

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DAWN BROWER



Snowflake
Kisses

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Dawn Brower

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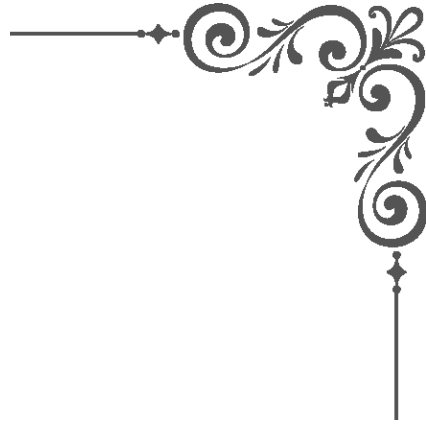
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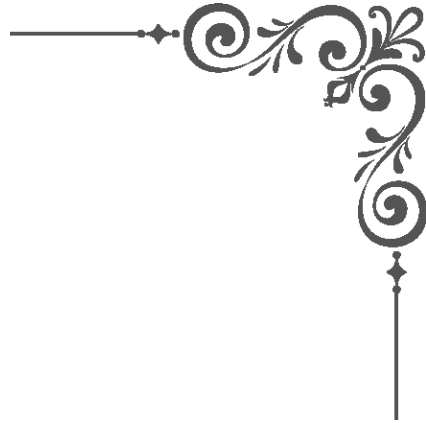
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DEDICATION

This book is for everyone that believes in magic and a second chance at love. I hope you enjoy Snowflake Kisses. Mack and Meghy love winter for their own reasons, and found their happiness by embracing life and take a leap of faith. Sometimes that is all it take to discover what you want and what you're willing to do to attain it—just believe in the possibilities.



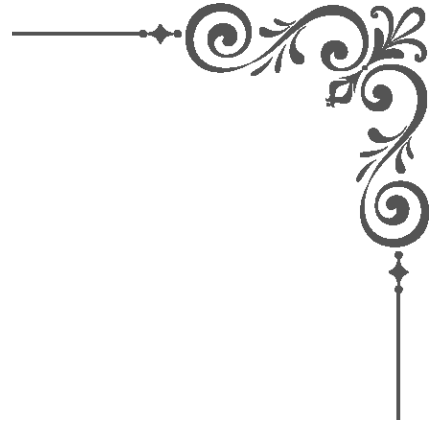
Snowflake Kisses

The color of my heart runs blue
Broken from the loss of you
You understood me
And all I could be...

No love could ever be more true
Than the one between me and you
Snowflakes flutter around
With the absence of sound
Dreams are made of
Happiness and love
Snowflake kisses
and unwavering bliss...

You understood me
And all I could be...

*Sleigh bells ring, are you listening
In the lane, snow is glistening
A beautiful sight, we're happy tonight
Walking in a winter wonderland*



CHAPTER ONE

Decorations glistened with glittery lights across every light post on the quaint village's quintessential main street. Snowflakes fluttered from the dark sky as they fell over everything. Bells from a nearby church started to ring as the hour turned to six in the evening. People walked along the streets talking merrily with excitement for the holiday season. It should have all filled him with joy, but it didn't. The town left a combination of nostalgia and distaste in his mouth. *What am I doing here?*

His agent thought it would be a good idea to return to his hometown to unwind—heal. Mack Taylor wanted to do anything other than go back to Suttons Bay. The memories should be good ones. His childhood hadn't been bad, and up until the months before he left he'd loved his hometown. His success had been his anchor and his way to prove some dreams can come true. He hadn't been an overnight sensation and had to climb his way to the top. Now that he was there though he refused to be sent back to the bottom—this injury wouldn't be his undoing.

He walked slowly down the street heading toward the only inn to be found in the small town—Hillside Homestead. It was a early twentieth century farmhouse turned into a bed and breakfast. The proprietor had made sure to keep it period accurate to the time it had been built. She also happened to be Mack's aunt, and only living relative.

Hillside Homestead was located just on the outskirts of town on top of a high sweeping hill. It was steep to climb on a good day, but on a snowy one—ten times worse. He'd hated it and loved it as he was growing up. As a small boy it was the best sledding hill to be found, and as a teenager a pain in his ass when he tried to sneak out. His aunt had caught him every single time, and yet he continued to try. Now with the injury to his leg he hated the damn climb more than ever. He stopped a moment to rub the ache in his thigh.

Mack trekked through the snow until he reached the front porch. The light in the kitchen greeted him and told him all he

needed to know. His aunt was home, and probably preparing baked goods for the next day's breakfast. She prided herself on her homemade and historically accurate food. He should go inside and tell her he'd come home for Christmas. She'd been begging him to return for years, but he kept giving her excuses why he couldn't. Truthfully, he had one reason for staying away, and as long as it still remained in Suttons Bay he would make sure to give the entire town a wide berth.

He pushed his hands into his jeans pocket and sighed. All he had with him was a back pack with a couple outfits, and his wallet. His agent had made sure he had no way to escape the town once he arrived. Until, Ben thought he'd had enough recuperation Mack was stuck in the town he'd grown up in. Ben thought he was doing him a favor. His agent didn't realize that he was forcing him to face ghosts of a past he'd rather forget. He made himself walk the distance to the front door and push it open. Heat wrapped around him immediately once he stepped inside. "Aunt Rose," he called out.

"Mack?" She rushed into the room and wrapped her arms around him a tight hug. "Why didn't you let me know you were coming? I'd have prepared a special meal or made sure your room was freshened up."

That was the one thing he could always depend on—his aunt keeping a room for him. If he'd failed on his endeavor he knew he'd always be welcomed back into the fold. He'd been so glad he hadn't had to come back—until now.

"It wasn't planned," he told her. "I'm on a forced vacation."

Aunt Rose stepped back and studied him. "What's wrong?" She frowned as she stared up at him. He opened his mouth to explain but couldn't get the words out. She was going to be irate once he told her about the accident. It wasn't common knowledge. Ben had handled everything to make it appear as everything was right in Mack's world. No one outside of Ben and the doctors knew the truth. Aunt Rose placed her hands on her hips and tapped her foot on the ground. "Tell me now," she demanded.

“Can’t I come home just to visit my favorite aunt?”

“I raised you boy,” she berated him. “You can’t fool me. I’ve been begging you to come home for too long to believe that malarkey.” She tilted her head and scrunched her eyes together suspiciously. “Did you lose all that money of yours and have no other place to go? Why didn’t I hear a car pull up?”

Aunt Rose wasn’t going to let any of it go. He’d have to fess up and get it over with. “I didn’t drive one here.” That was the truth. “My driver dropped me off in town. I wanted to walk the streets and see what changed since the last time I was here.” Not entirely the truth... He’d wanted a little more time to himself before facing her. He still wasn’t sure what he’d do or say to anyone else on this visit.

“How long are you staying?”

That was the hard part. He didn’t really know how long Ben was going to leave him stranded in Suttons Bay. “As long as you’ll put up with me.”

“Then you’re never leaving again,” she deadpanned. “Works for me. I could use an extra pair of hands to help around here. Something always needs fixing.”

He laughed. “Put me to work if you need to.” Some things never changed, and other things couldn’t help but evolve into something new. At least Hillside and his aunt would always be something he could count on. He really should have returned much sooner than he had.

“Have you seen her?” Aunt Rose asked.

“Who?” He pretended to not know who she was talking about. Especially, since the moment she asked the questions images of her floated through his mind. Her cinnamon gold hair and honey colored eyes—those luscious red lips, and delectable body. He had loved her since he was five years old, and she’d been his best friend. Mack could never forget her, or forgive himself for hurting her all those years ago.

“Don’t play dumb,” Aunt Rose accused him. “It’s past time—she’s forgiven you. You should forgive yourself and go

see her.”

“I can’t,” he replied mournfully. “Some things shouldn’t be forgiven.”

He closed his eyes and fought back emotions long buried. They were hard to control under the midst of memories bombarding him. Maybe he should tell his aunt the truth. If she knew the whole story she wouldn’t be pushing him toward his former friend.

“I don’t believe that and deep down you don’t either,” she said softly. “Meghy loves you.”

Mack didn’t want to think about that either. The pain was too much and it stabbed him in his broken heart. In that moment he made a snap decision. “There’s some things I haven’t told you.”

“Oh?” She lifted a brow. “Somehow that doesn’t surprise me. Follow me into the kitchen and tell me what’s going on in your life. I didn’t figure this was an unencumbered visit.”

Mack did as she told and trailed behind her. She headed over to a counter and started to knead some dough she had laid out. The silence was her way of telling him she’d listen once he decided to talk. His aunt had taken him in after his parent’s died in a freak accident when he was five. He knew her as well as she did him. They had a bond that formed over grief.

“I haven’t been sleeping well.” Ever since he left Suttons Bay years before he hadn’t been able to get more than three or four hours sleep at a time. Dreams haunted him every time he closed his eyes. “The doctor prescribed something to help me with it.”

“Probably all those late nights singing before large crowds of screaming fans.”

That might be a part of it. He had a natural high from the attention his fans gave him. There was nothing else like it and he’d never be able to explain it. He loved what he did and he’d always want to sing, but his career choice wasn’t why he couldn’t sleep. He didn’t explain that to his aunt. There was something else she needed to know. “I started sleep walking—

the drugs did weird things to me. I have no memory of any of it, and without the security cameras around my house I wouldn't have a clue about some of it."

She stopped kneading the dough and glanced at him. "Really? That must have been weird."

He nodded. "I didn't think much of it. Most of the time it was harmless... I might wake up on the couch when I fell asleep in bed, or on the floor of my studio—you get my point."

"I do," she agreed. "Did something change to make you worry?"

"The last time wasn't nearly as harmless..."

His aunt didn't miss a beat and asked, "What happened?"

"There was an accident..."

His sleepwalking had gone on to driving. He didn't have any memory of it and there was no video tape to help him figure it out. Luckily, he hadn't harmed anyone but himself in his drug induced state. He'd managed to drive his car into a tree on his property. The gardener had found him the next day. The bone in his left leg had broken in three places. He had needed three surgeries and several casts while it healed for months.

"You were hurt and didn't tell me?"

"I'm sorry..." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "I was embarrassed."

"Please tell me you're no longer taking those sleeping pills."

"I haven't had one since that incident." It had scared him senseless. "I also haven't been able to do much of anything for months. I'm afraid I've lost all my inspiration and I'm supposed to be recording a new album."

"Is that why you're here?"

Ben thought it was time for him to face his demons once and for all. If he could exorcise them, maybe he could return

to his music. If not—his career was over. He didn't want to see Meghy. He'd hoped to avoid her for the rest of his life. Unfortunately, fate had other plans for him. He would have to make peace with her and hope Aunt Rose was right. If she'd already forgiven him he would be one step closer to finding his motivation to create music again.

