

DRIVE-BY WEDDING



LISSA ADAIR

Drive-by Wedding
by Lissa Adair

Hard Shell Word Factory

www.hardshell.com

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Chapter 1

"WILL YOU marry me?"

"Marry you?" Sheena Douglas croaked, surprised that she could speak at all.

She'd known there was more to Kane than people thought. Even so, she hadn't been ready for the penetrating quality of his gaze when at last she met him. No one but a Scorpio could possibly summon this much internal power.

He was more than she'd hoped. She knew he was the one. But his proposal was the last thing she'd expected.

* * * *

KANE KNEW THAT she couldn't have been expecting his proposal. But for the first time in his life, he was serious.

He'd known as soon as he saw her.

She was the one. That glorious mane of auburn hair, that delicious mischief in her sparkling green eyes, and those mouth-watering lips. They'd swayed together on the dance floor, more and more slowly, closer and closer together.

He'd realized, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he wanted far more than a brief love affair. He wanted to forsake all other women; in fact he already had. He could barely remember the girlfriends of last week, let alone last month.

But she hadn't yet answered him. He repeated his proposal. "Will you marry me?" And he held his breath.

* * * *

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IT JUST HADN'T been in her plans. She'd thought she'd have to chase him, persuade *him*—being CEO of a junk-food empire wasn't the greatest character builder. Too many admiring women, too much money. And, of course, too much ice cream. His proposal threw her completely off balance.

She looked up at him. "Marry you?" she repeated, slowly.

"Sure," he said, as if it was perfectly natural to propose marriage to a complete stranger. "Why not?"

He turned his head away from her for a moment as he searched for a place to put down his wineglass. She caught the fresh scent of his hair as he turned his head back towards her. He smelled of cleanness with a tangy overlay of musky aftershave. And maleness.

She looked at him and frowned. What kind of answer was that, "why not?" She was a planner. She didn't just do things because there was nothing against them. She did what was necessary to gather information first, whether it was reading the tea leaves, or consulting the palmistry experts. She analyzed her options, and made an informed choice. "Most people don't propose marriage quite this way," she said, finally, on an outburst of pent-up breath.

"Neither do I," he admitted, a hint of amusement quirking up his mouth. "Normally."

"You propose often?"

"Never, as a matter of fact."

Sheena tried to look away, and found she couldn't. She felt bathed with warmth as he kept his eyes on hers. The effect was curiously intimate.

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"This is for real, you know," he said. His voice was deep, sincere.

She closed her eyes. Somehow, communication had been easier in the long interlude on the dance floor. They'd moved closer and closer together, dancing more and more slowly, arms, thighs, and then bodies touching. By the end they'd been barely moving, but perfectly synchronized, listening to one another's heartbeats, attuned to one another's breathing.

She shivered as he carefully reduced the distance between them.

"Sheena," he said. "I'm not scaring you, am I?"

She shook her head. He wasn't touching her, but he was caressing her—more thoroughly than he had on the dance floor. She'd never felt anything like it. The warm glow inside her spread suddenly, intensely, to her abdomen. The muscles on the nape of her neck quivered infinitesimally, and her scalp tingled. She wanted him.

He didn't frighten her. In fact, he seemed strangely familiar. She felt as if she'd known him all her life—or at least, as if she'd been waiting for him all her life. It was a pleasant feeling. She smiled up at him, dreamily.

"So ... what do you say?"

She gazed fixedly at the elegant black satin of his bow tie, completely at a loss for words.

"Marry me," he murmured, his lips close to her ear.

She moved her stare to his left shoulder, concentrating hard on the glossy black of his evening jacket. This was real. And it couldn't be happening.

"Look at me, Sheena," he said.

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She did. His steady gaze held her spellbound. She felt like the only woman in the room. But ... marriage? Here? Now?

He seemed to read the doubt in her expression. "Okay. Let's talk," he said. He put one hand gently under her arm and took her out the French windows onto the deck.

* * * *

THE COOL BREEZE of the Oregon summer night fanned Sheena's hot cheeks, and she finally found her voice.

"Look, Kane," she began, thinking it was time to bring some sanity into this encounter.

She got no further.

His mouth came down towards hers. Somewhere, beyond him, she could scent the fragrance of honeysuckle. At the first touch of his lips on hers she forgot everything else.

She forgot her big brother's warnings about Kane Ramsey, and forgot that she knew less than nothing about him. Other than he drove fast cars, was a magnet for beautiful women, and was as sexy as God ever made a man. She was too busy kissing him back, her heart pounding, her body on fire everywhere he touched her. She was experiencing total internal meltdown. And loving every moment of it.

When he finally raised his head, she smiled up at him. "Of course, I'll marry you," she said happily.

He held her shoulders lightly in his two hands, grinning at her. "You're sure?"

"Positive," she smiled back at him. This situation felt right. That was all that mattered.

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"You know," he said, the hint of a smile curling his lips, "I have this private plane at Portland airport." He paused. "We could..." he broke off, and brushed a stray tendril of her hair away from her face.

Sheena felt bold now that the big decision had been taken. She took his hand and cradled it between her head and shoulder, smiling sleepily up at him. "Let's go," she said, cheerfully. They were going to be up all night at this rate. Their destination was not exactly next door.

For her intuition now told her where they were going.

There was a longer pause. He removed his hand gently from her shoulder and caressed her chin between his thumb and forefinger.

Sheena shivered as the night breeze whispered along her bare arms.

He took off his jacket and put it round her shoulders. "Come on," he said, his hand propelling her towards the driveway as he spoke. "Let's go."

The car slid smoothly out of the driveway, and she watched Kane's strong wrists manipulate the steering wheel round the steep and curving roads down the highest hill in Portland.

Before she knew it, they were at the airport, and he was handing her into his Lear Jet, having issued a few murmured instructions to the pilot. She remembered the party only as a dim dream. It was, after all, not important. Marriage was.

"How long does it take to get to Vegas?" she asked, yawning widely as she burrowed into her seat on the plane.

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She'd never been to Vegas on any of her fashion buyer's trips.

"Two and a half hours," he said, leaning across her to buckle her seatbelt.

"Can we get married tonight?" she asked, only mildly curious. It didn't seem terribly likely, but one heard such strange things about Vegas. Anything was possible there, it seemed.

"Of course," he said, as he fastened his seatbelt.

"Won't your parents be upset that they weren't invited?" Sheena asked anxiously. She wanted everything about their relationship to be perfect right from the start.

"My parents?" Kane shook his head. "No, they're both dead."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It was a long time ago. How about yours?"

"My mother's dead, too. My father and stepmother won't mind."

Kane took her hand as they taxied to the runway.

"You know, Sheena, you really are an extraordinary woman," he said, relaxing into the comfortable armchair. "And very trusting. How could you know I was really going to marry you? Tonight?"

She wriggled her hand appreciatively in his larger one. "Beats me," she said, cheerfully.

"Hmm." He squeezed her hand. "How did you know we were going Vegas, though?"

"I just knew, that's all."

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Of course she had known. She'd been completely sure what his intentions were, as soon as her psychic energy had kicked in. Ian had been quite wrong about Kane. What did brothers know, anyway?

Ian had scoffed at her when Sheena, at the age of fifteen, neglected by her father and cordially disliked by her young stepmother, had conducted her first seance to get in touch with the spirit of their mother, who had died two years before. To her sorrow, she'd never managed to make that contact, even though she'd tried for five long years. She'd made lots of contacts with the living, though: astrologers, numerologists, and psychics. They had helped her grieving soul to find solace in the stars, and had taught her a new way to live.

Three months ago, she'd had a revelation. It had happened when she stopped by the fortune teller's booth at the Psychics' Summer Solstice Celebration in Eugene, Oregon. Sheena had asked what the future held for her. The bearded young man in the long embroidered tunic had gazed into her eyes. "Kane. His name is Kane. Look for him, and you will find a new life—together."

"Kane who?" she had asked.

He had merely replied, "Ice cream."

Sheena never ate ice cream, but after leaving the fortune teller's stand, she went to buy some. Kane's Kool Treats. That's who it was. Her brother Ian's friend, Kane Ramsey. She was going to marry Kane Ramsey.

She squeezed Kane's hand happily.

She was going to marry Kane.

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* * * *

KANE SMILED AT his soon-to-be wife as they landed at Vegas. It was a shame he had to bring her to such a tacky place, but it was the only place he knew of where they could get married at once.

She was enchanting.

And she was going to be his.

But first they had to find a jeweler, a chapel, and the hotel.

* * * *

THE JEWELER DIDN'T look too surprised to be greeting customers at one in the morning. No doubt, thought Sheena, he did this all the time.

Certainly Las Vegas was humming, its garish neon signs floodlighting the night sky, the sound of cars and canned music all around them on the Strip.

Kane had the taxi driver take them to a jeweler's, and asked him to wait outside while they made their choice.

"Anything you say, sir," said the driver, after Kane pressed a fifty dollar bill into his hand. "You're the boss." And the taxi driver, who was no more than twenty years old, had pulled out a cassette, stuck it into the player, and leaned back comfortably in his seat.

They stood now in a large store, filled with the kind of jewelry that Sheena would never wear in a million years.

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Thick gold bracelets, heavy silver necklaces, and rings that must have weighed at least half a pound, judging from the size of the gemstones clustered in them.

And yet, she knew from her fashion buying that they were expensive—and classy. It was just that she preferred the hand-crafted brooches and pendants made by her friends in rural Oregon. People with her values. People who treasured the intrinsic beauty of a stone more than its worth in greenbacks.

Kane might have to be shown a few things, she mused, as she watched him eyeing a particularly large and showy cluster of emeralds.

“What size does the lady wear?” The jeweler gestured at the rings in a tray he was holding. He sounded, thought Sheena, exceedingly bored.

Kane turned to her with a smile. “What size, darling?”

The jeweler's eyebrows rose fractionally. He even looked bored, as if nothing could really surprise him, but as if he hadn't ruled out the possibility that, one day, maybe something would.

“I don't know,” said Sheena. All her friends made her rings to her own specifications and designed them uniquely for her. She really didn't know her ring size.

The jeweler's eyebrows rose another fraction of an inch. “You don't know?” Clearly he'd never had a woman customer in his shop who didn't. He stared pointedly at her ring finger.

Sheena felt insulted. Obviously this sleepy and tousled little man thought she was a cheap tart. “All my jewelry is made specially for me,” she said, haughtily.

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Kane didn't seem to have noticed this exchange of hostilities. He was busy picking up rings and setting them down again.

He flashed Sheena a smile and waved an emerald engagement ring at her. "How about this, darling?"

He slipped it onto her finger, his eyes on hers. It fit perfectly.

Sheena had to admit it was lovely. The stone winked in the light as she turned her hand back and forth. The emerald was like deep, green fire. And beautiful. But it wasn't her usual style—she was a homespun girl at heart. She opened her mouth to tell him so, but he forestalled her.

"It matches your eyes," he murmured, holding her hand in his, looking back and forth, just once, between the ring on her finger and her face. The slow, sensual appreciation in his voice took Sheena's breath away, and she lost track of the objections she'd been about to make.

Kane turned back to the man. "We'll take it."

"Fine." The man pulled out his receipt book. "That'll be \$25,000."

Sheena nearly fainted in shock. She didn't make that much money in half a year. She couldn't let him spend that amount of money on a ring for her. She'd be happy with a simple gold band. She loved *him*—not his money. "Kane," she began, "It's far too much."

But Kane had already pulled out his American Express Platinum card.

"Kane," she said, tugging at his sleeve. He must have the lavish spending habits of the most extreme type of Scorpio.

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But he couldn't buy her love. She had already given it all to him for free.

She finally got his attention. "What is it?" he said, ruffling her hair.

"All we need is a wedding ring," she said, urgently, in low tones, wishing the store owner would give them some privacy.

The jeweler's eyebrows shot up nearly to his hairline, and he was betrayed into incautious and unbusinesslike speech.

"You don't need a ring in Vegas," he said, leering faintly.

"None of the hotels cares if you're married or not."

"Do you have any matching wedding rings?" Kane asked coldly, tapping his American Express Platinum card impatiently on the glass-topped counter.

The jeweler hastened to fetch another tray of rings from under the counter, and Sheena tried once more to impress on Kane her philosophy about expensive jewelry. Instead, she found herself seized in Kane's arms, and kissed violently. The experience was so extraordinarily pleasant that she forgot all about the emerald.

Ten minutes later, they were on their way.

* * * *

"WHERE TO NOW, sir?" asked the taxi driver.

Kane cuddled Sheena in the back seat. "Take us somewhere where we can get married," he said, his mouth half muffled in Sheena's hair. "I don't mind where."

The young driver whistled slightly between his teeth. Kane had given him another fifty dollars when they got back in the

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car after the jewelers. "Geez," he said, under his breath. "There's a drive-through chapel three blocks down."

"What?" said Kane, whose hand had strayed to Sheena's left breast. He wanted to feel her all over. It was important to get married, of course, very important, since this was the woman of his dreams, but he really wanted to get the formalities over with, so he could get his lovely bride up to their hotel room and get into bed with her. Or into a hot tub. Or anywhere, as long as it was private.

He didn't think he could hang on much longer. He was aching with need, the need to bury himself in her soft, tantalizing scent, and plunge himself inside her.

Sheena answered for him. "That'll be fine," she said.

She stealthily pushed Kane's hands away from her neckline as they pulled up to the drive through chapel.

The low building was enlivened with flashing neon lights all around its perimeter. A big sign on the rooftop shrieked its message for all the world to see: "GET MARR-ED HERE!" Where the "I" should have been was a dark patch in the floodlighting.

Another sign, on the front of the building, said: "ELIZABETH TAYLOR MARRIED HERE." At least she hadn't got "marred," thought Sheena, smiling inwardly. Though, given Liz's record, she wasn't so sure about that.

The place was terribly sleazy, of course. But it would get the formalities out of the way. As far as Sheena was concerned, the faster that happened, the better. Before Kane totally undressed her in the taxi.

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They swung into the driveway, and stopped at the first of two booths. This, evidently, was where they had to register. And pay. With dismay she watched Kane handing over \$450 in cash to the woman with the sixties beehive lacquered hairdo in the booth. This was really costing a lot. And although Kane seemed happy about splashing money about as if it were going out of style, it made her nervous.

The woman in the register booth flashed a sugary smile at them and pulled out a clip board. "I'll just need a few of your details," she said, "for the certificate." And she handed it to them. "This doesn't take long," she said, as she saw Kane's impatient expression. "And I'm right here to answer any questions, if you have a problem."

Indeed, the questions were very few. Kane removed his arms from around Sheena and took out his pen from his breast pocket. He began writing busily, while Sheena, dazed and dizzy with love, stared out contentedly at the neon-lit sky. "Your parents' name, darling?" he said, his pen skimming rapidly over the paper.

She came back to earth. "Parents? My mother's dead," she said.

The woman in the booth nodded reassuringly. "That doesn't matter," she said. "But you have to put their name down, all the same. For identification and the license," she added.

"What's their last name, darling?" Kane's pen hovered impatiently over the clipboard.

"The same as mine, of course," said Sheena, surprised.

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"Right." Kane's pen descended to the form, and then stopped. "What is your last name?" he inquired, smiling tenderly at her.

The woman in the booth cleared her throat, and huffed on her long, pink-painted fingernails, before polishing them with a tissue. Kane saw the taxi driver look at the woman in the booth, and shrug his shoulders. What the hell. Let them think whatever they liked. He was the luckiest man alive.

"Oh," said Sheena. "Of course. I forgot you wouldn't know. It's Douglas."

He wrote it down. "Brothers? Sisters?"

"Geez," said the taxi driver.

"Look," said the woman in the booth, rather sharply, "there are people behind you, waiting in line to get married." Her voice softened. "I don't want to rush you of course, but we do have another window for couples who need a little more time." And she gestured off to the right.

"Just Ian, my brother," said Sheena. This had taken quite enough time already. The last thing they needed was more delays. All she wanted now was to get him on a bed, and tear his clothes off.

Kane seemed to be of the same view. He scribbled on the form madly, taking down her address as she dictated it, asking her for her birth date, and handing the clipboard back to the woman with all possible speed.

"I'll need to see some ID." The woman flashed them another fake Vegas smile.

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Kane hunted for his wallet, and produced several pieces. Sheena opened her evening bag, hoping that her driver's license, which was all she had with her, would be enough.

The woman seemed satisfied with their ID. And they were whisked along the driveway to the chapel booth.

Five minutes later they were man and wife.

* * * *

"AT LAST," KANE groaned, as they fell together on the bed. Hotel registration had been swift, and they were finally alone.

"I know," Sheena said, flinging down her bag. "I thought we'd never get here."

"Me, too," he mumbled, his mouth on her neck.

She gasped as his tongue licked the sensitive skin between her collarbones, and she scrabbled feverishly at his shirt buttons. "Take this off," she said.

He complied, and she used the moment to rip off her dress.

He turned to her just as she was about to remove her earrings. "Leave those on," he said, touching them gently with one fingertip. "But take everything else off."

She grinned saucily at him as she reached behind her to undo her bra. "You, too," she said, nudging the bulge in his pants with one stocking clad foot.

Kane groaned, and unzipped his pants slowly, his eyes fixed on her as she wriggled impatiently out of her clothes.

"Hurry up," she said.

His eyes refocused. "Mmm?"

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She tugged his pants down over his hips, smoothing her hands over his taut buttocks. He was firm and hard and was like satin. Scorpios were so sexy. "The faster you get those off, the happier I'll be," she said. "Getting married takes too long, even in Vegas. I needed you two hours ago."

He grinned, and kicked his pants onto the floor. "I needed you four hours ago," he said.

"Four hours ago we hadn't met," she said, as he took her firmly in his arms.

She took his penis in her fingers and squeezed gently. He was hot and pulsing in her palm. She touched the beaded moisture on the tip and licked her finger.

He groaned, and rolled her over on the bed so that she was under him. She shivered as he pressed her into the mattress. His body touched the whole length of hers. She fitted her curves against him, longing to fuse her body with his.

He groaned again. "Your skin is so soft," he whispered into her mouth, as his own came down for another of his long, drugging kisses.

And then his mouth moved lower, and she lost her mind. His tongue idly circled that most sensitive part of her, while his hands cupped her bottom firmly and held her open to his taste.

He raised his head briefly. "You taste like apricot ice cream," he said.

Sheena dragged him up her body. "Make love to me, Kane," she whispered frantically. "Please. I love you."

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"I love you, Sheena Ramsey," he growled, spreading the delicate folds of her apart. And then he hesitated.

"Don't stop," she pleaded. "Do it now." She needed that space in her filled. With the man of her dreams. Now.

But still he held back. "I don't have anything with me," he said, apology and desperation warring for supremacy.

"Any what?" Sheena trailed kisses up the underside of his chin.

"Anything to protect you," he said, looking down at her.

"Silly," she said, pulling him towards her. "We're married now. What difference does it make?"

He let out a long breath and lowered himself towards her. "I just want you to know," he said, as he cupped the back of her shoulders in both hands. "I don't have any..." his voice trailed off, and his body halted its downward motion again.

Sheena looked into his eyes. "Any what?" she said again.

He said nothing, but traced a series of kisses around one of her nipples.

"Anything infectious," he mumbled, still not making any other movement.

"Oh," Sheena gasped, afire with the circular motions of his tongue on her breast. "Good." She pulled his bare buttocks down with both hands. "Neither do I."

They both sighed in bliss as he entered her.

And cried out in ecstasy minutes later.

* * * *

AT SOME POINT before dawn, they managed to switch off the lights. Sheena thought it was before Kane gave her the

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back rub, and after they had made love in the hot tub, but she wasn't really sure.

He was everything she could have desired. She told him so, using her tongue as he'd used his, all over his athletic hard body. They strained together, restlessly searching for intimacy again and again. Sheena didn't think she'd ever get enough of him.

Kane thought he'd never get enough of her. She was wild in bed, absolutely wild. And yet strangely innocent, too. He'd had other women, many other women, this way, he thought, as he watched her long wavy hair spread out over his abdomen, but they'd never filled him with this kind of incredible wonder. With each bout of lovemaking his desire only increased, he thought. And then ceased to think at all, as her mouth closed around him.

He bucked wildly as he climaxed, and she grabbed the sheet.

"Help, Kane!" she giggled. "I'm falling out!"

She was slipping off the crimson satin sheets. His body still surging, his blood still pounding in his ears with the force of his passion, he reached for her, desperately.

And missed. They ended up in a tangle on the floor. He managed to land underneath.

Kane grunted as his head struck the base of the ornate standard lamp on the floor.

Then, to Sheena's horror, he lost consciousness.

She shook him gently, whispering his name. Willing him to wake up. Desperate, she grabbed the carafe of water by the

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bedside and wetted his shirt with it, squeezing the drops out over his face.

"Kane," she said, as he stirred, and shook his head dazedly. "Kane!" She let out a sob, and clasped him to her. "Oh, thank goodness!"

Kane sat up, and pushed her quietly aside for a moment. He rubbed his temple, wincing. "Where am I?" he mumbled.

"Are you all right?" Sheena asked, concerned again. Could he have really hurt himself? Got concussion, maybe?

He looked at her. He seemed puzzled about something. But he nodded, and smiled. And seemed, finally, to recognize her.

"You bet, beautiful," he said, as he clambered back into bed. "I'm just dandy." And he rolled over, and went to sleep.

* * * *

THE SUN WAS high in the sky when Sheena woke. Kane was still asleep. The room was furnished in pink and purple kitsch, and not at all to her taste. The plush bordello look didn't speak to her inner spiritual nature. Still, what did it matter, anyway? She had a wonderful husband, and that was all that counted.

As if sensing her scrutiny, he woke suddenly, and blinked up at her as she lay on one elbow beside him.

He smiled at her, evidently not quite awake.

"You look exhausted," she said, prodding him with one finger in the chest. "But it's time to get up."

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She wanted to shower and get out into the fresh air. Like all Pisces, she was a morning person. She liked to be up and doing. "I could use some breakfast," she said firmly.

"Nothing wrong with that," he said. "Be my guest. But I'm going back to sleep."

He obviously wasn't a morning person. He just blinked and smiled again, sleepily, and fumbled for his jacket on the floor at the side of the bed.

"Here's a bit extra," he said. "Feel free to have a shower."

And he turned on his side and drifted off to dreamland.

He was a sleepyhead in the mornings, she thought, grinning. Did he think she wasn't going to take a shower?

She got up and explored the bathroom, carefully tucking the hundred dollar bill in her handbag first.

It was nice of him to give her some money. She needed several things, she thought, as she remembered the crumpled heap of her evening dress. Like fresh underwear. And toiletries. And something to wear in the day.

Good thing the hotel provided toothbrushes and toothpaste, she thought. And shampoo. She lathered her hair vigorously, enjoying the warm water.

* * * *

WHEN SHE CAME out, she was surprised to find the bed empty. "Kane?" she called out, but got no reply. His clothes were gone too.

Exploring, she found that the room was really a suite, with a sitting room and another bathroom, which was damp from a

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recent shower someone had taken. She grinned. Kane had evidently awakened. But where was he?

Nowhere in the suite, she discovered. He must have gone down to breakfast. Her face broke into a smile. He must have decided to join her after all.

She almost ran down to the hotel lobby, so eager was she to join him. She looked in the restaurant. She looked in the coffee shop. And she looked in the gift shop, the gym, the pool. She even stuck her nose into the casino area.

But he wasn't anywhere to be seen.

Chapter 2

SHEENA SEARCHED the hotel restaurant again with an anxious eye. Kane was definitely not there. There were four or five businessmen in dark gray suits, a blond family with crew cuts and gold jewelry and an older couple in golfing gear sitting over their coffee. But no Kane.

So where was he?

She turned to the elevator to go back up to her room. She didn't feel much like having breakfast without Kane. The room was eerily silent. All she could hear was the muted noises of traffic coming up from the street below. Where had Kane gotten to?

She turned her new wedding ring absentmindedly on her finger. It felt strangely heavy, as if it were weighting down her hand.

It really was a beautiful stone though, she decided, as she held it up and watched the reflections of the light dance over the ceiling. When they returned to Portland, she decided, plumping down on the bed and examining every facet of the beautiful ring in detail, she would have to show it to her friend, Mist, who could read its aura for her. She was confident that its aura would be perfect for her. After all, Kane, the love of her life, had chosen it for her.

She was less sure of herself after she had sat on the bed for half an hour, fully expecting Kane to walk in through the door of her suite at any moment. He was a Scorpio, after all.

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He was probably preparing some romantic surprise for her. But there was no sign of him.

Finally Sheena rose to her feet. She had to face the facts. Maybe he'd been called away on important business, or maybe he wasn't as kind and loving as his astral charts made him out to be. At any rate, she wasn't going to sit around all morning waiting for him to show. She'd take a bit of positive action and go and look for him.

She gave herself a fleeting glance in the mirror. Nothing looked quite so tawdry as a crumpled cocktail dress at ten o'clock in the morning, she thought dismally, as she tried to smooth down the wrinkles over her hips.

She had found her dress scrunched into a little ball and wedged between the end of the mattress and the footboard. It had looked as though an elephant had been sitting on it all night. But she had had nothing else to wear.

She hadn't minded when she had put it on this morning. But now she suddenly felt tacky. She turned away from the mirror in disgust.

Trying not to feel self-conscious in her crumpled finery, she opened the door to her suite and took the elevator down to the ground floor.

There was a party of elderly women in crisp white linen shirts standing around the check-in desk. They looked askance at Sheena as she sidled past them, trying to look as inconspicuous as possible. One of them gave an audible sniff, and twitched her bag out of Sheena's way.

She was relieved when it was finally her turn at the check-in counter. "Hi, I'm Mrs. Ramsey," she said brightly to the

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pimplly youth behind the counter. "I'm looking for my husband. Did he leave a message for me to tell me where he's gone?"

"Your husband's name is?"

"Ramsey. Kane Ramsey. We were in suite 465."

The pimplly youth punched in a few buttons on his computer screen. "Sorry, no message," he replied in a bored tone. "Mr. Ramsey checked out forty-five minutes ago."

"He checked out?" Sheena cried, disbelievingly.

"Yes, ma'am. At nine-fifteen."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"Sorry, he didn't leave a message."

