

**Formerly
Brandewyne**

Published by Lee Books
www.judesplace.com
2855 Alta View Drive 107
San Diego, CA 92139

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN (paperback): 0-9660653-0-1

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Cover design by MMG Graphics
Editorial and design assistance provided by Griffith Publishing
Caldwell, Idaho

Dedication

Dedicated to my mother, who got me interested in romance novels.

PREFACE

When I was attending college, I had to write many term papers. Well, I was determined to write them about things that interested me. I remembered reading an article about futuristic prisons. The idea was that the criminals would be cryogenically frozen for their prison terms, which would save taxpayer dollars. The idea interested me, so I did some research that turned out to be more fun than work.

After the paper was finished, the idea of cryonics stayed with me. I toyed with the possibility of someone being frozen and then cloned in the future. Naturally, a love story was formed. I've been told that Brandewyne is more like me than any of the characters in my other works. I admit I've put a lot of myself into her. Maybe it is my dream to start over and live in another century.

I hope you enjoy her story.

Jude Liebermann

Acknowledgements

I would like to express appreciation to my sister, Patricia, who took the time to look over this novel to find obvious flaws before I sent it to Griffith Publishing.

I would also like to thank Joyce Griffith, who took over from there to take my rough copy and transform it into the final printed novel.

Chapter One

Brandewyne Parker rolled over in bed. Sighing heavily, she realized she didn't really want to get up. So what if it was Christmas? She didn't even have a tree. She had already opened the few gifts she had received from friends. Staring up at the ceiling, she remembered that Nancy was going to give her present to her today. Well, at least that was something to get out of bed for. Doctor Nancy Thorgood was her oldest and dearest friend. As she lay there, the phone rang. Reaching over, she picked up the extension on her nightstand.

"Hello?"

"Did I wake up Sleeping Beauty?"

"Very funny, Nancy. Why are you so chipper?"

"Because it's Christmas, Bran."

"Oh, right." Brandewyne rolled her eyes but couldn't help smiling. She heard her friend snicker.

"Oh, don't be such a scrooge. Christmas is never a good day to sleep in, so I decided that brunch would be much nicer than lunch. Same restaurant. I'll meet you there at nine o'clock. Is that alright?"

"eah, Nancy, that's fine. See you in—" She looked over at the clock. She had to rub her eyes before she could focus—"one hour." She couldn't stifle the yawn.

"Now don't go back to sleep. As soon as you hang up, get out of bed and take a shower."

"Yes, mom." Her voice was thick with sarcasm, but Nancy laughed it off.

"See you at nine, Brandewyne."

"Bye." Brandewyne stretched as she hung up the phone. God, she hated that name. No one called her by her full name, except Nancy

when she was being smart. She didn't know what possessed her parents to name her something that sounded like "brandy wine." She liked neither drink: brandy nor wine. The few who did find out her full name never understood why she didn't like it. They would say it was unique and "quite lovely." It was unique alright. Nancy mostly called her Bran, and sometimes Brandy, which as a name, she preferred. Anything but Brandewyne.

Brandy rolled over onto her stomach and pushed up onto her elbows to stretch her back. She groaned as the muscles flexed. She was getting old. She really should get back into aerobics. She had gone to the gym religiously until she had turned thirty-five. Now, almost five years later, she had let herself get out of shape. It was hard to fit exercise into her busy work schedule. She hadn't even wanted to take Christmas off, but she had been practically threatened not to come in by her boss.

Well, now it was Christmas morning, and she had an hour to make herself presentable for brunch. As she undressed, she avoided looking into the mirror. She knew what she would see if she did. She wasn't an unattractive woman by any means, but the beginning of middle age wasn't suiting her very well; neither were the extra pounds her body had acquired. When she had been a little younger, she had been full of life and energy. She had a pretty face; oval shaped, with sparkling light green eyes with long lashes. Her lips weren't too full and if she were thinner, her cheekbones would be well defined. Her skin was pale but smooth, with a slight sprinkling of freckles. All this was complemented by her wavy, shoulder length reddish-blonde hair. Brandy's face didn't bother her. With a little effort, she could even be considered beautiful, but it was her body that was a major disappointment. After adolescence, the weight had started coming on. She had fought it for twenty years and was losing the battle. She was getting to the point where she was tiring of diets.

Whom did she have to impress? She should just give up and get good and fat. She was well on her way there now.

She took a quick shower and dressed in comfortable sweats and canvas shoes. She arrived at the restaurant ten minutes early. She believed in being prompt. It was expected at all the board meetings she attended. She smiled as she thought about how her colleagues would react to how she was dressed. They were so used to seeing her

conservative business suits and her hair up in a tight bun. Their jaws would drop at seeing her in grunge apparel. She looked around at the people seated at tables nearby. There was a lot of smiling and gift exchanging. Brandy sighed as she realized she had left Nancy's present on the kitchen counter. She watched the waiter fill a water glass at the table next to hers and then turn towards her. He was an attractive young man. Brandy guessed he was in his late twenties.

"Are you ready to order, ma'am?"

Brandy looked at her watch. It had taken fifteen minutes for him to ask for her order. She would remember that when it came time for his tip. Nancy was five minutes late. How typical for a doctor to be late for an appointment, Brandy thought. "Well," she said, "I would like an iced tea, but let's give my friend a few minutes before I order."

"Very well." He nodded and walked off.

Brandy looked around the room again. This time her gaze fell on an older gentleman sitting across the room. He was staring at her. Unblinking, Brandy stared back. The man grew uncomfortable and looked away. She smirked and looked at the table.

Brandy was surprised to see a glass of iced tea in front of her. She hadn't heard the waiter approach or retreat. As Brandy took a sip, she felt a tinge of remorse for glaring at the man earlier. Maybe she reminded him of someone. She truly wished she didn't have such a feeling of animosity toward men. It was hard after struggling to move up the ladder of success and being trampled on by men who weren't as qualified as she. Her thoughts were interrupted by Nancy, who took the seat opposite hers.

"Sorry, I'm late. Traffic was a bear."

The waiter came over and took their orders. After he left, Nancy turned to Brandy.

"You look comfortable."

Brandy looked down at her old sweatsuit and sneakers. "Well, this isn't exactly the Ritz. I dress for the occasion."

"I know you do. I see what you wear at work. Very respectable."

"Nancy?" Brandy said, muffling a threatening undertone.

"What? Bran, I just think you should make a good impression everywhere, not just at work. If you ever want to attract a man, you

have to.”

Brandy rolled her eyes. They had been through this scenario plenty of times in the past.

“Who says I want to attract a man?” Her thoughts went back to the man across the room. She shrugged it off. “Who says I need a man? I’m too busy for one.”

“You make yourself too busy. Brandy, you are burning the candle at both ends. I know you feel you have to prove something at work, but try to chill a bit.”

“Of course I have to prove something. When I was younger I was chased around the desk by my bosses, and now as I’m getting older I’m just known as ‘the bitch’ because I’m tough. I think I was born in the wrong century. Maybe in the future, equality of the sexes will be a reality and not just a goal. I’m so tired of this mess. I do the work of two men and a much better job. I just wish I could get the respect for it that I deserve.”

Nancy’s reflective look made Brandy nervous.

“What?”

Nancy seemed to snap out of a reverie.

“Huh? Oh nothing. I was just thinking about work. Bran, I’m working on something at the lab. It’s not quite ready yet, but I think it will be something big. Maybe I will tell you about it after the holidays. By then I should know if it’s going anywhere.”

“What are you talking about, Nancy?”

“Don’t worry about it. You know us scientists. We’re always experimenting with something new.”

“Yeah.” Brandy smiled. She still remembered how Nancy had been during medical school. She was always getting in trouble in lab for her “experiments.”

Nancy’s next question wiped the smile off her face.

“So, you looking forward to next Friday?”

“What is there to look forward to?”

“Brandy! It’s the last day of the century and the millennium. This is huge. This won’t happen again for another thousand years, Bran. Just think, in exactly a week, it will be the year 2000.”

“Yeah, the year I turn 40, joy. Everything is downhill from there. Hell, I don’t remember the uphill climb.”

“Oh, God, you’re so morbid. You are in the best years of your life, Bran. If you would just stop thinking that work is your life. Just live a little. Drop some weight, get some sexy clothes, and find somebody.”

Brandy reached up and rubbed her face. Taking a deep breath, she looked back at her friend.

“Find some man who will think he is better than me. Will probably resent the fact that I make more money than him, and have him eventually decide he needs a younger and firmer body and leave me for his floozy secretary? No, thanks.”

Nancy looked at her with concern.

“Bran, what has made you so bitter? Scott? Hell, I’ve had my bad luck with men, but I haven’t given up on them.”

Brandy tried to pretend not to notice Nancy’s reference to Scott. That wound went deep. Brandy had always been so independent. She was determined to make it on her own and show the world what she could do. She was still a semester shy of her Bachelors in Business Administration when she bullied her way into an interview at the company to which she ended up devoting eighteen years of her life. Her soon-to-be boss had tried to brush her off at the interview, but he admired her spunk. In the end he had hired her as his assistant. She had put up with him chasing her around the desk until she was accepted in the Entrée program and promoted to junior exec. She hadn’t batted an eyelash to all the sexual harassment and the lewd jokes because she hadn’t wanted to rock the boat. She had to be accepted as “one of the guys” in order to be taken seriously. Brandy had learned to check her emotions at the front door when she went to work. The first and last time she had shown emotion and gotten upset, one of her colleagues had guessed she must be “on the rag.” She had managed to laugh it off, but she refused to show any emotion from that day on. It had roughened her edges.

She had just been promoted to junior executive when she met Scott Rogers. He had been there a few years longer and was assigned to show her the ropes. Against her better judgment, they started dating. She fell in love a month later, and they dated for two years. They had been engaged to be married. One weekend she had been sent on her first out-of-state business trip. She finished up early and flew back

home. She had a key to Scott's apartment and was going to surprise him. Brandy could almost feel the same pain now that she had experienced when she had found him in bed with a newly promoted junior executive. She had turned to run, but Scott had caught up with her at the door. She had whirled on him and pulled out of his reach.

"Don't touch me!"

"Bran, you shouldn't have seen that. What are you doing back early?"

"You think it's OK, as long as I don't catch you?" She jerked away from him as he reached for her again. She wiped her eyes.

"Oh, come on, Bran. You knew I wasn't faithful. I'm not a monogamous type guy. You knew that when we first got started."

"I thought you had changed."

"Don't be naive. One woman just isn't enough for me." He gripped her shoulders. "I do love you, Bran, but I need other women. It's too boring with just one woman. You have to be a man to understand."

She forced her work glare. "You're a bastard. I never want to see you again." She threw his key in his face and stormed out. From that day on, she promised herself she would never again let a man see her cry. She had never gone on another date, or even smiled at any man. So far, she had kept her promise and would most likely keep it until her death. She would keep her heart safe, even if it meant she would be alone. She felt a touch of sadness at the thought. She focused on Nancy and forced her features to soften.

"You're not with anyone, Nancy. I don't see any wedding ring on your finger."

"True, I'm not married, but I have my prospects open. And I'm older than you."

"Only a year."

"Well, I'm already forty. I don't feel as if it's all downhill from here. I have a lot of life left to live. So do you."

"The eternal optimist."

"Maybe some of it will rub off on you."

Brandy half smirked, half smiled as she watched the waiter bring their food. It had taken too long this time. She almost com-

plained, but knew Nancy wouldn't like it. This guy evidently did not want a tip.

"Let's just enjoy our meal. Afterward, I'm taking you shopping. We have to find the perfect dress for next Friday. You are going to welcome in the new year and millennium in style."

"If you say so, Nancy." They enjoyed the rest of their meal in friendly silence.

The next day Brandy was in the office. She had a big board meeting to plan for Monday. She hated to miss work due to any holidays. She never liked to fall behind. Most weeks she worked Saturdays anyway. The only day she would willingly take off was Sunday. Even God needed a day of rest, so she figured she needed one, too.

As she walked to her office, she noted that a few of the other executives were also working. She had almost reached her door when a voice stopped her.

"Ah, good. You're here." She turned and faced her colleague, Stan Perkins. She nodded her greeting. "I was hoping to talk to you before Monday."

"What about, Stan?"

"The board meeting. I wanted to know what you are going to say about my idea."

She sighed as she turned to walk into her office. Stan followed. She hung her jacket on the rack and sat at her desk. Stan took one of the chairs across from her and stared at her expectantly. Stan was young for an executive. He was still in his twenties and hadn't been at the company long. He knew if she didn't like his idea, the company wouldn't let it fly.

"Stan, I already told you what I thought."

"Haven't you given it any more thought? It could sell, Brandy."

She narrowed her eyes at him. "It's shoddy and years behind everyone else. That is what I intend to tell the board."

He narrowed his eyes right back at her. "You don't like me, do you?"

“Now what does that have to do with anything? I don’t like your idea. It’s nothing personal.”

“Yeah, right. You’re just upset that I never asked you out, so you’re trying to sabotage me.

One side of her mouth went up. “If I were one of your locker room buddies and had the same opinion, would you be complaining like this? Have you asked any of the male executives what they think of your idea?”

His eyes narrowed even more. His silence was the only answer she needed. It told her that some of his friends probably agreed with her, but that she was one of the main deciding votes. The fact that a woman could make or break his precious idea had him steamed. He hated the fact that she was his superior. And Nancy wondered why she didn’t want a man in her life. Her lip curled at the thought.

“Stan, I don’t want to be your enemy. Whether you believe it or not, my opinions on possible products for this company are completely objective. I don’t care whether it is my best friend or an enemy. I do what is best for this company. You can believe that or not; it’s up to you.”

He stood up. Brandy leaned back in her chair at his furious glare.

“This is what happens when secretaries get promoted to a man’s job.”

“Be careful, Stan.” She gave him one of her trademark “freeze water” glares.

His lips twitched. She waited for the famous B word. She wondered if he had the nerve to call her a bitch to her face.

She stood up. “Don’t you ever tell me that I don’t deserve this job. After this display of yours, it’s obvious I deserve it more than you ever could. Before you come in here and throw one of your tantrums, just remember you were still in high school after I’d already been here for ten years.” She paused to take a deep breath. “You’ll have my full report at the meeting on Monday. Now, get out of my office.”

He bit his lip, stiffly nodded and walked out of her office. She could almost hear him muttering under his breath.

Brandy took a deep breath. She had to calm down. She had

succeeded in keeping Stan from knowing how upset she was. Now her challenge was to keep herself from getting upset at all. Men used that weakness against her. Tears weren't considered professional. It took her years to learn to control her emotions. There had been a few times she had to hold in her tears until she could find a restroom to hide in. The men she worked with thought she was a cold bitch who had no emotions. It was ironic, how wrong they were. Sometimes she wished she had a less stressful job. She loved being in charge, and she made good money, but this job was aging her. The Stans of this world would never give her a break. They would always be there ready to blame her opinions and feelings on the fact she was a woman. It made her sick.

At the meeting on Monday, she objectively told her boss, Douglas McFeeters, what she thought of Stan's idea. She kept any emotion out of her opinions. The CEO nodded every once in a while. Of all the men in this company, Brandy knew her boss was the most fair. True, he had been hard to win over at first, but he was confident she knew what she was doing. He trusted her opinion as much as his other top male executives. She really hoped that was in her favor when he would make his selection for Vice President, since Brandy was one of the contenders.

She felt Stan's eyes on her as she told the board about his idea. True, the idea had its good points, but the bad outweighed them. When she finished, she sat down. She spared Stan a quick glance. He was glaring at her. She nodded and looked away. Two other opinions were given by executives, both men. One in favor of the idea; the other was undecided. He had given just as many pros as cons. Brandy looked around the table at the two other female executives. Both were junior executives. Brandy wondered when the ratio would be equal for men and women. She doubted she would live to see it.

After everyone had finished with their reports, Mr. McFeeters leaned forward in his chair. Brandy looked over at him as he spoke.

"Impressive work, everyone. A lot of research has been done on these reports. Weighing the pros and cons, I will have to vote against Stan Perkins' proposal. Keep them coming though, Stan. It shows initiative. Better luck next time. Now, what's next on the

agenda?"

Keeping a straight face, her eyes traveled back to Stan. She was able to keep the cringe out of her features as she took in his countenance. She knew she had made an enemy today. Oh well, she had made them in the past, and would most likely make more in the future.

Chapter Two

Brandy felt uncomfortable in the fancy dress. It was a bit snug and shorter than what she was accustomed to, but Nancy assured her that she looked great in it. The dress came to just above her knees and was covered with red sequins, which brought out the color in her hair. The people she worked with weren't used to seeing her dressed this nicely. She couldn't help feeling she was a bit too chubby to pull off the look, but the compliments she had already received made her feel better.

Nancy had suggested this was the perfect dress for Brandy to wear to the New Year's Eve party Brandy's company threw every year. Brandy doubted that a woman would be taken seriously wearing feminine dresses, which was why she chose conservative business suits at work and never wore high heels. As a female executive, she had a certain image she had to maintain. The party was only a few minutes old, and Brandy was already regretting wearing a flashy dress. Nancy found her sitting by herself on the terrace.

"Brandy, aren't you having fun? This is a great party."

"I guess I'm just not comfortable here, Nancy. I suppose it's just not my thing."

Nancy shook her head in bewilderment. "I'll sit here with you, if you like," she said.

"I don't want you to miss the party."

"Oh, I won't. I'll go back in a while." She took a seat next to Brandy on the bench. "We can talk for a while. I have some good news from work."

“Really? What about?”

Brandy was only half listening.

“Well, do you remember last Saturday, when I mentioned something I was working on at the lab?”

At Brandy’s nod, she continued. “Well, it looks as if it might be possible. Have you ever heard of Cryonics?”

Brandy nodded again. “I read an article on it once, but I’ve never paid much attention to the subject.”

“You should have. It’s an interesting field. Cryonics has been around for awhile, but in the last few years there have been quite a few developments. I’ve been working on something new at the lab. I thought you might be interested in hearing about it.”

“Isn’t Cryonics where the body is frozen with the hope that some future civilization will thaw it out and bring the person back to life?”

“Something like that, yes.” Nancy smiled. “It really is possible. Some years back, a dog was frozen and it was brought back to life. Some people are getting only their heads cryogenically frozen and planning on having their bodies recreated later around their brain.” Brandy returned a horrified look. “What I’ve been working on is quite a breakthrough. Haven’t you always said you were born in the wrong century? Wouldn’t you like a shot at living in the future where total equality may exist?”

Brandy shrugged. “I suppose so, but I’ve always felt that Cryonics was a bunch of bull.”

“Oh, no, it’s very real and very serious. I would really like you to come to the lab where I can fully explain it to you. Can you come by next week sometime? You will be interested in what I have to tell you.”

“Nancy, I’m not going to let you freeze me. I’ve got a few years left.”

Nancy laughed for a moment. “No, Bran, you won’t be frozen until after you die.”

“But if I live to be an old woman, what’s the use of living in the future if I’m old?”

Nancy visibly hesitated. “You won’t be old. Oh, Bran, this is

all just too complicated to go into here. Come by the lab next week, and all will be explained. Like I said, this is a breakthrough. It's never been tried before. We could complete the first step next week. Freezing is the final step, and that happens after you die. This is so exciting. Come to the lab, and you'll understand everything."

"I have to admit, you have my interest. No promises, just my interest."

"That's fine for now. How about rejoining the party?"

"I don't think so. You go ahead. I'll be in later."

"Make sure you don't miss midnight. It's going to be quite an event."

Brandy nodded and smiled. She was still sitting on the bench staring out at the city when she heard someone approach. She turned to face the new arrival. It was Brad Smith. He was among those being considered for the promotion she had her heart set on.

"Why Brandy, I've never seen you looking so—so—so *womanly*."

Brandy stared him down. "How perceptive of you, Brad. Are you always this quick?"

"Nice of you to notice, Brandy. All you have to do is slim down, and you could be quite sexy."

"Is that supposed to be a compliment?"

Brandy was amazed to see Brad looking affronted for a moment. Had he actually thought he'd given her a compliment? His face turned to stone.

"Do you have to be a bitch even away from work?" he said.

She put her hand to her chest, feigning confusion. "Here I thought we were exchanging pleasantries."

Brad opened his mouth but then closed it. He knew she was being sarcastic. He smiled. "You're right. You have a lovely evening, Brandy."

She smiled at his blatant sarcasm. Nodding slightly, she turned away from him. She'd never win popularity contests, but she wouldn't allow her colleagues to treat her like a sex object. What Nancy had told her came back to mind. The idea of living in the future appealed to her. It was nothing but a life of stress and heartache in this age. With both

parents dead, she had only one person who cared anything about her—Nancy. She began looking forward to going to her lab after the holidays.

Brandy looked at her watch. It was a quarter past eleven. She didn't want to be around for the stroke of midnight. These people would get drunk and wild. She had never liked to drink. She wasn't going to start now. She looked through the open doors and watched her co-workers. They seemed to be having a good time. The photographer was making his rounds through the crowd. She and Nancy had already been cornered soon after arriving, but the resulting picture made her uneasy. She wasn't in a hurry to purchase it.

Nancy was talking with Stan. Without saying good-bye to anyone, Brandy left the party, making sure Nancy didn't see her leave. If she had, Nancy would never have let her go. Brandy wished she hadn't come. She found her car and unlocked it. She absently wondered how many drunks were on the road at this hour. Shrugging off the grim thought, she got behind the wheel and started her new Ford Mustang.

She tuned in an oldies station on the radio, hoping it would relax her. She was looking forward to peeling off her dress and snuggling into a warm pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt; curling up on the couch with a good book and a hot cup of cocoa. She smiled at such a nice thought, wishing that she had done that in the first place.

She had just reached the bridge when the glare from a pair of headlights pulled her out of her thoughts. She gasped as she saw a car swerve into her lane. He was going way too fast. There was nowhere for her to go. If she swerved to the right, she would go off the bridge. Hitting the brakes, she jerked the wheel to the right anyway and tried to get as close to the edge as she could without hitting the rail. Unfortunately, she struck the rail and could only sit there as the car headed straight for her. The driver hadn't hit the brakes yet. Just before impact, she could see the driver laughing and looking at the woman seated next to him. Too late, he turned to face the road ahead of him and mirrored Brandy's own look of horror, as the engine hurtled into her front seat. Somewhere Brandy could hear a woman screaming. As everything went black, she recognized the scream. It was her own.

Nancy was still at the party when her beeper went off. She didn't recognize the number but immediately went to the phone. It was after midnight, and she had been looking for Brandy. She had a bad feeling about the phone call.

"Yes, this is Dr. Thorgood. You just beeped me."

"Dr. Nancy Thorgood?"

"Yes, is something wrong? Who is this?"

"This is Gretta Brown. I'm a nurse at Memorial Hospital. Do you know a Brandewyne Parker?"

"Oh, my God. Is she OK?"

"Could you come down to the hospital, please?"

"Yes, of course. I'm on my way."

Nancy tried not to drive too fast, but she had to find out what was wrong with Brandy. It must be bad if the nurse didn't want to go into it over the phone.

After parking her car, she ran through the parking lot and into emergency. She asked everyone where a Nurse Brown was. When she found Gretta, she was taken to the waiting room and told that Dr. Thomas would be right with her.

Two hours later, the door opened. Nancy stood up and flew across the room.

"Are you Dr. Thomas? Why the hell have you kept me waiting so long? Where is Brandy? Is she alright?"

"Dr. Thorgood?" At her nod, he continued. "I was tending my patient. I came to see you as soon as I could."

"I'm sorry. I just haven't received any information on Brandy. Is she alive or dead?"

"She's alive, for the moment. Dr. Thorgood, your name was the only one mentioned in Miss Parker's belongings. Doesn't she have any relatives?"

"No. She is an only child and both her parents are dead. I'm all she has. I need to see her."

The doctor nodded. "She's in pretty bad shape and is in a coma. I really don't know if she'll come out of it."

Nancy placed a hand to her mouth.

"Oh my God! What happened?"

“A drunk driver hit her head on.”

“Oh my God!”

“Come this way, please.”

Nancy followed Dr. Thomas into the Intensive Care Unit. She froze in her tracks upon seeing Brandy. Tubes were everywhere. Her face was unrecognizable. Tears filled Nancy’s eyes as she realized that Brandy wasn’t going to make it out of this one. Her eyes traveled down Brandy’s body. They stopped at her knees. The sheet fell flat after that.

“What happened to her legs?”

“They were crushed during the accident. They had to be amputated.”

“Oh my God!” Nancy felt numb. She stepped closer to the bed.

“Hello, kiddo. You know there are easier ways to get attention.” She couldn’t control the tears and turned her back to Brandy and left the room. The doctor followed her.

“I really wish I had some good news. The next few days will tell.”

Nancy couldn’t believe that Brandy would meet the same end as did her parents. “What about the drunk driver?”

“He has a concussion. The woman in the car with him died soon after the accident.”

Nancy shook her head in disbelief. How was it that the drunk driver always seems to make it out alive? The drunken man who had killed Brandy’s parents also survived. Dr. Thomas patted her arm in sympathy.

“There’s nothing more you can do for her now. Go home and get some rest. We’ll call if there is any change.” After she nodded, he turned to leave. She watched him walk away before she sank into the nearest chair.

Nancy couldn’t sleep that night. She didn’t know what she would do if Brandy died. She was her best friend. They had known each other half their lives. As morning approached, the scientist in Nancy started taking over. She wished she had obtained Brandy’s permission for the experiment. She wanted to give her friend a second chance at life.

Nancy's mind shifted to high gear. Brandy had a donor's card. After she died just about anything could be done to her body. It was just a matter of getting the live specimens. If she could have half an hour alone with her, could she do it? Was it ethical? Well, she wasn't dealing with ethics right now. She was dealing with the possible death of her best friend. If Brandy somehow made it through, the live specimens could be destroyed if she went against the idea of Cryonics. But if she died, Nancy would need those specimens. Her mind made up, Nancy drove to Brandy's apartment to retrieve her medical records. Brandy never trusted a doctor's office not to lose them. She then drove to her lab to pick up the necessary items. She placed everything in her little black bag and put on her white coat and medical badge. Her next stop was the hospital.

Nancy stopped at the front desk and asked to see the nurse in charge.

"I'm Rachel Walker, head RN. May I help you, doctor?"

"Yes, I believe you have a patient of mine here? A Brandewyne Parker? I'm her personal physician, and I would like to examine her."

"May I see your identification?"

Nancy pulled out her medical license and Brandy's medical records and presented them to the nurse. She was legally a doctor of medicine, but had chosen science instead. The nurse nodded her approval.

"Very good, Dr. Thorgood. Your patient is in ICU. That's down the hall, take the first left."

"Thank you."

Nancy pulled the curtain around Brandy's bed. After pulling back the sheet, she looked at her friend's battered body. Brandy already had a pessimistic view of life. This horrible blow certainly wouldn't improve her opinion. She would never be able to walk unaided again. Who knew if enough plastic surgery could give her back her pretty face? Nancy almost wished she wouldn't pull through. The second chance Nancy's experiment would give Brandy would be so much better for her.

Not knowing when someone would show up, Nancy got her specimens as quickly as possible. She put them in special preservative

and put everything back in her bag. Sparing one last sad look at Brandy, she left the hospital.