“That's what I'm hoping for...”

“Then stay as long as you like. Maybe the problem is you left your muse here when you left.”

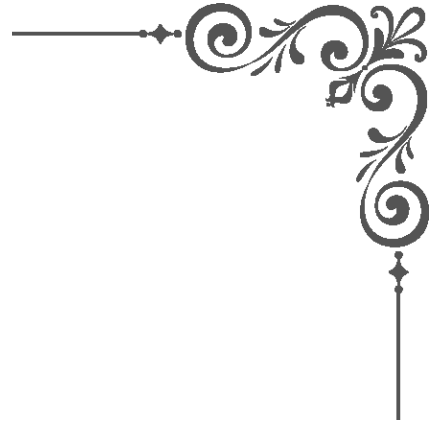
Mack hoped not—otherwise he was doomed. If he needed Meghy to produce again, he might never do it again. He would be forever trapped in the void he found himself in. In the morning he would seek her out and decide on his next move. Until then he'd make himself comfortable at Hillside.

“Do you need help with that?” he gestured toward the dough.

“No,” she said and then shooed him away. “Go to your room and rest. We will talk more tomorrow.”

He nodded and did as she instructed. Suddenly all the energy inside of him slipped away. Rest sounded rather wonderful. If only he could actually sleep...

*Gone away is the bluebird
Here to stay is a new bird
He sings a love song, as we go along
Walking in a winter wonderland*



CHAPTER TWO

Meghy Watkins stared at her computer and sighed. Exhaustion had become a permanent part of her life and she didn't like it. Who would? Somehow she'd managed to overwork herself and found no relief in sight. She did it to herself, and sadly she couldn't seem to make herself stop. She worked tirelessly every day when she could have taken a break or even a small vacation months ago. She didn't need to work as hard as she did when she'd first started, and yet she continued to keep the same rigorous pace she'd started at in the beginning.

Her career as a writer had been a lark. Something to do while she sat by her mother's bedside watching her—praying she'd open her eyes. Her mother had been in an accident several years ago. One she blamed herself for. It had left her in a coma with very little sign of waking up. The first year they'd been optimistic, but then they had to face reality. The doctors didn't have any hope that her mother would ever wake up, and they had some decisions to make.

In the beginning she'd poured all her wishes and dreams into her books. Those romance novels held everything she'd wanted from life, but didn't think she'd ever have. After her mother's accident her life took a drastic left turn in ways she'd never imagined. She had hoped to go to New York and become a hardcore journalist. She wanted to investigate scandal and dive into the political world. Instead she'd stayed home and wrote romance novels. Sometimes plans needed to be changed and Meghy was thankful in some ways hers had. She loved writing and it didn't matter if it was a romance novel or a biting article in a newspaper. As long as she could string words together and create her own personal masterpiece she'd always be happy.

As an author she could work from anywhere, and yet she never left Suttons Bay. Someday maybe she'd be one of those glamorous writers who traveled to exotic locales to weave her tales. Unfortunately she wasn't ready to explore the world and found safety in the confines of her hometown.

She needed a break...something to stir her imagination.

Otherwise the current scene she was working on wouldn't become the magic it should be. As much as she hates leaving the comfort of her cozy apartment—sometimes she had to put on a pair of pants and venture out into the real world. Vader, her finicky black cat rubbed his face across her leg. His purrs echoed through the room and were so loud it mimicked a vacuum cleaners buzzing.

“Hello, Kitty,” Meghy said as she leaned down to scratch behind his ears. “Do you want attention?” His purrs became even louder as she petted him. “You like that don't you?”

What was the world coming to? She talked to her cat on a regular basis instead of real breathing people. The internet didn't count. It was so easy to hide behind it and pretend that she had the courage to interact socially. She'd never been a social butterfly, but at least a few years ago it had been easier. Of course that was largely in part because her best friend had been good with people. His current stardom spoke volumes to how much. He thrived in a crowd and loved being around other's. So he'd dragged Meghy along with him.

She missed him...

At first she had blamed him for what happened to her mother. But really, it was no one's fault. She'd just needed someone to lash out at and Mack had made a good target. It had destroyed their friendship and she hadn't talked to him in years. She followed his career and applauded him when he not only won over millions of fans, but a Grammy too. He was a true star, and she was a floundering one. She had her own success, but it was quieter and suited her more. She would have hated to be in the spotlight.

Out of habit she moved her mouse over to the search bar and typed in his name, then frowned at the headline...Mack Taylor absent from the music world. She clicked on it and read it from top to bottom. He hadn't been seen in months, and had cancelled his upcoming tour. What was going on with him? She nibbled on her bottom lip and worried about her friend.

She wished she hadn't lost contact with him and could call him. Why had she pushed him away all those years ago?

Meghy clicked on a photo of him so it expanded across the monitor. He was as handsome as she remembered. His dark brown hair was mussed in the picture and his ocean blue eyes called to her. She had secretly loved him for most of her life, but didn't think she had a chance at being more than friends with him. Her heart had shattered when she'd learned he left. She'd done that to him—to them. He'd left without looking back and not bothering to say goodbye. She'd lost him forever and there was nothing she could do to change it. She would have if it were possible.

She sighed and minimized the screen. Staring at his picture wasn't going to change anything. It was time to snap out of her melancholy mood and face reality. This was no way to live her life and she had to make some changes. Starting with leaving her house and taking a walk to town—once there she could go to the coffee shop and maybe interact with some of the locals.

Resigned, Meghy prepared for her outing. She dressed in a pair of skinny blue jeans, a long red sweater, and brown ankle boots. Then she pulled on her tan winter coat, white hat along with the matching scarf and mittens. Winter time in Suttons Bay was no time to forget the necessary attire. Snow was bound to come down in buckets when she didn't pay attention. She braced herself and then left her home, praying she wouldn't regret her decision.



MACK PUSHED HIS HANDS into the pockets of his leather coat. Damn, he'd forgotten how cold it could get in winter. Living on the West Coast had spoiled him. He hadn't even thought to buy gloves or a scarf. Luckily, his aunt and an extra hat so his ears didn't freeze as he walked through the bitter wind. The place he was heading to came into view. *Which Brew* was the local gathering place according to his aunt. They had the best coffee and several different blends to choose from. The owner was one of his close friends, and Mack had loaned him the money to start his business over a few years ago. The first location was in Los Angeles, but Carl had gotten

the idea to open one in their hometown too. So far it seemed to be a success. Carl traveled periodically back to Los Angeles to check on the shop there, but decided to move back to Suttons Bay a few months ago. Mack missed being able to visit with him regularly. The one good thing about this forced vacation was being able to see Carl.

He pushed the door open and headed to the counter. His friend was working one of the espresso machines with skill. One of the baristas came over to him and smiled. “Can I help you?”

The girl didn’t recognize him. For that Mack was grateful. He didn’t want anyone to make a fuss out of him being there. Most of the locals would know him and not make too big of a deal out of his presence. Some though, would see it as an opportunity to exploit his fame for their gain. He would rather avoid those types if he could. “I’ll take a regular cup of coffee black—the blend doesn’t matter.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Carl said. “That’s the whole point of this shop.”

Mack grinned. “I haven’t had a cup of coffee in your place I didn’t like. I trust your coffee making skillz.” He emphasized the end of the final word to make it stand out.

Carl rolled his eyes. “Fine. I’ll make you a cup and give you the personal treatment. What do you think you are? My friend or something?”

“Maybe,” Mack replied jovially. “The only one I have.”

“Grab a seat and I’ll join you in a few.”

Mack nodded at Carl and found an empty table in the corner. He didn’t feel much like socializing and if he found one closer to the door or in the middle of the room he might have to. He still hadn’t gathered the courage to go visit Meghy. Carl joined him with a steaming mug in each hand. He placed one in front of Carl and then took the empty seat. “What are you doing in Suttons Bay? I thought you vowed never to return here.”

He had said something to that effect once. “It was time.”

“Just like that you decided that. Something changed. Want to tell me what?”

Mack shook his head. “It’s just as I said. I needed to exorcise some demons. It’s been affecting my work and its time I stopped ignoring my mistakes.”

“Have you seen her?”

The million dollar question... “No,” he said. There was no denying who Carl was talking about.

“Are you going to?”

“That’s the point isn’t it?” He’d come home to own up to his past mistakes and hopefully manage to get his head on straight. “Admittedly I’m not looking forward to it, but I owe it to her to do the one thing I failed to do years ago.”

“She keeps to herself and doesn’t come to town much. You might have to go to her if you want to see her.”

“If that’s what it takes...” He swallowed the lump growing in his throat. Why did this have to be so damn hard? “I’ll go to her place. I’d rather it be in public though so we can both bolt if necessary.”

The song played over the coffee shop’s speakers changed from a happy melody to a slow love song. One that Mack had written from a distant memory about Meghy. She didn’t know that—no one did. But it stabbed him in the heart and bled emotions into him he’d kept bottled up. The bell above the shop’s door jingled. Mack turned to see who entered and he lost the ability to breathe. It was her... Her cinnamon hair was buried beneath a snow white cap, but couldn’t be contained. Curls had escaped and floated down her back and over her face. He was transfixed unable to look away. With the song playing over head and her standing before him he couldn’t think let alone breathe.

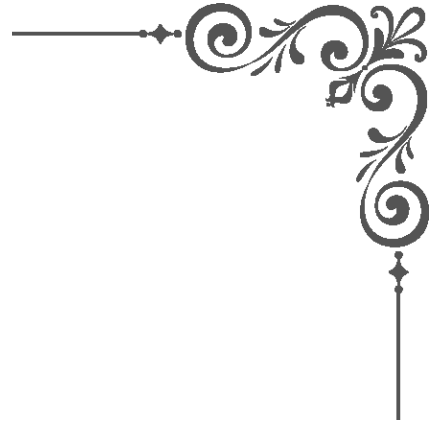
“Mack” Carl tapped his arm. “Here’s your chance.”

Meghy turned and met his gaze. Her honey colored eyes were as beautiful as he remembered and held a hit of surprise as recognition dawned on her. He could almost see the moment when she decided to turn and run. As she spun on her

heels to exit the way she'd come he bounced to his feet and went after her. He'd come to see her and it might hurt, but they both had some bad memories to work through. It was time for him to man up and face her, and the things he'd done to her. He'd been a horrible friend in the end. Mach owed her for more than she realized. If not for her he'd be nothing...