Sheena made her way over to a group of easy chairs in the lobby and sank down on to a leather sofa. Kane had checked out? Without so much as a word to her? It was ludicrous! Unbelievable!

He had only just married her, and he had already deserted her. In Las Vegas, of all places, where they were supposed to be on their honeymoon.

How on earth was she supposed to get home again? She had nothing with her; no money, no luggage, no credit cards. She had gone to Kane's party the previous evening with only the bare essentials.

She looked at her new wedding ring thoughtfully. It was a plain gold band, not as showy as her emerald. She couldn't bring herself to pawn it. She'd put it on last night with such jubilation, such love, in her heart. She'd never thought to take it off again.

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All she had with her was the hundred dollar bill that Kane had handed her this morning. At the time she had thought it was a gesture of goodwill—but now it was all that stood between her and disaster. She opened her handbag, and emptied the contents onto her lap. She read the marriage certificate. It was true. She really was married. She stuffed it back into her bag along with her lipstick and comb, and looked thoughtfully at the hundred dollar bill left in her hand.

“Like to earn another couple of those little beauties tonight?” The sofa cushions beside her hissed as a gray-haired man in a pin-striped business suit plumped down on the sofa next to her. “I heard what you told the desk clerk. That your husband,” and he positively sneered the word, “had checked out without you this morning.”

He flipped his hand at the bill that Sheena was stuffing hastily back into her handbag. “He left you a nice little present when he went.” He drew his face closer to Sheena, leering possessively at her. “But if you'll let me be your husband tonight, I'll give you two.”

She closed her handbag with a snap. “For your information,” she said loudly as she got to her feet, “I am not a hooker.” Half a dozen of the ladies in the white shirts swivelled their heads around to get a look at who was speaking. The businessman gulped in shock, and turned a fiery red.

Sheena stood squarely in front of him, looking down her nose as if he were lower than a worm. “I thought this was a respectable hotel,” she said in tones of great disgust, playing to her audience. Out of the corner of her eye she saw several

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heads nod in approval. "I am not accustomed to being propositioned in hotel lobbies. There ought to be a law against that sort of behavior."

And she swung her handbag over her shoulder and stalked out of the lobby into the street.

* * * *

KANE GOT OUT of the taxi, handed the driver a generous tip, and strode into the airport terminal. What the hell was he doing in Vegas? He hated Vegas.

He made his way over to the sales counter to find out about planes back to Portland. There was bound to be a commuter plane that flew back and forth every weekday.

The frizzed redhead behind the counter gave him a beaming smile when he walked up to her. Kane gave her a practiced grin back again, and her smile grew wider.

"How can I help you, sir?" she asked, looking up at him as if she would like to eat him.

"Ticket to Portland, Oregon," he replied curtly. "Earliest flight you've got."

The redhead reluctantly took her eyes off him and tapped a few keys on her computer terminal. Her long painted nails made irritating clicking sounds as they skated over the keys.

"The earliest one is at six-thirty p.m.," she said at last, looking back up into his eyes. "There's one seat left. Shall I reserve it for you?"

"Six-thirty tonight?" Kane let out a groan of dismay. He didn't want to have to spend all day in Vegas with nothing to

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do, wondering what on earth had made him come here in the first place. "There's nothing earlier than that?"

The redhead tossed her head flirtatiously. "Not on a Sunday, sir."

"On a Sunday?" Kane was appalled. He stopped in the middle of dragging his wallet out from his back pocket and stared at her, open-mouthed. "You mean it's Sunday today?"

The redhead nodded her head, as she accepted his American Express Platinum card and ran it through the machine. "Yes, isn't it amazing how time flies when you're having fun?"

"Yeah, right," Kane mumbled. It was a Sunday. Unbelievable.

He took his ticket in silence, barely registering the redhead's flirtatious act and her coy offer to give him whatever service he required, whenever he wanted it.

It was a Sunday. He looked at the date on his ticket. It, too, said it was a Sunday. He had to believe it.

So what had happened to the last three days? The last thing he could remember was drifting off to sleep on Wednesday night with Cindi in his arms. Or was it Bambi?

So what had he done on Thursday? on Friday? Yesterday? It was supposed to have been his housewarming party last night. He groaned. He hoped he'd made it to that. But what was the use of having a housewarming party if you woke up the day after and couldn't remember a thing about it, or if it had even happened?

It was all the fault of the car accident he had had last year. He'd sustained a bad head injury when his custom-built racing

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car, the joy of his weekends, had flipped on its back—he'd misjudged a curve and gone off the track at over one hundred miles an hour. He'd thought at the time that he had been lucky to get away with nothing more than a broken shoulder, a few scrapes and bruises, and a mild concussion.

But the concussion had turned out to be more than a temporary problem. Two months after the wreck, he had woken up one morning with absolutely no memory of the previous day. It was as if it had never existed.

A month later, the same thing had happened again, and he had lost the memory of another day out of his life.

But this time was by far the most serious. This time he had woken up in a strange city, with no memory of how he had gotten there. Or why he had gone there. And he had lost three entire days out of his life. Three whole days.

Hell, he didn't know what he had been doing in that time. He might have been in Vegas for the entire three days, or even in Paris, or in prison, for all he remembered.

Hell, he didn't even know whether he'd been having fun.

* * * *

THE HEAT FROM the pavements struck Sheena in full force after the air conditioning in the hotel. Before she had gone more than half a block, she regretted staging that scene in the hotel.

She didn't in the least bit regret embarrassing that dirty old man who had propositioned her—in fact, she had positively enjoyed seeing him squirm. But she was broiling to death in her black cocktail dress, and her insides were

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growling with hunger. She wished she had at least stayed around long enough to have breakfast.

She bought a can of soda from a vending machine on the sidewalk and read the label on it critically. Artificial flavoring. Artificial sweetener. It would take her a week to flush the toxins out of her body again. Still, it was better than dying of thirst.

Leaning back against the concrete wall of a casino building in a meager patch of shade, she sipped her soda thirstily and pondered her dilemma.

She was stranded in Vegas with one hundred bucks in her purse. The first thing she had to do was get back to Portland.

She would try the bus station first, she decided, as she squashed her empty can flat, and rammed it into purse. She headed out again to brave the broiling sunshine.

* * * *

KANE TOSSED DOWN the technothriller he'd bought at a kiosk at the airport. He must have read the same page at least seven times already, and he was no closer to taking in what it was saying.

He wanted to get out of Vegas and back to Portland, but he had this nagging feeling in the back of his head that he was leaving behind something very important.

Hadn't he had some woman in bed with him this morning? He had been so strangely disoriented when he woke up, finding himself in an unfamiliar hotel room, that he'd hardly noticed his companion.

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He generally didn't go in for one night stands, or picking up women in a grubby Vegas casino. But that's what he must've done, God help him. He couldn't recall ever having seen her before.

All he'd wanted to do was get out—and get out fast. He'd handed the woman a hundred dollar bill, and she'd taken it happily enough. Thank goodness he'd been able to sneak out of the suite while she was still in the shower. It was too early in the morning to deal with clingy females.

He'd been horrified to notice, while he was quickly throwing on his clothes after his hasty shower, the mirrors on the ceiling, the heart-shaped bed, the plush pink and purple fittings. It almost looked as though they had been put in some tasteless honeymoon suite.

Him getting married in Vegas? And then booking into a honeymoon suite? With no luggage? The idea was so ridiculous that he laughed out aloud, startling the gray-haired lady with the shopping bag who was sitting in the chair next to him.

She looked at him severely over her steel-rimmed glasses. He felt as though he was a little boy being chastened by his grandmotherly teacher in first grade, and looked ostentatiously at his paperback again.

* * * *

SHEENA WIPED away the droplets of sweat forming on her forehead with the back of her hand and then stepped into the Greyhound offices. The cool air inside was a blessed relief. She took several deep breaths and started to feel better. She

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would take the bus home, quickly and quietly, and no one would be the wiser about the fiasco of her marriage. She wouldn't even tell anyone she was married. She would burn her marriage certificate.

And never again would the name of Kane Ramsey pass her lips.

She walked over to the counter and waited patiently until the young man in the pin-striped suit behind it looked up at her. He took her appearance in at one glance and didn't seem impressed. "Can I help you?" he asked shortly.

He'd obviously decided that there was no point being polite to her, Sheena thought with annoyance. He'd taken one look at her and decided that she was a tramp down on her luck.

"Do you have a recycling bin?" she asked politely, trying to disguise her irritation with the snooty sales clerk.

He looked at her as if she were crazy. "What for?"

She fished in her handbag for her empty can and held it up to him. "For this."

"Trash is over on your left," he said.

She put her elbows on the desk. "Don't you realize that our landfills are already filled to capacity?" she asked. "You really ought to recycle, you know."

He just shrugged again, and looked bored.

She sighed. She wasn't going to get far with this guy. He was obviously in denial about the future of the planet. "How much is a ticket to Portland, Oregon?" she inquired instead.

The clerk shrugged his shoulders. "When do you want to leave?"

"Today."

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The clerk looked at his screen. "One hundred and seventeen dollars."

Damn, Sheena thought. Damn, damn, damn. She had only one hundred dollars. She couldn't afford even the bus. But all she said was, "And how long does it take to get there?"

The clerk looked at his screen again. "Between twenty-nine and thirty-four hours."

"Oh dear," she said lightly, although her heart had plummeted to the bottom of her high-heeled sandals, "it's a lot further away than I thought it was. I never was any good at geography. I guess I'll just have to take the plane."

And she swept out again, with all the aplomb she could muster.

There was no escaping it, she thought as she wilted in the fierce sunshine outside. She would have to call her brother, Ian. He would come to her rescue, as he always had before. He was so solid and dependable: a real Taurus man.

She walked ten blocks before she found a telephone booth. Then, when she hailed it with relief, she discovered that she had no change to make a call. She couldn't even remember her calling card number. She tried several numbers that she thought might be right, but they were all wrong, and she couldn't get through.

She had to walk two more blocks before she found a cafe where she could eat breakfast and change her hundred dollar bill.

Sheena ordered grapefruit and chamomile tea with a sense of relief. The chamomile would help to calm her frazzled

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nerves, and she liked to start the day off with a good, fresh dose of vitamin C. Maybe things were looking up after all.

Fifteen minutes later, when she had finally received her breakfast, her optimism receded again. The grapefruit was old and wizened and the tea was bitter. She didn't finish her drink—she left it to go cold as she stared morosely out at the shimmering sidewalk and thought about what she would say to Ian.

Back at the phone booth again she dialed Ian's number. His answering machine picked it up. Sheena hung up and checked her watch. It was just before twelve noon on a Sunday. Ian was almost always to be found at home on a Sunday morning.

She dialed his number again. After the recorder beeped at her, she began to talk. "Ian, this is Sheena. Pick up the phone." There was no response. "Please, pick up the phone. It's important." Still no response. "Ian, I'm stranded in Vegas without a cent. Kane walked out on me. Pick up the phone."

Ian didn't pick up the phone. She hung up and swore.

She would have to try her roommate, Angela, and pray that Angela would bail her out.

She dialed her own number. After three rings, a sleepy Angela answered. "Hello?"

Sheena breathed a sigh of relief. Angela was there. Everything would be okay now. "Angela, thank God you were at home. I tried to reach Ian, but he wasn't at his place."

"No, he's here," Angela replied, and gave a stifled yawn. "Why, what's the matter? Where are you?"

"I'm in Vegas," Sheena blurted out, too distressed to even think of keeping her disastrous secret from her best friend.

"I'm married to Kane."

"You're married to Kane? You really are?" Angela sounded as though she couldn't believe her ears.

"Yes," Sheena replied despondently. "But the stars were wrong about him. It was all a tragic mistake. Kane has abandoned me."

There was a shocked silence, and then a whispered conference on the other end of the line. Then Ian's voice came on. "What do you mean, Ramsey has abandoned you?" he asked carefully.

"Exactly what I say," Sheena said, her voice cracking. "We took his plane to Vegas last night, bought a ring, got married and checked in at the hotel. This morning he checked out while I was in the shower and was gone. I don't even have enough money to get back to Portland. And no clean clothes. My life is a disaster."

She was close to tears. After having to deal with callous strangers all morning, none of them who knew anything about her plight, and cared even less, the sympathy in her brother's voice nearly undid her.

"Have you got any money at all?" Ian's voice was calm and controlled, and immediately made Sheena feel much better. Ian would look after things for her.

"I've got one hundred dollars that Kane handed me before he left," she sniffed. Then a terrible thought struck her. "He must've thought I was a hooker," she wailed. "He was probably thinking to pay me off."

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"Get a cab to the Western Union office," Ian ordered her. "I'll get some money sent to you straight away. Then get a cab to the airport and get on the next plane to Portland. Angela and I will be there to pick you up at the other end."

Sheena gave one last sniff and wiped her eyes. "Thanks, Ian," she said. "I love you."

"I love you too, sis," Ian replied. "Now, hail that cab and I'll make sure the money is there as soon as you are."

* * * *

KANE FINALLY GAVE up on his paperback and tossed it into a nearby garbage can, along with a paper cup half full of congealing coffee.

He had to find the woman he'd woken up with this morning. He'd been nuts to leave without even looking at her face. He didn't know if he would even recognize her if he saw her again.

But he was increasingly getting the feeling that she held the clue to his lost memory, and that if he found her, all would be right again.

He didn't have to get back to Portland right away. He'd call his sister, Karla, from the hotel and tell her where he was. He didn't want her to worry when he didn't turn up to the manufacturing plant in the morning. She could handle everything for him for a few days.

He strode back over to the ticket agent and thrust his plane ticket back at her. "Cancel this for me, would you," he said brusquely.

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The redhead behind the counter looked as if all her Christmases had come at once. She took the ticket, stamped void on each page, scribbled a quick message on the front, and gave it back to him. "Good move," she said, as she beamed up at him. "No place is more fun than Vegas."

Kane took the ticket and shoved it into his pocket, before striding out of the double doors to the cab stand.

He was in the cab on his way back to the hotel when he remembered the message the red-haired clerk had written on his canceled ticket. He dug it out of his pocket, hoping she had had the foresight to write him down the time of the next flights to Portland.

But instead of times and flight numbers, written on his ticket in red pen was the following message: "Call me if you get lonely tonight," and a phone number. It was surrounded with little red hearts and signed Candi. Kane grimaced in disgust, threw it out of the window and watched it flap away along the street.

* * * *

THE WESTERN UNION official was even snootier than the Greyhound sales clerk, Sheena thought gloomily. The first thing she would do when she got her money would be to find a clothes shop and buy herself a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. Only after that would she go and book her plane ticket. She was sick of people looking at her as if she were a slug that had just crawled out of their salad.

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The clerk behind the counter finally handed her a big packet of money. Sheena grabbed hold of it with relief and jammed it into her handbag.

The clerk looked at her with distaste. "Enjoy."

Sheena gave him a sunny wave and sashayed out of the door. She had money now. She was safe.

It was two o'clock by the time she reached the airport, clad in a pair of ivory linen shorts, a burnt orange, sandwashed silk T-shirt, the same color cotton socks, and cream colored sneakers. She even had a cream scrunchie pulling back her long auburn curls.

She went straight to the ticket counter and leaned her elbows against it. "Ticket to Portland, Oregon," she said confidently. "On the first plane."

The redhead behind the counter looked at her with a bored expression on her face. "You're in luck," she said. "We had a last-minute cancellation. I can get you a ticket for the six thirty flight tonight."

Sheena nodded as she dug into her purse for her wad of bills. "Sounds great." She peeled off a couple, and handed them over.

She would get back home, and then start all over again.

It was hard to believe that the stars could have been so wrong. In fact, they couldn't have been. She must have misread the signs, misunderstood the patterns. Perhaps the auspicious life change her chart had told her was coming, would turn out to be something completely different.

The fortune teller had been wrong. She and Kane were not meant for one another. In fact, the auspicious life change

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probably referred to getting rid of her old misconceptions about him. She was indeed going to start a new life.

Without Kane.

* * * *

THE CAB DREW to a halt outside the hotel and Kane jumped out. He looked at his watch. Two o'clock. He would see if he could find out anything about the woman at the hotel first of all. They might have some record of her.

He walked into the hotel lobby and up to the front desk. "My name is Kane Ramsey," he said to the pimply youth behind the counter. "I was in suite 465 last night."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Ramsey," the pimply youth said. "Your wife was asking about you this morning. She wanted to know if there was any message left for her. She seemed quite upset when I told her that you'd already checked out. Is there anything you'd like me to tell her if she swings by again?"

"My wife?" Kane replied. He felt as though he had just been sucker-punched in the gut. His wife?

"Yes, your wife. Tall, pretty lady with red hair and emerald green eyes. Had a beautiful emerald ring on, too. Not that I usually notice what jewelry the ladies are wearing, but I did notice this one. It's just like the one that my Judy would love, but I told her she'll have to wait for that one until I'm made manager of this place." He gave Kane a conspiratorial wink.

Kane shook himself. The young clerk must be mistaken. He wasn't married. Or at least, he had no memory of being married. That amounted to the same thing.

"I don't have a wife," he stated.

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The pimply youth looked at him curiously. "Forgotten about her already, huh?"

Kane shook his head. "I don't remember anything about her."

The youth tapped out a few keys on his terminal. "I think I can help you there," he said. "You came in last night, pretty late. Actually I think it was early this morning really. You took the honeymoon suite."

He tapped a few more keys. "Oh, yes, and you registered for the free champagne breakfast today. Mr. K. and Mrs. S. Ramsey, married at two a.m. this morning."

He looked up and into Kane's astonished face. "We always ask to see the marriage certificate before we register you for a free breakfast—otherwise people would be taking advantage of us all the time. Cathy, who was on last night, checked the box that says she saw the marriage certificate, confirming that you are eligible for a free champagne breakfast."

Kane put his head in his hands. "Jesus," he muttered to himself. "I don't remember a thing about it."

The youth looked at him in sympathy. "You really tied one on last night, huh?" he asked. "You're the first bridegroom I've ever seen who's forgotten about his wife the day after the wedding." He grinned. "Most of the others try their darndest to forget, but they can't quite manage it."

Kane lifted his head. "Did my wife say where she was going? Or whether she was coming back again?"

The pimply youth shook his head. "Nah. She just walked away."

Kane sighed in despair and put his head back in his hands.

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"Can I book you your room again for tonight, Mr. Ramsey?" the clerk suggested helpfully. "Maybe your wife will come back tonight looking for you. And if she doesn't, then you can go and look for her at home." He gave a sympathetic grin. "There's many a marriage that's started off worse. Boy, could I ever tell you some stories about that."

Kane nodded and handed over his American Express Platinum card. He could only hope that his wife would come back looking for him. Because if she didn't, he had no idea where to look for her.

Hell, it actually seemed possible that he was married. He'd no idea that a bang on the head could make him not only lose his memory, but also flip his lid completely.

He'd always intended to get married and have children eventually. When he found the right woman.

But there was no guarantee at all that he had found the right woman. In fact, given the hotel suite he'd woken up in this morning, it was quite possible that his new wife was a down-on-her-luck Vegas chorus girl with huge hair, orange fingernails and the IQ of one of the lesser intelligent species of monkey. A real piranha-type.

The thought made him groan. Whoever she was, he had to find her. And quickly. Before she found the nearest gutter journalist and sold a juicy version of their brief marriage history for as much as she could squeeze of out the trashiest tabloid. He had to find his wife.

So, where was she?

And who was she?

And how soon could he get a divorce?

Chapter 3

KANE DIDN'T waste another moment. He strode to the nearest payphone and deposited a quarter. "I got married last night," he barked to the astonished state official on the other end, "and I don't know to whom. Can you pull up your records and tell me the name of my wife?"

"You got married when?"

"Last night."

"You want what?"

"I want a copy of my marriage certificate."

"Name and address, please."

Kane gave his name and address. "Send it out today, please," he ordered. "I need it immediately."

"Sorry, there's a backlog," the state official said in a bored voice. "Expect to wait about six to eight weeks for it to come."

"Eight weeks?" Kane said incredulously. "That's ridiculous. I can't possibly wait that long. I need it now."

"So do a lot of other people," the official said. "There's nothing I can do."

"I demand to speak to your supervisor."

There was nothing the supervisor could do. Or the supervisor's boss, either. Or the boss's boss. And no amount of begging, pleading, demanding, threatening or bribery would make them change their mind.

* * * *

SHEENA'S RESOLUTION to start her life again without Kane Ramsey didn't waver, but her spirits certainly drooped. The attractive Victorian house in Forest Grove, which Angela and Ian had helped her renovate all last summer, now seemed oddly quiet. Angie and Ian were usually elsewhere, attending yet another party to celebrate their engagement.

Life, Sheena thought, sagging wearily into her favorite armchair, and pouring herself some blackberry tea, was just not fair. She'd vowed that she never wanted to see her husband again, but it would've been gratifying to be able to tell him so herself. It would've been nice if he'd called, just so she could tell him to get lost.

He hadn't called. Thanksgiving had come and gone, and Christmas was drawing near. There was no sign she'd ever been married—except for the wedding band and emerald ring now resting in her jewel case upstairs.

She hadn't told anyone but Ian and Angie. It was too embarrassing, too painful. She'd married in haste, and was now repenting at leisure. It was galling to think that her husband didn't care enough even to repent.

She wondered, as she snuggled back into the cushions, and surveyed the open fire in the hearth, what on earth Kane would say to her if he were to think of calling. "Darling, long time no see—want to do lunch sometime?"

The urge to make contact with her husband was suddenly so strong that Sheena rose to her feet and grabbed her car keys. This time, she vowed to herself, as she drove down the road in her little yellow car, she would stop at his house. This time she would knock on his door and demand to know why

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he had cut her out of his life, after being married to her for all of seven hours. This time she wouldn't just drive past.

Kane's house was dark. Sheena parked her car by the side of the road, cut her engine and sat still, drawing on the power of her rising sign, Aries, for the courage to walk up his front driveway and demand an explanation.

As she waited, a gleaming pink Jaguar screeched up into Kane's driveway. A long-legged blonde in a fur coat got out and picked her way to Kane's door. The blonde rang the doorbell and then stood in the porchlight, fluffing her hair.

A light inside the house came on. Kane opened the door. The blonde flung her arms around his neck and plastered herself against him. Sheena could see Kane's profile as he unwrapped himself from the woman's embrace and ushered her in.

Her heart went cold. She didn't care to hear his explanations now. She knew what he would say. She only hoped she never saw him again. Never.

Back home again, Sheena twisted a lock of her hair in her fingers and stared into the fire moodily. This whole business was taking a toll on her. She wasn't eating, and she felt nauseous every time she thought about her marriage, which was every other waking moment.

Even though the retail industry was in the middle of the busiest time of the year, she couldn't seem to summon up the usual burst of enthusiasm she felt each Christmas. She just didn't have the energy. She didn't care.

She'd even scanned her horoscope to find the reason for her mood. A sign of things to come, the planets had told her.

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She hoped that whatever the stars had lined up for her didn't take long to arrive. She'd never felt this dragging lethargy before. It must be the stress.

Apathetically, she reached for the tray of aromatherapy equipment that she'd put on the coffee table and selected a mixture of lavender, geranium, and patchouli, always good for stress. Wearily she rubbed the scented oil over her wrists, and at her pulse points. It made her feel better—for about two minutes.

* * * *

KANE THUMBED through the Vegas phone book he'd had the sales manager of his ice cream company procure for him. "I don't care how you get it," he'd told Sykes. "Just get it. And don't ask questions."

The state had been unexpectedly unable to locate his marriage record. A sympathetic clerk had informed him that a fire in the vaults in the last week of September had destroyed some of the vital statistics section before the paperwork could be entered on the computer system. Kane would have to contact the relevant chapel or church, he learned. Which was awkward, since he didn't know it.

Kane picked up the phone for his eighteenth call of the day. "Hi, I'm Kane Ramsey. Kane J. Ramsey. Did I get married at your chapel in the last week of September?" There was a long pause on the other end, and Kane felt a bright bubble of hope begin to form in his throat. Maybe this time he would strike it lucky. He was running out of places to call.

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The bubble of hope shattered as he got the same reply as always—no. Sighing, he hung up, and stared glumly out at the first light snowfall of the season.

He wasn't getting anywhere. He'd tried every denomination he could think of. He'd called Roman Catholic chapels, and all the Protestant churches and chapels in the book, from Episcopalian to First New Pentecostal Church of Saints and the Redeemer, which he personally felt was a long shot.

Should he, perhaps, try Justices of the Peace? Synagogues? Mosques? Bahai temples? He sighed again. It was worth a try. He'd start on the JPs in the morning.

His sister, Karla, sitting on the armchair opposite him, looked at him quizzically. "No joy?" she asked.

Kane shook his head. "She's disappeared on me. Gone."

Karla gave a light laugh and fluffed her hair with one hand. It was blond again this week. She didn't look half bad as a blond. Better than last week when her hair had been an unlikely shade of blue-black. "I don't blame the poor woman, once she woke up and found herself married to you. I'd run for a week without stopping."

Kane grunted. It wasn't funny.

Karla inspected her pink fingernails. She had evidently painted them to match her hideous car. "Have you tried the bridal registries in town? Nordstrom's? Meier and Frank? That's the first place I would visit if someone as rich as you asked me to marry him."

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"You already have more money than you know what to do with," Kane grumbled. "Our company pays you far too much just to do our advertising."

"Ah, but I have made you famous," Karla replied equably. "I deserve every penny you pay me and more."

Kane grunted again. But she had given him an idea.

* * * *

"SO, THERE WAS, like, this huge, absolutely humongous cake, and guess what the best man said about it?"

The blonde's voice, screeching louder than the others, grated on Sheena's nerves. Fortunately the reply to the question was completely inaudible, and a burst of high-pitched laughter drowned out the rest of Screechy's story about the humongous wedding cake.

Angela's fourth wedding shower was well under way, and Sheena, who'd agreed to host this one at her house, was wishing herself a million miles away: on a trek in the Sahara desert, lost in the Amazon's rainforest, or even stranded in Vegas without a dime, wherever. Anywhere but here.

Never before had she realized how much noise a small gathering of women could make when they were having fun.

Sheena's head ached, and she retreated into the kitchen to fill up the depleted coffeepot. She had no desire to watch Angie unwrap yet another toaster oven, Cuisinart, or place setting.