Chapter Three

Brandy opened her eyes. Well, at least she tried. They wouldn't budge. She would like to rub them, but her arms were too heavy to lift. She scrunched up the muscles in her face to see if she could. They were stiff but did move. Trying again to open her eyes, she was able to open them a crack. The glare of the bright light made her shut them again. She could sense movement around her, and a shadow fell over her closed lids. Opening them again, she could barely discern the silhouette of someone hovering over her; blocking out the light. Blinking a few times, she was able to focus on a man.

"Hello." His smile was hesitant but sincere.

She tried to smile back but felt it was only a distorted version. He looked more hopeful at her attempt.

"Can you speak?"

Brandy opened her mouth and licked her lips. She was almost disgusted at how dry her tongue was. She tried to fill her mouth with enough saliva to coat her parched tongue. She choked on a word.

"Take it easy. Go slow. Would you like to try to drink some water?"

She gave him a feeble nod. What was wrong with her? She was hardly in control of any of her muscles. He returned to her side with a small white cup. Placing his strong arm beneath her head, he lifted her head to the cup. He poured a very small amount of water into her mouth. She let it sit on her tongue. When he asked her if she wanted more, she nodded. He gave her a little more. She swished it

around her mouth before swallowing it. She wished she hadn't. It burned all the way down. She grimaced as he laid her head back down on the pillow.

"Are you alright?"

She nodded as she felt tears roll down the sides of her face. He leaned forward and wiped them away.

"Try to say something. Reply Yes or No. Do you know your name?"

She frowned at such an odd question. Wasn't she in a hospital? Wouldn't they know who she was? She always carried her purse with her. How did she end up in a hospital? She couldn't remember what had put her here. She concentrated on saying the word.

"Yes." Had she been stranded in a desert without water? Nothing else could make her throat so dry and sore. It felt as if her vocal chords had never before formed a word.

"Good. Can you say your first name?"

She frowned. Could she say a word with two syllables? The question itself was ludicrous, but she wasn't at all sure she could.

"Braaan—" She took a break to swallow. This was too hard. She was becoming afraid. She didn't even attempt to voice the last syllable of her name. Her nickname would just have to do.

"Bran? Is that short for Brandewyne?" At her nod, he smiled. "Very good. Now, how about your last name?"

She took a deep breath and licked her lips. She gestured at the cup in his hand. He helped her drink some more water. At least her mouth wasn't quite as dry.

"Paaarker."

"Parker? Much better. Now, can you tell me your birth date?"

What was this, twenty questions? She was exhausted and only wanted to go back to sleep.

"April—nineteenth—nineteen—sixty."

"April 19, 1960?" Again she nodded.

"OK, Bran, what is the last thing you remember? Can you remember anything?"

Again she tried to remember what had happened for her to end up in a hospital.

“Hospital?”

“Are you in a hospital?” He waited for the nod then continued.

“Sort of. Let’s get back to you. Can you remember anything?”

When she didn’t speak, he continued.

“Do you remember the car accident? You were driving home from a party.” She noticed he was reading this information off a chart. The memory hit her so hard it almost hurt. If she had been standing, she would have fallen. Her car had been hit head on. She had tried to get out of the way, but there had been nowhere to go. She had been wearing her seat belt, but the angle of the collision...She had heard the scream. Her scream.

Brandy snapped out of the nightmarish memory and realized she was gripping the sheet with her left hand and the man’s sleeve with her right. She hadn’t remembered moving either hand. She had been unable to move them before. He was looking down at her right hand.

“I see that you remember. Can you move your arms again?”

At the mention of her arms, she looked at her right hand. The first thing she noticed was that her ring was missing. The next was her long nails. She unclenched her hand from the sleeve and flexed her fingers upward to see them better. All her nails were well groomed and about a quarter of an inch long. The stress of her job made her chew her nails. She had never taken good care of them. She turned her hand around and looked at the palm. She gasped. The scar she had received when she fell off her bicycle when she was nine years old was gone. Brandy turned her head to look at her other hand. The nails on her left hand were just as perfect as those on her right. Turning her arm outward, she looked for the scar from falling on the water sprinkler when she was eleven. It was also gone. She stared at the man.

“My scars.”

He only looked at her inquisitively. Slowly, she moved her hands to her face. After feeling her face, she trailed her fingers down to her ears and then her hair. Picking up a loose tendril, she let it slide through her fingers until she got to the end. Her hair should have been shoulder length. The hair she was now touching must go to her waist.

Fear almost stopped her, but she took hold of the top of the sheet; which was pulled up to her neck. Tilting her head so that she

could see, she noticed first that she didn't have any clothes on. Slowly lifting the sheet, she looked down her body. Brandy had never been classically thin, and she knew that gravity had taken its toll. She remembered that her breasts and buttocks had begun to sag. She had stretch marks on her breasts and hips.

Not now. As she stared at this youthful body, her jaw fell open. This body was slender with pert breasts free of stretch marks or fault of any kind. Her legs were long and shapely. Brandy let the sheet fall back in place. She let her heavy hands and head fall back to the bed. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Opening her eyes, she looked back at the man. He had stood silently as she appraised herself. He looked at her awaiting her next question.

"Am I dead?"

"No, Miss Parker, you are very much alive."

Brandy sighed but didn't feel confident of his answer. She licked her lips.

"Mirror?"

"Of course." He was gone only a moment. Upon returning, he handed her a mirror about six inches wide. She grasped it with trembling fingers, almost afraid of what she would see. Saying a silent prayer, she opened her eyes and looked into the mirror.

She would have smiled if she had not been so shocked. It was her face. Thank God, it was her, but a younger version. At 39 her face had aged well, but now she was looking at how she was in high school. A time before she was so pessimistic about life and men. A time when she had enjoyed living. She watched a single tear form and then roll down one rosy cheek. She lifted one hand and wiped it away. She again looked at that perfect hand.

"Miss Parker, I can't explain to you what has happened until you are stronger. If you're up to it, I can call in my assistant to take you to physical therapy."

Without looking away from her hand, she nodded.

"Clothes?"

"Yes, there is a robe beside your bed. In the bathroom there are clothes for you to wear. My assistant will help you up and get you dressed. I will be by after your therapy. Welcome back. I hope you like it here."

She looked at him with another feeble smile. What an odd thing for him to say. He hoped she liked it where? He smiled back and left the room.

About ten minutes later, the door opened. Brandy lifted her head to see a young woman walk in pushing a wheelchair. Brandy guessed she was in her mid twenties. Her clothing could not be seen due to the lab coat she wore. When their gaze met, the other woman smiled.

“Hi! We’re all so relieved you finally woke up. Are you feeling alright?”

Brandy managed a weak nod. She watched as the woman pushed the wheelchair next to the foot of the bed and then walked into the bathroom and came out with clothing—a green pullover shirt and green pants with a drawstring waist. The outfit resembled what doctors wore in surgery.

“My name is Sue. I’ll be in charge of your physical therapy. I’m sure you’re excited about getting into shape.”

She stood next to Brandy. Placing the clothing on the end table, she placed her hands on the bed.

“Now, I’m going to help you sit up, OK?”

Again Brandy nodded. Sue wrapped an arm around the back of her neck. “Now help if you can.” Brandy took a deep breath and tried to push herself up as Sue pulled. She realized she hadn’t helped as she grabbed the sheet to keep it from falling to her waist. Sue kept hold of her shoulder, and she picked up the green shirt with her other hand.

“Can you lift your arms for me?”

Deciding that modesty was stupid right now, she lifted her arms. She gazed down as the sheet fell. Brandy couldn’t help but stare at the perfect breasts. Her view was cut off when the green shirt was pulled down over her head.

“Alright, now we have to get your legs over the side of the bed.” Sue pulled the sheet completely off Brandy’s body. Brandy looked down at her legs. Since she was sitting up, she could see her legs much better. Beside the fact there was a light sprinkling of hair on them, they were thin and shapely. She looked in puzzlement at her legs. The hair resembled the texture and color of the hair on her arms. It looked as if her legs had never been shaved.

Sue reached forward and took hold of Brandy's knees. Pulling toward herself, Sue managed to slide Brandy's legs over the side. Brandy watched as she slid the pants up her legs. When they got to her thighs, Sue looked back at her face.

"Now, the hard part. I have to stand you up in order to pull these up. Help as much as you can."

Brandy nodded as Sue came closer and wrapped her arms around her chest. Sue pulled as Brandy attempted to push off the bed with her arms. Her legs felt like rubber as her feet touched the cold floor.

"Now, lean into me.

Brandy placed her arms over Sue's shoulders as Sue lifted the pants to her waist. Sue then shifted Brandy's body and then lowered her into the wheelchair.

The whole episode took less than five minutes. Brandy looked up at Sue as the other woman smiled radiantly.

"Now, that was easy, wasn't it?"

Brandy gave her a hesitant nod. Sue was pretty, with dark brown hair that was pulled into a bun and brown eyes. She had the kind of complexion that always looked as if she had a tan. Brandy would kill for a complexion like that. She had always hated how pale she was. Any time she would lie in the sun to get a tan, she would always get a burn instead. Sue's smile was infectious and Brandy returned it. Sue knelt and picked up a pair of slippers that were beside the bed and placed them on Brandy's feet.

"I'm sure you're looking forward to therapy. The sooner we work those lazy muscles, the sooner you'll be walking."

Sue pushed her out of the room and down a short hallway. Brandy looked at the surroundings. There were about eight other doors. This was a small hospital. Was she in some kind of clinic? Sue opened the third door on the left. When Brandy looked inside, she was surprised to see a small gym with various types of nautilus equipment, a treadmill and an exercise bike. There were mats in one corner and a whirlpool in another. A nice gym for such a small clinic.

Sue pushed her over to the corner with the mats in it. The mats were on a stage in the corner, about two feet higher than the rest of the floor. Sue pulled Brandy out of the chair and settled her on one of the

mats. Once Brandy was lying on her back, Sue leaned one knee against the stage and began stretching Brandy's legs. She winced as she felt needle sharp pains shoot through her legs. Sue caught the look.

"What are you feeling?"

Brandy closed her eyes for a minute.

"Feels like...legs are asleep...but now...waking up."

"That's terrific. You'll be up in no time."

Brandy closed her eyes as Sue continued working on her legs. Eventually the pain lessened and turned into a dull throb. At least she could feel where Sue touched. When she first woke up, she thought that she was paralyzed.

"Was I in," the words were coming easier, but it still took a lot out of her to talk, "...a coma for...a long time?"

Sue bit her lower lip in thought. "Yes, you were...Bran, I'm not authorized to tell you anything about what happened to you. After you're stronger, the doctor will explain it to you."

Brandy assumed she meant the man who had spoken to her earlier. She nodded as Sue moved to the next leg. She went through the same needle sharp pains as she had experienced with her left leg. After Sue had worked on both legs and arms, she bent both of Brandy's legs and leaned against them as she reached for her arms.

"Now, I want you to try a sit up. I will help."

Brandy tried to contract her stomach muscles. Sue pulled as she tried to move upward. With more help than exertion, she was sitting up. Sue had her do it over and over again.

Brandy was drenched in sweat by the time Sue propped her against the wall. She watched as Sue walked over to the weight bench and picked up two one-pound weights. She put one in each of Brandy's hands.

"Just this one last exercise and I'll take you back to your room. Your two hours are almost up.

Only two hours? She felt as if she had been tortured for twelve hours. She leaned her head back and closed her eyes. Her muscles screamed outrage as she forced them to contract. She was actually able to lift the weights. She opened her eyes and watched as her arms moved back to the mats. She smiled at Sue in triumph.

"What did I tell you? I'll bet you'll be walking in a week."

Brandy lifted the light weights again. In the back of her mind she realized this should be easy, but if she had been in a coma for a long time, her muscles must have atrophied. Sue made her do five reps; she then took the weights from her and helped her back into the wheelchair.

Chapter Four

Brandy leaned her head back against the edge of the tub. After making sure she was comfortable, Sue had left to get some clean clothes. After such a hard workout, the hot water was soothing to Brandy's worn out muscles. Her long hair floated on the water around her. Looking up at the ceiling, she sighed as she closed her eyes.

When she heard movement, she assumed that Sue had returned. Turning her head, she opened her eyes to see a man walk into the bathroom. Sue had left the door open, and he walked up to the side of the tub.

"There you are." He stopped as he took in her appearance. She didn't know what to do. She was too shocked to say anything. Luckily, her hair covered just about everything. This was the same man she had first seen upon waking. If he was her doctor, he had probably seen her nude plenty of times, but it was different now that she was awake. "Sue said you would need these. I'll just put them right here. I'll be in your room when you're ready to get out."

He placed the clothes next to the sink. She held her breath as he reached into the tub near her feet. Her eyes widened as he pulled the plug and the water began to lower. He then reached for a towel and laid it next to her on the tub. With one last look at her, he left the room.

Brandy took a deep breath. She scooped up some water with her hands and splashed her face with it. What had happened to Sue? Was he supposed to help her out of the tub? Help her get dressed?

What happened to privacy? She felt anger growing in her. As the tub emptied, she reached up and grabbed the towel. Did he mean for her to wrap the towel around her body and then call for him?

To hell with that! Brandy bit her lower lip as she grabbed the handhold on the side of the tub. She slowly managed to pull and slide herself over the edge of the tub. Her tired muscles screamed in agony. On her knees on the floor, she wrapped the towel around herself. As she looked around the door, she could see the man looking through her chart. She wondered if he was her doctor. He had never told her, and Sue hadn't mentioned anything about him. As Brandy began to dry her body, her thoughts turned back to him. He was attractive and must be in his early thirties.

"How are you doing in there, Miss Parker?"

"Fine."

"Are you ready to get out now?"

"No!" On her hands and knees, she made her way to the sink and snatched the clothes he had placed there. Putting on the shirt was easy, but the pants were tough. After getting them to her knees, she rolled onto her back and squirmed her way into them.

Breathing heavily, she tried to regain enough strength to roll back onto her stomach. That was when she noticed movement next to the door. She turned her head and saw the man. Brandy made a small noise in her throat. How long had he been standing there? She was mortified. His smile made it worse. She glared at him and then looked away.

"Now, that's really impressive, Miss Parker. You set your mind to something, and it gets accomplished, doesn't it?"

When she didn't respond, he walked over to her and knelt down beside her. She still refused to look at him. As he reached for her, he chuckled under his breath. She gasped as he put his arms beneath her neck and knees to lift her from the floor.

"Wait a minute!" she said.

"Miss Parker, you are too tired to make it all the way into your room, and I don't have the time to wait. This will be much easier and faster for both of us." Her face was within inches of his as she was forced to wrap her arms around his neck. She tried to ignore his cologne. She closed her eyes as she felt the warmth of his chest seep

into her body. She absently wondered how much she weighed now.

She opened her eyes as he placed her on her bed. She watched as he walked back into the bathroom. He picked up her discarded towel and threw it in the laundry bag. He then picked up a clean towel and a brush and walked back into the room. He placed both objects on the bed beside her. Brandy picked up the towel and began to dry her hair with it. "Thanks."

He nodded as he pulled a chair close to the bed. Leaning back in it, he crossed one leg over the other knee. She still wouldn't meet his gaze.

"I'm Dr. Brentwood, but you can call me Grey."

She finally looked at him. "Are you my doctor?" She slowly became aware that she didn't have any strength left in her hands. She couldn't keep them up long enough to dry her hair.

"One of them. I'm actually new here. I just completed my residency at the local hospital, but I wanted to transfer here."

"Where is 'here'? Isn't this the hospital?" She let her hands fall to the bed. The towel was still on her head.

He just stared at her as he tapped his foot against the bed.

"Do you need help?"

She could only nod. He stood up and sat beside her on the bed. He gently rubbed her head with the towel and gave it a few twists. Tossing the soaked towel aside, he picked up the brush. "Would you rather I use a comb?"

"No, I always use a brush."

He nodded and started at the ends of her hair, slowly working his way up.

"So how did training go?"

She almost answered, but then realized he was trying to change the subject. "Why won't you answer my question?"

"And what question was that?"

"Am I in a hospital?"

"I already told you that I can't tell you anything yet about where you are or why you are here. I don't know everything myself. Like I said earlier, when you're stronger, all your questions will be answered." He stared at her in silence for another minute. "If what you did in the bathroom is any indication, that won't take much more time."

So, how did training go?"

"Fine." She was becoming more aware of his hands. Every once in a while one of them would graze her arm or the nape of her neck. She could feel the chills running down her back. She turned her head to look at his face.

He gave her that smile again. If only he wasn't so attractive. She would like to yell at him and demand answers to her questions. He was younger than she was, and here he was treating her like a child. She may not be a doctor, but she had her MBA. He was so smug. As he continued to brush her hair, she stared down at it. She could swear it was a shade darker than she remembered. Her gaze left her hair and moved to his hands. They were big and smooth, with long fingers. There was no wedding ring on his ring finger. Now, why had she noticed that? Men rarely wore their wedding rings.

"How old are you?" She didn't know where the question came from.

He didn't answer right away, which forced her to look up and meet his gaze. He was staring at her hair. His gaze moved back to her face as he answered. "I'm thirty-two. How old are you?"

She shrugged and looked back at her hair. "Depending on how long I was in a coma, I'm either thirty-nine or forty."

She missed the shock that registered on his face. He covered it quickly. "Miss Parker—"

"You might as well call me Brandy, Dr. Brentwood. After all, you've seen me naked."

He looked about to laugh, but he held it in. Only the smile slipped through. "Brandy or Bran?"

She shrugged. "Either. Just don't call me Brandewyne."

"Ok, Brandy, how good is your memory? When you think back to your friends and family, are any faces or names missing?"

She hadn't even thought about that before. Did she have all her memories? Would she know if anything was missing? She knew both of her parents were dead. Nancy was her only real friend.

"Nancy! Where's Nancy?"

"Excuse me?"

"My best friend, Dr. Nancy Thorgood. Where is she? Does she

know I'm here? Her name and number would have been in my purse. Where is my purse? Where are my clothes? Where am I?"

This time only slight surprise showed on his face. "Dr. Thorgood knows you're here. I'm sure she will visit when she can."

"Oh, my God! My job! Damn, I'll bet they have fired me. Brad will get that promotion for sure, now. Please, tell me how long I was in a coma."

"Brandy, don't worry about your job. Everything's been taken care of. I want you to concentrate on getting better." He leaned forward and placed his left hand on top of hers. She stared down at it. She couldn't ignore how nice it felt having him touch her. Almost reluctantly, she pulled her hand out from under his. She still wanted to be mad at him. Looking offended, he placed the brush beside her and moved back to his chair. For the first time in a long time, she felt like crying, something she would never do in front of a man.

"Look, Dr. Brentwood, this is easy for you to say, but you have no idea how I feel right now. How can I get better, when all this secrecy and evasion is loading me down with stress?"

"Believe me, Brandy, if I felt that it would be better for you to know, I would either tell you or find out the answers. I personally feel that if you knew more, you would have to deal with more stress. Just let me say that you are perfectly fine and that you should concentrate on your therapy right now. That will keep you busy. And please, call me Grey."

"Grey?"

He nodded.

"I don't agree with all of this, but I'll go along with it for now. When I get stronger, you better tell me everything. I'll have a list of questions for you."

"And I will make sure you get all your answers. Sue will be taking care of you. I will check back at the end of the week. If there is any reason you want to talk to me before then, just let Sue know. You're probably tired, so I'll let you get some sleep. You had quite a first day."

Brandy nodded. He picked up the towel and brush and took them into the bathroom. He then helped her get under the sheets. She watched him walk to the door. He looked back and smiled before

leaving. After he left, she smiled back.

Every day for the next week Brandy was taken to the gym. They always started with warming up the muscles in her arms, legs, midriff and abdomen. The weights were increased from one to two pounds, then five. By the seventh day, her arms were strong enough so that she could sit up in bed and eat by herself. Sue felt she was ready for the treadmill.

Brandy gripped the bars tightly so that she wouldn't fall if her legs gave out. The treadmill's speed was so slow at first that Brandy had no trouble moving one leg in front of the other. After half an hour, Sue moved up the speed. Over the next two hours, Brandy had worked up to a slow walk. True, she was leaning over the front, but her legs were moving. It was hard to believe that only a week had passed since she could barely move. Now, she had no trouble talking, and was well on her way to walking without assistance.

"Bran, try not to lean so much on it. Put more weight on your legs."

Brandy nodded. As she complied she immediately felt the added strain on her legs. By now she was used to the sweat running down her face. She had to eat an extra meal a day to replenish the calories burned during all this exercise.

She looked up as a young black man came into the gym. She was surprised. She hadn't seen other patients in the gym before. At first she had wondered where the other patients were, but since Sue didn't like to answer her questions, she had stopped asking them. She would just wait until Grey was ready to answer them all.

"Sue, we need you in the lab," the black man said. Brandy noticed that the man was wearing a white lab coat. She wondered if there were any nurses or orderlies. This man was only the third person she had seen the whole week.

"I'm not finished with Bran yet," Sue said.

"It's important, Sue."

Brandy could tell he didn't want to discuss it in front of her. Sue looked at Brandy.

"Bran, will you be OK here for one minute?"

"Oh, yeah, I'm cooking with Crisco now."

Sue gave her a strange look and then smiled. “Great, I’ll be right back.”

Five minutes passed, and Sue still had not come back. Brandy shut off the treadmill and stepped off the machine. Stretching to reach the wheelchair, she grasped the arm of it and stepped forward. She was just about to sit down, when a thought hit her. She was at the end of the hall with no one around her. She could use this time to look around a bit. Using the nautilus equipment as support, she managed to get to the door. Opening it an inch, she looked outside. There was no one in that direction. Opening the door further, she stuck her head out and looked to the right. The hallway was empty.

Brandy stepped out of the gym and headed away from her room. She hadn’t realized how weak she was. She had to stop every few feet and lean against the wall. Another hallway branched to the left. Bracing herself against the wall, she turned the corner. There was another short hallway. Taking the next right, she saw two doors and an elevator. She was only about ten feet away, but it seemed like 100. The muscles in her legs were screaming. Pushing herself away from the wall, she headed for the elevator. As she passed the nearest door, the nameplate caught her attention. Thinking she had misread the name, Brandy rubbed her eyes and looked again. It read, “Dr. Thorgood.”

If Nancy was here, why hadn’t she come to see her already? And why hadn’t Grey mentioned she worked here? She had been awake for a week now. That was plenty of time for her best friend to visit. She wondered if by chance this could be another Dr. Thorgood. Without knocking, Brandy tried the door. It wasn’t locked so she pushed it open. The woman behind the desk looked up in surprise. At first Brandy thought she had the wrong person, but as recognition lit behind the old woman’s eyes, she somehow realized that this was Nancy. As she stared at the woman who looked old enough to be her great grandmother, Brandy fell back against the doorframe. Nancy was old and Brandy’s own body was young. She shook her head as Nancy pushed back her chair to stand.

It couldn’t be Nancy. Was it possible that Nancy had an older relative that was a doctor?

“Brandy.”

Her eyes refocused on the old woman’s face.

“Nancy?” She asked, the fear mounting in her chest.

Chapter Five

The elderly woman approached and took hold of Brandy's arms. She led her into the office and sat her in one of the chairs. Leaning against the edge of her desk, she picked up the phone and punched in three numbers.

"Grey? Is Sue there?...I don't know the whole story, but you better hope it isn't too early...What? She's right here...I don't know." She looked at Brandy with concern. "No. She's seen me, so I have to explain everything to her. I had hoped to postpone this until she was ready...I'll talk to you and Sue later...No, I'll escort her back to her room...Yes. Bye." She nearly slammed the phone down. She took a deep breath and rubbed her face.

"Nancy?" Brandy ran her hand over her face. The sweat was pouring off her. She didn't know whether her heart was pounding from the exertion or over the shock she was now feeling.

"Yes, Brandy, it's me."

"How?...What happened to you?"

"Oh, Bran, nothing happened to me. Damn, I knew this was going to be hard. God, you look great." She stood up and walked to the other side of her desk. Brandy watched how slow she walked. She looked over a hundred years old. After Nancy was seated, she stared across at Brandy.

"Well, we have much to discuss." She smiled as she took in Brandy's appearance. "I see you had a hard workout today. I've been told of your progress. The fact you walked here is quite a miracle. Only one week. Much faster than we estimated."

“Nancy, what’s going on? How do you fit into all this? Why are you so old? Why am I so young? How come my body is so...so perfect?”

“Oh God, where should I start? I guess I’ll just tell you the year. Wait, what was the date of your last memory?”

“The accident on New Year’s eve. It was 1999.”

“Good. Do you have all your memories? Are there any voids in your past?”

She shrugged. Grey had asked her the same question. “Not that I’m aware of. Nancy, will you just tell me what is going on? You were going to tell me the year. Was I in a coma that long?”

“No, Brandy. You were allowed to assume that to alleviate some of your curiosity. You were in a coma for less than a week.” She paused to take another deep breath and then slowly let it out. “—And then you died.”

Brandy stared at her in disbelief. Nancy continued.

“Nothing happened to age me except time. The year is no longer 1999 or even 2000. Bran, it’s the year 2078. I’m 118 years old. I don’t know how much time I have left, but with improved medical science, the life expectancy has increased drastically. I may have one, two, or more decades left.” Doubt formed in Brandy’s eyes. “Bran, do you remember I mentioned Cryonics to you? I was going to explain it to you after the holidays? Well, I never was given the chance. You died on January 5th, 2000.”

“Cryonics. You froze my body and then brought it back to life 78 years later?”

“Well, that is what many people here have been led to believe...No, we didn’t freeze your body. Are you sure you want to hear all of this?”

“Yes, damn it. Don’t you think I deserve to know?”

Nancy smiled at the fury in her friend’s eyes. That fury would give her strength.

“OK, here it is,” Nancy said. “The day after the accident, I performed some minor surgery on you. I retrieved some skin cells and a few of the eggs from your ovaries. These samples were specially prepared and then frozen cryogenically. After you died, your brain was removed and cryogenically frozen.”

Brandy’s hand moved to cover her mouth, which had dropped

open. Nancy continued.

“At the time, cloning was only experimental and not very reliable. I thought I had discovered, with the help of several other scientists, a way to clone a human egg. That was what I wanted to talk to you about all those years ago. I found out a year after you died that we were going about it all wrong. By then it was too late. You were already frozen, and I was determined to bring you back. I knew it couldn’t be done at the time, but I had enough faith in medical science. I knew it would be possible within the next couple of decades. It took longer than I anticipated. About twenty-five years ago, Dr. Thomas Nelsen discovered the missing link. I teamed up with him and explained your situation. We got a grant and began. Our first two attempts failed miserably. Luckily, I had enough specimens for trial and error. The third time we were successful. The main problem with the first two attempts was the rapid growth cycle. The body couldn’t cope with it. It was too fast. We had to slow it down during the peak growth times. The first attempt, we tried to clone the body in six months: disaster. The second time, we tried one year: still a disaster. Five years turned out to be the magic number, but we didn’t exercise the body, so all of the muscles atrophied. The fourth time was our masterpiece.” Nancy paused as she stared at Brandy’s body. It suddenly struck Brandy that Nancy was talking about her. The bodies she had mentioned were their previous attempts to clone her body. She sucked in her breath. She still couldn’t make her mind accept all of this.

