

Marilyn Lee



Soul Mates, Part 2

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Two souls torn apart -- and a love stronger than time

When Trey refused to remember their past, Carlee knew it was time to move on with her life. Sam wants her and needs her -- but can he offer her a future?

Now Trey claims to remember their long ago love, but how can Carlee trust a man who's hurt her so many times in the past?

Chapter One

Trey bit back a groan at the sight of the tall, pretty brunette sitting in his living room. "Paulette. This is a surprise."

"I hope it's a pleasant one."

He was not in the mood to deal with Paulette. They'd been lovers for nearly a year, but he'd come to realize he wasn't ever going to be in love with her. When she'd issued a marry-me-or-I'm-out-of-here ultimatum, he'd called her bluff, and she'd walked out. Although he'd returned all his keys to her place, she'd obviously kept a copy of his.

"I brought a new nightgown I thought you might like." She rose, removed her short jacket, and spread her arms. Under her short, sheer nightgown, her nipples were taut. She parted her legs, providing a tantalizing view of her shaved pussy.

"Paulette..."

"I've been waiting for you for hours." Lifting the hem of the nightgown, she parted herself, revealing a luscious pink pussy, glistening with her natural juices. "See anything you'd like to stick that big cock of yours in?"

His dick jumped to attention. It seemed an eternity since he and Carlee had made love. He had no desire to make love to Paulette, but damn if he didn't want to fuck her. Trey dropped his briefcase and crossed the room, pulling off his jacket, tie, and shirt as he went.

She moved her hips against his, catching her breath as she ground against his cock. "Oh, my. Now there's a fella I've been longing to feel for months."

He bent his head and kissed her. Her lips were cool and thin. With his eyes closed, he remembered other lips that were warmer, sweeter, fuller. She parted her lips, sliding one hand down between their bodies. He drew his hips back, inhaling quickly as

her fingers closed over his cock. Still returning his kiss, she pumped him, getting him harder. He tore his mouth away and settled it over her right breast, sucking the big, firm mound right through the sheer fabric, aflame with lust.

Paulette pressed closer, maneuvering her body until his rigid dick was poised at her entrance. Moaning, she slid the head up and down the length of her bald pussy. But when she pressed the head between her cunt lips a vision of Carlee's beautiful womanhood flashed before his eyes.

Carlee would find him sleeping with Paulette unforgivable.

Paulette gripped his ass and pulled him closer, her juices flowing over the head of his cock, inviting him in. God, he wanted to fuck her so badly he could barely breathe. But if he did, he would risk his relationship with Carlee.

Feeling almost as if his heart were being torn from his chest, Trey pushed Paulette away.

Her eyes opened and she blinked up at him. "Trey? Darling, what's wrong? Oh!" She smiled. "Condom. I forgot."

He shook his head, stumbling away from her. "No. That's not it."

"Then what is it?" Her gaze went to his now flaccid cock. "Oh, hell! Not that again! Trey, I begged you to get some Viagra. There's no shame in using it."

Sinking down on the sofa, he slipped his cock into his pants and pulled the zipper closed. "Paulette, we need to talk."

"I want a fuck. We can talk later."

"There isn't going to be any fuck."

She curled her hand into a fist. "Why won't you give up your damned foolish pride and see a doctor? You're too damn young and handsome to be impotent!"

The blood rushed up his face. "I am not impotent!"

"You could have fooled me." She yanked her jacket on, and stalked to the door. "When you're ready to admit you have a problem and see a doctor about it, call me. Until then I'm going to find me a man who can get it up and keep it up long enough to do me some good."

"Fuck you!"

"Don't you wish you could?" She slammed the door on her way out.

Trey finished undressing and made his way to the shower. With warm water cascading over him, he ran the wet, soapy washcloth over the length of his cock. There was nothing wrong with his sex drive. It was just centered on one woman -- Carlee. What was so bad about that? Her face haunted his vision as he masturbated himself to a blinding orgasm under the scalding water.

* * *

"This is ridiculous. You need some time to unwind. You can't keep working these long hours."

Carlee shrugged. Working kept her from being held hostage by her lingering feelings for Trey. "It's therapy for me. Helps me work through this gut-wrenching sadness."

Erinae sighed. "Look, Mick Reilly left a message on my answering machine last night asking me out. I was going to refuse, but I'll go out with him and ask him about Trey."

"No! This has to work its natural course, Nae. Go out with Mick if you want, but please don't ask him about Trey. I'm getting a handle on this thing. I just need a little more time."

"Lee, a few more weeks or even months isn't going to change anything. You have it too bad for him."

"Just let me work through this my way."

Erinae shook her head. "OK."

"Let's get back to work."

"You get back to work if you want, but I plan to take the remaining fifteen minutes of my lunch to sit here and contemplate whether I'll go out with Mick Reilly and get myself another one of those blistering kisses of his."

"He seemed nice."

"He's a terrific kisser too. I wonder what he's like in bed."

"Are you planning to find out?"

Erinae shrugged. "I won't know until I see him again. I've never been with a white man. It might be interesting to see where this goes."

* * *

Mick placed a vase of flowers and a card on the bedside table. "You've spent nearly every waking hour of the last three weeks between here and your mom's room. You need a break."

Trey stared down at his sister, who was still on a respirator. "How can I take a break when they're both fighting for their lives?"

"It won't help anyone if you wear yourself out." Mick squeezed his shoulder. "Let's go to the cafeteria."

Feeling bone weary, he nodded and kissed Delta's cheek. "Just going for a quick bite, Del. I'll be back in a bit." Following Mick to the hospital café, he picked up a salad.

Mick put it back and steered him to the grille. "You need something more substantial than rabbit food." Mick nodded at the cook. "Two cheese steaks with onions and French fries."

With food in front of him, Trey realized he really was hungry. They didn't speak until he'd eaten half his sub.

"So. How are you really, Trey?"

He raked a hand through his hair. "Tired."

"I spoke to your dad before I came. He said there's some slight improvement for both of them. Your dad and I both agree. You need a break."

He sighed. "Maybe so."

"Have you talked to Carlee?"

"No. I'm not exactly in the right frame of mind to try to romance her into changing her mind about a long distance relationship right now."

"But that's what you want?"

"Yes."

"How is she going to know that if you don't tell her? It's been three weeks. At least call her and tell her what's going on with your mom and sister."

"I need to go see her. She waited for me for a very long time. She'll wait a little longer. I'll go as soon as I have time."

"Make the time, Trey. Call her, even if it's just to say hello."

"I will. When I'm ready."

Mick shook his head. "Something else is bothering you. What is it?"

He palmed his coffee cup. "Do you believe in reincarnation, Mick?"

"Personally? I can't say I've ever had any reason to, but that doesn't mean it can't happen. Why?"

"Carlee does. She says we -- she and I -- have lived before, on a Virginia plantation. She has vivid memories of our having been in love when we were teenagers. She said that one night my mother saw me kiss her and told my father. He sold her, and we never saw each other again -- until we met at the lodge."

"And you believe her?"

"Not really. But sometimes when we were together, she almost made me believe. Sometimes I felt just a breath away from remembering."

"How?"

He shrugged. "Once when we were walking in the woods we encountered a woman with a dog. She mentioned she had a white German shepherd named Danny. When I asked her what kind of name that was for a dog, she said it was short for Danton. I started to say that Danton was a horse."

"A horse?"

"I remembered a large white stallion called Danton. I've never ridden, but when she said he used to be my horse -- in that other life -- I knew she was right. When she told me my former mother had betrayed my confidence and my father had sold her and that was the basis of my resentment of them, I knew she was right." He paused. "I have faint memories of a strange woman I met a long time ago."

"How long?"

"A very long time... longer than I am old. I remember her, and yet I don't."

"Then you do believe you've lived before?"

"I don't know what to believe anymore, Mick. I just don't."

"So this is why you think you can afford to wait all this time without contacting her? You need to call her, Trey."

"Not until I know what's going on or what went on between us. The past is important to her. She needs me to remember."

"She'll wait if she loves you, Trey."

"See, that's the problem. I don't know if she does."

"Do you love her?"

"I want and need her. I've never felt this way with any other woman." He shrugged. "If that's love, then I guess I do."

"Did you tell her?"

"No, because I'm not sure I do. Look, I appreciate your concern, Mick, but I really don't want to talk about this anymore. What about you and her friend? Have you seen her?"

"No. I called, but our schedules are conflicting. We may or may not go out."

"Well, Carlee and I will get it together."

"Listen, you know I only live forty minutes away from her. I could stop by and let her know how things stand with you."

"Thanks, but no. She needs time, and so do I. As soon as things are better here I'll romance her off her feet."

Mick nodded. "I hope you know what you're doing. In the meantime, I have tickets to a game this Sunday."

"This Sunday? Well, actually..."

"I have a suitcase in the car. I'm spending the weekend to make sure we go on Sunday, so don't give me any shit."

Trey smiled. "I suppose I could use a break."

* * *

Mick drove home to his Center City condo Sunday night to find a message from Erinae. "Hi Mick, I'd love to have dinner with you tomorrow night if you're free. You have my number. Call me if you're available."

She answered on the fourth ring, "Hello?"

"Hi. This is Mick Reilly."

"Mick! How are you?"

"Fine. So we can do dinner tomorrow night?"

"Yes."

"What kind of place should I call for reservations?"

Her soft, sultry voice sent a tingle of anticipation through him. "Let's have dinner at my place. I'll make you a big steak and we can decide just how far we're going. Make sure you get a good night's sleep tonight because you'll need all your strength tomorrow night. Good night."

"Good night." He hung up the phone and stretched out on his bed. He'd expected to have to wine and dine Erinae for a few weeks before they slept together. He grinned. This way was so much better. God, he loved liberated women who didn't need to play sex games.

* * *

Five weeks after she'd last seen Trey, Carlee returned from lunch to find a bouquet of roses on her desk. "Trey," she whispered. Heart thumping, she rushed across her office and snatched up the accompanying card.

Lee

I'll be in town to wrap up some business on Friday. I'll be staying until Monday night. I'd love to take you to dinner if you're available. I'll call you when I arrive.

Sam

Carlee closed her eyes, a picture of Sam Creekland's handsome ebony face dancing along her memory. He was big, kind, considerate, and had once been

completely in love with her. While she'd been unable to return the depth of his love, she had cared deeply for him.

Why was he asking her out now? Was it just a courtesy visit? Or did he want to rekindle their relationship?

She recalled the taste of his mouth moving so sweetly over hers and shivered. He had been tender, considerate, and loving. Was she ready to put Trey in the past and give a relationship with Sam another try?

As she sat staring at his flowers, Erinae rushed in her office door. "Oh, God, Lee, you won't believe who I just got off the phone with!" She sank down into one of the chairs in front of Carlee's desk.

Carlee studied Erinae's face. Her smile was radiant and her eyes sparkled. Good news. "Mick Reilly?"

"What? No! Well, that would be good news, but no." Erinae waved a hand. "It was Mark Jackson from Mathis Builders. He wants to meet with me to discuss the possibility of offering us a contract to consult with Mathis Builders on an upcoming project!"

"Mathis Builders! Oh, my God, Nae. They're one of the most prestigious builders on the East Coast. If we can get a contract with them, we're on our way!"

"Why do you think I'm practically hyperventilating? Do you want to come to the meeting?"

"When is it?"

"Friday night. We're having dinner at Chez Ravel."

"Do you need me?"

"Not if you have something else you need to do. Do you?"

Carlee glanced at Sam's flowers. "Yes, and charming prospective clients is what you do best. Working out the logistics is what I do best. You go and knock him off his feet. I think I'm going to have a date Friday."

"With who?" Erinae blinked, her gaze widening as she saw the flowers. "Oh. Very nice. Who's in love with you?"

"Sam sent them. He'll be in town on business this weekend. I'm going to have dinner with him."

Erinae smiled. "Good for you. Have dinner with him and get to know him all over again."

"I'm afraid of hurting him again."

"Still longing for Trey?"

"I think there's always going to be some feelings there, but I'm determined to move on. I just don't want to hurt Sam."

"He's a big boy, Lee. If he's calling to ask you for a date, he must have decided he wants to risk trying it again with you. How do you feel?"

"I always liked him a lot."

"Just like?"

She shook her head. "If not for the memory of Trey, I think I would have fallen so deeply in love with Sam I'd still be falling. As it is, my feelings for him make me wonder if it's possible to love two men at the same time. I still have feelings for Trey. At the same time, I have some very strong feelings for Sam too. It's crazy, but I'm looking forward to seeing him again."

"And more?"

A memory of Sam's warm lips pressing against hers, his cock, hard and thick, pulsing against her body, sent a wave of heat through her. Cheeks burning, she lowered her lids. "He and I never..."

"I know, but maybe it's time for a new beginning in more ways than one, huh?"

Carlee drew in a deep breath. She definitely wanted to have sex with Sam. "I probably would have been better served giving my virginity to him instead of saving it for Trey."

"Are you sure about this, Lee? What if Trey calls and you've slept with Sam?"

"He left without saying good-bye and he's been silent for five weeks. If he wanted more than we've already shared, he would have been in contact with me. I'm

moving on. I'm more than willing if Sam wants to try again. In fact I'm happy for this new chance with him."

"I could ask Mick what's going on with Trey..."

"No. We had ten days. I think that's all we were supposed to have. It's time I got on with living in the present. I'll always have deep feelings for Trey, but he represents my past."

"Sam?"

She shrugged. "I'll be more than willing to go as far with him this weekend as he wants."

* * *

For the first time in weeks, Carlee enjoyed a restful night, her sleep undisturbed by unwelcome memories. She woke the next morning refreshed and optimistic. When her phone rang that evening as she and Danny returned from their walk, her heart didn't race and she didn't rush to answer it, hoping it was Trey.

The answering machine picked up while she flopped in the chair to take off Danny's body harness.

"Lee, this is --"

She reached over and snatched up the phone, smiling. "Sam! Hello!"

"Lee! It's good to hear your voice. I got in town a day early and thought I'd give you a call. How are you, sweet lips?"

"I'm fine. How are you, Sam?"

"I'm OK. Are you seeing anyone special?"

"No. You?"

He sighed. "No."

"Why not?"

"It's difficult to get seriously involved with anyone else when I still think of you all the time."

Her heart raced and her smile widened. Maybe she had been given the ten days with Trey to get him out of her system so she could finally give her heart fully to Sam.

She wet her lips before speaking quickly. "If you're finding hotel life lonely, you're welcome to share my bed."

"Tonight?"

"For as long as you're here."

"I'll be in town until Monday night."

"Then you're welcome to stay with me until then."

The silence that followed her words unnerved her. "Sam?"

"Hell, honey, I'd love to take you up on your offer without another word."

She raked a hand over her hair. "But?"

"I've accepted a position with an oil company in the Middle East."

Chapter Two

"The Middle East? Sam, no! This is a dangerous time for Americans there."

"I know, but as you know I speak the language and this is something I want to do to make the future more financially secure."

"But Sam, you're bright and intelligent and there are so many opportunities for you here. You could --"

"Lee, don't."

"You're determined to go?"

"It's a done deal. I've committed myself to a two-year agreement with a big signing bonus. That's the only reason for my hesitation. I care too much about you to sweep into town, sleep with you for the weekend, and then waltz out of your life for two years."

She closed her eyes briefly. So he wasn't interested in rekindling their romance. That didn't really change her resolve. She still needed a way to get over Trey and Sam was the man to do it for her. "I wish you weren't going, but I'd still love to spend the next few days with you in my bed. Are you interested?"

"Interested? I'm on my way."

"I'll be waiting for you, Sam."

"Damn, this is far more than I dared hope for."

"Make sure you bring protection, Sam."

"Protection? You mean you want --"

"I want everything, Sam. And I want it in every way imaginable."

* * *

Carlee showered and slipped a dark pink silk lounge suit over her naked body. She chilled a bottle of wine, dimmed the lights in the living room, and sat listening to

soft jazz till she heard a car pull into her driveway. Heart racing, she hurried to the side door.

