

JAY

HE CERTAINLY DOESN'T NEED A
DOCTOR TO TELL HIM WHAT TO DO...

KATIE DOWE

Jay

He certainly doesn't need a doctor to tell him what to do...

A sexy single parent romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

Thirty-two-year-old Dr. Alexia Faulkner was completely committed to the needs of her patients and always kept a professional distance...

Until she starts caring for the adorable and unhappy daughter of multi-billionaire Jay Templeton!

Now she can't keep Jay out of her mind!

Jay's daughter was the product of a one-night stand with an actress whose life ended abruptly and tragically...

Now he is left to take care of his ten-year-old daughter but has no idea how to be a single father to a strong-willed girl while battling demons of his own!

But when he meets his daughter's intelligent and beautiful doctor, his heart begins to thaw in a way he's never experienced before.

And after so many years, he is finally beginning to feel a bit of hope...

Can Jay overcome his troubled past to be there for his daughter, as well as for Alexia?

Or will he end up hurting the people who love him?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Katie
Dowe of **BWWM Club**.

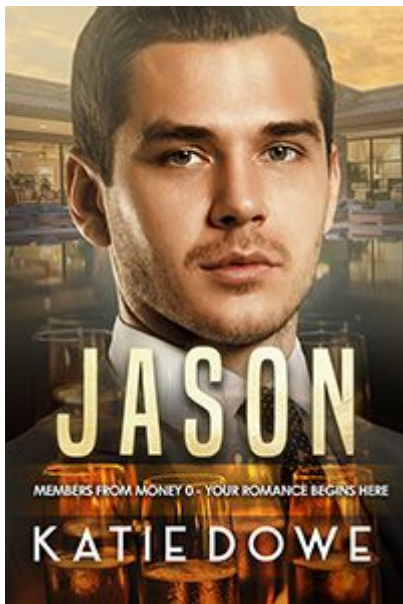
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Chapter 1

“I am going back to court,” Jay told her tightly, dismissing his very able assistant. “Give me a few minutes, Jeremy.” He waited until the man had closed the doors behind him before continuing. “I want my daughter, Sarah-Lee.”

“You can take me to court all you want; you are not taking her away from me. You did not want either of us, remember?”

Jay felt the headache pounding inside his temple. He was sick to death of fighting with her. Everything with the mother of his daughter was a battle. Jay had given up custody on his father’s advice and realized that it was a mistake.

The woman was using their daughter as a stepping stool and a way to milk more money from him. He was not having it.

“I want my daughter,” he repeated coldly. “I am going to be petitioning the courts and start the custody procedure. You were supposed to drop her off at the manor last weekend, and you did not hold up your end of the agreement.”

“That’s because you were not around! What do you expect? That your two sisters would be standing in for you? Do you actually know how to be a father?”

And he had to agree with her there. He did not know how to be a father because his own had been such a lousy example. Jeremiah Templeton had been the one to advise him not to fight for custody.

“She is a goddamned female. If you wanted to stick your dick into some whore, you should have ensured that you sired a son.”

And he had caved because it had been the easy way out. But now he was having a change of heart. He was

still a bachelor and unsure of his ability to take care of the ten-year-old, but he was damn well going to try.

“I am putting you on notice, Sarah-Lee. My lawyers will be in touch with you.”

“You selfish bastard!” she screamed. “You would put our daughter through that again?”

“You never wanted her in the first place. We could have been a family, and you and your precious family did not think I was good enough. But I was when you wanted to stick your cock in and screw me for the entire night. Remember that, Jay? You whispered words of endearment and the next morning you were gone.”

His mouth tightened at the memory of what a careless fool he had been eleven years ago. They had both been wasted and had fallen into bed without thinking of the consequences. At first, he had wondered if Marilee was really his, but one look at the blonde-haired, blue-eyed baby had convinced him that she had not been lying.

“Goodbye Sarah-Lee. We will have no further communications unless it’s through our lawyers.” He hung up before she could scream more obscenities at him. The throbbing had turned into a full-blown headache and one he could not afford to baby. He was meeting new talent in ten minutes and needed his wits about him.

Pressing the intercom, he summoned his assistant.

“Please do not transfer any more calls from her.”

“Of course.”

“And when I am through with the meeting, get the lawyers on the phone,” he told him abruptly.

The man scribbled something on his tablet. “Would you like me to set up in conference room one?”

Jay nodded.

“The files?”

“Right here. Marie – that’s how she wants to be addressed, no surnames – just Marie is coming along with her agent.”

“And we have the audio of her singing.”

“We do. There is also an amateur video recording of her as well. I will have the technician set things up in time for the meeting.”

Jay nodded. “My sisters? ” Jillian is out at a luncheon meeting with Boris, and Jessica is meeting with PR about the new campaign.”

“Tell them both that I would like to have a meeting as soon as they can schedule one.”

“Will do.” Jeremy scribbled again. “Anything else?”

“That’s it for now. I need a damn drink,” he muttered.

“Would you like me to pour you a finger of brandy?”

“No, just a cup of coffee for now. Buzz me as soon as they are here.”

With a nod, Jeremy left the office and closed the doors behind him.

Unable to sit still, Jay pushed away from his desk and wandered over to the carafe to pour a cup of the rich blend. Taking it to the window with him, he looked out at the lofty view of the uptown area, his frown of concentration revealing that the splendor of the buildings and the brilliance of the midday sun was lost on him.

Spring had arrived a few days bringing with it, rain to wash away the last vestiges of the snow. It had been a

long and brutal winter lingering for the first two weeks of April. But thankfully, the season had finally changed.

He took a sip of the coffee, his expression contemplative. He was not going to back down. His only concern was the little girl who was going to be caught in the middle.

Sarah-Lee had turned out to be very vindictive.

She had shown up at his apartment two months after their encounter and told him without preamble that she was pregnant with his child.

The panic had set in, and he had no idea what he was going to tell his parents. He had been barely twenty-two and had just finished university. He had celebrated it by springing for his own apartment, finding the manor too oppressive.

His mother had pleaded with him to stay home, but as much as he loved her, he could not bear to be in the same space as his father. The man was a monster, and Jay had discovered that early on in life.

He took a gulp of the coffee and deliberately turned his thoughts to something else. The memories were there at the very edge of his subconsciousness, and it was not often that he allowed them to surface.

A sigh of relief gusted from him when he heard his intercom. Work would distract him, and this girl was a new talent, a raw one, and would need his attention.

Dr. Alexia Faulkner strode into the office, stopping just long enough to retrieve the bunch of messages from her receptionist. She shared the high-rise medical building with several other doctors, one of whom she had been seeing on and off for the past six months.

“You have a patient waiting in Room One. Would you like some coffee?”

“You do not need to ask.” She leafed through the messages with a frown. “All of these are from Jesse?”

Arlene nodded ruefully. “You have gotten yourself an admirer.”

“One I can do without. Bring me the coffee and hold all my calls.”

She walked into the cheerful office and put her jacket and purse away. Slipping out of her three-inch heels, she went to her desk to key up her computer to look at her schedule.

Arlene had booked her solid through to four in the afternoon and afterward she had a quick stop to make at the free clinic before joining her brother and sister-in-law for dinner at The Cage.

She had tried to call it off but Anthony had told her in no uncertain terms that she had better be there. “We have news, and we have not seen you in ages.”

“I was there for dinner last Sunday.”

“You came to dinner two weeks ago and promised that you would be back the following Sunday. Ellen and I are looking forward to seeing you.” He had ended the conversation by hanging up the phone, so now she was stuck.

Their parents had died in a car accident when Alexia was just turning fourteen. It had been left to the eighteen-year-old Anthony to take care of her, and he had done a splendid job of it.

He had gotten a full-time job while going to community college to get his degree in computer science.

His unflagging support had helped her through her rocky patches and had insisted that she follow her dreams of becoming a child psychologist. He had not touched a penny from their parents' insurance and had sold the house to help offset the costs of medical school.

She owed him so much and would never be able to fully repay him for what he had done for her.

Leafing through her file, she apprised herself of the patient's history and rang Arlene to tell her to send him in.

"It's about time," Jillian told him approvingly as she took her seat on one of the comfortable sofas in the corner of the huge office.

"I was wondering why you waited so long," Jessica murmured. Jillian was the eldest of the three and had been divorced twice. She had been a very successful actress in her own way but had decided to quit her career and join in with her brother to run Templeton's Talent Inc.

Jessica had been a model like her famous brother but at the age of thirty, had hung up her stilettos when their father had died of a heart attack two years ago.

The company had been passed to him, and he had jumped in with both feet. He had been in the industry since he was in high school and knew everything there was to know about the industry.

He had also been groomed to take over when the time came. It had been unexpected since Jeremiah had been a very healthy sixty-year-old until he died of a heart attack in the bed of his twenty-five-year-old mistress.

Their family had been plagued by tragedy and gossip. Their mother had committed suicide five years ago, and that had kept the press busy for a very long time. Jay's own affairs with different women from their society had also fed the press.

When Jeremiah Templeton had been found dead in the apartment he had generously given to his mistress, the press had eaten up the salacious details.

“I want it to be kept low-key.”

“With a woman like Sarah-Lee?” Jillian snorted as she reached for a bunch of grapes from the fruit bowl on the coffee table. “That’s not going to be possible.” Her green eyes glittered. “And she is not going to go placidly into the sunset.”

“I am aware of that,” Jay said tersely as he joined them on the sofa. “I have asked Malcolm to dig up some dirt on her.”

“I am pretty sure there is much to dive into,” Jessica told them dryly. “She has been seeing Brian.”

Jay’s expression glowered. “That son of a bitch. He waltzed in here with that cocky smile on his face when all the while he was with her.”

“I think she is going out with him to spite you.”

“I am not interested in her and never was. I just want my daughter.”

“And we are siding with you,” Jillian assured him, wiping her fingers on the napkin she plucked from the holder.
“Let us know if you need our help.”

She was fighting exhaustion and stifling yawns as she handed her key fob to the valet. It had been a rather long and difficult day, and she had been tempted to call her brother and cry out. But she would never hear the end of it, and Anthony had a way of making her feel guilty about not showing up.

The Maître d, himself showed her to the table where her brother and his willowy wife were already waiting. Ellen White-Faulkner was a prosecutor and a very good one at that. But she was also head over heels in love with the handsome, closely-shaven man standing next to her. It showed each time she gave him a look or a touch.

Alexia realized that she wanted something like what they shared.

“You are late.” Anthony moved forward to embrace her, dark brown eyes wandering over her face. “And you have to burn the candles at both ends.”

“Good evening to you too,” she told him dryly, returning his embrace, before giving her sister-in-law a warm smile. “How do you put up with his bullying?”

“I happen to be in love with him. We ordered the shrimp plate.”

“Excellent choice.” She slipped into the booth across from them and reached for the glass of wine already poured. “You both look ready to burst.”

“We want to wait until the meal is served, but what the hell! We are pregnant.” Ellen turned to look at her

husband, dark brown eyes dancing. “Darling I am sorry, but I could not wait a minute longer.”

“You are forgiven.” Leaning over, he kissed her full on the lips, his expression gentle.

Turning to look at his sister, he continued. “We are just keeping it between us for now. We do not want to jinx it.”

“Of course. I am so happy for you. I get to be an aunt. How far along are you?”

“Six weeks.” Ellen took the glass of water and sipped. “So far, everything is going well. I noticed that I was feeling a little off a couple of weeks ago and did not dare hope. But it has been confirmed.” She reached out to take her husband’s hand and squeezed it gently.

“My darling here is already planning how to set up the nursery.” She gave a soft laugh, her lovely face lighting up. “I told him he needs to wait until we actually find out the sex of the baby.”

“Neutral colors.” Lifting her hand, he kissed the back of it before looking at his sister. “What’s going on with you and David? Anything concrete yet?”

“I happen to be thirty-two years old and running my own successful practice,” she reminded him mildly. “I certainly do not need my big brother to be asking about my love life.”

“I still think he is not man enough for you.” Anthony waited until the waiter had placed their meals before them and left before resuming. “You need someone who is not going to allow you to call the shots all the time. That man is like a whipped puppy around you.”

“Why, thank you, dear brother. I really needed that.” She dug into her shrimp and decided to ignore him.

“I am afraid no man is ever going to be good enough for his little sister,” Ellen responded, her eyes dancing.

“And he keeps forgetting that I am not little anymore.”
She took a sip of water to counteract the spiciness of the seafood. “And David is not so bad.”

“The man is afraid of his own shadow.”

“He is an excellent doctor.”

“And lover?”

She gave him a reproving look, not in the least shocked or surprised at his bluntness. She and Anthony were close – had to be since losing their parents at such a young age. He had told her frankly that they had each other, and there was nothing she could not tell him.

She had started seeing her periods shortly after the death of her parents and had had to tell for him to pick up the necessary sanitary items. He had not shied away from telling her the facts of life, even though her mother

had spoken to her about the facts of life when she was only twelve.

She had confided in him when she had her first crush and had come crying to him when the boy had broken her heart.

He had sat her down, telling her that it was not the end of the world and she was going to meet more boys and have her heart broken several times before the right one came along.

“Don’t give yourself to the first guy you think you are in love with. I guarantee that you are going to fall in love several times in your life until you experience the real thing.”

She had sailed through high school and received a scholarship to a very prestigious college. From there, she got into medical school and worked hard so that he would be proud of her.

Everything she did had been because of him. He had shown up at her graduation with a huge smile and keys to a second-hand Toyota. He had also insisted on her living in his tiny apartment until she got settled.

“I am not even going to grace that with a response,” she told him mildly, turning to look at Ellen. “I am going to be spoiling this child so much that you would not believe it.”

“I am right behind you in that,” Ellen told her with a laugh.

The conversation turned to a case Ellen was prosecuting, and that opened up a heated debate on the justice system.

She refused the three-layer chocolate cake by protesting that she was bursting at the seams.

“You are too thin.” Her brother gave her a critical once-over.

“I am fashionable and slender,” she corrected with a lofty smile.

“I can see your collarbones sticking out.”

“Will you get off my case?”

“When was the last time you took your stove for a spin?”

“It’s not a sports car, and I would have you know that I cooked last Saturday.”

“What did you make? The usual chicken alfredo?” he asked her dryly.

“It was a chicken in a mushroom sauce that I saw on Pinterest.” She gave her sister-in-law a fond smile as she got to her feet. “Hopefully, the child will take your

wonderful personality.” Leaning over, she kissed her on the cheek and went into her brother’s arms as he rose to his feet.

“Go straight home. You look dead on your feet, and text me when you get there.”

“I am so happy for you,” she told him fondly. “You are going to make a great dad, even if you will be an overbearing one.” She touched his jaw tenderly.

“See you Sunday for dinner?”

“I will bring the champagne.” She looked over his shoulder at Ellen. “A glass will not hurt.”

“I know. Drive safe.”

With a quick hug, she stepped out of Anthony’s embrace and left the restaurant.

Main Street was hopping at this time of night, with the young executives flowing from the various buildings and driving onto the roadway.

The popular restaurant was a few blocks from where her practice was, and she was tempted to swing by there and attack the mountain of paperwork she had left on her desk as she went to the clinic. But her brother's imperious voice sounded inside her head, and besides that, she was almost falling asleep at the wheel.

David had been slightly put out that he had not been invited to dinner.

"Your brother does not like me," he had remarked, a petulant look on his attractive face.

"Anthony does not like any of the guys I have dated. It's nothing personal."

But she was getting tired of his whining and the fact that he had been asking her for several months now where the relationship was going. They had fallen into it six months ago. The sex was nice and relaxing, but she wanted something more. She wanted what her brother had with his wife.

She wanted explosion and heat, and she had not found that with David. Touching the left turn signal, she drove a few minutes before the turn-off to her home.

She had bought the three-bedroom, two and a half bath a year ago when it came up for sale. It was in a very nice area, and her closest neighbor was a mile away. There was a park nearby, and a very active neighborhood watch society.

Driving through the open gate, she came to a stop in front of the garage and got out. Grabbing her purse and laptop bag, she headed toward the porch, a smile curving her lips as the ginger-colored tabby curved around her legs.

“Lost again, Ginger?” Stooping, she hefted the cat into one arm while juggling with her stuff as she tried to unlock the door. “I bet Mrs. Lowe is right now looking for you.”

“Let me get you something to eat, and then call her. We do not want her wandering all over the place looking for you.”

Slipping out of her shoes, she went to get the food and poured it into a bowl before calling to assure her neighbor that Ginger was safe.

“I figured he would make a beeline for your place Alexia. He is quite fond of you.”

“Want me to bring him over in a few minutes?”

“Oh no. Please do not trouble yourself. I am heading that way for my usual walk. I will collect him while I am at it.”

Chapter 2

The phone call came while he was in the middle of a board meeting. “I am sorry, sir, but you need to take this.” His face was grave as he handed him the phone.

“This is Jay.”

He listened for a minute before abruptly leaving the boardroom and hurrying to his office.

“How bad is it?” he asked tersely, gesturing to Jeremy to come into the room and close the door behind him.

“How is my daughter?”

“Thank you.” He stood behind the desk for a few minutes, not knowing what to do.

“Shall I call Jillian and Jessica?” the man’s voice rose him out of his numb shock.

“Yes. I must go to the hospital.” They both looked up as Jillian and Jessica came rushing into the room.

“I suppose you have heard?”

“We saw it on the news. There was no update on their conditions.”

“The hospital called. Sarah-Lee is dead, and so is Brian. Marilee has a broken arm and several contusions, but she is alive.” His hands were clenched into fists. “I need to go – I need to see her.”

“We will come with you.”

He looked at Jeremy.

“I will cancel your appointments for the remainder of the day.”

“Thank you,” he said simply.

The man exited the office and closed the doors behind him.

“I need a drink,” he muttered, striding toward the recessed bar and punching the button. “Care to join me?”

“No, and hon, you are going to need a very clear head.”

“I am aware.” He poured the alcohol and took a healthy swallow before turning to face them. “I never wished this on her. I wanted my daughter but was prepared to go through the legal channels. I would never wish her dead.”

His hands were shaking slightly. Uttering a curse, he put the glass away. Jillian was right; he needed a clear head to deal with the press and the tragedy.

He had no love for Sarah-Lee, but death was the final insult. And she was so young. Whatever she had been, she did not deserve this. And she could have taken his daughter with him. He was thankful that she was alive.

“Another story for the press to sink their collective teeth into,” Jessica mourned. “This is going to be a PR nightmare.”

“I don’t give a damn about that. I just want to be assured that Marilee is okay.” He went behind his desk. “She is going to need a lot of help to get through this tragedy.”

“And we are here for her,” Jillian said quietly.

“I am talking in terms of professional help, but yeah, we have to be there for her.”

Alexia had just finished with her first patient for the morning when the news report came in.

David walked in just as she was pressing the remote to turn up the volume.

“I just heard it on the news.” He moved forward to join her as they both listened to the report. “What a damn shame. At least the child is still alive.”

“And will be going through a hell of trauma,” she added grimly.

“I suppose you will be called in to do an eval.”

“They have psychologists on staff at the hospital she has been taken to.”

“But you happen to be the best,” he said loyally, squeezing her arm. “From what I understand, there was tension between the mother and father.”

“I don’t really follow up on celebrity gossip,” she murmured, still listening to the report. “The mother and companion died on impact.”

“Neither of them was wearing seat belts, and it’s alleged that she was speeding.” He nodded to the solemn newscaster who was doing the reporting. That was careless of them.”

“And beside the point...” She listened for a few more minutes before switching the TV off. “Did you need me for anything?”

“Not particularly. I am in between patients now and wondered if you would have a cup of coffee with me.”

“I have a patient in five minutes and a phone consultation. I am going to have to pass.”

He masked the disappointment with a smile.

“Rain check. Lunch?”

“We will see.”

He nodded and left the office, closing the door behind him. She was going to have to tell him and soon. She was certainly not the type of woman to keep a man hanging. Their relationship had run its course, and she was going to have to cut him loose. Anthony was right.

She should not have gotten involved with him in the first place.

It had been a spur-of-the-moment thing. He had lost a

patient, and she had been unable to get the fact that her fifteen-year-old patient tried to commit suicide out of her head.

They had ended up at her place, and one thing had led to another, and they had ended up sleeping with each other. The sex had been adequate for want of a better term, but the passion had been lukewarm.

She had known from the very beginning that he was not the man she was going to spend the rest of her life with but had been reluctant to tell him that it was over.

With a sigh, she went back behind her desk and picked up her phone.

“Mr. Templeton,” the doctor nodded to Jillian and Jessica, directing them into his office. “I spoke to you over the phone. I am Dr. Grayson, head of the trauma

team here at Grace Memorial.” His expression was grave.

“My daughter?”

“She is out of surgery. She suffered a concussion, but we did a brain scan, and everything is okay there. Like I told you, she is suffering from a broken arm and several lacerations to her face and chest.” He hesitated, shoving his hands into the pockets of his white lab coat.

“What is it?” Jillian demanded.

“I have gone ahead and called a psychologist. Dr. Alexia Faulkner is the best in her field, and your daughter is going to need all the help she can get.”

Jay nodded. “When can we see her?”

“She is out of surgery and in recovery. She is still groggy from the anesthesia.” He hesitated again. “She has not been told of her mother’s passing.”

“We will let her know. Is she in a condition to be told?”

“I am not certain. Please come with me.” He led the way out of the office and along a corridor. They had passed the press camped out in the parking lot and had refused to make any comment.

They had also received a call from Sarah-Lee’s parents, who had been contacted by the detectives who had been on the scene of the tragic accident.

Pushing the door open, he guided them into the room and went straight to the bed to check on the patient.

“She is still asleep,” he murmured quietly as he checked her vital signs. “But she should be waking up soon.”

“We will stay with her.”

“I will be back to check on her in a few minutes. In the meantime, I will see to it that you are afforded some privacy.”

“Thank you, doctor,” Jessica told him gratefully.

The man nodded and made his way from the room, closing the door behind him. Pulling up a chair, Jay sat down and stared at the little girl propped up against the pillows.

Her thick honey-blond hair was strewn over the pillows, the cast on her arm propped up against another pillow to keep it from being jostled. She had inherited his looks. The same shade of hair with sapphire blue eyes.

“She looks so vulnerable,” Jessica whispered. “Jay, we could have lost her.”

“We didn’t,” he whispered back sharply. His heart contracted as he continued to stare at her. “And we are

going to have to break the news that her mother is dead. I am not looking forward to that.”

“We will help her to get through it.”

“We just might need the psychologist here when we do so.”

Jillian nodded in agreement. “I will alert the doctor to get her here.”

“Please push back my noon appointment to one or one thirty,” Alexia told Arlene as she hurried from her office, her jacket draped over her arm. “I am going to the hospital and not certain how long I will be. I will call you when I am on my way back.”

“Of course.”

“Tell David I am going to have to skip lunch. I do believe he is with a patient now.”

“I will let him know.”

With a nod, she made her way out of the building and into the parking lot. It had rained earlier this morning, and the scent of wet grass and flowers blooming filled the air and made her appreciate that she was alive.

According to the news report, Sarah-Lee had been two years older than she was, and she was no longer able to appreciate the beauty of nature. Pressing her alarm, she opened her car door and got in. There was a little girl waiting for her at the hospital who had been deprived of her mother.

There was no easy way around that.

She was shown to the hospital room as soon as she arrived. The press was still camped out in the hospital parking lot when she arrived. Looking straight ahead, she made her way into the reception area and spoke to the charge nurse before Dr. Grayson came to meet her.

“The family is with her now.”

“Is she awake?”

“Just coming around.” His hand touched her arm briefly.

“You are aware of who the family is.”

“I am.”

“It’s a damn mess. Neither the mother nor her companions were wearing seat belts. The mother’s parents are in the waiting room. I just spoke to them, and they are destroyed. They had the gruesome task of identifying their daughter’s body. This way.”

Alexia followed him into a room with the door slightly ajar. She had seen photos of the family, of course. The Templetons were forever in the news. The entire family had, at one point been in the entertainment industry. But her first sight of Jay Templeton had her catching her breath. His photos did not do him a bit of justice.

He was larger than life, tall, perhaps topping six foot two inches. His thick blonde hair had a wayward lock curling over his forehead. But it was his eyes that had her feeling jittery and nervous.

She was a professional and had been in her field for the past eight years. Usually, she portrayed a calm and controlled demeanor. But as soon as he got to his feet and turned to look at her, she knew she was lost.

Struggling to hold herself together, she walked into the room and extended smiles all around. Introductions were made even though it was not necessary.

“I would like to speak to her alone, if you don’t mind,” she told them quietly.

With a curt nod, Jay gestured for his sister to follow him out of the room.

“I will be in my office if you need me,” Dr. Grayson told her.

“Thanks, Aaron.” Taking the chair, Jay Templeton had abandoned, she faced the little girl who was staring at her with confused blue eyes. Another jolt went through her at the uncanny resemblance to her dad.

“Marilee? My name is Dr. Alexia. How are you feeling?”

“Strange,” she murmured. “Where is my mom?”

“Your father is here. As well as your aunt and also your grandparents.”

Tears welled into her eyes and spilled over her porcelain cheeks. “Is she dead?”

Alexia nodded, seeing no other way to shield her from the news.

“I am afraid so.” She took the uninjured hand and pressed it for comfort. “I want to be able to tell you that you are going to be okay, that you are alive, and you have a family here who will be supporting you, but for now, you are going to feel the pain here.”

She touched the place where the child’s heart was beating rapidly. “The physical bruises will heal over time, but you are going to miss your mom.”

“They were arguing,” she whispered hoarsely.

“Who? Your mother and her friend?”

“He was her boyfriend and we were all going away so that she could avoid going to court.” Her deep blue eyes moistened with tears, looking at Alexia. “She told me that she was not going to let Daddy get custody of me. So she was taking me away, and she and Brian were arguing.”

“Oh, my dear. I am so sorry.”

“I cannot tell Daddy that because he is going to be so upset.”

“Not with you,” Alexia assured her swiftly. “Never with you. I am sure he would not have wanted to be deprived of your presence in his life.”

“Mom said he did not really want me. He just wanted to stop giving her the money she was entitled to.”

Alexia had to school her expression of disgust. The things adults do to children continue to astonish and dismay her. “Do you believe that?”

She shook her head, a look of uncertainty on her beautiful face. “He has not really been in my life.”

“The fact that he was willing to go to court to get you back should say something,” she told the child gently. “Will you talk to him?”

“Will you stay?”

“Of course. I am here for a little bit, and I will be talking to you some more. I promise that I am here to help you get through this horrible situation. Do you feel up to receiving some more visitors? I understand your grandparents are also here.”

“Mommy is dead, and Grandma will be sad. We did not visit them often.”

“Why was that?”

“Mommy did not like them very much.”

Alexia felt a jolt at that. Sarah-Lee sounded like a real bitch.

“I am sure they would love to see you.” She pressed her hand gently. “I am going out to talk to your dad for a minute, but I will be right back.”

She nodded.

Pressing her hand again, she left the room and pulled up the door behind her. She felt another jolt again when he turned to watch her progress into the room.

“My sisters went to get coffee. What’s her progress?”

“She is very shaken and conflicted.”

“Conflicted?” He stared at her with a frown.

Alexia told him what the little girl had revealed to her.

“She was running away with my daughter?” His expression became ominous, and Alexia realized he was teetering on the edge.

“I am afraid so.”

“She deliberately put my daughter in harm’s way.” e reined in his temper and shoved his hands into his pockets. “How is she?”

“Trying to be brave. I will be coming to see her for the time she is here.”

“And after?”

“If she requires my attention after, I will, of course, be there for her. She is going to need a lot of family support.”

“She will have it.” He stared at her for a moment. “I understand you are one of the best in your field?”

“I am committed to my patient.”

“That was not what I asked.”

She did not like to dwell on her qualifications, but apparently, he needed verification.

“I am quite competent.”

A slight smile curved his lips and had the heat curling into her lower body. The man had a lethal charm that was well-recorded. His body was lean and muscled, the leashed power emanating from him in waves.

“Diplomacy, not well practiced in your field.”

“I hate blowing my own horn and prefer to let the results speak for themselves.”

He nodded at that, his expression sobering. “I want my daughter to get well.”

“In time, she will.” She hesitated. “I assured her that her grandparents would get a chance to see her.”

“I have no beef with them. And they just lost their only daughter. I would never dream of depriving them of their only grandchild.”

She nodded. “I will stick around for a little bit.” She glanced at her watch. “But I am afraid I have an appointment in a few minutes.”

“Thanks for coming at such short notice. We really appreciate it.”

“You are welcome.” They both looked up as the door was pushed open, and his sisters came in bearing coffee.

“Doctor, how is she?” Jillian asked.

“I will fill you in.” Jay took the cup of coffee and gave a dismissive nod.

Alexia lingered a few minutes more to make certain that Marilee was okay. She was surrounded by her family, and the color was returning to her skin, replacing the pallor that had been there before.

And she had promised to come back for a session tomorrow. The press was still camped out in the parking lot, and a very enterprising reporter jogged over to her vehicle just as she was getting in.

“It’s Dr. Faulkner, isn’t it? The child psychologist?”

“Who wants to know?” she asked coolly as she disengaged her alarm.

“Teddy Blythe from Sun Press.”

“The society gossip magazine.” Her disgust was apparent. “I have no comment.”

“I just need some confirmation, and we happen to be a respectable magazine.” Her skeptical look had him grinning charmingly. “It’s a fact. We already know that the little girl in there is Marilee Templeton, daughter of Jay Templeton. What is her condition?”

“I am not her medical doctor. Please excuse me.”

“Is it true that the mother was taking her out of the country to avoid a custody hearing?”

Alexia was careful to appear nonplus.

“You know more than I do.”

“Oh, come on, doc. We know that you were called to deliver the tragic news to the little girl about her mother’s death. Can you at least confirm the rumor that there was bad blood between the parents?”

“Please get out of my way. I am running late for an appointment.”

She got into the car and backed out of the lot with him standing there and staring after her. A sigh of relief left her as she made her way into the uptown traffic that would take her to her practice. Her expression was grave, her fingers clenching on the wheel as she reflected on the scene she had left at the hospital.

Marilee Templeton was going to need a lot of help. Not only was she going through the trauma of losing her mother, but she was going to have to get used to her dad and his family.

She had read the reports, and even though she did not condone or even read society news, she knew there had been ongoing tension between both parties. The family was fraught with tragedy.

The mother had committed suicide a few years ago, and just recently, the father had a heart attack while he was with a woman younger than his daughters.

Now this. Taking a deep breath, she pulled into the parking lot of her building and shut off the engine, her mind going over the event.

Closing her eyes, she willed herself to stop reacting to Jay Templeton. He made her nervous and acutely aware of herself as a female. But someone would have to be a corpse not to react to a man like him, she thought wryly.

He was the epitome of a Greek god with a body to match. “Down girl,” she whispered wryly. “You are not some naïve teenager who is going to allow hormones to dictate your emotions. It’s just something purely physical. A woman reacting to a handsome man’s magnetic appeal. Nothing more than that.”

But the bracing pep talk worked so much and no more. Leaning against the headrest, she took several deep breaths, before alighting from the car. Making her way toward the building, she decided that she was going to get her head on straight before she saw the family again. It would not do to be caught drooling again.

“Your one-thirty is here.” Arlene handed her some messages. “And Anthony wants you to call him immediately.”

She rolled her eyes at that. “Probably wants to know if I had lunch and speaking of which-”

“Soup and sandwich are on your desk.”

“You are a wonder.”

“I am hoping my salary and bonus will reflect such,”
Arlene told her with a smile.

“Give me five minutes before sending in the patient.”
Going into her office, she made the call to her brother.

“Hey, I was just-”

“Ellen is in the hospital.”

She groped for the chair and sat down heavily.

“What’s wrong?”

“She started spotting and we were afraid-” He took a breath. “We did not want to take any chances.”

“Of course not. Is she okay?”

“She is being monitored and they want to keep her overnight. I need you.”