“Of course, getting your memories into the new body was a major hurdle. We at first thought we could just do a brain transplant, but that would take away from the perfection we had achieved. During the last five years while your body was growing, we worked continuously on that one problem. We’ve known for quite some time that memories are chemical and can be frozen. A few decades ago, we were worried that they were also electrical, but fortunately it was discovered that the chemical memories are only stored and retrieved electrically. We knew that they were all intact in your brain. It was just a matter of extracting these chemicals and inserting them into the new brain. The answer was almost too easy. We had been overlooking it for months.” She laughed lightly. “There is only a certain portion that

holds memories. Most of the brain is unused. Some of it controls motor skills, keeps all the muscles working, keeps you breathing. It was just a matter of finding which section stored those memories. With minor surgery we were able to replace those sections...We went through your left eye socket."

"My eye?" Brandy's hand reached up to touch the corner of her eye.

Nancy nodded as she continued. "Of course it would have been easier to go through the skull, but no one wanted to shave any of your hair off. It was a very intricate, complicated surgery. We had to maneuver through various parts of your brain before we could get to the right section." She looked deeply into Brandy's eyes. "It seems it was worth the effort... How do you feel, Brandy?"

Brandy still had her hand at her eye. She was trying to imagine how they could go through such an opening, and what did they do with her eye? They must have had to push it aside or pop it out. Probably would have hurt like hell if she had been awake. The thought made her smile.

"Brandy?"

"Huh?" She looked back at her friend. She was still not used to Nancy being so old. "I...I guess I feel fine. How do you feel?"

Nancy chuckled softly. "Well, the arthritis is bearable most of the time."

"Jesus, Nancy, this isn't a joke is it?"

"No, Bran. During the car accident that put you in a coma, your legs were crushed. They had to be amputated. Look at your legs. They are lovely. Can you remember them looking that good?"

Brandy stared down at her legs. She no longer wore the green surgical scrub uniform. Sue had bought her some T-shirts and a few pairs of shorts. She had even gotten her a pair of sneakers. Brandy was still not used to how great her body was. Her last memory of her 39-year-old body was varicose veins beginning to form on the backs of her calves. There were definitely none on the backs of these legs. She shook her head as she looked back at Nancy.

"I can even show you your medical record if you want." Nancy looked down at the top of her desk. Her eyes lit upon something and she picked it up. "Look at this."

Brandy looked at what Nancy held. She held it closer to her. It was a calendar. Brandy read the date at the top: July 2078. Brandy could only stare at the calendar. She was dumbfounded. Her eyes moved over Nancy's desk. As of yet she had not seen anything that looked futuristic. Her gaze stopped at something that looked like a fax machine, except that it had a small screen in front. Nancy followed her gaze.

"That's the videophone. You never saw anything like that in the Twentieth Century."

It wasn't a question, but Brandy shook her head. Nancy turned the phone so that it faced Brandy. The screen had the image of a dialing keypad on its face. Nancy began to describe how it worked.

"You dial on the touch screens. Videophones are the only type of phones sold, so you don't have to worry that the person you call won't be able to receive your call. Here, let me show you."

Nancy tapped the screen three times. The keypad disappeared and was replaced by the word, "ringing." This was immediately replaced by a woman's face. A legend beneath her face contained the words, "hold," "conference," and "hang up."

"Yes, Dr. Thorgood?"

"I'm sorry, Beth. I must have dialed the wrong extension."

"No problem, ma'am."

Nancy tapped "hang up" in the legend. The screen returned to the keypad. "When I called Grey, I used the handset, which gives privacy to the person using the phone. Sometimes you don't want everyone in the room knowing who it is you're talking to."

Brandy nodded, still trying to take everything in.

"I guess all this also explains why my hair is so long."

"Yes, isn't it beautiful? You're beautiful, Bran. I was unsure back then if I should take the chance by preserving you, but now I'm so glad I did...I've missed you, Brandy." She had wanted to embrace Brandy since the second she saw her but hadn't wanted to shock her.

Brandy could only stare at her friend. She was speechless.

"There is much more I want to tell you, but I think I will give you time to absorb all this. You probably want a shower and a nap. I'll take you back to your room." Nancy was beginning to stand up to assist her friend. Brandy put up her hand.

"No, there is no need for you to do that. I can make it back on

my own. There is no reason for us both to get tired out.” She stood up and headed for the door. Nancy’s voice followed her out of the office.

“I will visit you tomorrow.”

Brandy paid little attention to her surroundings as she headed back to her room. She felt like she was in shock. When she got to her room, she stopped long enough to get a change of clothes and then headed for the bathroom. As she stripped and stepped under the stream of hot water, her mind raced over the events of the last half hour. Her best friend was an old woman, and it had been seventy-eight years since the car accident. She still wanted to reject the idea that her body was a clone. Her old body was dead and buried, as was her old life. Her job may have been stressful, but she had worked hard to achieve that status.

Her eyes fell again to those perfect hands. Brandy held her arms out in front of her and looked them up and down. How could she think of this body as her own? This came from one of her own eggs. My God, was she in the body of her own child? She turned off the water and stepped out of the tub. Grabbing a towel, she quickly dried off and donned a pair of clean panties.

Brandy stared at her reflection in the mirror. This body definitely didn’t look like her old one. In those days she had no idea what she would look like thin. She had started getting chubby around the time her breasts grew and her hips spread. She let her eyes move from her distinctive collarbones to her pert breasts. They lingered there before dropping to her rib cage, which tapered to a small waist. Her hips spread slightly, but not as much as she remembered. The extra fat was no longer there. No longer there? It had never been there. This body wasn’t hers. She looked about seventeen or eighteen. Hell, she was in the body of her own child.

She looked hard at her face. True, it did look like her, but was there any difference? The eyes were the same, but the shape of the face was different. Brandy couldn’t tell if it was because she was thinner, or if her bone structure had changed.

Brandy let her eyes drop away from the mirror as she lifted her left hand to her face. With her lips trembling, she moved her fingers across her cheek. She moved her hand down her chin and neck. When her hand reached her left breast, Brandy closed her eyes. Her hand continued to move lower until it had reached her stomach. This body

didn't even feel like her own.

Her eyes flew open as she heard the door. Her gaze locked with Grey's in the mirror. She spun around covering her breasts. "Don't you knock? Who the hell do you think you are? Get out!" She reached behind her and threw the first thing she got her hand on. Grey ducked as the brush flew over his head.

"I'm sorry. I..." He muttered in shock and quickly closed the door. Brandy spun around and clutched the sides of the sink. Staring into the mirror, she noticed the tears. She hadn't been aware of crying. The idea that Grey had also seen her tears made her angrier. With halting movements, she pulled on her shirt and stepped into her shorts. She couldn't hold onto her feelings as her emotional roller coaster hit bottom again. She sank to the floor and covered her face. With her back against the tub, she cried her heart out.

Grey closed the door and leaned against it. His heart was beating something fierce. What had made her so angry? He couldn't put off the confrontation any longer. He would have to talk to Nan about Brandy.

He walked down the corridor and knocked on the door. After hearing the response from inside, Grey entered the office. Nancy looked up as he walked in.

"Grey, I was just about to call you. We need to talk."

"Yes, I think so."

Nancy stared at him for a moment. Worry etched her face.

"Grey, what is it? What's wrong?"

He attempted one of his smiles but failed.

"I just came from Brandewyne Parker's room. She's very upset. I figured it must have something to do with your talk. Nan, what did you tell her? And why didn't you mention to me that she was your best friend?"

"She's upset?" Nancy rubbed her hands together with worry. "Grey, you're new to this project. There's much about it you don't know. I just didn't have time to tell you how close Brandy is to me." Nancy's mind wandered for a second then she refocused on Grey. "I told Brandy everything. Maybe I shouldn't have, but I felt it best at the time." She leaned back in her chair and let out a deep breath. "Grey, how upset did she seem?"

“She was crying. She became violent when I entered the room.”

“Violent? That doesn’t sound like her...What was she doing when you entered her room?”

“Well, she was in the bathroom... She was standing in front of the mirror in her underpants.”

Nancy smiled. “Only her underpants?”

Grey nodded, still looking distraught.

“Grey, Brandy was raised differently than you were. You’re comfortable seeing both sexes undressed, Brandy isn’t. She believes in equality but has never lived it...Give her a few minutes to calm down, and go back. This time, I suggest you knock.”

Still a little confused, he nodded. Leaning over, he kissed her lightly on the cheek. “Sorry it has taken me so long to come talk to you. I wanted to come by earlier in the week, but it’s been hectic.”

“I understand. I’ll see you later.”

Grey nodded again as he left the office.

Brandy was still on the floor leaning against the bathtub when she heard the light knock. At first she was tempted to ignore it, but decided to answer. “Come on in,” she said. The door opened slowly, and Grey walked into the room. Brandy let her head drop back onto her folded arms. The tears had dried by this time. She heard Grey walk closer. He put the lid of the toilet down and sat on it. She waited for him to say something. She almost wished she were still mad at him.

“Do you need help getting up?”

She shook her head. She probably did, but she wasn’t going to admit it.

“I had a talk with Dr. Thorgood. She told me why you are so upset...I can’t pretend to understand how you feel, but you are the first person brought successfully out of a cryogenically frozen state. You should be thrilled. This is a much better century to live in than the twentieth.”

Brandy lifted her head. She made eye contact with him for an instant before letting her head rest back against the edge of the tub.

“Maybe if I ever get out of here, I’ll be able to judge for myself...By the way, thanks for knocking this time.”

“I wish to apologize for that. I had no idea it would upset you

so.”

She looked at him this time.

“You didn’t? Because you’re a doctor?”

He shrugged. “Partially, though more just habit, I guess. I have to remember that you are from a different society.”

“Times must have changed a lot. You’ll have to tell me about it.”

Grey nodded. “Are you sure you don’t want help? It would be much more comfortable for us both in the other room.”

Sighing, she nodded and held out her arms. Thinking that he would help her to her feet, she was surprised when he again swept her into his arms. Brandy thought her doctor would want her to walk as much as possible. Maybe he felt she had done enough walking today. She wouldn’t even listen to the voice in her head that said he might like holding her. This time she didn’t resist as he carried her into the other room. After placing her on her bed, he pulled the chair closer and sat down.

“How has your training been going?”

“Tiring.”

He flashed another of his winning smiles. “Sue has documented everything, and you are improving by leaps and bounds. No one thought you would be walking so soon. The fact you made it to Dr. Thorgood’s office is impressive.”

“She would say it’s because I’m too stubborn for my own good.” She felt sudden anger as she remembered that no one had told her Nancy had been here the whole week. “When was I going to be told she worked here? If I hadn’t stumbled upon her, would I have ever been told?”

“Now don’t get upset again.” He held up his hands. She tried to relax when she realized her voice had risen. “We didn’t want you to know how much time had passed until you were stronger. It would have been any day now, but you beat us to it. Would you like to talk about what you were told?”

At first she could only stare. Did he really think that the only thing bothering her was how much time had passed? She shivered and closed her eyes. Shaking her head, she crossed her arms in front of her.

“Not right now. It’s still a bit too new.” She opened her eyes and was struck by the concern showing in his eyes. He was an unusual

man, but maybe he was the norm for the latter half of the twenty-first century. This time she really looked at him. She noticed how he styled his dark brown hair. The bangs were long, but his hair was trimmed close around his ears and neck. His eyes were so dark, it was hard to tell they were blue. His features weren't rugged, but they were still very manly. The jaw was strong, but his lips were full. His nose was perfect. He must shave, but his complexion was smooth, and like Sue's, was naturally dark. He was tall and obviously strong. He carried her around as if she weighed nothing. She had felt safe in those arms. She never feared that he would drop her. She almost wished he would take off the white lab coat. She had no idea what his taste in clothes was. She could tell he wasn't wearing a tie, if men even still wore ties in this century. As she stared into his eyes, she couldn't help but think he reminded her of someone.

Brandy suddenly realized she was staring. What must he think? She tore her gaze away and stared down at her hands. When she looked back at him, he was still staring at her. The concern was gone. It had been replaced by something else. As Brandy tried to recognize it, his expression went blank. He cleared his throat.

"Well, there's no rush. Just let me know when you're ready."

Chapter Six

Brandy was on the treadmill first thing the next morning. She couldn't stop yawning. Dreams had kept her up most of the night. Most of them had been nightmares. The worst one had been the other three clones were alive and they came after her. They had just reached her when she awoke in a cold sweat. Grey had been in the nicer dreams. They had done things that still made her blush.

Brandy had been walking for half an hour when Nancy walked into the gym. Brandy almost stumbled. Would she ever get used to seeing Nancy as an old woman? She forced a smile as Nancy walked closer.

"How are you doing this morning, Brandy?"

Brandy didn't mention the dreams she had all night. "OK, I guess." As usual she was drenched in sweat. Nancy smiled and pointed at the mats against the wall on the stage.

"Why don't we sit down? You're making me tired just looking at you."

Brandy looked over at Sue, who nodded. She turned off the treadmill and stepped down. Following Nancy, Brandy watched as the older woman took each step. It was strange that they were both walking with the same awkwardness. Brandy shook her head. How much longer would her friend live? Her friend? They hadn't been friends in seventy-eight years. Nancy must have changed a lot since then. What had she done all those years? Brandy knew that she herself had not changed. Well, excluding physical appearance, she hadn't

changed. She wanted her friend back.

They both eased themselves down on the mats. As Brandy stared into Nancy's face, she realized their friendship could never be fully restored. Nancy would die soon. It was optimism that made her believe she may have a decade or more left. One hundred eighteen years old! George Burns hadn't made it that long. Brandy cursed herself silently as she felt her eyes begin to water. She was not a crybaby. Trying to get a grip on her emotions, she swallowed hard. Nancy reached out and touched her hand. Brandy tried not to flinch.

"I had a talk with Dr. Brentwood. Apparently, you didn't handle the news very well yesterday."

"What did he say?"

"Just that you were upset. I must admit, I was surprised that you got violent with him. He is a very gentle man."

Brandy almost smiled. "Did he tell you why I threw the brush at him?"

"You threw a brush at him?" She chuckled and shook her head. Maybe that did sound like Brandy after all. "Yes, he told me that he walked into the bathroom without knocking."

"Damn right! I could have been in the shower. I don't know how he was raised, but that's just not the way it's done."

"Brandy, that is the way it's done now. True, some people still cling to modesty, but overall the sexes are just about equal. It is what you always wanted. Grey will treat you with the same respect as he would a man. He was raised that way. How can you complain about that?"

"Maybe I'm just not used to it? How else are we equal?"

"Well, the most recent change is coed public restrooms. That happened less than ten years ago. It bothers some of the older folks, but the current generation was raised to accept this new equality."

"Coed public restrooms?" Now Brandy did smile. "If we're equal, is there marriage or sex anymore? Do men still see women as sexual objects?"

"Yes, there is still marriage, and I can only guess if there is still sex. I wouldn't know personally."

Brandy laughed at that. Nancy still had her sense of humor. Thank God! Brandy was hoping that she hadn't changed too much.

“Nancy, did you ever get married?”

“No. I was way too busy. I did meet a man I was attracted to. I was forty-five. He was only in my life for a month,” she paused as she stared across the room, “but it was long enough to get me pregnant.”

“Pregnant? You have a child?”

“I had one. A beautiful little girl. The doctors didn’t want me to have her. They said I was too old. I would be forty-six when she was born. They wanted me to abort the pregnancy. No way! I had her, and I’ve never regretted it. She was perfect.” Nancy looked back at Brandy with tears in her eyes. “I named her after you.

“Nancy, what is it? Where is she?”

“She died in a plane crash thirty years ago. Both she and her husband died.” She got a faraway look in her eyes. “Thank God, I was watching the baby.”

“Nancy if this is too painful, you don’t have to talk about it.”

Nancy wiped the tears out of her eyes. “No, I haven’t been able to talk to you in seventy-eight years. We have a lot to catch up on. Besides, this will give you something different to think about.”

“Yeah, I do need to think about something else...You said there was a baby? So, you have a grandchild?”

Nancy nodded. “I raised him as my own. Your namesake, Brandy, died when she was forty-two. Like me, she waited to start a family. Luckily, she was able to find Payton. She had a good three years with him. She had my grandson when she was forty. By then, that was an acceptable, even normal, age to start having children. I’m sure she would have had more...Damn, Brandy, I wish you could have met her.”

“I wish I had.” She almost felt like crying. Brandy Thorgood had been born, lived, and died in nearly half the time she herself had been dead. She felt sorry for the boy to have to grow up without his mother. “What about her son? I would like to meet him.”

A strange smile crept across Nancy’s face. “You know, it’s funny how fate works. My grandson is thirty-two years old now. He isn’t married. Never even been in love. I have raised him to follow in my footsteps. He loves the same things I do: science and medicine. He’ll be a much better scientist than I ever was. And he’s a much better doctor than I ever could have been...I’m sure he will love you as much

as I do.”

A light was going off in Brandy’s head. The pieces of the puzzle were starting to fit. Nancy’s final comment was the last piece. “The man my daughter married was named Payton Brentwood. They named their son Grey. Brandy, you’ve already met my grandson.”

Brandy sucked in her breath. Grey Brentwood was Nancy’s grandson?

Grey met up with Nancy in the cafeteria. She let him cut in line and bought him lunch.

“How are you doing today, Nan?”

“So-so.”

Grey took her tray and walked to a table carrying both. Setting her tray down first, he then placed his across from it. Once they were both seated, Nancy looked her grandson over.

“So, have you seen Brandy yet?”

“No, I’m going right after lunch.”

“What do you think of her, Grey?”

Grey gave her a half smile. “Medically or personally?”

“Let’s start with personally.”

Grey furrowed his brow in thought. He mentally pictured Brandy in his mind. “She’s a strange one. Very intriguing. Her differences will take getting used to.”

“Well, haven’t you always complained about the women you’ve known? You’ve always thought they were too predictable and didn’t need anyone? Grey, Brandy needs you. She would rip out her tongue before admitting that, but she does. She is the most independent woman I’ve ever met, but I’ve always felt she needed someone.” She took a sip of her tea. “But besides being different and strange, what do you *think* of her.” She emphasized the word ‘think’ so he would catch her meaning. “Do you find her attractive?”

“Oh, Nan, you’re not playing match-maker are you? For Christ’s sake, if it weren’t for her dying and you freezing her, she’d be a hundred years old.”

“But she’s not, Grey. She is a thirty-nine year old woman in the body of a teenager.” Nancy sucked in her breath. How could she let that slip without first explaining it to him? She should have briefed him

on it from the beginning.

Grey could only stare at her for a moment. “I thought she was just confused when she told me that. I never knew how old she was when she died, and I never asked how old you were when the two of you were friends. How is she thirty-nine with such a young body?” Brandy’s youthful body flashed before his eyes. Grey remembered how she looked standing in front of the mirror. Her eyes were closed, and his eyes had risen from her hand on her stomach to her perfect breasts, and then up to her shocked green eyes. Then, of course, she had gotten angry with him. He forced his mind back to his surroundings and his grandmother. “Cryonics does not rejuvenate old flesh.”

“I—I wanted to wait for a better time. Maybe I wanted Brandy to be the one to tell you. The answer is just so cold and clinical. I wanted you to get to know Brandy before you found out.”

“Found out what, Nana?”

That got her attention. Grey hadn’t called her Nana in years.

“Th-that she was an experiment. Grey, I can’t tell you. This is up to Brandy. I know I should have told you, but I didn’t and now it is up to her. I know you’re her doctor, but this is something I just didn’t want you to know. I’m sorry.” She pushed herself up out of the chair and left the cafeteria.

Grey watched in astonishment. They had always been truthful with each other. He felt betrayed. It was his right to know everything about his patients. What was so bad that Nancy didn’t want him to know? Would Brandy tell him? Was that why she was so upset the other day? An experiment. What was this experiment? Brandy’s body was perfect. It surely wasn’t cut open or tampered with. He had to get some answers. He pushed himself away from the table and headed for the medical wing and Brandy’s room.

Brandy was on the floor of her room when Grey walked in. The glare she sent him reminded him that he should have knocked.

“Sorry. Habit.” He shrugged with a smile. Brandy fought off the smile trying to form. She rolled her eyes as she continued with her sit-ups. She had never been in great shape, but sit-ups had always been easy. They weren’t easy anymore. She was nearly ready to quit. She had to force herself to do twenty.

“How many have you done?”

“Ten.”

“Before you know it, you’ll be able to do a hundred.”

Grey’s eyes widened as she snorted in disbelief.

“Yeah, right.”

Grey stood over her as she did her last ten. It took awhile, but he didn’t become impatient. He admired that she was doing this on her own. When she finished her last one, she collapsed in exhaustion back to the carpet. Without a word, Grey held out his hands. Brandy stared at them for a moment before taking them. Grey helped her to her feet. She suddenly realized that this was the first time she had stood next to him. If this body were as tall as her original one, she was 5 feet 5 inches. The top of Brandy’s head came to Grey’s shoulders. She stepped back a foot to look up into his face. She smiled as she looked into his eyes. Now she knew who he reminded her of.

Grabbing hold of the foot of her bed, Brandy walked closer and sat on the edge. Grey took his usual seat.

“This body sure is weak.”

“In a month you’ll forget how weak you are now. Sue has told me you have worked up to benching ten pounds.”

“Hooray!” She lifted an arm and twirled her forefinger in the air.

He chose to ignore her sarcasm. “Brandy, I just had a discussion with Dr. Thorgood. I would like us to talk about what she told you.”

“I told you I wasn’t ready for that. You said there was no rush.” She didn’t want to think about that again. She had to change the subject. “Why didn’t you tell me she was your grandmother?”

He was thrown off by the subject change. It took him a moment to compose himself. “I guess I’ve just gotten used to separating my professional and personal lives. People wouldn’t take me seriously if they felt I only have this job because of my grandmother. When it’s just the two of us, she’s a relative. When there are others present, she’s Dr. Thorgood. It’s quite lucky for me that we have different last names...Don’t get me wrong. She’s the most important person in my life. I owe everything to her.” His face took on a sad expression. He looked at Brandy as if he just figured out two and two

made four. “My mother’s name was Brandy. I hadn’t thought about that before. She was named after you, wasn’t she?”

Brandy nodded. “That’s what Nancy told me.” Brandy wanted to reach out and comfort him. They were both orphans. What would he do if she moved closer and embraced him?

As Grey thought about his dead mother, he shook his head and mentally shook himself. He cleared his throat.

“Good attempt at changing the subject,” he said. “I didn’t want to rush you, but we really need to talk about what Nan told you.

All desire to touch him faded. She looked away in frustration. Why was it so important to talk about it? Would he want to continually harp on it if it were happening to him? She didn’t think so.

“Nan? She never let me call her that. She hated nicknames.”

“It’s not a nickname. I called her Nana when I was little. Somewhere along the line I shortened it to Nan. I’m the only one who calls her that. Don’t try to change the subject, Brandy. This is important. I have to know what she told you.”

“Damn!” She pushed herself to the other side of the bed and turned her back to him. “Read it in your damn chart!” She lowered her head. Why did he like to make her mad at him? She didn’t want to be mad at him.

“I wasn’t told everything about your case,” Grey said. “Nan told me she told you everything. I need to know, Brandy. What does she mean by an experiment?”

Brandy sucked in her breath at the word. She had thought of many ways to describe it, but hadn’t stumbled upon that word yet. Yes, that’s what it was. She was an experiment. One that could have gone wrong—and did three times. She shuddered as she remembered the nightmare. What if they had run out of her eggs? What if the experiment on her brain had failed? She knew the answers. She would have remained dead and buried. She was a freak.

“What were you told?” Brandy asked.

Grey walked around to her side of the bed and leaned against the wall.

“I was told that you had been cryogenically frozen after the accident,” he said. “I was brought onto the project a month ago, supposedly two weeks after you were brought out of the cryonic freeze.” He pushed himself away from the wall and knelt in front of

her. Looking into her face, he took her hands. "Please tell me what experiments they did on you. I now know you were thirty-nine years old, but I thought you were between sixteen and eighteen."

Her lower lip trembled as she looked into his kind face. It was different now. If he had known before, he would have gotten used to it. Now he would just be shocked, and maybe even disgusted. People were usually disgusted by freaks. She pulled her hands out of his and raised them to her face.

"Please, leave me alone." She had always sworn that no man would see her cry. How could they think of her as an equal if she showed such a weakness? She had never seen a man cry. There were many times she wanted to cry at the injustice at her old job, but she had swallowed the hurt and fought back. She had earned the title of 'bitch.' Where was that strength now?

Grey pulled her hands away from her face. "What is wrong? Why have you been so upset? What did they do that was so bad? And why can't you tell me?"

She fiercely wiped away her tears. "Before Nancy told me who you were, she said that she felt her grandson would love me as much as she did. Do you think that's possible? I don't think it would be, if you know. I don't think anyone could love me."

"Why do you think that? You are a beautiful young woman. You have a great life ahead of you."

"Young?" She scoffed at the word. "I can't see what kind of life I'll have. No one even knows I'm here. How is my existence going to be explained?"

"Cryonics is common. Everyone will accept that."

"No!" He was so close. She could tell he was wearing a different cologne. This one was more appealing. Without realizing she was doing it, she leaned forward and wrapped her arms around his neck. She buried her face in his neck as his arms came around to envelop her. Fresh tears formed in her eyes as she moved her head back to see his face. The next thing she knew, they were kissing. The sensations were all new. This body may not be hers, but she felt what it felt. It felt good. She didn't know which one of them ended the kiss, but soon they were staring at each other, breathless. She shook her head.

“Cryonics won’t be accepted since my body is buried in some graveyard.”

Brandy pushed herself away from him and swung around to the other side of the bed. Standing up, she walked toward the bathroom. All he could do was watch. He stood as if frozen until she had reached the doorway.

“What do you mean?” He followed her. Brandy didn’t close the door. She walked over to the sink instead. Looking at Grey’s reflection in the mirror, she lowered her head. Turning on the cold water, she splashed some on her face, grabbed a towel and dried away the water and tears. She knew he was still standing behind her. Reaching up, she caressed her lips with her fingers. Would he ever kiss her again like that if he knew the whole story? She spun around and leaned against the sink for support.

“I mean that Brandewyne Parker is dead and buried. She died on January 5th, 2000. She had a funeral and was buried. She was three months shy of turning forty, and she had no legs.” She cleared her throat. Talking about it wasn’t hard until she mentioned the loss of her legs. The tears wanted to come, but she managed to hold them off for now.

“But how is that possible? When you woke up and looked in that mirror, you recognized yourself. That wouldn’t be possible with a brain transplant.” His mind raced through the possibilities.

“It wasn’t a transplant. My best friend, Nancy, who was six months older than I was, preserved some of my eggs and cells. Years later, she and another doctor began attempts to...”

He stepped closer. “What?” He knew the answer, but he had to hear it to make it real. Could it really be done? He thought they were still decades away from making that possibility a reality.

