

# ~Reflections On The Past ~

Erin O'Rielly

the sequel to [Of Love And Betrayal](#)

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## Disclaimer and Acknowledgments

This is an adult story that primarily features stories involving women. If it is illegal in the state, province, or country in which you live; or if you are under the age of 18, please leave the site and find something else to read.

There are consensual sexual relations between adult women, which may be graphically explicit.

There are elements of strong language, violence, physical and/or mental, as well as some emotional hurt and discomfort in the story.

The events portrayed in this story are fictional and any resemblance to actual events and/or people is purely coincidental.

Acknowledgment:..Thank you for all your help Alice, Packie, T and Julie.

Dedication:..This story is for Jennifer who first suggested I write this sequel.

Author's Note:..This story was written in three parts. The first part is from Kiley's viewpoint. The second part is from LJ's viewpoint about the same events. The last part is from both their viewpoints. The reading of the first story "[Possibilities](#)" and the second "[Of Love And Betrayal](#)" may help in the understanding of the characters in this story.

## **Kleenex Alert**

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## Introduction

Surrounded by their children, family and a small group of friends Lucinda Jane Evans and Kiley Marie Andrews Wilcox pledged their love. They wrote their vows and said them for the first time on that day.

Taking Kiley's hand, LJ spoke. "My heart was cold and unreachable...I thought love meant I was weak and vulnerable. Then you came into my life and what was once cold, became warm...that which

was unreachable, reached out. You saved me." Tears cascaded down both their cheeks. "Kiley, I love you...it is as simple and as complex as that." She pressed the smaller hand against her heart. "In here is where you will always be for now and for always. You are my home, my life, my love." A brilliant smile crossed features, which up until then were serious, as she began sliding a ring upon her love's finger. "Kiley, will you walk through this life with me as my partner through the good and the bad? Will you allow me to journey throughout all our lifetimes with you? Will you be my love?"

As tears of happiness filled her eyes, Kiley responded. "Yes, yes, yes."

"I love you." Whispered LJ.

Kiley smiled as she held LJ's hand. "Lucy, my love, you have brought me joy and happiness...the likes of which I never thought possible. When I first met you I thought you had a heart of ice, but how wrong I was...once thawed, your heart radiated the warmth of love. Not only did you love me, but took my family as your own." Taking her hand she wiped a tear away from LJ's cheek. "You brought into my life a love and passion I only thought existed in stories." Taking LJ's hand and slipping a ring on her finger, Kiley continued. "Lucy, we have had our good times and our bad ones, but through it all our love prevailed. I love you; will you do me the honor of being my life partner? Will you be my love?" The smile on LJ's face was all Kiley needed as she finished putting the ring on the finger.

"Oh, yes, my love. YES!" Then, LJ took Kiley in her arms and kissed her gently before they turned and smiled at those gathered there.

The two women pledged their lives and love to each other. Their bond began with the joy and excitement of a new love until betrayal almost tore them apart. Like all events in life, lessons were learned from that experience. Relationships, if they are to be successful, need to be nourished and cared for with diligence or they are sure to fail. In a world that was unfriendly to their lifestyle, LJ and Kiley worked hard every day to make what they had together thrive. They knew that together they could face and conquer any obstacle in spite of the difficulties in their way.

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### *Kiley's Memories*

I'm sitting here watching my love walk to the barn and I am filled with as much passion if not more than when we first made love. Even when I'm angry with her my knees become weak just being near her. She never ceases to amaze me with her never-ending love and passion.

I remember our commitment ceremony and how I was talking with my mother and Lucy rode up on her horse and offered me her hand. She pulled me up and sat me in front of her putting a strong arm around me as we rode off. I had no idea where we were going until we came upon an old linesman shack nestled among a grove of trees.

It didn't look like much on the outside, but once inside I was amazed at the romantic environment she had created. Candles were lit everywhere and I remember wondering who lit them and if it was a fire hazard.

*§Kiley is chuckling at this point. §*

Looking around, I noticed all the little touches she had made to make this old shack a dreamy hideaway for us to seal our commitment to each other.

The bed, which looked new and not like a cot cowboys would have slept on over the years, was strewn with rose petals. The air was perfumed with the scent of the carnations, roses and daisies that filled the vases surrounding the room. In the background the meditation from Thais by Massenet was playing softly adding the final touch of love and passion to the moment.

Lucy took me in her arms as we began to move with the rise and fall of the music; each lost in overwhelming feelings of love. Gently she kissed me as she began to remove my dress then lifted me in her strong arms and laid me on the bed of roses. Whispering words of love and adoration she began to slowly make love to me.

*§A dreamy look crosses her face as she recalls the moment as if it were happening now. §*

She is a wonderful lover...slow and patient, making sure my every need is met before she continues. I have often thought that archeology has had a hand in her lovemaking skills. First, she explores the area until she finds the perfect site that will yield treasures. Then, with practiced patience and skill she begins her exploration to expose each layer until she reaches her goal. Slowly, and with great care she touches the prize, stroking it with love and tenderness. Once revealed, she holds the object as if it were precious to behold before claiming it as her own.

*§ A silence ensues, as she is lost in the moment before a pained expression crosses her face. §*

There is no way to talk about the past without mentioning Maxine Dillon and her affect on my life. We have moved on as a couple and I forgave Lucy for her weakness. Yet, sitting here some twenty plus years later, I would be lying if I said there weren't any doubts.

There is a part of me that still wonders if she will one day crave that power over another again. Sometimes when I am alone I agonize over the thought of her turning to Maxine Dillon or someone like her. She has never given me a reason to think she would, but my heart is still full of fear.

Betrayal is a heinous act for it can never be completely erased or repaired; it just sits there festering waiting for the opportunity to say I told you so. No matter how many times she tells or shows me her love the little voice of doubt cannot be quieted.

Oh, don't get me wrong; she does make me happy in so many marvelous ways. She wakes me every morning with a tender kiss and whispers I love you. Every night she holds me close to keep me safe from things that go bump in the night.

*§ A look of absolute joy crosses her face. §*

Do you know that she makes a cake for me on my birthday?

*§ Laughing she continues. §*

The first time she made one it kind of looked like a ski slope...there was flour and sugar all over the kitchen...I think she used every bowl we had. But, you know, it was the best cake I ever ate because she made it for me.

It is the little things she does that tell me over and over again how much she cares and loves me. Why can't I let the past go?

*§She shakes her head as she sighs deeply. §*

*§ § § § §*

It took a few years for the archeology camp to take off giving us the time to really get to know each other. I don't mean surface stuff, but the stuff that makes each other what we are. It seemed at times like we were inseparable; before long we began to pick up on the other's thoughts and feelings before they were expressed.

*§ A smile crosses her face. §*

Lucy would laugh then put her hand to her head and say, *tell me, oh wise one, what am I thinking now?* That time was so special to me...it seemed like everything had fallen into place for our family.

Robbie and Katie were four at the time and would often accompany Lucy on her excursions to find the best sites on the property for digging. One day she decided to go out and *dig in the dirt*, as Robbie called it, and asked them if they wanted to go. Katie had just gotten over a cold and I tried to discourage the idea, but it was too late as they were busy putting on their boots excited to be going. Lucy picked up Katie and said, *tell Mommy it will be okay*, in an attempt to appease me.

I was having none of it and just glared at her telling her that it was suppose to rain and I didn't think it was a good idea to take them out. We always tried to keep our disagreements mild when the kids were around and this was no exception. Lucy just smiled and in a condescending tone said, *we'll be okay, Mommy*,

*don't worry.* Then gave me a wink before she kissed me goodbye.

I began banging pans around and cursing under my breath and continued to do so until I heard the door open and in walked three drowned rats. I began laughing and Lucy just held up her hand and said *I don't want to hear about it.* I wrapped the kids in towels and got them into a nice warm bath before I approached her. She was standing in our room, naked, grouching about weathermen and how the rain had ruined a perfectly good day. I asked her if she wanted to try out for the duck-capades next. Before I knew it she had me in her arms holding me close and saying quack...quack.

*§A far away look crosses her face before she began to speak again.§*

I'm not sure when it happened...when I noticed that Allie was growing up fast and soon would be leaving us. Her transition into adolescence was difficult for both of us. It was at that time we decided to have another child, which, in hindsight, made the situation worse.

Allie had always been a delightful child, so loving and kind until...teenage Allie was born! Out of nowhere she seemed to appear as a surly, argumentative woman-child. Both her mothers suddenly grew horns, took stupid pills and became a major source of embarrassment.

I think that is what hurt us the most...her shame of our lifestyle. We tried to make compensations, but at the end of the day she was our child and she had to answer to us for her behavior. In spite of all the tears and hateful words we loved her unconditionally although I could see and feel Lucy's pain.

*§Tears welled up in her eyes. §*

There was nothing I could do or say to help; it was up to Allie, and she wasn't going to make the first move. Lucy attempted many times to see if they could come to an understanding. Usually the session would end up with Allie screaming and slamming her bedroom door and Lucy sitting on the porch swing in a sullen mood. Then, one day, while they were both out in the barn, something happened and they came to an understanding. After that, our family seemed to go back to the easygoing style of earlier years.

I never really knew what happened, but for me, it was a blessing; the pregnancy was difficult and all the stress between them didn't help. Finally I was able to relax and concentrate on the new life I was carrying.

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Carolyn Marie Evans came into the world wailing to be noticed. Lyn was a mover and a shaker from the moment of conception. She punched and kicked me throughout the pregnancy. We all fell in love with her as soon as she was born.

If there was a mountain to climb or a dare made she was the one to take on the challenge. We were bragging about her crawling by six months and were mortified when, at eight months, she found that running was the only way to travel.

As anxious and annoyed as she made us, she would always make us smile. Her antics at one moment would make me gasp, then I would laugh out loud at the outrageousness of her exploits. We would always keep an eye on the tornado called Lyn, constantly amazed at her knack for staying in one piece. We all fell in love with her as soon as she was born.



My mother and father arrived every morning at eight sharp to take care of the *wild child*, as they called her. I secretly think Lyn made Mom and Dad feel young and alive...I know that is how she made me feel.

Ben was a special favorite of Lyn's. If we couldn't find her we knew she would be with Ben, jabbering to him constantly. He, of course, had it all over the rest of us...the barn was her preferred playground.

Allie would race home from school just so she could spend time playing with Lyn. Katie and Rob would spend hours just trying to keep up with her.

§ § § § §

It was about four years after Lyn's birth that Ben passed away. We were all devastated as he was such a special man to us all.

*§Her eyes stare out the window towards the barn.§*

Robbie would tell us he saw Grumpy in the barn cleaning up and when we looked it seemed as if it had been recently swept. Wishful thinking on our part, but I do believe that the spirit stays behind until everyone has come to terms with their passing. Allie and Katie said they saw him down by the creek fishing on more than one occasion. Lyn would look at his picture, smile, and begin babbling as if she was carrying on a conversation with him. Children always seem to be open to the possibility of seeing those that pass.

After Ben passed I got the idea that it was time for Lucy to find her family.

*§Shaking her head she lets out a snort. §*

Of course she would have none of it telling me *let it go, Kiley, they are nothing to me.* It was something in her eyes that told me she wasn't being honest with herself or me. So, off I went in search of Lucy's family.

Ed and Kathy Evans weren't hard to find, nor were her brothers. They all still lived outside of New York City in the same community that Lucy had left years before.

Her oldest brother, Ed Junior, had married and, as far as I could tell, had no children. Her other brother, Mark, heeded the calling of the Lord and became a priest. Since the Evans had no other grandchildren I thought that would be the way to bring them all together.

I was filled with hope that I could accomplish what Lucy felt was impossible. As I dialed the number I could feel the butterflies in my stomach.

*§She begins to laugh. §*

They were caused more from Lucy walking in on me than speaking with Mrs. Evans. If it didn't work out I would have a lot of explaining to do.

*§She raises her eyebrows and sighs.§*

I heard a woman's voice say *hello* and I told her my name and that my call was in regards to her daughter Lucinda. I could hear a sense of relief when she asked, *is she dead?* That comment alone should have told me to just hang up, but I carried on and I told her no, her daughter was alive and well. I also said she might like to know she was a grandmother. I definitely had her attention...she asked, *is she married?* There seemed to be excitement and joy in her voice. *Yes, to me,* I replied.

There was a long period of silence before she said, *I see, so they are your children.* Her tone turned bitter and distant. *They are our children, Mrs. Evans. We have three girls, Allison, Katie, Carolyn and a boy, Robert.* I could hear her sobbing and took it as a positive sign. When she finally spoke there was only coldness and hate in her voice. *Do not call here ever again! We do not recognize a deviant or her children as our daughter. I will pray for those poor children who are being victimized by your evil ways.*

A sense of fear filled my heart as it occurred to me that she might try and take our children away from us. I was trembling when I hung up the phone wondering what I would do and more importantly, how to tell Lucy.

She was sitting on the ground surrounded by seven year olds when I found her. She gave me her patented *everything will be okay* smile as she told the class to try and do what she showed them. I think she knew what I had done for she didn't seem surprised when I told her about the conversation.

She took my hand and led me away from the group to a private area. I can still feel her arms around me as he held me close and reminded me that *the children and you are all the family I need. Besides, I have parents that love me for myself right here.* I remember thinking how lucky I was to have her in my life.

§ § § § §

By the time Rob was ten and Lyn was five they were Lucy's chief companions while working at the camp. Katie preferred the artist life and would spend hours at the camp just sketching the sights. Allie graduated from high school and was making plans to attend the university in the

fall with premed as her area of study. I found myself coming to the sad realization that the last few months of our being a complete family were upon us.