“As soon as I finish up here, I will head to your place.”

“See you then.”

Alexia bit her lip and stared at the unadorned wall before rousing herself to do her job.

Chapter 3

He hugged her, arms wrapping around her waist like a steel band. She clung, closing her eyes as she tried to absorb his despair and fear.

“How is she?”

“Come and sit on the porch swing. I just came from the hospital, and she is asleep. The doctors say that she needs rest with no stress.” He waited until she had taken a seat before asking. “Have you eaten?” He shook his head wryly. “Of course not. I will go and get something from the kitchen.”

“You should let me-”

“No. I need something to do, or I am going to drive myself crazy with worry. Stay,” he ordered.

Pushing the swing slowly with her toes, she breathed in the clear, crisp air. Ellen was an avid gardener, and as soon as the last vestiges of snow had been washed away, she had started digging and transferring bulbs she had been babying inside the house.

The lush poinsettias with their startling red blossoms were spilling over the porch. She was transfixed by a bee buzzing around for nectar. The place was quiet and serene, somewhere lovely for a baby to grow and blossom.

“Ellen made lasagna yesterday.” Anthony placed the tray table before her. “I just added the garlic bread.” He gestured with one hand as he took a seat. “The wine is non-alcoholic.”

Alexia shared a plate and passed it to him. “Eat.”

He gave her a thin smile and did as she told him. “We cannot lose this baby, Lexie.”

“And you won’t. Women spot for more than reason.”

“Her workload is too much,” he said grimly, shoveling the pasta into his mouth. “I keep telling her to take it easy. But you know Ellen.”

Alexia nodded. “She enjoys her job.”

“After this, I am going to tie her to the bed and make sure she rests.”

“I am certain that after this, she will not be taking any chances.”

He was silent for a minute as he stared out at the gathering dusk. “Thanks for coming.”

“Oh, please. Where else would I be?”

“On a date with the very uninteresting David,” he pointed out.

“It’s talk like that makes him believe you do not like him,” she said dryly.

“I don’t dislike him. He is just not the man for you.”

“I agree,” she told him with a grimace, biting into her pasta and savoring the taste of garlic. “And I am trying to find a way to break it off gently.”

“Just pull off the bandage. It’s less painful.”

“Why thank you, dear brother.”

“You are welcome.” They exchanged smiles. “Any other prospect?”

“I am still involved with him.”

He eyed her contemplatively. “Don’t rush into anything,” he said sagely.

“Yes Mom.”

“I am just looking out for you, and your taste in men leave a lot to be desired.”

“That’s not true!” she protested.

“That idiot in high school.”

“I was fifteen.”

“What about the guy from college. What was his name again? Phil or Bill something.”

“His name was Dillon and he was cute.”

“And a jerk. He wanted you to do his coursework for him.” Anthony snorted. “Where the hell is he now?”

“He is a pharmacist.”

“Could not cut being a doctor, huh?”

“He failed anatomy,” Alexia said with a grin. “And he is now twice divorced.”

“You still keep in touch?”

“On Facebook. He wanted to reconnect.”

“Of course he does. I hope you told him to take a hike.”

She eyed him with a shake of her head. “Are you going to ever approve of anyone I go out with?”

“As long as he is worthy of you.” His smile vanished, and he put the dish away.

“Anthony?”

“I need her here with me, Lexie. When she is not with me, I am lost.” He leaned back against the cushions and pushed the swing gently. “It sounds pathetic.”

“It sounds like someone head over heels in love,” she murmured. “And that is something I am dying to experience,” she added wistfully.

Reaching over, he took her hand in his and squeezed.
“You will.”

She could not tell him that she was already there. Stifling a sigh, she turned her mind to more pressing matters. “I got a new client today.”

“Yeah?” He still had her hand in his. “Who?”

“Ever heard of Jay Templeton?”

“Of course. Oh, I heard about the accident on the news this morning. The news reporter is saying that the driver was speeding and ran a red light.”

“I have no idea what she was thinking. She had her daughter in the back seat of the car, and all three of them could have perished. I hate to speak ill of the dead, but-”

“She was damn careless,” Anthony added grimly. “That’s a fact.”

“You are right.” Picking up her glass, she took several sips of the ice-cold wine.

“How is she?”

“Hanging in there. Her family is around her, so I guess that’s something.”

“I was reading that the father has not been in her life.”

“Something like that. There were some custody battles of a sort,” she hissed out a breath. “It’s a shame that the child always gets the short end of the stick.”

“The family dynamics tend to be complicated,” her brother said quietly.

“Or we tend to over complicate things.”

“I agree with you.” His phone rang, and he dragged it out, his face lighting up with pleasure. “Sweetheart. You are supposed to be sleeping.”

“I just woke up. Have you eaten?”

He chuckled softly. “You should not be concerning yourself about that.”

“Let me talk to Lexie.”

“How do you know she is here?”

His wife snorted. “Oh please. The first thing you did was to call and tell her what’s happening, and the second thing was to tell her to come over and hold your hand.”

“I am not a damn baby,” he growled, handing the phone to his sister.

“You are looking good,” Alexia told her with a smile. Her brother had switched the video as soon as he answered the phone. “I hope you have a hot doctor taking care of you.”

“He happens to be the hottest. Arms bulging out of his lab coat and a butt tighter than a corkscrew.”

“I am right here.”

“And I love you, darling. But I am not blind. Lexie, he is single.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be resting?” she exclaimed.

“It does not mean I cannot do my sister-in-law a favor. I will get his contact info for you before I leave.”

“Don’t-”

“Let me talk to my honey bun.”

She passed the phone to him and rose to take up the tray table and give them some privacy. Stepping into the cool foyer, she headed into the neat as pin stark black and white kitchen to get rid of the uneaten meal.

Force of habit had her washing the dishes and putting them away. She had just wiped her hand on the dishcloth when her phone rang.

She fished it out of her pocket, frowning at the strange number.

“This is Dr. Faulkner.”

“Doctor, I hope I am not catching you at an inopportune time. This is Jay Templeton.”

She leaned against the counter top as her legs weakened. Of course, she had recognized his deep, cultured voice.

“Is something wrong? Marilee. Is she okay?”

“Physically, she is okay.”

“But you are concerned about her mental state. Has something happened while I was not there?”

“She was crying for her mother. It was not so much that she misses Sarah-Lee, but the fact that she has died is having a dramatic effect on her.”

“Which is only natural. I will be by to see her tomorrow.”

“She is being released in the next couple of days. We want to get her into a comfortable environment as soon as possible.”

“She will be staying with you?”

There was a pause before he responded. “I am pretty sure you are aware of the circumstances Dr. Faulkner. I gave up custody of my daughter initially, and I happen to have a bachelor pad. She will be staying with my sisters.”

“I see.”

“It sounds as if you don’t. But that’s beside the point. I would like to talk to you about her treatment.”

“Eventually, you are going to have to be in some of the sessions, but for now, I want to concentrate on Marilee.”

“I understand. I will see you at the hospital.”

She hung up from him and turned to see her brother framed inside the doorway.

“Was that the celebrity?”

“Yes.” Shoving the phone into her pocket, she turned to wipe the counter. “Is Ellen asleep?”

Placing a hand on her shoulders, he turned her to face him, his eyes narrowed.

“Don’t do anything stupid.”

Her eyebrow lifted. “How profound. What do you mean?”

“The man is rich and handsome-”

“Now you are pissing me off. I have been treating children of wealthy people before.”

“This one is single.”

“I am not desperate.”

“Precisely.”

“I am concentrating on the daughter.”

“And the guy will be in on some of those meetings. I know the drill.”

“I am not some groupie.”

“No, you are not, and I would like you to remember that. I have read about his reputation. He changes women like some men change socks. I would not like to see my

sister get hurt. Or celebrity or not, I would have to hurt him.”

She gave him a withering glance before shrugging off his hands. “Your confidence in me is touching.”

Grasping her hand, he hauled her in for a kiss on the forehead.

“I have the utmost confidence in you.”

Jay settled down in his office with a drink in his hand, a brooding expression on his face. Taking a sip of the scotch, he ran over the events of the day. His daughter was a complete stranger to him. And it had shown in their interaction with each other.

The little girl had not opened up to him. She had been tentative with her aunts, but they had managed to get

something out of her.

He had caught her eyeing him whenever she thought he was not looking, but as soon as he turned to meet her eyes, she would look away.

Heaving out a heavy sigh, he realized that there was going to be a long road ahead of them. He had not been there for her. He had been twenty-one when he discovered he was going to be a father, and it scared the living daylights out of him. He had just turned twenty-two the June when she had been delivered.

The natural thing had been to leave her with her mother. His father's idea, of course. His mother had warned him that it was the wrong thing to do, but of course, she could not have overridden her husband's decision. Besides this, he had been still studying while being a model.

His career had skyrocketed, and very soon, he was going all over the place. The last thing he had wanted to think about was a child. So, he had left raising her to Sarah-Lee and her parents.

Then Sarah-Lee moved out, demanding to have her own place. Jeremiah Templeton had taken care of the matter, setting them up in a very luxurious apartment with an enclosed wall. And he had also agreed to add her to the list of talents their companies represented.

She had come back to him, trying to persuade him to marry her. “We have a daughter,” she had pleaded. “We could be a family.”

But he had turned her down flat. Their liaison had been one night only, a night of drunken revelry, and he had not wanted to repeat it. He had seen her for who she was, not that he was in a position to judge her.

But he had heard from a very good source that she had deliberately fed him drink after drink so that they could end up having sex in her dorm room.

He was Jay Templeton, and even then, the name held sway. He could not have married her. Even if he came from a stellar family where mother and father loved each

other, he had heard about her reputation. She had come after him with the intention of bagging herself a very rich guy and had done it deliberately.

His father would never have allowed it either. Jeremiah had been a monster and a lousy husband and father, but his word was often final and implacable.

Tossing back the drink, he stared blearily at the painting facing the desk. It was a Jackson Colby original, and the swirl of bold colors was uniquely his. They had become friends even though they were several years apart.

Jay admired his blunt and precise manner and appreciated what he had been through in his youth.

He should have fought for her, he thought grimly. He should have stood up to his father no matter what, and he had tried doing so when Marilee was five years old and had come by for a visit.

“I want to take care of my daughter,” he had told the old man stubbornly. “I am missing out on her formative years, and I want to be there for her.”

His father had looked at him and laughed harshly. “Look at yourself in the mirror, pretty boy. The only thing you are very good at doing is posing half-naked in front of the camera. What are you going to do? Take her from her mother and leave her here with Dahlia?” he asked, referring to his wife.

“The woman is a fruit cake and would probably end up misplacing her,” he had cackled at his own sick attempt at a joke, and Jay had found himself despising him even more.

“Let her stay with that whore you had the lack of common sense to boink. That is where she belongs. That girl has us paying through our noses for the privilege of taking care of a Templeton.”

Jay had given him a sick look. “Are you sleeping with her?”

He had chuckled. "I would not call what we do sleep," he had roared with laughter at the disgusted look on his son's face. "She is not half bad either. I can see why you fell into her in the first place."

Jay had turned away, sick to his stomach, to see his mother standing just inside the doorway. The expression on her face had twisted his stomach. He had opened his mouth to say something to her, but the words had not been forthcoming.

His mother had turned around and ran toward the stairs, the tears stark in her beautiful blue eyes.

Tossing back the drink, he slammed the glass onto the desk, his body rigid. He came from a man like Jeremiah. What the hell did that make him?

“It’s good to see you up, Marilee,” Alexia greeted the little girl warmly as she stepped into the room. Someone had plaited the thick blonde hair and tied the end with a small blue ribbon. The fat plait was almost at her waist. And she was wearing ordinary clothing instead of the drab hospital gown.

“My aunts signed my cast. Daddy did too.”

“So I suppose I will have to as well.”

She nodded eagerly. She was sitting up in bed and looked freshly scrubbed, her peaches and cream complexion glowing.

Children were certainly resilient, Alexia thought. Yesterday the girl looked like death, having come close to it, and now she was smiling. “There you go.” She signed her name with a flourish, noticing Jay Templeton’s signature. Bold and arrogant.

“Have you eaten?”

“Aunt Jillian brought me breakfast, and I ate all of it.”

“You do not like the hospital food, huh?”

She shrugged slender shoulders. “You get to pick what you want to eat from the night before. But I had a feeling for Mickey D’s.”

“Of course.” She pulled up a chair and discreetly turned her recorder on.

“Marilee, I am going to be asking you some very pointed and personal questions. If at all you feel uncomfortable, just let me know, and I will stop immediately. Is that okay?”

She nodded. “Are you going to ask me about the accident?”

“Not if it brings back awful memories for you.”

She worried, her bottom lip and stared at the cast on her left hand. “Mommy was not happy.”

“Oh? What makes you say that?”

“She was always arguing. She would shout at me whenever she came home and saw me watching TV.”

“She did not want you watching it?”

She shook her head. “She said I ruined her life by being born.”

It took every ounce of professionalism for Alexia not to show her extreme anger and disgust.

“Are you certain that’s what she said?” she asked instead.

Marilee nodded. “Then, when I told her that I would like to go and live with my dad, she would scream at me by saying that I was ungrateful.” Tears shimmered in her sapphire blue eyes. “But I was just saying that because she did not want me. She said my dad did not want me either.”

Alexia felt her heart clutching in sympathy. “Do you believe that?”

She looked uncertain.

“You do not have to think about what to say to me, Marilee. Right here-” She pointed to both of them. “It’s a judgment free zone, and you are free to say whatever you like.

Do you understand?”

She nodded.

“Now, do you believe that your dad did not want you?”

“He never came to see me and is always busy.”

“He has a demanding job, and from what I understand, he did not get along with your mother.”

“She hated him.”

“She told you that?”

She shook her head. “She was telling Brian-” her lips wobbled, “Brian was her new boyfriend. She told Brian that she wanted to spite my dad and get some more money out of him.”

A picture was beginning to form inside her head of the woman, and it was not a pretty one. Apparently, she had used the little girl as a bargaining chip and had been prepared to do so for an indefinite period.

“How do you feel about living with your dad and his sisters now?”

Marilee fiddled with her blanket and avoided her eyes.

“Gram and Grandpa want me to come and live with them.”

She felt the slap of surprise at that.

“Mommy did not like them much either.”

“What makes you say that?”

“They would argue all the time, and she would refuse to have me over to see them.”

“And now they want you to come and live with them?”

Marilee nodded a miserable expression on her beautiful face. Alexia was angry that on top of the obvious abuse from her mother and the loss she was facing, she was being torn in two by the rest of her family.

Taking her right hand, she forced the little girl to look at her. “You are entitled to your own choice. It’s up to you who you would like to live with, and I am telling you this so that you do not allow anyone to pressure you into doing something you do not want to do. Do you understand what I am saying to you?”

Marilee nodded solemnly. “I have to go live with my dad.”

“Is that something you would like to do?”

She hesitated a minute. "I want to get to know him."

"And I am positive he wants that as well. What have you told your grandparents'?"

"I did not say anything. Gram was crying a lot and saying how much she misses Mommy and she would like to have me around so that she does not miss her so much."

"That's emotional blackmail, and I am going to have to talk to your grandma about that." She forced a smile to her lips when the girl looked at her. "Like I told you before, make your own choice, and I do believe it is time for you and your dad to have some sort of relationship."

She nodded.

"Will you come back to see me?"

“Try and keep me away.” She squeezed her hand gently.
“I understand you will be leaving here tomorrow?”

She nodded. “I will be going home with my aunts, and they said that I get to decorate my rooms.”

“That’s exciting. What colors are you thinking about?”

“Pink and lilac.”

“Wonderful choices. I happen to like pink too.”

“You do?”

“See what I am wearing?” She pointed to the pale pink blouse she had on beneath her steel gray jacket suit.
“Pink.” She spent a few more minutes with her before taking her leave.

Chapter 4

He was waiting for her in Dr. Grayson's office, just finishing up a phone call. He gestured her inside the room, blue eyes tracking her progress as he rapped off instructions to the person on the other end of the call.

"I do not want excuses, Jeremy. Have that file on my desk by the time I get there." Hanging up, he shoved the phone into his pocket.

"Dr. Faulkner, thanks for meeting me. How is she?"

"Looking much better than when I last saw her yesterday."

He waved that away dismissively. "I have already been apprised of her physical condition. I am talking about her mental state."

She did not take offense to his tone. As a doctor, she had been raked over the coals by anxious parents wanting to place the blame somewhere other than themselves.

“Mind if I sit?”

“Go right ahead.”

“Your daughter is suffering from neglect and lack of affection.”

“Come again?” He blinked at her.

“She believes she is in the way of everyone, and no one cares about her.”

He stared at her for a moment before raking edgy fingers through his thick blonde hair.

“That’s because I was not part of her life, to begin with,” he stated grimly.

“That’s not the only thing.” She hesitated briefly before plunging on. “Her mother told her that she was more or less a mistake.”

“What?” He stared at her aghast.

Alexia told him the gist of the conversation and felt a dart of sympathy for the bleak look on his handsome face.

She had seen from the moment she met him that Jay Templeton was trying to make up for his lack in the past, and she admired that.

“What can I do?” he asked hollowly.

“Show her that her mother was wrong. There is something else.”

“Of course, there is,” he said bitterly. “With this family, there always is.”

“Her grandparents, especially her grandmother, are putting it into her head that she should go and live with them.”

His expression became ominous. “Is that right?”

Alexia felt a shiver of dread and could feel sorry for the grandparents.

“I believe the grief is more than they can bear.” She was defending them, she realized.

“Did my daughter tell you that there was no love lost between them?” he asked sardonically. His phone was buzzing inside his pocket, but he ignored them and pinned her with intense blue eyes.

“That Sarah-Lee made their lives a living hell? She has a brother, you know. His name is Brian and has been addicted to heroin since I have known the family.”

He rubbed the back of his neck wearily. “I did not want him around my daughter and Jeremiah, my dad, was specific in his instructions to her. If he came around where she lived, he would cut off her very generous allowance.” He shook his head. “I am going to have to speak with them.”

“For the sake of your daughter, I think you should try and be civil.”

His eyes glowered at that. “I intend to be very civil and let them know that Marilee is my daughter, and I am not going to let her slip through my fingers again.” He leaned a hip on the desk. He peered at her. “Would you like to arrange a time to meet with her?”

“She will be staying at the manor, I take it?”

“Yes. I do travel a lot for work, and right now, during the spring and summer months, we are incredibly busy.” He held up a hand as she opened her mouth. “I am going to be scaling back somewhat, but I am still the head of the company and my input is integral.”

“Is there anything else?”

“Will she get better? Mentally? And what about nightmares? Will she be plagued by them?”

“Hopefully not. But she did witness her mother and the companion dying. That has had some impact on her. With treatment, with love and care, she will become whole. She is a little girl who is conflicted right now. She just needs to find her balance.”

“We intend to help her.” Sticking out a hand, he waited until she had risen gracefully and bridged the gap. His handclasp was firm and brief, but Alexia felt as if she had been branded by a hot poker.

Careful to school her expression, she pulled her hand from his and stepped back. His nearness had unnerved her to the point where she was shaking slightly.

She did not believe he noticed, but he was staring at her strangely, a slight frown between his brow.

“I have an appointment-” She made a show of looking at her watch to avoid his eyes.

“And I have taken up more than enough of your time. Thanks for meeting with me.”

“You are welcome,” she told him and made her escape.

Jay stared after her, his frown deepening. He had noticed her from the very first time she came into the

room but had been too distraught and confused to pay much attention.

She had thick natural curls that were pinned at the back of her neck and her complexion was flawless. He guessed he could describe it as coffee mixed with rich cream.

Shaking his head, he headed out of the room to peep in on his daughter. He had a pressing appointment to make before he returned to his office.

It's just hormones, she told herself as she made her way back to the medical center. Or just pure old-fashioned lust. Whatever it was, she was going to have to keep it under control. Nothing like this had ever happened to her before.

Contrary to what her brother said last night, she had been around celebrities before and always managed to

exercise control and professionalism. She was not a groupie, had never been one. But with Jay Templeton, she was a mass of nerves and unable to hold onto her composure when he was near.

She drove into the parking lot and shut down the engine, a frown on her brow. Her phone rang just then, jolting her out of her reverie.

“Anthony,” she murmured quickly. “Ellen?”

“She is home. I left her there to run a quick errand.”

“How is she?”

“Getting antsy and refusing to stay in bed, I was tempted to tie her to the headboard.”

She smiled at that. “And risk having to sleep downstairs?”

He sighed. "I thought about that and decided against it. She is fine. The doctors say the baby's heartbeat is strong." He drew in a breath and let it out. "We are hoping for the best. Is it possible for you to come over later? I am sure El would like to see you. You can keep her company while I do some work."

"Why don't you ask me to move in?" she asked him in exasperation as she exited the vehicle.

"I have been trying to get you to do just that, but you refuse to listen. How is your day so far?"

"I am just coming back from the hospital. I met with Marilee Templeton."

"How is she holding up? She lost her mother, that's got to be as rough as hell."

“It is complicated. I am heading into the building now and will catch up with you later. What do you want me to bring?”

“Perhaps a dessert. Some strawberry ice cream. She has a craving.”

“Aww, how sweet.”

Anthony snorted. “When she starts asking for coal and dirt, all bets are off.”

“You will manage. I love you, Anthony.”

He paused and she smiled. It always managed to shake him up when she said it.

“I am proud of you,” he told her gruffly. “Don’t work too hard.”

“I will try not to.” She hung up and made her way in. She spotted David coming out of his office and stifled a groan as he retraced his steps and came alongside her.

“Hi, stranger.” He took her arm in a proprietary manner as he fell into step with her.

“We have not gone out in a while. There is a play coming up over the weekend at the drama club. How about it?”

She started to refuse and then decided that it was the perfect opportunity to end the relationship. “I will let you know,” she told him evasively. “No patients to see?”

“Old Mrs. Engels is waiting for me in my office. Another of her many maladies.”

“You can tell me all about it later when I am finished.”

“Dinner?” he asked hopefully.

“I am afraid I have to stop by Anthony’s. Ellen is not feeling well.”

“I see.” He firmed his lips. “I have to be competing with your brother and his wife.”

Her eyes frosted over. “There is no competition. He is the most important person in my life.”

“I did not mean-”

“I have to go.” Without waiting for him to respond, she walked away.

“Blake.” He gave the man a brief nod. “We should talk.”

The man nodded and stepped back to let him in.

“Saundra is out at the funeral home making arrangements for the funeral.” His face was sunken, his eyes shadowed.

“Brian is out, God knows where. Would you like something to drink?” He led the way into the cozy living room.

“No thanks.”

“It’s hard.” His hands were trembling as he reached for his glass and went to stand by the mantle, his expression bleak. “I know you are aware that she did not give a crap about us,” he broke off and stared into the fireplace.

“She was ashamed of us. We are just simple people and did not fit in with her crowd.” He looked at Jay. “She told us we were the reason you did not want to marry her.”

“That’s ridiculous!” Jay said sharply. “There was nothing between us, except-”

“One night.”

Jay nodded jerkily.

“I realize that. Sandra is determined to eulogize her.”

“And make her into a martyr. I do not want my daughter to be burdened and pressured into making a decision in regard to her living arrangements.”

He had the grace to look ashamed as he stared down into his drink. “It was not my idea.”

“You were in the hospital room with her,” Jay pointed out coldly. “That was neither the time nor the place.”

“I told her that,” he muttered.

“Is she going to pursue this nonsense?” Jay demanded.

The man looked away; his expression tensed. “She misses Sarah-Lee. She happens to be a mother and she is hurting like hell. I cannot do anything for her. I have tried to be here for her, but she has closed me out. She is determined to find a way to get Marilee.”

“That’s a foolish and futile venture and you know it. I have the best team of lawyers money can buy, but I really do not want to put Marilee through anything like a custody battle, after what she has been through. Am I clear?”

Basil nodded. “I will try and talk to her.” He took a sip of his drink. “Reporters have been nosing around, trying to get a bead on a story.”

“What story?”

“It was alleged that Sarah-Lee and that man she was seeing were using.”

Jay’s expression turned hostile. “What did you say?”

Blake blanched. “I suspected that she was using the last time she came here. She was high as a kite and spouting about a part in a major movie. She could not sit still and was flitting all over the place. “

“You suspected that and never said anything?”

The man gave him a defensive look. “I did not want to interfere and besides, I heard you were on the verge of getting custody of Marilee.”

Jay rubbed his forehead wearily. “I have so much damn making up to do. My daughter does not know me. Sarah-Lee spun some lie about me not wanting her, yet she was the reason her life was ruined. She is going to have

to spend hours on therapy in order to have some semblance of a normal life.”

“Normal?” Blake choked back the liquor. “With the name Templeton? I don’t think that is going to happen.”

“I intend to keep her out of the spotlight as best as I can.” He rose to his feet and gave the man a hard stare. “Keep your wife in check. I appreciate that she is going through her grief, but I will not have her trying to use it to get to Marilee.”

“I will talk to her. Sarah-Lee’s funeral is on Saturday. I hope you can make it.”

“She was my daughter’s mother and whatever crap there had been between us, I will be there in support of Marilee.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t bother showing me out,” Jay told him briskly as he strode from the room. Dragging the phone from his pocket, he called his assistant. “I am on my way back.”

“You look well rested.” Leaning over, Alexia kissed her sister-in-law on the cheek.

“Your brother is like a mother hen. I have been in bed for the past five hours and he has resorted to threats to keep me here.”

“What threats?”

“I told her that if she does not do as I say, I am going out to find one of her colleagues and go back to her place,” he said mildly as he came into the room with the ice cream and cake.

“And you believed him?” Alexia scoffed, reaching for her bowl.

“I did not want to take the chance.” She lifted her face for his kiss, one hand curving around his neck to keep him there for a minute.

“I am counting on you to police her,” he told his sister as he moved away from the bed. “She only gets up to go to the bathroom.”

“I see what you mean. He gives the term jailer a whole new meaning.”

“That’s right.” He grinned, dropping a kiss on his sister’s forehead. “I will be back shortly.”

“If you cheat on me, I will know,” Ellen called out.

“I will make sure to take a shower before I get back,” he called right back, closing the door behind him.

“You two are so cute together.” Alexia scooped out ice cream and slid it onto her tongue. “I want what you have.”

“You will get it. Not from David, though.”

“I am breaking things off. I met someone.”

Ellen gave her a startled look. “That was quick.”

“I don’t want you to laugh or say anything to Anthony. You know how he gets.”

“You mean how territorial he is when it comes to you?” Ellen asked dryly as she spoon ice cream into her mouth. “I had not noticed.”

Alexia gave her a dirty look that had her laughing. “It’s silly.”

“Girl, I am holed up in bed with nothing to do except watch daytime TV. I demand that you entertain me.”

“How is the saga between Jack and Phyllis?”

“You know that Jack is now panting after that duplicitous Diane. “She sent the other girl an admiring glance. “You are trying to distract me.”

“Something like that. I told you it was silly.”

“You started it, now end it.”

“Remember my telling you that when I meet the right guy, I will know?”

Ellen nodded. "It happened to me when I met Anthony. There I was minding my own business and walking over to the plaza where his office is and he bumped into me. Literally. I had some packages in my hand and there was spillage. I opened my mouth to blast him and then it happened.

We took one look at each other and I ended up in his bed that night." She fanned herself. "Lord, did I feel like a slut, but the sex was dynamite. And he happened to feel the same way."

"I really should feel weird hearing about you having sex with my brother."

"But the relationship you both have is kinda weird."

"Agreed."

"Tell me who the guy is," she urged.

“I should not have mentioned it.”

“Honey, don’t make me hurt you. I am a pregnant woman and I have been advised to take it easy, but for this, I will make an exception.”

Alexia laughed softly. “It’s Jay Templeton.”

Ellen stared at her; the spoon suspended halfway to her mouth. “Well, hell.”

“Yes.”

“It might be just lust. I have seen his pics and I have to tell you that even though I am head over heels in love with your brother, I would definitely do him. ” Really?”
Alexia gave her a skeptical look.

“No,” she admitted ruefully. “I would probably accept a kiss and a hug but nothing more. Jay Templeton huh?”

He is not only loaded but has been a playboy since he was nine.”

“I know all that and have been trying to talk myself out of doing something incredibly foolish.”

“Like?”

“Like having sex with him. Maybe that will get him the hell out of my system.”

“Aren’t you treating his child?”

“Yes,” she sighed. “I am supposed to be professional and all that and I know it is a norm for him to have women dropping like flies in front of him, but it does not negate the fact that I am in lust.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Nothing, at least not now. I have a job to do and Marilee is my first priority. I am going to concentrate on that.”

Ellen lifted her bowl. “I am rooting for you honey and as soon as the deed is done, I want details.”

Jay was sprawled in the comfortable bean chair inside the little girl’s room, watching as she chattered with his sisters. He had left the office and picked her up from the hospital.

The conversation on the journey to the manor had been sparse, neither of them having the faintest idea what to say to the other. But he wanted to change that. He had stayed for dinner, and she had been animated as she dug into her lamb chops and brussel sprouts.

Jillian and Jessica were determined to make her feel comfortable, bending over backward to make that happen. They were right now discussing the color scheme and wallpaper patterns for the room. Jay was content to let the conversation flow over his head, contributing only when he was addressed.

He was also messaging his assistant and making him know he would be coming in late tomorrow.

Marilee might not be living with him, but he wanted to be here for breakfast to ease her into getting to know him. He had no idea what she liked to eat or what her favorite books and toys were. He was also planning to take her out to museums and parks, just as soon as she was well enough.

And there was the matter of school. He was going to find out if getting her a tutor is preferable to sending her back to school. They had left the hospital parking lot with reporters trailing them, but his security team had put a stop to that as soon as they made the turn off to the private road leading to the manor.

“Daddy?” He felt a jolt at the sound of the childish voice calling him and at first had no idea what to say.

“I am sorry. What?”

“Aunt Jessica is asking if you are ready to leave?”

“Not until you are all tucked in,” he told her with a smile.
“How are you feeling?”

“A little tired.”

“Does your arm hurt?”

“Only a little.” She stifled a yawn.

“I think the medication is kicking in.” Jay rose to his feet.
“Would you give me a minute with her?”

Both women nodded. Jillian patted her hand as she left the side of the bed. “We will be back to make certain you are okay.”

She nodded.

Jay waited until the door had closed behind them before taking a seat on the edge of the bed. “Do you understand why you cannot live with me full-time?”

She nodded. “You live in an apartment, and it does not have a yard.”

He gave her an amused smile. “That’s not exactly the reason, but close enough. I also travel a lot for business and here there is a lot of household staff to monitor you even when my sisters are at work. But I will be by to have breakfast whenever I can. Is that good enough?”

“Aunt Jessica said that I will see you on weekends.”

“Whenever I am in town.” He took her hand in his. “I intend to make up for the time I have lost and will not be apart from you again.”

“Thank you Daddy,” she said solemnly.

“You are more than welcome. Now how about a story before I go?”

“I would love that.”

Chapter 5

The funeral was a media event. There was a mix of entertainers and people from various industries. The large chapel was packed to capacity, with reporters milling around the parking lot, cameras ready to capture the images of people who were gathered there.

Alexia had decided at the last minute to attend because she wanted to make a note of the child's reaction to seeing her mother in a box. She had met with her again briefly yesterday, taking notice of the environment and how she was adjusting.

She had not seen Jay Templeton and was not certain if what she had felt was disappointment or relief. She had told Ellen how she felt and spent the night twisting and turning inside the bed.

She was on a fool's errand. Jay Templeton was way out of her league. Not just in terms of his wealth, but the

circle he belongs to. There were too many obstacles, and she should stay clear.

Her gaze was drawn to the front pews where the family of the deceased was seated. On the opposite side, there was the Templeton family. The two sisters looked chic and elegant, their blonde beauty a perfect foil to the expensive black dresses they had on.

Jay Templeton was wearing a simple black shirt over faded jeans. His blonde hair was brushed back from his forehead and the somber expression on his face did nothing to detract from his classical good looks.