A flicker of envy went through her. No one had bought her and Kane any presents. No one had celebrated their wedding. Sheena sniffed, and wiped back a tear. She was getting so

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emotional these days, far more so than usual. Being jealous of her best friend and her brother and their presents was so mean-spirited.

She took the coffeepot back into the living room, smiled perfunctorily at her guests, and surveyed with utter gloom the mess of paper wrapping littering the floor.

"Oh," squealed the noisy blonde, a secretary in Angie's office. "Just look at that spicy outfit."

Angie, blushing, held up a scarlet, and very brief, bra and panties set.

Ms. Screechy Blonde grabbed it from her, and waved it in the air. "Look girls!" She waggled her fingers through a certain strategic slit in the satin. "Whatever is hubby going to think?"

"It's what he'll do that interests Angie," said a brown-haired petite woman, slyly.

"Ooh!" Screechy pantomimed extreme lust. "I just wish I could be in your shoes when he sees you in this, Angie!"

"Somehow I don't think she'll be wearing shoes," said a redhead, winking and leering at the blushing bride to be.

Now Sheena knew she was going to be sick. She made a mumbled excuse, and rushed to the downstairs bathroom.

She was only just in time.

* * * *

WHY DID EVERY department store have to locate its bridal registry in the middle of the damn lingerie department? Kane muttered to himself, as he strode past racks of red satin panties. This was his third store of the day. He'd already

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called all the JPs in Vegas, and none of them could tell him anything about his wife. It was time to try the local bridal registries.

He'd had no luck at Nordstrom's or Meier and Frank's. A nice lady at Nordstrom's had told him to try at Saks on Southwest Fifth. So here he was.

He brushed past a rack of pink silk chemises, sending half a dozen of them sliding to the floor.

He was about to bend down to pick them up again when he saw her—the woman of his dreams. As soon as he set his eyes on her, he forgot about everything but the reality of the vision that was in front of him.

She was stunning. Her long red hair cascaded over her shoulders and almost down to her waist. Her eyes were a startling green, her mouth small and bow-shaped. She was looking straight at him, her clipboard motionless in her hand.

Kane felt his heart turn over inside him. He knew this woman. Somehow he was sure that he knew her, although he'd never seen her before in his life.

He had always thought that love at first sight was a fool's dream, but what else could he be experiencing now? He loved this woman. He would love her for all time. Somehow, he just knew it.

"A tall, pretty lady with red hair and emerald green eyes," he murmured to himself. The hotel clerk's description of his wife was etched into his memory. Could she be his wife? Could he have struck it lucky?

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He shook his head again. No chance. He was clutching at straws. Besides, pretty was far too prosaic a word to describe the vision in front of him. She was heart-stoppingly beautiful.

She turned away from him, and Kane felt as though he had lost the best part of himself. He strode after her between two racks of black lacy bras. "Excuse me," he said, placing a tentative hand on her shoulder as he caught up with her.

She didn't answer him. She didn't even turn around. She shrugged his hand off her shoulder and kept on walking.

"Excuse me," he said, a little louder. "My name is Kane. Kane Ramsey, and I—"

He hadn't even finished his sentence before the redhead whirled around and fixed him with a glare. "I know perfectly well who you are," she said. Her voice was cold.

"I saw you standing there," Kane continued, a little daunted by her reaction, "and I wanted to meet you. I'd like to get to know you better—"

"That is not funny," the redhead cut in, in a voice that cracked a little. "That is not funny at all. Get away from me. I have nothing to say to you. Nothing at all. Ever."

She turned on her heels and strode through a door marked "Employees Only," leaving Kane reeling.

Before this moment, he'd considered his lost wife only as a mistake needing to be corrected. Now that he'd met the woman of his dreams, however, the search to find his wife had taken on a new urgency. He had to find her. He had to divorce her.

Then, whatever it took, he was going to woo and win that redhead. She would be his. His wife. For all time.

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SHEENA WALKED blindly to the small office the store allowed her, and sat down at her desk.

It was humiliating. Humiliating to be dumped the day after the wedding. Humiliating to be so cruelly teased. Humiliating to feel the same tug of attraction that she'd always felt around Ramsey.

Despite all Kane had done, she still wanted him. Physically, sexually, and every other way as well.

And Kane thought it was just one, big joke.

* * * *

SHEENA TURNED away from the pot of stew she was ladling out and took several deep breaths of the icy winter air. The fresh, clean scent of trees and grass in the South Park Blocks of downtown Portland calmed her stomach, and she turned back to her task again. She'd only filled one more bowl when the fit of sickness assailed her again. She threw down her ladle and walked quickly away from the outdoor soup kitchen, willing herself not to retch.

One of her co-volunteers hurried after her, and led her to a bench. "Sheena, are you okay?" the older woman asked. "You look as pale as a ghost."

Sheena nodded. "I'm fine now," she said. "It was just the smell of that stew."

"Smelled pretty good to me," the other woman said.

"I don't know," Sheena said, as she leaned her head back against the seat. "For some reason it made me feel ill. I must

have an upset stomach. I've been getting pretty rundown lately. Tired, lethargic."

The older woman looked at her curiously. "You aren't expecting, are you? That would explain the tiredness and the upset stomach. The smell of carrots used to set me off in my first three months." She gave a small shudder. "I've never been able to touch carrots since."

"Expecting? As in having a baby?"

The older woman nodded.

Sheena sat as still as death for a moment. A sign of things to come, her horoscope had said. Then she nodded. "Yes, I never thought about it before. But now you mention it, I probably am."

* * * *

THE REDHEAD he'd fallen in love with wasn't anywhere to be seen in his second visit to Saks. After spending two hours rustling through the lingerie racks yearning to catch another glimpse of her, and looking up hopefully whenever he heard footsteps, Kane had finally grabbed a handful of satin panties at random, paid for them and left again. Sundays must be her day off.

He walked several blocks back towards his car, bought an espresso at one of the coffee places downtown, and sat down at a table on a sunny corner of pavement. The gentle breeze ruffled his hair, the sun smiled down on him, and the trees of the South Park Blocks across the road let their last few yellow leaves flutter gently down on the people below, as if conferring a blessing.

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Kane hated it all.

He sipped his espresso moodily. He was alone. No one cared about him. Even his wife, however badly he'd treated her, hadn't given him the benefit of the doubt. How could she really care after all, if she didn't make any effort to find him?

His eyes wandered disinterestedly over the park in front of him, a part of the grounds of the city university. He'd parked along one of the two roads on either side of the park.

Some sort of soup kitchen had been set up. Damn. It was going to take a month of Sundays to get his Ferrari out.

Then he saw her again. He would know that red hair anywhere. She was wearing a plastic apron. She must've been serving food to the homeless, and had taken a few minutes off for a coffee break on a bench in the park. Or at least, thought Kane, as he walked over to her in a daze and looked over her shoulder into her cup, a tea break. There was some sort of weird blood-red tea bag floating in her paper cup, and she was waving it back and forth in the steaming water. It didn't smell good. Kind of flowery. Like cranberries.

He cleared his throat and put on his best smile. "So, we meet again," he said to her, placing his hands on her shoulders gently, so as not to frighten her.

She jumped as his hands touched her, but didn't say a word.

"I looked for you in the department store today," he said, "but you weren't there."

The redhead picked her tea bag out of her cup and tossed it into a nearby garbage can. "I don't work Sundays."

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"You weren't there yesterday, either. Or the day before. I've been looking for you."

She shrugged her shoulders and said nothing.

"I'd like to get to know you. Will you see me again?"

"No."

Kane thought of the satin panties he'd just bought at Saks. "I bought you something today," he offered. "A present. I wanted to give it to you." Kane gestured to his red Ferrari convertible parked on the side of the road. "It's in there."

At that, the redhead got to her feet and walked over to his car. Kane knew a moment of disappointment that he'd managed to get her attention only by mentioning gifts. She must be rather mercenary. Still, that was a minor flaw.

The redhead was standing by his Ferrari, and staring at it with a funny look in her eye. "This is your car?" she asked, in a bored voice.

"Yes."

"Good," was all she said.

But it wasn't all she did. She raised her paper cup over the immaculate white leather seats of his beautiful convertible, and upturned the scarlet contents.

"Happy landings," she said.

And Kane stared at her, open-mouthed, as she ambled away.

Chapter 4

KANE WIPED off his car seat, drove moodily home, and thought about nothing else for days.

He still found it hard to believe his instant reaction on seeing the redhead. He didn't believe in love at first sight, but how else was he to describe the way his whole body had lit up at the sight of her?

She, however, had been less than impressed with him—unfortunately. Maybe she just didn't like his face.

He stroked his chin reflectively. He was no male model type, but he didn't think he looked that bad. Even after the weeks of sleepless nights. And the cartons of apricot ice cream he had consumed.

He took another spoonful of chocolate cherry crunch ice cream that he was testing for next fall's product launch, put his bowl down on the floor beside him, stared morosely into the fire, and cursed his lack of memory.

He had left his wife on their wedding morning without a word. No wonder she hadn't contacted him. She never would. She must think he had purposely abandoned her.

And he didn't even know who she was.

It was a Sunday evening, and he was alone. Married, but alone. Until he found his wife, he would stay that way. His hands were tied. He couldn't even try to make contact with that redhead again, much as he wanted to, much as his loins ached even just thinking about the gorgeous body that must be hidden under those baggy, mud-colored clothes of hers.

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He was even neglecting his work for her. He still went into the office every morning at 6:00 am, but he couldn't concentrate on his work. Market share, balance sheets, profit and loss; they were all jumbled hopelessly around in his brain. In his meeting last Friday morning with the CEO of a large midwestern supermarket chain, he had found himself zoning out of the discussions of shelf life and promotional costs and thinking about apricot ice cream—and how the redhead would taste. She would taste, he decided, like that first golden spoonful of ice cream fresh from the icebox on a hot summer's day.

It was crazy. Kane needed the goodwill of the midwestern CEO if he wanted to take his ice cream national. Thanks to Karla's efforts, it was already the most popular brand in the northwest, but Kane wouldn't be happy until it was the most popular brand in the United States.

Karla had taken him to task severely for his inattention, even though she had managed to salvage the situation by quickly offering to take the supermarket tycoon out for dinner that night. Despite her bimboish exterior and her truly revolting pink Jaguar, she was a smart cookie. They had gone into business together after they had graduated from college and the ice cream company belonged to both of them; she would not let him ruin her investment while he daydreamed about luscious redheads.

He couldn't help haunting the streets outside Saks. He had even taken to going to the park every weekend in the hopes of seeing her again.

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Maybe he should put an ad in the paper, he thought despondently. "Lost, stolen or strayed. Kane Ramsey's wife, name unknown. Needed for divorce action. Reward if returned in good condition."

He was almost desperate enough.

He was wrapped up in his thoughts when the phone rang. For one heartstopping moment he thought that it might be his wife calling. That she might have felt his pain, and be reaching out to him. He grabbed the receiver. "Ramsey here," he said.

"Kane," a male voice called back. "Jeff here. How's it going?"

Kane's heart sank. So much for ESP. Either his wife couldn't feel his thoughts, or she could feel them and she didn't care about him enough to respond. His greeting to his old college friend was less than enthusiastic. "So, so, I guess," he replied. "How's it for you?"

"Couldn't be better," Jeff said. "But say, what's up? I haven't heard from you in months. You've turned yourself into a monk. You sick or something?"

Kane grunted noncommittally.

"Okay, intrusive question. Forget I even asked. But look, Kane," Jeff continued. "I'm calling to ask you for a favor. I'm driving up from San Francisco on Friday for the big event and I need a place to stay. Can you put me up for the weekend?"

"Sure, you can crash here for as long as you like," Kane replied. "But tell me what the big event is. I think I'm missing something here."

"The big event? Ian's wedding, of course. I wouldn't miss that for the world. Ian Douglas is getting shackled, giving up his freedom, taking a wife."

Kane laughed. "Come on now, you don't expect me to believe that, do you?" he said.

Jeff was silent for a moment. "It's Ian's wedding," he said at last. "He's marrying some woman named Angela. You mean you haven't heard anything about it?"

"You're welcome to stay for as long as you like," Kane said. "You know that. But I still don't believe you."

"Are you okay, Kane?" Jeff's voice was anxious now. "You sound kind of blue. Is the ice cream business getting you down? Getting you stressed out? You're not, like, taking stuff, are you?"

Kane scratched his neck wearily as he mentally pictured Jeff's concerned expression on the other end of the line. This phone call was taking up valuable time. Time in which his wife might be calling him. He shifted the phone to his other ear. "Relax, Jeff." He cleared his throat and forced out a bark of laughter. "I haven't taken anything stronger than caffeine for half a year."

There was a silence from Jeff's end. Kane sighed, and went on doggedly. "Even before then, the most I indulged in was an occasional glass of wine. When you drive fast cars for a hobby, you can't afford to abuse your body with all kinds of crap. You'd kill yourself. I don't aim to follow that particular family tradition."

Jeff snorted. "As far as I could tell, you did your darndest to kill yourself every weekend out on the track. It's a damn

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good thing you've finally given it up. At least give yourself a chance for a long life. So what have you been doing since you gave up racing cars on the weekend? Driving an ice cream truck around instead? Mixing business with pleasure?"

Kane hesitated for a long moment. He wanted to tell Jeff what was up, but he couldn't face explaining it on the phone. He was suddenly in a hurry to get off the phone. "Look, I'll talk to you about it on the weekend, alright? I got things to do. See you Friday night." And he hung up.

Come to think of it, he thought as he put the phone down on his lap, he hadn't seen Ian Douglas for the last few months. Not since after he'd come back from Vegas, in fact. He'd left several messages on Ian's voicemail—after all, Ian had been at the housewarming party and might possibly know something about his mysterious wife—but Ian had never called back. He'd been too preoccupied to really take any notice of Ian's failure to call.

Kane dialed Ian's number. Jeff's call was probably a hoax, but it was a good excuse to come out of his self-imposed isolation and start connecting with people again.

He'd start with Ian. Maybe Ian would have some bright suggestions as to how to find a missing wife.

The phone rang twice before it was answered. "Hello," a woman's voice said. It was a smooth, sweet, sexy voice that made Kane think of melting ice cream. Double-Dutch chocolate ice cream. No wonder Ian was planning to marry this siren. Ian was a lucky man.

"You must be Angela," Kane began in his smoothest tones, "I hear that congratulations are in order."

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"Actually, I'm not," the voice replied.

Kane grinned to himself. Obviously Ian Douglas was getting up to some of his old two-timing tricks. So much for his "marriage."

He cleared his throat. "Is Ian there?"

"Can I tell him who's calling?"

"It's Kane. Kane Ramsey."

There was a short silence and then the phone on the other end was slammed back into its cradle so hard that Kane could feel the vibrations of it echo through his head.

He took the receiver away from his ear and looked at it in puzzlement. He hadn't just imagined that, had he?

He dialed the number again. The line was busy. He tried again. And then again. Still busy.

"Oh, hell," he said to himself, and jerked his body suddenly out of the depths of the sofa. He grabbed his leather jacket and his car keys and headed for the door. He might as well just go over to Ian's place and see what was up. And find out why that woman with the gorgeous voice had hung up on him so violently.

* * * *

FIVE MILES AWAY in the West Hills, Sheena, dressed in loose brown corduroy pants and an oversized moss green sweater, threw down the receiver on the floor in disgust and muttered an expletive under her breath. Ian and Angela looked at her in amazement.

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"What's up?" Ian asked, as Sheena showed no signs of calming down again, but walked up and down the room swearing to herself and kicking her toes on the carpet.

Sheena stopped pacing and looked at her brother. He was sitting on the sofa in the living room, his arm loosely around Angela. Angela had her feet tucked up under her and was snuggling into Ian's shoulder; a Gemini who had found the other half of herself. Sheena felt a burst of envy at the sight of them together. The two of them were so much in love—so very happy together. They would have a wonderful marriage. Whereas she and Kane ... She sighed heavily. The contrast didn't even bear thinking about.

"Who was it?" Angela asked, amused. "What was he trying to sell you?"

Sheena made a face and sat down heavily in an armchair opposite the pair of them. "It was Kane Ramsey, rat of the century," she said. "He wanted to speak to you, Ian."

Ian shrugged his shoulders. "Like I care?" he said. "I haven't talked to the bastard ever since you came back from Vegas."

Sheena shrugged her shoulders. "I was so happy at the thought of meeting the man the stars had picked out for me, my dream man." She gave a short, bitter laugh. "Some dream he turned out to be. More like a waking nightmare."

"Thank the Lord," Angela went on, "that in just a few months you'll be able to file for a quickie divorce, and then everything will be over. You'll never have to have any contact with him again."

Sheena looked at Angela, and shook her head. "It's not going to be that simple."

Ian nodded. "Yeah, it will be, sis. You don't need to worry about him any more. Before you know it, everything will through, and you'll be Sheena Douglas, single woman, again."

"No. I won't be Sheena Douglas, single woman. I will be Sheena Douglas, single mother. I'm pregnant. With Kane's baby." And she put her head down and burst into tears.

Ian put his head in his hands. "Oh, shit. That goddamned bastard. I'll kill him."

Angela jumped up from the sofa and came to Sheena's side. Sitting down on the arm of the overstuffed chair, she put her arm around Sheena's shoulder and hugged her tight. "Sheena, you poor baby."

Sheena raised her tearstained face, and gave a weak smile. "I only found out three weeks ago. I had sensed it before but I didn't want to hear what my body was telling me. I hoped it might go away if I ignored it hard enough. But there was no doubting what my horoscope said about it."

She wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her oversized sweater. "It's been almost too easy hiding my big tummy in sweaters like this. But when I tried on my bridesmaid dress a few days ago, I knew that you'd be able to tell that I was pregnant as soon as you saw me in it. I didn't want to give you a nasty surprise on your wedding morning."

"When's it due?" Angela asked.

"Four months. Exactly four months."

"Are you sure it's Kane's?" Ian inquired hopefully. "It couldn't possibly be anyone else's?"

Sheena shook her head. "No. It couldn't possibly be anyone else's."

Ian looked at his hands again. "Damn."

"What are you going to do about it?" Angela's voice was all concern.

"Keep it, of course," Sheena replied. "I couldn't give up my own baby for adoption, even if half of it did come from Kane." She sighed. "It means that my plans for quitting my job and establishing my own line of natural earth fashions will have to be put off for a time. When Mist cast my charts last weekend, they said for me to be sure to take one thing at a time."

"Does Kane know about it?" The anger in Ian's voice was evident.

Sheena shook her head. "No, and I'm not going to tell him. He abandoned me in Vegas without a word, and he hasn't even tried to contact me once since I got home again. Kane may be my son's biological father, but he has no moral claim on him at all. He's my baby," she said fiercely. "And I'm not going to share him." She rose to her feet and paced agitatedly to the fireplace. "He can take this to the highest court in the land," she said, resting her arm on the mantle shelf. "But he's not getting my baby."

Ian ruffled his hands through his hair. "I don't blame you, sis," he said slowly. "But I'd like to break both his legs for what he did to you."

Just then there was a ring at the doorbell. Angela, after a pointed glance at the still sniffing Sheena, looked meaningfully at Ian.

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He got to his feet reluctantly. "I'll be right back," he said, as he walked to the door.

* * * *

KANE RANG THE doorbell with one hand, while with the other he clutched a bottle of red wine. He'd picked it up at the local supermarket on the way. It was as good an excuse as any to call on Ian. Back a few months ago they had often called at each other's house on a Sunday evening to share a pizza and a bottle of wine.

In his obsession to find his wife, he had been cutting himself off from his friends for far too long. It was about time that the old tradition was revived again.

He stomped the snow off his boots as he waited on the porch for Ian to answer. He hoped that Ian was at home. He didn't know if he could face going back to his empty house tonight. Without the redhead from Saks.

Ian opened the door, and stood in the doorway.

At the expression on Ian's face, Kane felt slightly uneasy. It was almost as if Ian wanted to hit him, and was keeping himself in check with a great effort. He gave himself a mental shake. He really had been isolating himself for too long. Now he was getting paranoid and starting to imagine things.

He held out the bottle of red wine he'd brought with him. "I brought the wine," he said. "You buy the pizza. Pepperoni and olives on my half."

Ian didn't move. He didn't even stand aside from the doorway. He didn't invite Kane in. He didn't say anything. He just stood and looked at him.

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"And what's this I hear about you getting married?" Kane asked, still holding out the bottle of wine to the stony-faced Ian. "Jeff called me a few minutes ago and said he was coming up for your wedding next weekend. I thought at first he was pulling my leg, but he stuck to his story. He's staying at my place for a few days. So, what's the story?"

"Yes, I'm getting married next weekend." Ian's voice could cut diamonds, it was so hard. "What's it to you?"

"What's up, Ian?" Kane asked, now really confused, and getting angry in his turn. "What the hell's the matter with you? For crying out loud, we've been best mates since our freshman year at college. How come you didn't invite me?"

"This is why," Ian grated. And a large, meaty fist swung in the air.

Kane looked at Ian in amazement. A fraction of a second before Ian could complete his swing, Kane instinctively turned his head away. Ian's fist connected solidly with the side of his head. Multicolored stars burst in on Kane in every direction, and then he knew nothing.

"Who was that?" Sheena asked, when Ian strolled back into the living room, hands in pockets, whistling tunelessly.

Ian straddled a straight-backed chair, his face grim. "It was that bastard, Kane."

Sheena twisted her hands together. "Kane!" she exclaimed. "What did he want? Was he coming to look for me?"

Ian shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know," he grunted.

"Where is he? Has he gone?"

"He will be, I'm sure. Just as soon as he can get up again."

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At that, Sheena jumped to her feet. "What do you mean, as soon as he can get up again? What did you do to him?"

Ian looked at his knuckles ruefully. "I just gave him a little reminder of what a jerk he was. It wasn't half as much as he deserved, but at least it was something." He shook his hand up and down as if to shake the pain away. "And damn it if I didn't break a couple of my knuckles on that bastard's head."

"You hit him." Sheena's voice was accusing.

"Just a little tap on the nose," Ian said. He rubbed his fingers. "Or it would have been on the nose if he hadn't moved his head at the last minute, the damn fool."

"You didn't hit him on the side of his head, did you?" Sheena asked, horrified.

Ian shrugged his shoulders. "So what if I did?"

Sheena ran to the door. "You could kill someone doing that," she cried, as she threw open the front door.

Kane had fallen off the front step and was lying on the snow in the path, covered in blood. Sheena gave a scream of horror and knelt down beside him.

"For God's sake, Angela," she yelled back through the open door. "Call an ambulance. Right away. He's unconscious and bleeding everywhere. I think Ian's killed him. He's dead."

Weeping hysterically, she sat down in the snow on the grass and cradled Kane's head in her lap. He let out a low moan and shifted his head slightly.

Her tears fell faster. He wasn't dead. Her baby's father was still alive.

Inside she could hear Angela dialing 911 and calling for an ambulance.

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She stroked Kane's forehead and wiped the hair out of his eyes. She didn't know what else to do. She only hoped that somewhere in his unconscious, he would feel her presence, and know that she was reaching out to him with all her heart.

It seemed an age before the ambulance arrived. Two men and a woman hopped out and came running over to where Kane lay in the snow. They took a quick look at him, and one of the men dug into his pocket for his walkie-talkie and spoke softly into it for a minute.

The woman laid a hand on Kane's chest, watching it rise up and down as he labored for breath. "Still breathing." She dipped her finger into the red liquid staining Kane's chest and took it up to her nose. "Alcohol," she said briefly. "I thought so."

She turned to Sheena. "Is he hurt anywhere? Stab wounds? Gunshots?"

Sheena shook her head. "No."

The woman turned back to Kane. After a few minutes she sat back up again. "It looks like just a simple concussion, but we'd better take him in to the hospital just in case."

"Will he be all right?" Sheena asked anxiously, as she held Kane's hand tightly in her own.

The paramedic nodded. "He'll be just fine. He'll wake up with a doozy of a headache in the morning, but that's all."

They were hauling him onto a stretcher when the police car pulled up. Two officers got out and slammed the doors shut behind them.

One of them gave the paramedics a hand with loading the stretcher into the ambulance, while the other walked up to

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Ian and Angela, who were standing at the front door, looking at the scene.

"What happened here?" she asked.

"He fell and hit his head," Angela replied immediately.

"I hit him," Ian said at the same time.

"He fell and hit his head. You hit him," the officer repeated.

"Which one is it?"

Angela looked shamefaced. She hung her head and shuffled her toes.

"Both," Ian said, putting his arm around Angela's shoulders and drawing her close to him. "First I hit him. And then he fell and hit his head on the ground."

The officer nodded and took a pen and notebook out of her pocket. "Do you want to make a statement now?" she asked. "In case the patient wants to press charges? Of course, you have the right to remain silent, and to request the presence of a lawyer before you say anything."

Ian gave a harsh bark of laughter. "I don't need a lawyer. I hit the jerk and I'd do it again if I could. I'd break his neck if I could get at him.

"Kane's welcome to press charges against me. Because if he does, I can tell the whole world what scum he is. After that, nobody would ever buy his ice cream again. Yeah, I'd just love for him to press charges."

The officer looked up at Ian curiously. "Can I come in?" she asked. "And you can tell me all about it."

Ian waved her into the house, and strode in after her.

Sheena watched anxiously as Kane was strapped into the ambulance. "Can I come along to the hospital with him?" she

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asked, looking up at the paramedic as she knelt by Kane's side, his large, brown hand clasped in her small, white fingers. "He needs me. I can feel his need. He wants me to be with him."

The woman paramedic shrugged. "Sure."

Sheena sat down in the spare seat next to Kane's head. "Thanks," she said, as she clasped her seatbelt.

"No problem," the woman answered. "There'll be some time along the way to answer a few questions about the patient, if you're up to it."

Sheena nodded.

The ambulance trundled slowly along the snowy road on its snow tires, creeping cautiously around each corner, and occasionally slipping on a patch of ice. The sirens were silent.

Sheena was comforted as they waited at one intersection for the lights to turn green. Surely they wouldn't be stopping for red lights if Kane were in any danger.

She leaned over and planted a kiss on his forehead, and clasped his hand in hers again. She traced over his lifeline on his palm. It was very long. It told her without a doubt that Kane wasn't going to die before he had lived a long and fulfilling life. She sighed in relief. She could feel it in her heart now that he was going to be okay.