A tall, handsome man with dark skin and eyes got out of a late model luxury car, grabbing his suitcase and garment bag from the backseat. She opened the door and Danny rushed down the driveway toward him. Sam dropped his bags on the path, catching her in his arms when she tossed herself at him. "Sam!"

"Damn, baby, it's good to see you again." He hugged her and settled his warm, sweet lips over hers. A tingle danced through her. She linked her arms around his neck, parting her lips. He kissed her with a passion and heat that sent a rush of moisture between her legs.

She felt his cock hardening against her as they clung to each other. She drew back and looked up at him. "We should go inside."

He nodded, but bent to pat Danny, who sat on his haunches, his tail wagging wildly. When he straightened, he picked up his bags and they went inside. He put his luggage down near the door and turned to gaze at her. The look of desire and affection in his eyes stirred a deep-seated need in her.

He opened his arms and she walked into them. He held her close, with his lips pressed against her cheek. Being in his arms felt so right. Excitement and desire soared in her. Finally she would give him what she had denied them both for so long.

He pressed his lips over hers. She clung to him, her mouth opening, inviting his tongue inside. They kissed and caressed each other with a sweet hunger they allowed to build gradually. By the time she felt the hardness of his cock against her, she was wet and ready for him.

She broke their kiss and cupped his handsome face between her palms. "Are you hungry?"

"For you? Oh, yes, sweet lips."

She stepped back, opening her arms. "And I'm hungry for you. Take me and make me yours."

"Are you sure? I have protection, but I won't be back for two years. That's a long time."

"We'll both get on with our lives when you leave. While you're here, if you want, we'll be together."

"Honey, of course I want." He drew her into his arms and held her, grinding his lower body against hers.

Tingles of desire shot through her as she anticipated his hard length sliding between her legs and into her hot, wet pussy. She thought briefly of Trey but ruthlessly pushed the thought away. This long weekend belonged to her and Sam alone. "I want you to love me."

"Oh, yeah, baby."

She took his hand and led him to her bedroom. She'd been a fool to blow her first chance with him while chasing a dream of a life with Trey. Had she not made a mess of things, she and Sam could have shared their future. In longing for Trey, she'd lost a possible chance of a life with Sam.

Or had she? She'd waited several lifetimes for Trey. If he were willing, she could wait two years for Sam.

"What's the matter, honey?"

"Nothing." She opened the top of her lounge suit, revealing her bare breasts. "Please? Touch me?"

"You have no idea how I've longed to be with you." Leaning forward, he kissed her. His mouth was soft, but insistent, cajoling her lips apart. When she opened her mouth, he sucked at her tongue and cupped a hand between her legs. Her natural juices flowed freely as their lips and tongues got reacquainted.

Feeling her hunger for him spiraling out of control, she moaned against his mouth. "Please."

His dark eyes alight with desire, he eased her top off her shoulders. Her pants and slippers followed. When she stood before him naked, he stared at her, his lips parted slightly. "You are even more beautiful than I remembered." His voice came out

as a soft, husky whisper. He had seen her nude before, but the wonder in his voice and gaze made her feel as if he were seeing her bare body for the first time. "I used to lay awake at night longing for you like this. God, I ached for you."

"I'm sorry I hurt you, Sam, but now I'm all yours." She swallowed a lump of pain. "Your turn."

He grinned, and that boyish dimple she loved appeared in his left cheek. She liked that he undressed slowly, dancing as he did. She dragged her gaze from his, slipped two fingers inside her pussy, and allowed herself to study his physique. His shoulders were broad, his chest covered with a light sprinkling of hair, his abs taut and defined. His legs were long and muscular, but her gaze centered on the breathtaking tent in his briefs. She pumped her fingers, getting her pussy nice and damp for him. "Sam... Oh, Sam..."

Smiling, he clasped a hand over the one she pressed between her legs. He lifted it to his mouth, sucking her fingers. "Hmmm. Delicious. I think I'd like to get reacquainted with your sweet pussy."

"I'd like that too, but first I want what I've denied us both so long." She reached inside his briefs. A shudder danced through her. "I want your cock inside me. Now. Please."

"I want it too, baby. Just let me get my condom..."

She closed her fingers around his cock. "No."

He stiffened. "No what?"

"No condom. I want it like this -- hot and naked and now. Right here. Do it."

He glanced over his shoulder toward the bed.

She turned his face back toward her. "Not there. Here. Now."

He arched a brow. "Against the door, without protection?"

"Yes. Against the door without protection. Please, Sam. Just give me some cock!"

"I'll be gone for two years. We should use a condom. I don't want to leave you in a bad situation."

"I wouldn't consider having your baby a bad situation."

"I would, if I couldn't be here with you."

"Let me worry about myself. I'm on the pill."

"That's not always a hundred percent, Lee."

"I don't care. I want your bare cock inside me."

When he stood frowning, she took matters into her own hands. "You want to argue or you want this?" She eased his shaft outside of his briefs, rubbing the head of him along her wet slit.

He shuddered, grabbed her hips, bent his knees, and thrust forward.

The breath caught in her throat as the big head of his hard length found her opening and pushed its way inside. "Oooh!"

He paused with the head wedged inside her and stared down into her eyes. "You want more?"

"Yes! I want all of it."

"Baby, you're going to get it all."

She placed her hands on his hips and tugged forward. He resisted, ensuring his first possession of her was exquisitely slow and utterly delicious.

Chills and heat ran through her. She wanted to close her eyes and savor their first coupling, but found it impossible to look away from his burning gaze. He was thick and long and seemed to take an eternity before his groin came to rest against her. She shuddered, every inch of his thick flesh buried deep inside her pussy. She stroked her hands over the hard, taut flesh of his ass. "Oooh!"

He nibbled at her breasts. "Is that a good 'Oh' or an it hurts 'Oh'?"

"Both! It hurts, but Lord, Sam, it's a good hurt."

He laughed, withdrew slightly, and then gave a gentle thrust of his hips.

"Oooh!" Pleasure washed over her. Lord, she'd been a fool not to do this sooner with this wonderful man. "More. More. Do it. Fuck me, Sam!"

"You want our first time together to be a fuck?"

She felt so deliciously stuffed. Having him pounding inside her would be incredible. "Yes! Fuck me!"

He wrapped his arms around her waist, buried his lips against her breasts, and thrust in and out of her. At first, his strokes were long and measured. He pulled all but the big head of his cock out of her before sending it surging deep again, creating tingles of joy inside her pussy. Then as she moaned, grinding herself against him in a frenzy of lust and pleasure, he shortened his movements and increased the power of the hips driving his cock in and out of her.

"Hmmm. Hmmm." Pleasure built inside her with every downward thrust of his hips. Her heart raced. The muscles of her stomach clenched. Her nipples tightened. Her mouth opened in a silent gasp. Heat and lust soared in her. Embers flickered in her pussy and spread through her entire body. The fire in her pussy ignited. It raged out of control, incinerating her ability to think.

Her orgasm hit her with the force of an inferno. Moaning and sobbing with pleasure, she raked her nails down his back, tightening herself around him. "Oh, Sam! Sam!"

He groaned, bit into her breast, and pounded her, slamming his hips against her. She ground her hips against his, clinging to him as he shot his seed deep inside her.

Still holding her, he groaned again and eased them both down to the floor. They lay in a tangle of arms and legs, enjoying the aftereffects of their climaxes. She felt happy, satisfied, and cherished cuddling with him.

He kissed her forehead and stroked his hands over her body. "That was incredible."

"Oh, yes."

"Why do you sound surprised?"

Somehow she had expected to compare his lovemaking unfavorably to Trey's. But sex with them both had been beyond what she'd ever expected or imagined. The experience with each was different in a wonderfully exciting way.

"I don't know. I should have known it would be too good for words with you."

He rewarded her with a hug and a soft kiss. "It was so good between us because we belong together."

She would have once taken issue with that statement, but not now. A calm anticipation settled over her as she realized that given enough time with Sam, she could forget Trey. "I think you're right."

He lifted her chin and stared into her eyes.

She swallowed slowly, certain he was about to ask her to wait for him. When he hugged her instead, she stifled a sigh. It didn't matter. She had made her choice.

Later, when the floor became uncomfortable, he rose, urging her to her feet. He swung her up into his arms and carried her to the bed. They sprawled there together, with her lying on top of him. She kissed the damp shoulder nearest her lips. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

He stroked a hand down her back. "What are you apologizing for?"

She licked his shoulder. "For not letting this happen before. I was a fool to hold back."

He rolled them over until he lay above her, supporting his weight on his extended arms. "You did what you needed to do at the time. I can't fault you for that."

"Since the last time we've seen each other, I..."

A small smile tugged at the corners of his sensual lips. "Gave your virginity to another man? Yes, I noticed, but I've been with other women since then so I can hardly complain, can I? Do I wish I'd been that lucky guy? Sure, but even without your virginity, you were worth the wait. And hell, sweet lips, I just don't see how what just happened could have been any better."

She reached up and tugged at his shoulders. He lowered his weight, resting his hips and chest against hers. She held him close. "You are such a kind, sweet, handsome, wonderful man, Sam."

He brushed his lips against her neck. "You know that's not what a man wants to hear after lovemaking."

"Oh. In that case, let me add that you're a great lover too."

He nibbled at her neck. "That's better, sweet lips."

She sighed. "I wish I'd made a better choice."

"Don't second guess yourself, Lee. The past is just that. We have the here and now."

"I want more," she whispered, her voice trembling.

He sighed. "I wish we had time for more, but we don't."

She ran her hands down his back to his buns. "But we'll make the most of what we have now."

"That's all we can do, sweet lips."

"It's not all. We could make love. Want to?"

He hardened against her thigh. Sighing in anticipation, she struggled to part her legs. He lifted his hips slightly. She cupped his cock and pressed it against her slit. She lifted her hips, he pushed his down, and he slid inside her.

"Oh!" Her hips jerked off the bed.

"Damn, you feel so good, sweet lips."

"Kiss me."

His lips settled over hers. She gripped his hips and they made love several times. Each time he slid inside her was sweeter than the last time. Just as she prepared to curl her body against his and sleep, he rolled away.

She clutched at his hand. "Sam? Where are you going?"

He leaned over and kissed her mouth. "To take Danny for a last walk for the night."

She reached out a hand to touch his butt as he moved across the bedroom to pick up his clothes. She sat up and turned on the bedside lamp. He turned to look at her.

She sucked in her breath. Lord, there were few things as delicious as a naked, well-built and well-hung black male in his prime. Even flaccid, his cock left her wet and needy.

She licked her lips and touched herself. "Just looking at you makes me so hot. Do you know how beautiful you are?"

He smiled. "Not half as beautiful as you are, Lee. You take my breath away."

She gave him a wicked grin. "I'd like to take your cum away too."

He sucked in a breath. "Maybe Danny can walk himself."

She laughed. Feeling wanton and happy, she lay back against the bed, deliberately parting her legs, exposing her pussy. "I don't think so. But hurry back because here's what will be waiting for you, baby."

He pulled on his briefs and trousers. He crossed the room to caress her breasts. "Haven't you had enough yet?"

"No. Having tasted love with you, I don't think I'll ever get enough."

"Right answer." He leaned over and kissed her cheek and brushed a hand against her pussy. "Keep the bed warm and this sweet pussy wet for me."

"Hmmm. I'll think about it."

He nipped at her breast. When she rolled onto her stomach, he slapped her ass. "I'll be back."

She smiled. "I'll be here." She settled against the damp bedding and drifted to sleep, loving the smell of their lovemaking that filled her nostrils.

When he returned they shared a quick, hard fuck before falling asleep.

In the morning, she woke to find a piece of paper on her nightstand. Recalling the note Trey had left her, her heart raced. The hand that reached for the note shook.

Morning, sweet lips.

Danny and I are sharing a morning walk. Breakfast is in the kitchen. When I return you're going to need your strength, so eat hearty. See you soon.

Sam

Filled with relief, she sank back against the bed smiling. Then, feeling hungry, she rose, and went to the kitchen. She loaded up a plate, warmed it in the microwave, poured a cup of coffee, and went back to bed.

As she ate the home fries, scrambled eggs, and sausage, she smiled, recalling the long night of love with Sam. She didn't allow herself to think about their impending separation. She'd deal with that when he left.

After breakfast she showered and changed the bedding. The phone rang as she finished.

She sat on the side of the bed and answered it. "Hello."

"If you're not sitting down, sit down, Lee."

"What's up, Nae? You sound happy so it must be good news."

"It's great news!"

"Tell me."

"I didn't get a chance to tell you before you left the office that dinner with Mark Jackson from Mathis Builders was changed to last night."

Carlee pressed a hand against her chest. "It went well?"

"It went off the scale, Lee! He wined and dined me, looked at our portfolios, and then offered us a contract to design four models for a new development in Delaware County!"

"Yes!" She exploded to her feet, pumping her left fist in the air. "I knew we could do it!"

"We're on our way, Lee!"

"Oh, God! I'm so excited! Where are you? Home? I just got dressed. I'll be there in half an hour and we'll brainstorm."

"Where's tall, dark, and handsome?"

"He took Danny for a walk."

"He's spending the weekend?"

"Yes, but --"

"Had a good time last night?"

Her face burned. "Yes, but --"

"Then you keep your hiney right there and enjoy yourself. I'll get some prelims done and we'll go over them on Tuesday when you come into the office."

"Tuesday? No. I'm coming in today. I'll leave Sam a note."

"You'll do no such thing. I can handle this."

"I know that, but..."

"But nothing. You handle your heart. I'll hold down the fort."

"I spend the weekend with Sam while you spend it working?"

"Yes. One day you can return the favor. OK?"

"If you're sure..."

"I'm very sure. Besides, I don't intend to spend the entire weekend working. Since my Friday is now free, I'll probably pamper myself to get ready for my date with Mick tomorrow night. Give Sam a big juicy kiss and pinch that tight butt of his for me."

Carlee laughed. "I will if you'll do the same with Mick."

"I'm hoping to do more than pinch his ass. I plan to give him as much nookie as he wants."

"Well, have a good time."

"You too."

Sam arrived ten minutes later with flowers and candy. She greeted him and Danny with a kiss and hug. "Hi."

He brushed his unshaven cheek against hers. "Hi, yourself." He took off Danny's leash and harness before giving her his attention. "Any plans for today?"

"Just to spend it with you."

"You don't have to work?"

"I took the day off."

He caressed her cheek. "Great. What would you like to do?"

"Can we just sit, cuddle, and talk? We have a lot to catch up on and not much time to do it."

"Sounds great. Let me shave."

She stroked a hand down his cheek. "Don't. I like you like this."

He wrapped his arms around her waist and dropped a kiss on her nose. "You are so damn sexy and uninhibited."

She smiled up at him. "I plan to show you just how uninhibited I can be over the next few days."

"Sounds like a plan, baby."

"Yeah. Doesn't it? I have a new digital camera I'm dying to try out. How about being my guinea pig?"

"Sure, if you'll allow me to take some of you with me when I go."

She liked the idea of his wanting her picture. "Deal."

* * *

Mick woke to feel a pair of warm lips on his. He opened his eyes. Erinae, deliciously naked and enticingly voluptuous, sprawled on top of him. He smiled, stroking his palm down her back to her round ass. "Hey."

"Hey, yourself." She nibbled at his lips, slowly rubbing her pussy against his body. His cock hardened. "You know the best way to start a Sunday morning?"

He cupped his palms over her warm, firm ass, eager to repeat the passion of the night before. "With a hot fuck?"

"Hmmm. You interested, handsome?"

He squeezed her butt, grinding his hips against hers. "Oh, yeah, baby."

He lay in bed, watching as she opened a drawer beside her bed and tossed several condoms on the top. She opened one and rolled it over his cock. His heart raced as she straddled his hips and placed his cock against her entrance.