Marilee was surrounded by them as if they were shrouding her from disaster. The little girl looked pensive, one hand clutching her dad's Jillian had a comforting hand on her shoulder.

Suddenly he turned and their eyes connected, sending a jolt throughout her body. His eyes bored into hers for what seemed to be an eternity. He gave her a cursory nod before turning back around.

Taking a deep fortifying breath, Alexia clutched the back of the chair, her knees buckling. Oh Lord! she thought, shakily. What on earth was happening to her? but she knew. Like she had told Ellen, she was falling in love with a man who was completely unsuitable.

Jay hated funerals on principle. Each time he was at one, the memories of the ones he had buried would come flashing back.

His mother's funeral had been a society event with his father standing upright, shoulders back and chest out as he accepted the condolences from persons pretending that her death had come from a natural cause.

He had stood there looking at how peaceful she looked and realized that she had taken the decision, albeit a cowardly one, to get out of her misery.

His free hand clenched into a fist as he stared straight ahead. He was here for his daughter and when it was prudent, he would take his leave. He had felt her eyes on him and had felt compelled to turn around.

As soon as their eyes had connected, he felt the pressure in his lower belly. She was a beautiful woman, but in his line of work, he was used to beauty.

But there was something about her that got to him. He really did not have time to be sifting through anything remotely resembling a relationship right now. He needed to concentrate on his daughter. His last relationship had been six months ago and that was unusual for him.

Emily had been more than suitable. She was a voice coach and very successful in her line of work. He admired her and the lovemaking had not been without passion. She was the one who had told him that if he was not there all the way.

“I got pieces of you darling and am not satisfied with that. I am falling in love and before I get all the way there, I want to know you are even part way there. When you feel that you want a commitment, I am here.”

But he had left without a backward glance. She already knew that he could not completely commit, he was not wired that way.

He looked down as he felt the pressure on his hand to see his daughter looking at him.

“Dad?”

“Yes?”

“Why is the box not open?” she asked in a stage whisper.

“I suppose her parents requested a closed casket.” He pressed her hand. “And they want to remember her the

way she looks in that photo.” He nodded to the life-sized portrait of Sarah-Lee.

She was laughing, white teeth dazzling against coral-painted lips. Her wheat blonde hair was loose around her face, light green eyes sparkling in mischief. “As I would like you to remember her too.”

The little girl nodded and directed her gaze toward the photo.

Jay’s eyes landed on Sarah-Lee’s family. He had not heard anything back from Blake in regard to his warning and considered it a good sign that he had not received a summons from their lawyers.

Saundra had barely acknowledged him when he went over and offered his condolences. Blake had been studiously courteous as if trying to make up for the lack from the rest of the family.

Brian was in a world of his own. His green eyes were spitting fire, each time he happened to look in their direction and the animosity was clear.

Jay had told Blake that he did not have a problem sharing his daughter with them, but he was having second thoughts since some disturbing information had come to light. The detective on the case was a friend of the family and had told Jay that both Sarah-Lee and Brian had been using.

“Heroin and cocaine. And not recreational amounts. They were as high as kite; it was a wonder Marilee was spared.”

That had pissed him off to the point where if she had not perished in the accident he would have had to have words with her.

And he blamed himself as well. He should have stepped up and played his part as a father. Should have rescued his daughter before now. It had taken a near miss to make him realize that she was the most important person in his life.

She had decided at the last minute to attend the funeral reception. She had some errands to run and had promised to stop by her brother's house later in the evening. But she had felt compelled to be there.

"Thank you." She handed the key fob to the valet and stood at the edge of the fence to admire the quiet beauty of the weathered stone building. She knew the history behind the place. Sarah-Lee had bought the property for her family as soon as she came into the spotlight.

She vaguely remembered the interview in one of the society rags where the woman had waxed eloquently about family being the high point of her life and the reason for her success. She had also heard the rumors that the woman had turned her back on that same family as soon as her career started to skyrocket.

She came to a halt as she made out the solitary frame leaning against the black sedan. Jay Templeton was all

by himself, a tense expression on his face and a cigar in his mouth.

She hesitated, wondering if she should intrude on his obvious need for solitude. Before she could fully make her mind up, he turned and their eyes connected. She felt the familiar jolt in her system as he stared at her.

“Doctor Faulkner.” Pitching the half-smoked cigar into a patch of loose gravel, he straightened up and beckoned her to join him.

Taking a deep breath, she made her way carefully over the cobbled stone of the driveway until she was standing next to him.

“I hate funerals,” he muttered, rubbing his hands up and down his jeans. “The formality of it, the finality of it makes me ill.” He waved a hand at the people gathered inside the large family room. “People chatting and eating as if it is business as usual.”

“The cycle of life. The absolute insult is death,” she murmured.

He gave her a curious and appraising look. Her perfume was subtle and slightly exotic. She was her usual neat and tidy self; the navy-blue pants suit a perfect foil for her flawless complexion.

Her thick dark curls were pinned at the back of her head and not for the first time he wondered what it would feel like between his fingers. The thought jarred and nagged at him, feeling like teeth nibbling at his extremities.

Shifting restlessly, he put some distance between them by walking over to stand under the shade of a hanging cypress. “I came out here because the atmosphere inside the house is a little oppressive.”

“How is Marilee?”

“She is with her grandparents. Sandra is weeping and inconsolable and Blake is trying to be stoic. I am not sure

it is working.”

“We do put up a coping mechanism to deal with grief.
And Marilee?”

“Surprisingly strong and dry-eyed.”

“Children are quite resilient. I once went to a funeral where an eight-year-old had lost his mother and during the gathering at the home, he wanted to know when he could go upstairs and watch his favorite show.”

His dark blue eyes twinkled. He had come outside to get away from the curious eyes and speculative looks and was finding her company relaxing and rejuvenating. “He was exercising what he knew as his priority.”

Alexia nodded.

“You are saying that she will get through this.”

“Not just the funeral,” she said casually.

“You are referring to the fact that her mother was now exactly parent of the year.” His mouth twisted at that.
“Neither am I.”

His eyes met hers and he felt it again, the frisson of something that scorched his flesh. “You still have time to be better.”

He nodded, forcing himself to concentrate on anything else. Her nearness was doing crazy things to his insides.
“And I intend to exercise that privilege.”

“Good.” She glanced at her watch. “I will just peek in for a few minutes before I have to go. I came with the intention of checking on Marilee.”

“Thank you,” he murmured.

“You are welcome.” She stood there looking at him for a few seconds before turning on her heels and going toward the house.

His breath staggered out and he patted his pocket to see if there were any more cigars left. His nerves were frazzled, and he could still smell her perfume wafting in the air.

His narrowed gaze took in the gentle sway of her hips and the graceful way she moved. He had felt the insane urge to haul her into his arms and kissed those sexy lips of hers. With a shaky sigh, he made his way back inside, determined to stay away from her.

“I just buried my daughter!” she hissed, the tears rolling down her cheeks. “All I have of her is that child out there. He never wanted her in the first place and now all of a sudden, he is playing the doting father. I am not going to stand for it.”

“Keep your voice down.” Blake hurried to close the door of the library to avoid curious ears and eyes. He had brought her in here to reason with her. There were reporters present, people, who would love nothing better than to write some more damaging things about the family.

He had heard the whispers floating around. Sarah-Lee’s reputation had not been the best and it sickened him to hear how his daughter had lived her young life.

“I refuse to be consoled. I had to tolerate those people in my home when I knew how they felt about Sarah-Lee. She was not good enough for him to marry, even though she bore his child.”

“Not that again,” Blake murmured wearily. “You are going to get hold of yourself and behave appropriately. People are watching us like hawks, and we are going to have to put on a united front. I cannot have you falling apart.”

He stared at her through watery green eyes, and he felt his heart fluttering in sorrow. Sarah-Lee had abandoned them completely, preferring to hang out with her rich socialite friends.

No amount of begging and entreating had made any difference. He had given up trying, but his wife had called almost every day trying to make her change her mind.

She had also kept their granddaughter away from them, something that had been unforgivable. She was dead and he was sorry for the way of it. But he also felt a sense of relief.

She was his daughter and he loved her, but her rejection had cut him to the very core. He was not going to pretend that she had been the daughter of the year.

They had spoiled her rotten and had lived to pay the price. She had also been the one to introduce her brother to the destructive use of hard-core drugs which was slowly ruining his life.

“Why don’t you take a sedative and go upstairs?” he suggested gently.

“You just want to get rid of me.”

“I want what’s best for you, darling. I know you are hurting but lashing out at the Templetons is going to do more harm than good.” Moving forward, he took her arm, feeling a jolt of pity when she sagged against him like a rag doll.

She had held onto hope that one day their daughter would come to her senses and mend what was broken between them, but now it was too late.

“I know all of what they are saying about her Blake,” she whispered as she leaned against him. “But under all of that, she was still my little girl.” She sniffed. “I know I cannot get her back, but I want some sort of peace. The Templetons introduced her to that lifestyle.” They stopped at the door and her tear-streaked face lifted to his.

“Did you know she was involved with Jeremiah Templeton? She told me and I could not believe it. He took advantage of our little girl and for that, I can never forgive him. I am happy he is dead.

She was never good enough for the family except for one thing. They used her, both father and son used her body and dumped her like yesterday’s trash.” She buried her face into his chest and started weeping again. “I want revenge for what they did to my baby and I am not going to stop.”

Blake felt the weariness invading every area of his body. He had been dreading something like this. After Jay Templeton had paid him a visit, he had tried talking to her about her decision.

When she had started crying, he had given up for the time being, with the intention of trying again after the funeral. With a somber expression on his face, he led her out the door and up the stairs.

Jay watched her as she sat with his daughter. He was in one corner of the room, nursing a glass of champagne. The family had spared no expense in Sarah-Lee's sending-off party as he termed it.

He had sent a check from the company to help with the funeral expenses, justifying it with the fact that she had been his child's mother.

His eyes drifted back to the woman seated on the comfortable sofa with his daughter. They appeared to be deep in conversation, their heads close together. At intervals, his daughter would laugh at something she said.

At one point, she reached out and touched the woman's hand, her touch lingering. But they seemed to be getting along famously.

"She is very good, isn't she?"

He had not heard his sister come up and was startled at the sound of her voice.

“She is.” He dragged his eyes away from them to look at his sister.

“I am just thinking of an appropriate time to slip away from here. But we have to wait until she is ready.” He flicked a hand at his daughter.

“I suppose so.” Jillian looked around the room, a curl of distaste appeared on her lips. “Most of those who are gathered here, could not stand Sarah-Lee.”

“Including us?” he asked her sardonically.

She gave him a quick glance. “You are not to blame, hon.”

“For which part?” he asked with a bitter undertone. “The one where my daughter was subject to a less-than-

stellar lifestyle? She was using drugs for Christ's sake!"

She placed a hand on his arm. "And we never knew that."

"That's the point, isn't it?" he took a swallow of his champagne, his eyes drawn to the woman and child. She would make a very good mother, he mused. He knew she was merely doing her job, but she had a way about her that was undeniable.

She made people feel comfortable. He had spent a few times with her and had sensed that. He guessed it was what made her so good at her job.

"Where are Blake and Sandra? I saw them earlier, but they seem to have disappeared."

"Speak of the devil," he murmured as Blake came back into the room. He was wearing a somber expression and his eyes were bright with grief.

“He is heading this way.”

“I don’t want to hear anything he has to say.” Putting her glass away, she left him to deal with the man who was approaching.

“Everything okay?”

“No.” Blake touched his arm briefly and they headed over to the mantle. The crowd had dispersed somewhat, and most of the food was consumed. The rest of the crowd hanging around were curious people waiting to hear what else was happening.

“I had to give Sandra a sedative to calm her down. She is sleeping now.”

“That’s expected. She just buried her only daughter.”

Blake nodded; his expression tensed.

“What is it?”

“She told me something explosive.”

“Like?”

Blake cleared his throat. “She told me that Sarah-Lee was involved with your father.”

Jay did his best to school his expression but was not quite certain he achieved much success.

“Where did you hear that?”

“Sarah-Lee told her. Good Christ! You were both involved with her?”

Jay felt the sickness roiling inside his stomach. He had hoped that a dirty piece of laundry would not rear its ugly head. "It was not like that." Even saying it, brought back the very unpleasant memories of his father boasting of his liaison.

"I bet she is comparing notes," he had cackled.

"Wondered who came up with the better man. You were young and callow when you had her. I was mature and even if I say so myself, my dick is legendary. I certainly gave that gal something to talk about."

He had been disgusted to the point where he wanted to hurl and had left the room in a dead run, almost mowing down his mother.

"How was it like?"

"I am not going to rehash that piece of garbage. What my father did was despicable, but Sarah-Lee was a willing participant." He heaved out a harsh breath. "I found it sick then and it still turns my stomach."

I am not going to apologize for what he did, because he was a grown man who should have known better. But then again, Jeremiah did pretty much whatever the hell he pleased,” he added bitterly. “I am not like him and it took me years to realize that.”

Blake gave him a contemplative look. “I do believe you are not. But it does not make a difference to Sandra.”

“What do you mean?”

Blake sighed and rubbed her hands up and down his arms as if a chill had invaded his body. “It means she wants revenge. She is blaming the Templetons for what Sarah-Lee was involved with. She is determined to get our granddaughter.”

Jay stared at him sharply. “I told you to speak to her.”

“I did, and she is not to be dissuaded.”

“Well then, that’s too bad.” His expression became harsh. “Then I must get in touch with my lawyers and

apprise them of the situation. Have you reminded her that Marilee just lost her mother? Or the fact that there were illegal drugs in her system? I have friends in the local PD, Blake, and I have heard a lot of things.

Your daughter was running away with mine and the court is not going to look too kindly at that fact. I am very sorry for your loss, but I am not going to sit by idly while your wife plans a vendetta against the family. We have already been through too much as it is.”

Chapter 6

The play was outstanding. The actors and actresses did justice to the plot. The theater was packed to capacity, but David had managed to get them box office seats.

Using her binoculars, she scanned the crowd, her lips parting as she spotted a familiar figure. Jay Templeton was resplendent in a burgundy dinner jacket that perfectly offset his honey-blonde hair.

Her eyes strayed to the lovely brunette on his arm. The woman was wearing a dazzling green gown that made the ice-blue wool dress she had chosen from her wardrobe, looking frumpy or so she thought.

Her heart jittered as she noticed him bent toward the woman, giving her his utmost attention. She knew who it was of course. Amelia Perkins, the well-renowned and sought-after voice coach – the best in the industry.

Lowering her binoculars, she placed them in her lap and did her best not to look in their direction. He had his own private box, of course, the best seats in the house which was facing across from them.

She could see him from her peripheral vision and studiously tried to avoid looking at the couple.

“Isn’t that Jay Templeton?” David leaned over as he whispered.

Pretending that she was just noticing them, she took a quick glance and affirmed.

“I thought they were no longer seeing one other,” David commented.

“Obviously they are.” She hated that her voice sounded curt.

“Are you okay?”

She gave him a nod. “Just a slight headache. The play is about to begin.” She sighed silently as he seemed to be distracted by the cast making their way on stage.

Try as she might, she could not concentrate on the love story unfolding before them. She was so acutely aware of his presence that it was as if he was seated next to her.

Concentrating fiercely, she managed to block him from her thoughts and lose herself in the story.

Jay’s eyes wandered around the vast theater, a feeling of restlessness cloaking him. He had agreed to the date a few months ago and had a vested interest in the cast members.

He was here more because of work than anything personal. He had stated to Amelia that he was not ready to start anything back up yet and she had told him she understood.

“We both have vested interests in the players darling, so we can make this a working deal.”

He stared at the woman seated across from his box in surprise. It was her! Dr. Alexia Faulkner, was looking quite unlike her professional self. Her hair was loose around her face, the curls fairly dancing.

Her face was in profile, and he could see her rapt expression as she took in the scene. The dress was very striking against her skin. His eyes narrowed as he swung his gaze to look at the man who had just whispered something in her ear.

Lover? he wondered, surprised at the knot of something alien inside his chest.

It was definitely none of his business who she was seeing. Then why did it feel as if he wanted to go and drag the guy away from her? Had she noticed that he was here? Of course not. She was wrapped up in both her date and the play with the exclusion of nothing else.

She was his child's psychologist and that is exactly what it was going to be. Dragging his eyes from her, he forced himself to watch the performance on stage. But he could not help his eyes wandering back to her.

The second time he looked over, she turned her head and their eyes connected. For the spell of a few seconds, they stared at each. His heart picked up speed and he could hear the blood roaring through his ears.

What the hell was happening to him?

She was the first to look away and he had to force himself to do the same. He could not breathe, it felt as if the air was backed up inside his lungs.

Muttering his excuse, he made his way from the box and toward the narrow passageway that led to the balcony. It was a clear and beautiful night, with the stars twinkling overhead.

Patting his pocket, for a smoke, he dragged out the slim gold case and took out a thinly wrapped cigar. Using the lighter encased in the lining, he flipped the switch and dragged the smoke into his lungs, eyes narrowing as the smoke billowed upwards.

Instead of calming him, the tobacco was making him even more agitated. His hands were shaking slightly and his heart was still racing. Leaning against the wall, he propped one booted foot against it and closed his eyes as he took a drag.

A slight sound alerted him that he was not alone. Opening his eyes, irritated that his solitude was invaded, he was about to take his leave when he saw who it was.

“I am sorry. I had no idea that anyone was out here. It was a little stifling and I decided-” her soft cultured voice trailed away as he leveled his blue gaze on her.

“I will leave you alone.”

“Stay,” he told her abruptly. Dropping the cigar at his foot, he ground it out and went over to brace his hands against the rail. “I had no idea you were a fan of plays.” “I am.” Alexia wandered over to stand a few inches from him.

As usual, her subtle perfume invaded his senses. “Anything to do with the arts. The cast members are yours?”

“Most of them,” he said briefly. He struggled for a moment and then spoke. “The guy you are with, are you seeing him?”

“Yes. Sort of.”

Turning his head, he gave her an amused look. “Which is it?”

“He invited me to the play and I thought it was the perfect time to tell him it’s over.”

He felt a jolt at that. “Any particular reason why?”

She should tell him to mind his own business but found herself saying. “There are no sparks.”

“And that is important to you.”

“Yes. Your date is quite lovely.”

A smile curved his lips. “We are not exactly on a date. Amelia has worked with several of the actors, most of them actually, and wanted to see her handiwork.”

“Oh.”

“We were seeing each other.”

“But not again?”

“No. Are you comfortable breaking this guy’s heart?”

She shifted from one foot to another and looked in front of her. “No.”

“But you are going to do it anyway.”

“I have to.”

“Because you need spark.”

“Yes.” She turned her head to stare at him, and he felt the desire burning slowly in his lower body. Her lips were coated in a slick nude color, the bottom one pouty and he wanted to taste.

Dragging his eyes away from her face, he stared out at the passing traffic. It was highly inappropriate what he was contemplating. He was here with Amelia, and she was here with a date she was planning on breaking it off with.

He could not afford to get involved with her.

“I have to go-”

“I need to-”

They both started for each other at the same time. The moment their bodies connected, the heat sizzled and popped. His hands closed around her waist like a steel band, his mouth claiming her lips in a drunken foray.

Alexia's hands wandered up his chest and around his neck, fingers clutching at the fringes of hair at his nape. He inhaled her scent, his tongue desperately tangling with hers.

The kiss took on something wild and primitive, and he felt as if he was drowning. Her slender body was mashed against his, and he could feel his cock burgeoning, swelling against her middle.

He wanted more – he thought hazily, dragging at the scooped neckline. A serrated groan escaped him when he felt the delicate lace of her bra. He popped the front clasp, and her small breasts were bare for his hands to reshape. He swallowed her moans, his body searing when he felt the unyielding flesh of her nipple.

He had no idea what would have happened next if the sound of laughter drifting toward them had not penetrated the fog of desire.

Dragging his mouth from her, he swore viciously as he put some distance between them.

Bracing his hands against the rail, he fought for control, not daring to turn his head to look at her.

“I am not going to apologize,” he told her woodenly.

“I did not expect you to.”

He turned then, his heart skittering as he took in her swollen lips and glowing dark brown eyes. She had managed to fix her dishabille, but he could still see the imprint of her nipples against the material.

“Good night, Jay.”

She had started to walk away when he caught her at the arched doorway.

“Break the guy’s heart and come to me tonight,” he told her hoarsely.

“No.” Dragging her arm from him, she pressed her lips together. “We both need time.” With that, she turned and walked away, leaving him standing there.

Going back to the rail, he dragged much-needed air through his lungs, his body roasting. He could still feel her slender body quivering in his arms, her small breasts with the sensitive nipples branding his chest.

He was hard, his erection throbbing painfully. Uttering a hoarse laugh, he wondered at the irony of it all. He was undeniably and incomprehensibly attracted to the doc!

“Hey. You, okay?” David’s voice dragged her out of the fog that shrouded her. She had found her way back to her seat but was no longer interested in what was happening on stage. Her body was vibrating, her nipples painful, and she could still feel his lips buried in hers.

She had been so tempted to say yes to his invitation to go back to his place and had lied when she told him that she needed time. It was not that. It was the fact that he was Jay Templeton and was accustomed to women

falling at his feet. She could not afford to be one of those women.

She wanted more from him, more than a few months in his bed. She was holding out for permanency.

“Just a little tired,” she said in answer to David’s query.

“You were gone so long. I was about to come and look for you.”

“I wanted some air.” She settled back against the padded seat and tried not to notice that Jay Templeton had returned to his booth.

But in a few minutes, she turned her head, and the minute she did, she caught his gaze on her. Their eyes connected; the air sizzled between them. Her gaze locked with his, and she could feel her breath collecting inside her throat. Her fingers curled into fists, and she had to bite down on her lip for the moan not to escape.

This was getting ridiculous! Forcing her gaze from his, she concentrated fiercely on the play going on in front of her and ignored his magnetic presence.

Jay was having similar reactions. He could not sit still. He had never been so affected by someone in his life, and it was frustrating.

“Darling?” he jumped slightly when Amelia touched his arm.

“Yeah?”

“The curtain is about to come down. What do you think of Britney’s performance?”

“It was splendid,” he said distractedly, struggling to recall who the hell Britney was again. “She shows promise.”

“For a Brooklynite, she shows more than mere promises. Her voice is mellifluous, and her diction fluent. I am damn proud of her.”

Jay smiled at her indulgently. He might not have any sexual feelings for her, but Amelia was the genuine thing. She had risen from obscurity to fame in a few short years and had never forgotten where she was coming from. Her bluntness and lack of coyness were one of the things that had attracted him to her in the first place.

She was also a survivor and a woman who knew what she wanted.

“As you should be. I am incredibly proud of you myself.”

She slid him a glance, touching his arm lightly. “But not enough to invite me back to your place later?”

He shook his head, genuine regret on his face. “I am afraid not.”

“Who is she, darling? Anyone I know?”

“Why do you assume that there is someone else?” he asked her lightly, willing himself not to look over the opposite booth. “I just got my daughter back, and there are a lot of complications.”

“I still think that there is someone. But if you don’t want to tell me, that’s fine.” I only hope that she will get out of you what I have been trying to for the past months.”

“And that is?”

“Emotions, darling,” she told him wryly. “Something that has been sorely lacking in our relationship.”

She said no to dinner, instead inviting David back to her place so that they could have a private conversation.

“Would you like something to drink?” She avoided him when he reached out to take her into his arms.

“White wine if you have it.” He was looking at her strangely. Ignoring the pounding of her heart, she went into the kitchen to collect the wine from the cooler and two glasses.

Standing by the sink, she pressed her hands against the sink and took several deep breaths. She was so tempted to hurry him along so that she could go to Jay, but she was going to practice restraint.

Pouring the wine into the glasses, she took them with her into the living room. He was reclined into one of the double sofas as if he expected her to join him. She handed him the drink and perched on the edge of the sofa facing him.

“What do you think of the play?” he asked conversationally. If he noticed the tension in the room, he gave no indication of it.

“The plot was well written, and the casts were talented.” She took a sip of the wine to ease the dryness of her throat.

“Not that you were paying that much attention,” he said teasingly. “You seemed very distracted.”

“A little bit.”

He heaved out a breath. “We can continue with the requisite small talk, or you can tell me what’s going on,” he offered quietly.

“You are right.”

“You are breaking it off.”

She sent him a slightly grateful glance that she did not have to say the words.

“I am sorry.”

“For what?” He shrugged one shoulder as he stared at her. “I knew for months now that your interest was waning. You could have afforded me the courtesy of telling me before now.”

“You are right.” She cupped the glass between her fingers. “I am not in love with you, and I knew it since the beginning. I should not have allowed the relationship to reach this far.”

“You used me.” There was a definite edge to his voice. “You never let me in. I understand that you and your brother are very close, and I also understand why that is.”

I do not have a sibling, so therefore, I am not going to sit here and tell you that I can relate. I am an only child, and as such, I would never understand that sort of family dynamics.” He took a sip of the wine.

“But I am not blind Alexia. I have seen the way your brother looks at me, and I know in order for you to go ahead with any sort of relationship, he has to give his wholehearted approval. That never happened where I am concerned.”

She had to agree with him there. Anthony has to give his stamp of approval in order for her to even contemplate a permanent relationship with anyone.

It was the same way with him. He had fallen head over heels with Ellen at the first accidental meeting but had told her that his sister had to like her before he proposed.

“I never used you,” she responded stiffly. “And you are right. Anthony and I are very close. And you know why.” She sighed softly. “I had no intention of hurting you, David, but I cannot continue in a relationship that is not going anywhere.”

He nodded, expression cool and distant. “We work at the same place, and it is going to be awkward bumping into each other.”

“It does not have to be,” she said swiftly.

Draining the glass, he rose to his feet, and she did the same. “Thanks for your honesty. At least it leaves the door open for me to start pursuing Amanda.”

Her eyes widened as she stared at him.

“Dr. Gaiters?”

He laughed softly at her dumbfounded expression.

“Surely you cannot be all that surprised. We are in the same field, and we spend a lot of time together. I just wanted to give you the courtesy of making up your mind. I care about you a great deal Alexia, but we have not been intimate in months and a man has needs.”

Her eyes flashed. “So, you are basically telling me that you have been cheating on me with Amanda, the entire time?”

He laughed again. “Like I said, we had to work several late hours and one thing led to another.” He handed her the glass. “She has been hounding me to tell her the status of the relationship. Now I can tell her that I am free and single and ready to roll. I will see myself out,” he told her coolly as he headed out.

She waited until the door had slammed shut behind him before moving to secure the lock. She watched from the window as he backed out of the driveway, the tail lights disappearing from view. Well at least that was over and done with, and he did not appear to be too cut up about it.

Gathering the wine glasses, she went to put them into the sink and put the kettle on to make tea. Her phone rang just as she was taking the cup out of the cupboard.

“You always have perfect timing.”

“How was the play?”

“Terrific. I am now single.”

Her brother grunted. “He was never good enough for you.”

“So I keep telling myself.” She shook out the pouch and put it into the cup.

“Any regrets?”

“None. How is Ellen?”

“Sleeping. She was feeling some cramps earlier, but the doctor said they are not detrimental. I gave her some tea

and insisted she gets some sleep. There is this guy at my company-”

“Don’t!” She could not help but laugh. “I am going to enjoy being solo for now.”

“Don’t enjoy it too much. You are going to find the right guy, sis.”

“It has to be one that has similar characteristics to my only sibling.” The kettle whistled, and she turned off the flames and poured the water.

“I have some very unique ones. It’s hard to find a guy who measures up to me.”

“You are absolutely right.”

“Are you really okay?”

“More than. I feel light.”

“I always knew the guy was a burden.”

“He accused me of losing interest because of you.”

“How did I factor into the equation?”

“We both know the answer to that.” She slid on the stool and watched the steam rise up. “Sometimes I think we are too close.”

“No such thing.”

He could have called her back. Amelia was flexible like that. Even though he had told her that he was no longer interested in her that way, she would have accommodated him.

But he respected and cared for her too much to do that to her. He was not interested in her. As a matter of fact, he could still feel the taste of Alexia on his tongue. She had tasted like nectar and was just as intoxicating.

And he was unable to get her out of his mind. He had watched her leave as soon as it was curtains and had felt the sharp nagging jealousy when the man put a hand at the small of her back. The only thing that had kept him tethered was the fact that she had told him about the breakup.

She had also told him she needed time. How much time would that be? And was he making the biggest mistake yet? She was treating his daughter and he should keep his distance. He had tried to, but that had not worked. His awareness of her was so acute that it was almost tangible.

Prowling the length of the bedroom, he walked jerkily to pour himself a drink. He was sexually frustrated and horny as hell.

He doubted he was going to get any sleep tonight. He had also promised his daughter to take her to stop by and have breakfast with her in the morning. Tossing back the drink, he made his way into the bathroom to take a cold shower.

Chapter 7

There was a lot to be said about the resilience of a child. He had arrived at the manor at precisely seven A.M. while she was getting ready to come downstairs.

He was talking to his sisters when she came racing down the stairs as fast as her broken arm would allow her.

“I hear walking is a thing,” he told her teasingly. “I don’t think you would want to have the other arm broken, do you?” He held her awkwardly as she came into his arms.

“How are you?”

“You came.”

“I said I would.” Taking her hand, he led the way toward the dining table. “I understand you had a restless night last night?” he asked, pushing under her chair.

Marilee nodded. “I had a dream about Mommy.” She looked at her aunts and then at him.

A maid was busy putting the scones and eggs in front of them. Jay poured the cup of coffee and reached for the bowl of fruit.

“If it is too painful, you do not have to repeat it.”

“I want to,” she said solemnly, using her uninjured arm to cut into her eggs. “Dr. Alexia told me to always say what’s on my mind.”

Even the woman’s name had a distinct effect on him.

“As you should,” Jillian told her with a smile.

“What was the dream about?”

“That she was calling me from a distance, but no matter how I tried, I could not get to her. And I did not want to anyway.”

“Why do you think that is?” Jay asked her mildly.

The child smiled. “You sound like Dr. Alexia.”

“I do?”

She nodded. “I think it’s because she was always so mean.” She frowned a little as she stared into her orange juice. “Grandma says she misses her, but they were always arguing.”

“What about you?” Jessica asked her quietly. “Do you miss her?”

Marilee thought about that for a minute. “I don’t know. She was my mom, but she never hugged me or anything like that. I tried to hug her at times, but she would brush me aside. And she never told me she loved me.”

Jay felt the spike turning inside his chest. It was a mirror of his own childhood. His mother had tried with her many limitations but had been overpowered by a man who had been determined to call the shots. Now his daughter was feeling the very same inadequacies.

He wanted to apologize, but what the hell could he say? He had not told her he loved her, even though he did, but the words were hard to say.

“Do you believe you are loved by us?” Jillian asked her and earned a grateful smile from him.

Marilee nodded. "I got to decorate my own room, and we do things together." She looked at her dad. "You came here to have breakfast with me even though you are so busy."

"I will always try and make time for you," he assured her solemnly.

"I know that. I also know that what Mommy said about all of you is not true. She said you did not want me."

Jay's mouth tightened at that.

"I am happy you realize that we do want you. Now let's talk about school. You did say you wanted to go back?"

She nodded eagerly. "I do. I have lots of friends there."

"We were thinking of talking to your teacher so that you could get to start going back after the break. How does that sound?"

“I can hardly wait!”

It was more than a bit awkward to see David and Amanda together when she got to the medical center. She was certain he was making a production of the fact that they were now a couple. Usually, he would already have been in his office tending to patients or seeing to paperwork and inviting her in for coffee.

But this morning, he was in the lounge area sitting on the arm of Amanda’s chair, one hand intimately combing through her hair.

She could see that Amanda was trying to remove herself, but he held her there. She never thought he would be so spiteful. But then again, she had never really known him that much.

“Good morning,” she called out a greeting, ignoring the curious looks from the other doctors as she went to get her cup of coffee. Deliberately avoiding looking at him, she skirted the area where they were seated and headed for her office.