He slid open the door and out into the cold. She had already gained a good distance, but he knew where she was heading. There was only one place she would go, and he took a leisurely pace to follow her. She needed time to acclimate to his presence. By the time he caught up she might even be calm enough to have a semi-normal conversation with him. He hoped he was doing the right thing...

*In the meadow we can build a snowman
Then pretend that he is Parson Brown
He'll say, "Are you married?"
We'll say, "No man"
But you can do the job, when you're in town*



CHAPTER THREE

Meghy rushed away from the shop as fast as her legs could carry her. He'd been in there... She'd wished not that long ago she could contact him, then when faced with actually talking to him she'd panicked and fled. What a coward she'd turned into. There was a time when Mack would have been the first person she'd run to. How could she have let things go as far as they had?

She stopped in front of a meadow she'd played in often as a child. In the distance there was a local park, and behind it the bay leading into one the lake. Of course she'd come here. This was one of their favorite spots together. When she thought about Mack she'd often pictured this place. He had been such a huge part of her life for as long as she could remember.

“Meg,” Mack shouted in the distance. “Wait!”

She closed her eyes and returned to a happier time, one almost similar to the one she was in. He'd shouted for her—their mingled laughter echoing on the wind.

Meghy ducked to avoid the snowball flying toward her. She hadn't reacted quite fast enough. It hit her neck and water dripped down her neck and trickled underneath her coat toward the middle of her back. She shivered from the icy cold and didn't see the follow-up snowball flying toward her. It hit her in the face taking her by surprise. She wiped her face and turned to glare at him. “You're going to pay for that.”

She knelt down and made a quick snowball and launched it in record speed. She'd missed of course—he'd had fair warning what she'd been planning. She inched forward as she'd thrown the snowball. Once he was ducking she ran forward and tackled him to the ground. He hit the cold surface with a thud. She was lying on top of him—something she hadn't quite planned on. He wrapped his arms around her waist and rolled them to their side.

“I caught you,” he whispered. His hot breath brushed across her cheek. Her heart beat rapidly inside of her chest.

She hadn't counted on this—on him being so close. "What are you going to do now?"

She wanted to kiss him, but didn't dare. He was supposed to be her best friend. Sure they'd hugged, had even held hands once upon a time. When things were more innocent between them and no one thought the wiser... Meghy loved him with her whole heart and she had no idea what to do with those feelings. He didn't see her that way.

"Let me go," she said wiggling in his arms.

"What fun would that be," he teased. His cheeks were bright red from the cold, and his lips were a temptation she was battling against. "I rather like you where you are."

What did that mean? Her breathing became ragged. She told herself it was because of her struggles to free herself, but that was a lie. It was the close proximity to Mack. He made her a bumbling mess at times, and this was one of them. They'd been friends since they were five. Not a lot had changed in the past twelve years. This was their last year of high school and in a few months they'd be leaving Suttons Bay for good. He planned on heading to Los Angeles to strike his luck in the music scene, and she wanted to go to New York and attend school. They would be on opposite sides of the country. She dreaded the moment when they'd be separated.

He did something she'd never have expected in a million years. He moved closer and pressed his lips to hers. Sparks ignited inside of her and spread like rapid fire. Her whole body heated from the inside out and his kiss made her wish for things that she'd never thought possible. He lifted his head and met her gaze. His eyes were like blue fire and lit a new one deep inside of her.

"Meghy." His voice was hoarse and he swallowed hard. "Say something."

She shook her head and he groaned. Words failed her and she'd always been good with them. What could she say... He'd left her utterly speechless.

He rolled away from her and started to form a snowball. Did he really intend to throw that at her? After what they had just shared? “What are you doing?”

“Building a snowman,” he stated matter-of-factly.

“Why?” she asked, puzzled at his reasoning.

“Haven’t you ever listened to the song?”

Had he hit his head when she’d knocked him to the ground? What song? “I’m afraid you’ve lost me.” She wanted to talk to him about the kiss not a silly song. Music was his thing, not hers.

“Parson Brown,” he replied. ““We can pretend to get married, then much later do it for real when he’s in town.” He winked. “I’ve smudged your honor and I must make it right.”

He had hit his head. There was no other explanation. She got to her feet and joined him. “If you insist on building this I suppose I’ll help you.”

He smiled and kissed her cheek. That at least was a normal thing for him to do—her Mack. He transformed into the boy she’d fallen in love with and expected to see. He was no longer talking nonsense about snowmen and marriage. They built the snowman and then went to town for hot chocolate. Not once had they discussed the kiss...

“Meghy...”

She snapped back to reality and turned to face him. “Hello, Mack,” she replied awkwardly. “I didn’t know you were in town.”

He shoved his hands into his pocket and looked away. “It wasn’t planned.”

She nodded absentmindedly. Once again words failed her. Her heart beat heavily in her chest and she had no idea what to say to him. How was she supposed to converse with anyone when she couldn’t even talk to the one person who knew her better than anyone else.

“I’m sure Rose is glad you’re here.” She sounded so stupid... “How long are you staying?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “That depends on you.” He turned and met her gaze again. “And if you can forgive me.”

Her mouth fell open at that statement. “There’s nothing to forgive.” It had taken her a moment to get over the shock to respond. “You did nothing wrong.”

“I left you alone when I promised to stay.”

She shook her head. “Mack,” she said earnestly. “You were hurting too. I don’t blame you anymore. I did at first, but it’s not your fault. My mother was in an accident and that had nothing to do with you.”

“But...”

“No,” she interrupted. “There is not buts. You didn’t make me stay out late and have her come looking for me. I did that all on my own—I hated the idea of leaving you. The only time I’ve ever felt alive was when you were near me. I needed to be with you...”

She couldn’t say any more than that. Anything else and she’d be confessing how much she loved him and how horrible the past decade had been without him in her life.



MACK DIDN’T KNOW WHAT to say. He’d come to apologize and he had, but somehow that didn’t seem like enough. He glanced around the field and to the bay in the distance. This was their place. They’d spent a lot of time there through the years, and the last winter they were together as friends they’d even shared a kiss. He had avoided talking about it then not wanting to spook her. Meghy could be skittish and he didn’t want to scare her away. Now he realized he had handled it badly. He should have kissed her again and often, and instead he never did again. He would love to have the right to kiss her whenever the mood struck. The gap between them was too wide. They would never be able to recreate that magic again.

“Do you want to build a snowman?” Meghy asked taking him by surprise. Did she remember that day too?

“Why?” he asked. “I think Parson Brown retired.”

She smiled. It was so familiar it made his heart ache. “That’s too bad. We never did complete our previous ceremony. You promised we’d do it right later.”

He had... “I wish I could now.” Mack pulled his hands out of his pockets. “But I didn’t plan well.” He wiggled his bare fingers for her. “No gloves.”

She tilted her head and studied them. “I guess we can do it another time. We’ve waited this long. What’s one more day?”

What game was she playing? This didn’t seem—right. “Meghy?”

She moved closer to him closing the distance between them. She stood mere inches from him and he itched to pull her into his arms. He held back though not sure what she wanted from him. “Why did you cancel your tour?” she asked.

He held her gaze transfixed by her. He’d always loved her and that hadn’t changed over the years. There were other women, but none of them had been her. No one could ever take her place in his heart. “I haven’t been able to finish recording my album. I’ve lost the desire for music.” He didn’t mention the nightmares or the accident. They were symptoms to the problem—he didn’t have her.

“Is that why you came home?”

“Essentially,” he said. “My manager thinks I need to reconnect with what made music special to me.”

“And what is that?” she asked. “Suttons Bay? Family?”

They were part of it, but not the root. What made everything work for him was her—only her. “I’ve missed you,” he said. He didn’t tell her the rest. He was playing it safe like he usually did.

“Same,” she said. “I’m glad you’re home—even if it’s for a short time.”

Would she object if he kissed her? No, that probably wasn’t a good idea. They had just started talking again and were nowhere near being more than that. “Want to go back to Which Brew with me and grab a cup of coffee? I’d like to

catch up with everything you've done with your life since I saw you last." He just didn't want to stop talking to her. He needed to listen to her voice, and stare into her honey colored eyes as long as she'd allow.

"I'd like that," she said.

"Then follow me, Miss M," he said and held out his arm to her. "I'd never lead you astray."

She laughed and it was music to his ears. "Mr. M," she replied. "That's a lie if I ever heard one."

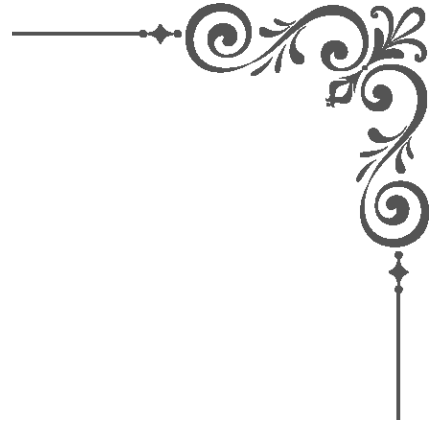
It was almost normal... Almost but not quite—maybe after a little more time he'd have his Meghy back. He was starting to become grateful for his enforced vacation. Otherwise he'd never have returned and had a chance to win Meghy's heart again. For that alone he'd send his manager a bonus.

Later on, we'll conspire

As we dream by the fire

To face unafraid, the plans that we've made

Walking in a winter wonderland



CHAPTER FOUR

Meghy hugged herself. Happiness had been so elusive for so long... Once the ice had been broken between her and Mack everything seemed to go much smoother between them. She just had to let go of some of her insecurities and open herself up to the possibility of having him back in her life—even briefly. He was bound to leave Suttons Bay at some point. She wanted him to find joy in music again and make more beautiful songs. He had such a wonderful voice and talent. If she could help him in any way she planned on it. He had already been in town a week and not a day had gone by that she hadn't spent some time with him. The annual Christmas party was that night and he was picking her up to attend with him. How lucky was she? She had Mack's full attention again.

Her doorbell chimed bringing her out of her daydreams. Mack was there temporarily. She'd enjoy his company while she could, but at some point he would leave her. This time though, she planned on keeping in touch with him. She would not repeat the mistakes of the past. She went to the door and opened it. He stood there rubbing his hands together. "Still haven't found any gloves?"

"Haven't had a reason to," he replied a huge grin filling his face. "I don't plan on being outside long enough to need any."

She shook her head. "Let me grab my coat and we can be on the way."

Almost everything in town was in walking distance. Meghy didn't bother buying a car. She had no reason to leave Suttons Bay and what she couldn't have delivered was a couple blocks from home. She slid on her coat and met him at door. He pulled her hand in his and brought it up to his mouth kissing her palm. "Thank you," he said.

"For what?" she asked. She hadn't done anything to deserve his thanks.

"For being you," he replied. "I should have come home a long time ago."