"Your name is?" the paramedic asked in the silence.

Sheena looked up at her. The paramedic had a pen poised over the official looking form in her lap, waiting for an answer. "Sheena Douglas," she said briefly.

"And the patient's name?"

"Kane Ramsey."

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The woman's head snapped up. "The owner of Kane's Kool Treats? The ice cream company?"

Sheena nodded. "Yeah."

The woman shrugged. "Hey, this is the first time I've ever had a celebrity in my wagon. Hear that, folks?" she said to the men riding in the front seat. "This here's Kane Ramsey."

Then she turned back to her form. "What's your relationship to him?"

"I'm his wife."

The driver of the ambulance looked back over his shoulder. "I didn't know that Kane Ramsey was married," he said curiously. "First I've ever heard of it."

Sheena wiped away a tear from her cheek with the back of her hand. "He doesn't seem to know either," she said, softly. Her voice was bitter. "At any rate, he doesn't seem to care."

Chapter 5

A HEAVY HAMMER was pounding in Kane's brain. He knew he had to stop it somehow. It was driving him mad. Shit, it sounded like a million jackhammers cracking through concrete.

He moved his head fractionally to his right. That was a mistake. Everything spun. It was strange. He never got drunk. Never. But by the way his head felt this morning, he must have really tied one on last night in Vegas.

In Vegas. Memory swooped over him. He'd got married to Sheena! To the woman of his dreams!! Their first night had been everything he'd imagined. He shifted his body on the bed, and reached for her.

The hammering in his head intensified, and he moaned in pain.

"I see you've awake," said the soft female voice to the left of the bed.

Sheena was not in bed. She was standing by the bedside. What on earth did she want to do that for?

He frowned, and squinted up at the dim white shape she made standing there. She had on ... he tried again to focus his vision ... what seemed to be a nightgown. She sure hadn't had it on during the night. Why would she wear anything at all to bed on their wedding night, anyway? He liked her just fine *au naturel*.

"You look better with no clothes on, honey," he said, reaching for the billowing white skirt.

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There was no reply; the white skirt was twitched out of his reach. Sheena was consulting a notepad. Why couldn't she just get into bed? "What are you doing there, sweetheart?" he asked, pulling urgently at the white fabric. "Come back to bed."

"I don't think so, Mr. Ramsey," said the woman, twitching her skirt once again out of his grasp. "Though I'm sure I appreciate the offer. I'm already married, you see."

"Of course you're married," he said, his tongue slurring slightly over the words. Had he been drunk last night? Had he annoyed her? He'd thought she'd enjoyed everything ... and everything they'd done, as much as he had. Could he have been wrong? "Of course you're married," he repeated. "You're married to me."

"I'm married to God," the voice said, sounding amused.

The dim shape that had been swimming in his vision began to come into sharper focus. "You're not Sheena," he said, as one making the discovery of the century.

"No," agreed his companion. "I'm not."

She wasn't Sheena. Kane's eyes were fine now. What he was seeing wasn't a nice surprise at all. The voice belonged to ... a woman wearing some kind of uniform. A white nurse's uniform.

"Who are you?" he demanded, his years of authority at Kane's Kool Treats coming to the fore. "I want to see my wife immediately," he barked. "What have you done with her?"

"Calm down," said the amused uniform, taking his wrist in her cool fingers.

"What are you doing?" He tried to wrench his arm away, but it was strangely difficult.

"I'm just taking your pulse."

"I want some information," Kane gritted, furious with the woman. "And I want it now. You can start by telling me about my wife."

"She seems a very nice woman," soothed the uniform, letting his wrist go and pulling out a thermometer from her pocket.

"Where am I?" he asked, sinking back on the pillows. "And where's my wife?"

"You're in St. Anselm's hospital," said the nurse. "And I'm Sister Warner." She gave him a cheerful smile. "You had a nasty bump on the head, but you're going to be fine."

"And Sheena?"

The uniform didn't answer.

Kane suddenly caught sight of the crucifix around the nurse's neck. Shit. Married to God, she'd said. She was a nun, and he'd asked her to sleep with him.

Oh, well. This was no time to worry about sin. He was married. To Sheena, the redhead from Saks. To *his* redhead. The love of his life, the woman of his dreams.

He held his head and groaned as the remembrance of the past few months washed over him with the force of a tidal wave. He'd loved and lost her. He had to find her again.

Now where was she?

Over the next few days in the hospital, he was to wonder the same thing again and again. Every moment, every hour, every day, and all through the night.

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Karla spent all the time she could spare from the company at his bedside. Kane was grateful for the companionship, but it wasn't his sister he wanted to see. He wanted his wife.

Bill Sykes, his chief of sales at Kane's Kool Treats, visited him the day after his admission. Kane's Kool Treats was doing just fine without him, Bill assured him. He wasn't to worry. Karla had everything under control.

Bill had done what he could to get information on Sheena and her family, too. Ian wasn't speaking to him, Ian's fiancée, Sheena's former roommate, the dark-haired beauty who had introduced them, wasn't speaking to him. Worst of all, Sheena wasn't speaking to him.

Bill had managed to get a hold of Sheena's phone number. Kane dialed it, methodically, relentlessly, desperately, every hour, of every day.

Each time he phoned he got the answering machine.

"Hi, this is Sheena. If this is Rod, scuba diving on the weekend is fine, as long as we get back by Saturday night."

Each and every time, the outgoing message was different.

"Hi, this is Sheena. If this is Chuck, Saturday at the Midnight Club sounds good. Don't forget your tux."

She was screening his calls, dammit. She was there, every hour, to change the message on the machine.

"Hi, this is Sheena. If this is Tom, Sunday brunch at the Harborfront Hotel is fine. We could take in a leisurely stroll along the waterfront afterwards. Catch you later."

Kane swore, and hung up again. She was listening to him, at least. He supposed that had to be something. He dialed

again, for the forty-ninth time. This was the beginning of his fourth day in hospital.

The machine picked up, as usual. "Hi, there," said Sheena's voice, even more chirpy than yesterday. "If this is Steve, Friday's fine for me. See you at the Yellow Flamingo at ten."

Kane ground his teeth. The Yellow Flamingo was the trendiest singles bar in town. He wasn't fooled, though. She'd already announced, to anyone who got her machine, that she was spending Friday night with Dick at the theater, with Harry at the symphony, and with Spike—Kane groaned at the name—at the art film festival. He'd have to remember that Fridays were her night for culture.

Meanwhile, she had already announced on her machine her intention to attend a Saturday wrestling match with Bud, and a Saturday night baseball game with Flip. That nearly got a grin out of Kane. His wife apparently didn't know that the baseball season hadn't started yet.

She was spending Sunday in a pool hall with another Rod. Bullshit.

She was running out of names—and recycling her weekends. He didn't believe that she would really date other men. She was trying to punish him by making him think that she was. Surely she wouldn't go out with someone else?

He didn't like to think of any strange men going out with his Sheena. He balled his fists, torn between a fierce surge of protectiveness and primitive male anger at a woman who could do such a thing to him.

* * * *

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IT WAS TWO o'clock in the afternoon, and Kane had just been let out of hospital after a week of incarceration for tests and observation. He'd driven immediately to Sheena's house. Sheena's car was in the drive. He knew it was her car; who else would drive a bright yellow '84 AMC Pacer, the ugliest car ever made, with vanity plates reading "SHEENA"?

Kane banged loudly on Sheena's front door. "Let me in, Sheena. I know you're in there."

There was no reply to his knocking.

After ten minutes, he left, hoping to make her regret not answering. He returned to the attack an hour later.

"Let me in. Sheena, I love you. We have to talk."

Still there was no reply.

He tried again at four-thirty. "Sheena, look, this isn't funny. It's not fair. I'm only just out of hospital. I need to see you."

Sheena stifled a snort on the other side of the door. She had been hoping he would get the hint when she deliberately hadn't answered his two o'clock appearance. "There's nothing to talk about," she called out, through the door.

"Yes, there is," he insisted. "You're hurt, and I understand. I just want to be there for you. Open the door."

"You can say what you want, but you're not coming in." Sheena was quite determined on that. She'd been in the middle of casting Mist's chart the first time Kane had called, and he had completely thrown out her calculations. She had dropped her fountain pen, and spilt ink all over her book of

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Rosicrucian Tables of Houses. She'd had to pour herself three cups of jasmine tea before she could face Mist's future again.

"Okay, okay." On the other side of the door, Kane wanted to thump his own head with exasperation, but remembered in time that this wasn't a good idea. He rubbed his head gently, instead. "I won't come in. Promise. But open the door, will you? We have to talk." He ached to put his arms around her.

Sheena did snort this time. "Forget it. Say what you have to say and then leave." She tried to calm her rapid heartbeats. It was important to stay stress-free, for the baby's sake. And that's all it was, stress. Her pulse rate had nothing to do with the lustful thoughts Kane conjured up in her, she told herself guiltily. She scowled at the door. This was all Kane's fault. She couldn't even sleep these days.

"Okay, have it your way," she heard him shout. His voice moved away from the door and she heard his footsteps heading away. She gave a relieved sigh and peered through the window to see him drive away again. She would be glad to see him go. He wasn't wanted here. She didn't need him. That strange stinging behind her eyelids was only allergies.

She peered harder, brushing away a tear. His car was still there. She suddenly noticed the pair of young children and their father on the neighboring lawn. The father was watering the grass, but the other two were looking curiously at the side of her house. Darn it! She rushed to the dining room window and slammed down the sash with all her might, moments before Kane reached it. Then she hid behind the curtain, not wanting him to see her in her condition. That would only make for complications. Since she had no intention of letting

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him have the baby, there was absolutely no point in letting him know it even existed.

Kane heard the window slam shut seconds before he reached it. Damn. He wished to high heaven that women weren't so unreasonable. He was going to have to persuade Sheena to jump-start their marriage from her backyard—and with an audience. With irritation he noticed the small crowd following him around the side of the house.

There was so much to explain.

"I lost my memory," he bawled through the back window. "That's why I didn't remember that we were married."

The neighboring family looked even more interested, and the father dropped his lawn sprinkler, abandoning his watering.

"Sheena?" Kane pleaded desperately. "Did you hear?"

"I should think they could hear you on the coast," she yelled back, safely hidden behind the kitchen curtains. She just *had* to remember that she'd made a mistake when she cast their horoscopes the first time. They weren't compatible at all.

"It's the truth, goddammit. I had amnesia."

She heard him rattle the back door.

"Nice try, Ramsey," she called.

"I was in a car wreck," he hollered, sitting down on the back steps and aiming his voice at the door. "I hit my head. That's what caused my memory lapses. You've got to believe me."

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Sheena saw the man of the next-door house come up to her back stoop. "Ms. Douglas," he shouted loudly. "Should I call the cops?"

Sheena was tempted, but it wouldn't be fair on the police. They had other things to do. Kane wasn't really a threat as long as she kept him at arm's length. She'd known that even before Mist had assured her of it when doing a palm reading for her just last night. "No," she shouted back. "But thanks anyway."

Kane glared at the busybody, and challenged him with his eyes. The man hesitated, and then turned his back, shooing his family away to their own house. "Sheena?" Kane called out once more.

"Get a life, Kane."

And Kane was forced to retreat.

But not to admit defeat.

There was still Ian and Angela's wedding the following day. He wasn't invited, but Sheena would be. He decided to catch her there.

On the wedding day, he drove to the church, well after Jeff had left his house all dressed up in his tux. It was thanks to Jeff that he knew where the wedding was being held. Jeff was a good friend, carefully not displaying any more curiosity about why Kane was being ignored by their old friend Ian, and not asking anything about Kane's marriage.

Kane entered the church just after the wedding march began, and bride and bridesmaid were well on their way up the aisle.

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He slipped into a back seat in the crowded church. It wasn't until the wedding party was making its way back down the aisle that he realized just why Sheena hadn't wanted to see him ever again, particularly that day at her home when he'd had to communicate with her through closed doors. The organ played loudly, and the wedding party moved down to the church door, the bridesmaid's gown actually rustling against Kane's thigh as she passed. He barely noticed. His mind was seared with the picture she had made as she'd turned at the head of the church and he'd seen her profile. He'd looked her up and down as she walked towards him, and his tongue stuck in his throat.

Sheena was pregnant.

And Kane knew, without a shadow of doubt, that he was the proud daddy-to-be.

Chapter 6

KANE SLUMPED in the pew, momentarily stunned. His wife was going to have a baby. He had to be the father. He'd only just remembered he had a wife, for Christ's sake. Now it seemed that there was a little something that Sheena had forgotten to tell him while she was avoiding his phone calls from the hospital. Make that a big something. How could she have been so irresponsible as to keep this from him? He'd been at her house, for God's sake; she'd deliberately kept out of view, he now realized. She hadn't allowed him one glimpse of her figure. He ground his teeth. She was as stubborn as *his* mother. He clenched his fists, remembering what the result of his mother's stubbornness about her own physical condition had been during her last illness. But this was no time to think of old unhappy far off things. After all, pregnancy wasn't supposed to be an illness.

Kane didn't know a lot about pregnancies, but he knew that Sheena was pretty far along. He knew that the baby was his, too, from the way Sheena had glanced away from him as soon as she'd caught sight of him in the church. Which gave it only one chance of having been conceived.

One night. One, passionate, love-drenched, lust-soaked night in Vegas. He could now remember every detail, including their reckless disregard for birth control. His face softened as he recalled that night. Her pregnancy was, after all, his fault. Sure, he'd mentioned birth control to Sheena at the time, but he'd tossed his concern overboard as he'd felt

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the warmth of her skin on his and the softness of her full lips on his mouth, and he'd not given contraception another thought.

No wonder she hadn't wanted to contact him. Who ever heard of a bridegroom who married his bride four hours after they met, got her pregnant the moment he got her into bed, and then disappeared into the blue for five months? Kane felt heartsick. This was his doing. She had had to go through the trauma of losing her husband, only to discover that she was going to have a baby, alone. He wanted to jump up and hug her. He wanted to rush her into his car, whisk her off to his house, and wrap her tenderly in a blanket of love and caring.

No wonder Ian had punched him out. He and Sheena must have thought he was the worst kind of louse.

Kane put his head in his hands, oblivious to the slow emptying of the church. This was what despair felt like. She hadn't contacted him. She hadn't told him about their baby. No way was she going to let him back into her life. How was he going to get her to accept him? To forgive him for what he had done?

He groaned out loud. His Sheena hadn't had a proper wedding at all. He got up and joined the shuffling remnants of the congregation, gradually moving through the church door and out into the late afternoon sunshine, to find her.

He had to talk to her, even if Ian punched him again. He had to talk to his wife. To the mother-to-be of his child. They had to get things sorted out.

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He straightened his tie as the last group in front of him shook Sheena's hand and passed on to congratulate the bridal couple.

Ian hadn't yet noticed him.

Sheena had. Their eyes met, their gazes locking.

Her expression was hard as stone. Kane tried to take her hand, not to shake it, formally, as the previous guests had done, but just to make contact, to break through the barrier she had erected between them in that long week in the hospital.

She ignored Kane's outstretched hand and hugged the elderly woman who had come up behind Kane. "Look, Ian," she said, turning her back on Kane and presenting the woman to her brother. Kane stood, riveted to the spot, frozen by her blatant pretense that he wasn't there. He *was* there. And he wasn't leaving till he'd talked to her.

Ian took the old woman's hand and eyed Kane at the same time. "Darling," he said, moving his head to Angela, "this is Sheena's and my housekeeper from childhood."

Angela smiled. "So lovely to meet you at last," she said, tactfully drawing Ian away from Sheena and Kane. "Ian's told me so much about you."

Kane grasped Sheena firmly by the shoulders and swung her round to face him. "Sheena," he said, grasping her hand. "We have to talk." He looked deeply into her eyes, willing her to respond.

She only pulled her hand away, and flashed him a bright smile, as cold as ice and as brittle as glass. Then she turned to the photographer hovering round the wedding party.

"I'm ready," she said, walking away from Kane. The photographer looked confused as Kane strode after her, and into the first picture. "Er, Mr..."

"He's not one of the group," Sheena assured the photographer.

At that, Kane made up his mind. He wasn't going to let her get away from him. He didn't care if fifty photographers were taking fifty pictures. Kane elbowed his way into the second shot, and grabbed Sheena's arm. "I want to talk to you, Sheena," he said. "Now."

"Get lost, Ramsey," grated Ian, from the center of the smiling group. Kane ignored him.

"Don't you dare spoil this day," hissed Sheena.

The photographer coughed nervously.

Sheena turned to the photographer. "Don't take the photos until this man has left," she said flatly. "I don't know what he wants, but I can assure you he's leaving. Now."

Pain exploded in Kane, and he lurched away, dizzily. Sitting down on a tombstone, he heard one of the crowd say something about wedding guests who began on the drink before the reception had even started. He watched the photographing of the wedding party as if in a dream. His heart pounded, his head swam, and his muscles gave out on him completely. All he could do was watch. He couldn't move an inch, not to save his life. He couldn't take his eyes off Sheena's belly.

The next thing Kane knew, Sheena was climbing into a car with the rest of the wedding party. She had walked out on him.

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A slow burn began inside him. He might have messed up his marriage, but he was to be a father. He had rights. The baby was his, too. If anyone could have doubted that, the sheer strength of Sheena's contempt for him, her massive rejection of him, would have proved that he was the father.

She blamed him for his disappearance, but the amnesia hadn't been his fault, dammit. Kane swore, and crashed his fist down on a horizontal tombstone in the churchyard. It hurt, and he swore again.

Kane knew he had to get out of here. He'd had too many shocks in the last week. He'd only just remembered his marriage, and hadn't even begun to come to terms with the fact that he'd deserted his wife right after the wedding night. He had spent a week in hell, a surgically and clinically sterile hell, to be sure, but hell all the same. He'd never once stopped thinking about Sheena all week. Wondering what she had felt when he left. Wondering how to breach the gap that his desertion had made in their marriage.

He'd spent the week aching to hold her. To press his lips to her hair, to catch her in his arms, and pin her under him in bed, luxuriating in the feel of her next to him, running his hands through that magnificent mane of hair. Kane imagined her hair fanning out over the pillow, or streaming out behind her as she walked in the wind—her hair was living fire. Fire that couldn't burn him.

Except she *had* burned him.

Okay, he'd left her. Pregnant. But hell, she must have found out from the Sisters at the hospital what his condition had been. Mustn't she?

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He found his car where he'd parked it before slinking into the service. There was a parking citation pinned under the windshield wiper.

Kane whipped it out, tore it into little pieces, and flung them into the April breeze. The wind was blowing in his direction, and several of the tiny pieces plastered themselves lovingly to his face.

He clawed at the offending bits of paper, and wrenched open the car door, bumping his elbow painfully on the dashboard as, half blinded by the torn-up bits of paper, he slammed the car door shut behind him.

He needed to drive. And drive fast.

Kane didn't at first know what direction he was driving in. He was far too angry—and hurt. All he knew was, that after an hour or two of burning the rubber and squealing tires round curves in the road, he came to a halt, shifted into neutral, pulled up the handbrake, and put his head on the steering wheel.

This was no way to get Sheena back.

He was going to be a father. She was heavy with his child. He had to start acting responsibly. It was amazing that no one from the police department had caught him, driving like a maniac all over Portland. Amazing that he'd not been cited for reckless driving.

He sobered, a chill going over him. He could have killed someone. He rolled down the car window, needing air.

He had driven by instinct, and, thank God, instinct hadn't let him down.

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by Lissa Adair

He'd stopped at the manufacturing plant of Kane's Kool Treats. He would go in, he thought, and talk to the swing shift. Perhaps some semblance of normal routines, of daily business being conducted, would take his mind off the ache that was his marriage.

Ten minutes later, after eating a pint of apricot ice cream and kicking a few ice cream cartons around, he admitted that the distraction thing wasn't working.

He got back into his car, and headed for the place he should have targeted all along.

The wedding reception was almost over when Kane arrived at the river front hotel. The lights had dimmed, and Angela and Ian were slow dancing their last dance of the evening. Kane envied them their total absorption in one another, the look of utter bliss mirrored in each of their faces. The guests were grouped around them in a rough circle, and many eyes were moist, many handkerchiefs being passed from husbands to wives.

Kane shook off the slight sadness he felt on seeing the contentment of the bridal couple, and their total obliviousness to anyone else. This wasn't the time for meditating on past mistakes; he needed to find Sheena. He craned his neck over the crowd, and located her near the bar. He moved purposefully through the mingled guests.

She didn't see him at first, and he was able, with a profound sense of relief at the contact, to slide an arm around her while she talked animatedly to a young couple standing next to her. Completely absorbed in her bright chatter, she

didn't notice when he took the glass from her and sipped its contents.

Tonic water, he decided. With no gin. Just as well, considering her condition. He placed it back in her hand and kissed her ear.

At the touch of his lips, she did turn to face him. "Sheena," he murmured, not sparing the young couple a glance. "Want to dance?"

It was the wrong question, he realized swiftly, with a pang. She pulled away, out of his casual embrace, and regarded him frostily. "This," she informed him, "is the bridal couple's last dance. Their special dance. No one else is dancing, in case you haven't noticed."

Kane cursed himself. "You didn't seem to be paying them much attention," he said. "If it's as special as all that, shouldn't you be over with the other guests, watching them?"

"I'm not in the mood for romance," snapped Sheena. It wasn't true, she realized. How was it possible that a man she despised could make her heart beat faster? How was it that the very touch of his fingers on her bare arm could send shivers down her spine? It had to be, she decided, that dark Pluto magic that all November-born souls possessed to a disturbing degree.

Kane gave the young couple to whom Sheena had been speaking a cursory glance. "Excuse us," he said, grimly. "We have things to discuss." He led Sheena, protesting, out of the room. He pinned her against the wall of the passageway outside, in a dark corner, and planted his arms on either side of her body, leaning his own frame in towards her.

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"It's time you and I had a long talk," he said, between clenched teeth.

"We have nothing to talk about," she said, as nonchalantly as she could manage with two hundred pounds of angry Scorpio male trapping her between his brawny arms. Scorpio was a fixed sign, she thought, chaotically, through the thrumming of her pulse and the roaring in her ears. Fixed. This man wasn't going to go away until he had what he wanted. The odd thing was that she wasn't really scared. In fact, the excitement she'd felt a few moments ago had returned in full force. She stared up, mesmerized, into his deep set, penetrating eyes, wishing she could just drown in them, like the Pisces fish she was. More than ever, she wished that she could just give in, take the path of least resistance, and melt into his arms. Fuse her mouth to his. Take him inside her. She shivered again, her toes curling at the thought. It was hard to keep her mind on fending him off when she wanted him so badly.

He stared pointedly at her belly. "It seems we have a lot to talk about. Sheena, how could you have hidden this from me?"

"This is my baby," she flashed back. "Not yours. And I don't want to have anything more to do with you as long as I live."

"The baby is mine," countered Kane.

She looked around the room, ignoring him.

"Sheena, this baby is mine," he repeated. He cupped her chin in his hand and tipped her face up so that she'd have to

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meet his eyes. He kept a firm grip on the rest of her with his other hand. "Mine."

"How do you know?" she asked, as if hurling a challenge at him. "How do you know it isn't someone else's? Do you really think I spent the last five months just waiting for you? You?" She laughed, but her heart was breaking. She jutted her chin into the air. "Why should I wait for a deadbeat husband, who can't even stick around beyond the wedding night?"

"The baby is mine, and yes, you did wait for me." Kane swung her round so that he was against the wall, and he continued to hold her lightly, effortlessly, in a gentle but unbreakable grip. She twisted and turned in his grasp, aware that she didn't really want to break free. A tremor of pleasure shook her as she registered the contrast between his large frame and her smaller one.

"Sheena, I had amnesia. I've spent the last five months looking for you, trying to find out your name. I knew I'd married; the hotel in Vegas told me so. But that was all I knew."

She wished she could trust him. He had such an incredible voice, compelling, warm, and immensely persuasive. "Really, Kane," she drawled, "hardly a reasonable excuse. You could have found me though the Nevada state records."

"They'd had a fire. Our marriage papers never made it into their database. They told me that they could provide a duplicate marriage certificate only if I provided them with the details about our wedding," he said with exaggerated patience. "Which I didn't know, of course." He ran his fingers through his hair, frustrated by her unreasonable

determination to make this as difficult as possible. "That was why I contacted them in the first place. When they couldn't help, I started searching the records of every church, chapel, and justice's office there was."

"Really?" Her voice was cool. "I don't think so, Kane. Or you'd have found the record, now, wouldn't you?"

Kane could understand her skepticism. The same question had plagued him, until a helpful rabbi had pointed out the possible reason for the difficulty Kane was having in finding the merest trace of his marriage. Not all the chapels stayed in business that long, especially the seedier variations of the type.

"That particular drive-through chapel must have been a fly-by-night operation. Here today, gone tomorrow," Kane said, stroking her hair.

"Like you," she said, sarcastically, twitching her hair out of his fingers and flipping her head away from him.

Kane ignored her tone. "I didn't have any details. You were the one who had the marriage certificate. I didn't. Where is it?"

She yawned. "I imagine it's in the middle of the Pacific by now," she said.

"What?"

"I tore it up in little pieces and dropped them ceremonially off the Burnside Bridge." She smiled sweetly. "They'll have floated down river into the ocean by now."

"When did you do this?" Kane asked.

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"Oh, about when I found out that I was pregnant," Sheena said, quite as if it was an everyday thing to do, as if it didn't matter at all.

"I suppose," he said slowly, "that I deserve that." He stroked her hair again, more tentatively this time. "I'm sorry about our shabby wedding."

"Why?" she said, making an enormous effort and removing his hand from her hair. "Does it matter?"

"Of course it matters." He let his hand rest lightly on her shoulder. "We should have done it properly," he added, awkwardly. "Like your brother and sister-in-law."

"Oh, who cares? At least it was quick." She waved a hand in dismissal of his words. "But then, you do everything at high speed, don't you, Kane? Fast cars, fast courtships, drive-through weddings?"

He sighed, and scratched his head with his free hand. The other was now clamped to Sheena's arm. This didn't seem the moment to remind her that she had agreed to the fast courtship and the quickie marriage.