“I see David is showing his true colors,” Arlene said darkly as she stepped into her office.

“He has been circulating gossip about you.”

“I did hurt his pride by breaking up with him,” she said mildly as she collected her messages.

“Happy riddance, I say. You deserve better.”

“Thank you for that. Let me allow the caffeine to seep into my bloodstream before you send in the first patient.”

“Take your time.” Arlene waved a hand. “The files are on your desk.”

“Thank you.” She went into her office and closed the door behind her. Seeing David so early in the morning had put a decided edge to her day. She had thought they would remain friends, but she realized that would not be happening.

But whatever the outcome and whether or not she goes into a relationship with Jay Templeton, she was happy she had pulled the plug on the relationship.

Determined to get him off her mind, she took a sip of the excellent coffee and started to read the report. She had the free clinic this evening as soon as she was finished here, and that should take her mind off her problems.

She had told Jay that she needed time and she was going to take it. Pulling the folder toward, her she started to read.

Saundra sat on the edge of the precisely made-up bed, her eyes watering as she stared around the room. She had left it just the way it was when she had spent time decorating it, hoping that she would come home for weekends or whenever she was not on scene.

But that had never happened. Her daughter had found all sorts of excuses why she could not come and stay.

When she found out that she was carrying Jay Templeton's baby, she had come running home, not knowing what to do, and Saundra had comforted her and coached her on what to do.

She had done exactly what she had been told, and the Templetons had finally accepted that she was telling the truth about the baby's paternity.

They had both been so excited. "Now he is going to have to marry you," she had told Sarah-Lee in satisfaction.

“We were together only one night, Mom.”

“One night that had produced an heir. It will be a son, and they would have no other choice but to make it official.” But it had turned out to be a girl, and Jeremiah Templeton had been his usual obnoxious self.

“No way in hell is my son going to marry a tramp because he made the mistake of knocking her up. Not under my dead body.”

Her poor daughter had been devastated, and she had been enraged. They thought they were too good for the likes of them, and her daughter had ended up taking the brunt of the rejection.

It had turned her into a bitter young woman who was not satisfied with anything. The tears dripped from her eyes as she stared around the room. It was decorated in pink and cream. She had kept Marilee when Sarah-Lee was going out of town to shoot her scenes. And she had fallen in love with the beautiful little girl.

Now that her own daughter was dead, she wanted another chance. She wanted her granddaughter. She needed something to live for. Right now, her life felt so empty, and there was a hollow space where her heart should be.

Her husband did not understand. Pressing her hand against her stomach, she could feel the physical pain there. It would never be the same again. Her life would never be full again unless her granddaughter were living with her.

Firming her lips, she sprang off the bed, a new sense of purpose bringing light to her eyes.

“You are still cutting yourself.”

Alexia made a note on her pad as she watched the girl pull her sweater down.

“What to explain? Why is it still happening?”

The fifteen-year-old remained silent, a mutinous expression on her pretty face. She had chopped off her beautiful auburn hair, and it was now in a riot of curls around her face.

Danielle Stabler had been in therapy for the past six months, and Alexia was afraid that it was not working. Every time she thought she was getting through to the girl, something happened to slow down the process.

She had insisted that both parents arrive for the session, but from the look of things, only the mother was present. And she did not look too pleased to be waiting in Arlene’s office. But Alexia wanted to communicate with the girl first before bringing the mother in.

“Danielle?”

She shrugged her thin shoulders, eyes downcast.

“If you do not speak to me, we are not going to be able to fix things. This room is a judgment free zone, and I believe I already said that.”

“I am fine,” she mumbled.

“Obviously, you are not. Will you tell me what’s going on? Where is your dad?”

Her lips quivered a little before she turned her head away.

“Somewhere.”

“That’s not a place. Is that’s what’s bugging you? Your dad is not around?”

“They are getting a divorce, but I really don’t care.”

“But that’s not true, is it?” she prodded quietly. “You care a great deal. Why don’t we talk about it?”

“I don’t want to. He has a girlfriend, barely old enough to vote.”

“He told you that?”

“I saw her when I went to his apartment. She was coming out of his bedroom.”

“Did he know you were coming?”

“He did, and it did not matter to him. I hate him!”

“Have you told him how you feel?”

“Yes. He told me that he has his own life to live, and I should learn to accept his choices.”

“What did you say to that?”

“I told him to go to hell.”

“What did he say?”

“He told me to go home and not come back until I learn some manners and respect.”

Her lips curled in disgust. “How can I respect a man like that?”

“Where is he now?”

She shrugged again and plucked at the hem of her sweater. “France, I think. His production team is shooting a documentary film there.”

“What does your mother have to say about all of this?”

“She still loves him. She is an idiot.”

“No, she is not,” Alexia said quietly. “Love is not something you fall out of as soon as the other person starts getting disagreeable.”

“He left us.” Danielle pointed out, green eyes shimmering with tears. “He no longer loves us.”

Leaning forward, she gave the girl an intent look. “There is something I would like you to do for me. I am going to be bringing your mom in here in a few minutes, but before I do so, I would like you to repeat some things out loud. I am beautiful.”

“I am not-”

“No.” Alexia shook her head. “I am not going to accept anything else from you. Please repeat the words.”

“I am beautiful,” she muttered.

“Do you believe you are?” Alexia gestured to the full-length mirror in the corner of the room.

“I am not certain.”

“Look in the mirror and tell me what you see?”

She did, slowly studying her reflection. “I used the scissors to chop off my hair. Mom almost had a cow when she saw it.”

“Why did you?”

She shrugged, still staring at herself critically. “I did not care anymore.”

“Did it make you feel better?”

She shrugged again. “At the time, I felt a lot better.”

“And now?”

“I don’t know.”

“I am going to ask the question again. Do you feel beautiful?”

“Not really.”

“Why not?”

“My hair.” Lifting a hand, she patted the curls. “My hair was always so beautiful and thick. The girls at school used to envy me.”

“It will grow back.”

“I suppose.”

“I am going to bring your mother in here, and I would like you to talk to her, really talk to her, and tell her how you are feeling.”

She nodded.

Pressing the intercom, she told Arlene to send the woman in.

“You are not eating?”

“I am monitoring my calorie intake,” Ellen told her. “This is my first day out of the prison your brother had me in, and my stomach is protesting. But please don’t let me stop you.”

“You are back at work.”

“Doing office duties. My very overbearing husband threatened me with bodily harm if

I so much as step foot into a courtroom. I am doing clerical duties, and research for the cases I have pending. The doctors say I am on the mend, but we are still not taking any chances.” She sipped her lemon water with a grimace. “Now, I want to hear all about your progress.”

“What progress?” Alexia asked wryly.

“The last time we spoke, you were on a mission. To seduce the handsome Jay Templeton and Anthony told me you broke up with the dreadful David.”

“Not soon enough,” Alexia told her about what happened when she walked in this morning.

“That prick.” She snorted in disgust. “Was he like that the entire day?”

“I went out of my way to avoid him.”

“So what are you waiting for in regards to Jay?”

“We sort of hooked up at the play,” she told her sister-in-law details about the kiss on the balcony.

“It sounds hot and heavy.”

“I got cold feet when he suggested we go back to his place.” She stirred her drink, plucking the strawberry from her drink and plopping it into her mouth. “I am beginning to have second thoughts. Do I really want to be part of his harem?”

“He has one?”

“You know what I mean.” She waved a dismissive hand. “I am smart and have worked hard to be where I am. And Anthony is going to have a fit when and if he finds out who I am interested in. He already warned me not to be an idiot about Jay Templeton.”

“I love your brother to distraction, but this is your life. You have feelings for this man, honey, and it is not going away.”

“I am not the type to have a casual fling El.”

“And maybe it is time you throw caution to the wind and just go with your feelings. Call him up and set a meeting.”

“To have sex?” she asked with lifted brows.

“To talk or just to enjoy each other. Live a little.”

She spent the time pacing when she got home. She had told him she needed time, but did she really?

Picking up the phone, she went to get his card and sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the embossed words. Using a well-manicured nail, she traced the lettering that made up his name and studied the title.

It simply said – CEO and the name of the company. Running her fingers over his name again, she contemplated. Ellen had told her not to overthink it. But

she could not help it. She was old-fashioned in that sense.

Perhaps it was the fact that she had grown up without parents that she had this idea of wanting a family of her own.

She was in her thirties and still had not found anyone who came close to what she was looking for until now.

And he was not suitable.

Could she just jump into something with him and casually tell him bye afterward?

She shook her head in response to her own question.

But she could not deny her own feelings or even ignore them. She was a planner, and for the first time in her life, she was going to be doing something so out of character that it was as if she was a whole different person.

Biting her lip and firming her shoulders, she dialed the number. It rang out, and the call went to voicemail. Without leaving a message, she hung up and laughed derisively. She had gotten her answer.

When he noticed the missed call and if he happened to call back, she would make up an excuse. As despicable as it sounds, she would perhaps tell him that she had called to check on Marilee.

She was about to get up and change her clothes when the phone started ringing. Heart slamming inside her chest, she looked at the LED and realized that he was calling her back.

Taking a deep breath, she slid the icon across. "Hi."

"I missed your call. I was in the shower." He paused a little, and she waited. "I take it you have made a decision?"

“Can we talk a little?”

He chuckled at that. “You want to talk.”

“I want to justify to myself that I am really doing this.”

“And what exactly are you doing?”

“Making the conscious decision to have sex with you.”

This time he laughed out loud, the sound relaxing her somewhat. “I see. And what have you come up with?”

“I am still trying to sort it out inside my head.”

“Is that something you do often?” he asked her musingly.

“I am afraid so.” Sitting on the edge of the bed, she rubbed her palm over her thigh.

“I am a planner. I weigh the pros and cons of the situation before ever going ahead.”

“Sounds serious. Do you usually put pen to paper?”

“I do.”

“I was being sarcastic, but wow!”

She laughed nervously. “See what you are up against.”

“Have you done your due diligence about me? What have you come up with?”

“Nothing so far.”

“Liar,” he murmured.

“You are right. The odds are against you.”

“Because of my reputation.”

“That and the fact that I am treating your daughter.”

“That should not be an issue, considering that I am not your patient,” he pointed out.

“But still...” She plucked at the sheets.

“Let me simplify things for you, but first, I would like an honest answer to a rather straightforward question. Are you attracted to me?”

“Yes.”

“I am also attracted to you. Next thing – did you take care of that thing you said you would?”

“I did.”

“So we are both single and disengaged. We are also adults and will be going into this thing with our eyes wide open. Am I correct?”

“Yes.” Her fingers were working the material feverishly.

“Then the only thing left for us to do is to act on what we are feeling. I have not been able to get you out of my mind, doc. And ever since we exchanged that explosive kiss, it has only gotten worse.

My daughter needs a hell of a lot of attention now, and there is the issue with her grandmother that I will probably have to deal with. But what we do on our own personal time is nobody's business. Agreed?"

She nodded and, belatedly realizing that he could not see her, murmured yes.

"Then the next thing to do is to make the time."

Anthony placed a possessive hand over her stomach and gave her an inquiring look.

"How is the babe?"

"Behaving itself." Ellen placed her hand over hers. "I only puked once, and that was from the conch soup I had when I was having lunch with your sister."

“You never did tell me what that was about.”

“We cannot just have lunch?” she asked him mildly.

“Is she okay? I know she dumped the loser she was seeing, but I wanted to call and find out if she was over it.”

“Considering that she was the one who did the dumping, I would say that she is great.”

“Good.” Leaning over, he kissed her on the lips slowly. “I think she might be interested in Simon.”

She gave him a startled look and burst out laughing.

“What’s so funny?”

“Simon is a pussycat. A woman like Alexia needs a strong man who is not going to be intimidated by her accomplishments and her beauty.”

“Simon is great at his job and very assertive,” he protested.

“And your sister would eat him up in one bite.”

“You make her sound like a damn barracuda,” he grumbled.

“She is a strong, intelligent woman. Simon is definitely not for her.” She kissed him on the cheek. “Allow her to make her own choice.”

Chapter 8

She deliberately put him out of her mind, and it was not very difficult to do so. Her morning was packed with patients and follow-ups she had to do. Danielle had come back, this time with her dad. She had stopped by to check in with Marilee and was pleased to see that the little girl was doing so well.

To her great relief, her dad had not been there. The little girl had informed her that he had an early meeting.

After their conversation this morning, she was not certain she would have been able to face him. She was planning on having sex with him and was excited and apprehensive at the same time.

“Mr. Stabler, it is good of you to come in.”

“It concerns my daughter, so, of course, I was compelled to be here,” he spoke in the authoritative tone of

someone who was always in charge and one not used to having his decisions questioned.

He was middle-aged with thick dark brown hair, threaded through with gray that added to his distinguished good looks. Danielle had inherited his beautiful green eyes.

“My wife told me she is still cutting herself.” His mouth tightened at that.

“I have given her everything a girl her age could ever desire.”

“Except your attention,” she murmured quietly.

“I beg your pardon?” he asked her icily. “What has she been telling you?”

“She said you are involved with a young woman.”

He had the grace to blush, the color riding high on his ruddy complexion.

“I can do what I darn well please,” he muttered. “I am an adult.”

“And Danielle is a frightened teenager who is watching her small world falling to pieces.” Alexia folded her hands into her lap and leveled a gaze at him.

“We are not aware of the incredible impact we have on our children, not aware that they watch us and make mental notes of what we do. She said you and your wife are getting a divorce?”

“Yes,” he muttered, shifting in the chair and pleating the seam in his chic dark blue pants. “We sat her down and spoke to her. We assured her that nothing will change.”

She stared at him with raised brows.

“You expected her to believe that?”

He had the grace to look ashamed. “We cannot expect to stay in a marriage where Lorelei and I are not happy. We decided it would be worse if we stayed together for the sake of our daughter. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Instead of responding, she asked a question of her own. “Have you pursued any other avenue? Therapy?”

His eyes flashed as he stared at her. She waited as he seemed to be struggling with a decision.

“We tried,” he finally said, huffing out a breath. “The marriage became strained when we tried for years to have a child, and nothing happened. There was nothing wrong with either of us. We were checked out thoroughly.

The childlessness put a toll on us, and when we were ready to give up, Danielle came.” He sighed, leaning back against the chair. “but it was too late by then. There was nothing worth salvaging. We tried for her sake, but something had been broken and cannot be fixed.”

“She is hurting Mr. Stabler. I know you have your own life to live, and I do not expect you to become a monk. But right now, your daughter needs you the most, and she is suffering from a lack of attention. I am not telling you to give up your personal life or anything like that, but I am imploring you to act before it is too late.

She is at a critical age just now and is very impressionable. Give her the time and attention she deserves.” She met his gaze. “I understand you travel a lot?”

“For work, yes.”

“Then I suggest that whenever you are in town, try and carve out a time for her. And whenever she is coming over, you might want to make certain that your personal life is not there for her to encounter.”

He gazed at her for a moment. “How serious is this cutting thing?” he asked gruffly.

“It’s essentially a call for help. It’s psychological but can be reversed.”

“How?”

“By long-term care.” She gave him a level glance. “I can only do so much and no more. It will have to be you and your wife who will have to make the move to start the healing process. You said you spoke to her about the divorce. Have you told her the real reason for the decision?”

He shook his head. “We just told her that it was best for all parties involved.”

Her eyebrows lifted at that, and he lowered his gaze.

“That sounds like something a lawyer would say.”

“It was,” he said ruefully.

“A lawyer does not know your daughter, Mr. Stabler. You do.”

He folded his hands between his spread thighs and contemplated his buffed nails.

“You suggest we talk to her.”

“Yes. Not just brushing her off. She is on the verge of becoming a young lady now, and she happens to be a smart girl.”

He nodded at that. “She chopped off her hair.”

“As a sign of protest. She wanted your attention, and hopefully, she has succeeded in getting it.”

“Another notch on our belt.” Jillian looked like she was vibrating, the excitement bursting from her.

“Another award. The newspapers want to do a write-up on the agency.”

“I am certain you and Jessica, as well as the PR department, can take care of that.”
Jillian stared at her brother with a frown.

“They specifically asked for you. Darling, this is a positive thing. The Templeton name has been taking a beating over the years and now we are getting good press for a change. They want to interview all three of us.” She sat down on one of the padded seats in front of the desk.

“And I am not in the mood for a sit down with the press,” he told her mildly. “I have too much on my plate right now, and I am pretty sure that they are going to find a way to work in the situation surrounding Marilee.”

“We will tell them beforehand that it is off-limits.”

“And they will listen, of course,” he said sardonically.

“It’s Nadine Hopton.”

His gaze sharpened at that. “At least she is decent and respects boundaries.” He muttered.

“And not one of those you have slept with.”

He gave her a mild look. “When is this interview supposed to take place?”

“The network would like it for the last week in April. Which is perfect. The spring art festival is the first week in May, and we need all the good publicity we need.”

“I will think about it.”

“We are supposed to give our answer by next week.”

He nodded.

“Another matter.”

He glanced at his watch.

“I know you have the meeting with the finance department in another ten minutes. But this is important. I called Marilee’s school earlier today.”

“And?”

“They are suggesting that she starts the first week of May. The schoolroom teacher will be sending some work for her to play catch up. I still think we should hire her a tutor as well.”

He nodded. “I was thinking of that myself.” He ignored the intercom and continued. “I promised her to be there to tuck her in later tonight.”

“She is looking forward to it.” She rose gracefully and sent him a smile. “We have not heard anything else from the Brinkleys. Should we be worried?”

“Blake told me he has spoken to his wife. Whether or not she has given up on her vendetta remains to be seen.”

“Marilee is settling in nicely, and Dr. Faulkner is doing wonders with her. I hate for anything to rock that particular boat.”

The mention of her name had a startling effect on him. They had made a date to meet tonight at her place, and he had been trying his best to try and put it out of his mind.

After the conversation with her last night, it had been hell for him to fall asleep. The kiss they had shared on the balcony had sent him into a tailspin, and he could still taste her lips.

“Jay?”

Mentally shaking his head, he gave her his attention. “I agree.” His intercom sounded again, and with a wave of her hand, she left, closing the doors behind her.

“Give me ten minutes, and then send her in. And Jeremy? I need the file on Marcia Brooks. Let the board know that I am running a little behind schedule.” Hanging up, he touched a key on his laptop. Damn if he was not distracted.

“I would like to apologize for my inappropriate behavior over the last few days.” David said quietly as he took a seat across from her. Alexia felt wrung out and dry from the last few sessions and had completely forgotten to have lunch.

Arlene had brought in a sandwich for her, but she had been turned off by the soggianness of the bread and decided to have something at the cafeteria here.

She had been so involved in the file she was perusing that she had not noticed him at first.

Looking up as he took a seat, she stared at him with narrowed eyes.

“Inappropriate?” Her tapered brows lifted. “Why don’t we try for a more apt word – like I don’t know – disgusting and juvenile. Oh wait! Those are two words.” She went back to sipping her coffee and looking at the document.

“I guess I deserve that.” His submissive manner had her looking at him again, and she could see genuine regret on his face.

“Did Amanda urge you to come and make nice?”

He hunched his shoulders slightly. “We spoke about it, and she insisted that I should try and make amends for the way I have been treating you.”

“Good woman. I am not certain you deserve her,” Alexia told him dryly.

“Look Lexie-” He started to reach for her hand and decided against it. “You hurt me, okay? I thought we had something special. When you accepted my invitation to the play, I felt hope surging inside me. I told myself that this was it.

You were going to try and make things work between us.” He shrugged. “I knew we were as close as we were supposed to be, but I kept hoping. I was pissed and hurt when you dropped that bomb on me right after a very enjoyable time at the theater.”

She thought about it for a moment and then nodded.

“I suppose I am at fault as well. And I accept your apology. I take it that things are going well between you and Amanda?”

He nodded, a smile flitting around his lips. “She is not as intimidating as you are, which is a plus.”

A frown touched her brow. “You found me intimidating?”

A smile curved his lips. “When you get a chance, take a long look in the mirror. You are beautiful and untouchable. It’s not just the fact that you are very intelligent, but you have the kind of beauty that gives ice queen a whole different meaning.”

He held up a hand as she opened her mouth. “It makes a man want to don a jacket and try and get through the layer of ice.”

“You are saying I am cold.” Alexia did not know how to feel about that. The first guy she had been with when she was in medical school had accused her of being a block of ice. “Your body is here, but your mind is elsewhere.”

“No,” he shook his head. “My analogy might be flawed. You care about your patients, and that makes you a damn good doctor. But as a woman...” He shrugged eloquently.

“It took me a while to approach you, and I was shocked and pleased when you said yes. But while we were together, I had a distinct feeling that you were never all there.” He reached out and hand to cover hers. “It just might be that you have not found that special person to unlock the emotions inside you.”

He shook his head again. "I flattered myself into thinking that it would be me. Forgiven?"

She nodded, her mind swirling as she tried to process what he had just told her. "I wish you and Amanda all the best."

He gave her a rueful look. "You are certainly hard on a man's ego Lexie. You are not even one bit jealous, are you?"

"I am not," she acknowledged, a regretful smile touching her lips. "But I am hoping that we can be friends. "We work in the same building David, and at times, we have to consult on a few cases every now and then. I do not want any awkwardness between us.

He nodded, removing the hand he had placed over hers. "You are right." He nodded at the folder in front of her. "Tough one?"

"Something like that. But I am making progress."

“What about the Templeton case?” he asked suddenly.

Alexia felt her heart spike at the name. She was meeting him later and did not want to think about it. Her heart was already quickening inside her chest, and she was trying to block him from her thoughts as much as possible.

David and Michael from medical school had accused her of being icy and unattainable, but one encounter with Jay Templeton had left her feeling as if she was neck-deep inside a furnace. She was definitely not an ice queen when it came to him.

“It’s going well,” she said casually. Picking up her cup, she took a sip of the now lukewarm coffee and realized that her appetite had disappeared. “Marilee is making remarkable progress.”

“And the dad is now more involved?”

“He is.”

David nodded. “I am not the expert that you are in that field, but I do believe that involvement makes all the difference.”

“It does.” She forced a smile. “I am so happy we are no longer enemies, David.”

“So am I.” He gave her a wide smile as his pager went off. “Thanks for listening to me.”

They both looked up as Amanda made her way toward them.

“I hope I am not interrupting.” She divided a gaze between them.

“Not at all. We were just clearing up a few things.” David assured her with a smile.

“And I have you to thank for the olive branch David just extended,” Alexia said with a smile of her own. The couple looked like they were genuinely happy together, and even though the relief was self-serving, she was glad it worked out for David. She had been feeling guilty about the way she handled things.

“My pleasure,” Amanda told her.

“See you around, Lexie.” Taking Amanda’s arm, he steered her away from the table.

Alexia felt a slight tug of something inside her chest before returning her attention to the document in front of her.

She stopped by her brother's place on her way home after calling to find out if they were already home.

"I did some grilling. El had a hankering for steak and hot dogs," he told her.

As soon as she stepped foot outside the vehicle, the scent of meat sizzling reminded her that she had not finished the salad she had had for lunch.

Her stomach protested as she made her way around the back, where her brother and his wife were reclining on chaises and enjoying the very pleasant spring evening. Ellen was balancing a tray on her lap and biting into the steak while Anthony had a beer in his hand.

"You took your time." Rising from his chair, he came forward to help her up the steps and onto the space next to him.

"Traffic." Waving to her sister-in-law, she toed off her heels and wriggled her toes to get rid of the kink.

“What are you having?”

“Everything,” she told Anthony as she eased back against the cushions and closed her eyes gratefully. “It has been a very long day.” Turning her head, she looked at Ellen. “How are you?”

“Still in jail.” She cast a look at her husband, who was busily sharing a plate. “I have a very vigilant jailer who monitors me even when I am at the firm. And to make matters worse, he has the other partners spying for him. It’s amazing that there is no sense of loyalty in the workplace these days.”

Alexia laughed softly. “They are reporting to him now?”

“Can you believe it? My own colleagues. I went to the courthouse to speak to the PA, and by the time I left, this one was already calling me.”

“I am doing my husbandly duty,” Anthony told her mildly, not in the least bit put out by her obvious annoyance. He handed his sister the tray and sat at her feet. Propping them on his lap, she prepared to enjoy the meal.

“You are being overbearing,” Ellen snorted. “Tell him, Lexie.”

“I am not about to get involved.”

“I should have known you would not side with me against your precious brother,” she complained. “You are two of a kind.”

“You know that I am on your side about a lot of things, honey, but I am just not getting involved in this argument.”

“Good choice,” Anthony said approvingly, rubbing the balls of her feet automatically.

“In the meantime, David surprised me with an apology.”

“Is that right?” There was an edge to Anthony’s voice as he continued to massage her feet.

“It was very nicely done, and I admitted that some of the blame was mine.”

“He was an asshole, and I had a good mind to drop by and tell him so in no uncertain terms. He had no right to speak to you like that.”

She gave him a look of fond exasperation. “I am happy you didn’t. I kept expecting you to come charging into the medical center and start a war.”

“I had to stop him,” Ellen said mildly as she reached for her glass of milk with a grimace. “I reminded him that it was your place of work, and it would be embarrassing to go there and start anything.”

I also reminded him that I was pregnant and would not be bailing him out of jail for assault. He finally listened. You bring out the protector in him,” she added dryly.

“I am happy you talked some sense into him.” Alexia nudged his thigh with one foot. “I can fight my own battles, honey.”

He only grunted.

“I want an honest opinion about something.”

“You know I am all about honesty.” Ellen flashed her a smile.

“And I happen to be biased where you are concerned.
“Anthony told her.

“Then this question is directed at you, El.” Using the napkin, she blotted the sauce from her lips. “Do you think I am cold?”

They both stared at her in surprise. “I don’t get what you mean.”

“And that should not even be a question,” Anthony retorted. “You are the warmest person I know.”

“With you and, of course, you, Ellen, because I happen to love you guys. But David said something to me that had me thinking.”

“You should not be listening to anything that loser says,” Anthony muttered.

“He was not the only one. Remember Michael from med school?”

“That was another sore loser. He was her first and another bad choice,” he explained to his wife.

“Ah. The guy you went all nuclear on and almost got locked up for assaulting him.”

“I had forgotten about the beating you gave him. Anthony, you really have to stop.”

“You are my sister,” he said simply as if that explained everything. “And I am going to always look out for you.”

“If I was not so confident in his love for me, I would be feeling very insecure.” Putting away her empty glass, she looked at Alexia. “Why did you ask the question about being cold?”

“Because both guys said it. David also said I am intimidating.”

“That much I can agree with,” Ellen told her with a grin. “Honey, you are astonishingly beautiful, and you do have that untouchable aura going on. The first time Anthony introduced us, I was afraid that one word from you and our relationship was going to be history.”

First of all, your beauty intimidated me, and then the way you have of speaking, that superior cultured voice of yours, was another factor.”

She stared at her sister-in-law open mouthed. “You never said anything.”

“You turned out to be the best, so there was no need.”

Alexia turned to look at her brother. “I have nothing bad to say about you. I personally think you are a close second to the love of my life.”

Chapter 9

She took a long warm bath and shaved her armpits, hesitating about shaving her legs and her pubic hair. Hoping that the warm bath would relax her, she added a glass of wine and leaned her head back against the padded headboard.

She was going into this with her eyes wide open. She had already given herself the pep talk about thinking as a sophisticated woman. She might have quite the feelings for Jay Templeton, but she was not going to inquire as to the status of the relationship.

If he just wanted her in a physical sense, then so be it. She was mature enough to accept that. Her hands trembled as she picked up her wine glass. She was expecting him in the next hour.

“I promised Marilee that I would get her all tucked in and then I will be by after that.”

Taking another sip of the wine, she lifted her left leg, and she smoothed the sponge over it slowly.

She should have shaved, she thought. But now it was too late.

Ellen had taken her aside and whispered, making certain her husband's attention was otherwise occupied.

"Any progress on you know what?"

"I am seeing him tonight."

Ellen had given her a thumbs up and told her that she wanted a report.

Climbing out of the bath, she reached for the towel and wrapped it around her. Pulling the pins of her hair, she dragged her fingers to untangle it. Sitting on the vanity stool, she contemplated her face. She had inherited her looks from her mother.

She had the same shaped face and thick dark curls. She had decided since she was a teenager that she would never introduce chemicals to her natural beauty. It was harder to manage and maintain, but at least once a month, she would go and get it professionally done.

Leaving it loose, she went to select a brand-new peignoir she had ordered from Romano's online and went downstairs to await his arrival.

"You and Lexie looked decidedly cagey when she was leaving. What were you two talking about?" Anthony asked her causally as he rubbed the cream into her skin. She had started early to apply the cream to the areas of her body that were going to stretch during the pregnancy.

"Just because I am having a baby does not mean I have to lose my shape and the elasticity of my skin."

“Really?” Her half-closed eyes watched as his large hands moved over her belly. She had not started showing yet and had to admit that she was looking forward to when she started to. “Whenever you two have a conversation, do I grill you into telling me what it was all about?”

“Why are you being so defensive?” His eyes narrowed as he stared at her. “Now I am more than curious. Has she met someone?”

The widening of her eyes gave him the answer.

“Who is he?”

“I never said anything,” she pointed out defensively.

“Darling, you have the most expressive face I have ever seen, and for a lawyer, you are a lousy liar.”

“The cases I close give credence to my ability to have a poker face,” she told him loftily.

“You do that when you as well.”

“Do what?”

“Deflecting. I happen to know you a hell of a lot. So, spill. Who is she seeing?”

“She told me in absolute confidence, and I will feel like the worst sister-in-law if I betray her.”

He merely cocked a brow at her and waited as he recapped the bottle and put it away.

“She is going to kill me and will probably never speak to me again.”

He stared at her with a frown. “Who the hell is this guy?
It’s a guy, I am assuming?”

“Of course it is.” Ellen sat up against the pillows, one hand moving over her stomach. It was too soon to feel her baby moving yet, but she could swear she was feeling some flutters.

“Ellen?”

She gave him a cross look and shifted the sheets over her lap. “It’s nothing, really. I think it might be just lust. The guy happens to be a looker, and I think the attraction is natural.”

“I am still waiting...” his voice petered off as he stared at his wife, understanding dawning. “Please tell me it’s not Jay Templeton.”

“I can, but then I would be lying. Look-”

“She must be out of her damn mind!” he exploded, lunging to his feet. “And you did not try and dissuade her? Talk her out of this nonsense?”

She bristled with anger. “She is a grown-ass woman who can do pretty much as she pleases.”

“Jay Templeton?” He started to reach for his phone, and she snatched it away. “Give me the phone.”

“Anthony Blair Faulkner, I love you to death, but if you do what I suspect you of doing, I am never going to forgive you.”

His eyes flashed as he glared at her. “Do you have a sibling? No,” he answered his own question. “Lexie is my sister, and it is my job to look out for her. Jay Templeton is a user of women, plain and simple. He is going to eat her up and spit her out just like that.”

He snapped his fingers for effect. "I will not allow that to happen."

"What are you going to do?" she shouted, her temper snapping. He was right when he said she did not have a sibling.

She was the only child of very doting parents and had never known what it was like to vie for attention. When she had met him and realized that it was not something casual for her, she had thought his relationship with his sister very strange until he had told her the circumstances that had forced them to look out for each other.

But even so, there were times when she found it difficult to come to grips with his air of protectiveness for her. "Go over there and stop; what is going to happen? I might not have a sibling, but I happen to be a woman, and nothing you say or do will alter what is inevitable. They are attracted to each other-"

"He wants to jump her bones because of the way she looks, and if she is willing, then all the better." He was

spitting mad, and more than that, he was afraid. Alexia might be tough and independent, but when it comes to men, she was innocent.

She had no idea what she was getting into with this guy.
“I cannot believe you encouraged her.”

“Yes, I told her to go for it,” she retorted, eyes flashing.
“She admitted she has strong feelings for him, and I encouraged her to act on them.”