She glanced down before looking up at him, her eyes gleaming with desire. "You have an awfully big, sweet monster cock."

His lips twitched. "For a white guy?"

She laughed. "For a guy of any color. Whoever said white guys had small dicks never met you. This is one big, bad boy."

He jerked at her hips. "Are you going to talk or are you going to give me some pussy?"

"Oooh, I am definitely going to give you some pussy, handsome." She moved forward, easing his cock between the lips of her slit and deep into her tight, hot body.

He groaned. "Damn, you feel good."

"Well, you know what they say."

"What?"

She slowly eased up and down his length. "The darker the skin, the tighter and sweeter the pussy. And you know this is some good pussy."

"The best I've had in ages."

She smiled and leaned down to press a hard kiss against his lips. "Just for that, you get to fuck me."

He rolled over until he lay on top of her, between her legs. Tilting her hips, he kissed her, thrusting hard and fast into her slick warmth as he fucked her.

She moaned, wrapped her legs around him and bucked her hips against his. A wave of lust rolled over him and he fought to hold onto his control. Afraid he would come before he'd satisfied her, he pulled his lips away from hers and sucked the side of her neck.

"Oooh!" She shuddered and exploded.

The convulsions of her pussy destroyed the last of his control and he came, thrusting hard and deep, until the last jet of seed shot from his cock.

He buried his face against her neck. "Hell, that was good."

She stroked her hands down his back. "Yes, it was. You want to do it again?"

"Damn right!"

An hour later, he slipped out of bed and went into the bathroom to shower. When he returned to the bedroom, he pulled on a pair of briefs and pajama bottoms. He walked over to the bed where Erinae lay sleeping and stood staring down at her. She lay on her stomach, her legs parted slightly, her cheek pressed against the pillow.

She was pretty with her dark, sexy eyes and smooth, dark, lovely skin. Much of the sexual frustration he'd experienced since his divorce had dissolved under the sweet heat of her uninhibited response to him.

She was funny, disarmingly honest, sexy as hell, and great in bed. A woman with all she had to offer usually wanted a commitment. He raked a hand through his hair. A new tension knotted his shoulders. The sex with her blew him away on a physical level, but left him unmoved emotionally. Sleeping with her was probably not one of the smartest things he'd ever done.

She rolled over suddenly and opened her eyes. She smiled and extended a hand.
“Hey.”

He took her hand and sat on the side of the bed. “Hey.”

She studied his face. “What’s wrong?”

He kissed the back of her hand. “Nothing.”

She sighed, keeping her gaze locked on his. “You look worried. Don’t. There’s no need.”

“What do you mean?”

She sat up, resting her back against the bed frame, making no effort to cover her breasts or her pussy. “We’re both adults, Mick.”

“And?”

“And let me ease your fears. Sex with you was great, but it was just sex.”

“Erinae --”

She shook her head. “Let me finish. I’m not about to fall in love with you just because you know how to use that big cock of yours.”

“What?”

She leaned forward and stared into his eyes. “I don’t expect you to fall in love with me either, Mick. All I want from you is sex.” She took one of his hands and placed it between her legs. “I want your big cock, not your heart. OK?”

A wave of relief washed over him. Still smarting from his unwanted divorce, he wasn’t mentally ready to get serious with anyone yet. “You mean that? I wouldn’t want to do anything to hurt you.”

“Let me be brutally honest, Mick.”

“OK.”

“I do want to get married again and you are a great lay. But when I get serious, he’s going to hopefully be tall, handsome, and very dark.”

“Meaning what?”

“Meaning I’m going to marry a black man. So if you can deal with a brief, casual sexual relationship, we’re good to go.”

While annoyed that she found him good enough to fuck, but not good enough to marry, he was nonetheless relieved. "Well, damn, Erinae, you're nothing if not honest."

"The only way anything can work between us is if we're honest with each other."

"So you're serious? You're really not looking for a relationship?"

"I nearly always mean what I say." She rubbed his hand against her pussy. "I'll admit that I like you -- a lot, but all I want is your cock and an occasional dinner out. Can you handle that?"

He stroked his fingers along her pussy. "Oh, yeah."

"So tell me, handsome, are you interested in being my booty call?"

He eased her onto her back and slid on top of her. "What do you think?" he demanded.

"I think some handsome hunk had better bare his dick," she whispered. "Your booty is waiting."

Chapter Three

Half awake, Trey tossed on his bed. It was happening again and he couldn't stop it...

Trey and Carlee walked together in the moonlight, hand in hand, miles from the house. Danton walked behind them, his reins tossed over his back.

The night was still. The stars and a quarter moon provided the only illumination among the trees. The beauty of the night paled in comparison to that of the slender, shy girl with the warm brown eyes and small breasts who walked at his side.

Lately, every time they were alone, he longed to take her in his arms and kiss her until they were both breathless. Then he wanted to ease her down to the ground, push up her dress, and press his aching cock between her legs and into her pussy. Since he had seen her naked at the river, he couldn't stop thinking about sliding between her legs. It was the last thing he thought about at night and the first thing in the morning.

Burning with the need to at least kiss her, he turned, putting a hand on her arm. She stopped walking and looked up at him. "Time to go back already?"

"No." He wet his lips. Did he dare give in to his desire? Would he scare her if he did? He knew, like him, she'd never been with anyone. But he knew from his father what happened between a male and female who were attracted to each other. Did she want him to touch or kiss her? "Carlee?"

"Yes?"

He closed his other hand around her arm, drawing her close to him. Her eyes widened and her lips parted. They looked soft, full, and in need of being kissed. He bent his head, brushing his mouth against hers.

If she protested, he would stop. She didn't protest. Leaning against him, she parted her lips, kissing him back. His heart raced and his cock stirred. He put his arms around her and kissed her again, grinding his lower body against hers.

She shuddered and stiffened against him. "Trey! I can feel your..." She gasped and jerked away from him. She closed a fist over the bottom of her dress. "Take me back before you try to..."

The blood rushed up the back of his neck. "I'm not going to do anything you don't want me to."

"You've already done as much as I want you to. Take me back before you do more."

He shifted his gaze away from the accusing look in her dark eyes, hurt and angry that she didn't trust him. "It was just a kiss. I wasn't going to do anything else."

"You were, Trey! I felt your thing." She pointed a finger at his pants. "Look at it. It's all stretched out. Take me back, Trey. Please."

He heard the panic in her voice. "I swear I wasn't going to hurt you. You know I would never hurt you. Don't you?"

"I know what happens when a boy's thing starts getting long when he's with a girl. You want to put it in me. Mama said no matter what you say, I mustn't let you."

"She thinks I'd hurt you?"

"She said if I let you, bad things would happen."

"Do you want to let me?"

She bit her lip and dropped her head. "Take me back, Trey."

He turned and mounted Danton. He leaned down and extended his hand. "Come on. We'll go back and you can tell your mama I didn't touch you."

She stood gazing up at him. "Don't be mad, Trey. It's not that I don't want to, but Mama says I mustn't let you put it in me."

He grasped her hand and swung her up onto Danton's back in front of him. She turned to look at him and he lost his head. He leaned forward and kissed her, nibbling her lips. He balled his hands into fists to keep from cupping them over her breasts.

She drew back, pushing against his shoulders. "If you don't stop, I'll have to walk back, Trey."

"I won't hurt you!"

"Then stop kissing me! It makes me feel very strange. I feel hot and cold. Please, stop, Trey."

He touched her cheek. "Don't be afraid of me. I won't hurt you. I swear it!"

"I'm not afraid of you. I'm afraid of how you make me feel and what you make me want to do."

Why would it be so bad for him to coerce or cajole her into doing something they both wanted? He looked into her eyes and saw his answer there. It would betray the trust between them.

He swallowed hard and wheeled Danton around. They rode back to the house in silence. At the small shack where she lived with her mother, she slipped off Danton's back. He dismounted also. When she turned to look up at him, he closed his hands over her arms and kissed her again.

She made a small sound, her soft, sweet lips moving against his. He slid his arms around her. "Come back with me," he whispered.

"No!" She pushed at his shoulders. When he reluctantly released her, she ran from him. He stood staring after her, resisting the urge to run her down, toss her onto Danton's back, and ride off into the woods where he'd take her.

He shook his head. No matter how much he ached, he would never hurt her. He heard a soft sound and swung around, looking up at the house. His mother stood at her open bedroom window with a hand pressed against her lips.

He turned and took Danton's reins. After settling Danton in his stall, he made his way to the house. His mother waited in the downstairs hall. "What have you been doing, Trey Brandauer?"

"I couldn't sleep so I went for a ride."

"With Betsy's girl?"

He hated how Mother insisted on calling her "Betsy's girl" as if she had no name. "Her name is Carlee, Mother."

"I know what her name is," she hissed. "And I know what I saw."

He sighed. "I kissed her. That's all. Now I'm tired. I'm going to bed." He kissed her cheek and started up the wide staircase.

"If your father learns what you've been doing with her --"

He stopped and hurried back down the stairs to stare at her, his heart racing. "There's nothing to tell him, Mother! I kissed her, but --"

"What did you do when you two were alone?"

"Nothing! You have to believe me."

She searched his gaze and after what felt like forever, she nodded. "I do believe you."

He closed his eyes.

"But what's going to happen the next time you're alone with her?"

He opened his eyes. "Nothing! I promise. I won't touch her."

"You are of an age when a boy is ready to become a man. Betsy's girl has the body and wiles of a woman, as her kind so often does."

As far as he knew his father had never touched any of the slaves on the plantation and yet his mother always behaved as if every female slave was a rival for his father's affection. "She's not like that, Mother."

She shook her head, her eyes filled with hate. "They're all like that, Trey. No matter how sweet or innocent they pretend to be! That girl is just waiting for a chance to lead you astray. I will not sit back and allow that to happen. I will not have mulattos in this family!"

The hate in her voice and eyes shook him. "I give you my word. I will not touch her, Mother. I swear it! Please. You have to promise me you won't tell Father what you saw."

"Trey --"

"Please, Mother. I don't know what he'll do if you tell him. Please promise me you won't tell him."

She tightened her lips. "You promise me you'll stay away from that girl and I will not tell him."

"What do you mean, stay away from her?"

"I mean no more midnight rides, no more long walks, no more anything. You stay completely away from her."

"For how long?"

"Forever!"

"Forever? Mother!"

"You promise me that and I will not tell your father."

"How can I stay away from her forever? We live --"

"I am not going to engage you in an argument, Trey. Will you do it?"

"I... yes."

He had kept his promise. But two weeks later he woke to hear Carlee's cries. "Trey! Trey, help me! Please!"

* * *

"Trey, help me! Please!"

As the memories rushed at him, Trey cried out in anguish. Drenched in sweat and filled with fear and grief, he sat up, looking wildly around his bedroom. "Carlee! Honey, I'm coming!" He jumped out of bed and ran to the window. He looked out not onto a road leading away from the plantation house, but onto a dark city vista.

He closed his eyes, leaning his forehead against the windowpane, shaking with grief. His knees buckled and he sank down to the floor, gasping. "Carlee. Carlee, I remember."

A sudden, overpowering tiredness descended on him. He closed his eyes. As he drifted off into a deep sleep, he felt a warm, compelling voice in his head. *Trey Brandauer, the time has come for you to resume your burden. Come to me.*

When he woke several hours later, his memory had dulled again. He was left with an ache that haunted him and a certainty that he needed to make an appointment to see Dr. Margolis Cheyenne.

* * *

Carlee had promised herself she wouldn't cry. Standing at the front door with Sam Monday night, a lump tightened her throat. She blinked hard to keep her tears at bay. "Can't you stay a few more days?"

He touched her cheek. "I wish I could, but you know my sister Phyllis is my only close relative. She's very distressed that I'm heading out to the Middle East. I promised I'd spend the next four days with her and her family. She has all kinds of plans for us. As much as I'd love to stay here with you, I can't disappoint her now."

She nodded. "I know." She closed her eyes and rested her forehead against his chest. "I just wish..."

He hugged her. "We had five wonderful days together. God willing, who knows what the future might hold for us?"

"I'll wait."

He lifted her face, pressing a finger against her lips. "No. I don't want you to wait. A lot can happen in two years. If we both feel the same way when I return, we can talk about a more permanent relationship then. While I'm gone, I want you to live, Lee."

"Is that what you're going to do?"

"Not next week or even next month." He stroked her cheek. "I know how hard it is to get to a point where being separated from you doesn't ache like crazy. Eventually I'll feel the need for female companionship -- just as you'll want male companionship. We both need to be free to do what we need to do. Just try not to fall in love on me. OK?"

She sighed. "OK. Will you at least call me sometime?"

"I'll call you when I get there so you'll know I arrived safely, but after that, we both need to let go -- at least while we're separated. If what we feel is real, it can stand a two-year absence. OK?"

She nodded. "OK."

"But if you find you're pregnant, that will change everything. You call me and I'll break my contract, take the penalty, and come home."

She shook her head. "That won't be necessary. I can --"

"Yes, it would be necessary. I have no intentions of allowing you to be a single mother. I want your promise, Lee."

Although she nodded, she was determined not to stand in the way of his achieving his goals. If she got pregnant, she could go it alone until he returned.

He sighed. "Damn, Lee. I love you."

Her heart raced and tears filled her eyes. "I love you too. I wish I could come with you. If only Erinae --"

"No. You think I'd drag you away just as things are taking off for you and Erinae? After all your hard work is finally paying off? I'll be back in two years. If you can, keep the flame burning for me until then."

She nodded, her throat too tight to speak.

He pressed a quick kiss against her lips, patted Danny's head, and let himself out.

She stood by the door until the sound of his car was no longer audible. Then she went to her bedroom, fell across the bed, and let the tears filling her eyes spill down her cheeks. Intermingled with her sadness at losing Sam was the lingering pain of losing Trey for the final time. Without Sam or Trey, the future looked bleak.

She rolled onto her back and touched her stomach. God willing she would have Sam's baby. Going it alone as a single mom for over a year would help keep her mind off the two lost loves of her life. She sat up and lifted a small picture from her nightstand. She had used her new digital camera to take several photos. This one

showed a handsome, smiling Sam kneeling next to Danny along the path behind the parking lot.

She lay back, hugging the picture against her chest. "I miss you already," she whispered.

* * *

"I've heard a lot about you."

Trey considered the woman seated on the other side of the large desk. She had short dark hair, smooth brown skin, and surprising gray eyes. They had never met, yet he had known her the moment he walked into her office. "From whom?"

"Carlee. You're her Trey."

He stiffened. For the appointment, he had given his middle name and his mother's maiden name. "You know who I am."

She inclined her head.

"How do you know?"

"As I said, I've heard a lot about you from Carlee."

"What did she say?"

She sat back in her chair, her compelling gray eyes locking with his. "Let's talk about you. What brought you here?"

"Why do I get the feeling you already know? We've met before."

"What leads you to that conclusion?"

"I don't know. I just know we've met."

"What have you come to discuss?"

He sighed in annoyance. Why was she making this so hard for him? "I think maybe Carlee was right." He raked a hand through his hair. "I had this dream. It wasn't really a dream. It was more like a memory..." He paused, waiting for her to prod him. She remained silent and he finally went on. "Of a past life."

"Why do you find it so difficult to consider a prior life?"

"If I'd lived before, wouldn't I have remembered just as Carlee did?"

"What do you think might explain your lack of memory?"

"Well, the memory I had... actually now that I look back, I've had several that I thought were nightmares. I always woke up feeling scared and angry and sad because I hadn't been able to keep my word to her. I tried, but I never found her. I didn't rescue her when she needed me."

"And how did you deal with that?"

"I was miserable and unhappy."

"But life went on for you?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"Did you think about what kind of life she must be living without you?"

A wave of anguish washed over him. "After a while I couldn't think about what she must be going through. It was too painful."

"So how did you handle it?"

"Oh, God!" He closed his eyes briefly. "I was going crazy thinking about her possibly being abused and mistreated and I couldn't handle it."