"How can I make it up to you?" he asked, simply. He lowered his voice, and brushed a tendril of hair off her brow. It was hot in the room, and her forehead felt slightly damp. He searched her face. She was trying to hide it, but she was sad. Sad at the need she felt to push him away? The thought gave him hope.

"Look, it's stifling in here," he said. "Come home with me. It is your home, too, you know." Her expression registered only stubborn refusal. "Okay, I'll come to your place. I want to live with you, Sheena. You're going to need help when the

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baby is born. We're man and wife; we belong together. I don't expect you to understand this, or share my feeling, at least right away, but I love you. I want to be a good father to our child. Children need their fathers."

"I did quite well without my father," Sheena said casually. "He ran off with his teenage secretary when I was three months old. Ian and I didn't see him again for thirteen years, when our mother died. Dad only took us in again because he had no choice. He made that quite plain to us on numerous occasions." She tried and failed to jerk her arm out of his grasp. "I'm not going anywhere with you. You're a rotten husband, and you'll make an even worse father than mine was."

Kane felt the sting of her words, but knew that they were to an extent justified. He ignored the hurt, and concentrated on holding her to him, both physically and mentally. He'd finally got her talking. He wasn't going to give up on her now. He wouldn't let her get away, as he had let his mother slip out of his grasp. He was going to keep this particular woman under his control. And in his sight. "We're going home to your place," he said, firmly.

"If you don't let go of me," she warned, "I'll make one hell of a scene. A scene you'll never forget. I'll tell the entire world you're a deadbeat husband."

Kane kept his features still. She had no idea how incredibly sexy she was when she fought him like a vixen. He repressed the pictures that rose into his mind unbidden as he held her fast in a light grip. Pictures of Sheena twisting and turning under him, over him, as they rolled, naked and slightly damp,

on satin sheets, wrestling amicably together, thigh to thigh, belly to belly ... He regained control of his thoughts—and his features—with an effort. “I’m not impressed with your threats,” he said. “Let’s get your coat.”

“I’m warning you, Kane. Let go of me now or I’ll call Ian. We’ll see what another bump on your head does for that on-and-off-again memory of yours. Maybe you’ll forget all about Sammy and me again.”

“Sammy?” He searched her eyes, forgetting his lustful thoughts. Who was this guy, Sammy? A wave of sheer, primitive possessiveness washed over him. No one was getting his woman. No one.

“My baby,” she explained, patting her stomach. “Mine, not yours.”

Kane relaxed, but he kept his features stern. Of course, the baby. It was time to get this subject straight before she ran off again, he thought, ignoring for now his own role in their separation.

“The baby is mine, too,” he said, implacably. “And I’d advise you not to call for your brother. I really don’t want to knock him unconscious on his wedding night. I know what that’s like, you see.”

As it turned out, there was no chance for Sheena to call Ian, for at that moment there was a cheer from the assembled guests, and she noticed that Angela had flung her bouquet. Ian and Angela were leaving, diving through the crowd in a flurry of congratulations and pats on Ian’s back. A few ribald jokes, aimed at Ian, were catcalled across the room.

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They'd gone, thought Sheena dismally, and she was stuck with her husband.

She turned to him. His explanation, unlikely as it was, matched what the Sisters of St. Anselm's hospital had said. She had been rather skeptical, suspecting that Kane had managed to wind even the nuns around his little finger. But he sounded so sincere. Amnesia would certainly account for why he had abandoned her in Vegas, and why he had failed to get in touch with her ever since.

Maybe it was possible that she had been wrong about him. Maybe the disaster of their marriage hadn't been all his fault? Maybe she deserved some of the blame for not giving him a second chance?

She thought back to the blonde in the pink Jaguar she had seen entering Kane's house that evening, and shook her head. Maybe he didn't deserve to be given a second chance.

She'd already trusted him once, and look where it had gotten her. Abandoned, heartbroken, and pregnant, though by this time she was glad of the last. Sammy would be good company for her in her next twenty years. She didn't plan on having much to do with men from now on, except for Sammy of course. She knew he was a boy; the tea leaves had said so. He was all the man she wanted from now on. Look at how her own father had treated her mother, after all. Men were simply more trouble than they were worth.

But even as she pronounced this thought in her head, Sheena knew that she would never really be free of that hot, secret desire she felt for Kane. Like all those fish born under the sign of Pisces, she was ruled, in all her deepest actions,

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by the king of the sea, Neptune himself; like the water that was her natural element, she was a shape-changer at heart. Incapable of sticking too rigidly to a fixed path, or a rigid mold. Water always, eventually, escaped the most careful constraints, and spilled, unrestrainedly, from its confining bounds. Sheena knew that she couldn't forever banish her husband from her mind and heart.

After all, Kane was special. He was her husband. The father of her baby. He seemed sincere in his desire for a reconciliation with her.

She owed it to him to meet him halfway. She might regret it later, but she would give him one more chance. Still, she didn't intend to make it too easy for him. He didn't deserve that much.

She believed that Kane really did care what kind of wedding they'd had. He was the very highest kind of Scorpion, manifested in the alternate and rarer symbolism of the soaring Eagle, who did things in grand style. She paused, thinking over her wedding ring, which she'd stuffed underneath her underwear in her dresser drawer. She didn't want to think about it. She should have gotten rid of it, but hadn't been able to make herself do so. That was totally illogical, of course, but Sheena had nothing but contempt for people who believed that one could live life strictly according to logic, poor earth-bound signs that they were.

All people were irrational, sometimes; it was what made them human, but she believed that he was sincere when he said that he wished they'd had a decent wedding.

She set about to rub his nose in the truth.

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"Actually, I rather liked the drive-through chapel," she said, as she allowed Kane to pilot her outside to his car.

"Please," he said, kissing her ear. "Don't remind me."

"Especially the neon lights," she added. "Not all of them working."

"Sheena." He gave her a sidelong glance. "I care."

At the warmth in his tone, she almost gave in to the longing, that she'd been trying to suppress ever since she'd seen him at the church, to touch him, hold him, and be held by him. Just looking at his chiseled profile made her insides melt. His voice, infused with caring, made her feel that she was the only woman in the world. She wanted to press her body against his hard, lean, exciting length, and ravish him on the spot.

"Sure, you care," she said, flippantly, in an effort to disguise her emotions.

He opened the car door and began to help her in. "I meant what I said."

"Whatever." She swung her legs inside the Ferrari.

He held the door open for a moment, and squatted down beside her. "Neon." He fingered her cheek, his voice very gentle. "Not your style."

Sheena repressed a shiver. His hands on her just felt too good. "Oh, I don't know," she said, flicking his finger off her face. "The retro look is in these days. Didn't you know? Aren't you going to close the door? I'm getting cold."

Wordlessly, he did as she asked. He didn't speak again until they were well on the way to her house in Forest Grove.

"I'm sorry," he said, finally. "I wish it hadn't been like that."

"Think nothing of it," she said airily. "Really, it was quite suitable for an amateur racing car driver; a drive-through wedding."

He grimaced at her and put one hand on her thigh. "More like a drive-by wedding," he said, his voice rueful, his expression contrite. "What you must have thought of me. Then and later, I mean. When I forgot you."

Sheena again fought the urge to melt into him. She could feel her resolve weakening dangerously. His voice was like warm molasses, dark, soft, and sweet. Heaven help her, but she wanted him.

They pulled into her driveway, silently, and she got out of the car and was at her front door with Kane practically on her heels. He put his hands lightly on her shoulders.

It was ridiculous for her to be nervous now. Venus, the planet of love, or lust at least, was currently in her sign. Pisces. So what if those born in March were famous for having trouble with temptation?

And why did she shudder in pleasure as his lips feathered over the nape of her neck?

"Don't do that," she instructed him, trying to sound firm, and she hurried into her house. She felt slightly calmer once inside, and flung her wrap and bag down on the chair in the hall. "Drink?" she asked. "Or were you hoping that something else was going to be on offer?"

Kane heard the flippancy in her voice, and tried to control his raging hormones. Just getting inside her door, into her

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house, was turning him on. Her closeness, the soft flowery scent of her, was hard to resist. But he had to establish something more than sex between them. He had to resist the offer of bed, which he sensed was not all she wanted, though he could see that she wanted him.

He *had* to reach her. He wasn't going to let her get away with this independence thing. He'd been that route before, and had the scars to prove it. Very old scars. He wondered briefly about Sheena's family background. Had her mother been as foolish as his? All he knew, from a casual remark of Ian's once, long ago, was that their mother was dead.

He wanted Sheena. He wanted her as he had never before wanted a woman. It was more than just sex. Though sex, he grimaced to himself as he twisted uneasily in his too tight dress pants, was definitely a part of the equation.

But they had to talk first. "Drink," he said, reluctantly, thinking about her bedroom, and realizing that he'd never seen it. He wanted to see it. He wanted to get her there right now. His eyes flickered to the stairs, despite his good intentions.

"No drinks, I think," she said softly, following his gaze. "Let's just go upstairs." Slowly, her eyes fixed on his, she shrugged the straps of her evening dress off her shoulders, and let them fall. The slinky fabric slid softly down to her rounded breasts, and, still looking at him, she raised both her hands to her chest and slipped the fabric down over them.

Kane cursed himself, even as his heartbeat quickened. Her breasts, only slightly fuller than he remembered, were

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exquisite. The knowledge that their increasing roundness was in preparation for his child only turned him on the more.

"Like what you see?" she asked, still softly.

He moved like a man in a dream. Towards her. Towards the woman he had sought for so long. He put his hands on her ribs, and drew the stretchy material of her dress gently down over the roundness of her belly, kneeling as he did so, to kiss first her breasts, each one, and then her belly, and then lower, to the edge of her panties. He pressed his lips gently to them, and squinted up at her. "No nylons?" he asked.

"They're uncomfortable."

"You don't want to catch cold," he murmured against her belly, and then turned his ear towards her stomach.

Then he heard it. That faint but unmistakable sound. A heartbeat. He groaned, and put his arms round Sheena's hips, pressing her closer to him. He had never thought that the prospect of fatherhood would seem so erotic to him. He had done this. He had created this life in Sheena.

He felt like a king. He wanted her as his queen. Now.

"Let's go upstairs," he croaked.

* * * *

ONCE KANE HAD finished undressing her, which he did with agonizing and exquisite slowness, they tumbled into her big bed, and Sheena tried to get a grip on her feelings.

She didn't know why she had let her dress drop like that. She hadn't meant to. She wasn't sure what she had hoped for from this evening, but she hadn't consciously planned to

seduce him. It had just happened, somehow. Though she wasn't sure who was seducing whom.

Well, maybe she *did* know why she had dropped her dress, she conceded unwillingly to herself. And why she had let Kane into her house. Why she was letting him into her bed. She knew the whys of simple lust; she was a big girl now. That didn't mean that she approved. Sheena made a hasty deal with her conscience and her sanity, both of which felt severely strained at the moment. She would enjoy herself, but only up to a point, in a limited kind of way.

It was okay to enjoy the events that were about to follow. It was not okay to melt when he touched her belly, naked and rounded in the dim lamplight. This errant husband of hers was just overcome by the thought of the miracle happening inside her. She had to remember that.

Then she forgot everything else, as her fingers touched his warm, slightly sweaty skin. As he molded her body to his, and she felt his hard shaft pressing into her own thigh. "Will it hurt if I—"

"No," she said, grasping him greedily.

Still he held back, cupping her breast in one hand, and stroking his other hand down the length of her spine. "Are your breasts tender?"

"No," she said, shivering under his touch. "It's fine, Kane. Make love to me, now, please." She almost whimpered the last word.

Kane took over, and she forgot everything else.

Their lovemaking was urgent, demanding, restrained only by the need to safeguard her baby. She gasped as his fingers

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searched out her secrets, and cried out as he brought her to climax with his lips, his tongue, and finally, with the tip of his long shaft, which he used to circle her endlessly, as a tool to prolong her pleasure, and to bring her to climax again, within minutes of the first ecstasy.

Then, slowly, Kane pulled her to face him, side by side on the bed. Slowly, he arranged her limbs around his, and gentled her belly with his hand. Finally, even more slowly, he penetrated her. Sheena lost track of the time he took to enter her body; it seemed to go on forever. Then she was full.

"Please," she cried. "Faster!"

He didn't go faster, not at first. He didn't move at all, once he was fully in her. She thought she had never felt so full.

"Kane!" she grated, clawing his back with her nails.

He began to move, in long, almost leisurely thrusts, each time coming almost out of her, before beginning the long thrust inwards again. Each time he drove gently into her, he reached deeper, and she stretched to accommodate his length.

Only gradually did the thrusts increase in pace. He was, she realized dimly, trying to be careful. "Faster," she moaned, as another climax crept up on her.

He obeyed, matching her passion with an ardor that turned her on all the more. His face gleamed with sweat in an effort to hold back his own climax, and she pulled his buttocks to hers. "Now," she panted. "Come for me."

Suddenly he did, spilling his seed unrestrainedly inside her.

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When it was over, he fell back on the pillows. "I love you, Sheena," he said. He felt like a king. He felt like a god. It was going to be all right. He had his goddess back again. He heaved a sigh of relief. He was going to win, this time.

He took her back into his arms, and held her tightly. He wasn't ever going to let her go. Never. Never again.

"We'll move your stuff into my place tomorrow," he said. "It's plenty big enough for a family. You can stop working. My company makes enough money for the both of us. It's no good for you to be on your feet at the department store all day. I'll look after you from now on. I know we started off badly, but I want to make up for that now. I care for you, Sheena. Together we can make our marriage work."

Her passion sated at least for now, Sheena came down to earth with a jolt. She listened to him in growing disbelief. So he really thought that that was all it was going to take? He just had to jump her bones, give her a good time in bed, and he would make the last five months all right? Just one quick "I love you," and she was supposed to believe in his undying commitment to her? And to her baby?

She wasn't going to trust him again that easily. She couldn't help but think of the blonde in the pink Jaguar. How many other women had he been sleeping with in the five months he had been married to her? How many times had he made promises that he had no intention of keeping?

Sheena swore at herself silently for allowing herself to be turned on by this faithless Scorpio. Why hadn't she listened to her astrological early warning signs?

Why hadn't she remembered that one of the more sinister symbols of the Scorpio was the serpent? How had she let him worm his way into her bed?

She had never done too well when experiencing sensory overload. And she couldn't even look at Kane without experiencing the most devastating kind of sensory overload. Total, mind-boggling, fuse-blowing, overwhelming electrical current.

She cursed her own stupidity. The truth was, that as a mutable sign, she never did too well when forced to stick to one course of action.

Bile rose in her throat. Suddenly she wanted more than anything else in the world to hurt him as he had hurt her. She wanted him to feel unloved, unwanted. She wanted revenge on him for the five months of anguish she had felt when he had left her. She wanted revenge for the blonde in the pink Jaguar, for all the blondes Kane had ever known. She wanted revenge on behalf of every woman who had ever been left, abandoned and pregnant, by her sorry excuse of a man. "Excuse me a moment," she said, sliding off the bed. "I'll be right back."

He was too exhausted to argue as she whisked out of the room, nude, and fetched her handbag.

She didn't open it until she was back in bed with him. He reached for her, drowsily, and she batted his hand away. "Here," she said, producing the hundred dollar bill. She'd started carrying a lot more emergency money round with her since her marriage.

He looked puzzled. "What's that?"

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"It's one hundred dollars," she said, coldly.

"I can see that," he said, raising himself on his elbows, and looking her in the eyes. "But what's it for?"

"Great sex," she replied. "You can leave now. Thanks for the good time."

Chapter 7

KANE SLAMMED Sheena's bedroom door and stomped down the stairs. Behind him the door opened again, and Sheena threw his clothes down after him. He ignored his sneakers as they bounced around his ankles. One hundred dollars for great sex? Is that all Sheena thought he was worth?

He retrieved his jeans from halfway up the stairs, pulled them over his hips and zipped them up again, frowning. Sheena had a right to be mad with him, but she wasn't going to toss him out of her life. She was his wife, and pregnant with his baby, and he wasn't going to let her get away a second time.

But at last he had found her. He had found his wife. A pleased grin spread over his face. Sure, she was sitting up in her bed right now madder than a hornet, but he wasn't going to let that worry him. She was the most gorgeous redhead he'd ever seen, and she was his.

One hundred dollars for great sex? He would have to have words with Sheena about this.

He was worth at least two hundred.

* * * *

WHEN SHEENA GOT to work on Monday morning, tired and grouchy from what had to be the worst weekend of her life, her entire office was filled with red, yellow, pink and white hothouse orchids. The bunches of flowers covered her desk

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and filing cabinet and were lined up along her windowsill. Even her chair was covered with orchids. She took one look at them, sneezed three times, and backed out again in a hurry.

"Why is my office filled with orchids?" she asked the receptionist, as she snuffled into a handkerchief. "I'm allergic to orchids."

The receptionist shrugged her shoulders and gave Sheena a "don't blame me" look.

"Well, get rid of them for me, please," Sheena said, wearily. She knew they must have come from Kane. No one else could have made such an outrageously extravagant mistake.

As an apology for his conduct, orchids were most definitely lacking. "Put them on your desk. Give them to McKenzie. Arrange them on the shop floor. Just get them out of my office."

The receptionist gladly took over disposal of the flowers, saving several of the choicest bunches for her own desk. Once her office was cleared, Sheena opened the window wide to let the noxious fumes escape. The stars had told her to expect a surprise today, but they had been uncharacteristically vague on exactly what was in store for her. She could do without surprises that made her sneeze.

Despite the dried ginger capsules she hurriedly consumed, her nose still felt stuffy by the time she took an early lunch break at the organic foods cafe she patronized.

Sheena was taking her first bite of millet and aubergine casserole when Kane walked in. She suppressed a jolt of surprise at the sight of him. All through the rest of her

sleepless Saturday night and her miserable Sunday she had thought she had chased him away forever. That was all to the good, she had told herself. It was wiser to resign herself to a life without him.

It was annoying how her heart beat faster at his approach. He came straight to her table and sat down.

Sheena shook her fork at him. "What do you think you are doing here?"

Kane picked up the menu, grimaced slightly, and ordered a toasted cheese sandwich and salad with ranch dressing, with a large plate of fries on the side. "Having lunch with you," he said calmly, after the waitress had gone.

"Why?"

Kane glanced curiously at the casserole on her plate. "How does my daughter survive on food like that?" he asked.

"Doesn't she complain about being force fed that garbage?"

"My son," Sheena said emphatically, "is perfectly happy with what I feed him. Ice cream is garbage. This," and she gestured at her plate, "is good, wholesome food."

Kane shuddered. "It looks like hog feed to me."

Sheena defiantly took another bite. "So, what do you want?" she asked, when she had finished her mouthful.

"Surely you didn't turn up here just to criticize my eating habits?" She glanced dismissively at the greasy looking toasted sandwich surrounded by fragrant mounds of curly, golden French fries that the waitress plonked down in front of him. She loved French fries. The smell of them was playing havoc with her resolution to eat well for her baby's sake.

"Which, by the way, are far more healthy than yours are."

"I have a proposition to make to you," Kane said simply. "A business proposition," he added quickly, as she opened her mouth to protest.

Sheena didn't trust any proposition that he could make to her. He was probably out for revenge for being tossed out of her house on Saturday night. She stole a French fry from off his plate, took a quick sip of alfalfa tea, and regarded him warily.

"You're a good fashion buyer," Kane said. "Everyone says so."

Sheena drummed her fingers on the table suspiciously. "Have you been checking up on me?"

Kane shrugged his shoulders. "Everyone knows that the fashion industry is going through a downturn. No one's job is safe."

"So?"

"So I want you to come and be a buyer for my company. It's only a half-time position, but the company is booming and we'll pay you well." He named a figure that sent Sheena's brows shooting up in surprise.

"Why are you offering me this?" Sheena asked, stealing another poisonous French fry and looking thoughtfully at the tea leaves she was swirling around in the bottom of her teacup. She still didn't trust him. It all sounded too good to be true.

"Because my company needs good people like you. Because I want you close to me. Because I love you."

Sheena put down her teacup and bent her attention to the last scraping of aubergine on her plate. She didn't want Kane

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to see that his words made her skin prickle and glow with excitement. She didn't want to believe in him or in his love. "I don't want your money. Or your love. Or you." She stole another crispy, golden curl and let the taste linger on her tongue. "I only want your French fries."

"Don't answer me now," Kane said. "Promise me you'll sleep on it before you come to a decision."

Sheena shrugged on her coat and stood up. "I like my job."

Kane sat back in his chair and watched her walk down the street, her hips swaying slightly. He didn't think she would take him up on his offer. Not yet. But she would, soon. Once he had arranged a few little details. It was time to call in an old favor from Dirk McKenzie.

It was totally unethical and immoral of him, he knew, but he didn't care. He would do whatever it took to get Sheena back.

* * * *

IT WAS FIFTEEN minutes before eight the next morning when Sheena drove up to the manufacturing plant of Kane's Kool Treats in North Plains. Just yesterday at lunch she had had no intention of taking Kane up on his offer to work at his ice cream manufacturing plant as a buyer. She didn't even like ice cream, for heaven's sake.

But she had had little choice after McKenzie had abruptly laid her off yesterday afternoon. It had come as a shock to Sheena. She liked her job well enough, and she was good at it, too. Even though she had only been planning to stay until

she had saved enough money to start her own line of original fashions, she had given it her best. It was disconcerting to be summarily dismissed, with the weak excuse that the downturn in the market had made her superfluous to requirements. Something about McKenzie's behavior just hadn't felt right to Sheena.

He had been too nervous. Still, she supposed, her astral sensitivities might have been disturbed by the string of traumas to which she'd been subjected ever since the man at the Eugene summer solstice fair had pointed her in Kane's direction. She wasn't nearly as reliable in her predictions as usual, and hadn't been for some time. And downsizing was happening all over the place, after all.

So now she was pregnant and unemployed. Her brother and her best friend were away on their honeymoon. She was all alone and sitting on a job offer from heaven. Even if it was working in an ice cream factory. For Kane Ramsey. For her baby's sake, for little Sammy's sake, she had had to swallow her pride and accept it. She banished the little voice inside her that said she was only accepting this job so as to be near Kane.

To his credit, Kane had been very business-like when she had called him up last night to see if his offer of the morning had been serious. He had assured her that he had been quite serious, and then explained to her the basic workings of the business and where she would fit in. There had barely been the trace of a gloat in his voice when she had agreed to start first thing the following morning.

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Sheena parked her little yellow Pacer next to a vaguely familiar pink Jaguar in the parking lot and walked over to the gray building labeled administration and head office. She was to be working for Karla Ramsey, Kane's sister. The Ramsey's ice cream manufacturing plant was a family business.

A blonde woman was lounging in an armchair behind the reception desk. Sheena gave her a cursory glance and stopped dead in her tracks. The blonde woman was wearing a pink suit, and her fingernails were painted pink. She held a magazine in one hand as she idly fluffed her hair with the other.

Sheena remembered the pink Jaguar she had parked next to in the lot. It belonged to this woman, she was sure of it. This was the woman she had seen walk into Kane's house a month ago and wrap her arms around him as if he belonged to her. Sheena's heart stopped. This woman ... she had totally forgotten this woman the other night when she gave in to her cravings and allowed that snake, Kane, into her bed.

Sheena made a small choking sound. So Kane gave cushy jobs to all of his girlfriends, did he? No doubt the entire plant was populated with glamour girls who had had the honor of sharing the CEO's bed for a night or two. She would not join his harem.

She was about to turn right around and walk out of the building, when the blonde woman rose to her feet, dropped her magazine on the floor and caught Sheena up in a warm embrace. "I didn't hear you come in," she said. "You are Sheena, aren't you?"

Sheena could only nod mutely.

"How wonderful to meet you at last," the woman said. "When Kane first told me he was married, but he didn't know to whom, I thought he was joking. I've wanted a sister for the longest time, but he always said he was hanging out for the right woman to come along. I didn't think the right woman ever would come."

Sheena felt her legs begin to buckle under her. "You're Karla?" she ventured, in little more than a whisper. "Kane's sister?"

"His twin sister," Karla replied. "I'm ten minutes older than he is. Which gives me, of course, all the rights of an older sister to boss him around and mind his business for him."

Sheena sat down heavily on a sofa in the reception area as Karla perched on the desk and chatted on to her about the surprise she had gotten when Kane had announced his marriage, about his distress over his amnesia, and about his Herculean efforts to find the woman he'd married. It was too much for Sheena to take in all at once.

She was overwhelmed with a rush of guilt. She'd been too harsh, too hasty to condemn Kane; she had fallen victim to her fiery ascendant, with all its flaws, of which impetuous behavior was the most prominent. She'd misjudged Karla. And Kane. Every word that Karla said was like a hammer blow on Sheena's conscience.

She was almost grateful when Kane walked in and broke off Karla's stream of talk. His jacket was slung over one arm, his sleeves were rolled up, his tie was loosened and his hair was ruffled. He looked good enough to eat.

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Sheena had been intending to be coolly polite to Kane when she met him that morning. She wanted him to be in no doubt that their new relationship was to be as business partners, not as partners of a more intimate nature. But Karla's startling revelations had put her off-stride.

Kane gave her no chance to put her planned aloofness into action. He strode over to the sofa, sat down next to her, put his arm around her shoulders and kissed her good morning.

There was nothing platonic about the kiss that he gave her. It was hot and possessive and very, very sexy. Sheena felt the power of his kiss all the way down to her toes. He forced her to respond to him.

She knew now that she wasn't being asked to be a harem houri. Karla was only a sister. Kane wanted her. He didn't have any other women. She was only too happy to meet his caresses, passion for passion. This time it was right. This time she didn't have to make deals with her conscience and her sanity.

This time....

She clung to him, opening her mouth to allow him access, and pressing her breasts against his chest. When the kiss finally ended, she was breathless and her face was flushed. Her whole body felt as though it were humming. She rested her forehead on his broad chest.

A clapping noise made her lift her head. Karla was watching the scene with amusement, and applauding. Sheena felt her face flame. Wrapped up in her kiss with Kane, she had completely forgotten that Karla was in the room. She hurriedly rose to her feet, and smoothed her hands over her

shirt. "Well, are you ready to show me around the plant?" she asked, in a voice that she hoped was brisk and business-like.

Karla seemed more amused than before. "Ready when you are," she said, looking pointedly at Kane.