“They began attempts to clone me. Oh, Grey, I didn’t want you to know.” The tears wouldn’t be stopped this time. “I should be dead now. If my best friend hadn’t cared enough to take some samples of my body, I would be. If she had failed, I still would be. I’m a freak against nature. This body isn’t even mine. I didn’t want to talk about this. I don’t want to accept it. My old life may have been crummy at times, but it was mine. It was taken away from me one night. One moment I was in that car, the next I was gone. I shouldn’t have

wakened here. I should never have known you, let alone kissed you..." She stared down at her body. She began tugging at her clothes. "You know, it really is stupid to be modest about this. How can you be modest about something that doesn't belong to you?"

Without further hesitation she pulled off every item of clothing and stood there, stripped naked. Grey's mouth dropped open, and his hand moved up to cover it.

Like a wild woman Brandy stared at her hands. "I wonder if the water is hot enough if this will melt away," she said. "Sure, I feel what this body feels, but I can hardly control it. I walk like an old woman. Who knows when I'll be able to run, or even be strong enough to carry a bag of groceries?" She stumbled over to the bathtub and turned on the water. Getting in she stepped under the hot spray while Grey watched the steam fill the bathroom.

"You're going to scald yourself," Grey muttered, thrusting back the shower curtain. Brandy barely flinched while Grey leaned forward and shut off the water. Grabbing a towel with one hand, he wrapped his other arm around her waist and lifted her out of the tub. He drew her towards him as she attempted to push him away and made comforting sounds in her ear. Finally she relaxed against him and wrapped her arms around his neck. He draped the towel around her shoulders as he returned the embrace.

"Oh God, Grey, help me."

This was all too new. He had no idea what to do. Somehow, she had to accept that she was alive, and that this body did belong to her.

"You didn't burn yourself, did you?"

She shook her head.

Brandy closed her eyes and forced herself not to cry. She had to think of something else. She felt on the brink of madness whenever she thought of what she was. She knew she would have to accept it soon, but it just wasn't the right time. She pressed herself closer to Grey. Nothing felt wrong now. She felt him from her face to her knees. She realized she was naked, but it didn't bother her. She instinctively felt she could trust him. Nancy had certainly done a great job in raising him.

"I'm sorry. You must think I'm crazy, now."

“No, Brandy. You’ve had some unsettling news and need time to adjust.” He placed his chin on the top of her head as he stroked her back. He moved her long hair out of the way and glanced down at her face. Her mind was older than his, but her body was nearly half his age. “I think you need to get some sleep. Do you want me to get you something to help, or can you manage on your own?”

“Well, I can get to sleep OK, but the dreams keep me up.”

Grey nodded as he reached out and caressed her cheek. “You shouldn’t be afraid to tell me anything, Brandy. I will help you get through this as much as I’m capable of. Nan and I both will help you. Keep your chin up.” He stared at her beautiful face. “You’re not a freak, Brandy. You’re a miracle.” He started for the door. “Get in bed, and I’ll be right back.” She nodded as she watched him leave. Brandy turned to look in the mirror. Now that she was calming down, she realized how bad she must have looked. She had actually ripped her clothes off in front of him. She hoped she had gotten the worst of it out of her system. She didn’t want to fall apart. She cringed. What would Grey think of her now?

She changed into her pajamas and was waiting in bed. It took only five minutes before he returned with the shot. She was hoping for a pill. He smiled at her expression.

“Now come on. You’re a bit old to still be afraid of needles.”

She turned away as he gave her the shot. She winced as she felt the prick.

“Sorry, I don’t have any candy.”

She smiled and stared at him until her eyes closed.

Grey stayed by her side for another ten minutes. He moved some stray hair out of her face, and straightened the covers. She truly was a miracle. Before leaving he leaned over and lightly kissed her mouth. He still had a vivid memory of the kiss they had shared. He had never felt such a strong reaction to any of the women he had been with in the past.

Grey suddenly realized he had a headache. It had been a stressful afternoon. He would have to have another talk with Nancy. He wanted to see Brandy’s medical records.

Chapter Seven

Grey had Brandy's medical records spread out on the desk in front of him. He hadn't even had to explain. Once Nancy had seen his face, she didn't have to ask whether or not Brandy had told him. Once she had handed him the medical records, she spoke.

"If you have any questions after you've read everything, come get me."

She had let him use her office. As he read everything, he couldn't help but be shocked. Even though Brandy had told him, this was real. Her signed death certificate was in her record. One of her questions came back to him. How was her existence going to be explained? They couldn't exactly say she had been cryogenically frozen when there was no record of it anywhere. His grandmother had done that on her own. Grey gasped when he turned the page and saw a picture of Brandy. It was an informal shot of her at a party. She was wearing a bright red long-sleeved dress that reached above her knees. Her hair was short, and her smile looked forced. His eyes widened at how chubby she was, but what surprised Grey the most was how old she looked. She hadn't aged well. She looked older than thirty-nine, but he could see her potential beauty. He finally tore his eyes away from her and looked at the woman next to her. He smiled as he recognized Nancy. She was just as thin as she was now. She wore a sleeveless blue dress with a black shawl draped loosely around her shoulders. Her dark hair was long and wavy. It was strange seeing her so young. She'd been old as long as he'd known her. Unbelievable that the two women were the same age. Nancy looked a decade younger

than Brandy.

Grey turned the picture over. It was dated December 31, 1999, the night of the accident. The last picture taken of Brandy. No wonder Nancy had kept it. As he put the picture aside he realized it wasn't the last picture taken of Brandy after all. The next picture was of Brandy lying in a hospital bed. At least he assumed it was Brandy. He stared at the picture in horror. How could this be the same woman? He quickly turned to the last one, a picture of Brandy's gravestone. Flipping it over, Grey read the address of the gravesite and the date of the funeral. He assumed this was in case Brandy ever wanted to know where her body was buried.

Grey put the last picture aside and moved to the new section of the record. There was an annotation of when Nancy froze the specimens from Brandy's old body. Five days later, the brain was frozen. The next entry wasn't for another forty-five years. Grey realized he wasn't born yet. Nancy had begun working with Dr. Nelsen. After three years at the drawing board, they were about to attempt their first clone. Grey's parents died, and Nancy withdrew from the project for six months. When she came back, they attempted the clone. It failed. After two more years spent in the lab, the second attempt was made. It also failed. Grey was six years old by then. There wasn't another annotation for ten years. He wondered if they had considered giving up.

When he was sixteen, they tried again. Grey tried to remember what he was doing at that age. He certainly hadn't been curious enough to ask his Nana what she was doing at work. He suddenly remembered he didn't see much of her the last few years of high school, and then he had gone away to college. It must have been when he was in medical school that they created Brandy.

The third attempt failed also, but Grey recognized Nancy's scribble. She circled "five years" and drew an arrow to an underlined word: exercise. The final attempt wasn't made for almost five years. December 16, 2077 was circled with SUCCESS written in red ink. That was seven months ago. On May 29, 2078, surgery was performed on Brandy to replace the section of her brain, which held her memories. Grey was intrigued by this and read the entry three times. One of his research papers in medical school dealt with the way memories are transmitted electronically but are stored in their chemical

state. He was excited that his theory had been right. He searched through the notes until he found which section of the brain held memories. He smiled when he read that it was in one of his two suggested locations. He wished he could have been a part of Brandy's rebirth.

Her progress was monitored closely for the next week. She was no longer considered critical. On June 5th, she was moved from the lab to her new room in the medical wing. Grey was brought onto the project on June 8th. They kept up her exercise, and she had started moving around and moaning on June 26th. On July 11th, 2078, Grey was notified by a nurse that her eyes were fluttering. He stayed by her side for the next two hours, and she opened her eyes and focused on him at 9:42 in the morning. Everything else he already knew. He was about to close the record when he reconsidered. Turning the page, he saw an entry out of order. A pelvic exam had been performed on Brandy on February 20th. Nancy had thoroughly examined her reproductive organs. Grey didn't comprehend the findings at first, but in a way wasn't surprised. In capital letters was the word: INFERTILE.

Grey was staring off into space when Nancy walked in. She was wondering what was taking him so long. She expected him to come charging after her and expecting an explanation.

"Grey?"

He seemed startled as his eyes swung around to meet hers.

"You know, it makes sense. Hybrids are sterile. It only makes sense that an exact clone would be also. Could you imagine if she weren't? Who knows what kind of mutations she could conceive?"

Even though he sounded clinical, Nancy could pick up a hint of sadness. She supposed he felt sorry for Brandy. Nancy had wondered how she was going to tell her. Would she be hysterical? She hadn't seemed to want children before. Would she want them now that she had a second chance? Would this ruin Nancy's hope that Brandy and Grey might end up together? Grey had always said he would start a family someday.

"Well, you're her doctor. When do you think she should be told?"

Grey remembered how Brandy had acted earlier. How would she react to another bit of bad news?

"I think she should accept her new body as her own before we

tell her that anything is wrong with it. Either that or wait until she starts mentioning having babies.”

Nancy wanted to ask him how he felt about it. Did he consider her only half a woman now? Would Brandy consider herself only half a woman?

“At the end of this week I think Brandy needs to get out of here for the day. I would take her, but I can’t walk for very long. Would you take her, Grey? That way you can make sure nothing goes wrong. You can make sure nothing is too much of a shock for her.”

Grey only stared at her for a moment. Nancy continued.

“She needs to feel normal. Everything has been too fast for her. Take her shopping, tour the city. You can use my credit. Do whatever she wants to do. For me, will you do it?”

“Sure, Nan. I agree she does need to get out of here.”

“Good.” Nancy walked around her desk and unlocked the bottom drawer. She pulled out her wallet and a manila envelope. After giving him the authorization numbers to her account, she opened the envelope. After pulling out something, she handed it to Grey. He looked at it for a moment. It was an identification card with Brandy’s picture on it. The name beneath the picture was Brandy Parker. Grey sent a questioning glance at his grandmother.

“It’s the identification I had made up for her. That picture was from her first driver’s license. She always liked it, and since it was already laminated, it was well preserved. I just scanned it onto this one.”

“But her name is the same.”

“No. Her legal name was Brandewyne Parker. Now her name is Brandy Parker. I think she’ll be pleased to hear that.”

Grey stared at the ID for a while. He shook his head. “This is a forgery isn’t it? Does anyone outside this wing know about the experiment?”

At first she only stared at him, but slowly shook her head.

“But where did you get the funding? In order to get a grant, you would have had to explain what you were doing.”

“Dr. Nelsen funded the experiment. Before he died, he set up the grant. When I die, you and Brandy will be the only ones to know the full truth. Everyone else thinks she was simply taken out of cryonic freeze. Well, Sue has found out a few things, but I trust her.” She held up the manila envelope. “This will be her new life once she puts this

place behind her.”

“Jesus, Nan, what happens if the truth gets out somehow? What would happen to Brandy?”

“The truth won’t get out. It can’t. Grey, just take Brandy out. Don’t show her the ID unless you have to. Let’s spare her that for now.

By the end of the week, Brandy was able to do a slow jog on the treadmill. Her arms were getting stronger, and she was able to do the twenty sit-ups with little trouble. She was proud of her achievements. When Nancy told her about leaving with Grey, she felt it was a reward for her hard work.

“But why can’t you go with me, Nancy? It would be like old times. It’s been a while since we ‘did lunch’.”

Nancy smiled. “We can still ‘do lunch’ here. It would be too exhausting for me to go with you. Grey is young and vital. He’ll be able to keep up with you.” Nancy chuckled. “You no longer move as slowly as I do. I wouldn’t be able to keep up. You don’t mind going with Grey, do you?”

Brandy thought about what had happened earlier in the week. She hadn’t seen Grey since the day she had made a fool of herself by taking her clothes off in front of him and heading for the hot shower. It would be strange to face him again. But she said, “No, I don’t mind.”

“Good. He’ll be by for you after lunch. Have fun. I’ll want to hear all about it when you get back.”

Brandy dressed in a shirt and a pair of shorts. She had French braided her long hair. Normally, she just put it up with a hair band. She could hardly wait to get some clothes of her own taste. She quickly ate lunch and waited for Grey. When he walked in, she was shocked. Instead of the customary lab coat he was wearing a light blue button down shirt with blue jeans. Brandy had guessed right. He did have a great body. He smiled at her.

“Are you ready to face the unknown?”

“I’ve been looking forward to it the second Nancy mentioned it to me. Where are we going?”

As Grey turned to lead the way, Brandy’s eyes dropped to the back of his jeans. She nodded in appreciation and then mentally shook herself. She was acting like a high schooler. She smiled at the thought.

It was about time. They started walking down the corridor.

“Wherever you want to go. What do you feel like doing?”

“Well, I would like to get some new clothes. You don’t mind going shopping with me, do you?”

“Whatever you want.”

She followed him into the elevator. He pushed the button for the upper basement level. She noticed there were four upper floors and two basement levels.

“I am a little tired of these shorts. It was nice of Sue to get them for me, but I want to get some clothes of my own. And I would kill for a pizza. Do they still have that?”

Grey laughed softly. “Yes, that survived. Didn’t you just have lunch?”

“Yes, but I figured we wouldn’t come back until later tonight. Can we have pizza for dinner?”

“Oh, sure.”

“I don’t have any money.

“I know that, Brandy. Don’t worry. It’s taken care of.”

The elevator doors opened and they stepped out into the parking garage. Brandy froze in her tracks. Her eyes went from car to car. Grey stopped ahead of her and waited. She knew she should have been expecting this, but she realized that she still hadn’t fully accepted she was in the future. Looking at the cars, she wondered how different everything else would be. She thought the cars looked strange. They were brightly colored and low to the ground. They were built extremely aerodynamically. They looked more like airplanes without wings than cars from the twentieth century. Some only came to her waist. Brandy began walking again. Grey led her to a red car. This one wasn’t as low as the others, but was still lower than any car she had ever been in. The height was similar to a Corvette, but there the resemblance ended. Grey typed in a code and the passenger door lifted. Brandy ducked to look under it. This one door gained access to both the front and back seats. That was convenient. No more having to shove the seat forward and climb into the back seat. After she was seated, Grey closed the door. Brandy felt something and thought she was being attacked until she realized it was the seat belt. It had come out of nowhere, not attached to the door like others she had seen in the past.

Grey's door opened and he joined her in the front seat. She watched as his seat belt engaged. The seat itself controlled it. The shoulder belt slid up from the bottom of the seat and connected at the top. Grey reached forward and placed his thumb on a small console. The dashboard lit up and a tube popped out. Grey leaned forward and breathed into it. The car immediately started. Brandy watched the tube slide back into the dashboard. She stared at Grey.

When he didn't seem to notice anything, she pointed to the place where the tube had been. "What was that?"

"That makes sure you're sober before it lets you drive. It's a standard feature in all automobiles."

Brandy nodded as he shifted gears and pulled out of the stall. She held her breath as they emerged from the parking garage.

Chapter Eight

Brandy let her breath out slowly as she looked at the buildings. Not much different here. Everything looked polished, but nothing stood out. There were still streetlights. Grey pulled up to something that looked like a tollbooth and stopped the car. He rolled down the window and removed a small plastic card about the size of a credit card from the machine and inserted it into a slot in the dashboard. A display lit up in front of him. He punched in a few things on the keyboard below the display. He then removed his hands from the steering wheel. Brandy's mouth fell open as she looked at the dashboard. In the very middle of the display was a map. A red dot blinked in the center as the map scrolled. To the left of the map was the digital speedometer, and what looked like a countdown of some sort. She sucked in her breath as the speedometer reached 100 miles an hour. It didn't feel as if they were going that fast.

"Grey, what just happened back there? Are we on auto pilot?"

Grey turned his head to stare at her. He had to remind himself that everything was new to her. He was having trouble thinking that all this was strange and unusual. He had grown up in this world.

"We just drove through an entrance booth to the freeway. It gave me a computer data card."

"A computer data card?"

"Yes, it tells my car's computer which entrance we are in, and then I tell it which exit I want to use to get off. It computes how many miles there are, and will do the driving for me. If I run low on gas, it

will take me to the nearest exit, where I take over. I drive myself to the gas station, and then back on the freeway.”

“Good Lord, we sure have come a long way.”

Brandy watched as the car moved. The freeway had only two lanes, but they were wider than she was used to. At each entrance and exit, there was a third lane, similar to the ones she was used to but longer. As Brandy looked in the distance, she saw there were only two lanes. There was no exit or entrance in sight. No car was in the right lane. Well, they had been in that lane until their speed had stabilized at 120 mph, and then the car took them into the left lane. She smiled as she understood.

“I think I’ve got it,” she said. “The right lane is the acceleration and merge lane, and the left lane is for normal driving. But how do the cars keep from hitting each other?” She could not get over the technology. She hoped she wasn’t driving Grey crazy with all her questions.

“Every car is equipped with sensors on the front, back, and both sides. The sensors won’t let the car get within 25 feet of another car in the front and back, or within 5 feet of both sides. When my car drove from the entrance lane to the merge lane, its back and left side sensors would have detected whether there was a car in the lane. If not, it would move over and accelerate. Once at nominal speed, the front sensors move up to 100 feet. All cars move over to the farthest left lane unless they are getting ready to get off the freeway.”

“Does this car fly, too?”

“No, of course not.”

Brandy was attempting a joke, but apparently it had gone right over his head. She wondered if he had a sense of humor. She had always liked men who could make her laugh. She looked over at the display on the dash. The countdown was at six. That must be how many miles they had left before the car would take them off the freeway. Her assumption was right. Three minutes later the counter reached zero. The car changed lanes just before the exit lane appeared. At 60 M.P.H., the car moved into the exit lane. As they reached the exit booth, Grey rolled down the window. The computer data card ejected from the slot in the dashboard, and Grey pulled it free. He then slid it into the exit booth. The display went black, and Grey put his

hands back on the wheel.

“Well, we’re almost there.”

“Where?” She looked outside the window anticipating something spectacular. This world seemed full of infinite surprises.

“The mall. You said you wanted to go shopping.”

Brandy had wondered if there were still malls. She didn’t suppose those would ever go out of style. They were just too convenient. She wouldn’t be surprised to see an apartment complex right in the middle of a future mall.

When Brandy saw the mall, she gasped. She couldn’t see where it began or ended. It looked as big as a University campus. Grey drove down a ramp into the underground parking garage. After they were parked, Brandy reached for the seat belt. It didn’t have a normal locking mechanism, so she looked over at Grey. He reached over her and touched a button on the side of the seat. Their faces were inches apart, and she was reminded of their kiss. She wondered if he thought about it. After gazing into her eyes for a moment, he leaned back. The seat belt disengaged. Grey got out of the car while Brandy searched for the door latch. Grey opened it for her, and then showed her where it was.

“It’s obvious, now that I know.” She smiled at him, and he smiled back.

“Let’s go. You probably won’t be able to decide where to go first. This is the largest mall in the city.”

“Which city?”

Grey was surprised. She hadn’t thought to ask which city she was in before now?

“Los Angeles.”

Los Angeles, California? A jump from her hometown in Florida.

“How long has Nancy lived in California?”

“When my mother moved here, Nan followed her. I guess she brought you along for the ride.”

Brandy smiled at his attempt at a joke.

They rode the elevator up to the lobby. When the doors opened, Brandy stepped out in awe. This had to be the prettiest mall she had ever seen. There was crystal and glass everywhere. Her eyes went from one store name to another. She didn’t recognize most of

them. When her gaze fell on a beauty salon, she pointed.

“That’s what I want, a hair cut.” Without thinking, she grabbed his hand and tugged him along.

Grey leaned against the wall at the beauty salon and watched the hair fall. She had beautiful hair. It almost reached her waist. He kept seeing foot-long pieces fall to the floor. He hoped she wouldn’t get it as short as her hair used to be. He grew bored and picked up a magpad, which was two centimeters thick, twenty centimeters high and fifteen centimeters wide. This smaller version of a laptop computer weighed only 150 grams.

Grey activated the menu by touching the screen. Choosing his favorite electronic magazine, he switched to the table of contents. Finding an article that looked interesting, he opened it. Settling back in his chair, he began to read the magazine from the screen.

A little less than half an hour later, Brandy walked up to him. He looked up and sucked in his breath. He couldn’t believe the change. Her hair had been all one length, but now she had wispy bangs. Her hair was still long, but now went only half way down her back. With some of the weight gone, it was slightly wavy. The bangs softened her face even more.

“Now you look like a teenager.”

“Don’t you like it?”

He shrugged. “You’re beautiful.” He hadn’t known he was going to say that, but he didn’t regret it. It was the truth. She was so happy with her new look, she glowed.

“Thank you. Now we can get to the clothes stores.”

He nodded as he handed the clerk his credit card. After the card was scanned, Grey reached forward with his left hand. The clerk completed the order and then handed the card back to Grey. Brandy looked at it as Grey took it.

“What’s that?”

Grey handed her the card. “It’s my credit card.”

“This doesn’t look like any credit card I’ve ever seen.” She turned it over and looked at the back. There was no signature on the back, and no slogan or company name on the front. “Is it Visa or

MasterCard?”

There was a strip on the back, but Brandy didn't think it was magnetic. She couldn't identify what it was. She handed it back to Grey.

As he took the card, he glanced at the clerk. Luckily, the woman had stepped away from them and had not heard Brandy's comments. Grey took her arm and led her out of the salon.

“The kinds of credit cards you're talking about were outlawed thirty years ago. There was entirely too much fraud involved with them. They were too easy to counterfeit. Since paper money was also easy to counterfeit, it became obsolete around the same time. Today's money is this card. It is a literal credit card.” He tapped the back of the card. “In order for the funds to be accessed, my thumb print must match what is in this strip when it is scanned. Once everything matches, the access codes, which are also in the strip, tell the computer how to get to my account. It's that simple.”

Brandy nodded, impressed. They walked into the nearest store.

Three hours later Grey was sitting on a bench massaging his feet. They must have been to nearly every store in the mall. Brandy wanted to see everything. She had done more window-shopping than actual buying. That's where her maturity showed. A real teenager would be an impulsive buyer. Brandy was conservative with what she wanted. She bought a few jeans, shorts, jump suits, dresses, and shirts. She insisted on going to the lingerie section on her own. Grey was more than happy to stay away from ladies' underclothes. She had then picked out some makeup, a brush, and necessary hygiene items

At the moment she was in the shoe store across from him. Her packages were beside him on the bench. There were only three of them. A few of her smaller purchases had been placed in the larger bags. He wondered if she was ready for that pizza. With all that walking, he had worked up quite an appetite.

It wasn't much longer before she emerged from the shoe store and sat beside Grey.

“What do you think of these?”

She opened two boxes. One of them contained a pair of brown loafers and the other was a pair of black pumps.

“They're very nice. Do you want to take a break? I'm getting

hungry.”

“Yeah, I guess so.” She closed the boxes and put them back in the bag.

“Good. The food court is this way.” This time he grabbed her hand and led the way. Brandy could almost forget who she was and who Grey was today. For now they were just a man and a woman shopping together. With her new hairdo and clothes, she could be just about anyone. No one stared at her as if they suspected she had a secret. She felt closer to Grey. Spending three hours with a man in a mall was a good way to get to know him. She giggled. Grey looked at her.

“What’s so funny?”

“I was just thinking about how much fun I’ve had today. Thanks for bringing me. I needed this.”

He squeezed her hand. “So did I. I can’t remember the last time I went shopping. I usually have Marie get me things.”

Brandy’s heart fell. Was Marie his girlfriend? Why hadn’t he mentioned her before? She pulled her hand from his grasp. He glanced down but didn’t say anything. They walked to the food court in silence. Why hadn’t Nancy mentioned Grey had a girlfriend?

Brandy could smell the food court before she could see it. After hospital food, everything smelled wonderful. She wasn’t sure she still wanted pizza. When Grey stopped at the counter, he turned to her.

“What do you want on it?”

“Sausage and pepperoni?” Did they even serve that on pizza any more?

He ordered the pizza and two drinks. They took their colas and their number and sat down. Brandy sipped her drink and looked around. Grey noticed she was no longer smiling. What had happened in the last few minutes to get her upset?

“Brandy, are you OK?”

“Hmmm? Yeah, I’m fine.”

The way she said it, he knew she wasn’t. He racked his brain. She had been happy all day. Suddenly he knew what it was. He had mentioned Marie. Was it possible she was jealous?

“By the way, Marie is my housekeeper.”

Her eyes flew to his, and he knew he was right. She had been jealous. For some reason that made him feel good.

“Oh really? Uh, I mean, oh, that’s nice.”

“Brandy, I’ve been wondering. Before the accident, did you have someone?”

“Someone? Oh, you mean a man? No. When I was younger, I thought I’d met Mr. Right. He turned out to be Mr. Dead Wrong. After putting so much of myself into that relationship, I just never wanted to do it again.”

“How do you feel now?”

She thought about the question for a while.

“Do you know what’s really strange about all this? Although I know who I am, in some ways I feel like a stranger. Not just my body, but also my mind. As far as I know everything is there, but I seem to have forgotten a lot of it. I just realized it a couple days ago, but it wasn’t serious enough to mention. Even though I can remember why I hated Scott, I can’t recall actually hating him. I can’t remember how it felt.” She paused to think. “Another thing is my job. I know what I did for a living, but now I can’t remember how I actually did it. It’s really weird, huh? Maybe it’s because I have a new soul or something. That would make sense, right? My old body died, so my soul should have died with it or gone on to wherever souls go. It would explain a lot of stuff. I just don’t seem to feel the same way about things that I used to. It’s almost like I had a personality overhaul.”

“Interesting. You’re sure you remember everything?”

“Would I really know? I can’t sense anything that might be missing. I remember going to school. I remember my first kiss at twelve. I remember when I first started putting on weight at thirteen. I remember the first time I had sex at twenty-two. Pepe was the name of my first dog. I was five. And of course, I remember that damn car accident”

Grey’s mind was still on what she had done first when she was twenty-two. He wondered if she realized she had that experience to do over again. He was distracted from that train of thought when their number was called. He got up to get the pizza.

When he placed it before Brandy, she actually felt her mouth water.

“God, that looks good.” She reached for a piece and took a big bite. As she chewed, she realized it didn’t taste like she remembered. Grey watched her expression.

“Well, is it as you remember?” He reached for a slice. He hadn’t had a pizza in years.

Brandy swallowed. She shook her head slowly.

“No, there’s something different. It doesn’t taste right.”

He took a bite and chewed for a minute. After he swallowed, he stared at the piece. It was better than he remembered. He looked back at Brandy.

“Doesn’t taste right?”

“I love cheese, but this almost makes me want to—gag.”

“Maybe this body doesn’t like cheese.”

Brandy looked shocked. “Is that possible?” She didn’t like anything to remind her of her new body.

Grey noticed the change in her posture. He wished he could take back his comment. Now he had to tread lightly. “Well, you were raised on certain foods. Your taste buds acquired a preference for those foods. This new body hasn’t had the chance to acquire anything. It certainly hasn’t had the chance to get used to mozzarella cheese.”

Brandy thought about what she had eaten in the last two weeks. He was right. She hadn’t eaten cheese, and she had just felt there had been something wrong with the milk she had been given. The rest of the food had been bland, so it hadn’t surprised her that she hadn’t liked the taste of most of it. This was the first time she had tried normal food. She dropped the pizza in front of her.

“I don’t know if I can eat this.”