Lucy was so sweet as I cried one night about Allie's leaving us. She held me close and told me everything would work out. And, it did...that year was the first annual Evans family dig.

Thanks to her numerous contacts, Lucy was able to get permission for us to visit a dig in Mexico. For two weeks we camped out and participated in digging for relics. Robbie and Lyn followed Lucy everywhere eager for the knowledge she taught them. Katie wasn't as interested; she would spend hours on end sketching the site and surroundings. Allie and our guide would search for various plants used as medicines by the locals. Me, I just relished in having everyone together. Each night we would all gather around the campfire to talk and laugh about our day. For two weeks every summer after that we all could be found at some site or another bonding as a family.

*§Kiley is smiling once again as she recalls the time. §*

Our children are so different yet so alike. They all had blonde hair when born except for Lyn, who had thick, jet-black hair that no matter what we did insisted on the spiked look. Allie's eyes are green like mine...the others have various shades of blue. The twin's eyes are a light blue with a dark circle around the outside of the pupil. Lyn's eyes are the same blue of Lucy's and I am certain changed to green when she was up to no good.

*§She begins laughing. §*

Of course to me, their mother, I think they are the most beautiful children in the world.

*§ § § § §*

Now, it is twelve years later and so much has changed for us. Allie is about to start her internship at Children's Hospital; she will make a wonderful pediatrician. Rob decided after one semester that he could learn more from Lucy about archeology than any school could teach him; Lucy beamed when he went off to school majoring in her field. Surprisingly enough, she was not as upset as I thought when he came back home to learn from her. I think she secretly agreed with him.

*§She laughs. §*

Katie tried two semesters before she dropped out announcing she wanted to do something else...*what would that be I asked her,* only to be given the eye roll, before she said, *MOM.* We set up a studio for her in the old house where she could continue with her sketches and paintings. If you can keep a secret, I will tell you that I am glad they are here with us,

*§ she pauses, §*

and I need them nearby.

*§Tears begin to roll down her cheeks. §*

Lyn, my wild child, my baby...

*§Kiley's eyes mist over as sadness crosses her face. §*

How she made me smile.

*§Again Kiley pauses as she wipes tears away.§*

It was only a week ago that she and I were shopping for her prom gown. It was a glorious late spring day without a cloud in the sky as we walked along the streets of downtown Austin. I remember her dancing around me on the sidewalk describing the dress she wanted and how much she was looking forward to her date with Josh, her boyfriend. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a car careened towards us headed in my direction...as I unconsciously braced for the onslaught, I felt Lyn push me out of the way...then she was flying through the air making contact with plate glass before her body entered a store. I was dazed, but I knew my child had been hit and I screamed as I ran into the store.

There, on the carpeted floor of a hair salon, was her crumpled, bloody body. I sat down next to her and gently touched her beautiful, bloodied face...she opened her eyes and weakly spoke, *you okay, Mom*. I could see that her face was severely cut in several places and blood was escaping from her ears and the corners of her mouth. I know the ambulance came and the medics took great care with her before they put her on a stretcher and took her to the hospital. It was all so unreal, like it was happening to someone else and I was just a bystander...somehow I went into automatic as I called Lucy and the children.

We all met at the hospital and gathered around her oh so fragile body, which had, what seemed like, hundreds of wires and tubes. A ventilator was in her mouth to help her breath and as it pumped I could feel myself willing her to breathe on her own. Our vigil began with hope and prayers that this wonderful child of ours would come back to us.

It all seems so surreal as I try and focus on the events...I think that had we not started late

maybe things would have been different. A few days after the accident the doctors told us she was brain dead. Lucy and I then had to make the most dreadful of decisions...to let her go. Father Michael gave her last rites as we prepared for the final victory. He had baptized all the kids and me so it was a comfort to have him with our baby in her last moments. When he was finished he came and hugged each of us then laid a comforting hand on my arm. *She will be in God's hands; Kiley, she will find the ultimate happiness and peace.* He then placed his other hand on Lucy. *LJ, can you imagine her having the time of her life jumping from cloud to cloud challenging all the saints to outdo her?* We both let out a small laugh...yes; she would keep things lively for everyone in heaven.

As her brother and sisters held hands, Lucy and I each held one of our little girl's. I remember my parents standing at the foot of the bed holding each other crying. Father Michael provided our strength as we all kissed her goodbye one last time before we, her parents, together, nodded to the doctors that they could take her to a surgical suite and harvest her organs.

Lucy just stood there holding her hand as tears coursed down her cheeks. Parents love all their children equally; to lose one is devastating. For Lucy and I, Lyn was like a ray of sunshine in our lives...our wild child, so full of life and love. Finally, Lucy bent down and kissed her little girl once more before turning to each in the room and hugging them. When she came to me I buried my head in her shoulder and she stroked my hair and whispered, *our little girl is gone...what will we do?*

I pulled her closer, feeling the pain she felt. *We will face it together,* I said before looking

up at the glistening, watery blue eyes. *I love you.*

She gently touched my cheek. *Never leave me...I love you.*

We waited until a doctor, I can't even remember his name, came and told us they were done and our child was gone. Then a lovely young woman came up to us and introduced herself as the anesthesiologist who was with Lyn in her last moments. *She went peacefully, I made sure of that. Please accept my heartfelt sympathies.* What a comfort it was to know that this caring woman was with Lyn at the end.

Lucy turned to everyone and said *will you all please come with me?* We piled into the van; she took us to the largest cave on our property, held my hand before she began to wail. The sound came from her inner most being, flooding the cavern with all her pain and sorrow that reverberated off the walls. Soon we all joined in as we cleansed ourselves of the great sadness we felt.

That night Lyn came to me and told me she was okay now...that Grumpy Ben took her hand and showed her the way. She told me to take special care of Lucy; *she is hurting so much more than everyone else and won't let me come to her...will you tell her that Gram Rhodes is with me? I love you Mommy, I will always be with you.* I woke then, touching my cheek where she had kissed me goodbye.

Now we are all gathered in this funeral parlor as our wild child, is no longer wild, but still, as she lays in her coffin at peace. I still feel her near, touching my cheek when the wind blows or hugging me when the sun warms my body. Oh, how I miss her.



*§She is sobbing uncontrollably wanting to be  
left alone in her sorrow§*

*§ § § § §*

## *LJ's Memories*

Kiley. Doesn't the sound of it bring a picture of brightness and joy? It does to me.

*§She runs her finger around the rim of her cup  
as she stares into the dark brew. Her face is  
serene, reflecting her thoughts.§*

Have you ever seen a sunrise on a crisp, cold morning when the air is filled with just a hint of freezing and everything around seems so much more alive? Before the sun ever makes its blazing début the sky takes on a turquoise color as the horizon becomes white and the clouds above are turned into spires of pinks, purples, reds and yellows. Then, in the middle of the color show, a slip of fiery red can be seen as the sun inches its way; the messenger of a brand new day.

To me, that is what Kiley does to me each and every day. Even now, after all these years, I still tremble when she is near. The passion and love I feel for her grows with each passing day...there are times when I feel my love for her so intensely that I think I will explode from the wonder of it. She is my light that shows me the way in a world that can often be hard and cold. When all about me is not making sense one thought of her and it is all clear. She simply is the love of my life.

*§ § § § §*

I know that my betrayal with Max hurt her deeply...my indiscretion will never be erased, nor will the shame I feel. After the initial shock,

Kiley let me back into her life and after I received the award, she told me she forgave me...but, in her heart, how can she ever completely let it go? My grandmother once told me that people may forget the good you do, but they will never forget the bad. I wish I had heeded that advice way back before I ever met Kiley. Then, I never would have caused her so much pain.

*§Sadness is written all over her face as she stares into her cup of coffee with a pained expression. §*

It was shortly after we returned home from our trip to Cleveland for the award that I presented her with a diamond ring..

The night was balmy with a slight chill in the air as we sat in our favorite nighttime spot on the porch. Kiley was resting her head on my shoulder telling about our youngest exploits of the day.

*§She is smiling fondly. §*

As we were both laughing I reached down for the box I had waiting on the wooden floor. *What do you have there?* she asked and I winked at her.

I opened the box and held out a diamond ring and said...Kiley Wilcox, would you do me the honor of being my life partner? Will you become Kiley Evans for all time?

*§She is smiling broadly at the memory.§*

Kiley flung her arms around my neck with such force I almost fell off the swing. *I'll take that as yes,* I said just as she began to kiss me passionately. Pulling away she held out her left hand and I put the ring on her finger. *You may take it as a yes,* she said as she began tracing

her lips along my collarbone before finding my lips.

As a lover Kiley is wonderful...I am the only woman she has ever been with...from the very first time we made love she was spontaneous and open to exploration. That was right here in this very house.

*§Her face gets a distant look as she stares into space. §*

That was the day I let myself love again. I never thought it would happen again after Holly died, but there was Kiley just waiting to be loved. Incredible as it sounds, I didn't know love could be this intense or satisfying...I'm not just talking about the sexual part, although that is wonderfully passionate and fulfilling. I'm talking about in here.

*§She holds her long fingers over her heart. §*

For a long time...

*§She pauses...§*

I think even with Holly, I thought love meant sex and the hotter and more passionate the sex the hotter and more passionate the love.

*§She laughs. §*

What a dimwit I was.

*§She shakes her head and laughs again. §*

Can you imagine how dense I was? Kiley has shown me that love means more than hot bodies sliding against one another.

When I think of the true meaning of love I think of Kiley. In spite of all my shortcomings and my

betrayal she still loves me...me, the imperfect person that I am. It is really amazing and I thank God everyday for leading us to one another. She has taught me that once the sex is over; if you don't have a genuine love for the other person, then all you had was sex. Whatever it takes, I want nothing more than to make her happy...my happiness is when she is happy.

We had a small gathering for our commitment ceremony...only family and Rob Ludlow and his wife.

*§She gets a crooked smile on her face and a twinkle in her eyes. §*

Weeks before, Ben and Carl helped me get an old linesmen's shack ready for our 'first night'. At first I felt a bit strange having Carl help, but he insisted and in the end he gave me some rather good ideas for decorations. I remember when I went to their house to ask their permission to wed their daughter.

They both sat there and listened to all my reasons for wanting to commit to their daughter in a public fashion. I was so nervous...I mean, it wasn't like we hadn't been living together or that we didn't have children either, for heaven's sake! It was important to me that they know my intentions and approve before I ever asked Kiley. Know what they said after I had been sweating bullets while saying my piece?

*§She laughs out loud. §*

They said *thank goodness we thought it was bad news*. Then they both hugged me and gave me their blessings.

I am pretty sure Kiley was pleased with our rustic hideaway, if the look of pure delight on

her face was anything to go by. Even now, twenty plus years later, I remember the way she smiled that night. Her smile has a way of calming me in the hardest of times. And, we have had those.

§ § § § §

Around the time that Allie was growing into her teen years, Kiley and I decided to have another child. Once again I was given the honor of inseminating my love...it was so awesome...it made me part of the pregnancy and I can honestly say I impregnated Kiley. They are our children in every way imaginable and no one can ever take that away from us. Kiley insisted on putting on the birth certificate that LJ Evans was the father.

*§She laughs. §*

I think my enthusiasm over the pregnancy and the anticipation of the baby brought about our rift with Allie. Thinking back, I realize now that it was partially my doing. To our daughter, Allie, I was her hero...the one she looked up to and took such pride in. It probably started a little when the twins were born...what a time that was. You know after that, I petitioned every cellular company to put a tower in our area...I even offered to donate the land.

*§She smiles at the thought. §*

Jealousy is a green-eyed monster, mix it with adolescence and hormones and you have the makings of Allie the teenager. I am not sure who was the most hurt, but I think all three of us suffered during that time. The pregnancy had not started too well for Kiley...I found myself increasingly taking over the Mommy duties for the twins.

I can see how Allie, in her altered state of a teenager, would feel neglected, but what could I do?

*§ She shakes her head and sighs. §*

On one hand I had a pregnant, hormonal Kiley and on the other I had a teenage, hormonal Allie. Mix in to that two five year olds and it was all I could handle. Of course, Dorothy was there to help, which made it bearable, but I am sure our oldest felt left out and alone.

The most hurtful thing she said to us was that she was embarrassed by us. I know now that every parent, gay or straight, hears that, but at the time it was devastating. Every night I would try to communicate with her only to end up either saying the wrong thing or one of us getting angry. If I remember correctly, it was one Saturday morning when I was in the barn saddling my horse that Allie and I had our breakthrough.

*§She smiles as a look of peace crosses her face.  
§*

At first, I don't think Allie knew I was there as she began caring for her horse. I heard her talking; telling the horse how mean everyone was to her. When she realized I was there she tried to bolt, but I wouldn't let her.

I jumped on my horse and reached down to her. *Come on, lets go see if we have any new foals.* I said. She just frowned and said *I'm too big for that baby stuff.* Still, I held out my hand offering her a chance. She paused long enough for me to say...*Squirt, you're never too big...you will always be my best friend and baby.*

Allie looked at me with those green eyes and I saw what could only be described as joy in them. She took my hand and off we rode, just as the time so many years earlier. Words were never spoken about the troubles between us, but on that ride, we resolved everything.

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How do I describe the birth of Lyn? Well we did have the benefit of hospital help unlike with the twins...I still shudder thinking of their arrival into the world.