Kane merely grinned back at her and, sauntering, arm in arm with them both, led the way to the door.

The tour that followed was an educational experience for Sheena. She had no idea that making ice cream was such a complicated business. Long before the tour was half done, she began to have a new appreciation for Kane. He knew everything that went on in the plant from the technical processes of making ice cream to the business aspects of selling it.

Sheena watched, fascinated, as Kane ran his hands absentmindedly over a piece of gleaming steel machinery. His fingers were long, tapered, and feathered delicately over the curved, burnished metal. His gesture was possessive, almost like the touch of a lover. Sheena's lower abdomen did a little hop as she imagined those fingers on her, in her....

He glanced up suddenly, and caught her stare. He smiled, very gently, and her face flushed. Her abdomen grew warmer. She both did and didn't want him to know his power over her. Kane, as if sensing her instinctive feminine reaction, and her withdrawal from it, looked back, apparently engrossed, at the machinery. But the secret smile still twitched the corners of his mouth.

Karla was standing by, looking impatient. "Come on, Kane," she called, as he picked up a wrench and made a minor adjustment to the packing machine. "We haven't got

time for you to play Mr. Fixit Fox if we are ever going to finish this tour.”

Kane made one last adjustment, put the wrench down again and smeared a grease spot on his nose.

He put his hand in the small of Sheena's back to guide her into the next section of the plant. His hand was large and warm. Sheena's heart thudded. Sheena knew, with the wisdom passed down to her by the mother goddesses worshiped by her matriarchal ancestors, that she ought to step away from this disturbing contact.

But Sheena simply had no desire to retreat. Instead, she stepped a little closer to Kane. Being in close contact with him was intoxicating. It was like a drug. She couldn't help herself.

Through the rest of the tour, she found herself tugged back and forth between appreciation of the sensuous, questing gaze of her lover when his eyes rested on hers, and admiration for the way he detached himself long enough to show her his acute grasp of the operations at the ice cream plant. His business acumen, she realized to her surprise, was as much of a turn-on as his body.

By the time she was shown into her office, her admiration for both Kane the ardent lover and Kane the businessman had grown.

Sheena had never had much time for people who let their lives be ruled by logic. Logic was so cold and calculating. It had no soul. But she had to admit that in Kane's case, it seemed to work. His business was flourishing.

Still, there were many things she saw in the factory that Sheena itched to put right. Ice cream didn't need all those

artificial dyes in it. There was no rule that said strawberry ice cream had to be a bilious pink color. The preservatives weren't necessary, either. Ice cream was made to be kept in a freezer, right?

The packing plant could also benefit from a little more attention to the ecology of the planet. Offcuts and substandard boxes were simply tossed into the closest garbage can, rather than being sorted for recycling.

As the new buyer for the plant, she was in a position of power, Sheena thought to herself as she settled herself in the leather armchair behind the desk in her large, new office, alone at last. She relished the upcoming battle, and felt a shudder of purely sexual pleasure at the thought of tussling with Kane in the factory, in the warehouse, in the office, on a couch, naked, sweating slightly, as she was now ... She looked down at her chair again. Leather. Hmmm. She didn't like sitting on the skins of dead animals. That was something else she would have to address.

Her head whirled with plans. She would reform the company from within. She would make it into a model of ecological responsibility. It would be her new mission in life.

In the meantime she had to work out her feelings for Kane. He still wanted her back in his life. That much was clear. But did she want him? For more than a quick romp in the hay? Or at least, she thought, being honest with herself, quite a few romps in the hay, for a good long while?

She didn't know what to think. Kane wasn't anything like her father, to be seduced by the newest pretty face he saw. Kane had had amnesia and forgotten about her—but that

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wasn't his fault. She had contributed to the disaster by letting herself give way to the sensory overload thing she always had such trouble with, and by following her impulses. She had agreed to let him take things too fast, and had agreed to the quickie wedding in Vegas.

It had felt good at the time, so she had let it happen. She had succumbed to the twin lures of her own vulnerability to the heat of the moment, and to the legendary and very physical charm of a highly evolved Scorpion.

She wasn't going to make the same mistake this time. She was going to plan. She was going to stay in control. She would consult with Mist tonight. Mist had some psychic talents. She had always liked the aura surrounding Sheena's emerald engagement ring. Mist would help her sort out what she had to do. This time Sheena wouldn't make a single move until she had collected enough information to make an informed, spiritual choice.

A preliminary whirring of the chiming antique clock on her desk warned her that it was nearly noon. Karla was taking her out to lunch in a few minutes.

Sheena scribbled a quick apology and laid it on her desk where Karla would be sure to see it when she came into Sheena's office looking for her. Sheena didn't feel up to having a business lunch today, especially not with Kane's sister. She wanted, no, she needed, to go home and think.

Kane came into Sheena's office a scant five minutes after she had vacated it for the day. He picked up Sheena's note and swore softly under his breath. He'd counted on being able to take Sheena out to lunch today, and woo her gently over

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whatever health food muck she wanted to eat. Her skipping off home had foiled his plans for the day.

Still, the signs were hopeful. She had accepted his job offer. That was a major triumph. It kept her close to him during the day, and he could make sure that she wasn't overtiring herself. He would never forgive himself if she harmed herself or the baby by working too hard.

She had kissed him this morning, too, he thought with fierce satisfaction. Not a chaste good morning kiss, as he had first intended it to be, but an open-mouthed, blatantly carnal kiss that left him pulsing with need and aching for more. If Karla hadn't been in the room, he might have turned the encounter into a lot more than a kiss.

It was just as well that Karla had been in the room, and he had been forced to exercise his self-control. He had sworn to himself that he would take things more slowly this time. He had to show Sheena that his love was real. He had to teach her to trust him again.

She was his wife. For all time. And he wanted her back with a fierce love and possessiveness that left no room for failure.

* * * *

"YOUR AURA IS glowing," Mist said, as soon as she walked in Sheena's door that evening. "I could sense it even before I came inside. You look radiant. Glowing with positive energy."

Sheena smiled at her friend and poured two cups of vanilla mango tea. She felt good. She'd taken a long nap in the afternoon, and had woken with renewed energy.

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Mist settled herself on a pile of cushions on the floor, the many strands of filigreed silver chains around her neck jingling as she did so. From her large tapestry handbag she withdrew a pack of tarot cards and a small crystal ball. "So," she started, as she sniffed her cup of tea appreciatively. "You want my advice on whether you should go back to your husband."

Sheena nodded. She just knew that Mist would be able to help her.

Mist shuffled the tarot cards slowly in her hands. "Have you forgiven him for abandoning you?"

Sheena thought for a moment, and then nodded again. She didn't really have to think, since today. She just knew. She *had* forgiven him. It hadn't been his fault. According to Karla he had done his best to find her again. It wasn't fair to keep on blaming him for something that he couldn't help.

"Do you desire him sexually?"

Sheena didn't need to hesitate on this question at all. "Yes," she said enthusiastically, her face a little pink around the edges. She didn't generally talk to her psychic friends about sex. They were generally quite unconcerned with the physical aspects of relationships, preferring to concentrate on the spiritual side instead.

She went on, a little shyly. "He is the sexiest man I have ever met," she admitted. "When I'm in the same room as he is, I can hardly keep my hands off him." Mist sat back on her cushions, smiling inscrutably, like a satisfied Buddha statuette. Sheen plunged on, losing her shyness. "And when

he kisses me, I want to rip off all his clothes and make love to him on the spot."

"Do you love him?"

Sheena hesitated again. "Yes, I think I do," she said finally. It was amazing what a release it was to her to say the words out aloud. She was finally admitting to herself what she had known in her heart all along. She had loved Kane Ramsey from the moment she had met him, and she would never stop loving him. He was the man for her. "Yes, I do love Kane," she said again, more strongly this time. "Yes, I love him."

"I see," Mist said. She put her tarot cards back into their case, wrapped up her crystal ball, stuffed everything back into her handbag and serenely poured herself another cup of tea.

Sheena watched her in confusion. "Why are you putting everything away?" she asked. "Aren't you going to help me decide what I am going to do about Kane?"

Mist took a sip of tea and sighed with satisfaction. "Honey, you don't need a crystal ball to make your mind up for you. You have the hots for Kane. You've forgiven him for abandoning you. You're even in love with the guy. Get real. What's stopping you from moving in on him?"

Mist had a way of putting things, Sheena decided. Just what was stopping her?

Chapter 8

HER PRIDE WAS stopping her, Sheena decided the next morning. It was one thing to realize that she was still in love with her husband. It was quite another thing to walk up to him and coolly announce the fact.

She couldn't do it, she decided, for the hundredth time that morning, as Kane strode into her office, dropped a stack of papers on her desk, a light kiss on her forehead, and walked out again without a word. He was too busy. She didn't want to disrupt his schedule. She didn't want to make him feel pressured. He probably didn't care whether she loved him or not, anyway.

He'd been so cool all morning. He had kissed her good morning, true, but the light embrace they had shared had been quite different from the passionate exchange of the morning before. He'd been in and out of her office, but he had seldom stayed to speak to her.

"So, what's up with the two of you?" Karla materialized in the door to Sheena's office, set a cup of herbal tea and a bran muffin down on the desk in front of Sheena and plonked herself down on a chair. "I can't work out what's going on."

Sheena felt the tips of her ears turn pink. She had been daydreaming—again—instead of getting her work done, and Karla had caught her at it. At this rate she would be fired before the end of the week. She picked up her pen and scribbled something hastily down on the pad of paper in front of her. "What do you mean?" she asked.

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Karla sipped her own coffee and took a bite of her chocolate-covered doughnut. "Kane has finally found you, but it doesn't seem to have done him, or you, much good. He's wandering all over the plant, making excuses to come into your office every few minutes. And when he leaves again, you stare after him like a lovesick puppy. What's going on? From the kiss I witnessed yesterday, the two of you seem to be ... er ... pretty fond of each other."

Sheena took a sip of tea to calm her nerves. "Nothing is going on. I work for you and Kane now, that's all."

Karla heaved a sigh. "You're married to my brother. You're carrying his child. What's keeping you apart? Why aren't you living together like a proper husband and wife?"

Sheena shrugged. "He hasn't asked me to move in with him. Not since I threw him out of my house on Saturday. I can hardly turn up on his doorstep with my suitcase in hand, can I?"

"So you *do* love him?" Karla asked curiously.

"I wouldn't have married him if I didn't."

"In that case, everything is settled," Karla said, as she popped the last of her doughnut into her mouth and swallowed it with every evidence of satisfaction. "As your boss, I am taking you home this instant, and we are going to pack up everything you need and take it to Kane's house right away."

Sheena gasped. "But I can't just move in on him." The thought horrified her beyond belief. What would Kane think of her if she arrived on his doorstep without warning? It was impossible. Unthinkable.

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Karla clapped her hands together and stood up.

"Nonsense. Kane will be delighted to see you. Besides, it is time everything was settled between the two of you. As part owner of this company, I'm not going to sit back and allow the CEO to waste his time being lovesick when he could be using it to think about ice cream. It is exceedingly poor time management and is fast ruining the value of my investment in Kane's Kool Treats. Our market share is dropping daily."

She grabbed a pencil and paper off Sheena's desk and scribbled a short note. Then she took Sheena's hand and pulled her out of the door. "Come on," she demanded, as Sheena protested and dug her heels into the carpet. "You've got a lot of packing to do. Let's get started."

Sheena was still protesting when Karla pulled up outside her house in Forest Grove in her pink Jaguar.

Karla ignored her. She simply held out her hand. "Keys?"

Sheena sat quite still for a moment, gathering her inner strength. It was easy to tell that Kane and Karla were twins. Karla moved as fast as Kane did. Both of them were intent on getting their own way, no matter at what cost. And neither of them seemed to know the meaning of the word no.

She would not let Karla bulldoze her into a private decision, however. It was time she stood up to the Ramsey twins. "I can't do this. I won't start packing," she said firmly, drawing on the essential power of her karmic energies.

She got out of Karla's Jaguar and walked up the path to her front door. "You are welcome to come in for a pot of tea now that you are here," Sheena said to Karla, as she

unlocked her front door. "But that's all. I'm not going to move from this house."

Karla grinned unrepentantly as she followed Sheena into the kitchen. "Whatever you say," she said easily.

As Sheena boiled the kettle, Karla wandered around the kitchen. "Oh, you must take this with you," she said, as she caught sight of Sheena's pine spice rack. "Kane is a lousy cook. He wouldn't know a gourmet meal if you hit him over the head with one. Hot-dogs with tomato ketchup followed by chocolate ice cream is more his style. And this is so pretty," she said, as she fingered Sheena's linen apron patterned with a small open flower print. "You mustn't forget this."

"I'm not moving," repeated Sheena, trying to catch Karla's eye. Oblivious, Karla wandered around the kitchen, picking up first one thing and then another.

As Sheena sighed in frustration, Karla moved into the living room. "I like your furniture better than Kane's," she called back to Sheena. "He's got awful taste in furniture. All modern stuff with sharp edges. Metal and chrome and smoky glass. You'll want to take your upholstered sofa and chairs. But he's got a better stereo system than you do. You won't need yours."

That was too much for Sheena. She strode into the living room, dumped the teapot and two pottery mugs on the coffee table she had made one summer out of recycled driftwood, and glared at Karla. "I am not going anywhere," she said. "Nowhere. I'm staying here. In my house. You are not going to pressure me into moving in with your brother just for the good of the company."

"For the good of the company? What's this I hear about the good of the company?" Kane's voice broke in over the top of Sheena's protests.

Sheena jumped up, startled, spilling a drop of scalding primrose and lavender tea on her lap in the process. She hadn't heard him come in. What was he doing here anyway? He was meant to be at work in the plant in North Plains, not at her house ten miles away in Forest Grove.

Karla poured herself a cup of tea with ease. "Sheena is not going to move into your house for the good of the company," she said, looking up at her twin brother with a glint in her eye. "She doesn't seem to realize that you have been a total bear to work with for months, and that the whole company is looking to her as their salvation. Either that, or everyone will hand in their notice before the week is out. We are all relying on her to work a minor miracle and reform your temper."

Kane looked at Sheena with a lazy smile. "Is that true? You won't move in with me for the good of the company?"

Sheena shook her head. "No, I won't."

"She won't move in with you because you haven't asked her to lately," Karla interrupted. "She tells me that she loves you, but I'm starting to have my doubts."

Sheena was horrified. "Karla! How could you?" She had never felt so betrayed! She had told Karla her feelings for Kane in confidence. It was unfair of Karla to fling her words back in her face in front of Kane. It was worse than unfair. It was criminal. It was even worse than Kane's abandoning her in Vegas. She flushed hotly in indignation.

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Kane's smile grew wider. "Go away, Karla," he said. "Sheena and I have some things we have to talk about. You're not needed here."

Karla pretended to pout as she rose and groped in her bag for her car keys. "But things are just getting interesting. I want to hang around for the action."

"Go away. Now." Kane grinned lightly at his sister, as she stood there, taunting them with her eyes. "Move," he said, firmly.

Karla moved. "So, that's all the thanks I get for playing Cupid," she said, as she walked out of the door. "See if I help you next time you mislay your wife."

Sheena listened as Karla slammed the front door behind her and roared away in her pink Jaguar. She didn't move. She didn't raise her head. She knew that Kane was watching her. She could feel his still gaze on her. Waiting. The sound of Karla's Jaguar faded into the distance. A fly buzzed against the window, bumping against it in its effort to get out.

"Sheena." Kane's voice broke the silent spell that was holding her immobile.

"Karla had no business saying that to you," Sheena said, finally finding her tongue. "She had no right to ... it was absolutely cruel of her ... she shouldn't have..."

"Is it true?" Kane's quiet voice cut through Sheena's embarrassed babble.

Sheena knew what he meant. She knew also that there was no use lying to him. She loved him. He deserved the truth.

Besides, wasn't this what she wanted? What Mist had told her was right for her? To reconcile with Kane? Work things out?

She took a deep breath. "Yes."

"You love me." It was a statement, not a question. His voice seemed deeper. Huskier. She raised her eyes to his brooding, meditative gaze, resting on her face. He held her with those eyes. He always would, she knew suddenly. No matter what.

Sheena nodded a little shakily, as she took in the power that she felt from him, power that he offered to her as well as exerted over her. "Though heavens only know why," she lied. "You're all wrong for me. You're a corporate ice cream entrepreneur. I'm an organic healthfood believer. You see everything in black and white. I see everything in all the colors of the rainbow. We don't belong together. We can't belong together. But yes, I do love you."

"Will you move into my house with me?" Kane asked gently. "Will you give me a chance to prove to you that there is more to me than a corporate ice cream mogul? Will you come home with me? Not for the good of the company, but because I love you and I need you, and because you are carrying our child? Will you give me just one more chance to make our marriage work?"

Sheena nodded again, more firmly this time.

Kane let out a tremendous war whoop that just about shattered Sheena's ear drums. He pulled her off the sofa into his arms and planted a quick kiss on her forehead. "Where's the boxes?" he demanded.

"Boxes?" Sheena asked, puzzled. She had just told the man that she loved him and he was asking about boxes?

"Packing boxes," Kane replied, as he headed up the stairs. "I'm not going to give you a chance to change your mind. You're moving in with me today."

Dazed, her head in a whirl, Sheena followed him to the garage, where she had stored her boxes from the last move.

Kane only allowed her to pack the bare essentials. Clothes, toiletries, and her favorite books. At the last moment Sheena emptied out a couple of the kitchen cupboards into the boxes and threw them into Kane's car. Karla had said that Kane existed on a diet of hot-dogs and ice cream. It didn't sound promising. She didn't want to be stranded in a strange house without her tea.

Sheena was pleasantly surprised by Kane's house in Portland's West Hills. She had only ever been inside it once before—on that fateful night that she had gatecrashed the party at his house, and been whisked away to Vegas. Then, all her attention had been focused on Kane. She had barely noticed the house at all.

The house was important to her now. After all, it was to be her home as well. This is where she would be bringing up her son. It was important to his spiritual well-being that the aura of the house be right for him.

She wandered through the sparkling yellow and white kitchen, and through into the living room, with its beautiful hardwood floors. The psychic energy in the place pleased her. Despite Kane's truly hideous bachelor furniture, whatever unseen spirits lingered in this domestic sanctuary were

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friendly and comforting. Once she had replaced the steel tube armchairs and art deco tables with something softer, it would be even better.

She would take a sage stick, light the end of it, and trail the gentle stream of smoke from corner to corner of each room to ward off unfriendly auras and spirits. Once everything was arranged to suit the most harmonious planetary conjunctions, the house would have real possibilities. It was light, bright and sunny, and the view from the windows upstairs was truly glorious.

The garden was mostly lawn, with a few sterile pine evergreen shrubs. But in her mind's eye, Sheena could see it transformed. She would have roses arched over the trellis work in the center, and neat rows of organically grown vegetables behind the holly hedge. Best of all, she would cultivate a sunny herb patch, near the south wall, and by this time next year she would have her own supply of thyme, marjoram, basil, and cilantro.

She would grow sunflowers, she would plant low lavender bushes, and out beyond the herb patch, in the borders around the lawn, she would have sweet alyssum. The magnolias and orange blossom that she could see around her wanted only a little work to thrive; Sheena's fingers itched to be digging up the soil and carefully placing tender shoots into the ground.

She would make a beautiful haven here, and, next summer, she would string a canvas hammock between the old and stately rhododendron bushes, and watch little Sammy playing on a rug in the sunshine. She could already feel the warmth of the sun on the two of them, and the wind lifting

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her hair. She could almost hear the bumble bees buzzing slumbrously around the flowers, and the distant low murmur of a lawn mower, giving forth the sweet scent of freshly mown grass.

She sighed in pleasurable anticipation, and turned back to Kane's living room.

Sheena could do well with this house. When she had finished, it would be inviting, homey, restful. It would be a place of refuge from the busy world outside. The house and garden needed her care, her attention, and her love; only then would their psychic potential be unleashed.

Kane needed her, too. Living alone with nothing to focus his energies on but his ice cream manufacturing plant was no good for him. He needed to be introduced to the limitless possibilities of life and of nature, in all its fertile abundance. He needed someone to draw him out and show him that there was more to life than the corporate world of glitz and glamour and hard work. Much, much more.

She would be the one to show him the bounties of the freshly turned soil, the wonder of earth's beauty, and the splendor of the evening stars.

She had taken a lot on herself, she thought to herself with a wry grimace. She only hoped that her spiritual energy was sufficient to cope with the challenges she was giving it.

* * * *

SHEENA LINGERED over her meal that night. Moving house was hard work. By the time she had finished, it was late in the evening, and she was tired and wanted to go to bed. Still,

the thought of sharing Kane's bedroom, and his bed, unnerved her. It was quite different.

She had not shared a bedroom with a man before on a long-term basis. She hadn't exactly gone in for casual affairs, but she had never really felt that deeper level of intimacy that comes with being alone with a man for prolonged periods. She had never before tried to mesh her personality with a man's from day to day.

She had of course had plenty of male friends on the psychic and spiritual planes, but none that she was remotely interested in sleeping with.

She had, she supposed now, been saving the deepest core of her essential being for Kane. But Kane was still a stranger to her in so many ways. She didn't know what to do from one moment to the next, and wondered what he, in turn, was expecting from her. It was one thing to fuse bodies; it was quite another to blend psyches and souls.

Kane sensed her uneasiness. He drew his arm around her and pulled her to her feet. "You look tired, darling. It's been a long day for you. Go on up to bed now, and I'll be with you shortly."

Sheena hurried to comply. This way she would at least avoid having to undress in front of him, something which had not bothered her before she'd felt this strange new intimacy between them. She took a quick shower in the luxurious ensuite bathroom, towel-dried her hair and climbed into bed, quaking a little inside.

But the cool crisp sheets warmed with her body heat, soothing her fears and relaxing her body. She was drifting off

to sleep when Kane came into the room a few moments later, cup of rosemary tea in hand. She rose sleepily off the bed a little way. "Huh?" she asked, her sleep-drugged brain not quite registering what he had just said to her.

"It's ginseng. The tea." He held it out to her.

"Rosemary," she contradicted, sleepily.

"Whatever. It's to help you sleep, anyway. But it looks as though you are managing quite well without it."

"Mmmm," Sheena murmured sleepily, holding her arms out, not for the tea, but for Kane.

He seemed to know what she wanted without her having to tell him in words. Without a sound, he shrugged out of his jacket and lay down on the bed behind her, taking her into his arms.

The feel of his tautly muscled thighs against her buttocks, and the gentleness of his hands, and the even rhythm of his breathing, were playing havoc with Sheena's senses. He felt so good. His mere physical presence assaulted all her five senses at once.

Kane took advantage of her sleepy silence to nuzzle closer. She could feel his erection now, and her heartbeat quickened. His lips were on her neck, slowly trailing kisses from her nape around to the sensitive skin below her throat. At the same time his hands were moving rhythmically and very gently under her breasts, edging ever closer to their soft undersides.

She gasped as his lips feathered under her chin, and around her jaw. She clenched her fingers tightly on his forearms when his mouth moved with excruciating slowness to cover hers. When she surrendered to the enjoyment of his

kiss, his palms moved up to cup her breasts, leaving her dizzy, and desiring nothing but him.

He turned her over onto her back and spread her thighs apart. Sheena muttered a muted protest.

"Lie back," he murmured, kissing the inside of her right thigh. She trembled, and closed her eyes. The heat inside her was intense, the pleasure undeniable. She didn't have the will to stop him. She didn't want to stop him.

He didn't stop. She felt his hair, oddly soft for a man, lightly grazing the tender skin between her legs. His head moved up, forcing her legs apart, and opening her to his tongue. He pressed his lips against the exquisitely sensitive skin of her inner thigh, and inserted a finger inside her. She whimpered, softly. "More. Please, Kane."

His breath was hot against her feminine core. "Count on it," he croaked. "Count on me, my love." Moving his finger gently in and out of her, he put his mouth on her aching bud, and began to tongue it, first slowly, and then, as she writhed in the approach to ecstasy, faster.

She breathed hard, and in her writhing, slipped slowly but inexorably down on to him, her center pressing into his mouth. He removed his finger, and groped for her knees with each hand, not ceasing his tonguing of her, and anchored her feet against his shoulders. Within moments she cried out, pressing her feet against him in the exquisite pleasure of her climax.

"That one was for you, darling," he said, as Sheena murmured a protest that he was left still unfulfilled. "Now you must rest."

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And Sheena, secure in Kane's embrace, allowed her mind to dissolve into sleep.

* * * *

TWO WEEKS LATER Sheena still hadn't got enough rest. Once again, far too early it seemed, Kane had produced "breakfast in bed" for her.

"Coffee? Doughnut? Bagel with cream cheese?"

Sheena blearily rubbed her eyes. She had been a morning person once, she remembered, way back in the dark and distant past. That had been before she was six and a half months pregnant.

Now that she was roughly the size of a full-grown hippopotamus, it was getting difficult to get out of bed in the morning.

Kane didn't help any by being so bright and cheerful. He was so blasted happy that she wanted to kick him sometimes.

Like now.

All she wanted was a bowl of fresh fruit and a cup of parsley and dandelion leaf tea, and she told him so. He shoved a plate of chocolate doughnuts under her nose. And another of bagels with cream cheese. And coffee. Uuggghh. She waved it away with a motion of her hand. The very smell of it made her want to throw up.

She wished she could sleep in a little longer, but she had to get up and get ready for work.

Work. At the thought of going to work, her eyes lit up with a smile. Even though she had only been working for Kane's Kool Treats for a couple of weeks, she was starting to make a

difference. She didn't have much longer to work there—she had already decided that she would stop working as soon as Sammy was born and concentrate on being a mother. Maybe she would even have some time to experiment with a few designs for natural fiber clothes in funky new styles. Ideas had been bursting in her mind with the turbulent beauty of a kaleidoscope, and with increasing frequency, lately. She was beginning to sense that the time was right for her to fulfill her own potential as a designer.

But before she could do that, she had another job to do. She had to finish with the ice cream factory. Thanks to her efforts so far, Kane's plant was a lot less wasteful now. Much more environmentally friendly. She felt good about that.