“Just try. If you give it a few bites, it may get better.”

Brandy nodded. After all, he had spent his money, or rather his credit, on this meal. After taking a sip of cola, she attempted another bite. It was just as bad as the first one. She swallowed as quickly as she could and took a long draw off her cola. Grey was still watching her carefully. He had already started his second piece. She wished she could enjoy it enough to finish her first piece. She felt tears of frustration coming. What other horrible surprises lay in store for her?

Brandy was quiet on the way back to the clinic. She wanted to ask how much longer she would have to stay there but didn’t want any more bad news. She didn’t speak to Grey. They’d had so much fun, it was a shame that the afternoon was ending on a bad note. As he parked in his reserved spot at the clinic, she turned to look at him. Before he

met her gaze, she stared at his face. She looked from his forehead down his nose back to his cheekbones and then down to his chin. She was attracted to this man, but what must he think of her? She couldn't help but think he must know something about her that he wasn't mentioning. Was it as bad as she feared? Her worst fear was that she was falling for him. Wasn't it natural to fall in love with your doctor? Many women had done it. It was expected in some cases. Was that why she felt this way toward him? Was there any chance that the love was real, and that he may feel the same way? She suddenly felt depressed and wanted to be away from him. She opened the door as he turned to look at her.

"Brandy." That was all she heard before she slammed the car door behind her. She could hear him getting out of the car as she quickly walked toward the elevator. It was waiting for her, so she got in and pressed her floor before Grey reached her. She knew she should hold it for him, but she didn't. She didn't want to talk to or see anyone. Nancy would have to wait for her report on how things went. She felt tired and just wanted to go to sleep.

Grey reached the elevator just as it closed. He wanted to pound it with his fists. The day had been going well. Brandy had forgotten about what she was. Unfortunately, she had to be reminded. He had tried to get her talking on the way back, but she had just stared out the window. He was afraid of what might happen if she didn't accept her new body. He wished he could know what she was feeling. He knew it was selfish, but he felt he would be happy to have a younger, slimmer body. True, he was happy with his own physique, but wouldn't he be happier with it than with a fat older one?

Remembering the picture he had seen in her file, he did think she had been fat, but then he had never seen anyone who was fat. That stigma had been solved years ago. She hadn't been grotesque, but he wouldn't have thought she was attractive. He definitely preferred her new body. Was that the way to make her accept it? Show her the old pictures and make her look at herself now? He would have to think on it before he met with her again.

He turned away from the elevator and headed back to his car. No use in talking to her now. She needed time to think and be by herself. He would talk to his grandmother when she got home.

Nancy was walking toward her office when Brandy stepped off the elevator by herself.

“Where’s Grey?”

“In the parking garage.

“He didn’t come up with you?”

Brandy looked at her with impatience. She didn’t want any confrontations. She couldn’t deal with Nancy right then.

“If you want to talk with him, I’m sure he’ll be here in a few minutes. I’m going to bed.” She turned abruptly to walk away, but stopped. Looking over her shoulder, she forced a small smile. “Good night, Nancy.”

“Good night, Bran.” Nancy stared after her with concern. After Brandy had turned the corner, Nancy turned and walked into her office. She left the door open so she would see Grey after he got off the elevator. When half an hour had passed, she called home. Grey answered on the second ring.

“Grey, what are you doing there?”

“Nan, if you want to talk about it, come home. Brandy just needed time to herself.”

“But—”

“Nan, I will see you when you get here. Good-bye.” She stared at the phone after he hung up. She wanted to go to Brandy and talk to her, but something kept her from doing it. Instead, she pushed herself out of her chair and left her office.

Nancy sat in silence as Grey gave her an account of the afternoon. When he was finished, he stared at his hands. She took a few minutes to digest everything.

“She actually said she felt she had a new soul?”

He looked up in surprise. Instead of speaking, he just nodded.

“Interesting. It was something I had thought about also. The fact she mentioned it says a lot. She feels that her old body died, and she did also. She must feel as if we programmed her into someone else’s body.”

“Her own child’s.”

Nancy’s eyes sharply lifted to his face, but he was not looking at her. She nodded sadly.

“She must accept what has happened to her. She must, Grey! I have dedicated my life to bringing her back.” Grey looked up at her

voice broke on the last word. For the first time in his life, she appeared frail.

“Is it true that you told her that I would love her?”

At first she appeared confused, but then she recalled the conversation. The smile barely touched the corners of her mouth as she nodded. She cleared her throat.

“Well, we have much to do. This old woman is tired, so I’m off to bed.”

“Sleep well, Nan.” He stood up and walked to her. Leaning over, he helped her out of the chair and kissed her on the forehead. She squeezed his hand and then left the room.

Brandy had hoped she wouldn’t dream, but she did. She and Grey were having a picnic. They were both so happy. She was dressed in a flowing sundress, and he was wearing a pair of shorts and a short-sleeved Oxford shirt. He was saying something funny, and she was leaning back against his chest and laughing. His arm came around her and cupped her breast. She turned in his arm and slid up his chest. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she kissed him tenderly. He turned the kiss into a passionate embrace as he lowered her to the blanket. As he lifted her skirt and reached between her legs, Brandy’s eyes sharply opened.

She sat up in bed and lifted her hand to her heart. The room was shrouded in darkness. There was no window in this cell of a room. The only light came from under her door. She was instantly reminded of where she was and wondered why she had wakened.

She could still feel the kiss. She was still excited about it. She didn’t bother to stop the tears that had wanted to flow since she had returned from the mall with Grey. Lying back down, she curled into the fetal position. Wrapping her arms around her knees, she cried into her pillow. She knew she was falling in love with Grey.

Grey wrapped his arms around his pillow. He couldn’t get comfortable. He couldn’t get his mind off Brandy. He tried to remain clinical in his dealings with her, but his mind kept returning to that passionate kiss and the times he had seen her naked. Her body was emblazoned in his mind. He couldn’t close his eyes without seeing it. He wanted—no, he couldn’t think about what he wanted. He had to

think about what she needed. She needed him to be her doctor. He would deal with his wants at a better time.

Pounding his fist into his pillow, he slammed his face into the recess. Damn his soul, he was falling in love with her.

Brandy was in the midst of another dream. This one was not with Grey. It was of her old life. She was younger, about the same age as her new body. She was walking with her mother. She reached out and grasped her mother's hand. Her mother was so vibrant and pretty. They could always talk about anything. She was so happy to see her again. Her parents had been taken from her just before her thirtieth birthday. When Brandy heard the door open, she didn't even think about the fact there were no doors around. Something in the back of her mind felt something was wrong, but she ignored it and smiled at her beloved mother. Brandy was brought out of the nice dream by someone holding a cloth over her mouth. She tried to scream, but instead inhaled whatever drug was on the cloth. All she saw was blackness as the face of her mother faded away.

Chapter Nine

Grey slowly pushed open the door to Brandy's room. If she was still asleep, he didn't want to wake her. He had arrived early and just wanted to make sure she was alright. Not seeing her in bed, he headed for the bathroom. Since the door was open, he walked in. After looking around the room, he backed out. Where else could she be? Could she be in the gym this early? It was possible, if she wanted to get stronger faster. His long strides took him out of the room and down the hall. He pushed open the door to the gym and quickly scanned the surroundings. Not seeing Brandy, he began to worry.

Had she been so upset last night that she had run away? Where would she go? "No!" He shouted. Luckily, no one was in the gym at the moment. He stormed out and headed for Nancy's office. Passing Sue on the way, he stopped her.

"Sue, have you seen Brandy this morning?"

"Uh, no, I was just on my way to her room. Isn't she there?"

"No, damn it."

Sue followed him to Nancy's office. They walked in without knocking. Nancy looked up in surprise as the door hit the wall. She could tell her grandson was upset about something.

"Grey, what is it?"

"Brandy's gone."

"What do you mean, gone?"

"I mean gone. She's not in her room or in the gym. Where else could she be?"

Nancy couldn't think of anyplace else either.

"Why would she leave, Nan?"

Nancy only stared for a moment. Brandy went to bed right after getting back from the mall. Even if she was upset about something, would she actually leave? Wouldn't she feel safer here? The Brandy she knew wouldn't do something so rash.

"Maybe she didn't leave."

"Well, then where—" Grey cut himself off as it hit him that she may have been abducted. He felt as if he couldn't breathe. No, they couldn't let themselves believe that, at least not yet. "No, let's check the whole building. Maybe she's just walking off her upset."

Nancy nodded. That did sound more like Brandy. "Good idea." As Nancy reached for the phone and Grey walked to the window, neither saw Sue back up against the doorframe and put her hand to her mouth in shock. She backed out of the room and nearly ran down the hall.

The light seemed at the end of a long tunnel. There was a distant buzzing. As the light grew closer, Brandy realized that the buzzing was voices. She didn't open her eyes at first. It felt as if she were lying on a hard narrow bed. The tips of her fingers could feel the sides even though her wrists were touching her hips. Slowly, she opened her eyes. There were three bright lights above the bed. She suddenly realized she was on an operating table. She tried to lift her head to see if she had been cut open, but she was too tired. Why was she so tired? Then she remembered the hand pressing a cloth to her mouth. She had been drugged. Looking to her left, she saw an IV dripping a clear liquid into her arm. In the back of her foggy brain, she realized that the voices had stopped. A woman with a surgical mask appeared in front of her.

"Well, you shouldn't be awake. Just need to turn this up a bit." Brandy watched as she pushed a button on a machine connected to the IV. She watched in fascination as the liquid began to drip faster. In less than ten seconds, all was black again.

When she woke again, she was in a different room. The lights that had been above her were gone. When she tried to move, she realized she was strapped to the table. Since one of the straps went over her forehead, she couldn't move her head. Feeling movement, she looked above her as much as the strap allowed. She was moving into a narrow white tunnel. Brandy had seen this in plenty of movies. They were performing a CAT scan. Keeping her eyes closed, she tried to sort

out her thoughts. She wasn't as groggy this time, but then she no longer was attached to an IV. She flexed as many muscles as she could to see if there was pain anywhere. She wasn't aware of any. Brandy opened her eyes as she moved out of the tunnel. She could hear people approaching. When they got close enough to see, Brandy looked from the man to the woman. Neither was wearing a surgical mask, so she could see their faces clearly. She didn't know either of them.

"No, we can't have you join us just yet."

"What do you want with me?" She could only watch as the needle slid into her arm. She couldn't even struggle. She felt so helpless. She needed Grey. Where was he? On the other hand, where was she?

Grey sat in a chair opposite from Nancy's desk with his fingers steepled in front of his face. He was trying to remain calm.

"We can't just sit here."

"Grey, we don't know where she is. If she was taken from here, we need to figure out who took her. No one outside of this clinic even knows of her existence."

"It's been four days, Nan."

"I know, Grey, but we also have to accept that she may have been taken for other—for other purposes." It horrified her to think of what those purposes could be.

Grey pushed himself out of the chair so hard that it slid back against the wall. Nancy flinched from the sound.

"I can't think about that. I will tear this city apart looking for her if I have to."

Nancy watched her grandson with tears forming in her eyes.

"You care about her a great deal, don't you?"

"Hell, I think I've fallen in love with her, and it's killing me thinking about what she might be going through even as we speak. Treating like some kind of guinea pig. Making her feel even more like a freak." He paced in front of the desk. "I can't take this. I have to find her." He suddenly stopped pacing and stared at Nancy. "Didn't you say that Sue had found out a few things? What did you mean? What did she—" He was interrupted by knocking.

They both looked toward the door as Sue walked in. "Any luck?"

Grey shook his head and watched her closely.

“No, we don’t know where to start.” Nancy said as she wiped a tear from her cheek.

Sue had worked with Nancy for many years, and she had never seen her cry. She had no idea that Brandy meant so much to her. Her eyes shifted to Grey, who was so angry he shook.

“I’m so sorry.” The words just slid out. They may have appeared like normal sympathy, except that she couldn’t stifle the guilt that spread across her features. She started to back out of the room. Grey’s stare turned to stone.

“What do you have to be sorry about?”

She bit her lip and shook her head. “Nothing, I, uh, I’m just sorry, that’s all.” She quickly ducked out of the room, regretting she had come at all.

Grey looked at Nancy. “She’s lying.” He headed after Sue.

One hour later Sue was the one seated in the chair across from Nancy, her head in her hands and crying. Grey leaned against the wall with his arms across his chest. Nancy placed her elbows on the desk, her chin propped on her hands.

“How much did they give you, Sue?”

“I know I shouldn’t have taken it. They told me they wouldn’t hurt her.”

“How much?” Grey didn’t ask as softly as Nancy had, and Sue flinched in her seat.

“Five hundred thousand credits. I didn’t know how much you cared about her.”

“Why should that matter? She’s a human being, not some laboratory animal. Can you imagine what she’s going through, Sue? I’m so disappointed in you.” Nancy reprimanded.

“I know, Nancy.” Fresh tears formed in her eyes. “I’m ashamed also.”

“How did they know to approach you?”

“Oh, God, I went to a party one night. I had too much to drink and started talking about her. One of my friends works there. I guess he mentioned it to someone he worked with.”

“You’re using alcohol as an excuse? That security clearance you have doesn’t have an alcohol clause.”

Sue sobbed louder. Grey was getting disgusted. He hated to see women cry. Funny, Brandy's crying didn't make him feel this way.

True, he didn't like to hear her cry because it tugged at his heart. He only wanted to comfort her. He wanted to get away from Sue.

"Where does your friend work?"

"Dr. Peckman's clinic."

Nancy sucked in her breath. Grey shot her a look.

"What's wrong? Do you know him?"

Nancy nodded. "He used to work with me a long time ago. He was an eager young researcher when I first employed him. It didn't take me long to see he had no ethics. Of course, he would be responsible for this." She looked back at Sue. "Did you know when he was going to take her?"

Sue just shook her head. "No, I didn't think he would actually do it. He gave me the money for all the information I had on her. I didn't think he would actually take her."

"You didn't think at all!" It was only the second time Grey had spoken, but both times shook the walls. Nancy shook her head at him. He sucked in his breath and looked away again.

"Sue, you didn't even know everything about Brandy. What could you have said to spark Stuart Peckman's interest?"

"Some of the things that Brandy said bothered me, so I did a little snooping. When I found out she was a clone, I got really excited. The party was that night. It was still on my mind. Like you said, I wasn't thinking."

For the first time, Nancy's gaze softened. Grey was still fuming. Nancy looked back at Sue. She leaned forward and crossed her arms on the desk in front of her. "Sue, you do realize that I have to take away your clearance and also your job? I hope that money was worth it."

"No, Nancy, please. What if I help get her back?"

Nancy shook her head. "It doesn't matter. Even if we get her back, they're going to make sure the whole world knows about her. Don't make this harder than it has to be. Please, just leave."

Sue slowly stood up. She nodded and walked toward the door. She turned to look back. "I am going to do my best to help solve this mess. I'm so sorry." She closed the door behind her.

As usual, Nancy was the rational one. "Grey, we can't just

storm in there and insist they give her back. As childish as it sounds, they might just claim 'finder's keepers'."

"Finder's keepers?" He shook his head slowly. "I don't care. If I have to sneak in there like they did here, I will."

"Unfortunately, it may resort to that. The problem is, how are we going to keep a lid on this? Is that possible at all at this point?"

"Hell, Nan, let's worry about that after we have her back. God only knows what they are doing right now. If that's not bad enough, what if they let her know too much about herself? She knows too much already."

Nancy feared the same things he did. Brandy did not have a birth certificate. She was conceived and born in the lab. She didn't officially exist as a human being. She was an experiment. They could cut her open, even kill her if they wanted to. There would be no legal course Nancy or Grey could take to avenge her. They would be risking their own careers just by admitting they knew about her.

Nancy couldn't begin to describe the feelings that were forming about Sue. That girl had started out so promising. She had gained Nancy's trust over the past six years, which was why she had brought her on the project. She regretted that decision now. She should have known not to trust anyone with something this big. If it were a clone of a stranger, Nancy could pass the findings on and make a lot of money. But Brandy was a different story. She wanted her to lead a normal life. Grey and Brandy would be very happy together. She knew they would be compatible. She would be his wife and no one would have thought twice about the fake credentials Nancy had gotten for her. Now what good was any of that? There just had to be a way. She looked across the room and her gaze locked with Grey's. They were thinking the same thoughts. They looked over at the door as someone knocked. Before Nancy could move or say anything, Sue barged into the room. Grey looked about to speak, but something in her expression stopped him.

"I've got an idea."

"About what, Sue?" She refrained from reminding her that she had been ordered to leave the building.

"I was in the lab picking up my stuff when it hit me. I think I know of a way to get Brandy out of this. There are a few things about the experiment that I didn't mention to Dr. Peckman. It never entered

my mind to tell him.” She seemed to drift off for a second.

“Well, what is this miracle? Please, enlighten us.”

Nancy almost cringed at the sarcasm in his tone. She knew he had lost all respect for Sue. Either missing it or just ignoring it, Sue went on with a smile. She was just too distracted by her idea to let Grey upset her.

“I know that you tried several times to clone Brandy. Dr. Peckman realized this. He showed no interest in your failures. What I didn’t tell Dr. Peckman is that you have something worth keeping in cryonic freeze. Although I don’t know for sure what it is, I have my suspicions. If it is what I think it is, you may be able to use it to help Brandy.”

Grey’s mouth dropped open with shock and Nancy’s face lit up with a hopeful smile. How come she hadn’t thought of this herself?

“And you’re sure you didn’t mention any of this to your friend?”

“Completely sure.”

Nancy slowly nodded. “Now, we just have to worry about how we are going to get her back.”

“I’ll help as much as I can.”

Grey couldn’t help but think she was just being too helpful. Was she setting them up?

“Why are you doing this?”

Sue looked at him. She could hear the distrust in his voice.

“Dr. Brentwood, you haven’t been working here very long. I’ve worked with your grandmother for six years. I care a great deal for her. I had no idea that this would hurt her. I would do nothing to hurt her.” She looked back at Nancy. “You have always had faith in me. I let greed stand in the way. I let you down. I hope you can forgive me someday. I don’t even want my job back. I don’t deserve it. I just couldn’t leave until I made things right.”

Even Grey could hear the sincerity in her words. He finally smiled. “OK, let’s figure out how we are going to get her out.”

Brandy shook her head to clear it. She hoped they weren’t going to drug her again. She was too disoriented as it was. They had her strapped to a chair in an office. She wondered if they were finished examining her. What would they do to her now?

She turned to look at the door as it opened. A man walked in

wearing a lab coat and carrying a medical chart. His brown hair was graying at the temples. He had a kind face. That gave her hope.

“When are you going to let me go?”

“Go? Where would you go? Back to that other lab?”

When she didn’t answer, he smiled. “You appear intelligent. You articulate your words well. I’m impressed. Your body is in almost perfect shape. Now I’m curious just how smart you are. I have prepared a test for you to take. You can start that after I’ve asked you a few questions.”

“What are you going to do with me?”

“I’ll be asking the questions.”

She now knew his personality didn’t match his face.

“If you want me to answer your questions, you will answer mine.”

He leaned back in his chair. “You can either be cooperative or I can just shoot you full of sodium pentothal. Which would you prefer?”

She cringed at the idea of more drugs. She felt her eyes begin to water. “Please, just let me know why I’m here.”

“You know why you’re here. Medically speaking, you’re a miracle. I would do anything to get Dr. Thorgood’s lab notes, but my source was unable to get them. Apparently, the good doctor keeps them locked up. Of course, this prototype has a big fault, which I’ll work on myself. You will help solve that problem.”

Her eyes narrowed at his calling her a prototype. “What fault?”

“Don’t you know?” He opened the chart. After flipping a few pages, he moved the chart closer to her. Her eyes were drawn to a highlighted paragraph. She sucked in her breath as she read it.

“I’m infertile?”

“Yes, a shame really. I was looking forward to seeing what your offspring would be like. Did you have any children in your last life?”

She shook her head as the word went around her head: infertile. She couldn’t have babies? She had a second chance at life, and she couldn’t have children? How could she ever hope to have a normal life with Grey, if she couldn’t even have children? Where had that come from? She had barely accepted the fact that she had fallen in love with him, and now she was thinking she would be having his children? He wouldn’t want to be with her when he found out about

this. Did he already know? Had he and Nancy been keeping this from her? When would this nightmare end? She wanted to wake up and discover it was January 1st, 2000, and find that the car accident had been minor. She could just go on with her normal life. She was like an animal in a cage, to be looked at and prodded. She lowered her head and cried. The man across from her leaned back again and waited.

Five minutes later, she angrily glared at the doctor. Was he actually going to keep her there long enough for her to give birth? At the moment, she was almost glad she couldn't have children. "What else is wrong with this body?"

"I haven't come across anything else. I'll have to find out what your intelligence level is before I'll know what else is wrong. My source did not know how they transferred your memories from your old brain into this one, but I have my ideas. After the tests I have performed, I now know they didn't transplant the whole brain, so I have many more tests to perform before I know for sure."

"How long do you intend to keep me?"

"As long as it takes."

"So, how do we get in?" Grey asked Sue.

"That's the easiest part. A friend of mine works there. The same one who I stupidly told about Brandy. I can convince him that you are thinking about applying for a job, but want to check it out first. He can sign you in as a guest. After that, it's up to you how to get Brandy out."

"Then let's get to it."

Grey and Sue headed out to his car. She gave him directions to the clinic where her friend worked. Once they were inside the clinic, Sue looked through the directory and called Don in his office. It was easy to convince Don to show Grey around.

"Where do you work now, Grey?"

"I just finished my residency at General. I can either stay on there or move on. I want to move on."

"What are you interested in?"

"I've always wanted to reverse the aging process."

Sue gave him a sideways glance, but Don only nodded. "Yes, that is a respectable choice. I also have a passion for impossible tasks."

"Yes. If someone tells me something is impossible, I just have

to prove them wrong.”

“I know what you mean. I’m sure you’ll love where I work. It’s laid back, except in the lab. They are so intense down there.”

“Down there?”

“Yeah, it’s in the basement. When they designed the building, they didn’t want the lab to have any windows. It made sense to make it underground.”

He now knew he couldn’t get Brandy out by breaking a window. They would both have to leave by the front door. “I’ll bet that also cuts down on any distractions.”

Don nodded as he signed him in, and Grey was given a visitor’s badge. Grey had left his car unlocked, so Sue could wait there. After the two men walked past the front desk, she headed for the front door.

Grey patiently followed Don around for fifteen minutes. He worked on the ground floor, and Grey knew that only the floor beneath his feet separated him from Brandy.

“Don, I have to use the restroom.”

Don was busy looking through paper on his desk. “Down the hall to the left, second door on the right. I’ll wait here for you.”

“Great, thanks.” He darted down the hall and took a left. Now he needed to find a staircase. It was at the end of the hall. He pushed open the door, half expecting to hear an alarm. He mentally shook himself. This place wasn’t equipped to hold top-secret experiments like Brandy. The thought worried him. Had they actually brought her here? Was it possible they were holding her somewhere else? He would worry about that if he couldn’t find her.

When he reached the basement level, he pulled open the door. There were arrows painted on the wall in front of him. The lab had an arrow pointing to the right. He headed down the hall. There weren’t many people on this floor. When he reached the lab, a big red sign informed Grey that unauthorized personnel were prohibited from entering. He pushed open the double doors and entered. There was just a long corridor with doors on either side. Grey didn’t know which door to try. He nearly jumped when a woman walked out of one of the rooms. He held his breath, but she didn’t even look at him. She rushed down the corridor and disappeared through another set of double doors. That must be the entrance to the actual lab. Letting his breath out

slowly, he moved closer to the right wall. As he approached the next door, he listened. Two men were talking, so he moved on. He was halfway down the corridor when he froze. He ducked behind one of the columns. He watched the older man in a lab coat step out of the office then turn back to face someone still in the room.

"When I get back," Grey heard him say, "I'll free your arms so you can take the test. This will be much easier on us both if you'll be more cooperative."

The door closed on its own as he walked away. Since he didn't lock the door, Grey assumed he wouldn't be gone long. As soon as the man was through the double doors, Grey raced to the door and pulled it open. He sucked in his breath when he saw Brandy. Her back was to him, so she couldn't see him. She didn't bother to turn around, figuring it must be the doctor returning for something. He reached her in two strides, knelt down behind her and loosened the straps around her wrists.

She brought her arms around to the front and rubbed her wrists. Grey walked around the chair and took her hands in his. She finally looked up in surprise.

"Grey!" She flew out of the chair and into his arms. Before either of them knew it was going to happen, they were kissing.

Grey was able to pull himself together enough to gently pull away. "We have to get out of here."

Remembering the doctor, the smile left her face and she nodded. They both turned toward the door as it opened. Dr. Peckman strode in. When he saw Grey, he froze in his tracks. Grey pushed Brandy behind him and grabbed Stuart Peckman by the lapels.

"Who the hell are you?" Dr. Peckman seethed.

"The last person you may ever see." Grey truly wanted to kill this man.

"Damn, I knew I should have locked this door." He took a swing at Grey. Grey blocked the punch and retaliated with a fist to Dr. Peckman's abdomen. The doctor doubled over. Brandy grabbed her medical chart off the desk and brought it down on the back of his head. Dr. Peckman crumpled to the floor.

Grey smiled at Brandy and squeezed her hand, before turning back to the door. He walked to it and opened it enough to look down the hall. He then pushed it open enough to look to the right. No one

was in the corridor. He took Brandy's hand, and they left the office. It took less than a minute to get to the lab doors. Grey pushed them open, and they ran down the hall to the staircase. They both looked over their shoulders, expecting a bunch of people to give chase. Grey knew that would start any moment. He had no idea how long the doctor would be unconscious.

After they had reached the ground floor, Grey led Brandy to the restroom. Grey turned to her.

"Find something you can fit into. We can't leave here with you wearing that."

Brandy looked down at the ugly green hospital gown she was wearing. He was right about that. She looked through several lockers before finding a simple yellow shirtdress. Grey turned his back as she pulled off the gown and slipped the shirtdress on. After fastening the belt and slipping into a pair of beige pumps, she turned back to Grey.

"OK, I'm ready."

He nodded. Taking her hand again, he led her from the restroom. Grey wondered if Don had started looking for him yet. His question was answered as soon as he entered the corridor. Don was right in front of him. He let go of Brandy's hand before Don could see.

"Don! Sorry I took so long, but I met this woman in the restroom. She can't seem to find her badge."

Don looked at Brandy and smiled. "Well, that shouldn't be a problem. We can just go to the front desk and report it. Did you lose it in the building?"

Brandy tried to smile back. "I'm not sure. I think I had it on when I walked in."

They were headed for the front door. Grey was still expecting security guards to tackle them. He lowered his voice so only Brandy could hear.

"I'll distract the front desk; then you run out. I'll catch up."

When they reached the desk, Don stepped up to the security guard. "Bert, this lady has misplaced her badge. She isn't sure if she was wearing it when she walked in."

Bert looked at Brandy. She didn't look familiar, but he knew a woman had walked in with a yellow dress. She had a purse.

"I remember you had a purse."

Brandy looked down. She feigned surprise. "It's gone. That

must be where my badge is.”