"So you did what you needed to do to keep your sanity."

"I forgot. Oh, God! I conveniently forgot and she remembered and suffered for it. I took the easy way out. I --"

She shook her head. "It is not cowardly to do what is necessary to preserve one's sanity. You did what you needed for your mental and spiritual well-being. Do you think Carlee would begrudge you that peace of mind?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you ask her?"

He sighed. "Has she waited for me?"

"This session is about you. If you want to know something of what Carlee has done, why not ask her?"

"You know I haven't been with anyone since we met again."

"That's news you should, if you choose to, share with Carlee."

He looked into the dark gray, enigmatic eyes. "Who are you? We've met before."

"Really? When?"

"A very long time ago. You came to me in the middle of the night and helped me forget. How can you still be alive?"

"If you now believe that you and Carlee have lived before, why close your mind to the possibility that others might have lived before as well?"

"Have you?"

"Who or what I may or may not be is not important. You are now in full possession of that which was taken from you so long ago without your full permission or consent. For that, I offer a humble apology."

He suspected that was as close as she was going to come to admitting that like him and Carlee, she had lived before. Back on the plantation, she had wiped the memory of Carlee from his mind. He dismissed a fleeting anger. If he had found Carlee when they were both teenagers, he would have been in no position to rescue or protect her. Both he and Carlee would have been miserable and without hope. This woman, whoever she was, had done him a kindness. "Thank you."

"For?"

"Helping me."

She sighed. "That was the original intent, but it might have done more harm than good."

"No." He shook his head. "It was the right thing for me. I'm sorry that Carlee remembered and suffered, but that's something I hope to make up to her soon. Thank you."

"I didn't do anything. I asked questions and you did the work. You were ready to resume your burden."

He studied her. "You came to me in my dreams and basically said the same thing. You drew me here."

"Did I?"

"Yes. Is this how you helped Carlee?"

She smiled. "Contrary to what some may think, I'm not a quack. I ask probing, guiding questions that require thoughtful, truthful answers. Nothing more. Do I need to ask you any more questions?"

"No, but you can answer one very important one for me."

"If I can."

He suspected she knew what he wanted to know. "Are we going to be all right together?"

"I cannot foretell the future."

"Yet you knew I wouldn't be able to find her for a very long time."

"What one might have suspected and known for a certainty are not necessarily the same thing."

He shook his head. "Do you ever just answer a simple question?"

"Is there such a thing as a simple question?"

He laughed. "I suspect that even if there were, you wouldn't answer it."

"You might be right. Is there anything else?"

"Not at the moment."

She rose. "Then allow me to offer you my best wishes as I see you to the door."

He rose and extended his hand. "Thank you, Dr. Cheyenne."

She smiled, inclining her head slightly. "Be safe, well, and happy, Trey Brandauer."

"Will we meet again?"

"Only if you feel overburdened. If you do, I will be available at any time in the future."

"Thank you."

He left her office, filled with hope. In his car, he punched out the number to Carlee's office. Minutes later, her soft voice sounded in his ear. His heart thumped. "Hi, honey."

"Oh, my God. Trey?"

"Yes. How are you, honey?"

"I'm fine. Oh, God! I didn't expect to hear from you again."

He frowned. "Why not?"

"Why not? It's been... do you know how long it's been since you just walked out?"

"You said you didn't want to hear from me again."

"Then why are you calling now, Trey?"

He sighed. "I had to. I was hoping you'd be glad to hear from me."

"I guess I am. How are you?"

"I'm better than I was."

"Were you sick?"

"Not physically."

"Then how are you better than you were?"

"It wasn't me, but things are looking up now."

"I'm glad they are, but I didn't expect to hear from you again."

"You've already said that."

"It's been two months since we saw each other."

"Two months and four days."

"So what can I do for you, Trey?"

Her voice lacked the warmth and welcome he'd come to expect from her. Had he blown it with her? Mick had been right. He should have at least called her and told her what was going on with his mother and sister. "I need to see you. Can we have dinner tonight?"

Silence greeted the question. Oh, hell. He could imagine her shaking her head.

"Things have changed for me since we last saw each other."

Oh, damn, he didn't like the sound of that. "What does that mean?"

"It means you left without waking me and then you didn't call."

"I should have."

"But you didn't and I moved on."

He pressed his forehead against his steering wheel briefly before staring out the windshield into the dim parking garage. "You mean you're seeing another man." He paused, aware of the clear accusation in his voice. That wouldn't help. "Is it that guy you mentioned?"

"You clearly weren't interested and he was."

He swallowed a painful lump. "Is it serious with him?"

"It would have been."

He gripped the steering wheel. "Except?"

"He left for the Middle East for two years and we -- he decided he didn't want me to wait for him."

Yes! He pumped his fist in the air. "Are you all right with that?" He frowned. "You said he decided. Did you want to wait for him?"

"It doesn't matter. He's gone. I'll deal with that."

Damn. "Did you want him to stay?"

"Yes."

He swallowed hard. "I see."

"Listen, Trey, it's been nice talking to you, but I have a meeting in fifteen minutes and --"

"Dinner tonight?"

"I don't think that would be --"

"I have to see you, Carlee."

"Things have changed, Trey."

"The only thing that's changed is the fact that he's gone and I'm not. I can deal with whatever's happened in the last two months."

"Are you sure?"

Damn, things were sounding worse every second. "I'm going to have you, Carlee, so whatever's happened, I'll just have to learn to accept it."

"What if I don't want to deal with you?"

"I'll believe that when you tell me that to my face. You do that and..."

"And what?"

"And I'll know I really have to work hard to win you back."

"Trey --"

"I'll pick you up at six." He broke the connection before she could respond. He started his car and drove out of the parking lot. Oh, hell. He'd made a mess of things with Carlee and would have to rebuild his bridges quickly. This time, he knew what was at stake for them both. It wouldn't be easy, but he was determined to make things work with her.

* * *

Carlee put the phone down and sat staring at her closed office door. Her heart thudded, her mouth felt dry. She pressed a fist against her lips. How could she see Trey and risk having her heart broken again? Did she even want to see him again? Her feelings for him and Sam intermingled. Was it possible to love two men at the same time? How could she miss Sam already and yet long to see Trey again with all the old yearning? And what would she have done had Sam still been around when Trey called? Which one would she have hurt?

A rapid knock on her office door startled her. She blinked and sat up in her chair. "Come in."

Erinae looked in. "Staff meeting. Are you coming?"

"I'm not sure."

Erinae frowned and slipped inside. "What's wrong, Lee?"

"Trey just called."

Erinae crossed the room and sat in front of her desk. "And?"

"He wants to have dinner tonight."

"Great. I'm having dinner with Mick. Want to make it a foursome?"

She sighed. "I don't know what to do, Nae."

"See him. I'll call Mick and get him to call Trey and we'll do a foursome."

"I don't think..."

"Sometimes it's OK not to over think things. Let's just go with the flow and we'll see how things go. OK?"

"OK."

Erinae nodded. "Now. We have employees waiting. You coming?"

"Yes. I am."

Erinae grinned and reached over to hug her. "That's my Lee."

* * *

Forty minutes later, Carlee and Erinae returned to Carlee's office. Erinae sank down into one of the chairs in front of Carlee's desk and kicked off her heels. "So we are basically ready to roll with this new contract."

Carlee nodded. "Yes. I meant to ask you, how did Mathis Builders come to offer us the contract?"

Erinae grinned. "Don't you know?"

"No. You never said."

"Trey suggested us."

"Trey? My Trey?"

"That's the only Trey I know. He liked the portfolio you showed him."

"So he knows someone connected with Mathis Builders?"

"Lee, he owns Mathis Builders."

"Oh."

"Why oh?"

She shrugged. "I thought we'd earned a spot on the merits of our design."

"Hey! We did earn it. You don't think he's gotten where he is by making dumb business decisions, do you? The only thing your knowing him got us was our foot in the door. The portfolio did the rest. If we weren't good, we wouldn't have been offered the contract. So don't go getting an inferiority complex on me."

She nodded. "Yes. You're right. Things are looking up for us."

"Yes, they are! And not just professionally either. We'll have a great time with Mick and Trey tonight."

She shook her head. "I don't know if I should see him, Nae. He won't be happy when he learns I've slept with Sam."

"Sam is gone and you have to move on. Besides, you think Trey hasn't been getting his freak on while you've been separated?"

Trey was a passionate, skillful lover. Of course he hadn't been celibate. Since she'd been with Sam, she could hardly complain that he'd had other lovers. "I'm sure he has. That's probably why he didn't call before now. He was probably having too good a time."

"Oh, I don't know if I'd go that far. I knew the first time I saw him looking at you that he had it bad for you."

"Then why didn't he call before now?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. You can ask him when you see him. Right?"

She sighed. "He might tell me something I'd rather not know."

"If he does, you'll just have to decide how important that information is and weigh it against how you feel about him."

"You make everything sound so simple."

"Things are what they are."

"Is that how things are between you and Mick?"

She shrugged. "Things are definitely what they are between us. We both accept that. You'll have to decide if you still love Trey and if so how much." She glanced at her watch. "Look, it's nearly four o'clock. Why don't you head home and take a nice, relaxing bath to get some of the kinks out? I'll hold down the fort."

"You've been doing a lot of that recently."

"If you're keeping score, stop it. We're partners and friends. And don't you ever think that you're not pulling your weight around here. Is that clear?"

She rose and kissed Erinae's cheek. "Thanks."

Erinae squeezed her hand. "No matter what, I will always be here guarding your back, Lee."

Tears pricked her eyes. "I know."

Erinae blinked rapidly. "Get out of here before we both start bawling like babies."

She nodded. "Yeah." Half an hour later, she lay in her bath, her body immersed in warm, soothing water and oils, her eyes closed, resting her neck and head against a bath pillow. Pictures of Trey and Sam chased each other across her closed lids. She lifted a hand and touched her breasts, recalling the pleasure the touch of both males brought. The pleasure and the pain.

Sam was gone and now Trey wanted to see her. Did she dare allow herself to fall under the spell of his charm again? Had she ever gotten over him? Memories of the nights spent in Sam's arms assailed her senses. She hadn't thought of Trey on a conscious level much while she'd been with Sam. While with Sam, she had felt happy and content.

If she started seeing Trey again, what would happen when Sam returned?

With Trey she had felt anxious and hungry for their lost relationship. Like Sam, he had fully satisfied her physical needs, but left her emotions in turmoil. It didn't make sense to risk that again. Not when she had practically promised Sam she'd wait for him. Yes, he had told her not to make any promises. Furthermore, he'd made it clear he expected her to take a lover while they were separated. So why was choosing between them so difficult?

Chapter Four

Ninety minutes later, Trey stood at her door with a bouquet of lavender flowers. Her heart thudded and her throat tightened. Should she give him a cool smile? Or should she fling herself into his arms and welcome him back with all the anguish of unrequited love?

"Hi, honey."

She swallowed several times before she spoke. "Trey!"

He extended his left hand. Responding with her heart, she walked into his embrace, pressing her face against his shoulder. He held her close, brushing his lips against her forehead. "I've missed you, honey."

She drew away from him. "Why didn't you call?"

"You asked me not to."

"If that's your only answer, why did you call me?"

He touched her cheek. "Did you really doubt that I would call?"

"Not at first," she admitted. "But after a few weeks, I did. So why now?"

He looked into her eyes. "I went to see Dr. Cheyenne."

She swallowed quickly. "Why?"

He brushed the back of his hand against her lips. "I remembered -- kind of."

She clutched his hand. "How? Why?"

"I had another nightmare. I've had them over the years, but I could never remember any details when I woke. Last week, I had one that I remembered when I woke up. I dreamed about the night we were separated. I woke feeling lost and alone but with the certainty that everything would fall into place once I saw the doctor."

"And did it?"

"Yes. You were right to direct me to her. Who sent you to her?"

"No one."

"How did you meet her?"

"We were seated next to each other at the opera."

He gave her a wary look. "You like opera?"

She smiled. "Not particularly. It was my first and last time. I was drawn there. We started talking at intermission. I woke up one night from a dream knowing I had to talk to her. Once I had, everything made perfect sense. After our conversation, I knew I'd see you again. I just didn't know when."

He squeezed her hand. "I'm sorry I let you down, Carlee."

She had expected a sense of liberation and jubilation when he finally recalled what they had meant to each other. Instead she felt numb. He had remembered too late -- after she'd slept with Sam. She stepped away from him. "Where are we meeting Erinae and Mick?"

"We're not. I want to have dinner alone with you."

"I'd rather not."

"How can you say that after what we meant to each other?"

"A lot has happened since we meant anything to each other."

"I know, but those different lives don't matter."

"I meant a lot has happened since we saw each other last in this life."

"I don't care what's happened. I only care about now and in our future together."

She closed her eyes briefly, recalling all the times Sam had come inside her. Despite the birth control pills, she just had a feeling there would be consequences to their lovemaking. "I don't know that we have a future together, Trey. Our time might be past."

"The hell it is!" He closed his fingers around her arm. "It's taken me way too much time to remember. Now that I have, I'm not letting you slip through my fingers again." He released her arm. "Put the flowers in water and let's go."

"Trey --"

He stroked her cheek. "No matter what you say, you're going to be mine. We were meant to be together, Carlee. The sooner you accept that the sooner we can get started on our happy ever after. I know I let you down before, but I'm here now and I'll do my best to make it up to you."

She shook her head. "Sometimes there's no going back, Trey."

"Who's going back? I'm -- we're -- going forward. Together."

He only wanted to do that now because he'd finally remembered her and their past. That was the only reason he'd called her. That certainly hurt. She wasn't ready to be alone with him. "Trey, we're going to dinner with Erinae and Mick or not at all."

He considered her in silence for several moments. Finally, he shrugged. "Fine. We'll have dinner with them tonight. The next time we'll have dinner alone."

"Who said anything about a next time?"

"I did."

She shrugged. "After dinner --"

"We'll --"

"You're going home afterwards."

"It's a two-hour drive, Carlee."

She nodded. "Yes, but you knew that when you insisted on dinner tonight."

He shook his head, his gaze narrowed. "You're going to make this as difficult for me as possible, aren't you?"

"I'm not in love with you anymore."

"The hell you aren't!"

"You are too damn cocky!"

"Oh yeah?" He nibbled at her ear. "It's one of the things you love most about me."

She shivered, but moved away from him. "Let's go before I change my mind."

"You know you want me."

"Dream on, Trey."

He laughed and slapped her ass.

She gasped and turned to glare at him, her face burning. "Don't do that again."

"I'll do that and more, Carlee."

She swallowed, shaking her head. "I don't do the quiet-little-woman-waiting-at-home act, Trey."

"No one asked you to, but you should know that I don't do the let-the-woman-jerk-my-chain act either."

She sucked in a breath. "So where does that leave us?"

"On a collision course, where else?"

"Doesn't that worry you?"

"Why should it?"

"You seem to think you're going to win."

He leaned forward, staring into her eyes. "I always get what I want, Carlee. Always. Resist if you like. It will make your conquest that much sweeter."

"So this is about a conquest for you?"

He sighed. "That was a bad choice of words. You make me say and do things I shouldn't."

"Then you're not out to get me?"

"Hell yeah!" He slapped her ass again. "So let's go before I decide to blow dinner in favor of making love to you."

Heart thudding, she turned and walked toward the door. He followed her. The drive to the restaurant was made in near silence. Carlee was sipping a drink when Erinae and Mick arrived. Carlee looked at the two of them, laughing like old friends. She glanced at Trey. She and he had been working hard to make small talk since they arrived.

Trey smiled at her. "I know this is awkward, but it will get better, sweet."

But she wasn't so sure. During dinner, Erinae and Mick kept the conversation going while Carlee and Trey spent most of the meal staring silently at each other. Carlee readily agreed when Mick asked her to dance.