“Strong feelings.” He sat on the edge of the bed, his chest deflating. “As in, she is falling in love with this guy?”

“Something like that.” She sighed a little at the look on his handsome face. “She is strong, and I am positive that she is able to handle herself.”

“I have to talk to her.”

“Not today. And I do not think it is a good idea.”

He gave her a look before getting up and going to look out the window. She watched as he shoved his hands into the pockets of his sweats, his shoulders hunched. His face was in profile, but she could almost read his thoughts.

Anthony Faulkner had assumed the responsibilities of being a parent at the young age of eighteen, and with his personality, it had been taken seriously.

He had confessed to her that, at first, he had shied away from it. He was mourning the loss of both parents and had been tasked with taking care of his teenage sister. But there was no way he would have considered the alternative, which had been foster care.

He had given up going to college, got a job, and found a small place for both of them. He had juggled two jobs while going to night school and in between had been there for Alexia.

When she expressed her desire to go to medical school, the thought of the expenses that would involve had been daunting, but he had been determined to support her in following her dreams.

He was a big brother and parents all rolled into one and old habits die hard.

“She will be fine,” Ellen said softly.

“Yeah.” He muttered, not sounding the least bit convincing. “And you are right. She should know what she is doing.”

She opened the door to admit him, her heart hammering inside her chest. He had called when he was on his way and told her he would be there in a few minutes, and she had been waiting.

“Hi.”

“Hi.” They stood there staring at each other for a minute, his blue eyes wandering over her face, taking in the tumble of dark curls and the black see-through lace she was wearing. The feeling of shy awkwardness enveloped them both, and they had no idea what to do.

“Are you going to invite me in?” he asked softly, eyes twinkling.

“Oh, of course.” Stepping back, she waited until he had stepped inside before closing the door behind him.

“Would you like some wine?”

“Do you have anything stronger?”

“I do.” As she preceded him toward the kitchen, she wondered if he had to gather liquid courage in order to be with her. Shrugging the disturbing thought away, she

went to the liquor cabinet to get the bottle of Jack Daniels. "It's my brother's brand."

"I thought you were an only child."

"No." She gestured for him to take a seat around the square island in the center of the kitchen. "He is older by four years." She poured half into the brandy glass and decided to have a little of it herself. "We lost our parents to a vehicular crash when I was only fourteen. How is it?"

"Not bad."

"But you are used to better."

He shrugged and did not respond to that. "He had to step up and take care of you."

"Yes. It was difficult for him as he was only eighteen when he assumed the role of a parent. But to his credit, he fitted in seamlessly and made it look easy."

She took a sip of the brandy and grimaced as the fire spread through her stomach. "I am not exactly a drinker,"

she explained when he cocked a brow at her. “The occasional glass of wine at dinner.”

“Are you about to get drunk?” His tone was teasing, and she had no idea if it was the brandy or his soothing voice that was lulling her into a comfort level.

“No chance of that happening.”

“Good.”

He continued to stare at her for so long that she started to shift on the bench. “How is Marilee?” she blurted out.

His expression told her that he knew what she was doing by mentioning his daughter.

“She is coming along. But you already knew that.” He cupped the glass between his hands and gazed at her. “Do I make you nervous, doc?”

“A little,” she admitted.

“I have to admit that I was very surprised when you called.”

“Why?”

He shrugged. “You struck me as being a woman who does a lot of deep thinking and never acts on the spur of the moment.”

“I told you that’s exactly who I am.”

“And yet here I am, inside your home at the hour of nine. And you are more than ready for me.” He flicked a hand at her choice of clothing.

“I feel quite brazen and naked,” she admitted, tempted to wrap the lace around her more securely. “I tried talking myself out of it.”

“And?”

“It did not work.” Using the tip of her tongue, she moistened her bottom lip, drawing his gaze to it. Alexia felt the weightlessness inside her belly and realized that the rate of her breathing was increasing.

“I am glad,” his deep voice had dropped, his eyes still on her lips. “All the way here, I was trying not to appear too eager.”

“You were – are?” she whispered huskily.

“Like a schoolboy with his first crush.” He finished the brandy and put the glass away. “Are you going to finish that?”

“I don’t think I should.” Her entire body was trembling as she got to her feet slowly. He came around to meet her, hands reaching up to cup the back of her neck, lifting the heavy curls, his fingers caressing the flesh.

“I agree with you. I want you lucid and responsive for what I have in mind for us.”

“Sounds ominous.” Her mouth was parched as if she had been denied water for a very long time. His cologne was subtle and discreetly expensive. His thin navy-blue sweater clung to a rather impressive chest. His blonde hair was curling at the front, and he smelled wonderful.

“I was looking for a better word. A more appropriate one. Shall we say exciting? Exhilarating?”

“I guess we could.” She could feel the intense heat being generated by both of them.

“Shall we go upstairs?”

“Yes.” She swallowed audibly as he bent to brush his lips against hers. He had meant for the kiss to be light, something to ease the tension between them, but her tongue peeked out and at the touch of it, sensations rocketed through his body.

“Oh Christ!” he whispered thickly, his fingers gripping her neck as he used his fingers to bring her up so that he could devour her mouth.

Sensations flooded their bodies and when she swayed toward him, his hands drifted down her back and then her waist, moving restlessly to cup her derriere. A groan sounded inside his throat at the realization that what he was feeling was bare skin.

Lifting the hem of the flimsy material he passed his hands over the smooth tautness of her bottom, squeezing the skin restlessly.

He brought her up against his crotch, allowing her to feel his raging arousal. Lifting her up, he growled when she

came into full contact with his cock.

“We should go upstairs.” His voice was raw from the incredible lust surging through his body.

“Yes,” she agreed, her hands tight around his neck. Her robe was hanging off her shoulders, allowing him access to her unfettered breasts with their puckered nipple.

“In a minute.” Backing her against the wall, he got rid of the robe and lifted her up so that he could play with her nipples.

Her flesh reminded him of a particular brand of potent wine he had sampled on one of his many visits to Tuscany where they had a small vineyard and an enchanting villa.

His tongue swirled around the nipple, tasting and savoring the texture. Using his fingers, he shaped and reshaped the supple skin, opening his mouth and suckling the nipple.

Her cries echoed around the room, her body vibrating against his. He was full, almost to bursting and was afraid that the control was going to be out of his hands in the next couple of minutes.

Alexia could feel the coldness of his belt buckle against her bare skin. Arching her back, she dug her fingers into his shoulders and gave into the incredible swell of emotions swirling through her body.

Letting go of the nipple, he stared at her for a few seconds, his brow pleated.

“If we do, upstairs.” His voice was raw, his blood hot and his body vibrating.

“We should,” she agreed.

A groan erupted from him as he continued to stare at her. “If you continue to do that, I am not going to make it.”

“Do what?”

He laughed hoarsely, his fingers biting into her flesh. “Do you have any idea how you look?”

“None.” She shook her head, causing her hair to tumble around her face.

“Then I will not bother to tell you.” Keeping her in his arms, he headed out of the room and up the stairs, taking them two at a time. She buried her head into his shoulder, her hands wrapped around his neck.

Assuming the open door led to her bedroom, he stepped in, taking in the quiet and simple elegance of the lime green and shell pink room.

Placing her on the bed, he stepped back to take off his clothing, his fingers fumbling at the zipper.

He was finally naked and able to join her, one arm wrapping around her small waist.

“You have the most flawless complexion I have ever seen.”

“Thank you.” Her hands were splayed over the smooth skin of his chest, where she could feel the rapid beating of his heart.

“You don’t have to worry that I am going to start asking you where this is heading,” she assured him even though her heart was becoming even more involved.

“Is that so?” he was fascinated by a beautiful mole at the hollow of her throat.

“No,” she moaned when his mouth picked up where his fingers had stopped. “I am fine.”

“I am not.” His lips trailed the length of her graceful neck.

“I just meant-”

“Shut up doc,” he growled. She was startled into silence until she felt him nibbling at her skin and moving down to take her nipple inside his mouth again. Her hands gripped him tight, the heat spreading throughout her body. He climbed on top of her, his erection sliding between her thighs.

Sensations took over and she moved her body restlessly beneath his, fingers gripping his shoulders and then his back.

He started to slide into her when he realized that he had not donned protection. He was wired and pumped, more so than he had ever been in his life, but Sarah-Lee had taught him a very valuable lesson and he had learned from it.

Releasing the nipple, he rolled off her and went to fish the packet of condoms he had picked up yesterday in anticipation of being with her.

Getting back on the bed, he tore the package with his teeth, his body shaking, his blood pressure rising.

“Damn it!” he whispered, the rubber slipping out of his fingers twice. He was finally able to slide the thin condom over his shaft. Grunting in relief, he lowered himself over her.

“I want to make certain you are prepared,” he told her thickly as he reached between them and touched the core of her. Alexia’s body arched to meet his touch; her bottom lip caught between her teeth as he passed his fingers over her sensitive flesh.

A cry escaped her when he dipped a finger into her, edging in slowly. Jay grunted when he discovered the moistness, his breath hissing out in reaction.

“I can feel you are,” he introduced another finger, avidly watching as her eyes widened and her hips pumped to meet his thrusts.

Her lips parted, her body vibrating and humming in response.

“Not yet,” he said hoarsely. “Not without me.” Removing his fingers, he entered her swiftly, his body bowed as her incredible tightness wrapped around him like a well-worn glove. For a minute or two, he could not move, his head bowed to hers, his breath soughing through his parted lips.

“My God!” he whispered against her lips. He mumbled something else, something she was unable to interpret. And then he started to move, slowly at first and then picking up pace as she wrapped her legs around his trim waist.

The passion between them went wild and very soon they were clinging to each other. His fingers gripped her hips as he drove into her. He made a valiant attempt to slow things down, but it was hopeless.

They twisted against each other, turning sideways at first and then he was flat on his back, her knees drawn up as she straddled him. His eyes glittered as he stared at her. The thick dark curls tumbled down her back and hips

were pumping fiercely to keep up with his desperate thrusts.

He saw when she stiffened, her back arching as the climax exploded. Sliding his hands from her hips to her waist, he twisted until she was tumbled backward, her legs wrapped around his waist.

Bending his head, he latched onto a nipple, suckling hungrily. It was not long before he could feel his own climax roaring through him with the power of a volcano. Letting go of the nipple he took her lips with his, suppressing the fevered groans erupting from his throat.

He spent himself, his body shaking, his fingers curled into the thick strands of her hair.

Chapter 10

Easing out of her, he flopped back against the pillows, taking off the overflowing condom and tying the top of it to prevent spillage. Searching for a place to put it, he ended up placing it on the floor next to the bedside table.

And avoided her eyes as he stared up at the intricate pattern of the ceiling. He heard her stirring next to him and finally turned his head to look at her, his body tightening alarmingly at the tousled hair and the swollen lips.

She looked well screwed and a danger to his peace of mind. There was no way this was going to be a one-time thing, not even for the rest of the night.

He had thought she would be in and out and be on his way, but that was not going to be happening.

“You, okay?” he asked her gruffly.

“Something like that.” She tugged at the sheet and used it to cover the bottom half of her body. “You?”

“Ask me again when I can feel my legs. How do you feel about me staying the night?”

Her long lashes drifted over her eyes as she fought to control her reaction to his question.

“That would be nice,” she finally murmured.

A smile tugged at his lips. “Not quite the response I was hoping for.”

“I did tell you that I have no intention of making any claims.”

“That’s good because I do not think I can make any sort of commitment.” He tugged at a fat curl and watched in fascination as it bounced back against her shoulder.

“There are some things I am not prepared to reveal.”

“In regards to your dad,” she surmised.

His eyes met hers, and the understanding in them was almost his undoing. He had already established that she made him feel as if the top of his head was about to explode. The passion between them had taken him by surprise, and he had no idea what to do about it.

“Yes,” he said abruptly, his hand dropping to cup her breast. “He was not exactly what one could call the perfect dad. He did not even come close.”

“You don’t have to talk to me about it. I take it you are doing therapy?”

He gave her an amused smile. “Trying to get inside my head, doc?”

“Not at all. But when we keep things bottled up inside us, it tends to have an adverse effect on us and those around us.” She bit off a moan as he continued to toy with her nipple.

“I have spent thousands of dollars in therapy, and it has only helped marginally.” He was fascinated at the way her nipples were reacting to even his slightest touch.

“You have to be open to the idea of needing help in order for it to work.” She bit down on her lip to stop the cry from escaping. The man was lethal with his fingers.

“You think that sitting around on a couch and pouring one’s heart is the answer?” he cocked a mocking brow at her.

“I do.” She unconsciously moved closer to him, one thigh settling on his, her knee edging dangerously to his pubic area. “And it is not because I am into that field. I have benefited from it myself. At school, I was encouraged to

open up about what the death of my parents affected me and to describe how I was feeling.”

“And it worked?” To her disappointment, he had let go of her nipple and was sliding his fingers through her hair.

“Yes,” she murmured. “At first, I was sullen and resentful. Mad at the world and feeling as if nothing was ever going to be right again.”

“How long did it take you to come to terms with their deaths?” he asked her soberly. He had every intention of having her again, but he was finding the conversation intriguing.

“A year, maybe more.” He was massaging her scalp and sending tingling sensations along her spine. “I stopped being mad at the world, and then, of course, there was Anthony.”

“You heard the rumors, I am sure.” His lips twisted bitterly. “My mother committed suicide because she

could not take living with a monster anymore. And, of course, instead of sticking it out for her children, she took the easy way out.”

He was trying to appear blasé as if he was not affected, but she knew the signs. Even after all these years, he was still hurting. If he were a child and had come to her, she would have encouraged him to think of it in terms of her thinking she had no other option.

“Wasn’t she manic-depressive?” she asked him quietly.

“You are saying that gives her all the excuse in the world to check out early?”

“No. I am simply saying that we never really know what goes on in a person’s life. Being manic-depressive meant that all her emotions were completely heightened. It could not have been easy for her.”

He stared at her; his expression inscrutable. She was more than just a beautiful face with a rocking body. Her

mind was as sharp as a tack, and she was very good at what she did.

“You are saying that she felt she had no other choice?”

“I am not saying that. As a parent, I would never dream of putting myself in her shoes – I am simply saying that she must have been torn as a mother, even if not as a wife. Was she in love with your dad?”

His mouth twisted at that. “Jeremiah Templeton was not an easy man to love. I understand it was an arrangement.”

“So even that simple choice was taken away from her. She must have felt extremely powerless. It’s like living in a prison without the bars.

Not to mention the fact that having children exacerbated her mental condition. With all three pregnancies, her postpartum depression must have been through the roof. I wondered if she was ever treated for it.”

For the first time in his life, he could feel the pressure on his heart lifting. He had blamed her for leaving him and his sister to be brought up by a man like Jeremiah Templeton. He had gone through therapy, months of it, but had decided that it was not doing him any damn good.

He felt the ice enclosing his heart melting. Cupping her cheek, he bent to kiss her lips, his tongue exploring her mouth thoroughly. Alexia had felt the shift in his emotions and did not dare hope that he was having a change of heart.

Lifting her arms, she clung to him, bringing him down on top of her. The muscled length of his body felt great on her, it felt right, and she did not want to be without it.

She was aware of his reputation, but she did not care. She wanted him so much that she was willing to wait until he was feeling the same way.

“Are you safe?” he asked her hoarsely, his eyes darkened with passion.

“What?” The fog was making it hard for her to even concentrate on a basic conversation.

“I want to feel your skin against mine. Are you safe?”

“Oh.” She thought about it and nodded. “I am.”

“I am trusting you to not lie to me,” he whispered against her mouth.

“I do not lie.”

“I believe you.” Reaching between them, he guided his throbbing shaft into her moisture. Jay felt as if he was going to explode from the desperate pleasure of being with her like this. She was wet and incredibly tight, her flesh gripping his and sending his desire into overdrive.

“Sweet Christ!” He wrapped his fingers around her throat, feeling the mad fluttering of her pulse. “I don’t want to come – not yet.” He gritted his teeth as he bowed his head to hers. But he could not stay that way for much longer. As soon as he started to move, she came, her fingers digging into his chest and shoulders.

Her body arched upwards, exposing her neck to his hungry lips. He bit into her skin, drawing the flesh into his mouth. Her reaction was violent, the scream echoing around the room. He flooded her with his seed, his body shuddering as he poured himself into her.

He left at dawn. Her eyelids fluttered open as she heard him moving off the bed.

“I am sorry, but I have to go.” He realized that she was awake when she shifted, and the bed moved. “I have to go to New York for a couple of days to sign up an artist.”

“Have a safe trip,” she murmured, stifling a yawn.

His eyes glinted in amusement. “Aren’t you going to ask me?”

“Ask you what?”

“Don’t play coy with me, darling. I was starting to admire your open and honest approach.”

“I don’t see the need to repeat myself. I already told you that I will never be the one to ask you where the relationship is going.”

He touched her left cheek. “You are not at least going to ask me if I am going to call you?”

“No.”

“Are you going to call me?”

She shook her head.

“I see.” He gazed at her thoughtfully. “Is this some sort of game you are playing?”

“I do not play games. I am quite certain that you have already deduced from the way I reacted during our lovemaking that I have feelings for you.

I don't need to declare anything or torture myself by wondering if this is over between us. If you are interested, you will call.”

“Just like that?” he asked her curiously.

“Yes. We are both very busy people and if we want to be together, we will find the way.”

He stayed still for a few seconds, staring at her. “You are an intriguing woman, doc.” Leaning down, he kissed her slowly, sending the heat coursing through her body. Cursing beneath his breath, he shifted and covered her body with his.

Alexia felt as if she was floating as she made her way downstairs later that morning. He had been running late but had ended up making love to her twice. A smile touched her lips as she went to put the coffee on.

She could still feel the imprint of his body on hers, his lips ravaging hers. She had a late day today at the medical clinic and was going to drink her coffee and review some notes. She had told him she did not expect him to call, and she meant it.

She was on her second cup of coffee when she heard the alarm disengaging and the door being opened. A groan left her lips as she realized that it had to be Anthony. And the fact that he was coming around so early in the morning meant she was in for a lecture.

She stayed where she was, pretending calm she was not feeling.

He was dressed for work, the ash gray suit and shell pink tie looking great on him. He only dressed this way when he had to meet with a new client.

“I made coffee,” she murmured as soon as he came into the kitchen. “I was just about to go up and take a shower-”

“I know it’s your late day today.” There was an ominous expression on his face that predicted what was to come, and he had not greeted her as he normally did.

“How is Ellen?”

“She is fine.” He went to get a cup and poured the coffee.

“You are looking sharp-”

“Where is lover boy?”

She schooled her features and took a sip of the coffee to soothe her nerves. She was thirty-two years old, and yet he still managed to make her feel fourteen again.

“Ellen told you.”

“I pressured her into doing so, and I happen to know you like the back of my damn hand.” Temper was snapping at him, and she was trying to avoid an argument.

“He left.”

“He spent the night?” His frown deepened.

“Yes, and before you say anything, I have to remind you that I am an adult and can do whatever the hell I please.”

“And for someone so damn smart, you can be so dumb that it boggles the mind. Jay Templeton? You left that loser for a user?”

“Very poetic, Anthony.”

“I am not here to entertain you, Lexie. What the hell were you thinking? And do you really believe a man like him is going to want a relationship? Were you smart enough to ensure that he used protection?”

She never could live and with Anthony, it was even worse. He was right in saying he knew her like a book.

He cursed fluently when he interpreted the look on her face, and she sat there while he scalded her with his words.

“I know what I am doing.”

“Do you now!” Finishing the coffee, he went to pour some more, his movements jerky.

“Has he made any promises to you, any declarations, or stated his intentions? While he was enjoying himself without using protection, did he say – “Oh and by the way, darling, don’t worry about anything.”

If there is a child as a result of our carelessness, I am more than willing to step up.” He glared at her. “Did he happen to say anything like that?”

“I am not a complete moron,” she told him coolly, feeling the sting of his words. Her brother knew more than anyone else how much she wanted a family.

He had said as much to her when they shared the news of the pregnancy. He had seen the wistful look on her face and, later that night, had called to find out if she was okay.

“It will happen for you Lexie. You just have to wait.”

“What are you doing?” His voice softened as he came to sit across from her. “You are playing with fire, honey. I know you want to have children, but you are approaching it the very wrong way.”

“You think I would trap him or any man by getting pregnant?” she asked him heatedly. “I thought you knew me.”

“I thought I did too.” The anger was back in his voice. “The level-headed sister I know would never jump into anything, especially with a man like Jay Templeton. Is it the thrill of knowing that he is a celebrity?”

“I am not some brain-dead groupie who is bowled over by famous people. I deal with them all the time. And I do not have to justify my feelings to you. Now, if you would excuse me, I have to go and read some notes and get ready for my day. You can show yourself out.”

“I am looking out for you,” he shouted after her as she walked out of the room.

Anthony had ruined the very pleasant memories for her. She had stayed upstairs until he left, making sure to lock her bedroom door to deny him admittance. He had stayed outside the door pleading with her to let him in.

“You know that I just want what is best for you.” He had switched from reassurances to anger, reminding her that he was the one who was going to have to pick up the pieces when this all went to hell. He had finally left when she would not respond.

She had sat there on the edge of the rumpled bed, her head throbbing dully.

The sheets were rumpled, and she was glad Anthony had not been a witness to their night and morning of unbridled passion. He had dumped the condom into the trash can inside the bathroom. That had been the only

time he had used anything.

She had told him she was safe, and she had been telling the truth.

No matter how much she wanted a child, she would never be careless or reckless enough to trap a man into getting her pregnant. She was in a field where she had seen what separation does to a child. All or most of her patients were from parents who were now divorced or on the verge of.

Rubbing her hands over her face wearily, she closed her eyes as the memories of last night and this morning came flooding back. She was not expecting a phone call from him, and she was trying to be okay with that. She was not so insecure that if she did not receive one, she was going to curl up into a ball and cry herself to sleep.

She had made a choice, and she knew what she was doing. She wanted him to feel the same way she felt about him, and she was willing to wait. Last night, he had basically unburdened himself, but she would never know if it was because of her training that he had done so.

Only time alone will tell. She had seen the struggle he had to confide in her, but he had done so. They had talked, and she considered that a plus. Firming her lips, she arose and went to the bathroom to get ready.

Jay found himself smiling at odd moments. In his mad rush to the apartment to get ready to fly out, he could not help thinking about her. Things she had said to him, the way she looked while he was buried inside her.

He had managed to pop in to say good morning to his daughter and explained to her that he had to go out of town for a couple of days.

“But you will be in school, and I expect to hear all about your first day back.”

“I am going to miss you Daddy,” she had told him solemnly.

“I will miss you too,” he responded. But now he was on the jet to New York, and instead of concentrating on the contact before him, he was thinking of her. What was she doing now?

Was she thinking of him, missing him the way he was missing her? He shook his head wryly. He could not believe he was feeling so much where she was concerned. She had told him she would not be calling.

But twice he had reached for the phone to call her and decided against it. He had no idea where this was going. There were complications in his life as it was, and he really needed to concentrate on his daughter.

Leaning back against the seat, he closed his eyes and re-lived last night as well as this morning. He had wanted to slip out without her knowing that he was gone. He had spent the night with her and that was not something he normally does.

But the sex had been something out of the ordinary. And it had felt good with her slender body next to his.

His eyes popped open as he recalled that he had made love to her without using anything. She had told him she was safe, but he should not have taken her word for it. Women would say anything to try and become Mrs. Jay Templeton, but he did not think she was like that.

She was open and honest, and there was a way about her that said he could take her at her word.

“Would you like something to drink, sir?” The flight attendant’s mellifluous voice filtered into his thoughts and had him opening his eyes and straightening. “Some coffee.”

“Anything to eat?”

“Just the coffee, thanks.”

Opening the document, he tried to concentrate on the contract.

The last thing she wanted was to find the twelve-year-old waiting for her inside her office.

“His mother insisted on coming today, even though I told her that you were packed for the day,” Arlene said in an apologetic tone.

“How long have they been waiting?”

“Ten minutes. What should I do about your ten A.M.?”

“Push it back fifteen minutes. I need coffee.”

“I will go and get a cup. You look tired.”

“Just what I wanted to hear.” She forced a smile and collected her messages before going into the office to face the little boy and his obnoxious mother.

By the time the session was finished, she was wrung dry and felt as if she had just run a marathon. Leaning back against the chair, she closed her eyes wearily and took several deep breaths.

Anthony had been calling her for the past half hour, and she had been ignoring him. She knew that he was most likely miserable because of their argument, but she was not ready to forgive him yet.

She was also trying to put Jay out of her mind. Opening her eyes, she pushed herself up against the desk and opened her folder.

Chapter 11

“Thanks for coming,” Anthony’s voice was stiff and formal as he met her on the porch.

“No problem.” Alexia moved forward to greet her sister-in-law, who was standing next to him. It was Ellen who had called and told her in no uncertain terms that it was time for them both to make nice.

“My husband is miserable, and I am sure you are as well. For the sake of our unborn baby and for my own piece of mind, I am asking you to come over, and you two talk.

He did not hold a gun to my head, and I revealed a confidence that I should have kept to myself, and I am saying sorry. Now get your elegant butt over to the house and thrash things out.”

“Hungry? I made shrimp alfredo.”

“Nothing yet. Thanks,” Alexia declined, giving her a hug.

“How are you?”

“Fine.” She flicked a glance at her husband, who was standing at the rail, looking out, his shoulders hunched. She could read him well and knew that he was still fighting with the idea of his sister being with someone so unsuitable.

“I will be in my office perusing some case files with my door closed. So, if you two are killing each other, I will not hear a thing.”

“Thanks, El.”

Moving forward swiftly, Anthony dropped a kiss on her forehead. “I am sorry.”

“Yeah. Well.” Touching his cheek gently, she left them alone and closed the door behind her.

For a few minutes, they did not say anything. Anthony had taken his position at the rail again, and she went to sit on the porch swing, her expression pensive as she stared out at the gathering dusk. She had not heard from him and had convinced herself that she was okay with that. And she had not called him either. He has to be the one to make the first move.

But most importantly, she hated the rift between her and Anthony. He was the most important person in her life, and after their fight, she had felt the misery enveloping him.

“I would like to-”

“I am-”

He turned to face her, his eyes wandering over her face. “You look tired,” he said gruffly.

“Thanks.” There was a note of sarcasm in her voice.
“And you look like hell.”

“I did not sleep much last night.” He rubbed a hand over his face. “And Ellen was on my case about what I did.”
Taking a deep breath, he came to sit next to her. “I guess I overreacted.”

“You think?” she asked him mildly, using the tip of her toes to push the swing gently. There was silence for a couple of minutes before he spoke.

“When I received the news about the accident, remember where I was?”

Turning her head, she stared at his profile, her heart melting in love. “You had just turned eighteen a day before. It had been a Friday, and you were looking forward to going to college in the fall.”

She leaned back against the cushions, a whimsical expression on her face. “I recalled thinking that I was

happy you were going because I would get your room which was bigger.”

He slanted her a glance. “And I reminded you that I was not going there to live. I would be back on semester breaks.”

“That did not matter to me.”

“I was with Gary and Sheldon, drinking beers and celebrating my adulthood. I was going off, and as far as I was concerned, it was a time of freedom for me.”

He stretched his legs out, his expression pensive. “When the call came, I thought someone was playing a cruel trick on me. I was just about to knock off drinking because I would be driving and was heading toward the car when my phone rang.”

“Two policemen had come to the house – one female and the other a male.” Alexia took up the story, her fingers clenching as memories assailed her. “I was in the middle of talking to Mona, and I remembered how annoyed I was at the interruption.

I stood there looking at them for a minute, wondering what they were doing there.”

“I almost ran through every stoplight to get back home. It was a few blocks away, but it seemed like miles, and I was cursing the traffic on the road.”

“The officers would not tell me what was going on and I called Mom’s number, and it went straight to voicemail and the same thing happened with Dad’s phone. I was starting to panic when I saw you driving in.”

“I wanted to get to you, to be of comfort to you when you received the news. I did not want you to face it alone.”

“You held me.” She groped for his hand and held on. “I started screaming, and you held me. I did not even realize that the officers had left until you took me inside.

You stayed with me the entire night. I did not have to ask you; you just knew that I did not want to be alone.”

He squeezed her hand. “At that time, I knew that I had to be there for you.”

The tears had started to course down her cheeks, and he gathered her close to him. He rubbed her arm slowly. “It’s my job to take care of you,” he told her hoarsely, his own throat thick with unshed tears. “It does not matter how old you are. It will always be my job.”

“I know.” Turning her head into his shoulders, she clung to him. “I love you, Tony.”

His heart skittered inside his chest at the use of her pet name for him. It had been so long since she called him that, and it did something to his heart.

“I know.” He kissed the top of her head; his eyes blinded with tears. “Forgive me for the way I spoke to you before.”

She nodded and was silent for a minute. "I am in love with you," she said simply.

"Oh Lexie," he groaned. "You are going to get hurt."

"That might be the case, but I have never felt this way about a guy before and-" Lifting her head, she stared at him, her tear-stained cheeks causing him to feel weak.

It reminded him of the night they had been told of their parents' tragic accident. He had felt a fierce need to protect her then, and he felt it now. "It's not just sex. It is something much more than that."

"I am going to be compelled to hurt him if he hurts you," he warned.

"Hopefully, it will not come to that." Lifting a hand, she cupped his jaw. "I am not worried, and I am not going to fall into his arms like a ripe plum."

"Haven't you already done so?" he asked her wryly.

“In a manner of speaking. I have not called him, and even though my heart is aching, I am going to stick to my promise. He has to make the next move.”

“I trust you. I might not like it, but I trust you.” Leaning over, he kissed her wet cheek.

“Want to grab a bite?”

She nodded.

They both looked up to see Ellen framed inside the doorway. “I see you have kissed and made up. I put the food in the warmer.”

“Thanks, darling.” Anthony grinned at her. “We will be right in.”

She had just shed her clothing and was in the kitchen making a pot of tea when she heard the knock on the door. A frown touched her brow as she glanced at the clock.

She had spent more than an hour at her brother's place and by the time they had finished having the meal, things between them were back to normal.

Sliding off the stool, she went to get the door, looking through the security slot before sliding the lock. She went still as she saw the achingly familiar frame of the man standing there and it took her a few seconds to open the door.

"I was beginning to think you were fast asleep," he said teasingly. "Hello, doc."

"You are here," she said foolishly. "You said a couple of days."

“If you allow me to come in, I might explain to you why I am here.”

“Oh, sorry,” she muttered and stepped aside for him to pass. “You are-” “Those were the only words she managed to get out before she was slammed against the door, his body pressing against hers.

His mouth was hungry and grasping. Reaching between them, he untied the loose sash around her waist and hummed deep into his throat when he encountered bare skin. The robe fluttered to the ground leaving her completely naked.

His mouth – his tongue, and his teeth were all active. Ending the kiss, he nibbled at her neck as he lifted her against him. When he took a nipple inside his mouth, she could not help the startled cry from escaping her.

Tearing at the buttons of his shirt, her hands raced over his undershirt, her fingers trembling.

“Take it off, please!” She could not believe it was her voice. Letting go of her, he pulled the shirt over his head and dropped it to the floor before resuming his torture of her nipple.

“I am not going to make it upstairs.” His voice was thick. His eyes darkened with passion.

“I want you now.” Sliding her legs down his hips, she attacked his belt and unbuckled it. Popping the clasp of his jeans, she reached in to cup him, sending alarming shivers throughout his body.

“Stop,” he whispered hoarsely, lifting her against him again. Her eyes went wide as he plunged into her, fingers gripping her bottom. Bending his head, he took her lips again.

The jeans had pooled around his ankles, restricting his movements. With a harsh sigh, he toed off his shoes and managed to kick the jeans out of the way.

Lifting her away from the door, he walked into the living room without breaking the kiss. Lowering her down onto the sofa, he knelt between her thighs, wrapping her legs around his waist.

Alexia lifted her body as he started to thrust into her. She arched toward him, her breasts branding his chest.