Grey walked up to the desk. He stood between Bert and Brandy.

“I’d like to return my visitor’s badge.” Both Don and Bert looked at him. “I’ve enjoyed the tour, Don. Thanks for your time.”

“No problem. I hope it was helpful.”

After Bert took the badge, he tried to look around Grey. “What is your name, miss? We’ll be on the lookout for your purse.

Grey turned around and was relieved to see that she was gone.

“Now where did she go?”

Don and Grey shrugged. Grey waved at Don and walked out the door. He found Brandy in the car with Sue in the back seat. After he was seated in the car, he turned to Brandy. “I can’t believe they haven’t sent out the National Guard.” The smile left his face as he saw the older doctor and several guards running out of the building. They pointed at Grey’s car as he reversed it and sped out of the parking lot.

Grey had just pulled onto the freeway when a black car gave chase. Nothing would happen until they exited. When Grey got off at the exit, the black car followed. Brandy turned in her seat. Sue was nervously chewing her nails. Brandy looked over at Grey.

“Please don’t let them take me back.”

He turned toward her. “I’ll die first.”

Brandy didn’t want any of them to die. Brandy and Sue screamed in unison when the driver’s side window shattered. They hadn’t heard the gun, but they were being shot at.

“Get down!”

The next shot hit the left front tire. Grey lost control of the car. Less than a mile from the clinic, he swerved off the bridge and into a lake. The car sank fast. The black car stopped and watched as it went under. They waited almost fifteen minutes to see if there were survivors.

Nancy looked up as Grey walked in carrying Brandy. They were both drenched. Nancy stood up and rushed over. Brandy hung limp in his arms.

“Nan, she needs help.”

Nancy followed Grey as he carried her to one of the examining rooms.

Two hours later, Nancy was back at her desk when her rival Dr. Stuart Peckman strode in.

"If you think that stunt has stopped me, you're wrong. I have all I need. I will expose her, and you."

She looked up at him slowly. "It won't matter."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"I mean she's dead. Those guys you hired weren't very smart. I'm sure they told you that Grey's car went off the bridge due to them shooting out his tire. She and another woman drowned. I should have you arrested. Maybe I still will."

"They were only supposed to stop them. I demand proof that she's dead."

"You really have no right to demand anything from me, Stuart. You came in here and stole something from me. The clone doesn't belong to you. She doesn't belong to me, either."

"If you expect me to believe she is dead, you had better show me a body."

"Fine." She pushed herself away from the desk and walked around it. Not looking at him, she left the office. He followed her to the lab. They walked over to a table covered with a sheet. Nancy pulled back the sheet and stepped back. Dr. Peckman walked up to the dead woman lying on the table. Her yellow dress was still slightly damp as was her hair. He reached forward and placed his fingers to her neck. His lip curled at the cold clammy feel of her skin. Not feeling a heartbeat, he dropped his hand. She was obviously dead.

"You're lucky Dr. Brentwood didn't die, or I would have your ass. As it is, her death is millions of dollars down the drain. Your greed is responsible for this." Nancy glared as she spoke.

"It was selfishness on your part to not let the world benefit from this new technology. I'm still going to expose your experiment."

"Do whatever you want, Stuart. Take her if you wish. Just get out of my clinic."

"I want your lab notes."

"I burned them. I would never let you get your greedy hands on them."

"We could have worked together on this, Nancy."

"I don't work with maniacal, money-hungry men. Now, please leave, or I'll be forced to call security."

He looked at Brandy as if trying to decide if he wanted to take her body. He had already ran all his tests on her while she was alive. Unfortunately, he hadn't been able to find out how complete her memories were or how high her intelligence was.

"I'll let it go if you will tell me how you performed the memory transfer."

She walked over to the filing cabinet and unlocked it. Searching through several files, she pulled out a small pamphlet of paper. After copying it, she gave him the copy. "There, now get out. Perform your own experiments, just leave me out of it."

"You can count on it." Without a look back, he left the room. Nancy walked over to Brandy's body. Gazing at her face for a moment, she lifted the sheet and covered the body.

Chapter Ten

Nancy took the elevator to the top floor and walked down the deserted corridor. Hardly anyone used this floor, which was where terminal patients stayed while funds were used trying to discover a cure for whatever they were dying of. She walked to the last door on the right. When she walked into the room, she found Grey asleep in a chair. She touched his shoulder and he woke up.

“Hi.”

He rubbed his eyes and looked at the bed. Nancy’s gaze followed his. “Has she awakened yet?”

He just shook his head as he moved closer to Brandy’s side.

“Have they come?”

“Yes. We shouldn’t have to worry about them anymore. He looked away from Brandy to stare up at his grandmother.”

“It actually worked?”

“Well, they do look identical. Thank God Sue mentioned the other clone. I wonder when I would have thought about it.” Nancy grew sad. Sue’s life had been sacrificed. She had made up for her betrayal only to die for it. What a loss. “I had forgotten about the other bodies. Now I’m glad I kept them in cryonic freeze. The first two wouldn’t have done any good, but, Thank God, I kept the third one.” Grey had helped her thaw out her third attempt at cloning Brandy. The body was perfect, but the muscles had atrophied from lack of exercise. They had soaked the body in warm water until it was room

temperature. "I was very convincing. I even told him he could have the body if he wanted."

"You what? What if he had? He would have examined it and discovered it wasn't her."

"I was counting on him not taking her. He was alone. He would have had to carry the body out himself. He had enough time to do whatever he wanted with Brandy; he didn't need her lifeless body. I gave him something he wanted more."

"What was that?"

"My notes on her memory transplant. That should keep him busy for quite a while."

"She can't stay here now."

Nancy's gaze shifted to settle on Brandy's peaceful face. "No."

Grey leaned forward and stroked Brandy's cheek. He spoke to Nancy while still gazing at Brandy. "Do you think she would leave with me?"

"I think you two were made for each other."

He turned to face his grandmother. He reached out and took her hand. She squeezed his in return. A cough brought their attention back to Brandy. When she opened her eyes and saw Grey, she smiled.

"How are you feeling?"

"Like I swallowed half that lake."

"You just about did. Had us worried there for a moment."

Her face clouded over as she remembered something. "Are they going to come after me?"

"No. We've taken care of it. No one will ever bother you again. I'll see to that."

She looked from Grey to Nancy. Pushing herself up in bed, she looked back at Grey.

"Did you know that I can't have babies?"

"Is that what they told you?"

"Yes. Is it true?"

"Well, we really won't know until you start trying to have them. Miracles do happen. You've proven that."

"Weren't tests performed on me here to see if I could have children?"

Grey looked to Nancy for the answer to that. Nancy sighed.

She hated lying to Brandy, but she felt that would be better than the truth.

“Yes, but the tests were inconclusive. Like Grey said, we won’t know for sure until you try to have a child.” She exchanged a knowing look with Grey. “Well, I’ll leave you two alone. I’ve got to get back to the lab.” She leaned forward and kissed Brandy on the forehead. “I’m glad you’re alright.”

“Thanks, Nancy.” She reached up and embraced her old friend.

Nancy gladly hugged her back. Brandy kissed her cheek as she withdrew. “You’re welcome, Bran. I’ll check back later.”

After Nancy had left, Brandy’s eyes went back to Grey. He had rescued her. She had needed him and he had come. Was it possible he cared for her? Or was it just to get their experiment back? She was so confused. How did they know that someone else wouldn’t kidnap her and subject her to endless tests? Maybe the next guy would cut her up. She looked at him and bit her lip. She wanted him so bad it hurt, but she could never have him. What kind of life could they have together?

“The tests were inconclusive?”

Grey had always had a problem with lying. Her unexpected question threw him off. He hesitated before answering.

“Well, I didn’t really perform the tests. They must be whatever Nan told you.”

“I want to see my medical record.”

“Brandy, just rest. You’ve been through quite an ordeal. We are going to have to check you out to make sure they didn’t mess with anything.”

“You can check me out. I don’t trust anyone else to touch me.” She looked down at her hands. “How did they know about me?”

Grey covered her hands with one of his own. She looked back up at him.

“It was Sue, but she helped get you back.”

“Did she make it through the accident?”

Grey shook his head. Brandy had mixed feelings about Sue’s death. She had been there every day of her recuperation. She thought they had become friends. Why had Sue betrayed her?

“We’re leaving here later tonight.”

Brandy's eyes widened. "We?"

"Yes, I'm taking you out of here. Nan is getting you new credentials. We don't know whether Sue told them the new name we gave you. Once we have them, we're out of here."

"Where to?"

"Where would you like to go?"

She shrugged with a half smile. "I'm originally from Florida."

"Then that is where we'll go. That is far enough away."

She was afraid to ask whether he was just escorting her or if he was going to stay in Florida with her. She didn't want to hear the wrong answer.

"Where in Florida?"

"Tallahassee." She smiled as she remembered growing up there.

"What other city do you like? We don't want to press our luck by going to the city where you used to live."

"Well, I had a friend who lived in Pensacola."

"Pensacola it is."

Thinking of Florida reminded her of all of the state's attractions. "Is Disney World still open?"

Grey finally smiled. "It's still there, but I hear it's grown in the last fifty years. I've never been there."

"We'll have to go." Her dream used to be to have her honeymoon at Disney World. The smile left her face as she realized she might never have a honeymoon.

Grey noticed her change in mood. "Do you feel up to an examination? I have to make sure you are up to traveling."

She nodded as she lay back down. She turned her head to face the opposite wall as he pulled back the sheet. Grey tried to remain impartial as he exposed her body. Since he had removed the dress for Brandy's defective clone to wear, she wore nothing. He had to imagine this were some other woman.

As he examined her, his eyes kept drifting to her profile. Her eyes were closed. He wondered what she was thinking. Grey wanted to tell her how he felt about her, but he was afraid she would think he just pitied her. Now was not the time. When would be the right time? Maybe after they got settled in Florida, they could sit down and have it

out.

When Grey reached her abdomen, he noticed her navel was swollen. Looking closer, he saw the incision. He lightly pressed around it. "Does this hurt?"

"No, just a little tender."

This was how they had known she was infertile. They had actually cut into her. Grey clenched his teeth. He checked the rest of her body for any other cuts. Luckily, he found none. "Do you remember what was done to you?"

She finally turned her head to look at him. "I only woke up twice. Once I was on an operating table and the other time I was being x-rayed. They kept me drugged. How long was I gone?"

"Four days." He was relieved that was all she could remember. It wouldn't help her acceptance if she had been aware of being treated like a common lab rat.

"They must have used some heavy drugs." She looked down at her body. When her eyes locked on something, Grey followed her gaze to his hand. He had left it on her hip. He withdrew it, but she reached out and stopped him. Bringing his hand back, she placed it on her left breast. Grey opened his mouth to say something, but nothing came out.

"When I was in that office, I was hoping you would come for me. You did." She pushed herself up and lightly kissed his mouth.

"Brandy, I'm your doctor."

"So?" She said against his mouth.

A voice way back in his mind said that now was not the time, but a louder voice told it to shut up. He groaned as he wrapped his arms around her. She had been kissing his neck, but he claimed her mouth with his own. Her arms slid up his chest to wrap around the back of his neck as she pushed up to balance on her knees. She could feel that something was different about this kiss from their last one. She knew he could feel it, too. Without breaking the kiss, Brandy pulled Grey down with her. Maybe they didn't have a future together, but they could have this. She needed this.

Every feeling was new as he caressed her body. She definitely preferred these touches to his clinical ones. She couldn't get enough of kissing him. She unbuttoned his shirt.

Grey still felt he should stop this, but he really didn't want to.

He wanted Brandy more than he had ever wanted any other woman. He loved her. He hoped she loved him. He also hoped she believed that he could love her. Maybe this would help change her mind. He shrugged out of his shirt. His mouth lowered to her neck and then her breasts. He quivered as Brandy's fingers kneaded his back. After she had unzipped his pants, he discarded them quickly. She pulled him back to her. She sighed as she felt his naked body against hers. She couldn't believe how good everything felt. Maybe there were some advantages to having this body. Grey moved between her spread thighs. Brandy closed her eyes with anticipation. As he dove into her, she remembered that this body was a virgin.

Brandy couldn't stop the startled gasp. Grey noticed the change in her; then he, too, remembered she was a virgin. Well, not her, just her body.

"You OK?"

She opened her eyes and looked up into his dark blue eyes. She couldn't control the giggles.

"I forgot."

His laughter joined hers as he kissed her face. Their passion took over after his mouth rejoined hers. Brandy sucked in her breath as he began to move within her. She had forgotten it felt this good. Well, had she forgotten, or had it ever felt this good before? She would never know, but she was enjoying it now. She wrapped her legs around him and followed his movements. Grey winced as she dug her nails in his back. Brandy climaxed twice before Grey shuddered as they experienced their final one together.

Grey watched her for a few minutes. She had fallen asleep in his arms. He caressed her cheek. She had been through so much and needed her rest. He carefully eased out of the small bed and got dressed. Grey smiled as he stared down at her silky damp skin.

He kissed her shoulder before he pulled the sheet up to cover her. He lightly kissed her mouth before leaving the room.

He found Nancy in the lab. She looked up and smiled. "I put the body in the freezer, but I need you to help me put it back in cryonic freeze."

Grey nodded absently. "Of course." He looked around the big room. "Did you have any luck with the new credentials on Brandy?"

"Yes, they will be ready by noon tomorrow."

“Damn, I was hoping we could leave tonight.”

“Sorry, Grey. It’s as soon as they can get them to me.”

“Nan, those bastards cut into Brandy while she was there. I want her to be examined before we leave to make sure she is alright.”

It pained Nancy to hear that Brandy had been operated on. Of course, she had expected it, but it still made her wince. “Well, we can’t let anyone here know she is alive. I guess I’ll have to do it.”

“Brandy wants to see her medical record. She doesn’t believe the tests were inconclusive.”

“I’ll take it out of her record before she sees it.”

“Nan, that won’t solve anything. She is going to find out that she can’t have children. If not now, she’ll go to some doctor in Florida who will tell her. I am just afraid she will never accept her new body if she knows she is barren. I would ask if there was a chance the test is wrong, but I know better. Even their internal examination told them as much. I just wish there was a way.”

Nancy tapped her fingers on the table. Grey could tell she was working something out in her head. A smile began to form on her face. “There may be a way,” she said. “Thinking about the other clones made me think of it, but the timing would have to be right. Since she is still a virgin, we would have—”

“She isn’t.” Grey cut her off.

“What do you mean? Are you telling me—when?”

Grey looked sheepish. He tried to appear casual as he shrugged. “A few minutes ago.”

“Here?” The look of shock was replaced by a smile. “You work fast, don’t you?”

“Well, I didn’t want it to happen here—not until Florida, but it just—oh, hell, it just happened.”

“No, Grey, that’s wonderful. You’ll have to invite me to the wedding.”

“I doubt there will be one.”

“Oh, there will be one. You have to give your child your name.”

“My child? You said there may be a way, but how?”

“You want me to examine her, right? Well, I’ll do that tomorrow morning. You come to me first. I’ll need to get something from you before I see her.”

“What?”

“Your contribution to the baby, of course.”

“Of course. What are you talking about, Nan?”

“It was right in front of my nose. I must be getting senile. I still have a few of Brandy’s eggs. Her new body can’t have babies, but her old one could. One of them created her, didn’t it? Well, one of them will create your child, too. She’ll never know.”

Grey picked up his grandmother and swung her around the room.

“Grey, I’m too old for this.” She laughed anyway as he returned her feet to the floor. “I want to see you first thing in the morning.”

“I’ll be here.”

The next morning Brandy was ill tempered. She had awakened to find that Grey had sneaked away in the middle of the night. Weren’t she and Grey supposed to have left already? Had he left without her? After Brandy had taken her shower, Nancy came to get her.

“Since no one else can be trusted, I’ll be performing the pelvic exam on you,” Nancy said.

“You’re qualified to do that?”

“Hey, you know I went through medical school. You only knew me as a scientist, but I’ve dabbled in quite a few things during my long lifetime.”

“Oh, alright.” She wanted to ask where Grey was. She had wanted to wake up in his arms. Hadn’t last night meant anything to him?

With her feet in the stirrups, she let her mind wander. She thought about Grey with her in Florida. She daydreamed that he decided to stay with her, and they got married and had lots of babies. She knew it could never happen, but she tried to let the dream sweep her away. She paid no attention to what Nancy was doing. She trusted her.

After the speculum had been inserted, Nancy turned in her chair to retrieve the embryo. She looked past Brandy’s knee to see if she was watching. She had her eyes closed. Satisfied, Nancy went to work.

As soon as Brandy had been returned to her room, Nancy found Grey.

“Is it done?” Grey asked.

“Yes. Now just cross your fingers. I don’t know if I’ll get another chance to do this, and we only have one egg left.”

He nodded. “It has to work. How else can I convince her to marry me?”

“I’m sure you two will work it all out. She seemed upset. I think you better go talk with her. The credentials will be arriving in a few hours. After your talk, you had better go home and get packed. Brandy will need a suitcase for her things. Where are you two going?”

“Pensacola.”

“Nice place to live. Now get going.”

Grey nodded as he leaned down to kiss one weathered cheek.

“I’ll see you later.” He turned and walked away.

Brandy looked up as the door opened. Without commenting on him not knocking, she just looked away.

“Nan says you’re upset. What’s wrong?” He sat beside her on the bed. She waited for him to put his arm around her, but he didn’t.

“When are we leaving?”

“In a few hours. I will have to go home soon and pack my things. Are you OK?”

She wondered if he was only going to pack a few days’ worth or everything.

“Weren’t we supposed to leave last night?”

“We have to wait on your new identification.”

“Was last night a mistake?”

Was that doubt he heard in her voice? Had he rushed things? “Do you feel it was a mistake?”

She turned sharply to glare at him. “Don’t answer a question with a question? Why did you walk out on me last night?”

“Is that what this is about?” He pulled her to him and embraced her. She wanted to push him away but was unable to. She buried her face in his neck, willing herself not to cry. “You fell asleep, but I wasn’t tired. I had to talk to Nan to make sure everything was in

order. I didn't walk out on you. I'm here now. I'll always be here for you."

"Always?" She asked dubiously.

"Yes, always. Maybe you'll stop doubting it once we're married."

Brandy pushed away from him. "Married? How can we get married?"

"The same way people in your time did, Brandy."

"That's not what I mean. I'm not normal. I don't even exist. How can you even think to marry me?"

"Brandy, you are normal. If there was any doubt in either of our minds, last night should have gotten rid of them. I know we were made for each other."

"You pity me. You know I could never make it on my own. That's why you want to marry me. Is that why you made love to me, too?"

"Brandy!"

She held up her hand when he tried to touch her. "Please, I just want to be left alone right now."

He didn't know what to say. He knew she was upset, but this rejection hurt. He pushed himself off the bed and walked to the door. With his hand on the doorknob, he straightened his back. Without turning around, he spoke.

"I'll be back for you once I'm packed."

She nodded at his stiff back. She hadn't meant to make him angry. She only wanted him to love her, not pity her. Why couldn't she be normal? She slammed her fist into her pillow. She was just being so stupid. She refused to cry. She was getting tired of that show of weakness.

Grey felt like slamming his fist into a wall. He drove home upset and confused. What could he say to her? How could he convince her how he felt about her? Getting pregnant would dispel her notions she wasn't normal, but would she still feel he couldn't possibly want to marry her? And for her to think he had made love to her out of pity? It was unbelievable. She was just too stubborn. He would drag her kicking and screaming down the aisle if necessary. His mouth cracked a smile at the notion.

At his home, he pulled out two suitcases. Leaving one of them empty, he shoved everything of value into the other. He wasn't a pack rat, so there wasn't much left over to leave behind. He packed his important papers, a few photos and keepsakes, and his favorite outfits and shoes. He made a last look around to make sure he wasn't leaving anything he would miss. It wasn't like he would never be back. When enough time had passed, he and Brandy could come back for a visit. Maybe Nancy would decide to follow them to Florida someday, although he knew his grandmother didn't have many years left.

Grey grabbed both suitcases and headed out to his car. Back at the clinic, he left his packed suitcase in the car and carried the empty one upstairs. He gave it to Nancy.

"I want you to give it to her. She is upset with me. We'll sort through it later. She needs some time to think."

"Her credentials came while you were gone." Nancy pulled a manila envelope out of her desk and handed it to him. "I disposed of the others." Grey looked through them: a passport, birth certificate, driver's license and various other identification. He nodded.

"Looks good." He put everything back in the envelope and then put it under his arm. "What did you do with the old packet?"

"I burned everything that ties Brandy to the experiment. I don't want anyone else stumbling upon them."

"Good idea. You'd better get this to her so she can get ready to leave." He said referring to the suitcase. "I hate leaving during the day, but I don't want to hang around here any longer. I keep expecting someone else to show up and insist on seeing the clone."

"I know how you feel." She picked up the suitcase.

"I'll see you later." He watched as she walked off.

Grey gave her half an hour. When he entered her room she was sitting in the only chair, the suitcase next to her. She was wearing a long-sleeved white shirt and black jeans. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail. She seemed reluctant to meet his eyes as she turned to face him. Her gaze was level with his chest. Grey walked in and grabbed her suitcase.

"You ready?"

"Yes." She stood up and followed him from the room. Brandy held the elevator as Grey stuck his head in Nancy's office. A moment

later, she stepped out and they both walked into the elevator. Nancy put an arm around Brandy's shoulders.

"I'll try to visit as often as I can. Maybe someday you'll be able to come back for a visit."

"I hope so, Nancy." She turned to hug her friend, amazed again how frail she was. "Thank you for all you've done for me."

"Hey, I love you, kiddo."

"I love you, too."

As Grey watched them, he realized that everyone he loved in the world was standing in this elevator with him. He felt excluded. Would she be hugging him and telling him she loved him, if he were the one she was leaving behind?

When they had reached the parking level, Brandy and Nancy headed for Nancy's car. Grey went to his car. As Brandy waited, she noted it was the same style car as Grey's only it was a bright blue. After Nancy had unlocked the car, Brandy got in the passenger seat.

When they pulled into a parking lot, Brandy was surprised. She assumed that they were going to fly, but this didn't look like an airport. It was just a rectangular shaped building, with parking all around it.

"Where are we?"

"The tubeline station."

As they got out of the car, Brandy stared at the building in front of her. "What's a tubeline?"

"You remember the subways?"

"Of course."

"Well, this is a similar idea, only better."

Brandy looked behind her and watched Grey pull his car around to the back of the station. She gestured toward him. "Where's Grey going?"

"He has to check in his car. It's going with you."

"Really? That's different." Cars definitely didn't go with their owners on airplanes of the past. The two of them approached the building. Nancy continued her explanation of the tubeline.

"Well, the tubeline is a step up from the subways. It's underground, but it goes through a vacuum tube. It's faster than an airplane."

"I remember reading about something like that. It's actually a

reality now?"

Nancy nodded and squeezed Brandy's hand.

"Are planes still used?"

"Mostly for overseas flights. They haven't finished the tubelines under the oceans yet, but they're working on it. I give it ten more years."

"Incredible. What do these tubes look like?"

"Well, you're about to find out, so hold your horses."

Brandy giggled. Nancy couldn't help but smile at her enthusiasm. It was times like this she felt Brandy forgot who she was. If only it could happen all the time.

They met up with Grey at the counter. Since Nancy had made the reservations online the night before, they only had to pick up their tickets and check in their luggage. Then they took an elevator to the boarding level. Grey handed her a ticket.

"This will take us directly to Houston and then straight on to Pensacola. Ignoring the layover, the actual travel time will be just over an hour."

She stared up at him with big eyes. He wanted to lean over and kiss her. Instead he placed an arm around her waist. She didn't step away, so he kept it there.

"I'm sorry I snapped at you earlier."

"It's forgotten. Just enjoy this new experience. There are plenty more in store for you."

She smiled and nodded. After a few more moments, the doors opened. Nancy turned to them.

"I hate good-byes."

"Me, too." They hugged again. Brandy could feel her eyes water, but she laughed when she saw Nancy's eyes were also filled with tears.

"Hell. You would think we were never going to see each other again."

"You're right. I'll come visit as soon as you two get settled. I promise."

"I'll see you then." They hugged one last time, and then Nancy hugged Grey. She whispered something in his ear and kissed his cheek.

The checker scanned their tickets. They turned to wave and

then stepped into the tube. Brandy was surprised. It looked like an airplane's interior, except there were no windows. They took their seats and fastened the belts. She leaned closer to Grey.

"Where do they store our luggage and your car?"

"The luggage goes beneath us, and my car is in a compartment in the back."

"Oh." She paused for a moment. "What did Nancy tell you?"

"What? Oh, she just told me to take good care of you."

What Nancy had actually said was that she wished them luck with the baby. After everyone was seated, they secured the doors and the attendant picked up a mike.

"Welcome aboard US Tubeline's flight 76 to Houston, Texas with continuing service to Pensacola, and then Jacksonville, Florida. Please make sure your seat belts are fastened and remain fastened for the entire trip. There will be no moving about during the duration of the trip. Traveling time to Houston will be 42 minutes. Enjoy your ride." She put down the mike and took her seat. After everyone had been buckled in, the red light in front turned green.

Brandy was barely aware when they started moving, but as they picked up speed, she heard it. It was so smooth, you couldn't feel the movement, but it sounded a lot like an airplane. She wondered how fast they were going. Just 42 minutes from Los Angeles to Houston? She did some figuring in her head and was amazed. To say that the tubes were faster than airplanes was a drastic understatement. They left the airlines in the dust.

A few minutes later Grey handed Brandy a manila envelope.

"What's this?"

"It contains your identification."

Brandy spilled the contents on her lap. Her driver's license was on top of the stack. She picked it up and examined it. It definitely didn't look like her old one. The shape of the country instead of a state was on the front, and there was a picture, but there the resemblance ended. There wasn't an issue date or number of any kind. Turning it over, Brandy saw a narrow black strip on the back. She assumed all the information was in that strip. Turning it back over, she read the information: a name and birth date. She should have been prepared, but it was still a shock to see a different name there. She ran her finger over the fake name. Grey noticed her hesitation.

“You couldn’t exactly keep your old name. We can’t have anything tie you to the experiment. Since Brandewyne was your legal name, we just shortened it to Brandy. That’s now your legal first name. I hope that doesn’t bother you too much. We tried to keep it as close as possible.”

Brandy almost smiled. Hadn’t she always hated her first name? Still she felt a slight loss. Her parents had named her Brandewyne. She was happy that she didn’t have to think of herself by a totally different first name. Brandy had always been her nickname, now it was her whole first name. No problem there. She had been given a different middle and last name. She was now known as Brandy Nicole Harper. She had always liked her middle name of Kenna, but Nicole was nice, too.

“Formerly Brandewyne,” she said with a sigh. Brandewyne Kenna Parker was dead and buried. It was only fitting to let the name die with her. For the first time, Brandy didn’t feel depressed by the idea. She only felt sadness.

Since she spoke so softly, Grey had to strain to hear. It didn’t really matter what last name they gave her. He intended it to be Brentwood within a month. At least he hoped it would be. Staring down at her stomach, he could only hope their child was growing in there.

Brandy’s eyes moved to the birth date. Her new birth date was listed as June 2nd, 2060. She had to think about it for a moment, before she remembered the year was now 2078.