“Yes,” she agreed. “Why didn’t you?”

“I’m a coward,” he admitted. “I was afraid of rejection.”

She could relate to that. Every day she faced that same fear. They were far more alike than she ever realized. This was probably good for them. She’d held him on some sort of pedestal for so long. An illusion of a boy she had loved. The man was a reality she liked much better.

“No,” she said. “You’re not. Sometimes it just takes time to do the right thing. Everyone faces moments of doubt—it just took you a little longer than you would have liked to see reason.”

“Let’s go,” he responded seeming to ignore her insight. “I have a surprise for you.”

“Oh?” she replied eagerly, forgetting her earlier assumption. Maybe he was just excited to share the surprise with her. “What is it?”

“If I told you then it wouldn’t be a surprise would it?”

They closed her front door and started walking toward the town hall where the party was being held. It was an annual gathering and almost everyone in town attended. There would be a potluck dinner and dancing later on. It was fun for all ages. Santa would even make an appearance for the children. It took them fifteen minutes to walk from her place to the town hall. It was already filled to capacity. A fire was lit in the fireplace and the scents of food drifted by them. Some children ran past them on their way to the line to meet Santa who’d apparently come early this year.

“Do you want to sit on Santa’s lap?” Mack whispered in her ear. “You can tell him what you want for Christmas this year.”

She shook her head. “I’ve already had a wonderful Christmas. There’s not much more I could ask for.” She wrinkled her nose upward. “Besides I’m rather old to be sitting on Santa’s lap.”

He wiggled his eyebrows. “In that case you want to sit in mine? It’s been a while since I had a sexy woman in my lap.”

“Ha, ha,” she said. “You’re incorrigible.”

“Always,” he replied.

“If it isn’t M and M themselves,” someone said from behind—their old nickname pouring off her tongue. “I never thought I’d see you two in the same room again let alone together.”

Meghy turned and met Cynthia Rhode’s gaze. She was blonde, perky, and annoying as ever. She was a cheerleader in high school and the biggest snob. “Isn’t that your husband waving to you over there?” Meghy asked.

Cynthia didn’t bother to turn and look. She turned her nose up at Meghy and then turned her attention to Mack. “It really is a nice surprise to see you. How long are you in town?”

Meghy wanted to shove Cynthia away and grab Mack out of her reach. She had a thing for Mack back in high school and it appeared as if she still did. Her poor husband...

“That depends on Meg,” he replied and slid his hand around her waist. “She’s the only reason I’m here.”

Cynthia didn’t like that response at all. She glared at Meghy and if looks could kill—she’d be dead. Instead of giving into the urge to be mean, Meghy smiled at her. That might have made it worse though because Cynthia gave her a sour one in return. “I thought you would have managed to find better taste while you were away.” Cynthia shrugged. “But I guess she’s wormed her way back into your life regardless.” Cynthia tossed her hair back and stomped away. “Some people...”

“Well,” Mack said. “She hasn’t changed.”

“Not one bit,” Meghy agreed.

He led her to a chair near the fireplace—one that faced the stage where the band was setting up. “Stay here and I’ll bring you something to drink.”

“What about my surprise?”

“Patience,” he ordered. “It isn’t time yet.”

He went to the drink table and grabbed two mugs, then carried them back to her. He handed her one and then sat in a nearby chair. She took a sip of the hot liquid and sighed. Hot cocoa—her favorite. “mmm,” she muttered to herself.

“Still love it do you?”

“It’s the closest thing to heaven I’ll ever find.” The only thing that would be better was to have Mack’s love. “Tell me about the album you’re working on.”

“I may have found a little inspiration while I’ve been here.” He smiled. “When I return I think I’ll be able to finish. How do you feel about warmer weather?”

She set her mug down and said, “I am amicable why?”

“I’d like you to come back with me.”

Her mouth fell open in shock. “But...”

“Don’t answer yet,” he replied. “I want you to think about it.”

She nodded like a fool. Mainly because she had no response for him. Her in Los Angeles? Why did he want her to go with him? Was it only because he’d finally found his muse again and attributed it to her? She’d gladly help him with anything, but she didn’t want to be by his side just to stir his creativity. She wanted far more than that from him.

Someone tapped on a microphone a loud screech echoing through the hall. “Is this thing on?” the mayor said.

“Yes,” everyone shouted so he wouldn’t tap on it again. The screech had hurt the eardrums of almost everyone in the crowd.

“Good,” he said then laughed. “You’re in for an extra special treat tonight. As you know we have dancing every year and while the local band is good—they don’t have the talent Mack Taylor has.” The mayor held his hand up on his forehead blocking the overhead light as he searched the crowd. “Mack? Are you here?”

“That’s my cue,” he said and hopped to his feet, setting his cup next to hers on the table. He leaned down and pressed his

lips to hers quickly. “Wait here for me.”

She lifted her hand to her lips. That was different. He’d kissed her on the cheek, even her hand earlier. But the only other time he’d kissed her lips had been in the snow a decade ago. She didn’t know what to make of it.

Mack hopped on the stage and took the microphone from the mayor. “Hello Suttons Bay,” he nearly shouted. “It’s been a while since I’ve been home—too long really.”

Everyone clapped excitedly and moved closer to the stage—except Meghy. Mack had told her to stay where she was. She didn’t dare move afraid if she did she’d fall flat on her face. What was he up to?

“I wanted to sing a couple of songs for you if you don’t mind.” He gestured to the back who started the beginning of a Christmas song everyone was familiar with. “This particular one is special to me. It brings back memories of a time when I didn’t think I’d ever be happier.”

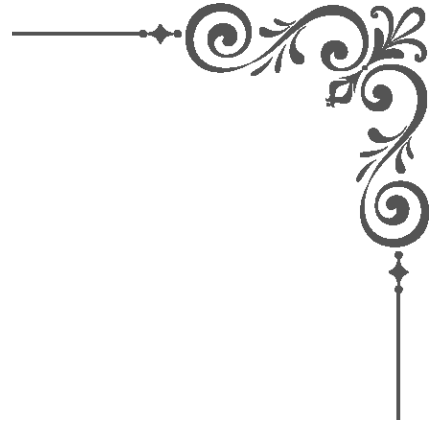
He started singing the lyrics to Winter Wonderland never once taking his eyes off of Meghy. What was he trying to say to her? That he wished he could go back to that day when he kissed her. Memories flooded her of their time together in the past, and over the past week. He’d been so attentive and let her lead them through every conversation. He’d been patient, kind, and wonderful. She never loved him more. Her heart pounded in her chest as he finished the song.

“Thank you,” he said as the crowd clapped again. “This next song is one I wrote and never recorded. It was too special to share with the world, but I’d like to sing it for you today, and I hope to have it on my next album.”

The band started playing the notes of a ballad. The melody was alluring and enticing, almost entrancing in its beauty. The lyrics nearly broke her heart. He wrote this song for her and it was about them. She’d suspected some of his songs were related to them in the past, but none more than this one. It was about their one kiss and the loss he’d felt leaving her behind. She knew in her heart that he wanted her to know how much he loved her. He was putting it out there in the world and

hoping she felt the same. Mack took a risk where she never would have—and she loved him even more for it.

*Sleigh bells ring, are you listening
In the lane, snow is glistening
A beautiful sight, we're happy tonight
Walking in a winter wonderland*



CHAPTER FIVE

Mack hopped off the stage and headed toward Meghy. He didn't take his gaze off her the entire time he'd been on stage. He wanted her and he prayed she felt the same too. She could work from anywhere as long as she had her computer. All he had to do was talk her into spending the rest of her life by his side. He'd give up his music if she refused to leave with him, but he hoped it didn't come to that. He did love it, and her. Choosing between the two might break him.

She stood when he reached her. "Meghy..."

"Don't say a word," she said. "I understand."

"You do?"

She nodded. "Let's get out of here and take a walk."

They grabbed their jackets and headed back out into the cold. A sleigh was outside for those wishing to take a ride. "Do you want to?" he asked.

"Oh yes," she said. The horse and sleigh was something new the planning committee thought to add to the festivities. She hadn't thought she'd actually utilize it, but with Mack... She was excited at the prospect. He helped her up into the carriage and then joined her. Meghy grabbed the blanket and spread it across their laps. Mack wrapped his arm around her and pulled her against him. Their mingled warmth kept them toasty as the sleigh moved around town.

"I've been thinking about your offer," she said.

"Oh?"

"About going to Los Angeles with you." That sounded dumb—that was the only offer he'd made her...

"And?"

This was the hard part, and it shouldn't be. She had a hard time admitting her feelings to herself, let alone him. He'd laid his heart out before her and it was up to her to accept it or not. She wanted him so it should be easy, and yet, it wasn't that simple. It would be a huge step for her to go with him. She

never left Suttons Bay—for any reason. She was a shy person and didn't socialize well. She'd be an albatross for him to carry. What kind of life would that be for them?

"I'm not sure it's a good idea." She wanted to go... "I don't do well with people I don't know."

"You would know me," he said. "The rest will come in time."

He made it sound so easy. "What if I embarrass you?"

The carriage came to a stop near the meadow where they'd first kissed. Mack pushed the blanket off of her lap and said. "Come with me." Once they were out of the carriage the driver pulled away leaving them to their privacy.

He led her to the middle of the field. In the center was a snowman. It had been dressed with a tie, top hat, and had a book resting between wooden hands. "Miss M," Mack said. "I'd like you to meet Parson Brown—turns out he decided to come out of retirement."

"Did he now?" Her lips quirked upward. "However did you convince him?"

"I explained to him that I was in desperate straits." He had a solemn expression on his face. "I had to convince the girl I loved to spend the rest of her life with me. If he refused I might have to live with a broken heart for the rest of my life." Mack rubbed his chest. "It's almost mended now but one more blow and it might be fatal."

She stared at him with bewilderment. Did he just say he loved her? She suspected as much from the song, but hearing it was entirely different. This was real. "Pinch me," she demanded.

"What?" He pushed his eyebrows together.

"I said pinch me," she repeated. "None of this is real. I have to be dreaming."

It was straight from something she'd have come up with for one of her romance novels. The environment, the admission of love, and the swirl of excitement pooling through

her blood—all of it screamed happy-ever-after. It was too much and so hard for her to believe was real.

“Darling,” Mack said his voice dripping with charm. “I can do you one better.”

He pulled her into his arms and pressed his lips to hers. The kiss sizzled and drenched her with desire. She wrapped her arms around him and met his kiss with equal enthusiasm. This felt too good not to be real. She reached up and ran her fingers through his dark locks. The stubble from his beard rubbed against her chin enticingly. She liked it more than she probably should.