It was a pity she couldn't feel as good about her relationship with her husband. Everything about their relationship was fine—as long as they were in bed together. Even feeling like a hippopotamus wasn't enough to cool Sheena's ardor for Kane. Kane didn't seem to mind making love to a female of a different species, either. He seemed very tolerant and broad-minded about her increasing girth.

It was only when they were out of bed that everything seemed to go all wrong. Sheena felt as though she was trapped in a plastic dome, separated from Kane by an invisible, but impenetrable wall. She knew so little about him. That he insisted on offering her coffee in the morning proved that he knew nothing of her. But it went deeper than that. Why had all her efforts to draw him out about his past, his family, and especially his parents, completely failed? She knew nothing about him. Nothing at all. Sheena could only

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hope that their sexual compatibility, and an earnest desire on her part to make her marriage work, would see them through.

* * * *

"SHEENA. I NEED to talk to you about something."

Sheena put down her pen and smiled at the foreman of the packing division, a burly man in blue overalls, as he bore down upon her. Inwardly her heart sank. She knew he was coming to see her with more complaints. She was getting fed up with dealing with people moaning at her this morning.

"Yes, Jim? What can I do for you?"

"Those new boxes you bought are no good," Jim said bluntly. "They're too thick. They gum up the machines. We've wasted more time in the last three days stopping the machines and picking out boxes from their innards than we've spent actually packing ice cream. We want the old boxes back."

"I'm sorry, but you can't have the old boxes back," Sheena said sweetly. "The old boxes were made from felled timber. This ice cream factory was killing at least a brace of spotted owls a week by depriving them of their natural habitat. The new boxes are made from forty percent pre-consumer recycled packaging, and 60 percent post-consumer recycled packaging. Not a single owl dies for them. Isn't that worth unjamming your machines once a day?"

"It isn't once a day. It's more like once a minute," Jim growled. "Kane isn't going to like the delay."

"Then get an engineer to adjust them so they don't jam," Sheena suggested calmly.

Jim opened his mouth to speak, but at the look of determination on Sheena's face, he shut it again and stomped out of her office, muttering under his breath.

Sheena calmly picked up her pen again. She banished the thought of Jim from her mind. Men could be so stupid sometimes. What did he think she could do about his jammed machines? She was no engineer.

It was barely ten minutes later when the head chemist came through her office door, looking hassled and harried. Sheena put down her pen again and gave a little sigh. Obviously she was fated not to get any work at all done today.

The chemist pushed his glasses up his nose and drew his white coat a little tighter around his lanky frame. "Sheena. I have a problem."

Sheena raised her eyebrows. "I don't think I'll be able to help you, Hank. I was never very good at chemistry in school."

The chemist muttered something under his breath. Sheena thought it sounded like, "I might have guessed," but she couldn't quite be sure. He pushed his glasses up his nose, absentmindedly scratched his ear and took his pen in and out of the pocket protector in his lab coat several times. "Ice cream needs preservatives," he finally managed to get out.

"Why?"

Hank stared at her as though she had sprouted horns and a tail. "You're mixing up my recipes," he said. "Kane's recipes."

"I don't like eating unnecessary chemicals in my ice cream," Sheena said, tapping her fingernails on the desk in front of her. "I'm sure that lots of people feel the same way."

"Does this mean that you won't ever again be buying the preservatives I've been using for the last ten years?" the chemist demanded, his horror giving him unusual eloquence. "Ever? You can't mean it. I'll have to make up a whole new set of recipes."

"Isn't that what you're paid to do?" Sheena asked matter-of-factly, as she steepled her fingers together. It was becoming a struggle to keep her temper. Her patience was wearing very thin.

The chemist wilted before her eyes, and scurried out of the door, muttering something about what Kane would have to say about this latest development.

Sheena got up and shut the door behind him. So far this morning, nearly everyone in the company had come to her with some complaint they had about the minor environmentally friendly changes she was making in the manufacturing process.

The only person she hadn't seen yet was the janitor, but he had left a nasty note on her desk about the new policy for recycling garbage that she was trying to institute, and the environmentally friendly cleaning fluids that she had ordered for his staff.

So much for their delight at her arrival, she thought bitterly. So much for their trust that she'd save the company by putting Kane back in a good mood. She was saving the company from getting a reputation for ecological vandalism. Already one senator and two House Representatives from Washington had endorsed her efforts. The publicity alone was worth millions. Profits were sure to go up soon. But the blasted workers couldn't see it.

It was enough to make a woman tear her hair out, she thought, as she turned back to her desk.

Before she had even sat back down, there was a knock on her door, and Karla entered.

Sheena groaned when she saw her sister-in-law and put her head in her hands. "Go away, Karla," she grumbled. "Whatever it is, I don't want to hear it."

"Bad day?" Karla's voice was amused.

"Complaints. I've had nothing but complaints all day." Sheena lifted up her head and looked Karla straight in the eye. "All I've been doing is trying to make the employees of this dratted firm a little more environmentally conscious, and you'd think I'd asked them all to go swimming in the Willamette River in downtown Portland in the middle of winter with no clothes on."

"So are you ready for some praise instead?" Karla inquired blandly.

"Yes," Sheena said. "I am. Tell me that I look wonderful today. Tell me that I'm blooming. Tell me anything. Just don't complain at me."

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"I wouldn't dream of it. Sheena, you look wonderful today. You are positively blooming. I like your idea for the all-natural ice cream without artificial flavors, colors or preservatives. I was thinking of giving it a name like The Natural Choice. I think it could go over with consumers in a big way."

Sheena held her breath. "You mean it?" she said, almost in a whisper. "You really like it?"

Karla grinned. "I think it's a terrific idea. The only problem will be convincing Kane. He's a control freak, you know. He likes to run the company his way, with no input from anyone else. It's his way. We'll have a tough job convincing him that artificial is out and natural is in."

"I'd certainly noticed that he likes his own way," Sheena said wryly.

Karla looked critically at her fingernails. "I can't blame him. He's built this company up from nothing. It means a lot to him."

"He's good at it," Sheena admitted. "It's not exactly the way that I'd run it, but it works. The staff like him. At any rate," she said, thinking of the comments of all of her complaining visitors of that morning, "they all seem eager not to upset him."

"Kane cares about everyone who works here," Karla said. "He looks after them well. After what happened to our father, I wouldn't forgive him if he treated them any other way."

"Your father?" Sheena asked curiously. Kane had still not told her anything about his family. All she knew was that both his parents were dead.

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"Dad was laid off from his job in aircraft maintenance when he was forty-nine. Kane and I were just fifteen. Dad never found another job, and after a while he stopped trying. He took to a bottle instead."

"What happened to him?" Sheena asked.

Karla shrugged. "Died in a car accident. He'd been drinking, as usual, went the wrong way down the freeway, and ended up plastered against the front bumper of a truck. Ever since then, Kane has been determined to avoid Dad's fate. He talked me into starting this company when we were just out of college, so that we would never be in the position of having to work for someone else. He even took up racing cars as a hobby. His ambition was to be the best amateur driver on the circuit. He's spent his whole life trying to exorcize Dad's ghost."

"And your mother?" Sheena asked.

"Mom went a bit strange after Dad died. She wouldn't go to a regular doctor. Said they were all quacks because they hadn't been able to save Dad after the accident." Karla made a face. "Unfortunately, neither her homeopathist nor her herbalist had any experience with diagnosing cancer. By the time it was discovered five years ago that she had breast cancer, her whole body was riddled with cancer cells. She died shortly afterwards. Kane has had a thing against health foods and herbalists ever since."

Sheena groaned and hid her face in her hands. "That explains a lot. The hotdogs. The ice cream. The way he offers me coffee every morning even though he knows I hate it. He

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must be trying to convert me to his own brands of caffeine-laden, sugar-enriched, super-refined garbage.”

Karla grinned. “Just as you are trying to convert him to fennel tea and organically grown sunflower seeds?”

Sheena nodded. “He told you about those, did he? Guilty as charged. But I have right on my side. Parsley tea is better for him than pizza.”

Chapter 9

"I THOUGHT we could do up our daughter's room in pretty pastel colors. Ice cream colors." Kane looked around the largest of the spare bedrooms. He'd never really noticed before how bland and unexciting it was. It had as much personality as a hotel room. Not at all the sort of room that a baby girl would feel comfortable in. It would have to be redecorated from top to bottom. His daughter needed the right atmosphere to grow up in. Nothing was too good for his and Sheena's daughter.

It was odd how sure he was that they were going to have a daughter. He placed one hand protectively on Sheena's stomach. He just knew, that was all.

"Babies can't tell the difference between soft pastels," Sheena said from beside him. "They should spend the first six months of their lives surrounded by only black and white. The contrast stimulates them."

"Black and white?" Kane queried. It sounded very sterile. Unbabyish. Not right for his baby girl. "Where'd you get a crazy idea like that?" he grumbled.

Sheena ignored the barb, continuing as if he hadn't spoken. "Black and white endangered animals would be perfect," Sheena said decisively. "Zebras, maybe, or endangered Cuban crocodiles. That should stimulate his senses and teach him early on that a social conscience is important."

Kane shook his head. "This room is too dark for black and white." Just the thought of surrounding his daughter with black and white crocodiles was enough to set his teeth on edge.

He stopped, and placed his hands squarely on his hips. "Ice cream colors would be much more suitable. And perfect for the owner of an ice cream company."

"We don't have to use this room for Sammy," Sheena said. Her small, white teeth were worrying her lower lip. Kane wanted to kiss her soft mouth. "In fact, the smaller bedroom at the front would be more suitable. It's a lot lighter and sunnier."

Kane's irritation vanished as he watched Sheena nibbling with unconscious seductiveness on her Cupid's Bow lips. He could hardly take his eyes off Sheena's mouth. "It's too small," he said. "She'll need space." His mind was really not on decorating his daughter's room any more. It was on much more immediately pressing matters. Such as the fact that it was a sunny Sunday afternoon and he hadn't held Sheena naked in his arms for a good six hours.

He moved around behind her and took her in his arms. She was growing steadily. He could barely clasp his hands around in front of her belly now.

She was eight months pregnant. The baby was due in just exactly four weeks and three days from today. In just one month he would be a father.

The prospect frightened him. In fact, he was much more than frightened. He was terrified.

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If something happened to Sheena or to his baby daughter, he would never forgive himself. He had not been able to save either of his parents. When they had died, one after the other, he had been left with the bitter taste of failure in his mouth.

He had done everything in his power to stop his father drinking. He had begged and pleaded with his mother to visit a proper doctor instead of relying on that quack of an herbalist. Neither of them had listened to him.

Sheena, however, was a different matter. He would make Sheena listen to him. She was his wife. She belonged to him. He had insisted from the first that Sheena visit a proper doctor in a proper hospital. She had wanted a home birth with only a midwife in attendance, but he had absolutely refused to let her take that risk. Herbal teas and the rest of that mumbo jumbo were all right as far as they went, which wasn't far. He didn't mind humoring her in the small things. But on some things he was willing to stand firm. He could not bear it if something happened to her when he might have been able to stop it. He would take care of her. She would survive.

It worried him that she was insisting on working right up until the baby was due. She didn't have to work. She was his wife, and he would look after her.

Sheena, however, didn't see it that way. She had given in about seeing a doctor, but she adamantly refused to stop working. She seemed to have launched a one-woman crusade to reform his ice cream company and nothing, not even her advanced state of pregnancy, was about to stop her.

Kane didn't particularly mind the changes she was making. They were costing him money, he was well aware, but nothing that the manufacturing plant couldn't afford. For now. He thought it was all nonsense, personally, but if buying recycled packaging and all-natural dyes was that important to Sheena, then he wouldn't stand in her way. They could get back to normal after she got absorbed in his daughter.

He couldn't help wishing, though, that Sheena would take more care of herself and trust him to run the ice cream factory.

He nuzzled into the softness of Sheena's neck and bent his attention to what Sheena was saying.

"...with a pretty cotton rug on the floor. I know just where I can find one. I'll pick one up after work tomorrow."

"Hmmm," he said, not hearing, or even really caring, what she had just proposed. "Sounds good. Why don't you take all day off tomorrow? Then you wouldn't have to rush to do it after work."

Sheena sighed. Kane could feel the vibrations travel through his body, and he held her closer. "I can't take tomorrow off," Sheena said. "There are just too many things I have to do."

"The ice cream factory will survive without you," Kane said. "It's gone on this long. It will go on for a bit longer. It's time that you went on maternity leave."

Sheena stood up straighter and brushed Kane's mouth away from her neck. "You mean, you can't wait to get rid of me," she said. "So you can get back to running the company the way you always have."

"That's not it at all," Kane protested. He was uncomfortably aware, though, that he did slightly resent Sheena's efforts to interfere in his business. Especially now that she had upset several key members of his staff. He had built it up out of nothing, and she was hell on his corporate pocketbook, though he had to admit that he'd had some great publicity lately due to her efforts and his market share looked set to rise. But none of his grievances could change the fact that his first desire and priority was to look after Sheena and the baby.

"Isn't it?" Sheena broke out of his embrace and turned to face him. "Be honest with yourself, Kane," she said. "You're using the baby as an excuse to get me to leave work. You want me out."

"I'm trying to look after you." Even to his own ears, his voice sounded weak and unconvincing.

"I don't think so," Sheena said. "Ever since I moved in with you, you've been nagging at me to give up my way of life. Stay at home with the baby. Drink your caffeine-laden, cancer-inducing coffee. Come and work for you if I must, but keep my nose out of your business. You just wanted me close to you so that I would be even more under your control."

He made an abrupt movement of impatience.

"You see?" she said wearily. "You can't listen to my ideas even for a moment without bristling."

Kane stuffed his hands in his jeans pockets, and stared out the window.

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Sheena continued, exhaustion making her voice sharp. "Well, I've just about had enough. If you can't accept me for what I am, there's no hope for the two of us."

"If I can't accept you for what you are?" Kane said, turning back to face her. He could hardly believe what he was hearing. What did Sheena think that she had been trying to do to him all these weeks? "You're the one who is trying to change me, and I don't like it anymore than you do. I happen to like coffee and ice cream and hotdogs. I'm not giving them up to munch on dry wheatgerm burgers and naturally fermented goat's yogurt."

"It's better for you," Sheena said defiantly.

"It tastes like garbage."

"You'll live longer."

"No, I won't. It'll only seem longer." Kane raked his hands through his hair with frustration. "And you're trying to do the same thing to my company. New environmentally bloody friendly boxes. Goddamn natural dyes. You're upsetting all the staff. I had to spend half an hour with the head chemist the other day begging him not to quit."

Sheena put her hands on her hips and glared at him. "You're just concerned about what I'm costing you." She jabbed at his chest with an accusing forefinger. "Well, let me tell you this—you hired me of your own free will. Now you're stuck with me. I'm not going to quit on you."

"I can afford the money. I just don't like anyone else telling me what to do."

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Sheena stared right at Kane, her green eyes unblinking, her bow-shaped mouth set in a hard line. "Neither do I," she said. "Neither do I."

* * * *

NEXT DAY AT Kane's Kool Treats, Sheena pressed her hand against the small of her back and sighed heavily. Her back really hurt today. She must have slept funny on it last night.

She sighed. It *would* be today that she felt slightly under the weather. Today was the visit from the inspector. The county had, it seemed, received a complaint from a customer claiming he'd gotten sick from Kane's ice cream. There had been threats of litigation. Kane didn't know about it yet; she and Karla, who was proving to be a real friend, had managed to keep it from him. Sheena was preparing for a nasty battle.

She hadn't even introduced her biggest change yet, the one thing that she had feared the customers might not all take to right away—ice cream made from raw milk. Karla had kept quiet about that, too. Karla had more faith in Sheena's ideas than her brother did, thought Sheena, with annoyance. Well, they would just show him. Raw milk was the up-and-coming thing. And the inspector was going to get an eyeful on his visit today.

Their new ice cream was going to be the latest thing. The product wasn't even on the market yet.

Just as she was turning back to the paperwork on her desk, the internal phone rang.

"Showtime, honey," purred Karla's voice in her ear.

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Karla had been taking the inspector round the plant, with Kane in attendance. Karla had arranged with Sheena, who was more and more tired these days, to save the raw milk ice cream assembly line for last, so that Sheena could enjoy the pleased expressions on Kane's face and the inspector's face, without having to tire herself out tramping over the whole factory first.

Assuming they would be pleased, of course.

"Of course they will see the possibilities," Karla said on the phone, reading her mind. "I did, didn't I?"

"You're you," said Sheena, grateful for the encouragement. "Okay. I'll see you in the reception area."

* * * *

"RAW MILK?" Kane roared, staring at Sheena in stupefaction. "You're going to put my name on ice cream made from *raw milk*?"

The inspector wrote something on his notepad. "It's been tried before," he said, gloomily. "Never did work. Unsanitary stuff." He shuddered delicately.

Karla stepped in to the rescue. "That's because we weren't making it," she said, firmly taking the inspector's arm and drawing him into the first chamber, where cartons of raw milk were unloaded and poured into huge vats for the giant ice cream makers in the next chamber.

"You're going to ruin me," hissed Kane, as he held back, holding Sheena's arm. The rest of the entourage went on to the freezing station.

There were times, thought Sheena, when a woman just had to use womanly wiles. She pressed infinitesimally closer to Kane. "I would never ruin you," she breathed, and had the satisfaction of feeling his immediate response.

"Mr. Ramsey," uttered the nervous youth who had appeared suddenly at Kane's elbow.

"Not now," said Kane, as he drew Sheena to him.

"But the engineers at the cooling system have a problem..." the youth continued desperately.

So did Kane. "Later," he said, pressing Sheena surreptitiously to him. "Go away."

Sheena barely noticed the youth's disappearance. It hadn't sounded serious, anyway. Just another of the staff's interminable and endless complaints. Kane's mouth, nibbling on her ear, was much more interesting.

"Raw milk, huh?" Kane whispered into her ear. "What's next?" His tongue probed the delicate tissue behind her earlobe. "What's the flavor of the month? Arrowseal? Goldenroot?"

Sheena shuddered delicately as his lips feathered over hers. Evidently he'd been reading the labels on the bottles of herbal remedies in her medicine cupboard. "That's arrowroot, and goldenseal," she whispered, as he took her lips again and again in tiny fleeting kisses. She wanted more. And he knew it.

He was deliberately holding back, making her wait, making her ache with the need to feel his tongue on hers. "Let me guess. Herbal ice cream. But what herbs?" he murmured into her mouth, between kisses. "Twinko? Featherfew?"

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"That's gingko and feverfew," she gasped, her belly on fire with wanting him.

His hand ran down her left side, gently cradling her breast. "Acacia?" he said, softly, and lightly touched her nipple.

"Echinacea," she moaned, as his fingers did their work on her.

It was some time before they rejoined the group. And entered total chaos.

* * * *

THE FIRST BELT on the assembly line seemed, even to Sheena's inexperienced eyes, to have something wrong with it. For one thing, it was moving in a strangely jerky way, not smoothly, the way it was supposed to do.

"It's the boxes." Jim's voice was agonized. "They've jammed the works. None of the machinery is working right. It's all going to break down."

"Nonsense, said Karla, surveying the conveyor belt with undiminished calm. "See to it, Jim. I'm sure you can fix it." She led the inspector, who by now was looking even gloomier, on to the next belt, which was moving marginally more smoothly.

Kane frowned, and followed them.

"What the hell?" he exclaimed, as the inspector dipped a sterile stick into the cartons of what was supposed to be ice cream. "That stuff's not frozen. It's liquid," he said, turning accusingly to Sheena.

The cooling system engineer looked pained. "I tried to tell you, boss. We did all we could. And I sent you a message by

young Frank. But you were too busy..." His voice trailed off at Kane's icy stare.

It was the only icy thing around, thought Sheena, biting her lip in anxiety. She had seen the report on the temperature problem last week, but had forgotten it in the heat generated by a passionate embrace from Kane. Her forgetfulness was unforgivable. She promptly confessed.

Karla summoned up all her poise. "But you told *me*," she said, rather too loudly, to Sheena. "Don't you remember?" And she gave Sheena a pointed stare.

Sheena didn't remember anything of the sort, for the simple reason that no such discussion had occurred. Karla was lying to protect her. Karla was gently drawing the inspector's arm through hers. Karla was saying that it was all her fault.

"A minor problem," said Sheena's sister-in-law, "but one I should have rectified. I take full responsibility."

Sheena's eyes moved from the inspector's faint air of disbelief to Kane's thunderous countenance.

He met her gaze. "Not you again," he said, wearily.

Sheena saw red. "You are the most arrogant, haughty, stuck-up CEO that ever lived. I've done more good for your stupid business in just a few weeks than you've done in years."

He shrugged his shoulders. "My beloved wife," he said. "As much as I love you, I'm afraid you're fired."

"You can't fire me," she said, gesturing widely to the crowd gathering round them, eager to witness this noisy showdown.

"See this, folks. Kane Ramsey, arch-capitalist, has just fired his own wife."

"Oh, give me a break," groaned Kane. "I love ice cream—"

"You love the money it makes you," shouted Sheena, over the noise of the huge mixer over their heads, which had just started on another of its cycles, preparatory to dropping frozen, or as it now seemed, liquid raw ice milk into the cartons on the conveyor belts below.

"And what's more," she picked up a carton sloshing with unfrozen ice raw milk, and held it up in front of her, "*this* is going to make us a fortune."

Kane had the nerve to laugh in her face.

That did it. "You need to grow up, Kane Ramsey," she yelled, and she flung the contents of the carton straight at him.

She missed. The inspector, who had returned with Karla, got it full in the eyes. There was a roar of laughter, and Karla covered her face, shaking slightly. Kane raised an eyebrow at Sheena. "Got any more fun in store for us today, darling?" he drawled.

Sheena picked up another carton. "Yes. This." And aimed again.

This time she didn't miss. Raw milk hit Kane's chest and splattered all over his neat green shirt. He didn't bat an eyelash. But he began to advance on Sheena.

She picked up another carton. She was starting to enjoy herself. "You want some more?" she yelled.

He didn't stop his slow pacing towards her. She flung the next carton, and drenched his left shoulder. Her aim was

obviously improving, she thought, with satisfaction. But she had to improve more quickly. He was almost on her, and she still hadn't wiped that superior, know-it-all expression off his face.

She was about to pick up another carton, when there was a strange popping sound from overhead.

As one person, they all looked up.

"Oh, my godalmighty," said Hank, the chemist. "Just look at that baby."

"My mixer," screamed Jim. "What's happening to my mixer?"

The giant mixer was emitting very peculiar sounds, ever more loudly. And slowly, relentlessly, it rotated on its axis, bringing the huge vat closer and closer to the upside down position.

"Is it full?" asked Karla, tranquilly.

"Of course it's full," responded Kane, with equal serenity. "Just look at the indicator," and he pointed to the digital display below.

"Those things have been known to go wrong," said the inspector, gloomily.

"Not in my factory." Kane's voice was firm. He stood, calmly, while the vat's mouth slowly turned upside down.

For Sheena, it all happened in slow motion. The noise seemed to vanish, as she watched the awe inspiring sight of one hundred gallons of raw milk descend onto the factory floor. She herself was protected, being one or two steps up from floor level, at the third conveyor belt. And Karla

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hurriedly stepped out of the path of the descending deluge, pulling the inspector with her.

But Kane stood quite still. Sheena watched, fascinated, as the milk dumped itself in a huge milkfall three feet from where he stood. He didn't budge. Arms akimbo, motionless, he let himself be drenched by the milkspray, and made no move to step out of the rapidly rising pool of raw milk.

The inspector dropped his notebook. The crowd applauded. And Karla, ever tactful, drew the inspector off, to the drier reaches of the plant, far, far away.

* * * *

KANE SIMPLY stood, until the milk stopped rising. And then, with infinite slowness, he turned to Sheena.

At the grim expression on his face, his employees melted away. Sheena was left to face him alone.

"Well?" was all he said.

Sheena squared her shoulders. But she was prevented from saying anything in her defense.

Just at that moment, another shaft of pain shot through Sheena's back. She faltered in her aggressive stance and put a hand to the small of her back, concentrating on making the pain go away. It didn't work.

As the pain reached its peak, she felt a small pop, and a rush of fluid that trickled wetly down her thighs. She looked down at her legs in dismay. She had no time to worry about raw milk now.

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Her childbirth books had warned her about this, she thought with a mild onrush of panic. Her waters had broken. She was in labor.

A bubble of happiness arose in her throat, canceling out the panic. At last the waiting was nearly over. She was going to become a mother.

It didn't make any difference that her son wasn't due to make his appearance for another three weeks. Babies made their own time. Her son wanted out. Now.

She sank slowly back against the metal rim of the assembly line belt. Her sense of reality faded. Out of the corner of her eye she could see that Kane was still shouting at her, but she didn't hear him. She had no energy to spare on listening to him. She needed to channel all her psychic force into having her baby.

She looked idly at Kane, who was now striding up and down in the shallow lake of milk in front of her, gesticulating furiously, and shouting something at her. "Don't splash at me," she said calmly. "And don't shout, either. I don't have time to listen to you. I'm having a baby."

Kane stopped striding up and down for long enough to look curiously at her. "Of course you're having a baby," he said. "I'd just about figured that out by now."

Another pain gripped Sheena. She closed her eyes and counted slowly to ten, fifteen, twenty. When the pain had subsided and she could focus her thoughts outside herself again, she opened her eyes a crack. "You don't understand," she said. "I'm having a baby. Now."

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Kane stopped mid-stride. "Now?" His voice sounded as though it was coming from a long way away.

Sheena nodded. She had no energy left to speak.

Kane threw down the papers he was clutching. They fluttered briefly in the air before coming to rest face down in the lake of milk. Kane didn't notice. He raced towards the door, splashing milk in all directions. "Don't move. I'll be back right away," he yelled, as he disappeared down the corridor. Sheena leaned back and wondered whether she had ever seen a man move so fast in his life. She was in no hurry herself, despite the pains that were gripping her every ten minutes or so. She knew that Sammy wouldn't be making his appearance for another couple of hours at least.

It seemed only a few moments before Kane, still dripping with milk, and car keys dangling from his fist, was picking her up in his arms and carrying her out to his car.

"I can walk," Sheena protested feebly, but Kane ignored her. She was glad of it. Despite the souring smell that now clung to his saturated frame, his solid, masculine bulk was comforting against her body. She cuddled closer to him, suddenly feeling chilled as another pain swept over her.