*§She laughs out loud. §*

We all gathered around the birthing table as the seven pound, two ounce baby was born. Screaming immediately as if to say *here I am world... now what are you going to do with me?*

Everyone adored her and made her the center of attention. Now, you might think she was a spoiled brat...actually she was, but not in a bad way.

*§Again she laughs deeply. §*

She had us all wrapped around her little finger and never seemed to know. She took life head on at a hundred miles an hour. If it was to be done she would do it...the child knew no fear.

I remember once when coming out of the barn I looked up to see her sitting on the roof outside her room. My heart skipped a beat for the pitch of that little overhang was very steep. Trying to keep a calm voice I asked, *Lyn what are you doing up there?* I remember wondering how she even got there.

*§A great glorious smile crossed her face. §*

Finally she answered me with a tone that could only be describes as awe. *I'm watching the birds to find out how they fly.* I didn't know if I should laugh or cry, but then, that always seemed to be the case with Lyn.

In the later years I remember hearing two ladies talking in the grocery store about how one of their houses was TP'd the night before. My shoulders immediately stiffened as I inched closer to hear more. *Do you know who did it Ethel? One woman asked. No, but I bet it was that little Evans girl and her friends. Then they both started laughing. She does have a way about her doesn't she...I bet she runs her parents ragged.*

*You know, Ethel, she came up to me one day in the post office and just stood there. I looked down and asked if she wanted something. She just looked up at me before she slapped my arm and said 'you're it'. I saw her go outside as all her friends gathered round slapping her on the back. I looked down and there was a big yellow, smiley face sticker on my arm. The woman was laughing heartily. Well, I know they all call me old Mrs. Parks so I marched outside right by them so they could all see the sticker. All the kids were still until I passed by and then they began whooping it up. It wasn't too long after that I heard footsteps behind me...it was Lyn Evans. She looked up at me and said thank you, Mrs. Parks, I will make sure no one ever calls you names again. And, they never did.*

Yep, that's the kind of kid Lyn was...ready to take any challenge, but with a heart of gold. I went up to the ladies, introduced myself, and apologized for anything my daughter had done. They both laughed and told me how lucky I was to have her and to cherish every moment for time goes by way to fast.



*§She sighs deeply. §*

No truer words were ever spoken.

Robbie was my buddy anytime I went out to search for sites or dig in the dirt. Of course, Lyn always tagged along with us and Robbie would delight in showing her what he knew. She would rather look for trouble than hear what he had to say though.

*§She laughs then smiles. §*

Once I showed Robbie how to read the landscape and look for what 'didn't belong' he caught on quickly. It wasn't long before he could spot sites before me. I think, of all the children, I knew he would be the one to follow in my footsteps. Maybe it is just a mother's pride, but he seems to have such a natural knack for tracking and finding the best dig sites. It is hard, at times, to realize he isn't really my blood child...we have more alike than not. As he has gotten older the blonde hair has turned darker...along with the blue eyes...

*§She smiles. §*

He is my son, no denying it.

Now Katie was a different story...after the age of six she really wanted nothing to do with digging in the dirt. She preferred to sit with us and draw what we were doing or look around to find an interesting plant or scene to replicate. I still have a wonderful drawing she did of the whole family on one of our family trips. Where the others were extroverted she was our quiet child who we never could quite figure out. As Robbie was my buddy, I think Katie was closer to Kiley.

*§LJ has a warm, loving smile on her face. §*

She is the best 'pick me upper' that I know. Katie has the uncanny ability to know when I am out of sorts and she will come up and give me the biggest hug, then sit down and tell me a corny joke.

*§She laughs. §*

It never fails to make my day brighten.

§ § § § §

In the summer before Allie went off to college, we all went to a dig in Mexico to bond one last time. Little did we know, at the time, it would become a yearly event that we all would look forward to.

That first year Allie went in search of medicinal plants with a local until she discovered Kevin Cunningham, one of the archeology students. Thanks to him we saw much more of her after that.

*§She raises her hands and shakes her head then laughs. §*

He also became a fixture each year we went on our yearly travels. I'm pretty sure they will marry at some point.

*§She raises her eyebrows for dramatic effect before smiling. §*

I'm not sure I am ready for that!

Robbie spent hours on end with many archeologists learning everything he could about the dig and their philosophies. Many would comment how astute he was and would predict great things for him. They of course were right...today he is sought after for his knowledge and expertise in the field.

Katie spent her hours sitting by Kiley watching and drawing her mother's work of restoring some of the finds. Sometimes I felt as though I was an intrusion when I would approach them...not by Kiley, but by Katie who would glare at me any time I sat with them.

There wasn't much time for sitting though, as the wild girl, Lyn, would keep me busy. Not that she was malicious...she wasn't...she was just curious and...fearless.

§ § § § §

*§LJ becomes very quiet as she tries to get hold of her emotions. Finally, with tears threatening, she continues.§*

How can I talk about this? The day was perfect...cool temps, bright sunshine and blue, blue skies. Robbie and I were setting up for camp when my cell rang. I listened to Kiley's voice, wondering who it was at first, until I heard Lyn's name and the word accident.

In no time Robbie and I were racing to the house where we found Katie before taking off for the city and Brackenridge Hospital. On the way we called Carl, Dorothy and Allie; they too headed for the hospital.

Entering the emergency room, I couldn't believe my eyes as I saw my sweet baby girl lying on an examination table...bloodied and torn. Walking over to Kiley, I put my arm around her and we stood there not speaking, jointly willing Lyn to wake up and smile. At one point she did open her eyes and tried to smile, but couldn't...the damage to her face was too severe. Weakly she managed to tell us, I'm okay, before she closed her eyes forever.

Now we all are gathered around her coffin telling her goodbye for the last time. This will be a hard day for us all...I want to be strong for Kiley.

*§Tears are glistening from her blue eyes. §*

How can I be strong for her when I feel so weak myself? Will we ever survive this tragedy?

§ § § § §

## *The Road Ahead*

The limo drove up the dirt road to the house. As the family disembarked, they all stood together, none really wanting to go inside. It was Dorothy who finally spoke first.

"You know this is such a lovely day why don't we have a picnic over there under the tree. We certainly have enough food." She said with a slight laugh. Looking around at the somber family she shook her head. "Okay, Kiley, why don't you get the drinks? Carl, will you and Robbie get the table cleaned off while LJ, Katie and I get the food ready? Allie, why don't you and Kevin set the table for me?" Still they didn't move, so she took Kiley and LJ's hands and started walking towards the house. "Get moving, you two!"

At first, the dinner was a quiet affair with each lost in thoughts of the day and events of the past weeks. Katie finally spoke. She was sitting on a picnic bench and looking up at the green, leafy tree above them when she began laughing. "Do you remember when Lyn climbed to the top of this tree?"

A roar went up around the table. "I thought my heart would stop." Kiley said laughing.

Stepping outside, Kiley called for Lyn who hadn't been heard from in fifteen minutes. For Lyn, that meant she was up to no good. "Lyn, where are you?"

"Hi, Mommy."

Kiley looked around not seeing her daughter until she looked up when leaves began dropping on her. "Lyn! What on earth are you doing?"

Just then Dorothy came outside to see what all the commotion was about and saw her granddaughter sitting at the top of a twelve-foot tree. "Oh NO! Carl, get out here!" She called out.

Carl stood next to his wife with a big smile on his face...Lyn always had that affect on him.

Next, Ben came out of the barn and cried out, "Don't worry little one I will get a ladder and get you down."

The twins were dancing around as Kiley and Dorothy were calling out to Lyn. It was a definite circus atmosphere until LJ came outside.

"STOP!" came the loud command.

Everyone stopped and looked at the dark, un-amused face of LJ who was looking up at her daughter.

"Hey, Lyn, whatcha doin up there?"

"I'm waitin for a cloud to come by so I can catch it." Came the unassuming answer.

"It's time to come down now, okay?"

"Okay." The small voice replied.

"I'll get the ladder." Hollered Ben.

"Hurry, before she falls!" Kiley cried.

"NO!" Exclaimed LJ. "She got up there by herself and she can get down by herself."

And, she did.

That started the nightly dinner ritual of...*can you top this Lyn story*. It was their way of keeping her close to them and the start to everyone's healing.

§ § § § §

Nights would find Kiley and LJ snuggled in each other's arms each trying to sooth the other's hurt. One night Kiley woke up hearing LJ sobbing into the pillow. She pulled her lover closer and said, "It will be alright. I will be here for you always; lean on me, Lucy, let me keep you safe and warm."

LJ turned over and lifted her body, resting on her left elbow. In the moonlight, Kiley saw a look on the beautiful face she had never seen before...cold, distant with icy, glazed over eyes. At first, Kiley welcomed the kisses, since they hadn't made love since Lyn's passing. It wasn't long before the kisses and body of LJ took on a predatory feel while she assaulted Kiley's mouth, sucking her tongue in so deeply she thought that LJ might swallow it. As her lover greedily sucked on her neck and breasts Kiley realized what was happening.

*This is the Lucy that Max and the others know.* She thought as she struggled with what to do. If she pushed LJ away she might find solace with another or once she realized what she had done, never forgive herself and turn away completely.

There must have been some sort of sound or movement that brought LJ out of her trance. Looking down at Kiley, her face filled with horror. "Oh, God, Kiley, I'm so sorry. What have

I done to you?" She cried before beginning to move away.

A gentle hand touched her arm. "Don't go...its alright...do what you need to." Kiley was determined not to let Lucy leave and find another.

Unbelieving blue eyes looked at Kiley. "No, no it isn't alright! I'm disgusting...I can't believe I wanted to treat you that way!"

Kiley began to slowly rub the arm as she drew Lucy back to her. Then, she started to kiss the woman she loved so deeply.

"It hurts so bad...when will it stop...I miss her so much." LJ was sobbing.

"The night she died, she came to me and told me to take care of you...that you were hurting so much...that you wouldn't let her in." Kiley kept kissing cheeks, eyes and lips. "Let her in, Lucy, let her comfort you."

LJ opened her eyes and stared into the green ones above her. "She is as stubborn as I am...she keeps trying to invade my thoughts, I won't let her."

"Let her in, love. Let her in."

The next day, LJ got up early and rode her horse out to the furthest boundaries of the property. Dismounting, she sat on a large boulder before casting her blue eyes to the threatening skies. "I miss you so much, Lyn, you left us too soon. My heart feels like a part is missing that I'll never get back. Everyone thinks I am so strong, but I'm not. I want you back here where you belong."

Sitting on the rock, LJ began to cry uncontrollably for her child not noticing the hawk circling above her. Looking towards the sky she screamed, "Why did you leave us? Its not fair!"

The clouds that were threatening a storm began to dissipate as the hawk's circles came closer to the ground. LJ watched in fascination as the circles became smaller until the bird landed on a nearby rock. The small black, beady eyes seemed to be looking into her soul as she remained locked in the magnificent bird's gaze.

At first it was a distant sound, like a train wailing in the night, then it became louder until she had to close her eyes at the thunderous noise surrounding her. Opening her eyes, she blinked when she saw her beloved Lyn standing where the hawk had been. Shaking her head she closed her eyes again she refusing to believe the sight before her. Slowly, she opened them again to see Lyn still standing next to her. LJ reached out, tears coursing down her cheeks as Lyn moved a step away.

"You can't touch me, Mom. I love you and want you to know that I am with you always."

A wonderful healing warm glow filled LJ's heart. "I miss you so much." Came the babbled words.

"Mom, I'm okay. There are many wonderful people here with me...Ben and Gram Rhodes look out for me."

"Why did you leave us?"

"It was my time, Mom, and others needed me to help them live. Just because you don't see me doesn't mean I am not with you. I will be there



watching over everyone just as the others do. I love you and always will."

The vision began to fade. "NO, don't leave yet, there is so much more to talk about." LJ pleaded.

"It is time...remember I am always with you...I love you all...tell them for me."

Then she was gone. LJ reached out to where her daughter had been standing and felt the warmth of her love. "Goodbye my sweet baby, Lyn."

Riding back towards the house, LJ saw the hawk circling above her seemingly to follow her. LJ smiled at the sight, remembering her daughter's words...*I will be there watching over everyone.*

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Three months later..

The drunk driver responsible for the loss of Lyn was arrested for vehicular homicide. He plead guilty and was sentenced to the maximum prison term. With that completed, Kiley and LJ's lives returned to a modified normal existence growing closer from the mutual loss. Summer was quickly coming to an end, which meant the camp would only be open on the weekends giving them more time together.

"Babe, what would you say to our closing the camp for a month and going on a cruise with me?" LJ asked one morning over breakfast.

Green eyes glowed as a gorgeous smile appeared on Kiley's face as she moved to sit in her lover's lap. "Why, Lucy, that sounds lovely. Where shall we go?" she asked as her lips began exploring a tempting ear.

LJ was temporarily at a loss for words closing her eyes as she became lost in the ministrations of lips. "If you continue that I know where we will go right now." Her husky voice responded.

"Want me to stop?" Kiley asked as she felt LJ's hand slide under her shirt. "Thought not." She said as she sought out the red lips of her lover.

Soon the two were embroiled in passionate kisses.

"You two need to get a room!" Katie exclaimed as she entered the kitchen.

Quickly LJ removed her hand from Kiley's breast as the small blonde lifted her head, red evident on her face. "Are you ready for breakfast, pumpkin? We had toast and fruit." Kiley asked stumbling over her words.

Katie laughed at her mother's red face and obvious embarrassment. "Coffee would be great." She said as she moved towards the coffee pot and the steaming brew sure to wake her up.