Dragging his lips from hers, he sought blindly for her nipple. His urgent suckling of the flesh had her crying out, fingers digging into his hair. She came, the climax so explosive that it had her sobbing, her body bucking against his.

Jay emptied himself into her, his body shaking from the violence of his own release. It took him a few minutes to recover some semblance of composure. His body was shining with sweat, his heart pounding inside his chest.

He was still intimately joined to her. He could feel the fear and frustration invading his soul. He had taken her like an animal in heat. He had been on his way to his

apartment when he asked the driver to divert. He had also cut his trip short because missing her was like a huge hole in his chest.

“Don’t,” she whispered as he moved to get off her.

“You must be uncomfortable. I am not exactly a lightweight.”

“I am fine.” She stroked his back and his neck. Somehow, they were lying full length on the sofa, his body pressing against hers.

“We should go upstairs,” he murmured.

“Soon. Why are you back so early?”

The question threw him for a few seconds. He could not exactly tell her that it was because of her. “I finished up earlier than I anticipated,” he said instead.

“I am glad. I missed you.”

He grunted, breath sending shivers against her flesh.

“You don’t have to say it back,” her soft cultured voice was making fun of him.

Lifting his head, he stared at the sexy, provocative woman who was haunting his life. Her lips were swollen, her hair spread out against the cushions.

“Thanks for the advice.” He flicked at her chin and could not help it as he bent to kiss her lips. “How was your day yesterday and today?”

“Let’s see...” She pretended to think about it. “I had several very patients who managed to try my patience. And after you left, I had a blowout with my brother.”

“About?”

“You.” She gave him a level glance.

“Why?”

Her tapered eyebrows lifted. “Take a wild guess.”

“He does not approve of a white guy dating his sister.”

“We are not dating,” she reminded him.

“Then I guess he is thinking that I am not good enough for you.”

“Something like that.” She pushed back the tendrils of hair clinging to his moist skin.

“What did you tell him?”

“That I love him to death, but it is my life.”

“He thinks I am going to hurt you and he might be right.”

She ignored the spiking of her heart as she gave him a steady look. “It is still my life.

You are not forcing me to be with you and I already told you that I have my own reasons for being with you.”

He stared at her for a few seconds, his fingers stroking her cheek. “You adore the sex.”

“Hmm.” She moved her hips suggestively and he could not stop the sound humming inside his throat.

“It is pretty great sex.”

“I have to agree with you there. You did not call.”

“I said I wouldn’t.”

“Hmm.” He gave her a strange look. “I wanted to, several times.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“I wanted to give us some space.”

“I see.”

“I don’t think you do.” He trailed the shape of her bottom lip. He was getting hard again, but this time he wanted her on a bed, where he would have the freedom to explore her body. “I missed you and could not

concentrate on what I had to do. It was damn frustrating.”

She felt her pulse leaping with joy. “Want me to apologize?”

“Would you mean it?”

“No.” She smiled and reminded him of a feline who had swallowed all of the cream. The first thing he had wanted to do was to come to her. He would not have been able to sleep without having her and it was scaring the crap out of him.

“Hmm.” Shifting slightly, he lifted her into his arms without breaking the intimacy and headed out of the room and up the stairs.

“You smell nice,” she whispered against his neck as she burrowed.

“What-” his knees buckled, and he had to hold onto the banister for fear of crumpling.

“Shit!” He stopped, his eyes going crosswise as she took a chunk of his skin and sucked it between her teeth. “If you continue-” he broke off with a groan and could feel his cock lengthening and thickening inside her.

He finally managed to make it into the bedroom. Putting her against the pillows, he tumbled on top of her, his body surging hotly into hers.

She knew him and because she did, she knew he was worried. He had hidden it well when his sister was here and made the best of the situation.

Ellen did not fully understand the bond between them, but she tried to be supportive of it.

“Are you going to sit there staring into space or come to bed?”

Her question jarred him out of his reverie and had him smiling at her absently.

“There is absolutely no competition there.” Sliding his feet out of his bedroom slippers, he came and joined her. “How is our babe?” he asked solicitously, placing a hand over her stomach.

“Behaving for a change.” She placed her hand over his. “How is my baby?”

“Trying to accept the fact that my sister is heading toward heartbreak. She is in love with him.”

“And this might just turn out to be a good thing.”

He gave her a wry look. “What universe are you living in? We are talking about Jay Templeton here. A man who has never settled down in a relationship before. A guy who has a daughter as a result of a one-night stand

when he was only twenty-one.”

“Stranger things have happened, and your sister is not an airhead. She had a plan.”

“Yeah, she told me,” he murmured sardonically. “One where she was going to string him along until he realizes that he cannot do without her. That’s a lousy idea.”

“It worked for me,” she told him mildly.

“What?” he stared at her frowningly. “What are you talking about?”

“Men,” she snorted. “Remember how we met?”

“Of course. You clumsily bumped into me.”

“I deliberately bumped into you,” she corrected, smiling at the confused look on his face. “I had seen you several times before and knew that I was hooked. But for the life of me, you would not look in my direction. So, I devised a plan to make it happen.”

He gave her a narrowed look. “You are trying to tell me that we did not meet by chance?”

“Nope.” She kissed his whiskered jaw and watched in amusement as he tried to bring up the events of that fateful day.

“That cannot be right. I was the one who bumped into you. I recalled how upset you were and how grudgingly you accepted my offer to buy you coffee.”

“All part of the game. I was so damned nervous that I almost blurted out that it was about time.”

He continued to stare at her.

“You manipulated me?”

“Something like that.” She massaged the back of his neck. “You were taking too long to notice me, and I had to take matters into my own hands.

“And look how well it turned out. I am just saying that to you to give you more confidence in your sister.”

“I am not certain I like this damn plan and we are going to talk about the way you manipulated me,” he growled.

“Are you complaining?” she asked him arching an eyebrow.

“It’s just the principle of everything. The way you went about it. A man likes to do the pursuing.”

“And there are times when a woman has to take charge,” she pointed out.

He stared at her oddly. “You are thinking that is what my sister is doing?”

“Absolutely. Alexia is very smart, and she has decided that Jay Templeton is the man for her. The guy is used to women falling all over him and turning it around is the best way to go about getting his attention.”

He stared at her for a few minutes. Then a slow smile touched his lips. “You are a piece of work.”

“But you love me.”

“But I definitely adore you,” he corrected. “I am still worried.”

“I know. I am rooting for her.”

“We will see. Now I really would like to talk about something else.”

“Such as?”

“Taking off your clothes and using my mouth on your amazing body.”

“Sounds like a very good plan.” She cupped his face and stared at him intently. “She is going to be fine. I know you are accustomed to taking care of her, but she knows how to handle herself.”

“Yeah.” He did not sound convinced.

“Say it until you believe it.”

“I am not going to say it. I am just going to say that if he hurts her, billionaire or not, I am going to tear off his arms.”

She gave a startled laugh. “That works as well. Now I would like you to have your way with me.”

“Your wish is always my command,” he whispered against her mouth.

“I think we broke the bed.” He fell on top of her, his face buried in her neck, his breathing shallow.

“It’s sturdy.” Alexia hugged him, a beatific and completely satisfied expression on her face.

“Still think we broke something. Am I crushing you?”

“No. Stay.”

“I don’t think I can move anyway. The marathon sex combined with the jet lag is taking its toll. I am about to fall asleep.”

“Who is stopping you?”

He moved then, shifting away from her as she tried to hold onto him. Instead, he went to his side and gathered her to him, tucking her face into his chest.

“You are different,” he murmured after a few minutes of silence.

“Is that good or bad?”

“Oh, definitely good.” He stroked her back slowly, feeling the moistness of her skin.

“Was I rough?”

“You were, but I am not complaining.”

“Sorry.” He felt the urge to wrap his arms around her and protect her from anything bad. It left a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach that he was not yet willing to identify.

“No apologies necessary.” She flung a thigh across both of his and snuggled, stifling a yawn.

“Go to sleep doc,” he said with a chuckle, and she did.

Chapter 12

Saundra Brinkley carefully brushed away the dirt and dust that had gathered over the gray and black tiles that covered her daughter's grave.

She had brought a bouquet of mixed flowers with her. When Sarah-Lee was growing up, she had adored daffodils and tulips. So, she had picked the ones growing in her carefully tended garden and stopped at the florist to add red and white roses.

The woman had given her a sympathetic look and added sprigs of daisies as well. Neither Blake nor Brian knew where she was headed. She had told her husband that she was going to look for a sick friend.

He had not mentioned anything to her again about custody to get their granddaughter. And she had led him to believe that she was over it. Marilee had spent the weekend with them. Saundra had tried not to resent how happy and well-adjusted the little girl was.

She was constantly talking about her aunts and her dad, as well as that doctor who was treating her for trauma. It had been almost three weeks since her daughter had died, and it was as if everyone had forgotten about her.

Everyone except her. She would never forget her little girl, and she would never forget the people responsible for her death. The police had come to them with all sorts of stories about how Sarah-Lee had drugs in her system, but she was not going to believe that.

The lawyers she had approached must be in league with Jay Templeton and his family because they balked at the idea of going up against them.

“Mrs. Brinkley, I am afraid you do not have a case. I would like to tell you that you stand a chance, but I am not going to sit here and take your money when I know you are not going to win.

The Templetons are a powerful family. On top of that, your daughter was allegedly taking Jay Templeton’s

daughter out of the country. There have also been allegations that she was, along with the man she was seeing, a habitual user of drugs.

You also have a son who is in and out of rehab and still living at the house.” He had peered at her over his glasses. “I hope you see where I am going with this. No judge in their right minds would agree to give you custody of the little girl.”

“I understand the father has agreed for you to see the little girl every other weekend. I suggest you accept the generous offer and try to make peace with the family.”

But none of them understood, she sat on the cold tiles, the tears forming in her eyes. They had painted her little girl to be a monster, and that was unacceptable. She was going to find a way to pay them back.

“I am going to make it up to you darling,” she whispered. “Mommy has not forgotten you. I am going to make them pay. I promise you that.”

Using the back of her hand, she wiped at the tears as she stared out over the gloomy and deserted cemetery. A few feet away, an old man was standing and staring at a tombstone, his thin shoulders hunched. It was a weekday, and not a lot of people visited then.

As she struggled to her feet, the man, stooped with age, turned and started to walk slowly toward her.

“Hiya there.” He waved at her cheerfully as he came alongside her.

“Hello.”

“Your daughter?” he gestured toward the tombstone.

“Yes.”

“My son.” He nodded at the spot he was just standing. “Died in a car crash two years ago.” His wrinkled cheeks wobbled, and there were tears in his light blue eyes.

“Today would have been his birthday.”

“I am sorry for your loss.”

He nodded. “Only child too. Wife died when he was just ten, and from then on, it was just the two of us. We had him late. Martha had a difficult time conceiving, and we had almost given up when the good Lord granted us a reprieve.” He smiled sadly. “We were in our late fifties when he was born.

Leroy was the pride and joy of our lives, and we thought our cups were overflowing. Then my Martha had the cancer report, and we tried to fight it, but the Lord had better things in store for her. He took her home to be with him, and all of her pain went away. I could not fault that.”

He turned his head to look at the spot he was just standing. “Her grave is next to Leroy’s, and I would like

to think they are communicating with each other.
Keeping each other company.”

“He did not have children?”

The man shook his head. “Turned out he was gay.” He rubbed the sides of his faded jeans. “Sad thing, but he was my son, and even though I do not agree with that kind of lifestyle, I supported him because I loved him.” He gave her a valiant smile. “Name is Ezekiel, by the way. Ezekiel Brown.”

“Saundra Brinkley.” She waited for him to connect the dots, but he did not seem to realize who she was. For some reason, she felt relieved. She could not stand another person looking at her with judgment in their eyes.

“Nice to meet you ,Ms. Saundra, even though it is such a sad occasion. First time visiting?”

“Yes. I could not bear to come before now.”

He nodded. "It was the same thing with me. It took me a long time to come and pay my respects. I questioned the good Lord about taking away my entire family."

"And?"

"And I got my answer. Martha was suffering too much, and I loved her too much to put her through such a thing. And my son..." e shrugged.

"The good Lord wanted a big, strong angel, and He took Leroy." He shoved his hands into his pockets. "A lot of people snicker at my reasoning and think I have gone off my rocker, but that is the way I have survived over the years. My faith is my cornerstone, and it is what is keeping me."

She turned to look at her daughter's headstone. "I wish I could find some sort of peace with her death."

“It is going to take time, my daughter.” The man’s gentle tone had her turning to look at him, tears in her eyes.

Reaching out, he patted her arm lightly. “It will not happen overnight.”

“I cannot believe you have lost so much and are still so cheerful.”

“My dear lady, it takes time and a lot of patience. If you are ready, I will walk with you.”

“Hi.”

“Hi.” She could not stop the huge smile from spreading over her face. “You called.”

“Yeah, well. How are you?”

“I am doing great now.”

“Heavy workload?” He ignored the significance of what she just said, and she allowed it.

“Surprisingly light. I went to the clinic first thing this morning and just now got back. How about you?”

“Meetings since I got here.” He paused, and she waited.
“I -er – I want to see you tonight.”

“I want that too.”

“I know I – we have been spending a lot of time together.”

“I am not complaining,” she told him softly.

“I still do not know where this is going.”

“I am not asking.”

“You aren’t. Perhaps I should bring you a gift.”

“Like?”

“Jewelry?” She could hear the frown in his voice. “I am assuming you like diamonds.”

“What woman doesn’t?” she asked mildly. “But I have a weakness for chocolate and stuffed toys.”

“Really?”

She laughed softly. "I am pretty sure you saw that one corner of the room is completely dedicated to pandas. I am particularly fond of them."

"You want me to bring you chocolate and a panda?"

"And a bottle of Chianti. I am all out."

"I see. I will see what I can do."

"What can I get you?"

"Pardon?"

She bit her lip at the startled note in his voice. "What would you like me to get you? It has to stay within my budget, and I am pretty stringent when it comes to spending."

"I- nothing. No one has ever asked that before."

“I wonder if it’s because you have all the money in the world?” she teased him.

“Perhaps.” She could hear the smile in his deep voice.

“You are an intriguing woman, doc.”

“I take that as a compliment.”

“I meant it as one. I might be a little late. I have a dinner meeting with some clients.”

“I will be waiting up.”

“See you later.”

He hung up, and it was a while before she put away the phone. Her smile was wide, her mood buoyant. He was coming around, and that much was obvious.

A smile tugged at his lips as he sat behind his desk. It had felt good talking to her. He had decided to call on the spur of the moment and almost hung up after the third ring. Leaning back against the chair, he closed his eyes and brought back the memories of last night and this morning.

He had barely managed to make it to the manor to have breakfast with his daughter. He had not told them he was coming back, and the surprise had been evident.

He had worn the same clothes he had arrived in last night but had taken a shower with her just before he left. A shower that had been prolonged because he was unable to keep his hands off her.

A knock sounded on the door, and he called for the person to enter.

Pressing the intercom, he instructed his assistant not to disturb them.

“Would you like something to drink?”

“Scotch,” the man told him briefly as he lowered his large bulk into the comfortable chair.

Jay went to pour the glass and brought it to him.

“Thanks.” Robert tasted the excellent scotch and smacked his lips in appreciation. “I almost want to tell you not to pay me. Just give me a bottle of this baby.”

“For the astronomical sum you charge, I am tempted to take you up on that,” Jay said dryly as he sat on the edge of the desk. “What have you found out?”

“That the lady has been quite busy.” He patted the folder. “She has been turned down by several lawyers. They expounded on the fact that she does not have a case.”

“So, she is still pursuing that avenue. The husband?”

“Seems clueless to what is going on. The son, as you know, is a fruitcake and getting deeper into the hell he has placed himself in. He hangs out at the drug den downtown.

She went to visit her daughter’s grave, brought her flowers. Stayed there for more than half an hour and was seen talking to this old guy. Bonding in grief, I suppose.”

“What do you think?”

Robert took another sip of the scotch and savored it. “I think she is going to try something.”

Jay stared at him with a frown. “You mean kidnapping?”

He nodded. "She is desperate, and no one is listening to her. It's as if everyone has forgotten that she lost her daughter."

"How do you know what she is saying?"

Robert grinned at him, the smile white against his deeply tanned skin. "She had lunch with a friend on Monday and was complaining about that very thing."

"And I suppose you were close enough to listen in."

"It was at The Edge, and their outdoor dining is an experience. I was seated next to a huge potted plant that gave me an excellent opportunity to listen." His expression sobered. "The lady is brimming over with bitterness, my friend, and she blames you for her daughter's dive into hell."

Jay nodded, his expression bleak. "I did not want to deprive my daughter of her grandparents—"

“But you are thinking it might be a good idea to keep her away for now.”

Jay nodded.

“I agree with you.” Finishing the drink, he eased his bulk out of the chair and brought the file over to Jay.

“Want me to continue watching her?”

“Please. I need to know her every step.”

“It’s very good to see you looking so well,” Alexia told the girl with a delighted smile. “You were away for a week?”

Danielle nodded shyly as she took a seat in her usual chair and folded her hands in her lap. “Daddy took me

with him for the spring break, and we went to France.”
She smiled at Alexia. “We talked, Dr. Alexia, really talked about things, and I believe things are going to be a lot better.”

“I am happy to hear that.” She pointed to the short sleeve the girl was wearing. “That has stopped as well?”

She nodded. “You were right. Mutilating my skin was not cool. And I am letting my hair grow back.”

“What about your mom?”

“We are talking as well. Daddy is not seeing that girl again, and they have decided to go into therapy.”

“How do you feel about that?”

Danielle shrugged. “I told them that if they are not happy together, they should not stay on my account.”

“Good for you.”

The girl gave her a pleased smile. “You said that to me, and I went home and did some thinking.”

“I see you are maturing,” Alexia said approvingly.

“I have also decided that I want to become a doctor like you.”

Alexia’s eyes widened, and she felt the pride blossoming inside her chest. “I am flattered, my dear. You do realize that it is going to be a lot of hard work, right?”

Danielle nodded. “And I am prepared to put in the time. You help children like me, and I want to do the same.”

“I am so proud of you.”

“I am graduating next year, and, in the meantime, I am doing some reading.”

“What about the living arrangements?”

“Daddy has moved back in with us. They are living in separate suites, but at least they are there.”

“Having family dinners and all that.”

“Yes. Breakfast as well.” The girl beamed.

“I am happy for that. This might be our last session, Danielle.”

“Oh really?” She stared at Alexia in disappointment. “I thought we had some more time. I really like talking to you.”

“And I like the idea that you are one of my success stories. We can talk, but not on the clock. If you feel the

need to reach out, please feel free to do so. I would love to hear of your progress.”

“Thank you.”

“I will walk you out.”

“I think we surpassed the other couple of nights.” Alexia brought the full glass of wine to her lips, her dark brown eyes twinkling over the rim.

“Keeping score?”

“I have been making notations in my little notebook.”

“What would those notations be?” They were submerged in bubbles in her bath after making love twice already.

“A secret.” She grinned at him impishly, toes edging toward his crotch. He stopped her before she reached her target, a wry smile on his face. He was spending the night again and had brought over a case.

She was true to her word and never inquired about the relationship. He had no idea what to tell her anyway. This was new for him, and he was taking it one day at a time.

“You are playing with fire, darling.”

She tried not to flutter at the endearment. In his world, it certainly meant nothing.

“Am I?” She wriggled the toes he was holding, her eyes wandering over his tousled blonde hair and the relaxed look on his handsome face. She would not believe this was the same person she had met that first time at the hospital.

He was also opening up more to her, telling her little things in his past. Sometimes she could see from his

expression that he was surprised he had revealed a piece of particular information to her. “I am not afraid of a little fire.”

“This is more like a forest blaze, with the wind feeding its energy.” He surprised her by moving forward swiftly and taking the glass away from her.

“What are you doing?”

“You started it, love.” Lifting her up, he inched out of the suds until she was sheathing him. “See what you did?” he whispered against her neck.

“I should be punished.” She arched her back in anticipation.

“I concur.” Wiping the soap off her breasts, he tugged at a nipple, sending fire into the pit of her stomach.

“I can hardly wait.” She quivered when he started suckling at the tight bud. “Oh Jay,” she whispered, fingers digging into his shoulders. There were times when she had to curb the desire to blurt out how much she loved him but had barely managed to bite her tongue.

They had dispensed with the condoms since that first night, and she was secretly hoping she was carrying his baby. It was not the ideal situation, and she did not have a clue where she stood with him. Not to mention the fact that there was a child involved.

She and Marilee got along very well, but the little girl saw her as her doctor, not a potential mother. She was going to have to tread lightly.

Lifting his mouth from her nipple, he gripped her neck, his eyes fierce on her lips.

“What is it about you that drives me to distraction?” he was murmuring as if speaking to himself.

“My clever wit,” she supplied huskily.

“It might be that or the fact that you are sexy as hell. I cannot stop wanting you, craving you.” He demonstrated by lifting his hips and driving into her. With a gasp, she wrapped her hands around his neck, moving her body over his.

“Slow down darling,” he told her thickly.

“Impossible.” Her breath was coming rapidly between her parted lips.

“Try. I don’t want you to come yet.” Dipping his hand into the suds, he found the sensitive kernel of flesh and rubbed his thumb over it slowly, watching as her eyes widened and her lips parted.

“Jay-”

His body quickened at how husky her voice was.

“Hmm?”

“I can’t.”

“Yes, you can.” Releasing the flesh, he gripped her slim waist suddenly and rose from the water with her legs wrapped around his waist. Stepping out carefully on the rug, he grabbed several towels before striding into the bedroom. Still holding her against him, he spread the towel onto the sheets before lowering her.

“Tell me if I am hurting you,” he whispered roughly. His face was hard and taut from the passion pouring through him, and his cock was stretched to the limit.

“You are not.”

“How about now?” Taking her legs from around his waist, he placed her feet flat against his chest.

“No.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t,” she assured him.

He eased out of her until only the tip of his cock was resting against her opening. His eyes were on hers as he edged in slowly. His body shuddered as he drove full into her, shoving her up onto the bed.

Alexia curled her hands into fists, her body heaving upward to meet his fevered thrusts.’

“Take more,” he said harshly as he increased the pace. “Take everything.” The control was slipping away from him by degrees. Reaching between her thighs, he touched the kernel of flesh, watching as her eyes glazed over.

Her body heaved and pitched as the climax crashed into her with a gigantic force. She grabbed for and found his hand, her fingers digging into the skin.

A shudder went through him, and he found himself spinning completely out of control. He called out her name as he poured himself into her.

Collapsing on top of her, he could feel the rapid heartbeat roaring inside his ears.

Alexia felt nerveless, her feet falling weakly at his sides.

“I am crushing you,” he mumbled, not able to find the energy to move.

“No.”

“Liar,” he whispered against her neck. “Just give me a few minutes and I will move.”

“Hmm.” Her fingers were toying with the fringes of hair at the nape of his neck.

“I am starving.”

He chuckled and lifted his head to look at her. “I thought you ate before you got here.”

“A salad. But we have been at it for the past three hours.”

“It has been that long?”

“Yep. I was thinking of ordering Chinese.”

“Sounds good. Still need a minute.”

“Okay.” She cradled his head against her breasts.

“Or perhaps ten minutes.”

“Why? Oh!” she whispered as he started to move inside her again.

Chapter 13

They ate and talked. That was another novelty for him too. He was used to having dinner with women and then taking them back to his place or more often than not, going back to their place. He only took women back to his apartment if he figured the hook-up was going to be more than that,

There would be dinner and a minimal amount of conversation. He would not add anything to the conversation but would give a listening air. He recalled once when a woman he had been seeing had broached the subject of his past and that had been the last time they had spent together.

That was something he told everyone he was seeing. His past was off-limits. "You can read all the salacious details in the society rags," he would say sardonically.

But here he was, sitting around the kitchen counter and having a conversation with a female. The lovemaking

was mind-boggling and he enjoyed her company. She was vivacious and entertaining. She would talk about her patients, never by name of course, and was sure to leave out all the confidential details.

And she would make the telling of it very entertaining. He found himself laughing at her jokes and was drawn to her in more ways than one.

He started in surprise when she popped a piece of egg roll into his mouth and did not miss a beat as she continued talking. It felt strange, the intimacy that he had never experienced before, and he found himself unburdening.

“He was brilliant,” he admitted slowly. “When I was little and did not know any better, I thought he was the smartest and most intelligent man in the world. I likened him to my favorite superhero.” He sent her a whimsical smile. “At the age of six, it was Spiderman.”

“Mine was Superwoman,” she told him with a grin.

“Why am I not surprised?” he asked her teasingly.
“Anyway, I had him on a pedestal.

He could do nothing wrong as far as I was concerned.”

“That’s natural.” She sent him a sober look. “A child’s first hero is their parent or parents. When the illusion is shattered, it takes a chunk out of the person. It can be snatched away by death or betrayal. I am still trying to figure out which is worse.”

He nodded in understanding.

“When did you realize that he did not deserve hero status?”

He smiled at the wording and wondered if she realized that her soothing voice and choice of words made a person feel comfortable. No wonder she was so great at her job.

“When I turned seven.”

She nodded. “A formative year. What happened?”

“I saw him with my nanny.”

“Oh, Lord.”

Jay smiled grimly and reached for his egg roll. “I was coming. Sent home early from school because of a tummy ache. Mother was at a luncheon I think, and Jillian and Jessica were both at their schools. I attended an all-boys school and boarded whenever I had some extracurricular activities.

The principal had called Mother, and she sent the car for me. They had been trying to call him, but he was not answering, and he could not be reached at the office.” Picking up his wine, he took a sip, to ease his dry throat.

“I raced upstairs to his office and that’s when I saw them. Her name was Sally – and I was a little in love with her.

She had come straight from Arkansas and was big-boned with a strawberry and cream complexion.

She also had the most brilliant green eyes I had ever seen. She was kind and gentle and would read me stories every single night.”

He swallowed some wine and stared off into space. Alexia waited for him to resume and could feel her heart aching.

“They were both naked and the door was half opened. I heard sounds coming from the office and I think I must have figured out what was happening. He had her face smashed against the desk and was—” The fingers of his left hand curled into fists.

“He looked right at me and smiled. I stood there staring at them and felt the sickness curling inside me. It took me a long time to realize that he had always been in competition with me. Whenever I happen to like a girl, he would find a way to vie for her attention.”

“You don’t have to-”

He shook his head. “I want to. I thought the incident with Sally was the worst until I was going out with Becky from the neighboring girl’s school. We were both seventeen, and I invited her home one day to introduce her to both of them. I saw the way he was looking at her, but I could not believe...”

He drank some more wine. “I had been going out with her for the past six months when he made his move. He had a way about him. He could be charming when he set his mind to it and was often irresistible.

Somehow, he persuaded Becky to meet him at the pool house. It did not matter to him that her parents were friends of the family.”

Alexia felt the sickness curling in her stomach and tried not to show how horrified she was.

“You saw them?”

“There was a party going on inside the ballroom. It was the end of summer, and we were celebrating. It took a while for me to realize that Becky was not around. Someone said she had gone outside, and I went looking for her.”

His expression turned to brood. “I heard the sounds coming from the pool house and knew instinctively what I was going to encounter. I pushed the door open, and he was reclining on the bed, completely naked with Becky servicing his cock. He looked right at me and smirked.”

“What did you do?” she whispered.

“I marched right in and pushed her away, and then I started to attack him. And he laughed.” He shook his head in disgust. “He liked the idea that I was heartbroken over what he did. “Then he told me if my cock was good enough, he would not have been able to entice my girlfriend away.”

Abandoning her stool, she came around to him.

“I am fine,” he said gruffly.

“You are not.” Sliding between his thighs, she wrapped her hands around his neck. “You are not, and if one of my patients’ came to me with something as tragic as what you just told me, I would be crying buckets.”

She blinked away the tears, her hands cupping his face. “You were damaged from a very tender age. Your father was possibly a product of an abusive home.”

She shook her head. “Perhaps not physical abuse, but more than likely emotional. He was not strong enough to break the cycle, and it continued with him. More likely than not, his self-esteem was shattered, and he was powerless to reconstruct his confidence. You have broken the cycle-”

“I am messed up royally doc,” he told her harshly, his mouth pinched. “Years of living in that kind of household will do that to you. You are sweet and beautiful and are probably expecting more-” he swallowed the rest of the

words as she took his lips in a kiss that rocked his damn world.

He held onto her. He did not have a choice in the matter. Her softness melted against his hard unyielding body, and he just held her. He kissed her back fiercely, all the bitterness of his past washing away with the potency of the kiss.

“Was that your way of distracting me?” he finally dragged his mouth from hers, his breathing shallow, his body on fire.

“Did it work?” She had to lean into him, to ease the pressure off her trembling knees.

“Somewhat.” He gripped a handful of her hair. “You should be running in the opposite direction.”

“I never run. And I happen to think you are worth fighting for.”

He started to say something but thought better of it.

“Don’t say you have not been warned.”

“Duly noted.” The tenderness on her beautiful face humbled him and made him feel human.

“What now?”

“Now we finish the meal or not and go upstairs so that I can have my way with you.” She brushed back a lock of hair from his forehead.

“Sounds like a plan. Also sounds like you plan on sticking.”

“I do.”

His eyes narrowed at her choice of words. “I still cannot promise anything.”

“Noted.”

“How patient are you doc?”

“I guess you are going to find out.”

“I guess I will.” His hands roamed over her back restlessly. “I want to lose myself in you.”

“I am here,” she whispered against his mouth. “I will always be here.”

“Where is Ellen?”

“Working late. The threats I made had no effect on her. She has a big case coming up and is prepping for it.” He glanced at her and went to get the wine. “You look like you need it. Tough day?”

“Rough night.”

“Not something a brother wants to hear from his sister. No matter how old you are.”

He poured the wine and glowered as she started laughing. “It’s not funny.”

“And you need to get your mind out of the gutter,” she told him mildly. She had decided to stop by because she was not going to be seeing Jay tonight. He had told her that he had a function that he could not get out of. “And I promised Marilee that I would drop by to see her no matter how late.”

And tomorrow, he was going to his club for an obligatory dinner. Two days without him was going to drive her

crazy.

“Jay told me some stories that I cannot get out of my head.” She trailed a finger around the rim of the glass, her expression pensive. “It makes me rethink my entire existence and how much we were fortunate to have Mom and Dad in our lives, even for such a short time. They were wonderful parents were they not?”

“The best,” her brother agreed as he straddled the chair and picked up his glass.

“And they loved each other.”

“I remember bits and pieces. Picnics in the park and trips to the zoo and museum.”

“Not to mention Disney World when you were about five years old,” he said with a grin.

“Oh yes! I got sick on one of the rides and threw up all over Daddy.”

“He took it in stride and took you to get changed. He spoiled you rotten.”

She nodded. “I was definitely Daddy’s girl.” She gave him a look. “You were definitely Mommy’s pet.”

“That’s because I was so well-behaved and polite.”

She snorted at that and lapsed into silence.

“Sis?”

“Hmm?”

“That bad?”

She nodded and bit her lip. “It’s because I know you would never repeat anything I tell you in confidence. That’s why I am going to share this,” she told him the stories Jay had told her. The horrified expression on his face was justifiable and exactly what she felt when Jay unburdened himself.

“Oh, good Christ!” Anthony whispered, emptying his glass and reaching for the bottle to pour some more. “That’s some sick crap.” He stared at her. “I know what you are going to say, but I have to ask – are you sure you want to be involved with all of that?”

“Now more than ever,” she told him sincerely.

“Why? Do you consider him as one of your patients? Is it the fact that you want to heal him?”

She gave him a wry look. “I knew I was in love with him even before he told me those things.

Yes, I want to help him to heal, but not because I think of him as a patient. He is the man I am in love with, and I have seen beneath the layers and the roadblocks he has put up. I have seen the man he is, the man he should be, and I am in love with that man.”