They danced in silence for several moments before he spoke. "You know there's a reason he didn't call before today."

She lifted her head. "Because he wasn't interested in seeing me?"

"No. He probably hasn't told you but the morning after we got back from vacation, he learned his family had been involved in a near-fatal auto accident. His father broke an arm, but his mother and sister were critically injured. Both were in comas for weeks."

"Oh, no! Are they all right?"

"Even when they came out of the coma, it was touch and go with them. It looks like they'll both recover, but it's going to be a long, tough road to full recovery. For the last two months, he's had that burden on his shoulders. Don't think he hasn't thought of you, because he has."

"And you know that how?"

"I know because we often talked about you."

"I know he lives two hours away and he had to be there for his family, but he could have called. I know why he didn't."

Mick's blue eyes flickered. "Do you?"

"Yes. He was so confident of his hold over me he thought I'd just be sitting and waiting for him."

"And you haven't?"

She lifted her chin. "No, I haven't."

"I see." He paused. "Still, I think you should know that he cares about you."

"He's a big boy. If there's anything he wants me to know, let him tell me himself, Mick."

"Is that your way of telling me to mind my own business?"

She laughed. "Maybe, but I do appreciate your telling me about the accident. I hope he knows what a loyal friend you are."

"He's loyal too. He also needs you."

The music stopped and he released her. They walked back to the table where Trey and Erinae sat laughing. Trey rose and held her chair out for her. His fingers brushed against her bare arm as he seated her.

His blue eyes blazed down at her. She sucked in a breath. The desire in his gaze struck a chord in her. Maybe she wasn't in love with him anymore, but she damn sure still wanted a physical relationship with him.

When he resumed his seat, he cupped a hand over hers. Their gazes met and locked. Her heart raced, recalling his sweet, addictive lovemaking. Other memories of how eagerly they had looked forward to being with each other so long ago invaded her senses. A flutter of longing for the days when she could openly admit how she felt about him assailed her.

There would be ample time when she was alone to decide what she should do about Trey. Giving herself a mental shake, she made an effort to take part in the conversation.

An hour later, they stood together outside her front door. She steeled herself to refuse him when he asked if he could spend the night with her. If there was going to be anything meaningful between them, he was going to have to prove to her he wanted something besides sex. He was going to have to work to get into her bed.

"I'm going to spend the night at Mick's place."

She blinked up at him. "You are?"

Tiny fires flickered in his gaze. "Yes. I know you were hoping I'd beg to spend the night with you just so you could tell me to take a flying leap, but you'll have to wait for another opportunity to slap me down a peg or two."

She laughed, hitting a closed fist against his shoulder. "You are too damn sure of yourself."

He took her fist in his hand, brought it to his lips, and kissed it. "What I'm sure of is that we belong together, Carlee. I know you're angry and hurt because it took me so much longer to remember on a conscious level. But on an unconscious level, I think

I've always remembered." He kissed her fist again. "Tomorrow is going to be a nice day. I'll pick you and Danny up at eleven."

"For what?"

"Mick tells me you have a number of large parks in the city where we can hike and have a picnic."

"And what if I've made other plans, Trey?"

He bent his head. "Then you'll cancel them." He spoke against her lips. "I know I have fences to mend and I'm willing to put in the work to do that, but don't think I'll allow you to jerk my chain, Carlee. I don't care what else is going on or what you have to rearrange. When I'm in town, you're going to make time to be with me. End of discussion."

He pressed a hot, hard kiss against her lips, urged her inside her open front door, and pulled the door closed.

Carlee leaned against the locked door, a slow smile spreading over her face. Despite her independence, Trey's I-take-what-I-want-and-I-want-you attitude left her breathless and tingling with anticipation.

* * *

Danny, Carlee and Trey spent hours hiking along trails in the Mill Creek section of Fairmount Park. Carlee allowed her thoughts to dwell on Trey. He was forceful, considerate, and yet enigmatic. She knew he wanted to resume a sexual relationship with her. Nevertheless, he made no effort to touch her while they were alone.

As they walked, she turned to him. "Thank you."

He glanced at her. "For what?"

"The contract to design the models for one of your upcoming projects."

"Oh." A brief smile touched his lips. "Thanks aren't necessary. I inherited Mathis Builders from my maternal grandmother a few years ago. As you know, I'm a financial analyst. I don't know anything about building. Mark Jackson does an excellent job of running the business. I did ask him to look at your portfolio, along with two others,

with the clear understanding that the final decision was his alone. If he hadn't liked what he saw, believe me, you wouldn't have been offered the contract."

"Maybe not, but you gave us the opportunity to present our work."

"So you're grateful, huh?"

She nodded. "Yes."

"How grateful?" He grinned. "Grateful enough to give me a quickie?"

She hit a clenched fist against his shoulder. "In your dreams!"

He laughed and they resumed walking in silence.

It was an uncomfortable silence for Carlee. When he took her home, he refused her offer to come into the living room. She felt awkward and yet needy. She wanted him to stay but couldn't find the words to admit it. Just under his obvious desire for her she sensed a brewing anger that kept her silent.

He bent down to rub Danny's head before looking at her, his eyes cool. "Well, good night."

"Trey --"

His swift kiss left her barely enough time to part her lips before he lifted his head and moved away from her. "I'm spending the night at Mick's place."

"Oh. Well."

"Well what?"

Don't go. Please stay. She lifted her chin. "I hope you have a safe journey there."

"Is that all you have to say to me, Carlee?"

"Yes." She compressed her lips so she wouldn't blurt out something she shouldn't.

"Liar." He stroked her cheek. "I'll call you."

"When? In about six weeks? I'm not going to sit and wait for you, Trey."

His eyes glittered. "The hell you won't!" His fingers closed in her hair. "Do not make the mistake of thinking I'll forgive another transgression on your part!"

She lifted her chin. "What transgression?"

"Your sleeping with another man."

Her face burned. "Where do you get off --"

"I'll tell you where I get off." His voice deepened into a hoarse whisper. "I know you slept with him."

She swallowed the apology trembling on her lips. "Well, if you're waiting for me to make an excuse, forget it. You left while I was asleep and you never called once in weeks! I didn't owe you anything."

"I didn't say you did, but after waiting so long, would it have killed you to wait a few lousy weeks more?"

"Maybe I would have waited if you had bothered to call!" She hit a fist against his shoulder. "I didn't sleep with him until I thought it was over between us."

"How the hell can you use that excuse? It'll never be over between us! Never! Even death hasn't been enough to separate us permanently. You should have waited for me, Carlee."

"Yeah. I'm so sure you waited for me!"

"If you think for one second I've been with anyone else while we've been apart, you are wrong."

She saw the truth of his words in the angry, hurt eyes staring down into hers. She bit her lip. "You knew how fragile our relationship was. Why didn't you call? If you had called and told me you still wanted me, I would have waited another lifetime for you, Trey!"

"So it's my fault you hopped into bed with the first man who winked at you?"

Rage and pain warred with each other. Rage won. She slapped him. "Bastard! Don't you dare talk to me that way!"

He stepped away from her, his eyes narrowing. "Don't ever do that again."

She despised women who thought they had a right to slap a man with impunity, but at least now she understood how one could be goaded into it. She swallowed the apology trembling on her lips and glared at him. "Or what? You'll hit me back?"

"No matter what the provocation, I'd never strike you."

"Then what?"

"You think it's fair to slap me? Did you enjoy it? Want to do it again maybe with a closed fist this time?"

She averted her gaze, tears of shame and regret filling her eyes. "I'm sorry, Trey. I shouldn't have hit you." She gulped back a sob.

He moved closer, putting his arms around her. She pressed her cheek against his shoulder, allowing her tears to flow freely. "It's all right," he whispered against her ear. "I shouldn't have said that. I just wanted to hurt you like I'm hurting."

She clenched a hand into a fist and pressed it against his shoulder. "I didn't mean to hurt you. There was this big, gaping wound in my heart when I thought I'd lost you again. I felt alone, afraid, and so unhappy. When he came back into my life, I needed him to love some of the ache away."

He stiffened against her. "Love?" He drew away slightly and lifted her chin so he could look down into her eyes. "Are you telling me you love him?"

She resisted the urge to lie. They could never have a serious relationship with lies between them. "He's a great guy. I think I've always been a little in love with him. When I thought you were lost to me..."

The color drained from his face. "If you're in love with him, where does that leave me, Carlee?"

"Do you believe you can love two people at the --"

"No, I do not!" He jerked away from her, pacing the length of the foyer before turning to look at her, his blue eyes icy with anger and accusation. "Don't you stand there and tell me you love us both! I don't want to hear that shit!"

She stared silently at him.

"Oh, God! Oh, God, this cannot be happening!" He raked both hands through his hair. "You cannot be in love with another man! You belong to me!"

Her legs buckled and she slid down the wall to the floor, wrapping her arms around her bent knees. "I'm sorry!"

He stared down at her, a hint of moisture in his eyes. "And that's supposed to make this all better?"

A sob escaped her closed lips. Another followed and she lost control. She closed her eyes and pressed her cheek against the top of her knees.

"Don't cry! Please don't cry! This is my fault! None of this would have happened if I had called." He knelt beside her and drew her into his arms, rocking her and kissing her hair. "Don't cry."

But she couldn't stop the tears or the pain.

He held her, whispering soft assurance while she sobbed. When the flood of tears subsided, he drew her to her feet, and wiped her cheeks dry with a handkerchief.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. But even as she said the words, she felt a stab of guilt. She had spent several lifetimes longing for Trey, but she didn't regret a moment of the time she'd spent with Sam.

He stroked a hand down her cheek. "I won't ever make the mistake of taking you for granted again."

"Then you can forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" He shrugged. "I'll have to, won't I?"

His voice lacked warmth and conviction. She sighed. She was going to have to work to regain his trust. Still his next words shocked and annoyed her. "But you should know that I won't overlook your sleeping with another man ever again."

She narrowed her gaze. "Take care of business, Trey, and it won't ever happen again. Leave me alone and unsure of you for months at a time again and you'll just have to learn to live with the consequences."

He stared at her. "If you ever sleep with another man, under any circumstances, you'd damn well better be prepared for my going on a fucking spree you'll hear about all over the damned state."

"And you expect me to believe you've been celibate for over two months?"

"Fuck you, Carlee!" He pulled the door open and stormed out, slamming it closed.

She sank back down against the wall, fresh tears filling her eyes. Now it was over between them.

* * *

Halfway into the forty-minute drive to Mick's condo, Trey regained control of his temper. He pulled over to the shoulder of the road, turned on his hazard lights, and picked up his car phone. He dialed quickly.

His chest tightened when he heard the remnants of tears in Carlee's voice when she answered. "Hello?"

"I'm sorry, honey."

"Trey! Oh, Trey!"

"No, honey, don't cry. Please. I'm a first-class idiot who tends to say things I don't mean when I'm hurt."

"I didn't mean to hurt you."

"I know that, honey." He sighed. "This whole mess is my fault. Can I come back and make it up to you?"

"I think we need some time away from each other, Trey."

"We've had far too much time apart. I'm on my way, Carlee."

"Trey --"

"We belong together. I'll be there in about twenty minutes." He broke the connection, started the car, pulled back onto the road, took the first exit and headed back to Carlee's place.

He parked the car and picked up his car phone. The phone rang several times before Mick answered, sounding very annoyed. "What?"

Trey smiled. "Busy?"

Mick groaned. "Please don't tell me you're on your way already."

"So you are busy."

"Can't you find something to do for an hour or two?"

Erinae must be with him. "Actually I'm going to spend the night with Carlee."

"Great. Have fun!"

He laughed and got out of the car. This time he removed his garment bag and shaving kit from his trunk.

Carlee opened the side door and Danny rushed out to meet him. "Hey boy, I'm glad to see you again too."

He walked down the driveway and into the door Carlee held open. He put his bag and kit on the table there and turned to look at her.

The baggy sweat suit that covered her from neck to ankle sent a clear message. He stifled a sigh. "No sex?"

She shook her head. "No."

He struggled. "OK. I've waited this long. I can wait a little longer."

Her eyes widened. "You mean you're OK with that?"

He laughed. "Of course not, but I'm not going to try to coerce you."

"Oh, Trey!" She linked her arms around his neck and pressed her cheek against his shoulder. "Thanks for understanding. Tonight I just need to be held."

Spending the night holding her in his arms made for an extremely long night. Long after she slept, curled against his side, he lay plotting strategy for winning back the portion of her heart and affection he had lost to his rival.

The next morning he woke to the smell of brewing coffee. He sat up and looked around. He was alone in the bedroom. He glanced at the bedside clock. Five-twenty a.m. He got up and headed to the shower. Twenty minutes later he emerged, wearing a pair of briefs, his hair damp.

Carlee sat up in the bed with a tray across her lap. "You've shaved and showered." She smiled. "I hope you have time for a quick bite before you leave."

He noticed she wore the baggy sweats from the night before. Getting back into bed with her when she wasn't interested in anything but a cuddle would be asking for blue balls. He smiled and walked over to the bed. He leaned down and kissed her cheek. "I thought I'd take Danny for a walk before I hit the road. I have a meeting this morning I can't miss."

"What time?"

"Nine o'clock."

"That's plenty of time to have a quick bite. I'll take Danny out after you leave." She reached over and pulled the cover back. "Trey?"

The breath caught in his throat when he saw her bare legs. She had taken off the sweatpants. He lifted his gaze to hers. Tiny lights of desire danced in her dark eyes. She wanted more than a cuddle. So did he, but if he got in bed with her now, he wouldn't be climbing out for hours. And he would not make that meeting.

He leaned down and kissed her cheek again. "I'd better not."

He saw the beginnings of hurt in her eyes before she looked away, allowing the cover to fall back in place. "Fine."

He sat on the side of the bed, stroking a finger down her cheek. "Don't misunderstand. I'd love to have breakfast with you, but I really have to go."

"Fine. Go!"

He cupped a palm against her cheek, turning her to face him. "I'll call you later today."

"Don't do me any favors, Trey."

He dropped his hand away from her face and rose. "I have a two-hour drive ahead of me. Don't give me any shit, Carlee."

Her eyes narrowed and she opened her mouth.

He bent and kissed her until they were both breathless. When he straightened, she stared up at him, a confused look in her eyes. "Trey..."

"We need to talk, honey, but for right now just know that I will not make the mistake of allowing you to be unsure of me ever again. You are the only woman for me. Is that clear enough for you?"

She nodded, pressing her trembling lips together.

"Good." He bent and kissed her again, gently this time. "I adore you."

"Oh, Trey! Why didn't you say that before?"

"Because I was an arrogant idiot who almost blew it and lost the best thing that ever happened to me again!"

"I'm yours as long as you want me."

"That'll be forever! We were meant to be together."

"Trey!" She linked her arms around his neck. When she kissed him, he tasted her tears. He drew away and sighed in relief when he saw her smile.

"Hey. Want to know a secret?"

She nodded. "I love secrets."

He cupped a palm against the back of her neck. He pressed his lips against hers. "I love you."

She jerked away from him, her lips parted, her eyes wide. "You do?"

"Yes. Why do you look so surprised?"

"Because I love you too!"

He closed his eyes, leaning his forehead against hers. "Are you sure about that?"

"Yes!" She closed her fingers in his hair. "Please don't misunderstand about Sam. I've always loved you, Trey. If you can't forgive me for Sam..."

He sighed. "There's nothing to forgive. He made you feel loved and wanted at a time when I let you down again." He opened his eyes and looked at her. "As far as I'm concerned we don't need to talk about that any more."

"You can forgive and forget it?"

"Yes. I've had other lovers, why shouldn't you have at least one other?"

"You mean that?"

"Of course I do. Just do me one favor, honey."

"What?"

He glanced over at her nightstand. "Can you move his picture? If I have to look at him smiling once more, I'll smash the picture."

She snatched the picture and clutched it against her chest, her eyes wide. "No, Trey, you will not smash this. I'll move it."