"Katie, we were talking about taking a cruise, would you be okay here by yourself?" LJ asked. Since Lyn's death she had become a mother hen where the children were concerned. "Your grandparents will be close by and we will close the camp on the weekends that we're gone."

"Mom, I'm twenty-one years old I think I can be by myself for a few weeks." Katie said as she swooped down to give her mothers kisses. Sitting down with them, she smiled. "If you both get some time later will you come out to my studio? I have designed some clothes and need a critical eye."

"Of course we will." Kiley said as she reluctantly gave up her cozy seat to get them more coffee. The phone rang and she answered it. "Robbie! It is so good to hear your voice. How is England?"

One of the archeologists Rob worked with over the years thought he discovered a Druid village and asked Rob to join the expedition. It was difficult for his mothers to let him go, but they knew it was important to him and them. As much as they would have liked, they couldn't keep their children from growing up and moving away. Embracing life and living it to the fullest was the lesson Lyn taught them; now to accept the lesson.

"I'm so glad you're having a great time. Mom and I are talking about going on a cruise and it seems your sister has branched out to clothes design." She listened intently then laughed. "You're right, what else is new." Lucy was hovering next to her wanting to speak to their son. "Here's Mom. I love you, sweetie. Bye."

Sitting back down at the table Kiley patted her daughter's hand. "So, what has inspired you to design clothes?"

"I'm not really sure...I saw a woman wearing the most awful outfit and thought I could design something better. I guess that was my inspiration...a tacky, polyester big flower number." She laughed until she heard LJ call her.

"Hey, Mona, your brother wants to speak with you." LJ winked at her daughter.

"Mom, why do you always have to call me that!" Katie said with a grin as she passed her mother and lightly tapped her on the arm.

"Because you are my Mona Lisa." LJ answered with her stock reply before kissing Kiley as she sat down.

"He certainly sounds happy and excited, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he does, I think this will be an important stepping stone for him. At some point he is going to have to get credentials, which means school. Not sure if he will go for that."

Kiley patted LJ's hand. "Love, it will be as it should."

Leaning in so only Kiley could hear, LJ spoke, "What do you say when Mona there goes out to her studio we take up where we were before?"

A radiant smile crossed the blonde's face. "I'll do you one better." She said wiggling her eyebrows. "How about a nice leisurely bath for two?"

"I like your way of thinking, Ma'am." LJ bent closer and began kissing her lover.

"You should see them, Rob, they are like teenagers." Katie told her brother as she began laughing. "Ok, talk to you later, bye."

Standing there with her hands on her hips, Katie shook her head. "I think I'll go out to my studio and leave you two lovebirds alone." She then kissed each of them on the head before heading out the door.

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"Alone at last. I will go start the bath, why don't you make sure that door is locked."

"You got it, my love, but why don't we do it together?" Taking Kiley's hand she said. "First we lock the door." She kissed her partner's hand as she twisted the lock. "Then, we head for the bathroom." She picked Kiley up and carried her down the hallway before gently putting her down. Once she turned on the water, tested the temperature, added a fragrant bubble bath essence, she stood in front of her lover. "Then, I take all your clothes off and lift you into the wonderfully warm, bubbly water before I slip in with you."

LJ lowered herself behind Kiley, straddling her before pulling her closer; their bodies in full contact. Her hands gently massaged the full breasts as her lips kissed shoulders and neck. "Hmm, have I told you lately that I love you?" She asked as her mouth found a tempting ear. Slowly she ran her tongue around the outer edge before entering the crevice. Her breath was hot against her lover's cheek.

Turning her head, Kiley captured LJ's lips as the passion they were both feeling intensified. Their tongues danced sensually slow before a hot and torrid tango began. Soon they were facing, Kiley's legs resting on top of LJ's, movements mirroring as they explored every body surface. After over twenty years together they could always find new ways to satisfy each other.

Taking a favorite bath toy, LJ slid it gently into Kiley before doing the same to herself. Bodies began to move as one with green fixed on blue. Slowly they inched closer together as passions rose to a fevered pitch. LJ squeezed the toy tight taking control of it as she increased the tempo causing Kiley to lean back and push her hips towards her lover. Their obsession for each other took over as they

drifted into the sexual haze of exploding orgasms.

Sated for the moment, they sighed as one, as Kiley pulled the toy gently from her partner. Smiling, she leaned forward and kissed waiting lips. "I don't think we had this many bubbles when we started." Her raspy voice spoke while her hands began lathering LJ's tempting body.

"Maybe we should write the company and tell them how to keep the bubbles going." LJ purred as she too started sliding soapy hands over her partner.

As busy hands stoked each body, steamy heat filled the tub. "What do you say we take this to the bedroom?" LJ asked as she stood, the water glistening on her dripping wet body as she held out her hand to Kiley.

"I like your way of thinking, my love." Taking the hand, Kiley stood and moved closer, rubbing her slick body against the taller one.

Stepping out of the tub, LJ picked up Kiley, carried her into the bedroom, laid her on their bed then climbed in next to her. Adoring lips began to explore the beautiful body next to hers until the shrill ringing of the phone stopped her movements.

Anxiously, LJ grabbed the phone. "Hello." Since the phone call alerting her of Lyn's accident, LJ dreaded what she may hear. "Kevin! Is Allie okay?" Her voice filled with fear as Kiley leaned in to hear.

"She's okay. I am calling to see if I might stop by later on." Kevin said.

A sense of relief filled both LJ and Kiley as their shoulders relaxed. "Sure, Kevin. What time do you think you will be here?"

"Is in an hour okay with you?"

Looking at the clock LJ responded. "That's fine." Kiley began mouthing words that she couldn't understand. "Just a minute, Kevin, Kiley wants to speak with you."

Taking the phone, Kiley smiled at her lover. "Hey Kevin, why not plan on having lunch with us?"

"That sounds great! I'll see you both soon. Bye."

"Bye." Reaching across LJ she hung up the phone, but didn't return to her previous position. Looking at the beautiful face below her she winked before her lips began an onslaught of the delicious body.

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Hurrying around the kitchen Kiley tried to pull something together for their lunch guest. She and her partner had languished too long with their morning exercise. The morning's workout had been especially invigorating causing them both to scurry about.

"Lucy, unlock the door, will you?" Kiley called out as she chopped ingredients for a salad. Putting everything in the bowl she smiled when her lover passed by and patted her backside. "You keep that up and our company will find us in a compromising position." She laughed while setting the table.

"And, that would be bad how?" Lucy asked as she opened the door then prepared glasses of iced tea. "Wonder what Kevin wants?"

"Probably a reference since he worked here this summer." The blonde replied as she put the finishing touches on the meal.

Looking out the door, LJ saw Kevin's car pull up. "We're about to find out." Opening the door she smiled. "Hey, Kevin, good to see you, come on in."

In the typical Texas style, the three sat down at the table and visited while eating lunch. No one was in a hurry, civility ruled, as it always had for years.

"Kevin, I sure did appreciate all the help you gave us during the summer." LJ said pleasantly. "What are your plans now that you have finished up your Masters? You might think about getting in on some of the more important digs before getting your doctorate. If you want, I can put you in contact with some of the bigger sites."

"Thank you Ms. Evans, I would appreciate that." Kevin smiled nervously.

Kiley noticed the young man's uneasiness as she stood up. "Kevin, more tea?"

"Yes, thank you."

As she poured the tea she asked about her daughter. "Have you seen much of Allie lately, I imagine she hasn't much time with her schedule at the hospital."

Kevin's face brightened with the mention of Allie's name. "I see her when I can, if she isn't working she's sleeping." He laughed nervously. "That is sort of why I am here." His



eyes searched the two women's. "I want to ask you something."

"Hmm, sounds serious, Kevin. Is something wrong?" Kiley asked, concerned for her daughter.

Kevin sat in his chair wringing his hands as he repeatedly cleared his throat. "Well, you see...it's this way...hmm...I would like to have your permission to ask Allie to marry me." He said the last part hurriedly then held his breath.

A bright smile filled Kiley and LJ's faces as they both got up and went to hug Kevin. "Of course you have our permission!" LJ exclaimed as she hugged Kiley.

"When are you going to ask her?" Kiley asked. "Oh, there is so much to do!" Turning to LJ her eyes opened wide. "Our little girl is getting married."

LJ just laughed. "Slow down, Mama, he hasn't asked her yet."

Kiley's face turned several shades of red. "Oh, Kevin, I'm sorry...it's just that I am so happy for you." She put her arms around her future son-in-law. "Welcome to the family."

"Thank you both. I thought I would ask her Thursday night, she has two days off." The young man seemed more relaxed as he got up out of his chair. "Guess I better get going, I have to work tonight. Thanks for the lunch." He walked towards the door with both women following.

LJ put her arm around his shoulders. "Kevin, thank you for thinking it was important to ask our permission. I'm glad to have you join our family."

The two women held each other as they watched the car pull away. Turning back into the house they both had what can only be described as goofy grins.

§ § § § §

The ringing phone woke Kiley out of a sound sleep. "Who is it?" she groggily asked.

"Allie, she's engaged." LJ said as she held her hand over the receiver holding the phone out so Kiley could hear too.

"The ring is so beautiful, I can't wait to show you. Is it too late to visit?" Allie was gushing.

Kiley spoke into the phone. "Come on over, sweetheart, I'll put some coffee on."

LJ snorted. "The hell with coffee it is champagne time!"

"Okay, we'll be there in about thirty minutes. Kevin is so wonderful...did I tell you I love him." Allie began giggling. "See you soon, bye."

"Bye." They both smiled as they dragged themselves out of bed.

Looking at the clock, Kiley shook her head. "We must be crazy, it's two A.M.!"

LJ took her in her arms and kissed her soundly. "Crazy is good, besides it's for our daughter."

Out of nowhere tears began to course down LJ's cheeks. As her thumb wiped them away, Kiley asked, "Lucy, what's the matter?"

Blue glistening eyes searched Kiley's face. "Nothing, tears of happiness, that's all." How

could she spoil the moment by telling her lover that she was thinking of Lyn? "We better get dressed or they will find naked mothers when they get here." Then she quickly kissed Kiley's cheek before releasing her.

The creak of the porch and squeak of the door alerted the two women that the kids had arrived. Hurrying out to the kitchen Kiley smiled when she saw the radiant Allie standing there by her fiancé, Kevin. Now, Kiley was the one with tears as she hugged her daughter. "I'm so happy for you."

For Kiley, her happiness was bittersweet; her baby was getting married; another chapter of her life was closing. Looking up she saw LJ coming into the kitchen carrying a bottle of wine. Her heart, as always, skipped a beat at the vision of her lover.

"I don't have any champagne, this bottle of wine will have to do for now...we will have to celebrate correctly later." Putting the bottle down she went over to Allie and embraced her. "Are you happy, Squirt?" She whispered.

Allie's face beamed. "Yes, I'm very happy. Do you approve?"

Squeezing her a bit tighter she kissed her daughter's cheek. "Yes, Squirt, I do." Brushing an errant tear away she let go of Allie. "Why don't I open the wine and we can all toast to your future happiness." Looking at Kevin, who was just standing there seemingly at loose ends, she put her arm around him. "Come on, you can help me."

A relieved look came over his face. "Sure thing Ms. Evans."

"You're in the family now, Kevin, call me LJ or Mom, your choice."

As they all settled down in the family room they all raised their glasses.

"To the happy couple, may your lives together be filled with all the happiness you deserve." LJ spoke with a sparkling smile on her face as she looked at Kiley.

Kiley moved closer to her partner as they clinked their glasses. *I love you*, she mouthed before turning to the kids. "We need to meet your parents, Kevin. Have you told them yet? There is so much to do...of course we want your mother to be a part of everything." She patted LJ's hand as she stifled a yawn.

"Hey, we can talk about all that later. You two old people need to go back to sleep, I didn't realize how late it was. Besides, I want to go tell Katie, is she in the studio?" Getting up, Allie and Kevin gazed longingly into each other's eyes.

"You're kidding, right? You know what your sister is like when she gets woken up unexpectedly." Kiley's voice was filled with knowing trepidation.

"Oh, Mom, it will be okay...this is special."

Clearing her throat, LJ laughed. "Listen, why don't you two lovebirds and Kevin's parents join us for dinner tomorrow night? I'll make all the arrangements."

Allie seemingly flew into her mother's arms. "Thank you, I love you."

"I love you too, Squirt."

After the two left, Kiley hugged LJ close.  
"Guess we better wait up for a bit, want something to drink?"

"Want to take bets on how long before she comes in?"

No sooner had LJ spoke than a very sleepy Katie walked into the kitchen. "Mama, Allie woke me up." Came the indignant words.

LJ turned to Kiley. "Oh, dear, she wants you to solve this." She said as she chuckled.

"Yeah, I'm always the mom with problems." Kiley laughed as she got up and went over to her heavy-eyed daughter. "Katie, will you try to wake up some for me?"

Katie nodded her head keeping her eyes tightly shut.

"What did Allie tell you, sweetie?"

"She said she was getting married and wanted me to be her maid of honor." The drowsy girl said.

"Okay, now think about what she said." The grinning mother said.

Again Katie shook her head, and to all present she seemed to fall fast asleep. Her eyes shot open as she began to squeal. "You're getting married? Oh, Al, I'm so happy for you." She said hugging her sister soundly. "Want me to design your dress? I have a great idea!"

Laughing, LJ hugged Katie. "Listen, Mona, why don't we all go back to sleep for another..." she looked at the clock on the wall. "Four hours or so?"