Mack stopped kissing her, but resumed again by trailing his lips across her cheek, and then down her neck. He twined his fingers through her curls and yanked on them lightly. He started to trail his kisses upward to her jaw, then back to her lips again. Mack kissed her with everything inside of him and she could feel it straight to her toes. He was right—this was so much better.

He lifted her up into his arms and twirled her around until her laughter echoed around them. She’d never been happier than in that moment—with him. The shell of a person she’d become without him was not who she wanted to be. She didn’t want to live like that anymore. She wanted to be a newer better version of herself. It was time to let go of the past and enjoy life.

“Stop,” she said between laughs. “I can’t take it anymore. The world is spinning.”

“Then you know how I feel whenever you’re near,” he said and set her down. “Since the moment I met you my world has been topsy turvy. I’m sure that isn’t entirely your fault.” He grinned. “I did come here an orphan, but you made me feel welcome. I think I fell in love with you all those years ago.”

“At five years old?” She lifted a brow.

“Yes,” he said adamantly. “I just didn’t realize it. What five year old would?”

She had to agree with him on that point—well, on all of them really. Sometimes she believed she'd fallen for him when they were both five too. They had bonded back then, and even though they'd spent so many years apart it hadn't been destroyed. It might have bent a little bit and allowed them to grow and change into the people they had become, but it was still strong—unbreakable.

“So what changed?”

He remained quiet for several heartbeats. Meghy started to think he might not answer until he did. His voice was always so wonderful to hear and this time was no exception. “Nothing—everything,” he finally said. He rubbed his hand over her arm. “Being here again with you was more than I could have ever imagined. I didn't come here hoping for this. I never would have dared for anything so wonderful.” He brushed his hand over her hair. “Please be with me. I'm selfish and I don't deserve you, but I want to have a chance at forever.”

Her heart was in her throat and she fought tears of happiness. She failed as one slipped down her cheek. Mack reached up and wiped it away. Snow began to descend upon them like white glitter sparkling in the night sky. “I don't know what to say.”

“Say yes,” he urged. “Come to Los Angeles with me. I promise you won't regret it.”

“I don't know.” Why couldn't she say what he wanted to hear? She wanted to say yes, but something inside of her wouldn't let her. The doubts she carried deep inside reared their ugly head. “It's a big step.”

“Take your time,” he said. “I can wait as long as you need. I'm not leaving again without you.” He pulled her hand into his. “Why don't I walk you home.”

She nodded and let him lead her away from the meadow. The walk to her place wasn't far from the field. Nothing in Suttons Bay was a long walking distance. Still, it was far too short for her liking. She didn't want the evening to end yet. When they reached her front door she turned to face Mack. “Do you want to come inside?”

“Do you think that’s a good idea?”

She smiled. “I don’t want you to leave me.” Uncertainty filled her. Was she being too direct? She wanted to be with him, and this was a test for him and herself. What he did next was going to be the deciding factor on whether she went with him, or stayed in Suttons Bay. It was perhaps a little ridiculous, but she believed in signs and she desperately needed a good one.

“I’m never leaving you again,” he replied earnestly. “Not unless you want me to.”

“I don’t,” she said. “I love you.” There she said it. The one thing that had terrified her more than anything—saying aloud how she really felt about him, and somehow she managed to survive it.

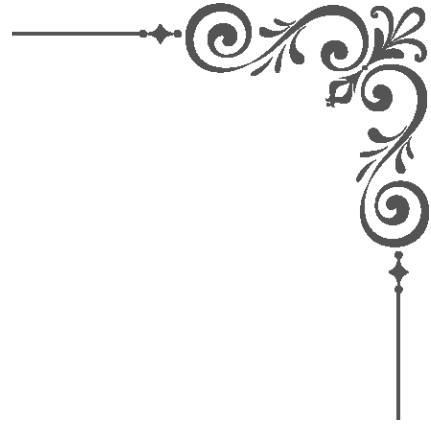
“I love you so much,” he replied. “There should be nothing standing in our way. The whole world is before us. All we have to do is be brave enough to explore it.”

There was only one thing she could do. “I’ll move to Los Angeles,” she told him. “Are you sure that is what you want.”

“There’s nothing I want more...” Then he leaned down and kissed her again. Snowflakes danced around them covering them in their magic. Sometimes dreams did come true... Meghy had gotten more than she could have hoped for when she realized that Mack had come home. Now she had so much to look forward into the New Year.

Tonight though—happiness spread through her like wildfire, and she owed it all to Mack and his bravery. If he hadn’t admitted how much he loved her and sang that beautiful song she might not have found the courage to acknowledge her own feelings. She had never loved him more than in this moment. They understood each other and everything that they could be—alone and together.

*Gone away is the bluebird
Here to stay is a new bird
He sings...*



EPILOGUE

They left Suttons Bay before the New Year and headed back to Mack's home in Los Angeles. They had spent a wonderful Christmas with Mack's Aunt Rose, and then his manager had shown up to escort them back personally. Their trip had been uneventful and tiring.

"I see the trip was a success," Ben said.

"Better than I expected," Mack admitted. "I want to schedule time in the studio to start recording."

"Is the girl the reason for this change?"

It wasn't as simple as that. Yes, Meghy made a difference. He was at peace with his past and hopeful for their future. They still had a lot to work through and he was ecstatic to have that chance with her. She'd settled into the office he had set up in the house and never used claiming it as her own. He was glad to give it to her. He'd give her anything she wanted if it made her happy.

"Just set up the studio time and let me know when to be there. I wrote some songs I want to lay down and prepare the album for release."

"I'll be right on it." Ben said. "I'll be on my way."

"You know your way out," Mack replied. He had something else he had to do. He had another surprise for Meghy later and he had plans to make. He'd already said everything he wanted to say to his manager.

Mack worked tirelessly creating the winter wonderland in his backyard—as much as one could in California. Instead of snow he strung white lights over the trees, and had a fake snowman that glittered white. Parson Brown wouldn't melt anytime soon. Everything was ready—all he needed was the guest of honor to arrive.

"Mack?"

Right on time... "Out here," he called out. He patted his pocket to make sure the final piece of the surprise was still

there. He flipped a switch as the song he'd written for her played over head. When she came outside her mouth fell open, and then she covered it with both of her hands. "What is all this?" She turned to meet his gaze. "I thought we were going out for New Years?"

Meghy had on a dark red gown that brought out the cinnamon color in her hair. Her hair was elaborately styled with small curls floating down her back. She had no jewelry on but she didn't need any to sparkle. Meghy glowed without any adornments.

"We can if you want to," he said. "But I thought this would be better—more romantic. You're the only one I want to be with as we celebrate the start of a brand new year. One I hope will be full of more happiness than we can possibly imagine."

"I don't know," she relied lightly. "I can imagine a lot."

"I'm sure you can." He gestured toward her. "Come over here."

She walked to his side and Mack dropped to one knee. "Meghy." He pulled out the ring in his pocket—a fire red ruby flanked with diamonds. "Will you marry me?"

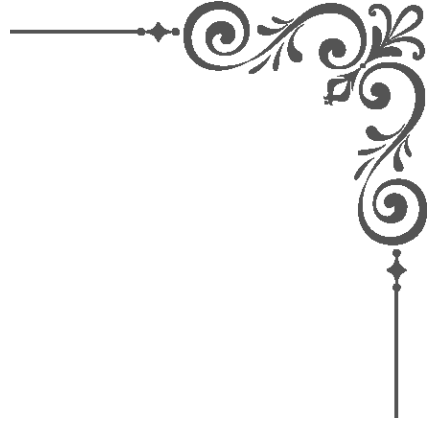
Tears spilled down her cheeks. She wiped them away furiously and then dropped to her knees. She wrapped her hands around his and leaned in to kiss him. "There's nothing I'd love more than to be your wife, but are you sure? This is all happening so fast."

He nodded. "Darling, this didn't happen nearly fast enough. We've missed out on so much already. I don't want to wait years to start our life as husband and wife. Forever is waiting for us, and I'd hate to keep it hanging on a thread. Say yes."

"Yes," she said enthusiasm echoing loudly in that one word. "A thousand times yes."

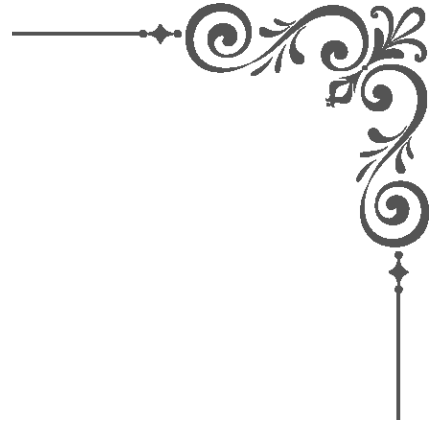
The melancholy that had driven him for so long finally lifted away from him. His songs would reflect that from that moment on. He was a new man, a better one because of his love for her. She made him lighter and hopeful. They had a

bright wonderful future ahead of them. Their own perfect winter wonderland full of snowflake kisses and magic.



EXCERPT

KISS MY HEART GOODBYE: HEART'S INTENT
FOUR (Lana and Sullivan)



PROLOGUE

T*en years earlier*

It was an especially humid summer afternoon. Sweat beaded on Lisanna Kelly's forehead as she stared out the upstairs window of the Brady mansion. Her mother was the housekeeper, and they lived in the apartment above the garage. They hadn't always lived there though. There was a time when she'd had a room in the main house. But that was before the Bradys's world had been turned upside down and their daughter, Daniella, went missing.

She should be washing the windows as her mother had instructed. It was hard not to daydream and wish for things she'd never have. Washing windows was boring and tedious. What fun was that? Instead of doing the job she'd been tasked with, Lisanna had become riveted with the scene below her. In her defense, any living, breathing female would be too.

Sullivan Brady had removed his shirt and stretched by the pool. His muscled chest glistened in the sunlight. His skin had darkened to a nice golden tan and caramel streaks now highlighted his usually midnight locks. She licked her lips and forgot all about washing anything. Well—maybe Sullivan needed her help. She could wash him... Lisanna shook the idea away from her head. He would never look twice at her. She was the help's kid, and he was... Everything. She'd never find another male comparable to him. In her opinion, he was so darn perfect.

"Lisanna," he mother bellowed at her.

"Yes, Mama," she answered.

"What are you gawking at girl?" She came over to the window. Lisanna bit her lip. She was in trouble now. If her mother realized she had been staring at Sullivan she'd berate her endlessly. He was too old for her, and she had to remove those silly daydreams from her teenage brain. Her mother stared out the window and frowned. Lisanna braced herself for the impact of her mother's words "It's a nice day out," her

mother said, then sighed. “The pool does look inviting. If you finish the windows, I’ll ask Mrs. Brady if you can swim.”