“I’m eighteen?”

Grey smiled. “Well, we’re really not sure how old you should be, but we figured we had to make you legal.” Definitely, if he intended to marry her.

“I’m eighteen. Does that mean I have to go to college again?”

“Well, there are many different ways to get educated. There are many trade schools that open up more jobs than the traditional degree. School has changed quite a bit since you went.”

She flipped through the rest of the paperwork. At least there was a high school diploma. Her eyes skimmed her birth certificate. It was the size of a credit card, with a bar code on the back. She read her parents’ name with little emotion. They were as made up as she was.

“Do you want to work in the same field?”

Brandy thought about it. Was sexual discrimination really gone? If she tried to work her way back up the corporate ladder, would she encounter no resistance? She definitely wouldn't be taken seriously looking as young as she did.

"I guess I have many years to figure that out. It won't be too bad going through school again. I'm sure there is a lot more for me to learn. Corporations have undoubtedly changed in the last 80 years. Just looking at all this," she said as she gestured toward the information in her lap, "I have a lot to learn. There are either barcodes or strips on everything. You already mentioned that paper money is obsolete. Did the economy ever crash?"

"Everything is electronically transferred. Our economy didn't exactly crash; it was restructured. Debit and credit cards are basically what I consider money. Both have been around since the late twentieth century, but now the network has been improved."

Brandy was a little confused. "OK, you've explained that your credit cards are different from what I'm used to. What exactly is it, and how is it different than a debit card?"

Grey shifted in his seat so that he was facing her. He rubbed his chin in thought. He had never had to explain this before. "Let's see. My credit cards are connected directly to my identification number. On payday, after deductions have been made, the remaining credits are transferred to my account number via my identification number. I can leave the credits in this account and access them by using my credit card, or I can transfer the funds to a savings account that I can access by a debit card. I can also invest in stocks or bonds or real estate. The possibilities are endless as they were in the twentieth century. Does that help?" He looked at her hopefully.

She absorbed the information for a moment. "This account that is connected to your credit card. Do you make interest on it, or only on the savings account?"

He shook his head. "No. I guess you could call your credit card account a holding account. You're able to transfer money into someone else's accounts. With the proper authorization codes, you can take money from someone else's account. To deposit all you need is their name and account number. We're known by our account numbers more than our identification numbers."

"What about social security numbers?"

He frowned at the phrase; then recognition lit up his features.

"It's not called that anymore. What used to be our social security number is now our identification number. The phrase social security isn't used now." He paused to think. "I was ten, so it's been just over twenty years since the entire social security system ended."

"So, what's done about it? You don't still pay FICA tax for it do you?"

"When social security was canceled, so were any taxes associated with it. It's all personalized now. Instead of taxes, you have mandatory automatic deductions. You choose between seven to ten percent of your gross earnings. Any money you put into your retirement account is what you get out of it; plus interest. When you're old enough to start receiving it, you are issued a debit card that will access it."

"Like an IRA?"

There was a phrase he knew. "Exactly, IRAs took off around your time. They have grown since then. Social security wasn't needed anymore, especially since the government was spending the money before it could be given to senior citizens. Many people complained, but what could they do? Why would they want to be taxed for something that wouldn't pay off in the end? Since people live longer than before, the government couldn't afford it. They kept increasing the age of retirement. Just before it was canceled, the age a person had to be to receive benefits was eighty-five. Of course, the stock market is still strong, so mutual funds are available to all, and they are a major portion of our retirement accounts."

Brandy nodded through most of what he said. It made sense. As time went on, it was obvious that computers would become even more integrated in everyone's lives. She wouldn't be surprised if homes came pre-installed with computers. She already knew they came in the cars. She couldn't help but feel excitement. She had always wanted to live in a technologically advanced society. She decided that when she started school, she would take every computer class offered. She wanted to see what new innovations there were.

For the first time since she had opened her eyes in the twenty-first century, she felt excitement at being there. She could almost forget what she was. Almost.

Chapter Eleven

Their layover in Houston was only fifteen minutes. A few people got off and a few others got on, but Brandy and Grey waited in the tube.

“Are you sure you don’t want to visit the restroom? It’s another twenty-five minutes to Pensacola.”

Brandy looked at Grey. “No. I’m fine.” She turned to look out the window and smiled as she remembered for the umpteenth time that there wasn’t one. “Have these small stations replaced all the domestic airports, or are they still there?”

“Airports make great malls. Others were torn down and made into apartment complexes.”

She turned back to him on the verge of laughter. “They turned the airports into shopping malls?” Well, she guessed it did make sense. Each of the gates could make a store, and airports were just filled with stores and restaurants. Even the parking lots were already there. “How many airports are left?”

“LAX in California and LaGuardia in New York. Those are the only two in the US. There’s one in England, one in Europe, one each in Asia and Africa” He paused to think. “Japan. Australia, and all the major islands each have one.

“So the tubelines are worldwide?”

“Oh, yes. Like Nan told you, it’s just a matter of time before they go underwater too; then the airlines will go out of business. They just can’t compete, by price or speed.” He looked up as the main door

was closed. He noticed that Brandy hadn't taken off her seat belt, so he sat back in his seat.

Brandy nodded as she turned to face the front. In less than half an hour and they would be in Florida. What used to take four days in a car was taking just over an hour through the tubelines. It was incredible. She doubted it even took four days by car anymore. With the car on autopilot and going 120 mph, it could probably be done in one to two days. You would just have to stop to refill the gas or get a hotel if you didn't want to sleep in the car.

Her mind raced at the possibilities of this future. She suddenly realized she would be alive to see the twenty-second century. Would *Star Trek* be a reality by then? Were they working on it now? To live in space would be a giant leap.

"Are there underwater or outerspace colonies yet?"

"Not for public use. They started building an underwater city about fifteen years ago. It's taking longer than they estimated. Only the technicians and their families have been moved down. It's not big enough to be called a city yet. Would you want to live in an underwater city?"

She could tell he wasn't impressed with the idea. She shook her head.

"No, I would probably get claustrophobic. I was just curious. That was one of the things that was expected to happen in this century. I guess outerspace colonies are still on the drawing board?"

He nodded but didn't comment. She wondered if he was getting bored with all her questions.

"I'm sorry I ask so many questions."

He turned to her with a surprised look.

"Don't be sorry. I would have a lot of questions if I were you. I just wish I had better answers for you."

"I would kill for a newspaper."

He nodded with a smile. "We'll get you one as soon as we arrive in Pensacola."

She was reminded that she didn't know whether he would remain in Pensacola with her. What do high school graduates do in this time, go straight to college?

"Is college still as expensive as I remember?"

He shrugged. "There are a few prestigious colleges that charge

more, but many of the trade schools are state funded.”

She nodded. Would she have to work at McDonald’s and go to a trade school? That may not be too bad. She remembered what McDonald’s had looked like in that food court. It looked more like a restaurant than a fast food place. The counter was gone, and orders were taken at the tables. Thinking about school was making her even more unsure whether Grey would stay with her. Should she even expect him to?

“What is happening at work with you taking off like this?”

“I answer to Nan. She’ll cover for me.”

“Have you ever been to Pensacola before?”

“No, this will be a new experience for us both. I’ve never done much traveling. In my early twenties, I went to New York for a week and I went to medical school in Colorado, but that’s about it.”

“With my job, I traveled all over the place. It even took me to Europe a few times.”

“What was your job?”

“I worked for a computer company. I was on the board of directors. I was deeply involved in the decision making process on whether or not we invested in a product. I made a few enemies on the way up. I started working for the company right out of college. I got my masters four years later along with a promotion to executive. I had just made senior exec. My goal was to run that company. I would have done it, too.”

“Well, there are definitely enough computer companies. You could try to take over one of them.”

She smiled absently. “I don’t know. It was a lot of work. I’m not sure I want to go through it all again. I love computers, but—” She was suddenly at a loss for words. She didn’t know what she wanted to do. She thought back to how things had been when she was eighteen.

She had started college feeling she would make a difference. She would never be dependent on any man. Men had never taken her seriously. She was determined to make more money and earn more respect than any man around her. She refused to be talked down to because she was a woman. She had promised herself that she would never let a man see her cry. She had managed to keep that vow until she met Grey. He made her smile and cry.

“Brandy, what’s wrong?”

Grey's voice brought her out of her memories. She looked at him with sad eyes. Tears formed in her eyes, but she refused to cry.

Where had her strong resolve to succeed gone? Had it died with her old body?

"I was just remembering. There's nothing wrong with my memories. Still, I almost wish I could forget them."

They looked up as the tube began to slow down.

"We're already there?"

"I guess so." He looked back at her with concern. "Are you sure you're alright?"

She nodded without meeting his gaze. They waited in silence as the tube stopped and the door opened.

Once they were in the lobby of the Pensacola tubeline station, Grey bought her the promised newspaper after they picked up their luggage. She hadn't realized what it was at first, because it fit in the palm of her hand.

"What is this?"

"It's the newspaper."

She stared down at it in shock. Like everything else, it was shaped like a credit card, only slightly thicker. At the top, "Pensacola News Journal" was printed with the date below it. It actually resembled the 3.5-inch computer diskette she was familiar with, only smaller.

"What do I do with it?"

"Everyone has a terminal at home—and there is usually one on every corner." He looked around the lobby and pointed. "There's one over there." He led her to something that looked like an ATM machine. "They also fit in a magpad." After taking the "newspaper" from her, he inserted it into the machine.

"What's a magpad?" She asked as she watched what he was doing. Once he had typed in a long string of numbers, the screen lit up with the headlines of the "Pensacola News Journal."

"It's a portable mini-computer that replaced the magazines and newspapers of your time. You can either buy the card, as I just did, or have the magazine or newspaper downloaded into your magpad through the Internet. Though the service used to be free, it no longer is."

Brandy nodded. That made sense. "I saw that coming. I'm sure the companies felt they weren't getting their fair share."

Grey nodded as he gestured at the screen. "The index will tell you the title of every story. You can directly access any section you want, or read the newspaper from start to finish if you prefer. Give it a try." He stepped back to allow her to get closer.

Brandy approached the machine. She selected "index" from the main menu. Another menu appeared. She selected "Sections" and nodded when she saw a menu of familiar sections. She chose "Living" and then "Movies." She scanned down the long list of movie theaters. Movies were apparently still America's favorite pastime. She backed out and selected the "Classified" section. After reading about a few cars for sale, she backed out of that. Next she selected "Global." Grey stood behind her as she read a few of the articles. Brandy looked at him over her shoulder.

"This is incredible," she said.

He shrugged. "You can read that at the hotel. You would be more comfortable there. We both would." He gave her a lopsided grin.

"Oh, sure. Sorry, I just got engrossed."

He chuckled. "I understand." She let him back in to exit the machine.

Grey retrieved his car from the underground lot. It was parked next to a new Stellar Z convertible. Brandy assumed there would be new car companies. She wondered which companies had survived into the twenty-first century. Half the car companies she knew no longer sold cars. Most of them manufactured only computers and electronics; some of them had gone out of business. That left new companies like Stellar to make the cars. Grey and Nancy each owned a Kember, manufactured by a new company.

Brandy looked around as Grey drove out of the lot. She had only been to Pensacola once as a child. It wasn't even recognizable. Once they drove down Airport and reached Ninth Avenue, she realized that the tubeline was where the old airport used to be. She was surprised to see that the old college was gone. It was now the Tubeline Hotel. She smiled as she looked across the street to see that Cordova Mall was still there. It had grown. The parking lot was gone, most likely built underground. Every available square foot was mall. She couldn't even tell if Parisian was still there. Brandy wondered if all the streets were still there and still named the same. It was encouraging to see that Airport and Ninth hadn't changed.

They pulled into the underground garage and took the elevator up to the lobby.

Brandy was silent as they checked in. She noticed that Grey got only one room. She wondered how many beds were in the room. After Grey unlocked the door, Brandy entered slowly. She immediately saw there were two double beds. Grey placed his suitcase on one and hers on the other. She stood in the middle of the room and watched as he opened his suitcase and began rummaging through it.

"I'm going to take a shower and then we can get something to eat. Is there anything you had a taste for?"

She was afraid to be disappointed again so she shook her head.

"Whatever you want, Grey."

"How does Mexican sound?"

"Fine."

"I saw my favorite Mexican restaurant right before we got here." He stared at her with his clothes in his hands. "Did you want to shower first?"

She shook her head without breaking eye contact. Why couldn't she ask him how long he intended to stay with her? She was afraid to be by herself. She would die before admitting that she needed him. God, where had her independence gone?

"How many women have been in your life?"

His eyes widened at the unexpected question.

"Not many. A few in high school and college, none in medical school. I was too busy to get involved with anyone."

"Your last girlfriend, what was she like?"

"Pushy, self-centered." He stopped when he saw her shocked expression. "Brandy, is something wrong?"

"Is that what you think of women?"

"Where did that come from? You asked me what she was like. Everyone I know is not pushy and self-centered, but she was. Maybe that's why it didn't work out. There has to be compromise in a relationship, but she wasn't willing to give."

"The woman always has to be the one to give?"

Grey rubbed his hand over his face. "Brandy, I need a shower. If you insist on continuing this conversation, it can be over dinner. I'm hungry, aren't you?"

He didn't wait for a response as he turned toward the bath-

room. She stared at the closed door. Was Grey as chauvinistic as the men in her time had been? She hoped everyone had learned equality. She sat heavily on the bed.

While Grey stood under the hot spray, he mused over Brandy's moods. She certainly wasn't predictable. He never knew what would come out of her mouth from one moment to the next. Now she was attacking him because he had given his honest opinion of someone. He didn't think he'd said anything wrong. Brandy wouldn't have put up with Beth's attitude anymore then he had.

Ten minutes later, he walked out of the bathroom. His hair was still damp. Brandy looked up as he walked in. He was only wearing his slacks, and she stared at his bare chest. Swallowing, she stood up and disappeared into the bathroom. Shaking his head, he finished drying his hair and selected a shirt from his suitcase.

Half an hour later, they were seated at a table in Grey's favorite Mexican restaurant. They had just ordered. Grey decided he had had enough of Brandy's silent treatment.

"Brandy, please, what is wrong with you? What did I say?"

"You talked about your ex-girlfriend like she was insignificant. Do you expect women to be perfect? We are as fallible as you men are."

"Hold it right there. This is about equality, isn't it?" He took a deep breath. "Brandy, you asked me what Beth was like. You could have asked me what my best friend had been like. I gave you an honest answer. If I sugarcoated how I felt about Beth, then I wouldn't be treating her as an equal. If you want to be equal with a man, than don't complain when he has something unflattering to say about you. If I knew a man or woman that was conceited, I would admit that both of them are conceited. I wouldn't call the woman a bitch and the man arrogant. It's all the same to me. What do you want? You can't have it both ways."

He could tell he was getting through to her as her expression lost its hard edge. "Brandy," he continued, "I was raised to be honest. I don't like to lie. It makes me uncomfortable. Please, don't ask me something unless you want me to be truthful."

She looked down at her food. What was wrong with her? "I'm sorry, Grey," she said. "It feels as if there are two people inside my

head battling it out. I'm sure I'll adjust in time. Just bear with me."

He softened. As long as it takes, he thought. She had let him order for her, since she was afraid to try something she used to like.

When their meal was served, Brandy was happy to note she enjoyed it. She had never been fond of spicy food, but now she liked it. They enjoyed the rest of the evening. They headed back to the hotel after dinner.

"Well, we'd better turn in early. Tomorrow I have to go out and find a job."

Brandy froze halfway to the bathroom. "A job?"

"Yeah. What money I do have will only last about a month, and I don't want to dip into my savings. If we're going to get settled, we have to find an apartment. In order to do that, there has to be a paycheck coming in. You'll be too busy with school, so it's up to me. I really shouldn't have too much trouble. I did my residency at a respectable hospital in Los Angeles. They'll give me good references." He had been moving about the room, getting ready for bed. He noticed that she hadn't moved. He looked at her curiously. "What's wrong now?"

"You're staying here with me?"

Now it was Grey's turn to freeze. Didn't she want him to stay? Was she so independent that she didn't think she needed him, or just didn't want him?

"What did you expect, for me to desert you here?"

There it was again, pity. He didn't think she could make it on her own.

"I don't need you to take care of me." She said softly.

"Whether you like it or not, I'm not leaving. Now get ready for bed."

"Don't tell me what to do!"

"Jesus, Brandy!" He angrily stripped off his clothes. Although she tried not to look, she did. As her eyes dropped down his bronze body, her own body betrayed her as it became aroused. He pulled back the covers and got into bed. Turning his back to her, he lay down. "Good night."

Brandy felt as if her feet were glued to the floor. He wasn't leaving. She prayed it wasn't because he pitied her. Would he ask her to marry him again? The way she was acting, probably not. If only he

would tell her that he loved her. Maybe then she could stop thinking he was doing all this out of pity. She wanted to join him in that bed, and experience what she had the night before. Had it been only twenty-four hours since they had made love? It was hard to believe.

The next morning Brandy awoke to someone knocking on the door. She heard it open and close. She rolled toward the door, and saw Grey walking across the room with a tray.

“Breakfast is served. I’ll be out most of the day. Look through the classified ads for an apartment. When I get back, we’ll go look at a few of them.”

She pushed up on her elbows and watched him place everything on the table. He picked up a breakfast sandwich and drank some of the orange juice. He walked over to his suitcase and rummaged through it. He pulled something out of it and placed it on the bed at her feet.

“This is a magpad. Insert the newspaper in the side and follow the directions. It’s user friendly.” Without looking at her, he headed for the door. “I’ll see you later.”

Her voice stopped him at the door. “Why are you staying with me?”

He slowly turned toward her. He looked about to answer, but seemed to change his mind. “Not now, Brandy. We’ll talk about it later. I have to go.” Without another word, he turned on his heel and left.

She sat up and reached for the magpad. She couldn’t help but smile. It was a little thicker than the kind of magazine she was used to, dark gray with a screen taking up most of the front. There was no keyboard or mouse. She had no idea how to work it. Reaching for the newspaper, she looked for a place to insert it in the magpad. She noticed a slot on the left side. As soon as she inserted the card in the slot, the screen lit up. She gasped as she realized it was a touch screen. Following the directions, and sliding and tapping her finger across the screen, she loaded the newspaper. Grey was right; it was easy. In less than five minutes, she was reading the classifieds. She had never had so much fun reading a newspaper. She would have to get herself one of these.

Grey got a call back from Sacred Heart hospital on their third day in Pensacola, although they wouldn't need him for another week. Brandy found a nice two-bedroom apartment. They had looked at several, but Grey let her decide which one she wanted to live in. She chose an apartment close to the hospital off Ninth Avenue. She wasn't sure, but she felt that the complex was built where Albertson's Super market used to be.

The apartment was semi-furnished, so they had to go out and buy bedroom furniture. The apartment came with a couch, bookshelf, and a table with two chairs. They put their bedroom sets on home lay-away and set up house. Grey had only lived with his grandmother, and Brandy had never lived with a man before. The tension between them wasn't helping matters. They still had not brought up the issue of why he was staying with her. Brandy figured it could wait until the right time, and Grey didn't want her to think he was lying when he told her that he loved her.

It took about three weeks for them to settle into a routine. Grey ached for her every night, not realizing she was dreaming about him. Brandy was experimenting with cooking on their kitchen stove when Grey walked in. He had worked a half shift at the hospital and was on call for the rest of the night. He smiled when he saw Brandy. Her hair was disheveled, and only half way up in the ponytail. Her face was flushed from the heat of the stove, but he thought she still looked beautiful.

"Smells wonderful."

She beamed at him. "Thanks. How was work?"

"Pretty good. I'm on call."

"Grey, do you like your job?"

"Well, it's always hard in the beginning. You know, adjusting to something new, but I'm sure I'll like it once I get settled."

"Are you glad you came here?"

"Yeah, it's a great place." He would be glad to be anywhere she was. He sensed Brandy wanted to talk about something, but was avoiding it.

"Brandy, is there something you want to talk about?"

"I've just been wondering about something."

"What?" He could see her hesitation. "Brandy, I'm not only your friend, I'm also a doctor. You can tell me anything."

"It's been awhile since I—woke up. I was wondering if I am supposed to have a period."

"A period? Oh, you mean menstruation?"

"Yes, I haven't had one, and it's been over a month. Since I'm infertile, am I not supposed to have one?"

"You've had one every month since you've stabilized." He didn't have her medical record, so he couldn't consult it. "You should have had one last week, if I remember correctly."

"Can you think of any reason why I wouldn't have had one?"

"You mean besides pregnancy? It could be the stress of coping with the real world again or being kidnapped, but don't rule out pregnancy, yet. I told you that we would have to wait until you tried to have kids. Neither of us used protection that time."

She blushed at the mention of that night. "Two separate tests were performed on me, and both came up with the same conclusion. I'm an 'it'."

"Brandy!" He gripped the counter and took a deep breath. He was not going to get exasperated with her. He was overjoyed to hear she had not had her period, although he would keep a tight rein on his emotions. It may be just as he said. Maybe the stress *was* what was keeping her menstrual cycle away. They would both find out after she visited an OB/GYN. "You have all your reproductive organs, so you're not an 'it'. Will you stop torturing yourself? We need to find a good doctor. He'll be able to find out why you haven't had your period."

"She."

"She?"

"Yes. *She'll* be able to find out why I haven't had a period. I want a female gynecologist."

"Whatever you want." He was running out of time. He had to convince her that he loved her before the test results came back. He had to make her believe that he loved her just the way she was. "I'll make an appointment for you when I get to the hospital tomorrow."

Brandy tilted her head back as he stepped closer. She could smell his cologne and swallowed hard.

"Wouldn't it be great if you were pregnant with my child?" He reached out and caressed her right cheek. "Then you would know how special you are. We were made for each other, Brandy. Nan certainly thinks so." He lowered his head to lightly kiss her mouth. She suddenly

forgot how to breathe. She couldn't let herself believe she could be pregnant. Did Grey actually hope she was? Did he really believe they were made for each other?

Doubt still lingered. She wanted to push him away. As his mouth left hers to kiss her neck, her voice came out in a throaty whisper.

"And when we find out I'm not pregnant, both of us will know me for the freak I am."

Startled, Grey pulled away. Brandy used the distraction to place her arms in front of her. Her eyes flew open as he roughly grabbed her arms above the elbows. She thought he was going to shake her.

"Why can't you accept that you're not a freak? I don't care if you never can get pregnant. Children aren't everything. It would be nice if you could have my children, but it isn't everything. Can't you see that? You didn't even want children in your old life. Why does it have to be the deciding factor now?" He paused and stared into her eyes. He shook his head. "Don't you care about me even a little? When we made love, I thought we both felt something. Is it possible I was wrong? If I am, it's a shame, because I'm pretty certain I was born to love you."

He dropped his arms and started to turn away. Brandy felt her heart leap up into her throat. She reached out and grabbed the sleeve of his shirt. His eyes dropped to her hand and then up her arm to her face. Without a word they flew into each other's arms. The passion that erupted when their mouths met surprised them both. They had both been suppressing these feelings for three weeks. Grey's hands were everywhere. Without breaking the kiss, he swept her up in his arms and carried her to his room.

Brandy draped her right leg over both of Grey's thighs. She sighed as she snuggled closer.

"We should have done this weeks ago."

Would it have worked weeks ago? Grey wondered. His left hand lightly traced up and down Brandy's arm.

"I have missed you these last three weeks."

"Missed me? I was right here."

Grey smiled. "You know what I mean."

Brandy rubbed her knee up his thigh as she kissed his neck.

“Yes, I know what you mean. I missed you, too.”

He squeezed her closer and placed his chin on top of her head.

“Brandy, I really want you to have that exam.”

He felt her stiffen. “Why is it so important?”

“You know why. Even if you’re not pregnant, it is still healthier to have annual checkups. You are old enough to know that.”

She cringed. Yes, she did know that. Suppressing tears, she nodded against his neck. “OK, I’ll have the exam.”

He could tell it was hard for her to agree. He leaned back so he could look into her face. When she didn’t look up, he lifted her chin with his left hand.

“Everything’s going to be fine, hon. You’ll see.” He lightly kissed each of her cheeks before moving to her mouth. Soon, they both had other things to think about besides the exam.

Chapter Twelve

Nancy stared across her desk at the detective. He was casually seated in a chair with one arm thrown across the back and his left ankle resting on his right knee. "You're trying to tell me you have no way of contacting your grandson?"

"Like I told you, Detective Harris, he calls me. He is trying to get settled and will tell me his address once he has one."

He nodded but she could tell he felt she was lying. "Do you know why Grey left Los Angeles?"

"He was upset about Sue's death. He just had to get away."

"Wasn't there another woman in the car?"

Nancy swallowed hard. "Another woman?"

"Witnesses say there were two women in the car. Divers only found one in the lake, a Sue Simpson."

"I don't know how many people were in the car. I wasn't there."

"What about the extra ticket?"

"What other ticket?" Nancy swallowed hard. She should have known the ticket would be traced.

"When Grey left Los Angeles, you e-mailed the tubeline station to reserve two tickets to Pensacola. He paid for both of them. Who was the second ticket for?"

She had to think fast. "It was for me."

"For you?" He asked doubtfully.

Think faster, damn it! “Yes, I was supposed to go with him. At the last minute, I decided I couldn’t get away from work. We ended up giving it to a family that couldn’t afford one.”

The detective looked at her skeptically but nodded. There was no way he could disprove what she said. Fortunately for Grey, he hadn’t traveled out of the country. Strict records were kept on out-of-country traveling.

“You don’t say. Well, Dr. Thorgood, when your grandson calls, tell him to get back here ASAP.”

“What reason do I give him?”

“Tell him I need to talk to him.”

“What if he doesn’t want to come?”

“You tell Grey to get his ass in my office, or I’ll get a warrant for his arrest.”

“On what charge?”

“Obstructing justice and fleeing the scene of a crime.”

“What do you mean, a crime?”

“We found a bullet in his front tire, and a dead woman in the back seat. If there wasn’t anyone else in the car, why was Miss Simpson sitting in the back?”

“I told you I don’t know how many people were in the car.”

“Just tell Grey to come home, Dr. Thorgood.”

“I don’t know how long it will be before he’ll call me.”

“I’ll give him twenty-four hours.” He stood up to leave.

“Thank you for your cooperation.”

Nancy only stared him down. “I’ll do my best.”

“I’m sure you will.” Without another word, he turned and left.

Nancy stared at the door for a few minutes before reaching for the phone. After letting it ring ten times, she hung up. Where was he?

Grey waited in the lounge for Brandy. He had gotten her an appointment sooner than she would have liked. He already had a little pull at the hospital. The gynecologist Brandy was seeing had a crush on him. Brandy walked in fifteen minutes later. He stood up and rushed over to her.

“Well?”

“We have to wait on the lab tests. Other than that, she says I’m

healthy. It's too soon for her to tell if I'm pregnant just by looking—not that I am."

Grey ignored her last statement. "When did she tell you to call?"

"Tomorrow."

"Good. I'll take you home."