"Good idea, why don't we all meet back here at, say, nine, and we can have a family breakfast. Gram and Gramps can come and you can tell them the good news, sweetie."

"Sounds good to me. Okay we're off." Then Allie and Kevin hugged everyone before heading out.

"Well I don't know how you can go to sleep now!" Katie exclaimed as she curled up on the couch before falling fast asleep.

"Come on love, I think my eyes are about to hit the floor." Said Kiley as she took LJ's hand and lead her to their bedroom after covering Katie with a light blanket.

§ § § § §

It took three weeks to coordinate everyone's schedules, but finally the day came for the celebratory dinner. LJ made reservations at Jeffrey's in Austin for seven o'clock along with a request for special champagne.

Throwing another dress on the bed, Kiley growled. "I have nothing to wear!"

LJ approached her cautiously knowing that it would take all her tact to defuse the situation. "Baby, you look beautiful in anything you wear. Why don't you let me pick one out for you?"

"You have got to be kidding, Lucy, like you could do that! I will find something myself." Her tension was increasing.

"Don't you have that dynamite red dress, it looks fabulous on you?" LJ said cautiously.

Green eyes bored into LJ. "I cannot meet Kevin's parents looking like a hooker, Lucy. What's the matter with you?" She sat down on the bed and

buried her head in her hands. "What if they don't like me...us? Why can't I find anything to wear?" She screamed before crying.

LJ sat down and put her arms around Kiley. "Listen, love, they will love you just as I do. You are a warm, giving woman who raised a terrific daughter. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree and that goes for Allie too. She is your daughter, a shining reflection of you. This night is going to be wonderful because we, Kevin's parents and Allie's, will be celebrating their love for one another." Hugging Kiley closer, she kissed her cheek. "What do you say we look through your clothes again?"

Kiley began to laugh. "I'm really being stupid aren't I? I just want everything to go perfect for Allie."

"It will, my love, I promise." Standing up she smiled wickedly. "You think you have problems finding something to wear, what about me? Do you think they will let me in Jeffrey's with jeans?"

Laughing Kiley got up went to the closet and pulled out a navy suit with a knee length skirt. "Wear this, it will show off those sexy legs of yours. I can dream all night about coming home with you." She winked as she found a crème color camisole to go with the suit. "I think I will wear the flower dress with this little jacket."

"Am I to understand that we now have outfits ready for tonight?" Her eyes were undressing Kiley as she nodded yes. "Ah, then we should think about getting our showers, shouldn't we?"

Taking LJ's hand Kiley started walking towards the bathroom. "We'll save time if we shower together." A feral smile crossed her face as she opened the bathroom door.

§ § § § §

Arriving at the restaurant early, LJ and Kiley were shown to their table. Kiley began fingering the silverware as she anxiously waited for Kevin's parent's arrival. Lightly putting her hand over her partner's, LJ smiled. "They're going to be family, babe, not the enemy."

Kiley looked pathetically at her. "What if they don't like us, Lucy?"

Patting her hand again LJ nodded. "It looks like we are going to find out now."

Allie, Kevin and his parents were walking towards the table. Taking a deep breath Kiley stood up to welcome their guests.

The Cunningham's looked like the typical middle-aged couple...he was about five ten, balding with a trim body and it was easy to see where his son got his good looks. His wife was slightly overweight with light brown hair, a wonderful smile and was very attractive. They were both dressed conservatively with an apparent unpretentious air about them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham these are my parents, LJ and Kiley Evans."

The man held out his hand, "Nice to meet you, we are Joe and Nora."

After the obligatory handshakes, Kiley spoke. "Why don't we all sit down?" LJ sat on one side of Nora with Kiley on the other.

Nora Cunningham looked at the two women beside her curiously. "Allie, I must say that it is nice that your mother and stepmother get along so well." She said smiling sweetly, seemingly



not understanding why her future daughter-in-law would have her stepmother there.

Nervously Kiley laughed as she looked around the table noticing everyone's eyes seemed to be opened wide. As always, her savoir, Lucy came to the rescue.

"Nora, I don't think you understand. Kiley and I are partners."

Scrunching her eyebrows, Nora cocked her head. "Oh, business partners. What business are you in?"

A snicker went up around the table until LJ once again spoke. "Nora, we are business partners, but I meant partners as in together in a committed relationship." Her blue eyes were fixed on the woman as she wondered...*does she get out much.*

Nora again looked confused. "Committed relationship?" Everyone watched, as the woman seemed to try and understand until her eyes bugged out. "Committed relationship! You're lesbians?" She said loudly enough to cause other diners to turn around. "I didn't know...you don't look like...I mean I never would have gue..."

Joe came to her rescue as he reached over to pat her hand. "Quit while you're ahead, dear."

The dinner proceeded as everyone got to know each other and discussed the upcoming wedding.

Nora turned to Kiley. "Tell me, Kiley, is Ellen really that funny in person?"

Kiley looked at the woman with a puzzled look. "Ellen? I don't think I know an Ellen."

"Sure you do, Ellen DeGeneres." Nora said, smiling broadly.

With a slight laugh, Kiley asked. "Nora, why would you think I would know Ellen DeGeneres?"

"Don't your kind all know each other...a sorority kind of thing?"

It was LJ who spoke next. "Nora, we don't know Ellen, but I did get an ultra slicer dicer when I recruited, Kiley...they were out of toaster ovens."

"Lucy, stop." Kiley winked at her partner. "Nora, we are just like you...we have children, a house, parents, friends, jobs, bills and problems just like anyone else. We are committed to each other forever and through our love have created a stable, loving environment for our children. Just as you love Joe, I love Lucy. It is simple really...love is love."

Nora listened to Kiley speak, nodding her head in agreement until she suddenly scrunched her eyebrows. "I don't understand." She said.

"What don't you understand, Nora, why we love each other or how we had children? We love each other because that is the way it is suppose to be and we had children out of love." Kiley was having a hard time understanding why this woman was so dense. *Doesn't she get out much?* She wondered.

Nora laughed. "I understand all that, I'm not dim-witted and I have listened to Oprah, you know."

"Then what's the problem?" Kiley asked trying hard not to become irritated with the woman.

By this time everyone around the table had become quiet, especially Allie and Kevin. They were wondering if the family meeting was a good idea.

Nora's friendly smile seemed to diffuse the situation. "I think you misunderstood me. I don't have a problem with your lifestyle...you are right that love is love." She paused as if she was trying to think of the right way to approach a touchy subject. "I thought her name was LJ."

An uproarious laugh filled the restaurant as five people had tears in their eyes from the innocent statement. So it began, two families merging into one.

§ § § § §

Because of Allie's hospital schedule and Kevin's work on his dissertation, the only time they could have the wedding was February. With Valentine's Day falling on a Saturday, they hoped they could find a place for the reception and the church would be available. Fortunately, both the Andrews' and the Cunningham's were well connected and they were able to secure both St. Philips and the Country Club for that date.

The downside of the wedding was that Kiley and LJ would have to postpone their planned cruise for a month. The wedding preparations took on mammoth proportions as Kiley and Nora went into *Mothers of the wedding couple* mode. They would spend hours shopping for the perfect center pieces, flowers and all the various items that would make the wedding one of the most talked about weddings ever. At first, LJ tagged along with them, but rapidly became bored with Nora's need for perfection.

In mid November, Rob returned from England much to LJ's happiness. She had missed his companionship and the way he made her feel.

LJ was sitting alone at the kitchen table enjoying her second cup of coffee and reading the newspaper when she felt an embrace and a kiss on her head.

"Good morning, beautiful."

"You always have had a knack for making me feel special." LJ smiled. "How did you sleep, Robbie?"

"Great! No matter where I go in the world, this is always where I want to be." He said as he poured himself some coffee. "The night sounds here are so peaceful...even the coyotes."

LJ laughed. "You know you could always stay here and run the camp." She said jokingly.

For a long time Rob gazed at his mother. "You know, that is exactly what I want to do. Would that disappoint you?"

It was LJ's turn to stare. "Disappoint me?" She asked herself out loud. "I thought you were happy with archeology and the traveling."

Rob sighed. "I have for a long time now been restless, wondering why I just couldn't find the happiness I used to have. It was when the plane was landing that I knew what I wanted, Mom. This." he said as his long arms gestured the area, "I want this, to be here where I belong."

Discreetly LJ wiped a tear from her eye. "Are you sure you want that?"

Rob shook his head. "More than anything. I want to live here and raise a family so my children

will know their roots. I was thinking about all the stories of Gram Rhodes and maybe we could make this a working ranch again." He reached over and took his mother's hand. "What do you think?"

"I think it is a wonderful idea. It's been a long time since this ranch had a manager. What do you say to a job running this place?"

Rob's eyes opened wide. "Do you mean it, Mom? I won't let you down, I promise."

LJ smiled broadly. "You can never let me down, Robbie. It's been fourteen years since Ben passed away; I think it is time someone moved into his house. What do you say?"

Rob got up from his chair and hugged his mother. "I say, let's do it." Looking around the kitchen he raised his eyebrows in question. "Is Mama still asleep?"

Shaking her head, LJ answered. "She's been gone for about an hour now. She and Kevin's mother are spending days on end looking for the perfect wedding accoutrements." She tried to keep the sarcasm out of her tone. "Why don't I call her and see if she can meet us later for dinner?"

"That would be great, I don't think I've been with her more than two hours since I've been home." Hurt was evident on his face

LJ smiled at her son as she gave him a comforting hug. "Great, why don't you go over to the house and I will be there as soon as I call your mom and then stop in and check on your sister."

Dialing the phone, LJ waited for the voice of her lover.

"Hey there." LJ said when Kiley answered.

"Lucy!" Kiley exclaimed. "We have found the perfect chandelier for the kids house."

"House? What house?" LJ was puzzled.

"The one we are buying them, silly." Kiley's voice was light and airy.

"We're buying them a house..when was I going to know about that? Besides, isn't that something they need to do for themselves?"

"Lucy, Nora says they need a good start in life and I agree with her."

"If you care about my opinion, I think you're making a big mistake."

"Oh, Lucy, don't be such a downer." Kiley said in an irritated tone.

LJ gritted her teeth. "Listen the reason I am calling is that Rob and I would like to take you to dinner tonight."

Kiley frowned. "I can't tonight. We're meeting the caterer to go over the menu. Tell Rob I'm sorry."

"Can't that wait?"

"No, it can't! Nora says this caterer is very much in demand and we need to keep him happy. He is very important!" Kiley said coolly.

"So is your son!"

"Listen, Lucy, I can't get into this now, Nora is signaling me, I need to go." She waved at the woman. "I'll see you tonight and we can talk then. Bye."

As she heard the dismissal all LJ could think to say was, "Don't bother." before she hung up.

Kiley looked at the phone and pondered LJ's last remark. *She certainly is grumpy today. I'll get her in a good mood tonight.* Then, she started towards the impatiently waiting Nora.

§ § § § §

Entering Katie's studio, LJ saw her daughter and mother-in-law hard at work. "Hey, Mona, how is the dress making business going?" she asked as she went over to give her daughter a kiss. "I see she has you working your fingers to the bone, Mom." She gave Dorothy a kiss too.

"Good morning, LJ, is Kiley coming too?" Dorothy asked.

"No she is out with Nora on a quest for something or another. I never knew a wedding could be so time consuming." LJ said sadly.

"Mom, do you think you two can come over in about a week and see Allie model the dress? We almost have it ready for the first fitting."

"I know I will be there. Are you inviting Nora too?" She was unable to keep the bitterness out of her voice.

"No way! I only want family there." Came the definitive answer.

Smiling, LJ gave Katie a hug. "Hey, I have some good news...Robbie is going to stay here and move into Ben's old house."

The happiness of the announcement was evident on everyone's face.

"He's over there now, if you want to give us a hand."

"What are we waiting for?" Dorothy asked as she got up from her seat and headed for the door.

Walking towards Robbie's house Dorothy stopped and took LJ's arm. "Is everything okay?"

LJ looked away not wanting Dorothy to see the truth. "Sure, Kiley is just caught up in this wedding business...first child and all. Come on let's see what treasures we can find in that old house."

As LJ walked ahead sadness filled her heart and soul.

Dorothy paused as she watched LJ walk ahead. *What has gotten into that daughter of mine? It's not like her to ignore her family. I need to set Kiley straight before she does anymore damage.* She thought before moving forward.

§ § § § §

When Kiley drove up to the house she was surprised to see all the lights out. Generally one light in the kitchen was always left on if someone was still out. Opening the door she turned on the light and began looking around for a note, but found none. Going to their bedroom she flicked on the light then quickly turned it off when she saw LJ asleep in their bed. Hastily she shed her clothes and slid into bed. Usually LJ would sleep in the middle, but tonight she was almost to the edge. She moved closer anticipating feeling her flesh against her lover's.

Kiley was shocked when she found LJ, for the first time since they had been together, sleeping with a t-shirt and shorts on. "Lucy,



are you awake?" she whispered. There was no response. Leaning on an elbow she leaned in and kissed her lover's cheek before turning over and giving into sleep herself.

LJ lay there motionless as tears began to well up in her eyes. Once she heard the measured breaths of sleep she silently got up and went to the kitchen. Her heart was breaking, this new Kiley was foreign to her and she didn't know how to bring the other back. After returning to bed, she lay awake long into the lonely night wondering how to make it all better again.