But she was clearly going to keep it. He wouldn't protest -- for now. "I'll take Danny for a quick run and then I have to leave."

Chapter Five

Forty minutes later, they parted at the door with a quick kiss. She closed the door and went back to lie across the bed, smiling up at the ceiling.

Finally. He was hers. The alarm ringing half an hour later interrupted her thoughts. She dressed, grabbed her briefcase, and left for work, taking Sam's picture with her.

She encountered Erinae in the parking lot. She blinked. "Nae? You look great today!"

Erinae grinned, linking her arm through Carlee's. "I should. I had a great night!"

"With Mick?"

Erinae arched a brow. "The man's wicked in bed. I spent the night screeching like a banshee! Talk about hot, mindless sex! The things that man can do with that big, delicious cock of his! It ought to be against the law for a man to have a cock half that lethal! I can barely walk this morning."

Heat rushed to Carlee's cheeks. "Glad you had a good night."

Erinae grinned. "I'm thinking you had a pretty good night yourself."

She smiled. "Yes. I did. Trey and I had a talk and then he held me until I fell asleep." She turned to look at Erinae. "He knows about Sam. And Nae, this morning, he told me he loved me!"

Erinae hugged her. "I knew things would work out between you two in the end."

"What about you and Mick?"

"We talked a little before the bedroom fireworks. He has issues."

"What kind?"

"The kind that leave deep scars. He lost his only child in a tragic car accident. Afterwards, his wife divorced him."

"Poor Mick!"

"Yeah. He's still broken up about it."

"His child or the divorce?"

"I know he's broken up about his daughter. I'm not sure about the divorce, although I do know she's the one who pressed for it."

"Poor Mick!"

"Don't you worry too much about him. He's handsome, kind, well-off, and he's wielding a lethal cock he knows how to use. He'll do just fine. Now. Let's go do some work."

Carlee walked into her office to find a vase of violet flowers in the middle of her desk. She dropped her briefcase on the sofa along the wall by the door and rushed across the room to pluck the card from between the flowers.

Tears filled her eyes as she read the four words on the card. *I love you. Trey.*

"Hey! They're pretty."

Erinae stood in the doorway. Carlee smiled and held up the card. "He loves me, Nae!"

"Oh, Lee, of course he does!"

She nodded. "Yes. He does. Everything is going to be fine now."

"Yes, but it was going to be fine even if things hadn't worked out with him. Right?"

"Well, yes, but it's better this way. I've spent my whole life waiting for and needing him."

"I know, honey, but try not to be too needy."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing! Just don't need him too much."

In case things don't work out after all. The unspoken words hung in the air between them. "That's not going to happen, Nae. We love each other and love can and does conquer everything."

"Yeah, I know, but let's just not tempt fate. OK?"

She laughed. "Lighten up, Nae. We're in love and nothing can change that."

Erinae kissed her cheek. "I know."

"I'm sure you do."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean with you and Mick."

Erinae shook her head. "Me and Mick? Don't get the wrong idea. You are in love with Trey. I'm in lust with Mick's big cock, but I am in absolutely no danger of falling in love with him."

"After the way you went on about how great he was in bed, I thought..."

"He is great in bed and he has a ravenous sexual appetite which I thoroughly enjoyed satisfying. I'm telling you that man loves the sistas. He did things to me that made me holler. The sex was so good it'd make you wanna disown your mama, but it was still just sex. You know, some women just like a good raunchy fuck. We don't all have to be in love to enjoy cock."

Her face burned. "I know that."

"Do you? You've had two lovers and been in love with them both. Good for you, Lee, but sometimes the rest of us love to go with the good, hot sex."

"I know."

Erinae laughed. "Imagine a woman your age so easily embarrassed. No wonder Trey is nuts about you. You are totally delicious."

She laughed. "Now you sound drunk as a skunk."

"Ain't it the truth? Now. I have to get ready for a meeting."

Later that morning as Carlee sat in her office, smiling at the flowers, her phone rang. She picked it up on the fourth ring. "Hello?"

"Hi, honey."

She smiled. "Trey! Hi!"

"How are you?"

"Very happy. How are you?"

"The same."

"How did your meeting go?"

"Fine, thanks to my partner. I found it difficult to think about anything except you. I made a mess of the meeting."

Her smile widened.

"Listen, I have another meeting at two this afternoon. After that, I'm out of here for the day. Do you have something sexy and scandalous you can wear to dinner?"

"Where?"

"Mick has a friend who owns a restaurant in the waterfront area. He says he can get last minute reservations if you're interested. We could go dancing afterwards."

"It's a two-hour drive."

"I know."

"Four hours is a lot of driving for one day. Why don't I find some place half way and meet you."

"No. I don't mind the drive."

"Do you have work tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Will you stay the night?"

"I thought you'd never ask. After my meeting, I'll stop by the hospital and then see you around six at your place? Or would you prefer to meet at the restaurant?"

"That's going to be an awfully long day. Meet me at home and I'll fix dinner. We can do the dancing and other things routine afterwards."

"Other things?"

"It's been a long time."

"A very long time."

Carlee smiled. "Unless I run into a traffic jam, I'll be home just after five-thirty. Are you a steak and potatoes kind of guy?"

"I don't care what you cook. I just want to see you."

"Just see me?"

"OK. See you and make love to you."

"Me too, but you need to eat and I need to get some work done. I'll see you later."

"OK."

* * *

After taking Danny for his last walk of the night, Carlee and Trey tumbled into bed. It was as he rose over her, his cock at her entrance, that she realized the enormity of what she'd done in making love with Sam without a condom. She pressed her hands against Trey's chest, closing her eyes. "Oh, God!"

He stiffened against her. "That doesn't sound like a good Oh, God!"

"It's not."

He sighed and slid off her. He reached over and turned on the light. "So?" He fluffed up the pillows and they sat back against them.

She shook her head. "I made what you'd probably call a mistake with Sam."

She saw him glance at the nightstand where Sam's picture had sat. "I thought we weren't going to talk about him anymore."

"We have to one more time."

"Why?"

"Because we need to use a condom."

"Why?"

"Because he and I didn't and..."

"And what? Are you telling me he passed on some kind of --"

"No! He didn't have anything to pass on."

"Then what's the problem?"

"I just thought you should know and we should use protection."

"Why didn't you use it with him?"

There was no mistaking the jealousy in his voice. "I didn't want to."

"But you do with me?"

"No! I just don't want there to be any secrets between us." She touched his shoulder. "I know what happened between me and Sam is going to be a problem for you for a while, but I thought it was..."

"Over. I know. You thought it was over." He turned to face her. He touched her cheek. "It's never going to be over between us. Never." He leaned over and kissed her. "You are mine and I don't want anything between us. If you get pregnant, all the better."

He pushed her back against the pillows and reached over to turn off the light, still kissing her. "You're mine and I love you."

She closed her eyes and wrapped her arms around him. She held him close, parting her legs. "Yes, Trey. I'm yours." She gasped as he moved against her, driving his cock balls deep with one powerful thrust.

He shuddered against her. "Oh, God, honey, it's been so long."

She slipped her legs over his thighs, lifting her hips against his. "Too long. Make love to me."

He bit her ear. "That'll have to wait for another time. Tonight, I'm going to fuck you until you're raw."

She suspected it was her mention of Sam that changed his mood from tender to raunchy. Not that it mattered. She loved sex with him. She stroked her hands down his back, rotating her hips against his. "However you want sex is fine with me, Trey. I'll always be yours."

"Damn straight!" He nibbled at her neck, held her tight, and fucked her so hard that tendrils of pain and pleasure shot through her. She came quickly. He fucked her hard twice, driving his cock deep into her pussy with a ruthless hunger before he flooded her with his seed. Then he rolled off her to lie on his side, his back to her.

She turned onto her side so they lay back to back. After a moment, she shook her head. After fucking without a condom, it was crazy to let anything come between them. She turned and scooted close to him. Throwing an arm over his body, she pressed her lips against his nape. "I love you."

He sighed and turned to pull her into his arms. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have rutted into you like that."

"It's not the first time you've used sex to..."

"Hurt you?" His arms tightened. "I know, but I promise if you forgive me, it will not happen again."

"We've been through a lot on our path back to each other, Trey. I can't think of anything that would be important enough to separate us. Can you?"

"No."

She sighed. "Then nothing matters except how we feel about each other."

"Do you believe that love covers all sins or mistakes?"

Why were they talking of sins? "Yes. Don't you?"

"No. I think some things are unforgivable."

She shivered, pressing closer in his arms. God forbid if she ever made a mistake for which he couldn't or wouldn't forgive her.

* * *

Trey kissed her awake the next morning. She linked her arms around his neck, smiling up at him. "I see someone is happy to see me."

"Very happy." He bent his arms, lowering his weight onto her body. He brushed his lips against hers. "But unfortunately I have to go after walking Danny."

"What time is it?"

"Five-thirty."

"That's time enough for a quickie."

"After last night, our next time is not going to be a quickie." He kissed her and rolled away.

She sat up, making no effort to cover her breasts. "I enjoyed last night."

He paused on his way to the bathroom. "Sure you did."

"I did." She tossed the spread covering her legs aside.

He held up a hand. "Stay in bed and cover up, please. I have an early meeting I can't afford to miss."

She sank against the pillow, pulling the cover over her breasts. "When are you coming back?"

He yawned. "Tonight after work."

"Trey, you can't!"

"Don't you want to see me?"

"You know I do, but you can't drive back here after working all day. I'll pack an overnight bag and spend the night with you."

"Then you'd have to get up two hours early in the morning and what about Danny?"

"I'll bring him with me. You don't mind?"

"His coming? No, but I do mind your driving two hours."

"Oh, you mind, huh? Well, tough. I'll be there around seven-thirty. I expect to find you rested, naked, and with dinner waiting in the oven."

"Carlee..."

"I'm not delicate, Trey. I can manage a two-hour drive easily when I know you'll be waiting at the end of it. OK?"

"You're sure?"

"I'm positive."

"Then you better go back to sleep. I'll reset your alarm."

They spent the next three weeks alternatively driving between their respective houses.

"Aren't you tired, Lee?" Erinae asked as they sat over coffee one morning.

Carlee shook her head. "The weekends I spent with Trey more than make up for all the commuting. Everything's fine." Everything would continue to be fine -- as long

as her growing suspicions about the consequences of having slept with Sam without protection proved unfounded.

"I guess so, because you look radiant, Lee."

She smiled. "I never thought I'd be so happy, Nae. I am so in love with him." She yawned and sipped her coffee. She had spent the weekend at Trey's place. Since she had to take Danny home before going to work, she'd arisen at five o'clock. "What about you? What's going on with you and Mick?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? I thought you two spent the weekend together."

"We did."

"You've been seeing each other for about two months."

"We've been fucking for that long. There's a difference and although the sex is as great as ever, there's no spark between us, Nae. We said our good-byes this weekend."

"You're not seeing him anymore?"

"Oh, don't look so upset. Lust can only carry a relationship so far and we've gone about as far as we can on lust alone."

"So it's over?"

She shrugged. "We may occasionally hop in the sack for a quickie now and again, but yes, it's over." Erinae smiled. "Don't look so sad. My heart is completely intact and so is his. And I am so pleased things are working out for you and Trey."

"Yes. I'm going to meet his parents and sister next week."

"Hey! He is serious, isn't he?"

She nodded. "Yes, he is."

"Ready to talk serious commitment?"

"I am and I think he is too. That's why he wants me to meet his family."

Erinae studied her face. "So why do I detect a hint of strain?"

She sighed. "Because I bought another pregnancy kit this morning on the way to work."

"Another one?"

Carlee nodded. "I bought one last week, but it was defective."

"Defective? How do you know that?"

"It was positive."

"And the test this morning?"

"That was defective too."

Erinae frowned. "I thought you'd be happy to be pregnant, Lee."

"I am, but this is a bad time for it and that's not all."

Erinae stared at her. "Oh, my God, Lee! You don't mean... how late are you?"

"About five weeks."

"Five weeks? So that would mean... What are you going to do?"

She shook her head. "The only thing I can do. I'm going to tell Trey the truth."

"Look, I know you don't like lying, but do you really think you should? I mean you could... not tell him. You could let him think..."

She shook her head. "No! I have to tell him the truth."

Erinae raked a hand through her hair. "I don't really think that's a good idea, Lee. Things are going so good for you two. Why risk messing up a good thing?"

"It's what I have to do."

"When are you going to tell him?"

"Tonight."

"OK. If you need to talk to me, I'll be home."

"Thanks, but I won't need that."

Erinae flashed her a brief smile. "Glad to hear it." The look in Erinae's eyes belied her words.

After Erinae left, Carlee went back to work. She was working on a storyboard when her phone buzzed later that morning. She picked it up. "Yes?"

"There's a Phyllis Holland to see you," Martha, the receptionist, answered.

"I don't know any Phyllis Holland. Does she have an appointment? I'm in the middle of something."

Martha lowered her voice. "She's been crying and she says it's important, Carlee. She's Mr. Creekland's sister."

Sam's sister? Carlee's heart raced. "Send her in."

Moments later, a tall, attractive woman with short, natural hair and beautiful ebony skin walked into her office. Carlee looked at her face and a lump of fear tightened her throat. She rose. "I'm Carlee Vanleer. You're Sam's sister?"

The woman nodded, compressing her lips.

"Please sit down."

"Thank you, but I can't stay long. I'm in the middle of making arrangements."

"Arrangements?" Carlee tried to swallow a lump of dread.

"Yes. I knew he would want you to know as soon as possible and I didn't want to do it over the phone. When we talked last week, he spoke of you, as he often did."

Carlee took a deep breath, clenching her hand into a fist at her side. "What's happened? Please don't tell me Sam's..."

The woman nodded, tears spilling down her cheeks. "He's dead. Sam is dead!"

"No!" Carlee's legs buckled. She collapsed into her chair, her eyes filling with tears. She wrapped her arms around her body, afraid the ache in her chest would consume her. "No, no, no! God, please no!"

Erinae appeared in the door and rushed across the room to her. "Lee? What is it?"

She wrapped her arms around Erinae. "Nae! He's dead, Nae! He's dead!"

"Who? Who's dead?"

"Sam!"

"Oh, my God!"

Later Carlee couldn't recall anything about the rest of the day. When she became aware of her surroundings again, she lay on her bed with her face buried against Danny's side. Erinae lay on the other side of the bed, occasionally stroking her shoulder, whispering to her that everything would be all right.

When the doorbell rang, Erinae bolted to her feet. "I'll get it."

She grabbed Erinae's hand. "I don't want to see anyone."

"It's probably Trey."

Carlee looked at her bedside clock. She blinked several times to clear her vision.

"It's only three o'clock."

"I know. I called him."

She bolted up, wiping her eyes. "Why?"

"Why? Because you're a wreck and you need him at your side."

"Oh, Nae, you shouldn't have called him."

Erinae frowned. "Why not?"

How could she admit her fear that her grief for Sam would annoy Trey? "I..."

Erinae tilted her head as the bell rang again. "Shall I tell him you need to be alone?"

That would not go over well with Trey. "No. Just give me a moment to wash my face."

"You've been sobbing all afternoon. You can't wash away the evidence and you shouldn't have to try. If you can't call on the man you love when you're hurting, he's not worth having or loving."

"I know, but..."

"No buts, Lee. Either you can count on him or you can't."

She sighed and nodded.

Moments later, Trey rushed into the room and took her into his arms. "Oh, sweet, I'm so sorry!"

She clung to him, trembling. "Oh, Trey! He's dead! He was in the wrong place at the wrong time when someone blew himself up."

He kissed her forehead. "I know, sweet, I know and I am so sorry."

He urged her over to the bed and stretched out with her. "It's going to be all right. Cry if you need to."

Erinae leaned over and kissed her cheek. "I'm going to take Danny for the night. Call me if you need anything. OK?"