Grey was unlocking the front door when he heard the phone ringing. He rushed in and snatched it up on the fifth ring. Brandy walked in after he had said hello. Using the handset bypassed video, so Brandy could neither see nor hear who was calling.

"Hi, Nan, what's up?"

He listened for a few minutes. "What? I was afraid of that." He paused.

Brandy pulled on his sleeve and mouthed, "What's wrong?" He put up his hand.

"He actually said that? Damn, I guess I have no choice. I'll be there as soon as I can. Alright, I'll see you later." He hung up and faced Brandy.

"We have a problem."

"What is it?" The hair on the back of her neck stood up.

He rubbed his hands over his face. "Oh, God." He looked back at Brandy. "The police in LA want to question me. Apparently there is a witness who saw two women in the car with me. They are wondering what happened to you. I have to go back."

"Go back?"

He flinched at the fear on her face. They had both tried to convince themselves that the ordeal was over, but he had been expecting this. He stepped forward and grasped her shoulders.

"OK, here's what we're going to do. Once I go back, I have to tell them where I have moved. They already know I'm in Pensacola. They are going to find you."

He paused and paced in front of her. "Our story is going to be that I came here by myself and met you the night I arrived. I spent the night with you. You had just found this apartment and asked me to move in with you."

"Grey, that makes me look bad, not to mention stupid. I slept with you the night I met you and then invited you into my home to

live?”

“It doesn’t matter how it makes you look. We have to make up a good story. You just went in for a pregnancy test, Brandy. That has to correlate to our story.”

“What do I say when they ask me why I’m in Pensacola?”

He looked up at the ceiling for a moment. “Uh, just look at the information I gave you in the tubeline. Tell them you just left home. Find your high school diploma. That should tell you where you were supposed to have graduated. Since you are supposed to be 18, they won’t bother to do much checking up on you. Minors aren’t able to do much of anything. Just stick to the story.”

Her eyes misted over as she nodded. Grey groaned and pulled her into his arms. “Everything will work out. You’ll be fine here, Brandy. Just pull on that strength you had in the twentieth century.”

“I’m not sure I can find it.” Her voice was muffled as she spoke against his neck.

“Yes, you can.” He pulled back and kissed her. She began to relax in his embrace.

“Come back soon.”

Brandy was sitting on the couch when Grey came out of the bedroom with his bag. He stared at her a moment before placing the bag on the floor and walking over to her. He kneeled in front of her and held both of her hands.

“I’ll leave the car at the tubeline station. There’s plenty of public transportation if you need to go anywhere. I showed you where the stops are. I shouldn’t be gone long. I called work, so they know where I’ll be. Take care.” He leaned forward and lightly kissed her.

“You take care.” She reached up and caressed his face. “I’ll be fine.”

“That’s my girl.” He gave her a quick hug and then stood. After one last glance, he left the apartment.

Brandy lifted her hand to her mouth. Biting her thumbnail, she forced herself to remain calm. What had happened to her independence? Well, she reminded herself, she wasn’t exactly dealing with a normal situation. How would she have handled this situation if it had

happened in her old life? Her life had been secure— no threat to her very existence. She stared at her hand, remembering seeing it for the first time in the hospital when she woke up. She had been given a second chance at life and love. She smiled as she thought of Grey. She did love him. She would never have met anyone like him in her old life. She was lucky to have met him. Placing her hand to her stomach, she truly wished she were pregnant. She wanted his child. They could get married and live happily ever after. Was that possible in this world? The smile left her face as she thought about their current problem. What if they found out who and what she was?

Brandy stood up. She wouldn't be that person. She was younger. She had a different name. Now she just needed to change her appearance. Yes, that was it. Grabbing her purse, she left the apartment.

Grey was seated in Detective Harris' office. He tried not to fidget as the cop stared him down.

"You know what, Dr. Brentwood? Something around here stinks, and I don't like it."

"What do you mean?"

"I think you know. This whole thing stinks. Everyone is being a bit too close-mouthed about it. Why did you leave LA?"

"I had to get away for awhile."

"What did you have to get away from?"

"What would you do? Some crazy driver tries to shoot me off the road, causes the death of a friend. I had to get out of this city. I know I should have come here, but I was shook up. I almost drowned myself. Knowing someone wanted me dead, I just ran."

"You have no idea who tried to shoot you?"

"No. Why would I?"

"You tell me, Grey."

Grey narrowed his eyes. He preferred to be called Dr. Brentwood. He lowered his gaze. Detective Harris stood up. Grey forced himself not to watch him move around the desk. From the corner of his eye, he watched the detective go through a file cabinet. He walked back to Grey and held out a piece of paper.

“Do you know who this is?”

Grey looked up at the cop as he took the paper. When his eyes fell on the picture, his heart leapt into his throat. He choked out the words. “Where did you get this?” It was a sketch of Brandy.

“It’s a sketch we had done from the witnesses description of the other woman in the car. Pretty good, huh?” He stood over Grey and looked over his shoulder. “She’s a beautiful woman. You sure you don’t know who she is?”

Grey didn’t want to get too deep in this. “Well, I’m not sure who she is. I think she was a friend of Sue’s. I don’t know what happened to her.”

“So you are admitting she was in the car?”

He handed the picture back to the cop. “I never denied it. If you haven’t found her, she’s either alive or still in the lake.”

“You don’t say. Strange that you are the only one who made it out alive.”

“I guess I’m a better swimmer.”

Detective Harris smiled as he walked back around the desk to sit down. He threw the sketch down in front of him, leaned back in the chair and stared at Grey. He finally dropped his gaze to his note pad.

“You told my guys downstairs that you moved to Pensacola?”

Grey nodded. They already knew that, but now they knew his exact address. They had him wait three hours before Harris had even seen him. That gave them plenty of time to find Brandy. He hoped she was alright. He almost flinched at the detective’s next question.

“Who is the woman you’re living with there?”

“Someone I met my first night in Pensacola.”

“Fast worker, aren’t you, Grey?”

Grey shrugged. He definitely did not like this man. The detective continued. “Says here she’s pretty.”

Harris gave Grey an unnerving stare. “When our guys went to your place, they took this sketch with them.”

Grey swallowed hard. Taking a deep breath, he nodded.

The detective pointed to the sketch. “Witnesses say this woman had long wavy strawberry blonde hair and light colored eyes. They also said she was slender. This was the woman who was in the car with you, right?”

Again Grey nodded. He was getting scared. Harris already knew that the woman in Pensacola resembled the woman in the car. He forced his mind to work. There had to be a way out of this. Sue had found a way the first time. Remembering Sue, a revelation came to him. Oh, God, he needed to talk to Nancy.

"Says here the woman you're living with has short curly brown hair and brown eyes. Seems she's also on the chunky side."

Grey's jaw almost fell to the floor. He quickly looked down at the floor. "Well, I wouldn't call her chunky." Had Brandy been able to disguise herself that quickly? She had a level head when it was warranted. He hadn't even thought of that. He hoped she hadn't made herself too "chunky." That would be suspicious. Harris confirmed his fear.

"Well, I guess it's a matter of opinion, but that would be something to see these days. I don't think I have seen anyone overweight in more than ten years. Why didn't she have the procedure done?"

He slowly shook his head. "She likes to be different. Happy the way she is, I guess."

Harris shrugged. "To each his own, I suppose. Well, I guess that's it. At least we know how to reach you. We'll drag the lake again, empty it if we have to. This woman," He tapped the sketch, "has to be somewhere. I won't rest until I have found her." He looked back at Grey. "No one will." A chill ran up Grey's spine.

"Am I free to leave now?"

"Yeah. Go." He waved him off.

Grey walked to the door as quickly as he could, but the detective's voice stopped him.

"You know, Grey, twenty years ago, you wouldn't be getting off this easy."

Grey slowly turned around.

"Before the collapse of the legal system, you couldn't swing a dead cat without hitting a lawyer with it. You would have been torn up in a courtroom." Harris shook his head. "Sometimes, I wonder why we even still have cops."

Grey finally smiled. "To shoot the bad guys."

"Are you a bad guy, Grey?"

“No, sir, officer. Just a doctor trying to do my share.”

Harris narrowed his eyes. “Well, doctor, get used to my face. We may not have courtrooms, but we do have justice. You will be seeing me again.”

“I look forward to it.” Grey backed out of the office.

Grey unlocked the door to his apartment. After a stop to see Nancy, he had gotten back to Pensacola as soon as he could. He was relieved to be back. He had to make sure Brandy was alright.

She wasn’t in the living room. He found her in her bedroom lying on the bed staring up at the ceiling. He almost laughed when he saw her.

“Please tell me this isn’t real.”

She flew off the bed and into his arms. As he returned the embrace, he could feel the extra padding.

“How did you have the time to do this?”

She pulled back and looked up into his face. He looked down at her brown eyes.

“What did you do to your eyes?”

“It’s just a temporary dye. It’s only supposed to last a month. I was almost afraid to have it done. In a month I will be back to normal. Don’t worry, I didn’t cut my hair. It’s a wig. I didn’t want to take off my disguise until I was sure it was safe.” She said, referring to the wig and padding. “The police were here earlier. I don’t know if they believed my story.”

“And what story is that?”

They both spun toward the door. Both their jaws dropped as they saw Detective Harris in the doorway. Grey stepped away from Brandy.

“What the hell are you doing in my home? This is trespassing.”

“You have more to worry about than that, Dr. Brentwood.” He walked over to Brandy. Before either of them could do anything, he pulled off the wig and ripped the front of her shirt open. Brandy gasped with shock. Long straight brown hair fell past her shoulders. Grey shoved him back against the wall. Detective Harris drew his gun. Brandy let out a small scream. Harris was obviously puzzled to see the

darker shade of hair, but he didn't let it faze him.

"I was suspicious when I heard you were overweight. That just doesn't happen anymore."

Brandy moved closer to Grey. Harris nodded as he saw the towels wrapped around her middle. "So, what are you trying to hide? You are the woman who was in the car."

They both shook their heads. "No, then why the disguise?"

When they both remained silent, Harris gestured toward the door. "Come on. Maybe you'll answer my questions at the station. I'm taking you both back to LA." When they had reached the front door, the detective's pager went off.

"You two stay right there," he said, keeping his gun on them as he moved over to the phone. After he dialed, he placed the handset to his ear. He didn't want his conversation overheard.

"Yeah. Harris here."

"Harris, this is Roy. They found that body you've been looking for."

Harris looked over at Brandy with a shocked look on his face.

"What body?"

"The one in the lake. The blonde who was supposed to have been in Grey Brentwood's car." Harris looked again at the woman's dark hair. He noticed it was straight, not wavy. Roy continued. "She washed up on someone's backyard. They just called it in. She must've been stuck under something and just got dislodged."

"Wait a minute. Does she match the sketch?"

Grey and Brandy exchanged looks. Grey's was relief, while Brandy's was shock.

"Yes. Just get back here. The case is dead. No foul play. This woman obviously drowned. Wait until you see her."

He looked suspiciously at Brandy. The expression changed to resignation. "OK, I'll be back in a few hours. Thanks for the update."

He stood by the phone for a minute after he had hung up. He holstered the gun and slowly turned towards the couple.

"Look, I don't know what's going on here, and I don't like it one bit. I have to get back to LA, but just remember I'm keeping my eye on you." He looked at Brandy again. "I don't know what you're up

to, lady. If this doesn't pan out, I'll be back. That's a promise."

Brandy nodded as Detective Harris turned and left the apartment. After they heard the car leave, she turned to Grey.

"How—?"

Slowly Grey took off her shirt and began to unwrap her extra padding. "Now that's a story. First you tell me what you did to your hair."

"I had it straightened and dyed, but I didn't think it changed my appearance enough. So I bought the wig."

"Good thinking. When he gets back to LA, he'll remember the differences. Let's hope this is enough."

"Hope what is enough?"

As he removed the rest of her clothes and padding, he told her.

Grey had gone to the clinic as soon as he left the police station. He had to talk to Nancy. He broke out in a cold sweat at the idea of what he was thinking, but he didn't know what else to do.

He found Nancy in the lab. She looked up with a worried expression upon seeing him.

"Grey, how did it go?"

"Later, I have to ask you something."

"What?"

"Do you still have the other clone?"

"Yes, it's still in cryonic freeze."

"What about the first two?"

"Them too."

"Except for the third clone, we have to destroy everything else."

"Grey, what do you want with the clone?"

"We have to dump it in the lake."

"What?!" She was appalled by the idea.

"Detective Harris wants to find her. I want him to find her in the lake. I can't risk him discovering she is in Pensacola with me. This is the only solution I can think of."

"What if they do an autopsy?"

"An autopsy is rarely done on a drowning. One look at her,

and they will be convinced that is what she died of.”

Nancy raised a shaking hand to her mouth. She haltingly nodded her head. “Okay, Grey.”

“We have to do it now. I don’t know when they will drag the lake again. Luckily, it’s a big lake. There are plenty of places we can drop the body, but if I’m lucky I’ll drop it from the bridge.”

“That seems awfully dangerous.”

“It is. I’ll only do it if the coast is clear.”

Nancy nodded as the two of them stepped into the adjoining lab.

After they had the clone out of cryonic freeze, Grey stared at the lifeless body.

“Something isn’t right.”

Nancy stared at the body as she dressed her in the yellow dress. The dress had been placed in a closet in the outer lab after it been removed from the clone earlier.

“It’s the hair. Brandy had hers cut.”

“That’s it.” Grey found a pair of scissors and estimated how much to cut. He did a sloppy job, but it would do.

Grey wouldn’t let Nancy go with him. After they had the body in the car, he had her stay at the clinic.

“It’s too dangerous. Someone has to stay here. If something happens to me, you have to be here for Brandy.”

She reluctantly agreed as he drove off. He began to get nervous as he got closer to the lake. He silently prayed that the police weren’t out tonight. Stopping the car halfway across the long bridge, he got out and looked across the lake. He could see flashlights in the distance. The police were starting on the other side of the lake. He had timed this perfectly. Turning back to the car, he looked up the road. It was deserted. Opening the trunk, he pulled the clone out of the car. As he held it cradled in his arms, his gaze fell to the angelic face and his feeling stirred. This *was* Brandy, after all. At least it could have been.

He leaned over the bridge and let her fall. Looking again to see if anyone was around, he sighed with relief as he looked back to the lake and watched until she had sunk below the surface.

Back at the lab, he helped Nancy get rid of the rest of the

experiment. They dismantled the cryonic tubes and burned everything else. Nancy was melancholy about it all, but she took it well. They both knew this was the only way to protect Brandy. They both loved her too much to see anything happen to her. The only thing they preserved was Brandy's last egg.

Chapter Thirteen

Brandy was lying on the carpet among the many towels and their clothing. Grey was on top of her. She kissed his face.

“Do you really think it’s finished?”

“I’ll call Nan in the morning. She can make sure. Let’s get some sleep.”

He picked her up and carried her to his bed.

Detective Harris stared down at the corpse. He opened her eyes. When he saw green, he nodded. This was definitely the woman from the sketch. They had taken a photo of her and given it to the witness. It was a positive identification. She had been pretty well preserved in the cool lake, but there had obviously been no foul play. He remembered the woman with Dr. Brentwood. She had brown eyes and hair, but then everything else was a disguise. Maybe she had done something to her eyes and hair. He hadn’t heard everything they were saying when he walked in on them.

Officially, the case was closed. He had no reason to follow up on why she had been disguised. She was too young to have anything to hide. Maybe she was hiding from an old boyfriend. Hell, he had better things to worry about. He threw the sheet back over Jane Doe and walked out of the morgue. Since Sue Simpson was dead, he couldn’t ask her who the mystery woman was. He wasn’t going to get any answers from Dr. Brentwood. Now he would spend the required time running her statistics through the central computer. If that failed to

come up with anything, she would just have to remain anonymous.

The next morning, Nancy called Grey to find out how everything went. After he had explained, he paused for a moment.

“Nan, I need you to keep an eye out for Detective Harris. I need to make sure that the body satisfied him.”

“I will, Grey, but don’t worry. There is nothing to tie them together. Police don’t like to create work for themselves, they never have but especially now.”

“Yes, but I can’t help being nervous. I just want this behind us.”

“It is, Grey. By the way, have you found out if she’s pregnant yet?”

“We have to call today. I had forgotten with everything else going on. We’ll let you know as soon as we know.”

“You better. I love you, Grey. Send my love to Brandy.”

“I will. We’ll see you real soon.”

“Okay, hon. Talk to you later.”

Grey hung up the phone and looked over at Brandy. She was still asleep, hugging the pillow. He looked down her body. One leg and thigh were exposed. He walked back to the bed and leaned over and kissed the exposed flesh. She smiled and stretched. As her body flexed, the sheet fell back to expose her perfect breasts. Grey moved up to kiss between them. Brandy’s arms came up to encircle his neck as he moved up further. He kissed her lightly on the mouth.

“Remember, you have to call the hospital today.”

Her arms dropped to her sides.

“Oh, yes. Why don’t you do it?”

He looked down at her lovely face for a moment. For both their sakes, he hoped she was pregnant. Nodding, he rolled toward the phone. After changing the setting from video to audio, he dialed the number. He was transferred to OB/GYN. When he had the doctor on the phone, he told her who he was.

After swapping pleasantries for a few minutes, he popped the question. Although Brandy had turned away, he knew she was listening.

“The results are positive, Dr. Brentwood. She’s pregnant.”

She rolled toward the phone. "What?"

"Oh, Brandy. Congratulations, you lucky girl."

Brandy sat up abruptly. Grey turned back to the phone.

"Thanks for the great news. I'll see you at the hospital. Good-bye."

He turned back to Brandy. She had her hands on her stomach. When she looked back at him, there were tears in her eyes.

"I'm pregnant?"

"You sure are, honey."

"I'm not a freak!" She squealed as she threw her arms around his neck.

"You never were." He returned the embrace for a moment before pulling back. "Like I said before, you're a miracle."

Smiling, she kissed him passionately. "No, *you're* the miracle." After kissing him again, she laughed. "Thank you for loving me."

"Damn right. Now will you marry me?"

Laughing and crying at the same time, she kissed every inch of his face.

"Damn right!"

Epilogue

Brandy sat in the chair in the lounge of her OB/GYN, waiting for Grey to arrive. She hoped he would make it in time for her appointment. Today, they would find out the sex of their baby. It had been four months since the end of their ordeal. At least, they had thought it was over.

During those four months, she had learned to drive the futuristic cars, and now she even had her own. She was attending an accelerated technology course at the local trade school, which was teaching her how to use the current computer systems. It still amazed her how many there were. She had finals in two weeks.

Grey was supportive of every decision she made. They felt their lives together were off to a wonderful start. Of course, he was still nervous about whether Detective Harris would keep digging.

His fears came to pass. Detective Harris wasn't willing to leave things as they were. Two days earlier he called Grey, asking him to go back to California for questioning. She hoped everything would be alright and that he would make it back for her appointment. She hated to think that anything would overshadow their happiness at the coming baby.

In LA at the police headquarters building, Grey was led into a large room. A table took up one side of it, and people surrounded it on three sides. On the fourth side was one chair. He was led to that chair.

He recognized only a few of the dozen people sitting across from him. Of course, Detective Harris was there along with his immediate supervisor.

Once Grey was seated, Detective Harris made the introductions. Grey only half listened. He didn't want to be there. What could they possibly want from him? After four months, couldn't they just let it go?

"You know why you are here, Grey. No one is at all satisfied with your conduct involving the death of Sue Simpson and Jane Doe. As you can see, we still have been unable to identify the poor woman who drowned in your car. We have brought you here to give you one last chance to be truthful. We want to know who she was and what happened the day your car went into that lake. What puzzles us the most is why we can't find any records on her? You know as well as I do that everyone is in the central computer now. Why not make this easier on yourself and everyone here? We can make this very hard on you. I hear you're married now, and expecting a child. You don't want to take the chance of disrupting your family life, do you?"

Grey glared. He and Nancy had talked many times in the past four months. They had both been pleased that she made it to their wedding three months earlier. She had visited Grey and Brandy in Pensacola a few times since then.

They had discussed what he would have to say if and when he was in this situation. They knew it was risky but unavoidable.

"Jesus, I wish you wouldn't make me say this."

"What, Grey?"

Grey looked at each and every person, whose face was turned expectantly toward him.

"You're never going to find any records on your 'Jane Doe'."

"Why not?"

"Because she doesn't exist." Grey thought of the picture in his wallet. He and Brandy had gotten married before the temporary hair and eye dye wore off. Apparently, the lighter the true color, the more it absorbed the darker color. To this day, she still had the dark eyes and hair. The hair dye lightened every time she shampooed, so she didn't have noticeable roots. Maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea for her to keep up the false appearance. At least until this mess was forgotten. When he got back to Pensacola, he would suggest to Brandy that she

dye her hair again.

“What do you mean, she doesn’t exist? I saw her. Plenty of people in the police department saw her, including the coroner.

“I don’t mean she wasn’t alive, but that she didn’t exist officially.”

“Please elaborate, Grey. You’re trying my patience.”

Grey took a deep breath. He had to bite his lip to keep it from trembling.

“She was an experiment. Her name was Brandewyne Parker. She died in the year 2000, and my grandmother, Dr. Nancy Thorgood cryogenically froze her and then cloned her once she perfected the technique.”

There was a collective gasp from the people assembled. Several started talking at once. Detective Harris silenced them with a harsh, “Wait a minute!”

Grey wasn’t the only one who flinched. He swallowed hard. He was laying it on the table now.

“You sly son of a bitch.”

“Harris!”

Detective Harris looked at his boss and nodded.

“Tell me, Grey. How was your grandmother able to clone Miss Parker?”

“I don’t know. I was brought onto the project for her medical care once she woke up.

“I see. I suppose your grandmother can corroborate your story?”

“Yes, she can.”

“And she has research and notes to back it up?”

“No, she destroyed everything to do with the experiment.”

“Well, that’s convenient. Why did she do that?”

“She dedicated her life to bringing Miss Parker back to life. After she died, she lost hope. She didn’t want anyone else to try to follow in her footsteps, but she did give some of her notes to Dr. Stuart Peckman. He can also back up that Miss Parker was a clone.”

That would probably add some fuel to this detective’s fire, especially after he heard that Dr. Peckman saw her body in the clinic, before the police found it in the lake.

Detective Harris raised an eyebrow. Grey realized that he must

know the doctor. He signaled someone sitting at the far side of the table. Grey recognized her as being another detective. Harris whispered something to her and then she left the room. Probably checking on his story. He wondered if he should fabricate a story, which would explain the inconsistencies or wait until Dr. Peckman brought it up. He would wait to see where this led.

“Let’s just assume for now that you are telling the truth. Why were you, Miss Parker and Miss Simpson in your car, and why were you shot at?”

“Dr. Peckman found out about Miss Parker from Miss Simpson. He abducted her from the clinic. I rescued her from Dr. Peckman with Miss Simpson’s help. As we were leaving, they gave chase. They must have been security guards from the lab where he works. I don’t think they meant for us to go into the lake.”

Detective Harris let that sink in for a few minutes. A female detective entered the room. Harris walked off to a corner with her where they talked for awhile. After she left the room, he walked back to Grey.

“I’ve just been informed that Dr. Peckman and your grandmother are on their way in. I will question them both when they get here. Maybe now we can finally get to the bottom of this for good. Grey, I hope you’re being honest with me this time.”

“I am,” Grey said. *I’m just not telling you everything, you arrogant fool*, he added silently.

Harris knocked on the outer door, and a guard walked in.

“Take him downstairs until we’re ready for him.”

The guard nodded as he escorted Grey from the room.

The next morning Grey was taken back to the room. Only half of the people from the previous day were present this time.

“Sit down, Grey.” Harris said, sitting on the edge of the table closest to Grey and running his hand through his thick hair. “Your grandmother corroborated your whole story. She was the easy one. Dr. Peckman was a tougher nut to crack, but he’s a lousy liar. I now know that Miss Parker was cloned. I checked, and I know that there was a Brandewyne Parker who died in the year 2000. I found out that she was best friends with your grandmother. The only problem I have with the whole scenario is that Dr. Peckman said he saw the clone in your

grandmother's clinic. He said she died there, not in the lake. Care to explain this?"

Grey rolled his eyes. "Yes. I took her from the clinic to the lake. It was one last effort to keep the truth hidden and protect my grandmother."

"I could arrest you for obstructing justice, you know?"

"Yes."

"But I won't."

"You won't?"

"No. I can see the kind of trouble your grandmother could have gotten into. She still may lose her medical license. She has cleared you of everything. You two must be very close."

"She's like a mother to me."

"Grey, I'll do what I can. I really will try to do what I can. I admire her for being able to make a successful clone. According to Dr. Peckman, Miss Parker retained her memories through a remarkable operation. He is attempting his own research now, legally. Of course, he wouldn't say anything about the bullet in your car tire, but that no longer concerns you."

Harris stood, indicating that Grey should do the same and extended his hand. With a smile, Grey took it. Harris chuckled.

"You're a smart son of a bitch. Even if we wanted to, there is no way to exhume her body. With the new laws, she was cremated. What else could we do with her? Without any money or a will, we couldn't cryogenically freeze her. I do appreciate you finally coming forward with the truth. This could have ruined you, Grey. Are you aware of that? You were taking the chance of losing your license."

"I don't care. I would gladly do it to help my grandmother."

"You wouldn't be helping her, Grey. I doubt she'll lose her license. The board will probably feel she's too old. I hate to say it, but she may not have that long to live. Miss Parker was her best friend. It must have clouded her judgment. Believe me, they would have thrown the book at you." He shook his head and pointed to the door. "Now, why don't you go home to your pregnant wife? I'm sure she's worried sick about you."

Grey looked down at his watch. He was cutting it close. He couldn't miss that appointment. As he was heading for the door, he looked over his shoulder at Detective Harris.

“By the way, what’s your first name?”

“Matt.”

“I’m going to find out the sex of my child today. If it’s a boy, I just may name him after you.”

“Yeah, right. Get out of here.”

Grey didn’t have to be told twice. Nancy was waiting for him downstairs. They embraced.

“I hope we didn’t make the wrong decision.”

Nancy shook her head. “No matter how it turns out, we did the right thing. Now, I want you to go home and call immediately with the sex of my great-grandchild.”

“I will. Thanks, Nan. I love you.”

“I love you, too, son.”

At the clinic Brandy heard her name called. She looked at the front door expectantly. Grey wasn’t framed there as she hoped. She stood up and followed the nurse.

She was told to lie down and lift her shirt to the bottom of her bra. She grimaced when they squeezed a slimy substance on her stomach. It was cold. The doctor walked in and was about to begin when Grey flew into the room.

“Did I miss anything?”

“No.” She smiled as he kissed her. She reached up and stroked his jaw. He put his hand in hers and squeezed gently. They both nodded at the doctor. He stepped toward Brandy. They watched the monitor expectantly. Brandy sucked in her breath when she saw their child appear on the monitor. Grey watched in awe as his child moved about. Finally the doctor pointed to something.

“You see that?”

They both just stared. The doctor chuckled.

“That means your baby is a boy.”

They both looked harder. When they looked at each other, they began to laugh. Tears filled their eyes as they watched their son. Brandy turned towards Grey.

“What shall we name him?”

Grey shrugged as he kissed her. “What do you think about Matt?”