Waking, Kiley stretched and reached out for her lover only to find her gone. Lifting her head she squinted at the bedside clock, surprised to find it was eight thirty. It had been a long time since she stayed in bed so late just to sleep. Sitting up she listened for sounds of LJ in the house, but heard none. Getting out of bed she put on her robe and slippers then shuffled out to the kitchen eager for that first cup of coffee; she was surprised when she found none was made. Looking out the window, Kiley noticed her mother's car parked in front of Katie's studio. "Ah, that is where I can get some coffee." She said as she grabbed a cup and headed out into the cold November morning.

She sang as she entered the warm room. "I hope you have some coffee."

"Good morning stranger." Dorothy replied. "The pot is always on, help yourself."

"Have either of you seen Lucy this morning?" Kiley asked brightly.

Katie just looked up and glared at her mother. "Like you would care! To what do we owe the honor of your presence?" She snapped.

Kiley cocked her head. "Excuse me, young lady! You don't talk to your mother like that!" she barked out.

"Whatever." Katie remarked as she left the room.

Turning to her mother Kiley asked. "What was that all about?"

Shaking her head, Dorothy set aside her sewing and sighed. "Darling, you haven't been around here at all lately and the first time in weeks that you do, the first words out of your mouth are about coffee. Good morning or a kiss and a hug would have been nice."

"Just what exactly are you saying to me, Mother, that I'm neglecting my family?"

Dorothy shook her head. "For starters."

Anger grew in Kiley as her face reddened. "For starters! What precisely do you mean by that? I am here for anyone in this family all they have to do is call me!"

"Are you here for LJ? What about Robbie? He's been home for nearly a week; have you spent time with him? Have you asked Katie about the dress or anything else she's doing?" Dorothy hurled the words at her daughter who was becoming a stranger to everyone.

"This wedding is important! I don't understand why none of you see that!"

Walking over to her daughter, Dorothy placed a calming hand on her arm. "Kiley, we all know it is important. But, is it more important than your partner or children. You're breaking their hearts." She said quietly.

Kiley jerked away and growled. "Thanks for nothing, Mom." Then she stormed out of the studio. Once outside the cold wind sliced through her robe sending a shiver throughout her body. "What's wrong with these people?" She screamed as she reached the door to her home. Inside she found LJ sitting at the table. "Just where have you been?" she demanded.

Tired, weary eyes looked at the blonde woman whose face was filled with fury and rage. "I could ask the same of you." A sad voice replied.

"What the hell is going on here? All I am trying to do is make Allie's wedding a wonderful affair and all I get from you is shit!" She shouted.

Calmly LJ closed her eyes forbidding tears to flow. "Tell me, Kiley, did you ever ask Allie or Kevin their opinion? Do you or your new friend Nora, have any idea what they want or are you off doing your own thing? Did you know that they came to me two weeks ago asking if they could build a house here at Rhodes End?"

"So that's it! You're jealous of my friendship with Nora! Well at least I am open and honest about whom I'm with...unlike you!" The moment the words left her mouth Kiley regretted them as she saw the wounded look on LJ's face. "Oh, Lucy, forgive me, I'm sorry." She said as she approached her.

LJ held out her hands. "Don't, Kiley, just don't. I have things to do with my son." Going towards the door she grabbed her coat.

"Lucy, please don't go." Kiley pleaded. She had promised never to bring up the Max incident again and now she had done just that. It had been over twenty years and she just had to drag it up and give it life again. "I'm sorry. I

cleared the day so we could spend time together, please stay."

"You cleared the day...that's mighty big of you, but no thanks." Then she went out the door.

Kiley stood there in disbelief. *What had happened?* All the words of the morning conversations started whirling around in her head. *How did everything get so mixed up?* She wondered. Picking up the phone she dialed then waited for an answer.

"Hi. I know you're busy, is there any chance you can spare me some time this morning? I really need to speak with you." her voice pleading.  
"Okay, I will be there in about an hour.  
Allie...thank you."

§ § § § §

When Kiley arrived in the patient waiting room she dialed Allie's pager to let her know she was there. About ten minutes later she smiled when she saw her daughter enter the room.

"Hi, sweetie thanks for seeing me."

Allie hugged her mother. "Come with me, we can talk in a private waiting room."

Once the door was closed, Allie turned to her mother. "What's going on, Mom, you sounded very upset?" She said as she motioned for her mother to sit next to her on the couch.

Sitting down, Kiley sighed deeply. "I just don't know what is going on...why all my family is ganging up on me. All I wanted to do is make sure you have a wonderful wedding. Am I butting in and taking over, Allie?"

Allie looked deep into her mother's eyes then she too sighed. "Do you want the sugar coated version or the hard facts?"

Kiley bent her head and rubbed her forehead with her fingers. "Am I that bad?" she whispered.

A comforting arm went around Kiley's shoulders. "Mom, you aren't bad, I think you have been overly influenced by Kevin's mother."

Kiley set her jaw and spoke in a deep menacing voice. "Nora is a perfectly nice woman who hasn't a mean bone in her body. I don't know why this family can't see that!"

Shaking her head Allie realized it was time for truth telling. "Mama, we don't know who you are anymore. You've never been one to interfere in your children's lives. You and Mom have always taught us to think and do for ourselves. Now, all of a sudden, you are out there with Nora Cunningham planning everything without any input from Kevin or myself." She took her mother's chin and turned her face so she could see her. "This isn't who you are...can't you see that?"

Closing her eyes and grinding her teeth Kiley's expression hardened. "Nora said with your busy schedules we could lessen your burden by planning everything. That sounds loving and kind to me!"

"Tell me, how many of the ideas are yours?" Allie asked softly.

Sitting up straighter as if to make her point Kiley said, "Nora has impeccable taste and I trust her judgment."

"Have you ever disagreed with her?"

"No, why should I, she knows what she is doing."

"Well let me tell you a story." Allie said as she took her mother's hand. "One Sunday Kevin and I were at their house for dinner and I asked if I could help. She, of course, said yes, but it wasn't to help it was to instruct me in proper meal preparation..."

"That sounds rather nice of her to me." Kiley interjected.

"Let me finish, please." Allie implored. "When I kindly told her my mothers had taught me well she turned to me and said...*listen to me young lady, I am an expert in this field and you will learn from me.* I again thanked her, but declined her invitation to learn." Allie's mouth grew taut. "She proceeded to spend the entire meal subtly mocking and berating me. As soon as the meal was over Kevin said we needed to leave, I was pissed and he knew it. He told me his mother is the master manipulator and was vicious if she didn't get her way."

Kiley looked at her daughter skeptically. "I don't believe you."

Allie took out her cell and handed it to her mother. "Here call her and tell her you have changed your mind about the meal and think it needs to be changed. See what happens."

"I will not do that to my friend!"

"Fine, then I will." Allie dialed the number. "Hello, Mrs. Cunningham, this is Allie. I am fine thank you. Listen, Kevin and I have decided to make all the wedding arrangements ourselves. I appreciate all you have done, but this is our special day and we need to plan it ourselves." She then held out the phone for her mother to hear what came next.

"Excuse me, how dare you spoil all my plans, you little ingrate?"

"I thought my mother was involved in the planning too." Allie said stiffly.

"She just tags along, all the ideas are mine and I won't have you change one thing. Who do you think you are?"

"I am the bride, it's my wedding, and I am taking charge. You may have some input, but most of it will come from Kevin and myself." Allie's voice was firm.

"No you won't! I will make sure the wedding never happens! When Kevin finds out how ungrateful you are, he will call it all off."

"Mrs. Cunningham, I think you will be surprised if you try that."

"You are a sicko just like those women you call mothers. You won't get away with this!"

Kiley took the phone from her daughter. "Nora, this is Kiley, I can't believe what I just heard come out of your mouth. I must say you had me fooled, but never again."

Nora started then stopped to gain her composure. "Oh, Kiley, you know kids today, they think they can do it all. The wedding will come off just as we have planned. Allie's outburst and my temper just got the best of us, that's all."

"Never again, Nora!" Then she closed the phone.

Allie hugged her mother close and whispered, "I love you."

Tears began to flow as Kiley buried her head in her hands. "What a fool I've been...oh, Lucy, I've

been so mean to her...and Rob, I've blown him off ever since he arrived home. How will I ever be able to make it up to them?" She blew her nose then spoke again. "You all tried to tell me and I wouldn't listen...I'm so ashamed."

Allie held her mother close. "We love you, Mama...this hasn't changed that."

"What about Kevin, will he listen to that witch?" A look of fear crossed her face. "I couldn't live with myself if I caused you to lose him."

"Mama, it was Kevin's idea that we build a home at Rhodes End, he wants to be as far away from her as possible."

For a long time Kiley was silent as the tears flowed freely. "I need to go home. Do you mind? Fences need to be mended; the sooner I start the better."

Allie hugged her mother then kissed her cheek. "I don't mind one bit. I remember you told me once that love was the answer and I have always believed that." She pulled Kiley closer. "Now go home and I will go back to work after I call Kevin and warn him."

Kiley smiled. "What will we do about the wedding? I'm sure she has canceled everything by now."

"Don't worry, it will all work out, it always does."

*s s s s s*

Kiley entered their home hoping to find LJ there, but she wasn't. Heading over to Katie's she was puzzled to find no one there either. A pain started in the pit of her stomach as she



began to realize that her stupidity and blind faith in Nora may have cost her the most important thing in her life...her family. She ran back to her house arriving in the bathroom just before she began heaving her guts out.

Walking across the lawn LJ noticed Kiley's car. "Hey, look." She said to her son. "Mom is home, wait until we tell her about what we found in your new home."

"The papers, I forgot them. I'll be right back."

"Okay, Rob, I will be in the house with her."

Entering the house, LJ heard the sounds of Kiley in the bathroom and hurried to her lover's side.

Feeling a bit better Kiley rose and began splashing water on her face and rinsing out her mouth. She felt a hand on her shoulder.

"Baby, what's the matter?" LJ said softly.

Turning around, tears began to flow from Kiley's eyes. "You came back to me." She sobbed as she buried her head over LJ's heart.

"I never left, I'm here and will always be. We were all over at Rob's new house."

"Robbie has a new house? Where?"

"He is moving into Ben's old house...he is going to manage the ranch for us."

"He is?" The glistening green eyes searched the blue ones. "Oh, he must hate me for ignoring him." She sobbed louder. "I thought you all had left me because I was being so selfish and awful to you all. I'm so sorry for neglecting you and our family. Can you ever forgive me?"

LJ lifted Kiley in her arms and carried her into the bedroom where she sat down on the bed holding her lover in her lap. "Listen sweetheart, we all love you. Yes, you hurt us, but we will always be here for you."

Wrapping her arms around her lover, LJ pulled her closer before noticing Rob standing outside the door. He motioned he would be in the kitchen before he quietly closed the door. "Baby, there is nothing to forgive; you look and expect the best from everyone, that is who you are. I love that in you."

"But, I thought I was doing the right thing for Allie and it turned out that woman was just using me." Tears continued to flow. Kiley looked up into the face she adored. "Will you please hold me so I know you still love me?"

Holding the beautiful blonde close, LJ kissed her head. "Of course I will, love. You can never lose me you know, we are bound to one another. Our love is the glue that holds us together through everything." She began rocking Kiley as she spoke. "I love you." She lifted the chin of her partner and smiled. "Why don't we go to the kitchen and see Robbie?"

"Do you think we can get Mom and Katie here too? I want to apologize to you all and tell you everything." Kiley asked.

LJ smiled and kissed Kiley. "Of course we can on one condition."

"Anything."

"After you talk with them, we put this all behind us."

Kiley hugged LJ's neck. "Oh, Lucy, I do love you so. Thank you for loving me no matter how stupid I have been."

"Always, my love. Now let's go talk to our family." She said as she stood up and gently put Kiley down on the floor.

"Let's go." Kiley took LJ's hand as they walked out of their bedroom.

§ § § § §

Kathy Evans touched the white Fed Ex overnight envelope that sat on her dining room table. It had been three days since she received the mail; by the address, she knew it was about her daughter Lucinda Jane. She had no idea who A. Evans was, but feared the message would be her daughter had died. The door opened and in walked her son, Father Mark, a priest.

"Thank you for coming, I need your advice."

"Okay, what can I help you with?" Ever since Ed Evans passed away a year earlier, Mark had been his mother's adviser and counselor. Her older son, Ed Junior, had moved to California and rarely visited; he did not even attend his father's funeral.

She picked up the envelope and handed it to him. "I received this three days ago and don't know if I should open it or just leave things as they are."

Father Mark looked at the return address before speaking. "Who is this A. Evans person...her partner?"

"Haven't a clue, but I am sure it is bad news."

"Now, you don't know that. Why don't we open this and see what it says. You know this may be God's way of helping you reach out to her." Handing his mother the envelope he said. "Maybe it is time to heal and reconcile."

Kathy tore the perforation and dumped the contents out on the richly polished mahogany table. Out tumbled four envelopes...one that looked like an invitation of some sort, one that held pictures, one legal sized envelope and a letter. Each was marked with Kathy and Ed Evans.

Opening the letter she began to read it out loud.

Hi,

My name is Allison Wilcox Evans. My mother is your daughter Lucinda...that makes you my grandparents.

Let me tell you something about myself...I have blonde hair and green eyes and stand about five foot five. I am twenty-nine years old and am presently interning at Children's Hospital in Austin. Hopefully, when my internship is over I can set up a pediatric practice near the ranch. I am engaged to Kevin Cunningham and our wedding is on Valentine's Day. It would be wonderful if I could have all my grandparents there.

Rob and Katie are my brother and sister who are twins. I also had another sister, Lyn who was killed by a drunk driver last spring. My moms still grieve deeply. I am not sure why you and my mother are estranged, but I want you to know that my mom lights candles for you every week. There is sadness in her that no one, not even my mother, can cure.