He stared at her for a few seconds before taking another sip of his wine. “You think he will come around?”

“I hope so,” she said whimsically. “Everything I have is riding on this. I have never felt this way about anyone before.”

Anthony felt the twinge of jealousy and had to push it away. He did not have to feel jealous; he already knew where he stood with his sister. But for the first time in her life, someone was taking his place, and he had no idea what to feel about it.

Jay was beginning to regret that he had made the commitment to be here. The evening had not progressed much before he realized that he was bored as hell and getting restless.

His sisters were present and enjoying the function. The ballroom of the hotel was jam-packed with celebrities. It was an annual event that was supposed to raise money for artists in several third-world countries.

His company was the main contributor to the event, which meant he had to show his face.

“You look like a man in pain.”

He smiled at the sound of Amelia’s voice.

“Is it that obvious?” he asked, turning to face her and objectively admiring the chic silver gown she was wearing.’

“From a mile away.” She touched his arm lightly. “I have not seen you in weeks. Not since that horrible play.”

“I thought you said the performance was excellent.”

“The performance itself, but not the story line It was trite. So, where is she?”

“Who?”

“The woman who snatched you away from me.”

“You are so certain that’s the case?”

“I am positive, and from the look on your face, I would say that you are trying to find a way to go to her.”

He smiled at her intuitiveness. “Why didn’t it work between us?”

“I was not who you were looking for. I was too willing to fall at your feet and not patient enough to nudge you to confide in me.” She touched his jaw gently. “There is something different about you. Before there was complete darkness, but now there is some semblance of light. This woman is doing wonders.”

“She is,” he found himself admitting. “She has a way about her that invites confession.”

“Like a priest?” she asked teasingly.

“More like a friend.”

She angled her head to look at him. “I think I came the closest where that is concerned.”

“You did.”

“She is a very fortunate woman. Go to her, darling. I doubt anyone will notice.”

And he did. He was impatient to get to her. Friday night traffic was hell with people out and determined to make a night of it. He had informed his sister that he was leaving, and they had given him curious looks.

He had something at his club tomorrow, which meant he would have spent two days away from her.

He was at her gate when he remembered that he had not called to let her know he was dropping by.

She answered on the third ring, her voice heavy with sleep.

“I woke you.”

“It’s fine. Are you okay?”

“I am outside your gate.”

There was a pause, and he wondered if she was trying to come awake fully.

“You are?”

“Yes.”

“I thought- Never mind. I am coming to open the door.”

He hung up with a grin and parked at the side of the fence. Getting out, he engaged the alarm and went to unlatch the gate, almost bounding up the drive and the porch steps.

She had the door open for him. She was silhouetted against the door frame, the light from the living room revealing her slender frame in the white t-shirt.

Her hair was piled on top of her head, tendrils escaping against her cheeks.

“I cannot believe you are here,” she whispered, stepping back to let him in.

“I got bored.” He shrugged out of his jacket as she locked the door and engaged the alarm.

“You look wonderful in a tux.”

He grimaced as he dragged off the bow tie. Taking them from him, she put them on the coat rack and turned to face him. “And you look too buttoned up,” she murmured, unhooking the tiny pearl buttons. He helped

her by dragging the shirt tail out of the waistband of his dress pants.

“Let’s go upstairs,” he ordered, lifting her into his arms and heading toward the staircase.

“I cannot believe you left in the middle of your own function.” They were flushed from the lovemaking, and she was sprawled on top of him. “Aren’t you going to be missed?”

“Possibly.” He combed back the hairs from off her face. “I don’t really care. I blame you, though.”

“What did I do?”

“You are making it impossible for me to be anywhere without you.”

She felt the quick dart of joy inside her chest.

“Here I was conditioning my mind to sleep without your really magnificent body against mine when you called.”

“Weren’t you asleep?” he asked her mildly.

“I had just managed to close my eyes when I heard the phone ringing.”

“The phone rang three times before you picked up, which means you were dead to the world.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

“Oh.” She propped her chin on the hands she clasped over his chest. “It still took me a long time to fall asleep. I missed you.”

His heart fairly jumped out of his chest, and his insides felt funny. “Yeah?”

“Hmm. You are starting to mean a hell of a lot to me Jay Templeton,” she rushed on before he could say anything. “I do not expect you to say it back to me of course and I will not pressure you.”

“Good. Just realizing that I am finding it damn hard to get you out of my head,” he growled. “Don’t get too excited, it probably means nothing. Just intense lust and nothing else.”

“Now you had to go and spoil it.” She pouted at him, and he had to kiss her. Hauling her up, he took her lips savagely.

“Better?” he asked her huskily.

“Much.”

She fell asleep on top of him. With his arms wrapped around her waist loosely, Jay contemplated his position. It had been damn easy for him to just up and leave. She was beginning to mean a hell of a lot to him as well.

He had been inside the hotel ballroom with hundreds of beautiful women, ones he had been with in the past, including one he had the utmost respect for and that had not meant a damn thing. All he had wanted to do was to come and be with her.

She made him feel safe and loved – his thoughts jumbled – loved? Where the hell had that word come from? Tilting his head, he gazed at the flawless complexion and the lashes making shadows on her cheek.

Was she in love with him? And if that was the case, how did he feel about it? He had told her repeatedly that he could not make her any promises and he meant it at the

time. But what about now? The thought popped into his head.

He had told her his deepest darkest secrets and had felt the lightness enveloping him.

He had also told Amelia that Alexia had a way about her. She listened and inspired confidence. She also knew exactly what to say and when to say it. He knew it was her profession and she had the training, but it was much more than that.

She stirred and murmured in her sleep, causing him to smile. She did that a lot and he wondered if she knew she did. What was he going to do about her? There were so many complications in his life right now. And what if Marilee did not approve of her? He stopped there, a frown touching his brow.

What the hell was wrong with him? Was he thinking in terms of permanency? But wasn't that what this was leading to? He had been making love to her without using anything. And aside from the time with Sarah-Lee,

that one drunken night, he had not done anything like that again.

Except now, and he had all of his faculties intact. Was he deliberately trying to make things permanent by getting her pregnant? And did he really want a child at this point? If someone had asked him before now, he would have told them an emphatic no.

But things were different, and have been different since he met Alexia. God help him!

Chapter 14

“Hey Templeton! Long time no see.”

Jay quelled the dart of annoyance as the man ambled over to him. Isaac Whittle was a long-time member of the Elite Club and a known snob. He had been trying very hard to get his granddaughter into the talent program at the company. Jay had been trying to avoid him for the longest time. Isaac Whittle did not take no for an answer.

“Whittle,” he responded formally. He had just arrived and was headed to the room he always used whenever he was at the club. And he was not in a particularly good mood, to begin with.

He had left Alexia early this morning and rushed to the manor to have breakfast with his daughter. He also had a decision to make. What he had thought was just a fling was turning out to be something that he could not get a handle on or was afraid to.

He wanted her. No, hell! He needed her and it was frustrating the life out of him. The image of her rumped nakedness on the bed was scorched inside his brain.

“Don’t bother getting up,” he had whispered. “I will see myself out.”

“I should get you a key. You practically live here.”

“That’s a thought,” he had told her lightly.

He had been seeing her in secret because of his daughter and the press, but he realized that he wanted more.

“Can we talk?”

“I am heading into my suite, and I have a match coming up in ten minutes. Bad timing, I am afraid.”

“Why do I get the feeling that you are avoiding me?” The man patted his considerable paunch as he stared at Jay.

“All in your mind.” Jay nodded to the man who was taking his overnight case in.

“Selena is devastated that she has not heard anything more from your company.”

Jay resigned himself to having a conversation with the odious man. “I have asked my talent team to listen to the demo and will get back to you as soon as possible.”

“I know you will like what she has to say.” He beamed.
“She is quite talented.”

“I really have to go.”

“That thing about your daughter’s mother.”

“Yes?” He bit off a sigh.

“Sorry to hear of her death. Quite a talented young woman and such a waste. How is your daughter coping?”

“She is doing fine, actually.”

“Children are resilient. I don’t know if I told you that my Selena lost her mother to a tragic accident when she was only fifteen. People say I spoil her rotten, but I am just trying to make it up to her.

It’s not right for a girl to be without a mother.” His light green eyes were inquisitive as he stared at the younger man. “I suppose you will have to find someone to mother her.”

“She has her aunts,” Jay told him shortly.

“I suppose that’s something.”

“I really have to go.” Turning on his heels, he left before the man could say anything else.

He was inside the cream and burgundy bedroom changing when his phone rang. Reaching for it, he felt the pleasure coursing through his body as he realized who it was.

“I know I said no phone calls.”

“Was that what you said?” he asked indulgently.

“But I am calling to tell you to break a leg or whatever the term is when playing tennis.”

“Thanks.” He sat on the edge of the bed, feeling the warmth invading his body. “What are your plans for today?”

“I have to go to the free clinic in about fifteen minutes, and then I plan on stopping by my brother on the way back.” There was a pause.

“I know I do not have any claims on you, but that still does not mean I cannot ask. It’s a tournament and then a party at the end of the evening. I know this because it has been hyped up in the press.”

“It’s an annual fundraising event. What’s your question, doc?”

“There will be a lot of single women there, vying for your attention.”

He grinned, his entire body relaxing. “I am still awaiting the question.”

“You are determined to have me say it, aren’t you?”

“That I am.”

“I have no cause to be jealous.”

“That’s, in fact, a statement.”

“Okay, fine. I am just going to come right out and say it. Please do not give me a reason to be jealous. Will you be spending the night alone?”

His grin widened, and he realized that sparring with her was becoming rather entertaining.

“I have not decided yet. Will you be coming by?”

He waited at the pause.

“Good one. Anyway, enjoy and bring home a trophy or whatever.”

“Thanks, doc.” This time he was the one who hesitated. “I miss you.” He blew out a breath and felt the fist around his heart loosen.

“Was that so hard to say?” she asked huskily.

“It was. Okay, doc, as much as I love talking to you, I really have to go.”

“I will see you when you get back.”

“Count on it.” He hung up from her and felt like a damn coward. The best he had been able to come up with was that he missed her. The words had been tumbling around inside but refused to come out. With a bitter sigh, he rose and set about getting ready.

“I am harried, Alexia,” the petite and dynamic administrator of the clinic admitted as she looped the stethoscope around her neck. “We are overrun with patients today, and it’s a Saturday.”

She passed a restless hand over her rope braids, dark brown eyes weary. “We have been at it since seven A.M., and there does not seem to be any let-up.” She gestured toward the overcrowded waiting room.

“And to make matters worse, one of our doctors called out sick. Some sort of virus is going around. We have four people waiting to see you.” Grace took her arm and led her to the tiny room that was assigned to Alexia whenever she visited the clinic.

“There is also a newcomer,” she lowered her voice as they made their way through the narrow hallway. “He is diagnosed as having bipolar disorder and has threatened

to kill himself several times. I don't know what you can do for him."

"Dr. Lang?"

"I will be right there," she called back. "Some grateful patient brought in tons of coffee and donuts. Help yourself when you find the time." With a wave of one hand, she hurried away.

Pushing the door open, Alexia went into the room to get started.

"What do you think?" Ellen turned to look at her husband, a slight frown on her brow.

"I think it is too soon to be painting the nursery."

"I am just weighing my options. We have three extra bedrooms. The one next to ours is too small, and the

other two are too far away.”

“It’s one tiny baby. How much room will he or she need?”
He wrapped his arms around her waist, feeling a jolt at the slight bump that gave an indication of the life she was carrying inside her.

Thankfully, everything was going smoothly now, with just a few morning sicknesses. But that was something she was handling like a pro. They were on the third month now, and he could not wait to get to the end of it, where he would be holding his son or daughter in his arms.

“You are not helping,” she told him dryly, leaning back in his arms. “Before you know it, I will be in my second trimester, and my caseload is getting heavier.”

He turned her to face him, his expression was stern. “Do I need to remind you that you are supposed to be taking it easy?”

“Yes jailer.” She sighed lightly. “I am aware that I am carrying precious cargo and will be taking things slow when the time comes. I feel fine now.”

“And we want that feeling to last.” He cupped her face between his hands. “We are not going to think about our precious cargo or anything pertaining to that. Today we are both off from work, and it is going to be about us.

Alexia will be coming by later, and that gives us enough time to pop out for breakfast and take a walk in the park.”

“You are right. We also need to go grocery shopping.”

“I thought we did that last week.”

She gave him a wry look. “I would not exactly call picking up milk and butter grocery shopping.”

“Okay, fine.” Bending his head, he kissed her, his mouth hungry. “New plan,” he told her huskily. “We might have

to make a ten-minute stop in the bedroom first.”
“I like that plan.”

“Anthony!” Ellen stared at the television screen in horror as the news unfolded.

“What the hell – are you okay?” Her husband rushed in from the kitchen, where he had just put the grocery bags onto the counter.

She pointed mutely to the television where the somber news reporter was standing outside the downtown clinic, reporting an incident unfolding.

“We are not certain how many fatalities there are yet, but we are waiting to hear. As I said before, breaking news. A lone gunman, a source confirmed that he was a patient of the clinic, just went inside and started shooting.”

Anthony felt his knees buckling. Grabbing his phone, he tried calling her.

“She might have left.” Even in his own voice, he could hear the uncertainty. His eyes became transfixed as he continued to listen to the report. “We are not certain what is taking place at this time, but it is alleged that the gunman took his own life right after spraying the place with bullets.

A number of people managed to flee the building, but we are still waiting to hear what is going on. Again, we are on the scene of another mass shooting, and this time, it is at the Hope View clinic on Cranberry Road.”

“I am going.” Anthony could not feel his feet. He felt as if he was rooted to the floor.

“You cannot drive in the condition you are in.” Ellen grabbed the keys from the key holder and her jacket.

“I cannot allow you to-”

“Chains cannot keep me in the damn house. Let’s go.”

“Hey Templeton, good game.” Jackson Colby called out to him.

“You certainly tried, but were no match for my expertise.”

“I am more of a touch sport kinda guy.” He slapped Jay on the back. “How about buying me a drink?”

“It’s not even noon.”

“It is somewhere.”

They veered toward the nearest bar and sat down on the stools, signaling for the bartender to bring their drink.

“Did you see Williams?” Jackson asked with a grin as he reached for the bowl of mixed nuts. “He was certainly off his game. The guy-”

“Turn that up!” Jay shouted. Reacting to the urgency in his voice, the man hurried to do just that.

“What’s wrong?”

“Jesus! Jesus!” Jay felt as if his bowels were turning to water.

“Another mass shooting.” Jackson muttered in disgust, his frown deepening as he stared at his friend. “What the hell is it, man? You are as white as a sheet.”

“She is there.” He pointed to the screen. “Oh, good God, she went there this morning.” Springing from the stool, he stumbled and almost fell, would have if Jackson had not grabbed his arm. “A glass of brandy, man,” he snapped at the bartender.

“I have to go.”

“First you are going to drink this, and then we will try and get you going. You are not going to drive back in your condition.”

It was pure chaos at the scene. Emergency vehicles were parked everywhere, and people were crammed there, with the strong police presence keeping them behind the yellow crime scene tape.

The car had not stopped completely before Anthony shoved the door open and got out, his eyes wild as he looked for his sister. His bowels turned to water again

when he saw several body bags being loaded into the ME's van.

Crime scene units were already processing the scene. EMTs were treating several people who were not fatally wounded, but there was no sign of his sister.

Marching over to where a gray-haired man with a badge pinned to the pocket of his jacket, he waited impatiently for him to finish issuing instructions.

"I have no comments for the press." Anthony was told brusquely.

"I am not the damn press," he said tightly. "My name is Anthony Faulkner, and my sister was – is one of the doctors in the clinic."

"What's her name?" He opened his notebook and scanned the page.

"Alexia Faulkner."

“She has been transported to Hope General.”

“How bad?”

“I have no idea. All I can tell you is that she was shot .”

“Thank you.” He turned blindly to see his wife behind him.

“I heard,” she said quietly, taking his arm. “I parked on the street. Let’s go.”

He allowed her to lead him to the car. The numbness had settled over him, and he was not certain he knew how to navigate.

“Buckle in, darling.”

“What?” Shaking his head, he realized that he was in the passenger side of the vehicle and had no idea how he got there.

“Seat belt”

“Oh.” He did so automatically and continued to stare out the window vacantly.

Putting the car in drive, Ellen prayed silently, her fingers gripping the steering wheel. If Alexia did not make it- no! She shook her head and pushed away the thought. She has to make it. There was no other alternative.

The hospital was a mad chaotic jumble of people. News had already spread and the number of patients that had been brought in was tremendous. At first, they could not get anyone to pay them any attention until Anthony

demanded to know what was happening from the charge nurse.

“We are extremely busy as you can see,” she told him stiffly.

“And my sister is one of the damn victims. I need to know what is happening,” he snapped.

“What’s her name?”

“Alexia Faulkner. Dr. Alexia Faulkner.”

The woman’s brows cleared. “I know her. She was brought in with GSW to the left arm and shoulder. She is in surgery. Your sister is in good hands.”

“She is in surgery?”

“She was rushed into the OR as soon as she was brought in. She lost a lot of blood.”

“What are her chances?” he whispered hoarsely.

“You will have to wait to hear from the doctors. Please excuse me.”

“Let’s go and find a seat.”

“I cannot-”

“Darling, we are going to have to wait to hear what’s happening.” Taking his hand, she led him toward an area where there were two vacant chairs.

All around the large room, there were people waiting anxiously to hear word of their loved ones. Directly opposite them, a woman was twisting a cloth in her hands, the tears falling from her eyes.

Another couple was hugging each other, the man staring straight ahead in stoic silence as he held his weeping wife.

Anthony gripped her hand, and she turned her head to look at him. He was frightened and was not afraid to show it.

She was scared too, but for the sake of the fetus she was carrying, she had to remain calm, and she could not afford to fall apart, not while her husband was on the verge of doing so. They both looked at the doorway, where the sounds of a commotion caught their attention.

“My God,” Ellen who was nearest to the doorway, exclaimed in surprise.

“What is it?”

“He is here.”

“Who is- oh.” Anthony got to his feet slowly as the man walked into the room, blue eyes scanning the crowd until his eyes alighted on the man who had gotten to his feet.

“Anthony Faulkner?” Ignoring the curious stares and the buzz of voices, he moved toward them.

“Yes.”

“Have you heard anything?”

“No. This is my wife, Ellen.”

“Nice to meet you. Do you know who the doctor in charge is?”

“No. We were just told she is in surgery, and it could take several hours.”

“I suppose you know who she is to me?”

“Actually, I don’t,” Anthony told him grimly. “Who is my sister to you?”

He stared at them both for a minute. “I cannot lose her,” he said hoarsely. “I spoke to her this morning, and she wished me all the best on my game.

I was at my club for a charity tournament, and the only thing I told her that was of any significance was that I missed her. I should have-” he broke off. “I will see if I can get something more than what you have.”

They watched him walk away.

“My God,” Ellen whispered as she stared at the impressive man making his way out of the crowded room.

“What is it?” Anthony asked as he lowered himself back into the chair.

“He loves her.”

Anthony nodded. “It would appear that he does.”

Jay was true to his word. Not only was he able to get more information, but he also got them a private room where they were offered refreshments that they did not need. Alexia had been shot twice. Fortunately, both bullets had been through, and through which resulted in her losing a lot of blood.

“I am afraid I cannot comment on the status of her condition yet because she is still in surgery.” The chief of surgeons told them with a grim look on his face. “All I

can say is that Dr. Faulkner is a colleague, and we are working assiduously to save her life.”

“How long will the surgery be?” Jay asked him tersely.

“Maybe a few hours. They are trying to find the source of the bleeding. She is still in danger at this time.”

“Please keep us updated,” Jay said curtly as he strode over to stand at the window.

The man nodded, and, giving the other two occupants a sympathetic look, he left the room, closing the door behind him.

There was silence in the room for several minutes, each involved in their own thoughts.

Ellen got up nervously and went to pour a cup of coffee for her husband.

“Would you like some coffee?” she asked the man standing at the window.

He turned to look at them with a frown as if wondering what the hell they were doing there. “Thanks.”

“You spoke to her this morning.” Anthony held the cup in his hands, his expression bleak.

“Yes. I was with her last night. I left this morning.” He accepted the coffee with a faint nod but remained standing.

“You have been seeing my sister in secret for how long?”

“Almost a month.” A smile played around his lips. “And in that month, she had managed to accomplish what others never had.”

“And that would be?”

“She got me to open up about my past.” He took a sip of the scalding liquid and wished for something stronger. Jackson had pried the story out of him and had arranged to get him here in a chopper. “She is...” He struggled to find a word to best describe the woman he had fallen in love with and came up with nothing.

He had felt that was where it had been leading to, but it was confirmed as soon as he realized that he might lose her. “She made me fall in love with her.” He shook his head in disbelief. “She achieved the impossible.” He lowered himself into the chair nearest to him, his body shaking.

“She is a special person,” Anthony said roughly as he stared at the man, before exchanging a glance with his wife.

“I want to get the chance to tell her how much I love her.” Putting the cup away, he dragged his hands over his face. “I am sorry. I—” His phone vibrated just then, and he took it out of his pocket. “My sister. I have to get this.”

He left the room and closed the door behind him.
Anthony reached for his wife's hand and held on tight.
"She is a fighter," he murmured as if to himself.

"She is. And she has too much to fight for to give up like that."

"She was doing a damn good deed, and this is the thanks she received," he added bitterly. "If that bastard had not taken his own life, I would-"

"You and me both."

He turned his head to look at her. "Oh El, I cannot lose her."

"And we won't," she told him firmly. "We have to cling to hope. We need her, and our baby needs their aunt." She nodded to the door. "And her life is just beginning."

Chapter 15

The wait was excruciating. Anthony was practically climbing the walls by the time two hours had passed. Jay was prowling restlessly, alternating between snapping orders on the phone and harassing the doctors for word on her status.

The press had somehow found out the connection and the mass shooting had taken a new turn. Playboy CEO of the talent company was somehow romantically connected to Dr. Alexia Faulkner.

He was so pissed at the leak that he had ordered his sister to have someone deal with it.

“And say what exactly?” Jillian had asked him coolly.
“You have been involved with this woman and never said a word to us.”

“There were complications,” he had muttered. “How is my daughter taking it?”

“She is, in fact, thrilled.”

“That’s something.”

“Jay? Is this more than your usual arrangement?”

“I am in love with her,” he admitted harshly. “And if I lose her...” he trailed off. “Yes, it is much more.”

“Then I will be rooting for you both and will apprise the PR department so that they can come up with something.”

“Thanks.”

Now he was back to prowling the length of the room. Jackson had called to inquire if there was any word.

“No.”

“Keep me informed, my friend. And I hope to God she makes it.”

“So do I.”

He spun around as the door opened to admit a very tired-looking surgeon. “She is out of surgery?”

“And?” Anthony asked tensely.

“We managed to stop the bleeding, but she is still out of it. Only the next few hours will tell.”

“We would like to see her,” Jay told him in an implacable tone.

The man nodded. “Please keep the visits to a minimum. This way, please. Alexia is a colleague and a friend, and we are fighting to make sure she survives.”

“Thank you,” Ellen told him gratefully.

“Here we are.” He pushed the sliding glass doors open. “I will make certain you are not disturbed.”

Jay stood at the door while Anthony and Ellen went to stand at the side of the bed. From where he was standing, he could see her trussed up against the pillows, tubes running from her to a monitor beeping.

He had seen death before. First, his mother, who had taken her life, and then his dad, who had died of a heart attack while servicing one of his mistresses.

Then only recently there had been Sarah-Lee. He had shed bitter and angry tears for his mother while standing at his father's funeral without an ounce of emotion. For Sarah-Lee there had been regret at a wasted life.

He had faced all of those with stoicism, but he would never be able to survive if this was the last time he was going to see Alexia. His heart would not only be broken but it would also be crushed.

He stood there in silence and watched as Anthony sat on the edge of the bed. The man was about to fall apart and only the solid presence of the woman standing next to him was preventing that from happening.

Jay told himself that he would keep it together. He had to. His eyes wandered over her usually animated face which had been leached of color. Her hair had been bundled up and secured on top of her head. The white hospital gown made her look as if she was dead.

His hands clenched into fists at the thought, and he had to take several breaths to calm down.

He straightened up as the couple left the bedside and approached him.

“We know you want to spend time with her,” Ellen said softly.

He nodded.

“We are going home for a little bit.” She smiled at him. “I am pregnant, and my stomach is roiling.”

“Congratulations,” he told her woodenly.

“Thank you.” She touched his arm briefly.

“We are depending on you to let us know if-” Anthony swallowed. “When she wakes up. Call immediately.”

He nodded again, not trusting himself to speak.

They left him standing there, and for a minute, he felt as if he could not move. As if he was glued to the spot. Then shaking off the enveloping despair, he strode toward the bed and pulled up a chair. The white bandage was a startling contrast to her caramel skin.

She was still that he had to check her pulse to see if she was still breathing. Her lashes made shadows on her cheeks and her lips were slightly parted. Taking her hand in his, he pressed a kiss onto the flesh that felt too cool for his liking.

Swallowing the lump inside his throat, he struggled to say the words that he should have told her when she called this morning. They had been together last night. Was it only last night he had ditched the function to go to her? It seemed so far away now. As if it had happened last month or a year ago.

He recalled her soft voice teasing him about a tattoo on his left arm.

“An act of rebellion?” she had asked, trailing a finger over the shape of the unicorn.

“Something like that.”

“Why not a dragon or something completely masculine?”

“I like unicorns,” he had told her with a grin. Talking to her was easy and he felt completely relaxed when he was with her. Unless he was making love to her and then it was as if emotions were swamping him and threatening to overwhelm him.

Pressing his lips against her skin, he closed his eyes. “I should have told you,” he said raggedly. “Why the hell was I so afraid to? I should have told you even last night. I felt it inside my chest.

It felt as if my heart was bursting, and I wanted to say the words but was too damned scared to do so.” He closed his eyes briefly and could feel the tears burning beneath his eyelids.

“We spoke just this morning, and I could hear the question in your voice, and I was too damned stupid to realize how much you mean to me. Come back to me darling and I promise that I will never again take you for granted.

That I will shout it to everyone that you belong to me. That you came into my life and have changed it drastically for the better. That you mean more to me than my own life. That I want us to be a family.”

He stared at the bruise on her left cheek where she had fallen when the bullet made contact with her flesh and could feel the anger burning inside his gut. He had heard that the man who had shot up the place had been someone that had frequented the clinic.

If he had not ended his life, it would not be worth anything. He would have found him and torn him from

limb to limb.

“Open your eyes, baby,” he pleaded. “Feel the touch of my hands and open your eyes. I just want to know that I am not going to lose you.”

But she remained stubbornly silent, her body still, driving fear into his heart.

“Come lie with me a bit.”

Anthony shook his head as he adjusted her pillows. He had been silent on the way back, the tension in his body palpable. Ellen was afraid that if Lexie did not wake up today, he was going to fall apart. She knew he was trying to hold himself together for her sake and wished that he would not feel the need to.

“I am going to make some tea. And you must be hungry.”
He stepped back when she reached out a hand.

“Just the tea will do.”

“You have not eaten since breakfast, and we had been at the hospital for five hours. You need sustenance, and the baby needs nutrients.”

“Perhaps some soup.”

“We did pick up some chicken noodle soup in the can. I will heat some on the stove top and make some tea.

“Will you eat something?”

“I am afraid it will not get past the awful lump inside my throat,” he admitted with a grim smile. “Do you think he will call?”

She knew he was referring to Jay Templeton.”

“He will. He loves her.”

Anthony nodded. “Unbelievable, but true.” He turned and walked out of the room, with her gaze following him with a frown.

He was holding it together by sheer will and she really should go downstairs and see to it that he was okay.

Okay? She shook her head wryly. Her husband would never be okay until he saw for himself that his sister was awake and whole.

Anthony busied himself with the simple task, concentrating fiercely on opening the can and pouring the contents into the pot. Next, he slammed the kettle on the opposite burner and went to get the box of Earl Grey. His phone was on the counter, and he was determined to stop willing it to ring.

She was going to be fine. She had made it out of surgery, didn't she? And the doctors were optimistic. They had said she had lost a lot of blood, but the bullets had not damaged any vital organs and had missed her lungs by inches.

There was the chance of an infection, but they were hoping that would not be the case. They were hoping for the best. He would have stayed with her if it had not been for Ellen.

His wife was pregnant, and he knew that if he had opted to stay, she would have insisted on staying as well and it would not have been fair to her or the babe she was carrying.

The soup was bubbling by now and turning off the flame, he poured the noodles into a bowl. He should make her some toast as well to go with it. But he could barely find the energy to do so.

Making the tea, he stirred the honey in. Suddenly it all came crashing home to him. His sister was in the hospital fighting for her life.

The tears came then and sliding against the wall, he buried his head into his arms and wept loudly.

Ellen, suspecting that something like this was about to happen had left the bed and was just in time to see him slide to the floor. Without a word, she sat next to him and placed her arms around him.

“She is awake,” Jay told him hoarsely, two hours later.
“Groggy but the doctors say that her vital signs are

looking positive. You don't have to come- “
“We are on our way.”

Hanging up the phone, he stood there until they had finished examining her and left the room.

Her dark brown eyes tracked his progress as he came forward.

“Hi,” she whispered.

“Surely you could have found a better way to get me to come running. You did not have to get yourself shot.”

She reached for his hand, wincing at the slight pain in her left shoulder. “I love a grand entrance and exit.”

He took her hand in his, his face inscrutable. “You could have died.”

“Yet, I am still here. Trying to get rid of me?”

“Your brother and sister-in-law are on their way,” he told her abruptly.

Alexia barely managed to stifle her gasp of disappointment at his formal tone. She was certain she heard him talking to her and could recall some of the words he said. Now he was acting like a complete stranger.

“It’s late-”

“They insisted.”

“And Ellen is pregnant.”

“I suppose they did not want to take my word for it.”

“How was the game?”

“I won.” He smiled slightly. It seemed like days away since that had happened.

“Great,” her voice floundered and she had no idea what else to say. He had let go of her hand and was sitting back against the chair, his expression brooding.

“Jay-” Whatever she had been about to say was interrupted by the noise at the doorway indicating that her family had arrived.

“I will leave you to it,” Jay told them briefly. “The doctors warned that she needs more rest.” Glancing at her, he turned and walked out of the room.

Forcing a smile on her lips, she welcomed her brother’s tentative embrace.

“You scared the crap out of me. Please don’t do it again,” he said in all seriousness.

“I won’t. What are you doing here?” her eyes touched Ellen.

“Your brother needed my support, literally. I was not about to have him involved in a car crash on his way here.”

“You should be in bed,” Alexia insisted.

“I am fine.” Ellen moved forward and kissed her forehead. “You gave us a hell of a scare.”

He had to leave or risked blubbing like a fool. And besides, she was with her family and surrounded by doctors. He was grimy, his clothes disheveled. A few reporters had been straggling outside in the parking lot and had come running as soon as he exited the building.

“Back off,” he told them coldly. He did not have the time or patience to satisfy their curiosity. Besides, he was not in a frame of mind to engage in any form of conversation.

He felt like a damn coward. He had left her without a word, ignoring the hopeful look on her beautiful face. She had probably heard every word he spoke while she was under and was probably wondering why he had not repeated them now that she was awake.

“Where to, sir?”

Jillian had sent a car for him, and he appreciated it.

“My place,” he said abruptly. Leaning his head back, he closed his eyes and felt the tears leaking from his eyelids. The adrenalin that had been pumping inside him when he heard the news had been replaced by a crushing sense of hopelessness.

He could feel the emptiness inside him. He hated the weakness and fear that was making him feel as if he did not want to go on. He should be celebrating, but instead here he was running away and hiding.

He allowed the tears to trickle down and could feel the awful fear spiking in his heart. Yes, she was alive, but the awful thing inside him was saying over and over that she could have died, and he would not have survived. She had brought out emotions inside him that scared the crap out of him.