She lifted her head and looked up at Erinae. "OK. His favorite food is --"

"I know what your spoiled doggie likes. He and I will take a long walk and then go to bed. I'll take very good care of him."

"And I'll take care of Carlee," Trey said.

"You'd better," Erinae said.

Erinae left with Danny, and Trey stripped them both to their underwear, made her a cup of hot tea, and climbed back into bed with her. He held the cup to her lips until she drained it. Then he slid down into the bed, pulling her with him. She curled her body close to his and allowed his whispered words of love and comfort to lure her to sleep.

* * *

When he was sure Carlee was asleep, Trey slid out of bed and walked out of the bedroom. In the living room, he called Mick.

"Is she all right?"

Trey sighed. "She's asleep, but she's pretty broken up. She was in love with him."

"I thought she was in love with you, Trey."

"She is, but she believes you can love two people at the same time."

"How are you?"

"Me?" He shrugged. "I'm fine. I'm sorry she's in pain, but he's gone now and I no longer have to compete with him."

"I hope that's right."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. I just think you need to tread slowly and gently."

"You don't think I'm treating her properly?"

"That's not what I meant. I've never seen you so content."

"I'm beyond content. I'm happy, Mick."

"Listen, if you need me to do anything, call me. And give Carlee a hug for me."

"OK."

After his conversation with Mick, Trey went to the kitchen. He checked the cabinets and refrigerator and decided to cook spaghetti and make garlic bread. As he sliced the bread, his hand slipped, and the knife bit lightly into his left forefinger.

"Damn!" He dropped the knife and put his finger against his lips. With his other hand he searched the utility drawer, which seemed to contain everything but bandages. The bandages were in the bathroom medicine cabinet. About to return to the kitchen, he realized he'd missed the trashcan. He bent down to retrieve the wrapper. When he tossed it into the can, it landed on top of a small box. He blinked and bent to lift the box, sucking in a breath. The box had contained a home pregnancy test.

He dropped the box back in the trash and walked into the bedroom where Carlee still slept. He sat on the side of the bed, staring down at her. They had been back together for just over three weeks and she thought she was pregnant already? He lifted the light cover. She lay on her side. Her bent knees blocked his view of her stomach.

Clearly she had reason to believe she was pregnant. A rush of pleasure suffused him. A smile tugged at his lips. He walked back to the living room and called Mick. "Mick! I think I'm going to be a father!"

There was a short, tense pause before Mick spoke. "Really? Congratulations!"

His smile vanished and he raked a hand through his hair. "I'm sorry."

"About what?"

"This must bring back memories of Kelly."

The silence that followed was longer. "I don't think a parent ever gets over the loss of a child, but that doesn't mean I can't be happy for you. I am happy for you. So! Give me details."

He shook his head. "When it comes to Carlee, I'm an idiot. I can't do anything right. I make goofy mistakes and I can't think straight."

"You say that to say what?"

"That I don't know she is pregnant. I saw a pregnancy test kit in the bathroom trash and jumped to conclusions."

"But you like the idea?"

"Of her having my baby? Yes. I can't tell you how much I love her. I want to share everything with her. I know you don't believe in past lives, but she and I really did have one. I can't believe I forgot her and let her down. That won't ever happen again."

"So what's your plan if she is pregnant?"

"We have to get married."

"Why?"

"Because I love her and no kid of mine is going to be born without my last name. We'll have to find a house that's midway between both our businesses and look at schools, start a college fund, buy furniture --"

Mick laughed. "You have it all planned already?"

"Why not? I always knew I'd have a few kids one day. I just didn't think it would be so soon."

"Tell you what. You go find out if she's really pregnant and we'll celebrate then."

He laughed, raking a hand through his hair. "Yeah, I guess that is the first step."

"Yes, but you might want to wait until after the funeral."

"I want to know now."

"But now is probably not a good time for her. Give her some time to grieve and let her tell you in her own time."

He sighed. "I hate it when you make sense."

Mick laughed. "You're welcome."

Chapter Six

The next week passed slowly for Trey. He spent his days working out of the conference room at Carlee and Erinae's office. He spent his nights rocking Carlee to sleep. Although she didn't cry again after the first night, she was clearly not in the mood for making love or even talking. Although he longed to ask her about the pregnancy test, he decided to take Mick's advice and allow her to tell him about it in her own time.

The following week, he and Erinae attended Creekland's memorial service with Carlee. She squeezed his hand during the short service, but didn't cry. When he looked in her eyes, her level of grief and sadness dismayed him. There was also a hint of fear in her gaze. What did she fear?

"Do you want to talk about him?" he asked that night as they sat on her terrace.

She sighed. "There's something I need to tell you."

He took a long swig from the open beer can sitting on the table in front of him. He'd waited nearly two weeks to have her tell him she was pregnant and now he was so excited his hands shook. He sat down his beer can and clasped his hands together on the table. "Go ahead."

She compressed her lips and clenched her hands into fists. "Trey, you know I love you. Don't you?"

"Yes, and I love you."

"Did you mean it when you said nothing would ever keep us apart?"

"Yes." He shook his head impatiently. "This build up isn't necessary, Carlee. Just tell me what you want to tell me."

"We talked about the possibility of my getting pregnant when we thought we were going our separate ways and you seemed to like the idea."

He nodded. "I did -- I do." He reached across the table to clasp her hand in his. "The idea of... hell, Carlee, let's stop beating around the bush. Are you trying to tell me you're pregnant?"

She whispered her answer. "Yes."

The frightened look in her eyes dampened his desire to pump his fist in the air and shout for joy. He released her hand and sat back in his chair. "Why so glum?"

"There's a problem."

"What problem?"

She averted her gaze.

"We both want a baby, Carlee. I don't see a problem here. We're old enough to be responsible parents, we have careers, we are financially able to provide for a baby, and we're in love. What can possibly be wrong?"

She sighed, shaking her head.

"What's wrong?" He touched her hand. "Look at me. Are you sorry?"

"I want this baby."

"So do I. So what's wrong?"

She bit her lip. "I'm pregnant."

He smiled. "Yes, I know."

"How?"

"I saw the pregnancy test kit in the trash a while back."

"What you don't know is that I'm about eleven weeks pregnant."

"So? I don't care how pregnant... what? How many... Did you say eleven weeks?"

She nodded.

He released her hand and slumped against his chair. "But prior to six weeks ago, we hadn't seen each other in over two months."

"I know."

"Did you get pregnant from our time together at the lodge?" Even as he asked the question, he knew that wasn't the explanation. That would have made her several months pregnant instead of eleven weeks.

"No." She pressed a fist against her lips.

He stared at her, feeling his world slowly fall apart. "Are you..." He bolted to his feet. "You're telling me it's *his* baby?"

Tears rolled down her cheeks. She extended her hand to him. "Trey?"

He shook his head, stepping away from her. "It's his baby?"

Her hand fell back to the table. "Yes."

His chest tightened and he had to fight to force air in and out of his lungs. He raked both hands through his hair. "I thought you were on the pill!"

"I was, but it's not a hundred percent!"

"No shit! Well, where the hell does that leave me, Carlee?"

"Nothing's changed, Trey."

"What?"

"I mean we --"

He stared at her. "Nothing's changed? Are you out of your mind?"

"Trey, please. I --"

"You sit there and tell me you're pregnant by another man and then say nothing's changed? What if I told you I'd gotten some other hussy pregnant?! Would you be OK with that? Hell no!"

Her lips trembled. "Are you telling me you think I'm a hussy?"

"If the damned shoe fits --"

She shot to her feet and faced him. "It doesn't! I'm thirty-three and have only had two lovers! There's no damned way you have any right to call me names, Trey! None!"

"I haven't called you anything, but I suppose you think I have no right to be upset either?"

"No, you don't! This happened when I thought it was over between us! I had a right to see who I wanted."

"And you did that all right, didn't you? You hopped into bed with him the moment my back was turned!"

"I didn't see him until six weeks after you left."

"How the hell do I know that's true?"

"Because I tell you it is!"

"Well, maybe that's not proof enough for me, Carlee. And even if I believed you, why the hell should it matter?"

"It should matter because we love each other!"

"I don't know if you even know what love is, Carlee. I had opportunities to sleep around while we were apart. I was tempted, but I resisted. Why the hell couldn't you do the same?"

"The difference is you knew you planned to come back. I didn't know that!"

"The hell you didn't!"

She closed her eyes briefly. "Trey, we need to have a time out and talk about this again when we can both be calm."

"That won't be necessary, Carlee."

"Why not? What are you going to do?"

"What the hell do you think I'm going to do? I'm getting the hell out of here!"

She gripped his arm, staring up at him. "Trey! I know you're upset, but --"

He shook off her hand. "Upset doesn't begin to describe how I feel. I feel betrayed!"

"You have no reason to feel that way! It's not like we were together when I slept with him! I thought it was over!"

"You know what? You're right. It is over -- for good this time! If you think I can forgive this, you're wrong. I can't do this. When we were separated, I didn't go jumping into bed with ex-lovers. I waited for you!"

"There's nothing I can say that will make you see reason, is there?"

"There's nothing you can say that will excuse your cheating on me! You want to have his baby? Fine! Have it, but don't expect me to hang around and watch!"

She grabbed his arm. "Trey! Trey, please don't go! I know why you're angry and hurt, but I need you. You can't leave me like this, Trey. You can't. You promised you wouldn't leave me again!"

The desperation in her voice and the pain in her eyes stabbed at him, but he couldn't overcome the rage knotted in his gut. "I can't stay and watch you have his baby."

"What else can I do?"

He stared at her. "There are ways of handling unwanted pregnancies."

She recoiled as if he had struck her. "What? You think I'd... no! Never. And there's something you need to understand, Trey. This isn't an unwanted pregnancy! You do what you need to do for yourself, Trey, but don't delude yourself into thinking I don't want this baby more than I want or need to be with you."

He sucked in an angry breath. "Fine. I hope you and your baby will be very happy together, Carlee."

She placed her hand over her stomach, lifted her chin, and gave him a cool look. "Don't you worry about us. I think I finally get the message this time, Trey."

"What message is that?"

"Depending on you leads to broken promises and heartbreak every time!"

The pain in her voice cut into him, reminding him of all the pain she must have endured in the past because he had not been able to keep his promise to her. Some of his anger dissipated. "I pride myself on keeping my word, but this is asking too much of me, Carlee."

"Then do what you need to do for yourself, Trey. It's what you do best, isn't it?"

He swallowed hard. "I would stay if I could, but I can't! If you need help, call Mick. He'll help you out in any way he can."

"Well, hell, Trey, thanks so much! The last time I looked, Mick isn't the one who said he loved me and would never leave me. I really need you now, Trey, and if you leave anyway knowing that, it's over between us."

He wanted to embrace her and assure her that everything would be all right. But a deep wellspring of rage and pain wouldn't allow it. It hurt more than he could bear that she had found it so easy to sleep with another man so soon after they'd become lovers. Now she wanted him to accept his rival's baby? "I can't stay."

She bit her lip. "Can't or won't, Trey? I know what I'm asking isn't easy, but --"
"What you're asking is impossible. Good-bye."

Her eyes filled with tears. "Please, don't." She clutched his hand. "Please, Trey."

He pulled his hand away, shook his head, turned, and walked into the house. In the bedroom, he tossed his suitcase onto the bed and threw his clothes inside. She followed him, standing near the door, tears streaming down her face.

His stomach knotted at the sight of her tears. He sucked in a breath. When he finished packing his suitcase, he paused by her, not quite meeting her gaze. "I'm sorry you're hurt, but I'm hurting too. I can't stand by and watch you have another man's child."

"What else can I do? You want me to abort the baby? Would that make you happy? Would that make you stay?"

"No!" His earlier remarks notwithstanding, he'd never ask any woman to have an abortion.

"Good, because I wouldn't abort this baby to keep three of you!"

He bit back an angry retort. "If you find you have any financial difficulties, I'll --"

"You're the last person I'll call for anything." She lifted her chin, wiped her cheeks, and glared at him. "You want to leave? Leave! You were never worth all the grief and pain anyway. I wish to God I'd never seen you again. Leave and don't ever look back!"

"I won't!" He slammed the door behind him.

* * *

"That stupid, selfish, self-righteous bastard!"

Feeling as if she were living a nightmare, Carlee sat at her kitchen table, sipping decaf hot enough to burn her lips. Erinae, angry tears streaming down her cheeks,

paced the length of the room. After two days of sobbing herself to sleep, Carlee felt numb, but no longer able to cry. "He's just hurt, Nae. If you look at it from his perspective --"

"He's a stupid bastard from anyone's perspective!" Erinae snapped again. "Who the hell does he think he is to just walk out on you when you need him most?" Erinae stopped by the table and slammed her fist down on the surface. "I know how much you love him. How could he just walk out on you with no thought for your feelings?"

"Well, he did suggest that if I needed male help to call Mick."

"Mick wasn't the one who took your virginity, he was!"

She sighed. "He didn't take it. I gladly gave it to him."

Erinae gave an angry toss of her head. "What are you going to do, Lee?"

She put her cup down and squeezed Erinae's hand between both of hers. "I'm going to have the baby and go on with my life. I've lived without him before and I will again. Please, Nae, it'll be all right. Stop crying."

"I can't! When I think of how he hurt you, I --"

"It does hurt, but I'm a survivor. With friends like you, the baby and I will be fine, I promise. Now please stop crying."

Erinae leaned over to embrace her. "If you won't cry, I have to cry for you."

She shook her head. "I've shed my last tears over him, Nae. I love him and getting over him won't be easy, but I'm going to do it for Sam's sake."

Erinae lifted her head and looked at her. "Sam's sake?"

Carlee nodded, touching her stomach. "I'm going to name the baby Sam. Samuel Erin if he's a boy and Samantha Erinae if it's a girl."

Erinae smiled through her tears. "Samantha Erinae?"

She nodded. "It has a nice ring to it, doesn't it? Although we'll probably end up calling her something silly."

Erinae nodded. "Yeah. Like Nae-nae."

"Yeah. That's silly enough. So no more crying, huh? Sam is going to be my reason for getting over Trey."

Erinae stared into her eyes. "You go ahead and be strong. No more tears for you. I can see a lot of grief in your eyes yet. I'll take care of the crying. It will be like old times. Me and you against the world."

This was something Trey had promised her would never happen again. She nodded, blinking away tears. "Like old times. Me and you against the world."

* * *

"Trey! Trey, help me! Please!"

Her screams for him shattered the still of the night and sent him bolting up in bed from a deep sleep. He tossed the bed covers aside. He nearly tripped in his haste to get out of bed and rush to the window. His room looked out over the back road leading to the slave quarters.

Looking out the window, he saw his father's overseer, Joshua Wilton. Wilton sat astride his big stallion with a small slender figure in front of him on the horse. Trey's heart thumped with fear as he recognized that figure. She had beautiful dark skin, warm brown eyes, and a sweet smile he'd never been able to resist.

He tossed the window open, leaned out, and blinked. Instead of the road below the plantation house he expected to see, he saw the dark contours of the neighboring condos.

Condos?

Trey bolted up in bed, his heart pounding, his body drenched with sweat. He turned on the light. He was alone in his bedroom. He glanced at his bedside clock. It was three-twenty a.m. He turned off the light and fell back against his pillow.

Sleep eluded him. With his eyes open, the nightmare returned. He couldn't stop it. He saw a young version of himself on Danton's back galloping down the road after Carlee. When his father caught him, the words he'd called out to her echoed in his ears.

Carlee, I'll find you. I promise. I swear. No matter how long it takes, I'll find you! And when I do I will never leave you again!

The nightmares had returned the night he walked out on Carlee and now they were merging with reality. He rolled onto his stomach, burying his face in the pillow.

I will never leave you again!

He'd broken his promise to her -- again. The first time he'd failed her he'd had the excuse of having had his memory erased. He had no such excuse for his latest failure.