I really want you to come to my wedding. I have included a family picture for you, an invitation to the wedding and two plane tickets. Please, Grandma and Grandpa, I would be honored for you to attend.

Allie

Putting the letter down, Kathy next opened the envelope with the picture. She gently ran her finger over the image of her daughter as a tear ran down her cheek. "She looks so much like my mother." She whispered as she opened the note with the picture.

From left to right: Rob, Mom, Mama (Kiley) and Katie. Sitting: Allie and Lyn.

"The boy looks like Lucinda," she said softly. "So does the one that was killed." She handed the picture to her son.

Mark looked at the picture. "They all look happy...in fact, I don't think I ever saw Luce looking so at peace."

Kathy buried her face in her hands as she quietly cried. "I wish I knew what to do. I have spent all these years missing my daughter, but how can I accept her lifestyle? I can't; it is an abomination!"

Mark went to his mother and put a comforting arm around her. "For many years now I have been searching my heart for the answer." He said as he held the photograph. "When I saw this picture, I knew my search was over."

"What do you mean?" Kathy asked as tears continued to roll down her cheeks.

"Jesus never turned anyone away, love was his teaching. We are not to judge, but to love...not to hate but forgive." He held out the picture. "Look at these people...this family...they are all happy and serene...they know and feel love. Isn't that what the Lord is asking of all of us?" Mark reasoned. "Perhaps it is time for us to stop judging and begin accepting Luce and let God be the judge."

Kathy took the letter and the picture in her hands. "Thank you for your insight. Now, I must decide what to do for myself." She hugged her son. "I think I will lay down for a while if you don't mind."

"Go ahead, I need to get back. Let me know what you decide then we can talk again."

Lying down in her bed, Kathy looked at the picture of her daughter and her family. She traced a finger around each face; there was no denying the love and happiness.

§ § § § §

"NO! I'm not going!"

"But, babe, we need to be there to support our daughter."

Turning as her face reddened, Kiley screamed. "Exactly what part of NO don't you understand? You're the one with the big degree, NO should be easy to comprehend!"

LJ sighed as she took a deep breath. "Kiley...come on can you just get by the anger and look at this logically?" She cautiously took the smaller woman into her arms.

Kiley pushed away. "Don't do that, Lucy! You aren't going to persuade me...there is no way I will be anywhere that woman is!" She poked her finger at LJ's head. "Can you get that through your thick head?"

LJ threw her long arms up in the air. "Fine, have it your way, I'll call Allie and tell her you won't be there to help plan her wedding." Then, she headed towards the phone.

"That's not fair!" Kiley blurted out.

LJ turned. "It may not be fair, but it is the truth. You're allowing your anger and embarrassment to keep you from helping our daughter." She stated emphatically.

Kiley rolled her eyes and pursed her lips. "I am NOT! I don't want that woman to think she can manipulate me again!"

"By not going you are doing just that, babe." She hesitated for a moment. "Shall I make the call or not?"

Standing there, Kiley shook her head. "No, I'll go." Her tone was resigned. "Where and what time?"

LJ moved closer to her lover and pulled her close. "We are in this together...if that woman tries anything we will squash it immediately. Okay?"

Kiley's head nodded as she breathed in the scent of LJ. "You can give her that ice cold stare of yours that should stop her in her tracks." She said with a slight chuckle. "I hope we are meeting them someplace good."

"Does the Tavern sound good to you?"

Kiley tilted her head back. "The Tavern? I thought it had closed forever."

Kissing the top of the blonde head LJ smiled. "Nope, it has been remodeled and is now open forever."

"I hope they haven't remodeled those fantastic hamburgers. Remember when we used to go there after work?" Kiley began to laugh. "I can still see those two men's faces who tried to pick me up and you pulled them in close and grabbed

their balls. What did you say to them? I never did know."

"I told them the lady has no interest in your nuts, shall I twist them off and show you?" LJ smiled broadly.

*S S S S S*

When they arrived at the Tavern, they saw Allie, Kevin and Nora already sitting at a table in the corner. Nora appeared to be agitated and LJ surmised Kevin must have faced a similar scene to get her here.

"Hello, everyone." LJ said brightly as she kissed her daughter and future son-in-law. "Nora, good to see you again." Pulling the chair next to Allie out she indicated Kiley should sit there before she sat herself down next to Nora. The waitress came over and asked them if they wanted a drink and both ordered a Shiner.

Tentatively Kiley spoke. "I hope they haven't remodeled the hamburgers too."

Allie laughed. "I had one last week, they are still as good. Later on you should check out the upstairs it really has changed.

Nora was looking over the menu. "Is this all they have? What kind of dive have you brought us to, Kevin?"

Kevin patted his mother's hand. "This place has been here for a very long time, Mother, and I doubt the owners would appreciate you calling it a dive." He looked around the table with an apologetic face.

Allie took his hand and smiled. "Why don't you start, darling?"



He shook his head and spoke. "The reason we asked you here was to discuss our wedding. We know there have been some hard feelings and we would like to iron them out so our wedding will be a happy event. It would be sad for us to start out our lives together on a bad note."

LJ and Kiley nodded while Nora's face remained stoic.

"Shall I tell you our idea?" Allie asked softly.

Even Nora perked up with the question and shook her head yes.

"What my mother and Mrs. Cunningham planned for the ceremony is right on. We like the selections for bible passages and the music...I especially liked the trumpet idea."

Nora's face changed from dour to a satisfied smile of superiority. She looked as if she had hit a homerun.

"For the reception...what you planned is very nice, but too snobby for us." Allie took a deep breath as she saw Kevin's mother's eyes narrow. "We thought we would rent out the County Line and have the reception there."

LJ and Kiley's mouths dropped open and Nora clasped her chest as she gasped. "Barbeque, you want barbeque for your reception dinner?"

"Yep." Kevin said. "With all the fixins...potato salad, coleslaw, beans. Of course we will have all the meats, beef and pork ribs, brisket, peppered turkey and sausage. There will be an open bar too." He smiled. "What do you think?"

LJ thought, *now that's a wide open question.* "It sounds good to me." She said as she winked at Kiley.

Kiley's face looked puzzled until she caught LJ's wink. "Me too, I love their brisket and ribs."

Nora began to speak then stopped only to blurt out. "How can you expect people in their wedding clothes to eat barbeque? What about the lovely dress your sister is making, Allie? It will get ruined."

"Oh, didn't we tell you? It won't be formal, it will be casual so everyone can enjoy themselves comfortably." She noted the audible gasp from Nora before continuing. "I have a friend that knows the members of the Jug Band and I think we can get them for the music."

Nora once again clasped her chest as she began to rapidly breath. "I will not subject my friends," she gasped "to a hoedown wedding!" Her face was flushed; her unhappiness was clear.

"Mother, this is not about your friends it is about our wedding and this is what we want." Kevin said.

"How can you let this happen?" Nora asked of anyone listening.

Kiley got up and moved around the table then indicated she would like LJ's chair. Sitting down she put her hand over Nora's. "Nora, how does it feel to have ideas rammed down your throat without anyone listening to your thoughts?" She smiled kindly before going on. "That is exactly how I felt shopping with you."

Tears were streaming down Nora's cheeks as she attempted to find a Kleenex to blow her nose. "I just wanted everything to be perfect." She sobbed.

"Mother, your idea of perfect isn't ours. Can't you understand that?"

Her face was tear stained as Nora began to speak again. "My family was very frugal, so when I was going to be married, my parents were down right cheap. I could only spend seventy-five dollars on a dress and the reception was at a motel with a rubbery chicken dinner and an accordion player." She opened her eyes wide. "Can you imagine, an accordion player at your wedding? I vowed that when my kids got married it would be first class no matter what I had to sacrifice. That's all I was trying to do."

Kiley tenderly touched Nora's hand. "What do you say we start over and see if we can come up with something that we all agree on?"

Wiping tears away, Nora nodded her head. "I would like that."

§ § § § §

Although the air had a chill the wedding day arrived with a spectacular sun and blue skies. Allie stood in front of a full-length mirror admiring the beautiful dress her sister had designed for her. Turning to her grandmother she engulfed her in a hug. "Thank you for sewing this for me, Gram."

Dorothy returned the hug. "It was my pleasure. Shall I get your mothers now?"

"Yes, please." Looking in the mirror again she spoke to her sister. "Katie, is this supposed to look like this?"

Katie looked at the sleeve and rearranged the material. "Is that better?"

§ § § § §

Kiley and LJ were standing in the vestibule as they spoke with Father Michael. "I hope you won't mind, I have invited another priest to assist me with the Mass."

Kiley smiled and patted the older man on the hand. "Not at all, Father."

The kindly man's eyes smiled as he pointed towards the back of the church. "There he is now, Father Mark."

Just then Dorothy arrived. "Father, isn't this a glorious day?" She asked as she took his hand.

"It surely is a day to rejoice in the Lord's miracles." He spoke softly; a twinkle was in his eyes.

"I must take these lovely ladies, Father, Allie is asking for them." She smiled as she looked at LJ. "LJ, darling, Allie needs you now."

LJ had been staring at the other priest wondering where she had seen him before and didn't even notice that Dorothy was there. "Huh?" She said. "Allie, right...let's go then." Her eyes still glued on the younger priest. "That priest looks familiar...wonder from where?"

"It will come to you in the middle of the night. Come on, we need to go." Kiley said as she took LJ's hand and led her away.

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Russell Wilcox entered the room with Carl Andrews. "Hey you two, you better get yourselves out there they are about to seat the grandmothers." Russell said as he kissed Kiley's cheek.

"Thanks, Dad." Kiley replied. "Guess we better go now." She said to Allie before she hugged her close. "I love you, baby. Be happy."

LJ looked down fondly at her daughter. "You look beautiful, Squirt. I love you."

Smiling radiantly, Allie kissed the two women. "I love you both so much." She then turned to the two men. "How lucky can one girl be? Two beautiful mothers and two handsome men to walk me down the aisle."

With that Kiley and LJ walked hurriedly towards the ushers and Nora for the mothers' walk down the aisle. They both knelt before sliding down the pew to their seats. LJ's eyebrows scrunched up as she saw a small, frail woman sitting next to Kiley. Recognizing whom it was, she smiled as she reached across her lover to take her mother's hand and gently squeezed it. Kiley was all smiles knowing that her Lucy was pleased.

The reception was a wonderful affair filled with love and happiness. After some awkward moments, LJ and her mother began to speak quietly, each wiping away an errant tear every now and then.

Allie stood, smiling radiantly in front of the band holding a microphone. Kevin had just finished thanking his groomsmen and his family and it was now her turn.

"Gosh, thank you isn't enough for everything my friends and family have done for me. First, I need to thank my little sister, Katie, for designing my gorgeous dress and my Gram Andrews for putting it together." A round of applause could be heard with catcalls. "Sally, Brenda, Lisa and Katie thank you for taking care of me and standing with me." A sad look crossed her face. "We didn't see her, but my lovely sister

Lyn was here with us today...at one point I'm sure I heard her tell me to get a move on she was hungry." A collective laugh was heard. "Not only did I get married today, but I was honored by meeting my Gram Evans and my uncle Father Mark for the first time." She looked directly at Kathy and smiled.

Turning to the lead singer she asked a question then stepped off the stage and walked towards her mothers. Standing next to the two women she kissed each. "These are the two ladies who taught me all about unconditional love and acceptance. My mothers showed my brother, sisters and myself that family is everything; without it our lives would be so very empty. I know there have been times that I hurt them, but no matter what, there was always love and a hand there for me to hold. I hope that Kevin and I have the successful and loving relationship they have had for over twenty years now. Thanks to both of you for guiding me on the path of love. I love you."

Kevin then joined her and kissed her tenderly before taking Kiley's hand. "May I have this dance, Mom? Allie requested this song especially for you." He said as he led her to the dance floor and the song 'You Belong To Me'.

Allie sat down next to her Mom. "I love you." Leaning across LJ she spoke to her grandmother. "Thank you for coming to my wedding." Then she turned back to LJ. "Are you and Mama going to dance?"

LJ looked around the room then towards her mother. "No, I don't think so...not tonight." There was the sound of resignation in her voice. "Looks like you need to save your mother from the line dance, she hates those you know."

Allie looked towards her new husband and her mother as they were doing the Electric Slide. Kiley was clearly out of her element appearing as though she didn't know left from right. The new bride also knew why her Mom wouldn't dance with her partner. A wicked smile crossed her face as she winked. "Mom I think you need to go and rescue her and I will sit with my grandmother and get to know her better."

As always, LJ and Allie were in sync mentally. LJ excused herself, kissed Allie then headed for the dance floor. Arriving at Kiley's side she took her hand. "Come with me I think you need private lessons. The two women were engulfed by the crowd and were soon out of sight.

Allie and her grandmother chatted amicably until LJ and Kiley returned to the table. "Here she is all safe and sound."

Kiley playfully tapped LJ on the arm. "Who rescued who?" She said as green eyes spoke volumes of love for her partner. "Allie, I understand I have you to thank for Lucy coming to rescue me." Her smile was broad with a hint of the mischief in her voice. "Thank you, I needed her kind of rescuing."

Allie winked at her mothers and then smiled when she saw her new uncle coming their way.

"Good evening." Father Mark said as he put an arm around his mother. "It is getting a bit late, Mother, would you like to go back to the hotel now?"

Kathy Evans patted her daughter's hand then she smiled. "I didn't sleep much last night...can we catch up more tomorrow?"

