in the herd around the small corral. They were on their sixth trip and Erin turned around, walking backward, so she could see the riders. She grinned. Secretly, she was almost as thrilled as Jamie.

"Honey, she loves this!" Jamie exclaimed. Baby Jordan sat in the saddle in front of her tall mother, with two loving hands securely clasping her chubby body. The tot was all gummy grins and giggles as she kicked her booted feet and slapped at the saddle horn, squealing her delight.

The twins were having their very first horseback ride, the first of many, many...many, if they were to take after their equine loving parent. Noah had already had his ride. He loved it too, but was much more docile in his enjoyment. But his little smile spoke volumes to his parents. While his sister was riding, he was being held on the corral fence by his uncle Jeremy, who had dropped by with presents.

"I knew they both would," Jamie said.

"Yes sweetie, you were right." After several dozen more pictures, Jamie dismounted the horse. Erin handed off control of the animal to a ranch hand. Jamie instructed the hand to give the beast a special treat as she wrapped her free arm around her wife. They walked over to retrieve their son, who happily reached out for his mommy. Jeremy headed back to his car and down the road to the house as the family of four approached their own transportation home. The couple's four legged children jogged along behind and Skye and Artemis jumped into the back of the SUV as soon as Jamie opened the door.

The adult's each secured a baby in a car seat, adjusting and double checking buckles. Jamie spoke to the babies about future rides and Erin listened with continued amusement over Jamie's enthusiasm. Before the twins were born, there had been a secret place in Erin's heart where she was concerned, not about Jamie parenting abilities, but her projected fears. She always knew that

Jamie would love their children and that her heart would always be in the right place, but Erin wanted her wife to be completely comfortable around their children. Those fears did rear themselves...for about two minutes, but love did conquer all, as it always does.

Jamie was living her second childhood, giving Erin very good insight to what her spouse had been like as a youngster. This had given the author a brainstorm for a new series of children's books. The Adventures of Jamie and Jordan would be about the worldly escapades of seven year old twins. Erin also planned another series for toddlers called, of course, The Mini Adventures of Noah and Jordan.

"We're going home now for another surprise," Jamie said, before kissing Jordan on the head.

Erin clicked in the last buckle and looked at the rancher a bit sternly. "Jamie, I have to draw the line at cake...not until their first official birthday."

Jamie smiled charmingly, "I didn't say the surprise was for the twins. I asked Jeremy to come over to watch the babies for a few hours so I could treat their mother to a romantic champagne and seafood dinner by the new pool and then a twilight swim."

Erin melted into a stunned, but happy puddle. "Really?"

"Absolutely!" Jamie walked around the car and took her wife into her arms. "Tonight is for lovers."

Erin peeled the hat from Jamie's head and planted a kiss on her lips that nearly made the babies and the dogs blush.

"Wow!" Jamie took a moment to compose herself, taking a moment or five to remember what she was going to say. She looked in the car again and back at Erin. "I do have one question though."

"What is it?" Erin asked happily.

"When can we have another baby?"

**The End**