He'd been a fool. He was going to have to find a way to make amends for having failed her yet again. He rose from his damp bedding and walked through the dark condo. In the living room, he sank down onto the sofa and finally slept.

The incessant ringing of his doorbell awakened him the next afternoon. He groaned and sat up on the sofa. His mouth felt dry. His head ached -- as did his heart.

The ringing of his phone added to the noise level created by the doorbell. Ignoring them both, he made his way to the bedroom and fell across the bed.

Moments later, he heard movement along the hall. He sat up just as Mick appeared in his bedroom doorway, the spare set of keys Trey had given him dangling from his fingers. Trey frowned. "What do you want?"

Mick came into the room and sat beside him on the bed. "Look, I've given you a week to feel sorry for yourself. That's more time than you can afford to waste wallowing in self-pity."

He shot to his feet and stood over Mick. "Feel sorry for myself? Self-pity?"

"Yes!" Mick rose and faced him. "You know something, Trey? The woman you love needs you and what do you do? You walk out on her! That's what I call one sorry bastard."

"She's having another man's baby. What the hell did you expect me to do?"

"Well, hell, Trey, that depends on how you feel. If she was just a good lay, walk out on her at the first sign of trouble. If you love her, stick by her. She needs you, Trey. Do the right thing. Go back!"

He pushed past Mick. "I am going back!"

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I'm going back. I just need time."

"She needs your support now. Don't blow this any more than you already have, Trey."

"Where the hell do you get off coming here telling me how I should feel?"

"I'm your friend. I've watched you torture yourself for a week and that's long enough. Let's be straight about something, Trey. This is partly your fault."

"The hell it is!"

"If you'd called her after the accident, this wouldn't have happened. This would be your baby, not his. I told you it was a mistake to allow all that time to pass without calling her. What the hell was she supposed to think? Now when it comes time to pay for your stupid mistakes, you want to go off and wallow in self-pity. Grow up, Trey!"

"If mistakes were made, they were hers and hers alone."

"Really?" Mick put a hand on his shoulder. "Your mistakes are piling up. It was also a mistake to leave her. It's not too late to show her you really do love her. Go back and support her."

He pushed Mick away. "I said I was going, didn't I?"

"When? When too much time has passed and she can't forget or forgive your not being there for her? And don't tell me she'll wait because we both know where that reasoning got you the first time."

Trey flushed. "What the hell do you expect me to do?"

"I expect you to get your sorry ass over to her place and apologize. Make her believe you love her, marry her, and raise the baby as yours."

"You think it's that easy?"

"I know it's not easy, but I know how it hurts to lose someone you love when you've let opportunities pass that you can never take advantage of again. I was too busy working and building the business to be there to read Kelly a bedtime story. There was going to be plenty of time to tuck her in when the business was established. Well, you know how well that reasoning worked for me!"

"What happened to Kelly wasn't your fault, Mick."

"No, but not being there for her when she was scared of the bogeyman was."

"You did what you needed to do to make a better life for her."

Mick shook his head. "I made a mistake in thinking it was more important to provide financial advantages than emotional ones for her. I'll always regret that mistake. Please don't blow what you have with Carlee. Swallow your damned pride, your pain, and your ego. Go back now!"

Trey clasped a hand on the back of Mick's neck. "You're right. I'm sorry..."

Mick shook his head. "This is not about my loss. This is about your not burning bridges you can't easily rebuild."

Trey remembered the bitter words he and Carlee had exchanged. More importantly, he recalled Carlee's pleas for him not to leave her. Pleas he had ignored out of a selfish sense of righteous indignation. "Shit! I've probably already burned them. She said she wouldn't forgive me if I left."

"And if you go back anyway, knowing that, that'll say something about how you feel about her. She'll probably make you beg, but so what?"

So what indeed? What did pride matter if it kept him from the only woman he'd ever loved? He nodded. "You're right."

Mick swung him around, a brow arched. "You're smelling a little ripe there. Shave and shower first."

He laughed, and then sighed. "God, I've been such an idiot!"

"Yes, you have. So you tell her that and make her believe it."

"What if she won't..."

"What if you go beg for forgiveness until she grants it? That's all you can do."

Chapter Seven

Returning from a late afternoon walk with Danny, Carlee spotted Trey's car in her driveway. She came to an abrupt halt. The driver's side door of his car opened and he got out.

Silence ensued. Danny tugged on his leash. She looked down. His tail wagged from side to side. She released his leash. Danny ran over, stood on his hind legs, and placed his front paws against Trey's chest, licking his face.

Leaving the two of them standing in the driveway, she unlocked the side door and went inside. She hesitated, then closed, but didn't lock the door. Legs shaking and heart thumping, she went to the living room and sank onto the love seat.

An eternity later she heard the side door open and close. Danny entered the room, put his paws on her legs, and looked into her face.

She gave him a quick hug. "I'm fine," she told him.

He licked her face and neck before jumping down and lying on the floor in front of the window.

"Can I come in?"

She looked up. Trey stood in the doorway, an uncertain look on his face. Still numb, she didn't take time to examine her feelings. "Why are you here?"

"I came to ask you to forgive me. I don't have any excuse for my behavior. I can only say I'm sorry."

"Sorry? You shatter my world, practically call me a tramp, and then you expect to waltz back into my life with a sorry ass apology? I don't think so, Trey! You know what the last week has shown me? I don't need you! Sam and I will be just fine without your fickle affections."

He blanched. "Sam?"

She touched her stomach. "I'm not only keeping my baby I'm naming him or her after Sam."

"I'm sure he would have liked that."

"Like you care about anything or anyone but what you want! You walk away from me and stay gone for two months and then when I turn to a man who loves me, you call me nasty names! I waited a lifetime for you! Several lifetimes. And when you finally do show up, all you do is hurt me!"

She saw his Adam's apple bob up and down. He leaned back against the wall near the door. "I know and I don't know how I'm going to make it up to you, but I promise you I will spend the rest of my life trying."

She shook her head. "I don't want anything from you, Trey! Please leave."

"You might not want anything from me, but I need something from you." He crossed the room and knelt in front of her. "I need you to forgive me. In addition to being an idiot, I know I've said hurtful things. I am so sorry."

"And what if I don't care?"

He sat on his haunches. "You have to. I made a promise to you a long time ago that I am now prepared to keep."

"What promise?"

"When my father caught up with me that night."

She sucked in a breath. "You really do remember."

He nodded. "Yes. And I remember promising you I would find you and when I did I would never leave you again."

She closed her eyes on a flood of tears as the horror and pain of being snatched away from her mother and Trey pushed its way up through the layers of memory to her conscious mind. After sobbing about that night in Dr. Cheyenne's office several years earlier, she had pushed all the pain and fear of that night and the life that followed back into her subconscious.

She shook her head and stared at him. "But you did. Nothing has changed, Trey. I am still pregnant with Sam's baby and I am still keeping Sam. And you are still jealous of my feelings for him!"

He nodded. "You're right. I am jealous of him. Maybe I always will be a little jealous, but that doesn't change the fact that you are the only woman I have ever loved. I fell in love with you when you were fifteen back in Virginia and I have never really loved anyone else."

"Well, I have! I loved Sam!"

He dropped his gaze. "I know."

"So why are you here?"

He sighed and looked up at her. "As you know by now, I'm far from perfect. But I do love you, Carlee. It's been so long since I've been in love, I've forgotten how to behave. Forgive me and I promise you a lifetime of devotion."

"And what do you expect from me?"

"All I want from you is forgiveness and a little understanding." He leaned forward, taking one of her hands in his. He pushed it under her sweat top, resting it on her swelling stomach. A tingle shot down her spine at his touch. "If you give me a chance to make amends, I will love and cherish you both."

Tears tightened her throat. "Both of us?"

"Yes. You and Sam."

"Before I allow you to hurt my baby, I'll walk away from you with no regrets. There is no one in the world more important to me than this baby, Trey."

He sighed. "I understand."

"Do you?"

He nodded. "Yes. I've always understood that. It was just hard to come to terms with the fact that you're having another man's baby."

"And now?"

He shrugged. "Sam is a part of you and I will love him or her just as I do you."

She blinked but the tears rolled down her cheeks. "Are you sure? It's so easy for you to hurt me, Trey! I won't have Sam hurt."

He caressed her stomach. "I know. I know, sweet. I promise I will treat you both gently if you'll just forgive me. Give me another chance to make things right."

"I want to believe you, but..."

"Please. You don't have to make any promises. Just give me a chance to prove myself. That's all I ask. Just give me another chance and I promise --"

She pressed her fingers against his lips. "No, Trey. No more promises that you may not be able to keep."

He kissed her fingers before removing them from his mouth. "I've learned my lesson. I will never leave you again."

"Trey..."

He rose and lifted her to her feet. When he drew her close, she pressed her cheek against his shoulder, allowing her tears to flow freely.

She bit her lip, aching with love for him.

He led her to her bedroom. She made no protest when he drew her down onto the bed. "I love you. I love you." He chanted the words, stroking his hands over her back in a way that made her feel cherished and protected.

Only a fool would trust him again. But how could she muster the strength to send him away when she needed him so badly? And although she had been prepared to live her life without him, she knew she'd be much happier living with him. "I love you too," she whispered.

He tipped up her chin and stared down at her. "Does that mean you forgive me and will give me another chance?"

"Yes."

"Oh, thank God!" He tightened his arms around her, burying his face against her neck. His body shook and she felt dampness against her neck.

She caressed his hair. "Trey? Trey, are you all right?"

He lifted his head and she saw tears in the beautiful blue eyes she had so long adored. "I'm so sorry I hurt you, sweet. I never meant to."

She nodded. "I know and I should have tried to see things from your perspective, but..."

"No. Don't make any excuses for me. I was wrong and I'm so sorry."

She smiled, leaning forward to kiss his lips. "So where do we go from here?"

"That depends."

She tensed. "On what?"

"On how soon you'll marry me."

"Marry you? You want to marry me?"

His eyes widened. "I've wanted to marry you since you were a nappy-headed fifteen-year-old who got me all hot and bothered every time I thought of you."

"Who the hell are you calling nappy-headed?" she demanded without heat.

"You." He brushed his lips against her cheek. "Have I told you lately that I'm partial to nappy-heads?"

An almost forgotten memory of him kissing and stroking his hands over her short, natural hair surfaced. "I think you've mentioned it a time or two -- a very long time ago."

"So what do you say? Will you marry me?" His slow, insistent kiss smothered the yes trembling on her lips.

His tongue touched hers. A shudder of desire shot through her. She sobbed against his lips, raking her hands along his back.

He lifted his head and looked down at her. "I love you so much. Will you marry me?"

She nodded. "Yes! Yes!"

"You're sure?"

"I'm very sure. I've waited several lifetimes for this moment, but I never really thought it would happen."

"Why not?"

She sighed. "How could I even dream that we could ever get married when we first fell in love?"

"I couldn't marry you then, but I can now. When will you marry me?"

"Soon, but right now, there's something else I need from you."

His blue eyes glittered with desire. "Really? I wonder what that could be."

She rolled onto her back, parting her legs. He rose and stripped down to his briefs. He leaned over the bed to remove her shoes, socks, and sweat bottoms. Kissing a path up over her belly he pulled her top off. He removed her bra and panties more quickly.

She lay on the bed naked and needy as he stood staring down at her pussy. "Trey?"

"I need you." He pressed a series of warm, moist kisses against her pussy before climbing onto the bed.

He slid his body on top of hers, resting his weight against her. Reaching between their bodies, he grasped his cock, pressed it against her wet slit, and pushed forward. As his cock slid deep into her pussy, she closed her eyes. Oh, yes. Yes. At long last she had everything she had ever wanted. All the long lonely years were past and the future would be filled with a lifetime of love and passion. That more than compensated for all the heartache and pain she'd suffered in the past.

Epilogue

A year later, Carlee woke alone in the bed. She glanced at the bedside clock. One a.m. Yawning, she got out of bed and crossed the room to the open bedroom door. Halfway there, she paused to scoop the dark blue shirt Trey had worn the previous day from a pile on the floor. Pushing the tangle of the clothes they had quickly discarded earlier aside, she walked down the hall and stepped through the open door of the adjoining bedroom.

Trey, wearing a pair of pajama bottoms, sat on the window seat. He looked up, placing a finger against his lips to indicate Carlee should be silent.

Smiling, she crossed the room and sat beside him. "Is she asleep?"

Trey nodded, his gaze on the sleeping baby cradled in the crook of his arm.

She smiled. Nae-nae, or as Trey insisted on calling her, Sami, was the apple of Trey's eye. In the four months since her birth, Carlee had lost track of the number of times she'd awakened to find Trey standing over Nae-nae's basinet, stroking a finger down her cheek and telling her that one day she was going to be even more gorgeous than her mother.

She spoke softly, stroking his arm. "Then put her down and come back to bed, Trey."

"In a moment. I just want to hold her a few moments longer."

She gave him an indulgent smile. "You'll spoil her rotten with this constant holding."

He looked up at her. In the moonlight streaming through the window, she noted the expression of adoration and wonder he had been wearing since the moment he first held Nae-nae after her birth. "I can't believe how incredible she is. She's so small and perfect and she looks so much like you."

Carlee nodded, offering yet another silent prayer of thanksgiving that Nae-nae had taken after her instead of Sam. She twirled the wedding and engagement rings on her finger. "She might look like me, but I have a feeling she's going to be all daddy's girl."

He grinned. "Yes." He stroked Nae-nae's cheek. "She is going to be daddy's girl."

"Just like her mommy." She leaned close and kissed the corner of his mouth. "Come back to bed and fuck her mommy."

He rose and gently placed Nae-nae back in her bassinet. He spent several moments tucking her in before he stood close to Carlee. "Ahhh. Greedy mommy want some more cock?" He whispered the words against her ear, as if he were afraid Nae-nae would hear.

Carlee slipped her hand into his pajama bottoms and cupped his warm flesh. "Greedy mommy always wants more of daddy's wonderful cock." She removed her hand from his pajamas, took his hand in hers, and led him into their bedroom in the old Victorian house that they'd moved into only two months earlier. "She's addicted to it and the wonderful husband who wields it."

Husband. The breath caught in her throat. Even after eleven months as Trey's wife, she sometimes found it difficult to believe they were married.

He removed his pajama bottoms and lay on the bed.

Carlee stood smiling down at him. Already aroused, his cock was long and thick. She tossed off his shirt and climbed onto the bed. Straddling his hips, she lowered herself onto his cock, sighing softly as she slowly impaled herself on him.

Once groin to groin, she shuddered and sighed. One of these days, making love to him was going to lose its thrill. That would happen just about the time they discovered a little yellow man on the moon.

She spread her upper body against his and whispered to him. "I love you so much."

He gripped her hips and thrust upward. "I love you too, my sweet. I always will. But then that's how it was always meant to be with us. You complete me as only you could."

"We're soul mates," she told him, slowly fucking herself along the cock she knew would belong to her for the rest of eternity.

"Forever," he promised, clutching her to him.

Forever? That might just be enough time with him.

Marilyn Lee

Marilyn Lee lives, works, and writes on the East Coast. In addition to thoroughly enjoying writing erotic romance, she enjoys roller-skating, spending time with her large, extended family, and rooting for all her hometown sports teams. Her other interests include Doc Savage pulp novels from the thirties and forties and collecting Marvel comics from the seventies and eighties (particularly Thor and the Avengers).

Her favorite TV shows are forensic shows, westerns (*Gunsmoke* and *Have Gun, Will Travel* are particular favorites), mysteries (loves the old Charlie Chan mysteries. Her all time favorite mystery movie is probably *Dead, Again*), and nearly every vampire movie and television show ever made (*Forever Knight* and *Count Yorga, Vampire* are faves).

Marilyn loves to hear from readers, who can email her at Mlee2057@aol.com or visit her website, <http://www.marilynlee.org>. Join Marilyn's Yahoo! Group -- Love Bytes -- by sending an email to marilynlee-subscribe@yahoogroups.com