Lisanna’s whole body brightened with anticipation. It would be lovely to spend some time in the pool. She was confused though... Sullivan had been at the pool when last she looked through the window. She didn’t dare peek out and give her mother any indication she was looking at something other than the pool. “Really?” she asked hopefully. Maybe he’d be down there when she was free to swim.

“Yes, dear,” she said softly. “It has to be difficult for you. Living here but not actually being a part of all of this.” She gestured to the lavish room and the expensive decorations. “You’re seventeen. I want you to have some fun.”

She hated when her mother reminded her of her age. She wasn’t old enough to do anything. Not sophisticated enough for Sullivan. He was turning twenty-one in a week. Then a few weeks afterward, he’d be off to college again. The summer would be over before she realized it.

“Thank you,” Lisanna said softly. “I’ll finish the windows now.”

“See that you do,” her mother said. “Check with me in the kitchen when you’re done.”

Lisanna nodded and picked up the cleaning supplies she’d abandoned to stare at Sullivan. She sprayed the window and wiped them until they sparkled. Wherever Sullivan had gone while her mother stared out the window she didn’t know, but he was back. It took every ounce of her self-control not to ogle him while she cleaned. She had big plans of swimming in the pool, and if she was lucky enough he’d still be out there when she did.

She wiped the sweat from her brow and packed up the supplies. Every window was as clean as she could make them. Now for her treat. Her lips tilted upward. The pool and quality time with Sullivan Brady. What more could a girl ask for? She exited the room and headed downstairs. She stopped at the supply closet and deposited the window cleaner inside. Then she headed toward the laundry room and slid the towels into

the whites's basket. After she finished, she slid through a door and entered the kitchen.

"I'm done..." she stopped midsentence when she realized her mother wasn't alone. Sullivan had come inside while she was taking care of the supplies. He was even more beautiful up close, and he hadn't bothered to put a shirt on. She licked her lips and reminded herself to breathe. After she cleared her throat she said, "The windows are done upstairs."

Her mother smiled. "Thank you. You're free to do as we discussed earlier. Make sure to put some sunscreen on so you don't burn."

Sullivan grinned. "I can help you when you come out. Mrs. Kelly says you're going to use the pool."

Lisanna blushed. He was going to put sunscreen on her? She was going to die—oh, but what a way to go. There was no way she wasn't going to go up in flames once he put his hands near her. "Um, yes," she stammered "Thanks." Why couldn't she utter a whole sentence in his presence?

"Run along now," her mother said. "Enjoy the day."

She didn't need to be told twice. She made herself scarce and darted out of the kitchen. A whole afternoon of doing nothing... She couldn't recall the last time she'd had any free time. Her mother was always asking her to do something. During the school year she had more time to herself because her mother wanted her to concentrate on doing well. The summers though—Mrs. Kelly didn't believe in leaving her daughter time to be idle. She'd not raise a lazy child.

Lisanna climbed the steps to the garage apartment and went to her bedroom. Everything inside the tiny room was neat and perfectly placed. At least she believed so. She opened a drawer and pulled out her swimsuit. It was the emerald green tankini she had talked her mother into buying for her. She'd been drawn to it because it matched Sullivan's eyes. Yes, she was obsessed with him. She couldn't help herself.

"It's a lost cause," she muttered under her breath. "Sullivan Brady is out of my league."

Lisanna shook her head and prepared herself for her swim. She put on her suit and pulled her dark auburn tresses into a high ponytail. Satisfied with her ministrations, she grabbed a white, mesh cover-up and headed to the pool.

Laughter greeted her as she entered the backyard. She thought she'd find Sullivan alone, but she was wrong. He had a friend with him, and not one of the male persuasion. Maybe she was mistaken. Oh, there definitely was a female there. Her bubbly laughter was hard to miss, but there might be others there as well. She rounded the corner and sighed with relief. The last thing she wanted to be was a third wheel on one of Sullivan's dates.

There were a few others there with him. Two more females and another male—all friends of his she recognized. The couple cuddling in the pool were Sullivan's best friend, Aaron Taylor, and his girlfriend, Sienna Kent. The other female was Victoria Masters. She was blonde, blue-eyed, and nothing but curves. Sadly, Lisanna could see what drew Sullivan to her. Vicki, as he called her, put the word gorgeous to shame.

"You're too nice," Vicki said to Sullivan in a condescending tone. "Why are you letting that girl join us?"

"Don't be mean," he chastised her. "She's not like us. This is a good break for her."

They had to be discussing her. Who else would he describe as "not like them"? Lisanna rethought her decision to swim. When it was just Sullivan, it had seemed like a wonderful idea. Now though... It pained her to have to face all of them. They were already judging her and she hadn't even walked fully outside. Lisanna rounded the corner as Vicki wrapped her arms around Sullivan's neck.

"You're so altruistic," Vicki told him. "I don't know if I could be so charitable to the help." Lisanna ground her teeth together. This was too much. She couldn't stay and listen to any more of it. She started to turn and caught Sullivan's latest girlfriend staring in her direction. Vicki lips tilted upward, mocking her. "You shouldn't waste your time on a girl like that."

“I...” Sullivan started to say and shook his head. “You may be right, but she’s like a sister to me. Of course, she doesn’t replace Daniella.” He shrugged. “I guess you could say I like her, and it’s my choice to make.”

A sister? Lisanna’s stomach fell at those words. She’d realized her crush on him was futile, but those words slashed through her heart and sent it crumbling to pieces. He’d never see her as anything more than a little girl. Their age difference didn’t even matter. Not really. He’d grown up with her and saw her as a semi-replacement for the sister he’d lost. There was no way she would go out there now... She spun on her heels and headed back to the apartment.

The afternoon would be better spent reading than drooling over a gorgeous male she’d never have. Some dreams died faster than others. It was time to focus her energy on something more attainable than the love of Sullivan Brady. He didn’t deserve her, and sadly, he’d never find out what he was missing. Lisanna wouldn’t give him the time of day ever again.

“Too bad for you,” she whispered. “One day you’ll realize how awesome I am, and it will be to your loss.” A strong woman looked a challenge dead in the eye and gave it a wink. One day she’d be that type of woman, and when she winked at Sullivan Brady, he’d go down on his knees and beg her to be his. Then she could laugh in his face and say, “After all, I can’t very well be with a man I think of as a brother.” The dream had made her feel good, even if it held an edge of impossibility, still she clung to it as she wiped tears from her eyes.



FOUR YEARS LATER...

Sullivan Brady strolled down the street, heading toward a club he was supposed to meet a few friends at. They had finished exams for grad school and would graduate in a few short weeks. He earned his MBA and was at the top of his class. When he returned home he’d take a position at Brady Blue, and soon afterward he’d take over for his father. He’d

been groomed to be CEO of the company for years—something he'd always wanted to do. The lower managerial position was a formality. His father wanted him to get his feet wet first and then, in a few years, he'd take over for good. Sullivan was fine with that plan. He wasn't ready for the responsibility of running the company yet. It would give him more time to play as he learned more about how the business was run. There's nothing he loved more than the time he set aside for fun.

“Sully,” a male called out. “It's about time!”

He turned toward it and found Aaron waving him over. They'd been best friends since grade school. They both had gone to New York for school—Columbia for Sullivan and for Aaron, NYU. It gave them space to grow, yet they could still rely on each other. Aaron's girlfriend, Sienna, sat nearby, sipping a drink.

Sullivan made his way over to their table. He wasn't currently dating anyone and wanted to have as much fun as he could. He loved having his freedom and shuddered at the idea of being tied down to one woman. Aaron had Sienna, and that was great—for him. Sullivan though, would much rather explore all of his options before he made any commitment. In truth, he wasn't entirely sure he was capable of a long term relationship. He had too much he wanted to do either way. After graduation, he'd be heading back home and have responsibility waiting for him. This was a night he hoped to always remember.

“What took you so long?” Aaron asked.

“Parents called,” he said. “Wanted to ask how I thought I did on exams and it held me up.”

They worried about him, and he couldn't really blame them. After they lost Daniella they coddled him perhaps more than they should. He didn't push because he understood their grief because losing Daniella had been traumatic for him too. He couldn't imagine what it was like to lose a child. It was one of the reasons he never intended to marry or have children of his own. He couldn't take it if he lost anyone dear to him.

“I’m going to get a drink,” Sullivan said. “Do you want anything?”

Aaron shook his head. “No, I’m good.” He turned toward Sienna. “You want anything, babe?”

“Yes,” she replied. “Can you get me a slippery nipple?”

Sullivan winked and said in a teasing tone, “I don’t think your boyfriend would appreciate that.”

“Ha ha,” she said. “I meant the shot, and you know it.”

He did, but he couldn’t help messing with her. “You break my heart,” he said holding his hand over his chest. “What does this chump have that I don’t?”

“Loyalty and monogamy,” she retorted.

“I resent that,” he replied flinching slightly. “I am perfectly capable of being loyal.” There was no person more devoted to those he cared about than him. “And I’m capable of being monogamous—one night at a time.” He shrugged. “Maybe even more than one if it’s warranted.”

Sienna snorted and laughed at the same time. It was rather disconcerting to witness. She held up her hand and finally spat out, “Only you, Sully, could say that with a straight face. Go get my drink. In fact, get slippery nipples for all of us. We’ll do a toast.”

He grinned and turned to head to the bar. Sienna was a decent sort and she made Aaron happy. They would probably marry one day and have a gaggle of kids. He wished them well, but that life wasn’t for him. The bar was busy and had two bartenders. One was helping customers and the other had her back turned to him. She has long auburn hair that floated down her back in luscious waves. The locks stopped at the curve of her ass, and what a fine one it was too. Black jeans hugged it emphasizing every one of her curves. Sullivan wanted to see if her face would be equally as gorgeous. *Turn around, please.* He waited anxiously for her to face him, and when she finally did, the breath was knocked out of him. She was indeed lovely. Her eyes were like warm chocolate and those red waves hugged an exquisite heart shaped face. Her

lips were plump and painted a ruby red. But this woman would *always* be off limits to him.

“Sullivan Brady as I live and breathe,” she said. The corner of her mouth twitched upward. “What brings you here?”

He hadn't seen her in years. After she graduated high school, she'd moved away from their hometown. “Lisanna,” he said as politely as he could manage. He was still on the edge of desire and rather disappointed she wasn't a girl he could fool around with. She was part of his extended family and he cared about her. Sullivan never messed around with a woman he had any kind of feelings for. That would always make her off-limits.

“Don't call me that,” she scolded. “I'm not a little girl anymore.”