He was feeling – so much that he could not contain it.

Shaking himself when the vehicle came to a stop, he wiped his cheeks and pushed the door open. It was now Sunday morning, and the bleakness of the early morning mirrored his mood.

“I will let you know if I need you later on today,” he said tersely. He was going to grab a bottle of scotch and drink himself into oblivion.

“Darling, could you go and get me something to drink?”

Anthony stared at her, his expression telling her that he knew she was trying to get rid of him.

“I am going to be speaking with the doctors and then we are heading home.”

Bending over, he kissed his sister on the forehead.
“Thanks for not destroying my life,” he said roughly.

“You are welcome.” She held onto his hand for a second before letting go.

Alexia waited until he had left and closed the door behind him. “Where is he?”

“I think he left.”

She plucked at the hospital gown; her expression haunted. “He just left?”

“I am assuming so,” Ellen told her gently. “He has been here all night staying with you. He flew from his club to get here when he saw the news.”

Ellen leaned forward and took her hand. “He loves you.”

“I think I heard him say something like that when I was under the anesthesia. And now he has left when I really need him.”

“My take is that this is all new to him, and he is trying to process. He was pretty shaken up while he was waiting. Between him and Anthony, I had no idea which one would crumple first.

Your brother cried. I was upstairs waiting for him to come back with the meal. When he did not return, I figured out what was happening. He was on the kitchen floor bawling like a baby.”

Alexia felt the tears starting. “I thought I was going to die. I saw my life flash before my eyes and felt regret.”

“You don’t have to talk about it.”

“I want to, and the detectives will be coming to take my statement anyway.” She bit her lip. “I was with a patient, a seventeen-year-old girl who was a recovering addict. I recalled smiling at something she said, I cannot remember exactly what she said, and then I heard the shots being fired.

At first, I thought it was a firecracker going off, and then I heard the screams. I told the girl to hide under the desk and was running to lock the door when he came charging in.”

She looked pensive for a minute, the horrible memories crowding her mind. “We stood there staring at each other for a few seconds, and I realized that I knew him. I tried reasoning with him, and it looked like I was getting through until he heard someone behind him.

That was when he shot me. I went down, and he shot me again. I passed out after that and do not remember what happened next.”

Ellen squeezed her hand and could not say anything.

“The doctors are not telling me anything.”

“That’s because they want you to get better.”

She shook her head, the tears surfacing. "I thought about Anthony and you and the baby. And then I thought about Jay and regretted that I had not said anything to him this morning when we spoke." She blinked away the tears. "I wanted to tell him how I feel, but something stopped me. I did not want to make a fool of myself."

"He said something to that effect."

"He did? Then where the hell is he?"

He woke up a few hours later, his head throbbing and his body shaking. The dream had been horrible. He was in the clinic with her and saw the man coming toward her with the gun. One minute they were laughing at something she said, and the next, she was being pumped with bullets.

He woke up, his lungs screaming and the sweat coating his skin.

His heart was pounding painfully inside his chest. Swinging his legs off the bed, he had to stand for a full two minutes before he could move. When he did, he felt the liquor swirling around in his gut.

He barely made it to the commode in time to empty his stomach.

Sliding down the tiles, he held his throbbing head between his palms and sucked in much-needed air. Alcohol certainly did not mix well with an empty stomach, he thought wryly.

He was struggling to get up when the phone he had put inside his pocket vibrated. His heart picked up speed when he saw the name of the hospital.

“This is Jay,” he whispered hoarsely.

“Good. You are alive. Have I offended you in some way?”

The sound of her soft cultured voice made him weak.

“Are you okay?”

“No. I am not Jay. You left.”

“I had to come home to get some sleep,” he said lamely.

“Is that so?” she asked him scathingly. “All those things you said when I was unconscious, were they just words?”

“What things?” He was being evasive but could not help it.

“I almost died-”

“And that right there is the damn problem!” The shout made his headache worse, and he tried to ameliorate his tone. Taking several deep breaths, he tried again. “I almost lost you, Alexia, and I cannot bear it. I cannot deal with that right now. I need some time.”

“No. Damn, you, no. I was shot and almost died, but for some reason, I am still here, and I would like to think that it is because I was meant to be. That we are meant to start a life together. I am taking the kid gloves off and telling you what I should have since I realized it.

I love you, Jay Templeton, and I am no longer prepared to abide by your rules. I want all of you, and I would like us to start our lives together. I want it all, marriage, being a family with you and Marilee, if she will have me. Am I clear?”

He nodded before belatedly realizing that she could not see him. “Yes,” he told her hoarsely. “And I accept.”

Chapter 16

“You are still weak.” It had been a week since the shooting, and she was finally cleared to go home. The press had been in a frenzy about their relationship, but Jay had not bothered to give them any comments.

They were getting married as soon as she was fully recovered, something he had insisted on. “We are not standing in front of God and family and friends with you wearing a bandage,” he had told her firmly. “I am not going anywhere. I promise,” he added quietly.

She had spoken to Marilee over the phone and asked her what she thought about the relationship, and the little girl had been ecstatic.

She had also spoken to Jillian and Jessica and both women had told her that she had made a difference in their brother and niece and that was a plus for her.

Anthony had insisted on her coming to stay with them until she was better.

“She is staying with me,” Jay told them firmly. “I have a housekeeper, and I intend to take some time off to take care of her.”

So it had been settled. Now she was ensconced inside his apartment with both of them fussing over her.

Ellen had left to go home because she had some work to catch up with.

“I am fine guys. I feel special and spoiled, but your hovering is driving me nuts.”

“We just want to make sure you are comfortable.”

Anthony adjusted the pillows behind her head and pressed a kiss on her forehead. “It’s good to see you almost looking like your old self.”

“I am well on the way to recovery.” Her gaze drifted to the man standing at the foot of the bed. She had time to

admire the stunning décor of his bachelor pad when she came in.

Anthony interpreting the longing looks being exchanged, felt the need to take his leave. "I will see you tomorrow."

"I love you."

His heart shattered, and he felt the tears pricking his eyes.

"I love you too," he told her gruffly. Placing a kiss on her forehead, he got to his feet and started to leave the room.

"Take care of her."

"That goes without saying."

Alexia watched as he walked over to sit on the edge of the bed. “We are finally alone.” She was still wearing a bandage and was receiving physical therapy to get back the use in her left arm. The doctors had explained how lucky she was, and she agreed.

“Yes.” Taking her hand in his, he drew out a box he had been carrying around for the past two days. “Why don’t we make it official?”

Springing the tiny clasp, he opened it to reveal one of the most stunning square-cut diamonds she had ever seen.

“Alexia Faulkner, would you do me the extreme honor of being my wife?”

Tears clouded her vision, and for a minute, words failed her.

“I am going to start suffering from an inferiority complex if you remain silent,” he told her teasingly.

“You are forgetting that I had to be the one to take the initiative and propose,” she reminded him. Stretching her left hand out, she watched as he slid the ring on. It was a perfect fit, the sun catching the stone and shooting fire.

“It suits you,” he told her huskily.

“I do not want a big wedding.” She was still looking at the ring.

“Okay.”

Tearing her eyes from the stone, she gazed at him. Everything she felt was right there in her eyes for him to see. “Just family and a few friends. And I want Marilee to be my attendant.”

“I am sure she is going to love that.”

“We could have the ceremony in June. There is this lovely place on Sunset Street-”

“I was thinking of the gazebo at the manor,” he interrupted her gently. “There have been so many awful memories there, we should start some new ones.”

She nodded, her eyes shining. “I thought I was going to have to hogtie you in order to get you to marry me.”

He grinned at her. “Fortunately, it has not come to that.”

“You still need to say the words,” she said soberly.

“You look lovely.” He winced when she pinched his arm.

“I thought that was what you wanted to hear.”

“Jay Templeton.”

He grinned at her, enjoying her and loving her beyond measure.

“I adore you darling.”

Her breath hitched, and the tears fell,

“That’s the very reason I had not wanted to say them.”
Taking off his shoes he eased into bed next to her.

“These are happy tears.” She sniffed and buried her face into his chest. “Oh Jay, I have loved you since the first time I met you.”

“That must have been hell for you,” he teased.

“A little bit.”

“You changed my whole life,” he told her huskily. “I never thought I would ever feel this way about someone, and

you proved me wrong. For the rest of my life, I will always be grateful.”

“You are completely welcome, darling.”

The wedding of Jay Aubrey Templeton to Dr. Alexia Essence Faulkner was announced in the society rags and speculated about for days. To the public’s surprise and acute disappointment, the wedding was a private affair with only family and close friends being invited.

The bride was fully recovered and days before the wedding, the groom had surprised her by contributing to the clinic where the violence had erupted. Two doctors had lost their lives as well as three adults and two children.

A memorial had been set up in their honor and Templeton Talent Agency had contributed to the addition of an extra wing in the clinic. A private security firm had

been hired to ensure that what had happened before would never happen again.

The ceremony took place in the beautiful arbor where Jay's mother had spent most of her time planting a flower garden.

Alexia had opted for a simple white off-the-shoulder dress with a cinched-in waist and wide swirling skirts. Her thick dark brown curls had been shampooed, conditioned, and styled by a top stylist. Little rosebuds dotted the front and one long braid drifted past her left shoulder.

Marilee looked adorably lovely in pink and lilac and was so excited that she could barely stand still. And she had started to call Anthony 'uncle' much to his delight.

The ceremony was over in ten minutes, giving the newlyweds time to get away for their month-long honeymoon. They were going to take a tour of Europe and then do some island hopping.

“We are going to be regular tourists,” her new husband told her with a wide smile.

“As if you could be.”

“You look wonderful,” Anthony was telling her goodbye. The guests had left and only the family remained. Jay was spending time with his daughter, reassuring her that as soon as they returned from their honeymoon, she would be living with them. Sandra Brinkley had come to her senses, and they were now a big part of the little girl’s life.

In a few weeks, school would be on break, and she would get to accompany her aunts on a trip to the UK.

“Thanks. You look handsome.” She touched his cheek lightly. “Please say you are happy for me.”

“If I wasn’t I would have definitely stopped the ceremony,” he told her gruffly. Lifting his head, he stared at the man who had swept into his sister’s life and captured her heart.

His wife had reminded him that he was not losing a sister but gaining a brother. He had snorted at that. But Jay Templeton had proven time and again that he loved her. The man was sappy when it came to Alexia, and he was convinced that he was not going to have to break his damn pretty face.

“I love him, Tony.”

He felt a jolt at the use of the name she had called him when they were children.

“I know.”

“And he loves me.”

“The only reason I am tolerating him.” His expression softened as he enfolded her in his arms. “Go and have fun and make a baby.”

“I will.” Hugging him tight, she wriggled out of his arms to go to her husband. Ignoring the dart of jealousy, he went to find his own wife.

He undressed her quietly, his fingers gentle on her skin. They were at their first destination, a little traveled island in Greece by the name of Milos. The company owns a small villa there, and it was managed by a local Greek couple who had been instructed to make sure the place was clean and stocked with food.

They would be staying a week before leaving to go somewhere else.

“Tired?” he asked solicitously as unzipped the dress.

“No.” She was shaking, her body warm and getting hot as he continued to take off her clothing. He had waited a month to make love to her after she had been discharged from the hospital, but the lovemaking had lacked its usual ferocity and she realized he was holding back.

She was not going to tolerate that tonight. She had slept on the private jet, her head resting on his shoulder, and was now wide awake with every intention of enjoying her honeymoon.

He made a sound deep inside his throat when he saw the thin lace teddy she had worn beneath her dress. His eyes became bleak as he stared at the scar right below her clavicle and he was reminded yet again, how close he had come to losing her.

“Don’t,” she whispered as he stood there staring at the scar.

“Please. This is our honeymoon and I do not want anything to spoil it.”

“Kind of difficult to do when the evidence is there. Would you feel better if I covered it with foundation?” she asked him quietly.

“No. No.” He shook his head. Taking off the lace underwear, he guided her toward the bed. He had not bothered with a tux for the wedding but had worn dark blue dress pants, a light blue cotton shirt, and a sports jacket.

He had stripped off the jacket while they were on their way and gotten rid of the shirt as soon as they stepped into the bedroom.

Kneeling before her, he slipped off the gold and white heels she had worn with her dress and started to remove her garter.

“Wasn’t I supposed to throw this?”

“You were.”

“My bad.” He did not look in the least bit sorry that he had not. “It’s going to be my keepsake.” He removed it slowly and then took off her sheer stockings. Running his hands up and down her thighs, he studiously avoided the vee between them.

Getting to his feet, he finished undressing before kneeling in front of her.

“I love you,” he told her simply. He had stood there and repeated his vows, his entire body shaking. He never thought he would be wearing a wedding ring, but he would wear this one with pride.

“I love you.” Her fingers drifted through his thick honey-blond hair, and she could feel the tears burning the back of her throat.

“My wife.” His voice had thickened. His hands parted her thighs as he slipped between them. He was going to pleasure her, no matter the cost to himself. “I promise you that I will be faithful until death.”

“I am holding you to it.”

He palmed her sex and watched as she arched her back. She fell back, her elbows supporting her as she watched him through glazed eyes.

“I want to taste you.”

“I am not stopping you. I want that too. Desperately.”

He parted the folds of her vagina and tormented her as he slid a finger against the flesh.

“Oh Jay,” she whispered.

He touched the sensitive flesh, inhaling her essence. Alexia curled her fingers into the cool cotton sheets, her body vibrating.

“So sweet, so addictive,” he murmured, bending his head to touch his tongue to the flesh. A cry escaped her, fingers curling into the sheets. When he sucked the flesh into his mouth, the cry turned to screams, her body bucking. He was ruthless. The careful lovemaking was a thing of the past.

He was revved and eager and starving. He had been holding back since the accident, but she had received a clean bill of health. Letting go of the flesh, he plunged his tongue in, sliding it in, tasting the muskiness of her climax on the tip.

Lifting her legs, he placed her feet flat onto his shoulders. Cupping her bottom between his hands, he eased her up and against him so that he could have more access to her. He tongued her ruthlessly until she was a shivering mass of nerves.

Banging her fists against the bed, he brought her up and over again, his fingers biting into her flesh.

By the time he stumbled to his feet, she was fairly vibrating, her body trembling.

Moving her up against the pillows, he bent his head to her sensitive nipple.

“Jay, I can’t-” She was crying, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

“You can,” he told her thickly. He proved it by sliding a hand between her thighs. His fingers slid into the moistness, the slippery sound very loud inside the room. He suckled her nipple, pulling it between his teeth. She came again, her body bucking and heaving.

He waited until she was spent before climbing on top of her.

She stared at him, her dark brown eyes drenched with tears, and he could feel his heart drumming inside his chest. She was everything to him and that meant so much.

“I want to see you swollen with my kid,” he said harshly as he drove into her. “I want to see my baby suckling at your nipple.”

“I want that too.” Her arms came to wrap around his neck. There was so much she wanted to say but could not find the words. She could only feel.

“There will never be anyone else for me. Do you believe that?” He was sliding into her with slow measured strokes, determined to prolong the exquisite pleasure.

“Yes.” Her fingers bit into his shoulders. “I do.”

“Good. You are mine.” His voice had become rough with possessiveness. All mine, is that clear?”

“Yes.” Her body lifted to meet him and suddenly he could feel the control slipping.

“I love you,” he cried against her mouth, his body surging into hers. “Take everything. I am yours darling.” He was gasping, his body so hot, he felt as if he was going to implode.

When she lifted her legs and placed them around his waist, his control broke. Gripping her hips, he twisted so that she was on top of him. He drove into her, and lifting his head, he latched onto a nipple, his mouth hungry.

Her body arched as she came again, fingers digging and curling. Letting go of the nipple, he took her lips, his mouth bruising hers. He came violently, his cries swallowed deep inside her throat as he poured himself – all of him inside her.

It always shook him up the power she was able to have over him. She was sprawled onto his chest as they both tried to quiet their breathing. His expression was

pensive, his arms were loose around her waist. He had said things to her that he had never uttered to a living soul before, and he was feeling more than a little vulnerable.

Lifting her head, she looked at him.

“I think we broke something.”

“Possibly my cock,” he told her lightly. “I cannot even feel it.”

“I can assure you it’s where it is supposed to be.” She skimmed his jawline gently.

“It’s fine.”

“What is?”

“The emotions you are experiencing. I feel them too.
They are returned, Jay.”

“Do me a favor? Stop shrinking me.”

“I am not.” She shook her head. “I love you, darling.”

That did it. She always managed to undo him.

“It’s obvious that I am crazy about you,” he admitted with
a slow smile. “It’s scary as shit but what can I do?”

“Embrace it, darling.”

He embraced her instead.

“She is so adorable. I could just eat her up.” Alexia looked at the baby cradled in her arms. It was the middle of January and Ellen had given birth to a very healthy six pounds, seven ounces baby girl. The delivery had been easy, and she was now back home.

It was snowing, the powdery substance coming down rapidly, covering everything in sight. Her husband had dropped her off and would be back to pick her up later. She was due the first week of March and the ultrasound had shown they were having a son.

“Hold her head properly.” The very protective dad ordered as he came back into the room bearing a tray of hot chocolate.

“I would have you know that I am an expert at this,” his sister told him loftily.

“You treat children’s minds, not their bodies,” he countered. Setting the tray onto the side table, he came to take his daughter. “She needs to go into her cot. Her eyes are closing.”

“You are annoying.”

“I love you too.” Grinning, he bent to kiss her forehead and placed his hand on her bulge. “Very soon it will be you.”

“I cannot wait. My bladder is overactive, and I think Jay is falling out of love with me.”

“Oh please!” Ellen snorted. “That man loves you to pieces.”

“I think I am getting on his nerves. I do complain a lot.”

“And no one likes a nagging wife,” her brother said loftily as he placed his daughter carefully inside the cot.

“Why, thank you, darling.” There was an edge to Alexia’s voice.

“Just saying.” He threw her a grin. “Nagging or not, I do love you.”

“Whatever.” She rubbed her belly absently, jumping slightly when she felt her baby move.

“Let me.” Moving forward, Ellen placed a hand over hers.

“I think he is going to be an athlete,” she said with a wide smile.

“I do believe you are right.”

“Are you getting tired of me?” Alexia asked later that night as they were turning in. They had decided to keep both the apartment and the house, with the option of finding somewhere else at a later date.

Marilee spent time at the manor with her aunts and was with them some days during the week.

“What?” He frowned as he turned down the sheets.

“You heard me.” Holding her belly, she climbed into bed and fluffed her pillows. “I have not been the most amiable pregnant woman. I pee every five minutes and I complain a lot. And I am jealous. Each time we go somewhere, and I see women looking at you, I tend to have violent tendencies.”

“Such as?” he asked tongue in cheek.

“Such as tearing their hairs out by the root.” She sighed. “I should not be saying such things within my baby’s hearing.”

“I am sure our son will not hold it against you,” he told her softly as he climbed in next to her.

“You have not answered my question.”

“What was it again?”

She gave him a baleful look. “Are you tired of me?”

“Can I get a day or two-” He broke off with a grin as she swung the pillow at his face.

“You really have become violent.”

“Jay, I am serious.”

Pulling her into his arms, he held her against him. “In case you are not aware by now, I am crazy about you.”

“Sometimes I wonder-”

“No.” his expression was sober as he lifted her chin. “I want you to get it once and for all. I don’t know what you are going through, I have read the books you bought, but I will never fully comprehend what your body goes through because I am a man. I love you darling and that’s it. Period. Does that answer your question?”

She nodded, tears clogging her throat.

“Do me a favor?”

“Anything.”

“Make love to me.”

“I thought you were going to ask me for the moon,” he said huskily.

“I have more than the moon. I have you,” she whispered.

Their son was born on a harsh wintry during the first week of March. Clayton Alexander came into the world after twelve hours of labor surrounded by all of his family members, staring at him in fascination.

“He looks so much like you,” his wife told Jay later that night after everyone had left.

“I think he has your chin and the shape of your eyes.”

She touched the soft spot on his head gently before lifting her eyes to look at her husband.

“Thank you, darling.”

“I believe that is my line,” he told her huskily as he joined them on the bed.

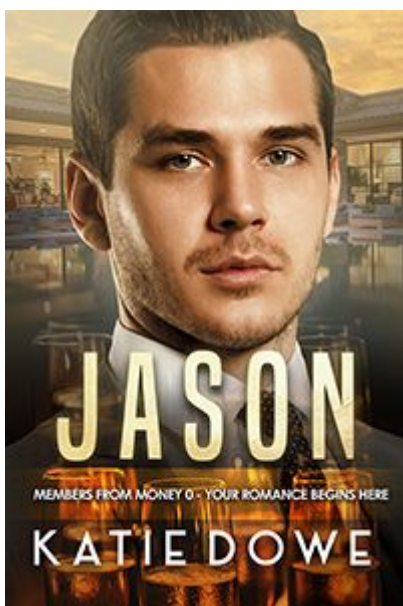
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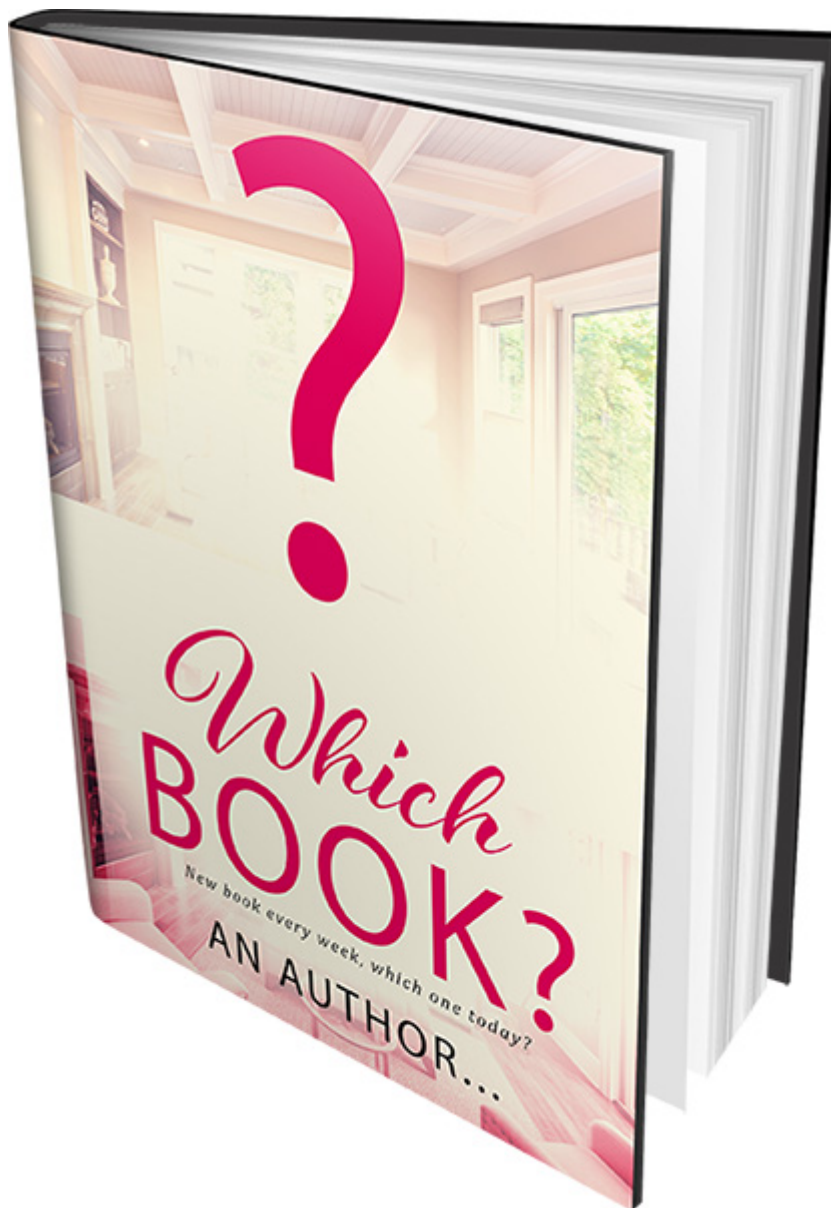


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Also available: [Gage Alberton](#) by Monica J Charles:



Description:

A sexy quadruplets pregnancy romance by Monica J Charles of BWWM Club.

Always the bridesmaid, never the bride...

Ashley never imagined her life would end up like this!

To forget about her bad luck, Ashley attends a bachelorette party and over the course of the night meets an attractive man and ends up spending the night with him!

Sunrise Society member Gage Alberton is a man who does whatever he wants, and never expected to see Ashley again after their one-night stand...

But to his surprise she seeks him out with grave news... she's pregnant!

And not just with one child... but with quadruplets!

Can Gage overcome the trauma of his childhood and become the father he always wanted and win over Ashley's heart?

Or will he continue to live his life as the world's biggest playboy?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Monica J Charles of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to smoking hot sex scenes with a billionaire!

Want to read more? [Then click here to get Gage Alberton now.](#)

*

Also available: [Eric Whitehouse](#) by Monica J Charles:



Description:

A sexy marriage romance by Monica J Charles of BWWM Club.

As the youngest of three sisters, Carlee has been able to get away with a lot throughout her life and often shirks responsibilities...

However, now she is finally forced to take action when she sees a small plane losing altitude while out driving!

Billionaire Eric's plane is crashing, and he thinks he probably deserves it.

And he definitely doesn't deserve the beautiful African-American woman who ends up saving his life!

But as Carlee nurses him back to health, a moment of passion causes them to grow closer than ever before.

Yet Eric has obligations miles away that he can't ignore, and the fact that he can up and leave at a moment's notice leaves Carlee insecure about their future...

With the distance between them threatening to end their relationship, can they both confront their flaws and grow together as a couple?

Or will this be the end to their happily ever after?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Monica J Charles of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to sizzling hot sex scenes!

Want to read more? [Then click here to get Eric Whitehouse now.](#)

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Also available: [BWWM Club 15](#) by various BWWM Club authors:



Description:

The fifteenth part in the Swirl Love series.

In this book you get 6 classic BWWM stories in 1!

With shocking secrets, surprise pregnancies, and sexy alpha billionaires, you'll absolutely love these sexy romances by various BWWM Club authors!

Suitable for over 18s only due to sizzling hot sex scenes!

This bundle features these 6 sizzling best sellers:

The Billionaire's Big Baby Momma – Rochelle Jackson

Marlowe Roseland needed a job, but she never expected her interview to land her trapped in an elevator with the CEO of the company!

And when the sexy man asks her out, she gets even more confused!

Billionaire Cassius West has it all—except for the love a woman.

And when he meets the big and beautiful Marlowe he knows it will be a battle to win her heart!

Her Billionaire Alpha – Mia Cater

Regina has always been a strong headed, no nonsense kind of woman...

But when those same traits bring her into a confrontation with Derek, the billionaire CEO of her company, she fears she's bitten off more than she can chew.

Surprisingly though, this puts her on Derek's radar in a good way, and he soon asks her out on a date.

But not everything with him is what it seems.

The Billionaires Over 40 Love - Adrian Kelly

After a heart-wrenching breakup, forty-one year old Faydra is determined to focus on herself and her job.

But her plans are uprooted when Calvin Dennison walks into her life!

Calvin is the billionaire CEO of a media company who is also very easy on the eyes!

Despite his good looks and endearing personality, Faydra is unsure of his intentions.

But she is unable to resist him, and soon they begin a whirlwind romance filled with sex and money!

Her Big Beautiful Wedding – Erica A Davis

Joe Sadler is the billionaire behind his perfume brand.

With a new campaign about to be launched, his investors want it to be based around Joe and his wife.

One problem: Joe doesn't have a wife!

Enter Samira, a beautiful plus-size model who Joe falls for.

Samira agrees to help Joe out with his problem, posing as his wife for their new campaign.

But with the attraction between them running so high, their relationship soon turns physical, and neither of them could be happier.

Will Samira and Joe's marriage shape up to be the real deal?

The Billionaire Who Changed My Life – Ayo Campbell

Ronni Curran is a hopeless romantic.

Even after countless heartbreak, she is still determined to find The One!

Ronni receives a job offer at a prestigious company and is introduced to the billionaire owner, Carson Ranger.

Carson is everything Ronni desires!

But when someone tries to blackmail her, all that she hopes for turns to dust.

Will Ronni finally get the life she wants with Carson?

A Second Chance at Love – Erica A Davis

Billionaire business woman Noelle thought she had it all together, but then she found out her husband Cameron

had a whole double life their entire relationship.

Instead of breaking down, she throws herself deeper into business, working harder than ever.

But when she collapses working late one night, her mom and sister insist she gets a personal assistant to ease some of the workload.

Handsome and hard working Aaron Young seems perfect for the role, so Noelle hires him.

Soon Aaron and Noelle are falling in love, having a secret relationship.

Their love feels like something out of a fairytale, so when Aaron asks Noelle to marry him, she accepts.

But with Noelle's troublesome ex-husband, Aaron's abusive mother, and a bombshell of a secret Aaron's been hiding, will it all end in disaster?

Want to read more? [Then click here to get BWWM Club 15 now.](#)

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You'll also want to check out these hot billionaire brothers and cousins in the [Brothers From Money series](#) too:



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Also available: [The Billionaire's Second Chance Baby](#) by J A Fielding:



Description:

A sexy surrogate pregnancy romance by J A Fielding of BWWM Club.

Successful lawyer Amy Lennox just won a high-profile case.

By all accounts she should feel happy, but Amy was tired of defending evil companies and her racist law firm...

Multi-billionaire Sean Willington has demons of his own: his unborn baby and girlfriend were killed in an accident, and he is devastated about not becoming a father and husband!

After hitting it off at a bar Amy agrees to be Sean's surrogate and in exchange Sean will give her \$10 million to leave her dubious law firm and set up her own business!

It was meant to be a business transaction...

However, Sean cannot help but notice the beautiful feminine goddess that is Amy and Amy cannot but fall in love with Sean's loving nature!

Amy is beginning to think she has found happiness at long last...

But will her troubled past end up breaking up their newfound romance?

Or will the two find themselves falling deeper in love despite the danger along the way?

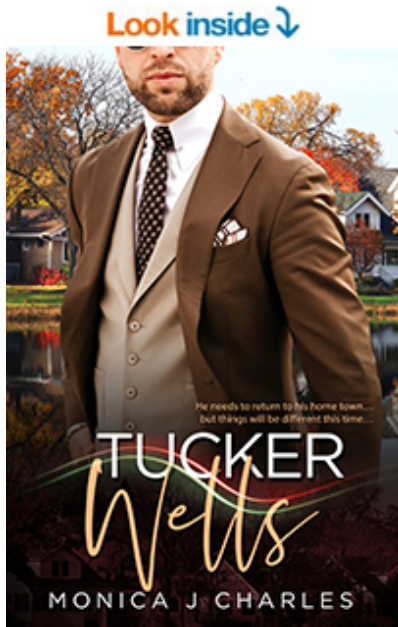
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Suitable for over 18s only due to smoking hot sex scenes!

Want to read more? [Then click here to get The Billionaire's Second Chance Baby now.](#)

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Also available: [Tucker Wells](#) by Monica J Charles:



Description:

A sexy small town romance by Monica J Charles of BWWM Club.

Bookkeeper Brittany lives in a small community and is one of the locals who takes care of feeble Walker Wells, the father of billionaire Tucker Wells.

She used to crush hard on Tucker, but time and different priorities caused them to drift apart...

Now, years later cruise ship captain Tucker has returned to Mossville to make amends with his father.

And when he sees the beautiful Brittany caring for him, something undoubtably sparks between the two!

Yet despite feeling once again comfortable in his hometown, and with Brittany, his heart strives for adventures on the open ocean.

And Brittany decides to take it upon herself to remind Tucker that joy and happiness can be found anywhere, in any situation, if you just know where to look!

But will Tucker open his eyes and see the forest for the trees?

Or will he leave the sleepy town of Mossville for good?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Monica J Charles of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to sizzling hot sex scenes with a billionaire!

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