"Of course." LJ beamed. "Why don't you bring your suitcases with you and stay with us at the ranch...there's plenty of room and I would like you to be there." She said quietly.

Kathy's flung her arms around her daughter's shoulders. "Oh, thank you. I would love that. It will give us plenty of time to get to know each other again." She then turned to Kiley. "I would like to get to know you too, dear."

Kiley cocked her head and grinned. "I would like to get to know you too, Mom." Then she hugged the surprised woman.

§ § § § §

Father Mark needed to return to his parish and Kathy opted to spend some time at Rhodes End with her daughter and family. Crossing the yard with her daughter early one morning, Kathy pointed to the old shack. "I wonder if anyone ever found my old hiding place." She said as she walked towards the building.

"What did you hide there?" LJ asked, amused by her mother's question.

"Money, I saved all the money I could...I think it was all of seven or eight dollars." She said laughing before she found the right board and slid it sideways. "What do you know, its still here." She presented her daughter with a tin filled with change and some bills.

LJ smiled fondly at her mother before sitting on a worn stool. "Look up there." She said as she pointed to an old wooden board high above them. "Can you see the LJE? I think I carved it there before we moved."



Kathy smiled. "I remember you doing that. You said since we were moving you wanted the ranch to remember you."

LJ nodded her head and suddenly felt uncomfortable being there with her mother. For a long moment she stared at the worn, lined face of her mother. "I respect the fact that you don't agree with my lifestyle, Mother, but I love her with all my heart."

The older woman stood there a while longer before sitting down next to her daughter and taking her hand. "I know you do; I can see it in your eyes and in Kiley's. The way you both treat each other is so loving and kind it was easy for me to recognize true love." She sighed then continued. "Everyone has a line they will not cross, Lucinda. For your father, homosexuality was his line. I had to choose between the two of you..." Sadness crossed her face. "Not a day went by that I didn't think of you and wonder how you were doing. I even subscribed to the several scientific and archeological magazines so I could read about you. Once there was even a picture of you and I was so excited to see it I tried to show your father. He said he didn't have a daughter and I should throw the trash out...I didn't, I kept your picture. I've read your book, 'Out Of The Past' and desperately wanted to show everyone, but I didn't." Her head bowed in shame and regret. "There were several years that I lost you until I saw the ad for your camp. I knew then you were safe and where you always belonged." Tears began to flow. "I'm so sorry, can you ever forgive me?"

LJ pursed her lips and creased her eyebrows as she mulled over what to say to her mother. "I turned to you for comfort and solace when Holly died and you turned me away...I hated you for that."

"I know...I hated myself." Kathy said softly.

"Do you have any idea what it was like for me to be cast out of my family? How lonely holidays and birthdays were for me until Kiley came into my life? She saved my existence in more ways than one...I will never leave her."

"You felt as if something was always missing from your life...like a necessary part was gone." Kathy said without raising her head.

"Exactly, how did you know?"

Kathy shrugged her shoulders. "That was how I felt from the day we left your dorm room. I never stopped loving you, Lucinda, never. You need to understand how it was for me, how hard it was to go against your father's wishes. He was a good man and I never understood why he was so adamant about you until his funeral. A man came up to me, paid his condolences and then said he was Ed's brother." She began wringing her hands. "I was shocked of course, and even more so when he told me they hadn't spoken since your father was in his teens."

"You never knew he had a brother?" LJ asked.

"Oh, I knew he had a brother, but your dad said he had died when he was twenty. Fred is gay and said that when his brother found out he beat him to a pulp and never spoke to him again." Her expressive blue eyes searched her daughter's face. "You look so very much like my mother." Her hand gently touched LJ's cheek. "Do you think we can start over again?"

LJ got up and paced around the small area until she fixed her eyes on Kathy. "Why would you want to do that, Mother? I'm an embarrassment to

you...an abomination...I'm not changing or giving up my family for you or anyone else."

"I'm not asking you to, sweetheart. I would have to be a fool not to see the love and commitment in your family. All I'm asking is for a phone call every so often...maybe on the holidays...I don't expect you to love me, maybe just like me."

Her heart was screaming out I love you, but the words would not come. The pain and isolation of all the years gone by were overwhelming her with their bitterness. "I don't know, I just don't know."

Kathy stood and touched her daughter's arm gently. "When Allie was speaking at her wedding about how you and Kiley taught her about love and family I felt such a pang of sadness; I missed all that. Your brother told me that God is about love and forgiveness; only he can judge. I only wish I had embraced that idea sooner."

The shoulders that were held taut relaxed as LJ realized how tired she was. It was time to let the past go and reconcile with the stranger now speaking to her. She remembered the words of the old woman in the museum; *love will show the way*. She took her mother's hand and kissed it then put her arm around the frail woman. "What do you say we go have a cup of coffee and gather the rest of our family and have a picnic down by the stream?"

Kathy's face brightened. "I would like that very much. Thank you."

"No, thank you for making the effort to come here." Smiling, LJ pulled her mother closer to her as they walked towards the house.

Kiley greeted the mother and daughter as they returned to the warm, cozy house. "How about some coffee and fresh baked cookies?"

LJ walked over to the counter and the cooling cookies then picked up one and took a bite. She immediately opened her mouth and began flapping her hand in front of it. "Hot, hot." She exclaimed. "Mom and I thought we could all have a picnic down by the stream today."

Kiley poured a glass of milk and handed it to her partner. "Didn't the steam clue you in?" She asked laughing. Pouring another glass she handed it to Kathy. "How about some milk and fresh hot cookies, Mom? A picnic sounds great, I think the weather will be cooperate."

Smiling Kathy shook her head. "No thanks not right now, Kiley. I would like to lay down for a bit if it is okay with you two."

LJ's eyes squinted as she hurried to her mother's side. "Are you okay, Mom?" She asked as she felt the frail woman's head.

Gently Kathy pushed LJ's hand off her head. "I am fine, Lucinda, just a bit tired from all the traveling. You know, us old ladies need more sleep to stay beautiful." A slight laugh came from her mouth.

Unconvinced, LJ searched her mother's face. "Okay, but I think you are beautiful right now." She said before bending over to gently kiss the older woman's cheek.

Kiley moved next to her lover's side and tenderly placed her arm around LJ's waist. "She'll be okay."

Turning, LJ engulfed Kiley in her arms. "This is so difficult for me. She isn't the mother I knew thirty years ago...she's so old and fragile."

Hugging LJ closer, Kiley remained silent as her partner continued.

"I'm not prepared for the flood of emotions I'm feeling. This woman, I call Mother and I have hated all these years, comes back into my life and I'm suppose to act like nothing has happened." She sighs heavily burying her head into Kiley's fresh smelling hair. "How can I reconcile it all with my head and heart?"

Releasing LJ, Kiley took her hand and led her to the couch in the family room. "Sit with me." She said before they both sat close to one another. "You don't reconcile it, you just accept it as so. No matter how much your mother hurt or disappointed you earlier you still loved her. The Lucy I know, who is so into family, doesn't have it in here to hate her mother." She tapped LJ's chest.

"I just don't know, I just don't know. I look at her and my heart fills with love, but my head tells me not to get too close." She buries her head in her hands until Kiley pulls her close. "It hurts so much, Kiley. All the ugly hateful things my parents did to me come flooding back, yet I still love them. How can that be?" Came the heartfelt cry.

"Lucy, it is what it is. Instead of fighting it, why not just enjoy having her back in your life. You lost thirty years, don't waste the time you have now...rejoice in it." Lifting LJ's head she slowly began lightly kissing her face. "I'm with you all the way."

"You won't lose me?" LJ said as her lips found their way to Kiley's.

"Never." After kissing her partner soundly, Kiley released her. "What do you say we take a plate of cookies to Rob and Katie and alert them to our plans? Then maybe when we return your mom will be awake and we can plan the picnic."

LJ patted her lover's backside. "That sounds great to me. Think I can have a few more of those cookies?"

Both women laughed as they prepared the plates of cookies for their children. Later on the family joined together for a picnic; all cherished the memory.

Kathy spent the next two months at Rhodes End, an experience that enriched everyone's life. After arriving back in New York she developed pneumonia and passed silently in her sleep knowing her daughter loved her.

§ § § § §

Rhodes End was busy with activity as Allie and Kevin lived with LJ and Kiley until their home was built. Rob hired several ranch hands and that necessitated the building of a bunkhouse. Horses were bought along with a hundred head of cattle making the place a working cattle ranch again. Fences were mended and a new white iron fence lined the borders along the roadway. The camp area was fenced off to seclude it from the other activities.

"How's it going, son?" LJ asked of Rob.

"Great. The guys have mended the entire fence and will be starting on the line shacks next week. Tom said he thought we could run about five hundred head eventually."

LJ shook her head in agreement. "Probably so, but we first need to make sure the land and water will sustain what we have." A wicked smile crossed her face. "Who was that lovely lady I saw leaving your house early this morning?"

Rob's face turned bright red as his words sputtered haltingly. "Well...I mean...she's my...ah, Mom, I should have known; nothing gets by you." He bowed his head and began kicking the dirt with his boot. "Sally Murphy. We've been dating for about two months."

"And we haven't met this Sally Murphy because?" LJ was surprised because Rob was always so forthright about his life. Fear gripped her heart as she worried it was because of his parent's lifestyle.

Rob continued to dig a hole with his boot unwilling to meet his mother's eyes. "I really care about her, she is unlike anyone else I have dated." Finally he raised his head and looked at his mother. "I think she may be the one."

LJ looked at her son, puzzled by his reluctance. "Really, that's great. Are we ever going to meet her?" She knew something was bothering Rob. "Listen, whatever it is we can talk and come up with a plan." She moved closer and touched his arm. "We're on your side you know."

Rob closed his eyes. "I don't know what to say or where to begin. It is so complicated."

"Why not start at the beginning. There is nothing you can say that will change my love for you."

He looked directly at his mother as he summoned the courage to speak. "She's married...well separated. She has two kids."

Nodding her head, LJ sighed; glad Rob's reluctance wasn't because of her relationship with Kiley. "Did you think we wouldn't approve?"

His eyes opened wide. "No, no, not at all. I didn't want you to think..."

"Think what?"

Rob shrugged his shoulders. "I'm responsible."

"Are you?"

"Yes and no." He said softly.

Noting her son's uneasiness, LJ put her arms around him. "Rob, I love you. There are no ifs ands or buts...I love you. Why not start from the time you first met."

Returning the hug, Rob sighed deeply. "Want to come to my house and have some coffee? I will tell you everything."

Later that day, when they were sitting together on the porch swing, LJ told Kiley about their son's love life.

"Did you know our son is in love?"

Kiley's green eyes sparkled. "Really! That's wonderful. Who is she, when do we get to meet her, how long have they been dating?"

LJ laughed. "Slow down. Her name is Sally Murphy. He met her at her job as a bartender at the Hula Hut. She is separated and has filed for divorce, seems our Rob was an influencing factor in her decision."

"He broke their family up?" Kiley asked, alarmed at the possibility.



"Not really, it was already falling apart because the husband began using her as a punching bag. She has two small children...three and four I think." LJ went quiet for a moment. "I was afraid it was because of our relationship that he hadn't brought her around."

Kiley pulled back her head as she frowned. "It shouldn't be an issue...did he tell her?" Knowing the story about Lucy's family she understood why she thought that way.

"Yes."

"And?"

"Its not a problem."

"Good, then you don't have to worry about that, do you? When do we get to meet her?"

"Tomorrow."

Kiley wrapped her arms around her somber lover. "Our family is growing." She said happily. "Wonder when Katie will be bitten by the love bug?"

LJ laughed. "Whomever it is will have to pry her out of her studio, she can't meet anyone when she never goes out."

"Give her time. She has her portfolio almost finished then she will have to get out if she wants to sell her ideas. She has some innovative ideas, I can see her doing quite well."

Just then the phone rang and LJ went into the house to answer it. Coming back outside she handed Kiley the portable. "It's Allie wanting to speak to Grandma."

Taking the phone from LJ, Kiley's face lit up.  
"The rabbit died?"

*s s s s s*

Wrapped in each other's arms, Kiley and LJ sat on the worn wooden porch swing.

"I love sitting here with you. Remember the first time we sat out here?" Kiley asked.

"Oh, yes. I was scared, did you know that?"

Kiley laughed. "Sure you were."

LJ kissed her thoroughly. "I was. The thought of making love to you for the first time terrified me. I was afraid I might not satisfy you."

Again Kiley laughed. "If I remember correctly you satisfied me numerous times that night."

"How did I know you would be insatiable and...still are?" LJ replied as she wiggled her eyebrows.

Kiley snuggled closer. "Any objections?"

"Oh no, love. None at all...in fact I think maybe we might do a test and see if you still have what it takes." LJ said as she began to run her fingers up and down Kiley's arm.

"Oh, I have what it takes. The question is, can you keep up with me." Kiley began nibbling LJ's ear. "Want to find out?"

LJ pressed her lips to the tempting ones of her lover and soon they were lost in each other. Hands began to move with ease readily finding flesh to touch.

From somewhere in the house they were aware of voices calling out to them. "Grams, where are you?"

Smiling the two women stood up. "Life goes on." Kiley said laughingly before they went inside to their grandchildren.

§ § § § §

The bond between LJ and Kiley was forged in love. From that bond came a family based on love. Acceptance, love and forgiveness are the road they traveled together to form a strong everlasting connection.

§ § § § §

Their souls and love lasted through all time...

**The End**

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Feedback is always appreciated

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