He scrunched his eyebrows together. “What do I call you then?” He agreed; she was far from the girl he remembered. Somewhere along the way she'd grown into a sexy woman he wanted to kiss senseless and a whole lot more than that.

“Lana,” she replied almost defiantly. “I have no use for the person I used to be.”

What the hell did she mean? He liked who she was before. What if he didn't like the woman she'd grown into? Sullivan definitely enjoyed looking at her, but that was entirely different and somehow wrong. “What nonsense are you talking about?”

“You wouldn't understand,” she said. “And I'm not inclined to explain it.”

Well, hell... What had she gone through over the past few years? She couldn't be more than twenty-one. In the next couple of years, she'd graduate, and then what? Was she even still in school? What was she doing working as a bartender?

“Didn't my parents offer to pay your tuition?” he asked, his confusion infused into the words.

She laughed and then said contemptuously, “There are more expenses to going to school than tuition, rich boy.”

Sullivan flinched at her words. When had she become so outspoken? Hadn't she always been shy and fumbled with words? "They'd have given you more if you asked."

She held her head high and answered, "I like my well-paid education, but I'm not a beggar. I intend to pay them back every penny, and I'd rather not put myself further in debt by taking more than I need."

Sullivan felt as if his entire world was tipped upside down. This was not the girl he'd known. Perhaps that had been the point. She wanted a change and set out to do it. She'd even gone so far as to change her name. He tested it on his tongue and said it out loud, "Lana."

She lifted a brow. "Yes?"

"What time is your shift done?"

"Now, actually," she replied. "Why?"

It was a bad idea, but he couldn't help the words that came out of his mouth. "Come home with me." He immediately wished he could take them back and leave them unsaid and at the same time he anxiously hoped she'd say yes.

She flinched as if he'd slapped her. "I'm not one of your floozies."

Damn, he had known it was the wrong thing to say. He didn't really want that from her. Hell, who was he kidding? He did want that. When he first glimpsed her backside he had visions of peeling those black jeans off of her slowly and dragging his tongue over her skin. Sullivan wanted to taste every inch of her and have her screaming his name. How could he have so many conflicted emotions about one woman? In some ways this meeting had turned everything upside down and he couldn't be sure where it would lead. He didn't like it one bit.

He smiled. "And you never will be, Lana dear." Sullivan leaned on the bar. "I want to go someplace quiet where we can talk. I'd like to get to know this new you." He desperately wanted to understand her and figure out what the hell was

going on inside of him. This was more than lust, far more than he'd ever experienced and it scared the hell out of him.

She nibbled on her bottom lip and he stared. He was a red-blooded male and yes, he noticed when a sexy woman paid homage to her mouth. Especially, when he wanted to put his mouth on it himself. If he didn't find something else to focus on, his dick would harden to even more painful degrees.

"No," she finally said. "As much as I'd like to indulge this whim of yours, I have to study. I have a final tomorrow morning."

He hadn't realized how much he wanted her to come with him until she told him it wasn't happening. His heart sank in his chest.

"Maybe another time," he said.

"Doubtful," Lana replied. "I have to go. My boyfriend's here." She gestured toward the door. A tall guy with sandy blond hair and broad shoulders stood at the entrance. "See you around, Sully."

She sashayed away from him. Her fine ass in view the entire time... Damn it all. He was hard for Lana Kelly and she wasn't available to help him with it. He closed his eyes and counted to ten, then twenty, and still his erection wouldn't recede. *Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.* He had to find a way to get over his sudden fascination with the one woman he couldn't have. When he opened his eyes the other bartender was in front of him.

"What can I get you, honey?"

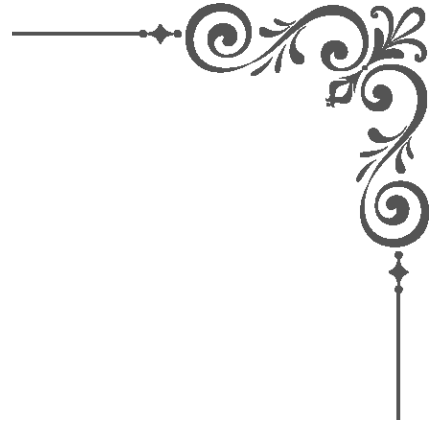
"What's your name, beautiful?" he asked. She was blonde, curvy, and sexy in her own way.

"Colleen," she replied. She lifted her lips enticingly. "What do I call you?"

"Sullivan." There was only one cure for what ailed him. "I need three slippery nipples," he said and then lifted the corner of his mouth into one of his more charming smiles. "Four if you care to join us."

The bartender made up the three shots and handed them to him. “On the house,” she told him. “Come find me at the end of the night.”

An invitation he fully intended to accept. He had to do something to forget Lana, and he was willing to start with the other bartender. She wasn't as sexy, and no one would compare to Lana, but that didn't matter. His heart couldn't take a night with Lana Kelly. She was the type a man kept...



CHAPTER ONE

A steady beep from the monitors filled the room. The constant thrum was enough to drive a sane man to lose his mind. Hell, the events of the past several days had damn near done Sullivan Brady in. The stark white room was blinding in its intensity, and Lana's pale skin nearly glowed against it. A single light was lit above her bed, leaving the rest of the room in relative darkness. She remained unconscious and had been for two weeks. A medically induced coma the doctors had assured them all was necessary.

Sullivan made his way to her bedside slowly. He didn't want to disturb her even though he realized that was an impossibility. She was drugged in order to sleep through everything, and even a stampede through her room wouldn't wake her. Sometimes he wished it would. He had to see her eyes opened and hear her sassy voice as she raked him over the coals.

He hadn't wanted to leave Lana's side, but others had forced him out. Her mother had a bigger claim than he did, but none of them understood. As long as she lay in the hospital bed, he couldn't leave and barely functioned. Everyone thought he'd left, but he'd made himself scarce when others were around. He couldn't let them realize the amount of terror that filled his heart when he'd found out about her car accident. If there was even a remote chance she might—no, he wouldn't even think of that possibility. She was fine. He'd made sure she had the best care. If the psycho bitch, Imogen Duncan, hadn't tried to murder her own sister, Jessica Sousa, none of this would have happened. Lana would've been safe. Instead she'd been caught in the crossfire of a years old vendetta.

"Mr. Sullivan," a nurse said. "We all thought you'd gone home."

He shook his head and didn't look at her. "I had to see her again before I could leave." Truthfully, he'd make use of the office he'd acquired when Daniella had been shot a couple months ago. He'd slept there when he was forced to rest. He

was there again earlier, trying to not think about Lana and her condition. Something had made him stand up and come back to her room. Now that he was there, nothing could pry his gaze from Lana's unconscious form on the hospital bed. A lump formed in his throat and wouldn't go away. He'd wasted so much time pushing her away. Why did he have to be a damn fool? If he could go back... No, thinking that way didn't help anything.

There was no changing the path they'd found themselves taking. Lana had pushed him away too. They had both made that decision; however, maybe it was time to find out what her reasons were. There had to be a way for them to set their differences aside and figure out if they had a future. This was the wakeup call he had needed to knock some sense into his stubborn head.

"It's good you're here," the nurse told him. "The doctor decided it's time for her to wake up. They stopped the medicine keeping her asleep a few hours ago. She might wake up soon, and it will be good for her to see a friendly face."

His jerked his head up to meet her gaze. "Why didn't anyone say something sooner? Her mother should be here..." Not him—never him. She'd probably have a setback of some sort seeing him first. They weren't in a good place, yet. He fully intended to change that, but she would need time to acclimate to it.

Mrs. Kelly should be there with her daughter. He should call her. He closed his eyes and sighed. It was late, and everyone else would already be asleep at the mansion. They'd all be here in the morning, and that was soon enough to realize Lana would be waking. They shouldn't have decided to do this in the middle of the damn night. If he hadn't paid the hospital a massive amount of money for the privilege of coming and going as he pleased, even he wouldn't have been here.

"The doctor didn't want to add any anxiety," the nurse explained. "Her heart went through a lot of stress. The tear might have been small, but if they hadn't caught it in time she would have died. Dr. West is being cautious."

Why did the nurse have to repeat how Lana could have died? The reminder stared him in the face every time he glanced at her lying on the hospital bed. The whole experience was a nightmare he wished he could wake up from. Sadly, the reality kept smacking him in the face. Each day, a new dose spilled over, making him regret many of the decisions he'd made along the way.

“Is he going to be here when she wakes up?”

The nurse nibbled on her lip. Preston better well be there when Lana opened her eyes. This was his idea, and he was her doctor. Sullivan didn't like how the nurse stalled. He wanted to shake the answers out of her but refrained from doing so—barely.

“The thing is, it's hard to tell when she will shake the drugs from her system. We're to watch her and call him immediately when she wakes. He'll be here as soon as possible once she's conscious.”

Sullivan didn't like it; nevertheless, it made a strange bit of sense. The medical staff at Envill East was the best. He had to trust they could handle their jobs. He couldn't do anything to help Lana but hang by her bedside and pray she made it through the ordeal. It killed him to watch her and remain helpless.

“Should I stay?” He wanted to, and at the same time it terrified him. “The doctor is doing this now for a reason. Will my being here hurt her?” He'd rather cut out his own heart than harm her in any way.

“It's fine if you are here.” The nurse smiled at him. “As I said as I walked in, it's good for at least one person to be here when she wakes. It's a crowd that might be too much, and during the daytime hours she has more visitors.”

Lana had a lot of people who cared for her. They deserved to be in her life far more than he did. Someone better than him should be there for her, but as he was all she had at the moment, he'd do what he could.

“She can wake at any time?” he asked.

“I expect soon,” the nurse replied. “I’ll leave you alone with her. Push her call button if she wakes, and I’ll come right in.”

He nodded and pulled up a chair to sit at Lana’s bedside. He wasn’t leaving even if a part of him wanted to run as far away as possible. He didn’t want to avoid her, but the feelings she invoked inside of him. Sometimes old habits were hard to break. They’d had this teasing relationship that bordered on derision for years now. He didn’t understand why Lana appeared to hate him, but he allowed her snide remarks because sometimes he believed he deserved them. Plus he didn’t think she really carried that much antipathy toward him. For the most part it was a game they played and couldn’t stop. Sullivan respected her far more than he did any woman outside of his family. For her, he would try to be a better man. He wasn’t entirely sure he was capable of it...



A SHARP PAIN STABBED her in the head, and her breathing. Oh, God... Who had punched her in the chest and set a heavy weight on top of it too? What was that beeping? Where the hell was she? She moved her hand and clawed at her side, trying to figure out what was going on. A soft material filled her palm as she clenched it tight. Her breathing became even more ragged, and the beeping became louder, shrilling in her ears. The crunch of metal and shattering glass joined the beeping comingling into a chaos of sounds. They echoed around her bringing back the moment her car had been struck and careened off the side of the road. Stinging pain spread through her paralyzing her in place. Panic seized her as she tried to regain a sense of control over herself and her surroundings.