"Where's your hospital bag?" Kane demanded roughly, as he swung into the driver's seat without a thought for what the state of his clothes would do to his expensive leather seats.

"At home," Sheena replied in a small voice. "I didn't think I'd be needing it quite so soon."

"We'll have to leave it there," Kane pronounced, his voice tight. "There's no time to pick it up on the way."

"Nonsense," Sheena replied, more firmly this time. "I want it. There's plenty of time." She wanted her vanilla and bergamot shampoo and her aloe vera gel for backrubs during labor.

"It can wait," said Kane, briefly.

"But you're covered in milk. You need a shower and some clean clothes. And I want my cotton nightgown, and the amulet, oh, and the chart I've filled out for Sammy," she said, as Kane turned the key in the ignition and his Ferrari growled into life.

"They'll have plenty of charts at the hospital," he said, not paying any attention.

"Really, Kane. Not that kind of chart. Sammy's horoscope. I've done as much as I can on it until I know the exact time of his birth."

Kane was completely unsympathetic, as she might have guessed. "I'll get Karla to pick it up for you and bring it in. I'm getting you to the hospital." Without another word, he maneuvered out of the parking lot and into the street.

Sheena had forgotten that Kane used to be a racing car driver in his spare time. He hadn't.

He drove to the hospital as though he were leading the Indy 500. As if his life depended on his winning the race. As if there wasn't another car on the road. When, in fact, he passed several thousand per minute. Sheena, grim-faced, clung to the dashboard and saw her life, and the life of her unborn child, flash past her at one hundred miles an hour.

By the time she got to the hospital, she wanted to throw up. And she was sure her hair had gone completely gray.

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She turned to Kane. "Thanks for the ride," she croaked, as she stumbled out of the door, her bag clutched tightly in her shaking hands. "I think." She heaved herself past the line of cops spilling out of the police cars, whose lights were still flashing and whose sirens were still making the unholy din they'd been making for the last two miles. Kane could deal with them. She had more important things to do.

* * * *

TWO HOURS LATER, Sheena lay flat on her back, a blissful smile on her face. She had done it. It was over. She had never felt so good in her life before.

The doctor placed the squealing baby on her stomach. Sheena cradled it tenderly in her arms and looked fondly at it. Its nose was squashed, its forehead was bruised, and it was blotchy and red. It was perfect and she adored it.

"You've got a wonderful baby boy there," her doctor said, as she stripped off her soiled gloves and put on another pair. "Now for the other one."

Sheena looked up, startled. "The other one? What do you mean?"

"The other baby," the doctor said, with a smile on her face. "Didn't anyone tell you? You've got twins in there."

Chapter 10

"TWINS?" SHEENA and Kane both said together. Sheena peeked a glance at Kane. He had appeared awfully fast after her. She wondered what he had done with the policemen. Maybe the smell of the rapidly souring milk had driven them away. She felt a wave of sympathy for him. He looked as pale and drawn as if he had just spent the last couple of hours in labor, and not her. Being told that he was to become a daddy twice over had robbed his face of its last vestiges of color. In fact, Sheena thought with a good deal of sympathy, he looked positively green.

Sheena herself didn't believe that she was carrying twins. Her intuition had told her that she was carrying a boy, but it had said nothing about two of them. Naturally, she had refused an ultrasound. It might have harmed the baby.

And then Sheena groaned as a fresh wave of pain and an uncontrollable urge to push flowed over her. The doctor was right. It wasn't over. Not by a long shot.

Kane sat by her bed, one arm cradling his newborn son, the other hand clasping her hand tightly in his. "I'm sorry," he whispered brokenly, as she struggled to birth their second child. "I never meant for you to go through this a second time."

There were tears in his eyes. Sheena gripped his hand as if it were her lifeline and bore down as hard as she could.

It took another half an hour before Sheena and Kane's daughter was delivered.

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Sheena held her daughter in her arms. She was finished now. Unless the doctor suddenly told her that she was having triplets.

She eyed the doctor uneasily. "You did say that I was only having twins, didn't you?" she asked. "There aren't any more surprises you want to spring on me, are there?"

The doctor shook her head. "Just twins."

Sheena sighed in relief, and lay back on her pillows.

She watched with great joy as her new babies were weighed and then bathed for the first time. She felt as though she had just run a marathon and won. She was more exhausted than she had ever felt in her life before.

She had never felt more alive.

Kane's large hands were cradling their daughter gently as he placed her in a tub of warm water and sponged her down until she was clean.

"I told you we were going to have a daughter," Kane said happily, as he trickled water over the baby's stomach. "And you refused to believe me."

Sheena glanced eloquently over at the nurse, who was bathing their son. "And I told you that we were going to have a son," she said. "I don't know why you didn't believe me, either."

The babies liked the water. They had stopped screaming and were giving muted little cries and kicking with their legs. They were both perfect little Geminis with an Aquarius ascendant—a truly harmonious combination.

They must be used to having been born now, Sheena thought happily. No longer were they in a dark cocoon of

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warmth and safety. They had just been born into a bright new world full of joy and sadness, full of experiences to be tasted.

Born into a mother's love.

Into a father's love, too, Sheena thought, as she watched Kane wrap up the newly clean baby girl and hug her close to his cheek. The sight of Kane holding their baby brought tears to her eyes.

"Maybe she's hungry," she said, holding out her arms for her baby, wanting to be part of the love they shared.

Kane gave the baby one last soft nuzzle and reluctantly relinquished the neatly wrapped parcel to Sheena, while the nurse handed him his son.

Sheena took the baby in her arms and gently stroked her turned-up little nose. She was so warm and soft. Her skin felt as smooth as silk. Her hair was red. Dark auburn red. It clung wetly to her scalp. She was enveloped with love for her daughter.

Sheena bared a breast and offered it to the baby to suckle. The baby grabbed hold of Sheena's nipple with her tiny gums and held on tight. She gave two or three suckles, and then, with a sigh of happiness, closed her eyes and fell fast asleep.

Sheena laid her new daughter in the bassinet on the left side of the bed and held out her arms for her son. "Is he hungry, too?" she murmured as she settled him on her breast.

Her son was amazingly bald. Sheena stroked his head softly, smoothing the faint wisps of blond hair behind his ears. He gave a few half-hearted suckles, then turned his head away, screwed up his face and wailed.

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Sheena looked at him with love in her eyes. "He's just like his father," she said gently. "He doesn't know what's good for him in the food department."

Kane held out his arms for his son and held him up against his chest. Sheena marveled at how gently Kane's strong hands were holding the fragile little bundle of humanity.

Their son must have felt secure in his Daddy's arms. His wails subsided to short sniffly cries, and then stopped altogether as he, too, dropped off to sleep.

Kane put their son down in the bassinet on the right side of the bed, and sat down next to Sheena, his arm around her shoulder. "We did it," he said, with a note of awed triumph in his voice. "We did it."

Just as he was bending over her to snatch a kiss, Ian and Angela walked in the door. They stopped short when they saw Sheena, Kane's arm around her shoulders, his head poised over hers, lying happily on the bed.

Sheena felt a shiver of apprehension crawl down her spine. Ever since Ian and Angela had returned from their honeymoon to find Sheena happily ensconced in Kane's house, and working in his ice cream factory, Ian had been prophesying that Sheena's marriage would come to a bad end. He had refused to acknowledge Kane as his brother-in-law, and had gone out of the way to avoid meeting him. He seemed determined to ignore Kane's existence for as long as he could.

Still, it was unavoidable that Ian and Kane meet some time or another. Sheena was glad that the two had finally met in a public place. They would have no chance to kill each other. It

was doubtful they would even get around to seriously hurting one another before they were stopped by the security guards.

She shrugged her shoulders. It was out of her hands now. If her husband and her brother wanted to make fools of themselves, there was little she could do to stop them. She pretended that she was oblivious to the black looks that Ian was shooting her way, and held out her hands to Angela instead.

"My God," Angela cried out, as her shocked expression took in the sight of the two bassinets. "I came as soon as I got Karla's message. Kane had left her a note that he was bringing you in here. She phoned me as soon as she realized what was happening herself. I didn't have any idea that it was all over already."

"Come and look at them," Sheena offered. "Aren't they the most beautiful babies you have ever seen in your life?"

Angela sat herself down on the end of the bed and she and Sheena peeked into each parcel of baby. Her daughter opened her eyes and lay quietly, waving one tiny fist in the air. Sheena picked her up and handed her to Angela to hold. Her son stirred gently, but didn't wake. She stroked him softly, longing to hold him but unwilling to disturb his peaceful slumber.

Kane wanted to groan when Angela and Ian walked in the door. Ian had not forgiven him for abandoning Sheena in Vegas. He doubted that Ian ever would forgive him. But right at the moment he wanted to celebrate the joyous beginnings of two new lives, rather than rehashing an old quarrel.

Ian ignored the babies. He sniffed suspiciously. "God, it smells bad in here," he said pointedly, as he strode over to the end of the bed and glared at Kane. Kane stood up and glared straight back at Ian.

"Well, brother," Ian said, with the reluctant beginnings of a grin on his face, as Kane matched him scowl for scowl. "I'd like to punch you in the nose right now, but that would make Sheena mad. That's one thing that I've learned by now—it doesn't pay to make Sheena mad." He held out his hand. "I sure as hell don't like you as a brother-in-law, but I can't see that I have much choice in the matter. Congratulations on the twins."

Kane took Ian's proffered hand and shook it heartily. "I was planning on doing some rearranging of your face, now that you mention it," he said genially. "That ugly mug of yours could do with some reconstructive surgery. But it might upset Sheena, and I don't like to upset my wife." He emphasized the last two words to make sure that Ian got the message. Sheena was his to look after from now on.

Sheena had been watching her husband and her brother size each other up out of the corner of her eye. When she saw the handshake, she let out the breath that she had been holding. She had been more than a little worried that Ian's Taurus bullheadedness would collide head on with Kane's explosive Scorpio temperament. Once that had happened, nothing would be able to put out the conflagration that they started, short of getting them both thrown out of the hospital by a posse of SWAT teams.

Thank the stars that Ian had shown some sense in finally accepting her marriage. It would have been embarrassing if he had insisted in taking a swing at his brother-in-law every time they met. Not to mention expensive, what with the hospital bills they would have.

She was relieved to see that their former friendship was being reestablished, albeit a trifle gingerly. "Ian," she called, wanting to break up their conversation while they were still being civil to one another. "Leave Kane alone and come and look at your niece and your nephew. Come and tell me how clever I am producing one of each."

"Yes, Ian," Angela added. "Come here and see what a baby looks like." She patted her stomach protectively. "You're going to need to know all about babies in a few months yourself."

Sheena looked at Angela curiously. "You mean you're...?"

Angela nodded. "That's why I was so late getting here. I was at the doctor's office, getting the good news."

Ian came to put his arm around Angela and look at the babies.

Sheena smiled at her brother and his wife, and then down at her own babies, the one in Angela's arms, the other asleep in the bassinet. "Angie, I'm so happy for you. You'll be getting a gorgeous little parcel like these yourself, soon, huh?"

"I hope so. She's pretty," Ian said, as he leaned over Angela and gently ruffled the hair of the baby she was holding. "She has hair just like her mother. And her uncle. Doesn't look a bit like her ugly mug of a father."

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Kane sat down by Sheena's side and put his arm around her again. Sheena leaned back into his chest.

"Lucky girl," Kane said conversationally, as he patted the baby's cheek in a proprietary manner. "I'd rather she looked like her gorgeous mother than her plain old dad any day." He gave Sheena a smile, and she wanted to purr. "But my son, on the other hand, is an exact copy of his father." He leaned over the bassinet and stroked his son's cheek with the tip of his forefinger.

Ian looked over into the bassinet. "Bald," he commented dryly.

Kane ran his fingers through his thick blonde hair and looked offended.

Angela glared briefly at Ian before turning back to Sheena. "What are you going to call them?" she asked.

"Samuel," Sheena said immediately.

"Samantha," Kane said at the same time.

They looked at each other and laughed. "But I have to call my son Samuel," Sheena protested. "I've been calling him Sammy for months. I can't change his name now."

"I've been calling my daughter Sammy for months," Kane argued. His eyes were smiling, but his jaw was set in a determined line. "I can't change her name now."

Sheena glared at Kane. She wasn't going to give way on this one. "It has to be Samuel."

Kane gave her back glare for glare. "My daughter's name is Samantha."

"Samuel."

"Samantha."

"Samuel."

"Samantha."

"Good, that's settled, then." A third voice broke in over the top of Sheena and Kane's argument. "Samuel and Samantha. Nice names for my new nephew and niece."

Karla, her fingernails painted a bright red, and her hair dyed to match, plonked Sheena's hospital bag down on the bed. "I've brought you some clean clothes," she said. "And some dry clothes for you, Kane. You stink of milk." She wrinkled up her nose before turning to a more pleasant sight. "Let me see the babies."

Angela held Samantha out to Karla. "Here. Come and hold her."

Karla shook her head and backed away a few steps. "I said 'see', not 'hold'," she said quickly. "'Look, but don't touch' is my motto when it comes to babies."

She looked briefly into the bassinet holding Samuel. "Very cute," she said, before sitting in an armchair as far removed from any of the babies as possible. She opened her briefcase across her lap, took out some papers and waved them in the air. "Sheena, you're a genius."

Sheena smiled as widely as a well-fed pussy cat as she looked first at her son and then at her daughter. "I know."

"Hey," Kane protested. "Don't forget about me. I had something to do with these babies, too."

"I'm not talking about babies," Karla said, drumming her fingernails on the edge of her chair. "I'm talking about ice cream."

"Ice cream?" Sheena asked. She would admit that she was a genius at making babies, but at ice cream?

"More specifically, the raw milk that we saw in action this morning," Karla said. "The raw milk that you and Kane were shouting at each other about just before you came into the hospital."

Ian glared at Kane anew. "You were shouting at my sister?"

"I was discussing business with my wife," Kane replied, with a slight edge to his voice.

Sheena groaned. "I don't want to think about that stupid milk. Just tip it all out. Pour it away down the drain. I never want to see it or hear about it ever again."

"Nonsense," Karla replied, as she shut her briefcase again with a bang. "We're going to make ice cream out of it. Buckets and buckets of ice cream."

Kane fixed his sister with a steely glare. "Over my dead body," he growled. "That milk is going down the drain. Every last drop of it. It's dangerous."

"Nonsense," Karla repeated. "Raw milk is perfectly safe, as long as it is treated right. I had a talk with Hank, the chemist, a week ago, when Sheena first told me about the raw milk she'd ordered. He guaranteed that he could come up with a recipe that was foolproof. One hundred and ten percent safe."

Angela was looking confused. "But why bother with raw milk," she asked, "when you can buy it already treated?"

Karla gave a smile of triumph. "Because the customers want it," she crowed. "They absolutely love the idea. Fresh-made natural ice cream. Made with fresh fruit. No added

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sugar. No colorings. No preservatives. No flavorings. No flavor either, but they don't care about that. Recycled packaging. Recyclable, too. Nothing is missing. And the crowning glory of it all is that it is made with raw milk. Even the inspector, with a little persuasion, has agreed to the idea.

"I've been on the phone non-stop for a week, and I already have customers lining up to buy the stuff. We haven't even started producing it yet, and already I've sold three months' worth of production just on a trial basis. If this keeps up, we'll have to build another factory just to keep up with the demand."

She looked at Kane with triumph in her eyes. "I've sold this ice cream to Kansas, to Vermont, to Florida. I've sold it to supermarket chains all over the States. We've hit the craze for health food big time. Your ice cream company has finally gone national."

Kane ran his fingers slowly through his hair. He looked, Sheena thought, as dazed as she felt.

Ian saved the day. From out of nowhere he produced a bottle of champagne and lifted the cork with a pop. "Seems like we have three reasons to celebrate," he said with a grin. He filled some paper cups and passed them around. "To Samuel. To Samantha. And, lastly, to being able to buy Kane's Kool Treats all over America. After all," he added quietly to Kane, "you've married my sister now. You'd better be able to sell enough ice cream to keep her."

Sheena choked on the slightly warm champagne. Would Ian never stop baiting his brother-in-law? But Kane merely shook his head and drank his paper cup dry.

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KANE DID UP the little sticky tabs on three-week old Samuel's diaper and passed him to Sheena to be fed.

Sheena grimaced when she saw what Samuel was wearing on his plump little bottom. "Do you have to use those horrible diapers?" she asked, as she settled him on her breast.

Kane grinned back at her. "You know our bargain. If I change the diapers, I use disposables. If you change the diapers, you get to use whatever kind of diapers you like best. All-natural, all-cotton, unbleached terry toweling, if that's what you prefer."

Sheena stuck her tongue out at him. "That's a cheap trick," she said, without rancor. "You just want me to change all the diapers. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You're blackmailing my environmentally-conscious conscience."

Kane's grin widened. "Is it working?"

Sheena shook her head. "No. I refuse on principle to be blackmailed. Give in to the first demand, and the blackmailers never quit."

Kane groaned theatrically. "Blast. Just as I was thinking I had worked out a sure-fire way of getting out of changing the diapers." His voice suddenly dropped and his eyes grew serious. "Sheena?"

Sheena lifted her eyes to his.

"When are you coming back to work at the ice cream factory?"

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Sheena lifted her eyebrows. "I haven't got a job to go to, remember? You fired me. At the top of your voice. Everyone in Washington County must have heard you fire me."

"I was mad at the time. I didn't mean it. You heard what Karla said about you. You're a genius. It's thanks to you that my ice cream has gone national. Of course you've still got a job."

Sheena felt her heart swell within her. This was all the proof she needed that Kane loved her and forgiven her. "You mean you would have me back in your factory?" she asked with a smile. "Getting in your way? Upsetting your staff? Sabotaging the visits of the health inspectors? Telling you what to do? Getting rid of your favorite leather armchair?"

"Not getting rid of my favorite leather armchair," Kane said with a martial glint in his eye. "I draw the line there. But you're welcome to come back and upset the entire staff, whenever you want." He paused for a moment and scratched his head. "I have to admit that you did a lot of good while you were there. And saved me some money, too." He paused. "My garbage collection bill has halved since you bullied all the production guys to start recycling. Our profits are up by around twenty percent, too, thanks to the raw milk project."

Sheena gave Kane's proposal a moment's consideration. "But what would I do with the twins?" she asked.

"We could hire a nanny," Kane said diffidently. "A nanny would be able to look after them perfectly well. Then you wouldn't be tied down to the house. You could get on with your career. Do what you really want to do."

Sheena shook her head. "What I really want to do right now is be a mother," she said. "I had decided a long time ago that I didn't want to keep working for you after the baby was born. Now that we have two of them to look after, I just couldn't go back to work for you. Besides," she added, "you're too difficult to work for. Our management styles simply don't mesh."

"You mean you don't do what you're told to do?"

Sheena shook her hair out of her eyes. "No. I mean that *you* don't do as *you're* told to do."

"There is another possibility," Kane said slowly. He turned his head away from her and looked down at the carpet.

"Uh huh?"

"You could go back to working for Saks again, if you wanted to."

"But McKenzie laid me off," Sheena said. "Why would he want to hire me again?"

"It took a lot of persuasion to make McKenzie lay you off," Kane said. He hesitated, and rubbed one eyebrow with his index finger. "He owed me a small favor. Actually, he owed me a big favor. A really big favor. Otherwise he'd never have done it for me. As it was, he carried on as though I'd asked him to steal the Hope diamond instead of just lay off his best fashion buyer."

Sheena felt as though all the breath had left her body in a whoosh. "You made McKenzie fire me?"

Kane eyed her warily. "Yeah. I guess I did."

Sheena was almost speechless with laughter. "You ... you sneaky, conniving little rat," she finally managed to get out,

in a choked-up voice. That Kane so obviously expected her to be mad at him made it even funnier.

Kane still hadn't raised his head to look at her. "Yeah. I guess I am."

Sheena strove to get herself back under control. "Why did you do it?" she spluttered.

"I wanted to be close to you. I wanted you to need me. That was the only way I could think of to make you vulnerable enough to let me in under your defenses. So I took it."

"You shameless manipulator!"

Kane shrugged and tried not to look too pleased with himself.

Sheena could contain herself no longer. She burst out laughing until she thought her sides would burst.

Kane slowly raised his eyes to hers. "You're not mad?" he asked as he strolled seductively towards her.

Sheena shook her head. "No, I'm not mad," she said, her giggles dissolving at the familiar warmth creeping through her. "You've been punished enough. You got what you deserved when you hired me. Besides, I don't want to work at Saks anymore." She paused for a moment while he tasted her mouth. "I've had a dream for a long time. I like designing clothes more than I ever liked working as a buyer in the corporate world. I want to start my own business from home, designing my own stuff. I won't have much time until the twins are older, but that is what I've always wanted to do. Now's my chance. I feel ready. The stars are well-aligned for my success."

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"Hush," he said, gathering her to him.
She hushed.

* * * *

MUCH LATER, Kane put his arms once again around her shoulders and hugged her to his side. "Sheena. I love you. More than I will ever be able to tell you."

Sheena smiled back at him. "I love you, too, Kane. I always have and I always will."

Just then Samuel, who had been feeding busily all the while, gave a small sigh and dropped off to sleep. Sheena cradled him in her arms and carried him into his bedroom, decorated in black and white striped tigers and crocodiles. Kane followed behind her and tucked a designer teddy bear filled with synthetic stuffing into the wooden crib next to him.

Sheena picked up the down-filled soft unicorn that Mist's husband, Zach, had made by hand, from the unbleached cotton rug on the floor. Hand in hand with Kane, she carried it into Samantha's room, which was decorated in soft pastels and ice cream motifs. Samantha, having been bathed and fed before her brother, was sound asleep, her thumb in her mouth. Sheena softly placed the unicorn at the foot of Samantha's white painted crib.

Kane drew Sheena into his arms. "I knew we were having a girl," he said softly.

Sheena raised her face up to his to be kissed. "Just as I knew that we were having a boy."

"It's just as well that we decorated two bedrooms because we couldn't agree on the color scheme."

"And bought two of everything else as well," Sheena added. "In pink and blue."

"We were the best prepared parents in the world. And we didn't even know that we were having twins."

"It's funny how we were both sure that we were right and that the other was wrong," Sheena mused. "When we were both right all along."

"Neither of us was seeing the whole picture," Kane said. "We were so convinced that we knew the whole story that we wouldn't listen to the other's point of view."

Sheena knew that they were no longer talking just about the babies, but about the whole of their life together. "So, do you think that a corporate CEO and an organic healthfood nut can live happily together?" she asked. "If we both work on seeing the whole picture rather than just our half of it?"

"I know we can," Kane said. "I love you more than anything else in the whole world. More than hot dogs. More than ice cream. I'm sure I will be able to tolerate a few organically grown lima beans for the sake of marital harmony."

Sheena made a face. "I will promise to tolerate your hotdogs and coffee, as long as you leave me in peace to drink primrose tea."

Kane bent his head to kiss her. "It's a deal."

Sheena felt her heart grow full of love. She looked into Kane's eyes and saw the same love reflected back at her. And she knew that their destiny was to be together—forevermore.

Epilogue

SAMANTHA REACHED out towards the freshly-sliced, organically-grown greenhouse tomatoes with her chubby four-year-old's fingers, took a big handful and stuffed them in her mouth.

"You're a pig," her twin brother, Samuel, scoffed at her, as he took a gigantic bite of hot-dog and smeared tomato sauce from his nose to his chin.

"Am not," Samantha answered automatically, around her mouthful of tomato.

"Are so."

"Am not."

"Are so."

At the foot of the table, Sheena patted her very round stomach and gave a Kane a look full of humorous resignation. "I only hope we don't have twins this time," she sighed. "Two at a time is double the trouble."

Kane smiled at his wife. "They'll be starting preschool soon," he said. "You'll have more time for the new baby, and to keep working on those designs of yours. Your first fashion show was a great success."

Sheena smiled back at her husband. After several years of hard work, she was finally starting to see some success in the business she had started from home a year after the twins were born; designing her own fashion label. Her clothes were now in trendy fashion boutiques through much of the Northwest, and she just knew that the successful fashion

show she had hosted last week would increase the demand for her designs.

"Thanks to you," she said happily. Kane's support and love had made her dreams possible. She owed more to him than she could ever tell him. The stars had been right all along. He was her lifelong mate.

"I had some good news today, too," Kane said, as he bit into his own hot-dog. "The German supermarket chain we have been courting has finally decided to stock our ice cream. The Natural Choice. The ice cream you championed, made with raw milk, fresh fruit and no artificial colors or any other pollutants."

Sheena beamed. "So Kane's Kool Treats is finally going multinational?"

Kane nodded.

Sheena got to her feet, waddled over to Kane and plumped down on his lap. "Congratulations," she whispered into his ear. "I know how much you have worked for this to happen. Kane's Kool Treats—the toast of Europe."

"But not even apricot ice cream tastes as good as you do," Kane whispered back, as he touched her lips with his. "Not even The Natural Choice apricot ice cream."

Their embrace was quickly broken by the plaintive voice of Samantha, who had spent the interval gazing dismally down at her plate. "Do I have to eat my yukky hot-dog?" she pleaded. "I don't like hot-dogs. I want some tofu with peanut sauce. And alfalfa sprouts."

Kane grinned at his daughter. She was growing more like Sheena with each day that passed. "Eat your dinner," he said.

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"It's good for you. It will make your nose glow in the dark and put hairs on your chest."

Samantha pouted. "But I don't want hairs on my chest."

Kane speared Samantha's hot-dog on his fork and held it up to her mouth. "Just eat half of it," he wheedled. "I promise that tomorrow night you'll be allowed all the tofu you want."

Samantha's face cleared. "Really?" she said, her voice full of hope. She took a tentative bite of hot-dog and chewed it gingerly.

Samuel groaned. "Really?" he asked, in a dismal voice, wiping his tomato-saucy face on his sleeve.

"Yes, really," Sheena replied. "I promise. Daddy made your dinner tonight. It will be my turn to cook tomorrow. And tofu and peanut sauce it will be. With alfalfa sprouts on top."

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Lissa Adair

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Catherine and Elissa have been best of friends since the day they first met—introduced by a fellow writer and mutual friend. Drive-by Wedding is their first joint book.

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