“Sshh,” a man said.

It soothed her in a way she couldn’t quite explain. She hadn’t realized she was screaming until his voice filled her ears. Who was there with her? Slowly, she opened her eyes and found nothing but blurriness. She blinked several times until he came into focus. The handsome devil who wouldn’t leave her thoughts, no matter how many times she tried to

exorcise him from them, stared at her with concern. That couldn't be a good sign. "Sully?" Her throat was raw, making her voice hoarse.

His dark locks and emerald green eyes were only part of his male beauty. He was the complete package—sinful mouth, chiseled cheekbones, and a well-defined body. Too bad he was a consummate playboy and unattainable. He'd probably outshine Lucifer himself as the most stunning fallen angel in existence. The very definition of *wickedness* described Sullivan Brady.

"Don't talk," he told her. "I'll get the nurse."

She reached out and latched onto his wrist to hold him in place. Normally, he wouldn't be her first choice as a companion, but she was terrified and he was the only thing familiar around her. "Don't go."

"I'm not leaving," he reassured her. "I'm going to push the call button."

He had mentioned a nurse. Was she in the hospital? She had to be; otherwise, none of this would make sense. What reason could Sullivan have for being there? Where was her mother? Lana took the time to finally get a look at her surroundings. She recognized the room, or rather one of the rooms located in the hospital. She'd been in them before working as a nurse. There were a few intensive care rooms available. She must have been injured gravely to be in one of them. The beeping came from the monitors surrounding her. They measured her heartbeats, oxygen levels, and blood pressure. She glanced at them, taking note of the numbers. They didn't look bad...

"Sleeping beauty awakes," another male said. She glanced up and met Preston West's gaze. "How are you feeling?"

She licked her lips. They were a little dry and cracked. Her mouth was so parched her tongue felt like cotton. "Can I have some water?"

"In a moment," Dr. West said. "Let me examine you, and then the nurse can get some ice chips for you."

She nodded. “Where did Sullivan go?” He’d said he wouldn’t leave her. Why would he have stayed though? It wasn’t as if he was anything to her. At one time she’d hoped to be more to him. A silly girlish fantasy that died as quickly as it had sprung to life.

“I’m here,” he said. She turned her head to the direction his voice had come from. He was leaning against the window ledge. His gaze had an intensity to it that sent shivers down her spine. He stared at her as if he had never seen her before. She had to be imagining it. Sullivan Brady had better things to do than babysit her in the hospital. She would have to ask who browbeat him to sit by her side. Her mother must have needed a break, and he was doing the honorable thing.

“You don’t have to stay,” she said. “I’m all right now.”

“I’m not going anywhere, Lisanna,” he said firmly.

A part of her she’d thought she buried sprung to life at the use of her real name. She’d not been called Lisanna in years and had made everyone use Lana. Even her paperwork at the hospital reflected the use of her nickname. Not many people remembered her as Lisanna. Her mother still called her that upon occasion, usually when she was upset. Sullivan hadn’t called her Lisanna in so long she forgot how it sounded coming out of his mouth. Something *had* changed with him, but she wasn’t sure if she liked it.

Lana decided to ignore him and directed her attention to Preston. “What happened to me?”

“You were in an accident with Jessica,” he replied. “What do you remember?”

A flash of light filled her mind and then the crunch of metal on metal. The tires squealing and the pain—it had been so horrible.

The nurse came in and handed her a cup of ice chips. Lana spooned some into her mouth and reminded herself the accident was over with. She didn’t want to relive it ever again, but feared it would haunt her nightmares for some time to come. After she swallowed the ice chips she glanced up at

Preston answered his question, "I was taking her to the hospital." Lana didn't want to tell him anything more. Jessica may not have confessed everything to him yet, and even though she thought he had a right to know all, it wasn't Lana's secret to tell. "A car hit us on the way."

"That's correct," he said. "Jessica is fine. She had her procedure and went home a couple weeks ago. She'll be happy to see you're awake."

Lana frowned. "She wasn't hurt?"

"I didn't say that," Preston said. "She did require surgery outside of the procedure she was scheduled for. You were hurt far worse though."

If Lana read between the lines, then Preston was aware of what procedure Jessica had come in for. Still, she wouldn't take any chances. After she talked with Jessica, she'd have a better understanding of what was going on with her.

"What happened to me?"

"That bitch, Imogen, wanted revenge on her sister and ran you off the road," Sullivan spat out. "She'll be prosecuted for attempted murder."

Preston glared at him. "Now isn't the time for that."

Sullivan's lips formed a thin line. He was pissed... Who was Imogen's sister? Did he mean Jessica? Her head hurt thinking about it. She rubbed her fingers over her temple then returned her attention back to Preston. His anger seemed directed at Imogen. Did he even realize his own culpability? He'd dated her and welcomed him into their lives. Lana hadn't liked Imogen from the start, and that had been before Sullivan started dating her. Of course it hadn't helped that he'd taken a liking to the blond bimbo, but that wasn't the point. He hadn't seen her for more than a pretty face and he wanted to place the blame on others for Imogen's actions. Imogen, and only Imogen, was responsible for the havoc she'd caused.

"You had a small tear on the membrane around your heart. One of your ribs punctured a lung and also cut into your heart."

Luckily, you weren't far from the hospital and the first responders reacted quickly, or you might not have survived."

Lana gulped. A tear in the heart could have been fatal. She was lucky to have lived. If it had happened anywhere else, and if Preston hadn't been her doctor... She shook the thought away. Things happened for a reason. She wasn't sure what that was at the moment, but she'd figure it out later.

"How long have I been out?"

"Too long," Sullivan muttered under his breath.

Preston glared at him again. Had Sullivan been there longer than she'd thought? She'd ask more questions after she rested. Astonishingly enough, she was still tired, and she'd been sleeping for days. Being injured sucked.

"Sullivan is right," Preston said in a cheerful tone. He was probably trying to cajole her or make her not worry. A heart injury was serious, and if her blood pressure rose, it might complicate things. "You've been unconscious for a week. I expect you'll be here another week before I'm comfortable releasing you."

Lana groaned. "I hate being a patient."

"Nobody likes being in the hospital," Preston said and laughed lightly. "Don't worry. We'll make it as easy as possible on you. I'll leave so you can rest." Then he looked at Sullivan and said firmly, "Ten minutes and then you have to depart as well."

Strangely, Sullivan nodded in concurrence without argument. Lana shouldn't be surprised at his agreement. Lana and Sullivan didn't have an easy relationship, and he was probably itching to bolt from the room. Preston and the nurse exited, leaving her alone with Sullivan.

"I don't need you to stay the full ten minutes," Lana said. "I am rather tired. Can you tell my mother I'd like to see her in the morning?"

"I will," he agreed. "And I won't remain long. I wanted to make sure you were all right before I followed the doctor out."

Why was he so concerned? He never acted like he cared much before. He'd been more of a nuisance in her life. Almost *brotherly*. She suppressed a groan and mentally rolled her eyes at that long ago memory. She was not his freaking sister and maybe one day she'd tell him that. "I'm fine," she told him. "Or I will be in time. Nothing a little rest won't cure."

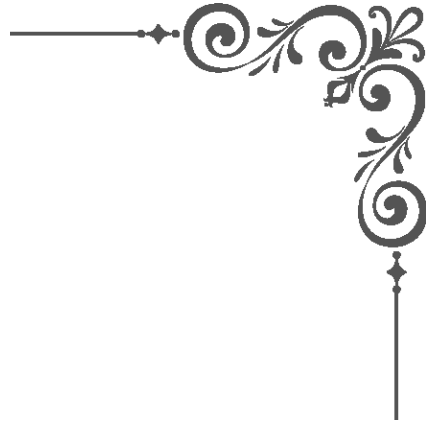
"Don't joke about it," he said curtly. "You almost died. I —" He cut off what he was about to say. She wanted to ask him to continue but refrained from pushing the issue. Mostly because she was too tired to argue with him, and partly because of the pained look on his face. Something about that made her uncomfortable and made her think it might be best not to have that much insight to the inner workings of Sullivan's mind.

Lana sighed. "I don't understand what is going on with you, and right now I'm too exhausted to try to decipher your mood. If you don't mind, I'm going to rest, and when you work through whatever is going on in that head of yours, please do me a favor and leave me out of it."

She closed her eyes expecting him to leave; after all, she had essentially dismissed him. Lana should have realized it wouldn't be simple. Sullivan never did things the easy way. She opened her eyes to meet his gaze and sucked in a breath. The way he was staring at her—it was almost as if no one else existed in that moment but the two of them.

"Lisanna," he said. She started to tell him not to call her that, but he shushed her by placing a finger over her mouth. "Don't argue." He caressed her hair almost lovingly. "Take care of yourself. I'll be back in the morning with your mother."

Then he did something he'd never done before. He leaned down and pressed his lips to hers briefly. The shock sent a jolt through her that left her speechless. After he was gone, she lifted her hand to touch her lips with her fingertips. What alternate reality had she woken up to?

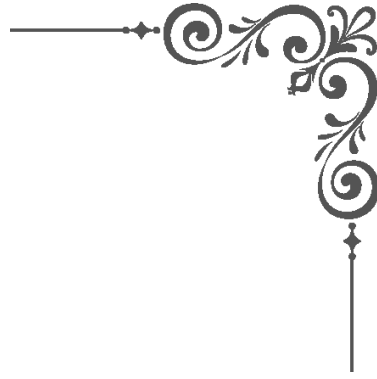


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

USA TODAY Bestselling author, DAWN BROWER writes both historical and contemporary romance. There are always stories inside her head; she just never thought she could make them come to life. That creativity has finally found an outlet.

Growing up she was the only girl out of six children. She is a single mother of two teenage boys; there is never a dull moment in her life. Reading books is her favorite hobby and she loves all genres.

For more information about upcoming releases or to contact Dawn Brower go to her website:
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Christmas Temptation

Linked Across Time

Saved by My Blackguard

Searching for My Rogue

Seduction of My Rake
Surrendering to My Spy
Spellbound by My Charmer
Stolen by My Knave
Separated from My Love
Scheming with My Duke
Secluded with My Hellion

Heart's Intent

One Heart to Give
Unveiled Hearts
Heart of the Moment
Kiss My Heart Goodbye

Broken Curses

The Enchanted Princess
The Bespelled Knight

Ever Beloved

Forever My Earl
Always My Viscount

