



Lost

By

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*This story is dedicated to my sunshine, starlight and moonbeam. May happiness,
love, and dreams live in your heart forever.*

“Getting old is inevitable. Feeling old isn’t.”

--George Burns

Prologue

“I’m never growing up. Never, ever, *ever*.”

“Yes y’ll, Peter. Mama says everybody grows up, gets a job, then dies. That’s life, she says.”

“What do you know, Wendy? You’re only seven. I’m ten, and I know a lot more than you. And your mama, well, she’s just wrong. I don’t have to grow up if I don’t want to. And I *don’t* want to.”

Wendy stared solemnly up at him. “Why not?”

Peter paused and his brow furrowed. He stared down at Wendy without speaking. She stepped closer and slid her hand into his.

“Why don’t you want to grow up, Peter?”

Peter looked down at their clasped hands, then back at Wendy.

“Because grown ups are boring. They don’t have any fun. And when things get too boring for them, they leave. And they don’t care who they leave behind.”

Wendy gave his hand another squeeze. She stared at him with those serious big brown eyes that always looked kind of sad. Knowing just how to cheer her up, his gaze lit with mischief and a wide grin spread across his face.

“And you know how much I like to have fun, don’t you?”

Peter grasped Wendy's other hand and began turning around and around. She swung into the air, twirling around him. Her giggling filled the lazy summer afternoon.

"I'm flying, Peter, I'm flying!"

"I told you I'd show you how to fly, Wendy."

Chapter 1

22 years later

"I'm flying there, and that's that," Wendy declared, pacing the room.

"I don't understand your morbid need to go to this funeral, darling. After all, it isn't even a relative. It's just a neighbor you barely remember from childhood."

The condescending tone of Jeffrey's voice suddenly grated against her nerves, but Wendy held fast to her decision.

"I'm not asking for your permission, Jeffrey. If you'd like to fly there with me, that's fine. If not I'll see you when I get back."

"You know I can't do that. I'm in the middle of a very important case. And what about our wedding plans? We're getting married in less than three months. There's so much to do. You said so yourself just yesterday. What will my mother do without your guidance? You know she has a tendency to take over."

Wendy knew firsthand how Jeffrey's mother tried to rule the roost and everything else. The woman was like a crocodile, snapping at everyone,

keeping them in line. If she could plan and run not only their wedding, but the rest of she and Jeffrey's life, she would do it. She had made sure her son became a lawyer, just like his father. Pleased that her son had met a woman she considered within their social circle, she now wanted to make sure his wedding was just the kind to impress her friends. Marion Hook tried to keep everything and everyone under her thumb.

Hook. Wendy Hook.

That was going to be her married name. She would have to get used to it. As corny as it was, she would have a hard time letting go of her last name, Thompson. Maybe if it was a different last name it would be easier. A last name like Johnson, Elliot ... or Kelley.

Kelley?

Where had that come from? It had to be her old neighbor's funeral. Judith Kelley was dead. Her son, Peter, had been Wendy's childhood friend. His mother died from complications to her liver. That's what the obituary read, but everyone back home knew what had caused it. Judith Kelley had been an alcoholic. For as long as Wendy could remember, the woman had drank. Even as a child, she had known there was something different about Peter's mom.

First it was the way she smelled every time Wendy went to visit Peter at his house. Then it was her personality. She noticed early on that when that smell, which later she discovered was alcohol, was very strong, Mrs.

Kelley would act differently. She would sing and dance around the house. Her laughter filled their home, and Peter's mother had hugs for everyone.

When she wasn't drinking, she was quiet and sad. Sometimes Wendy visited Peter, and his mother would answer the door with tears in her eyes. Other times she would be in her room crying, the sound of her sobs traveling through the walls of their home.

She remembered asking Peter about it once. But when she did, he got a hard look in his eyes and told her to ignore it.

"My mother cries sometimes. That's just the way she is," he said with a shrug. "She's unhappy that my dad left us, and she had to grow up. She tells me stories about when she was young and free. She says my grandparents have lots of money, so she was at parties almost every weekend. Having a kid changed all that, she says. And since she has to take care of me alone, she doesn't get to have fun anymore. That makes her cry."

"But, what about--"

"I don't want to talk about it, Wendy," he said as anger flared in his eyes. "You wouldn't understand. If you don't like it, stop coming over here. No one's making you. I don't know why you're always over here anyways. Don't you have any friends your own age? I'll be thirteen next month. You're only ten, just a baby. If you're going to come over here and whine, go home and don't come back."

Wendy had tried to fight back the tears. Her eyes had widened as his cruel words struck deep. She loved Peter. She had always loved him. Ever

since he moved into their neighborhood when she was five, and taught her how to fly. He would twirl her around and around at the park and she would laugh from the joy of it until her stomach hurt. He would laugh too, and the sound always filled her heart with happiness.

She remembered standing there, silent and frozen, looking up at Peter as tears slid down her cheeks. Then he did something she would never forget. He knelt in front of her and gathered her in his arms.

“I’m sorry, Wendy. I didn’t mean that. I like you hanging around with me. I just don’t want to talk about my mom. We can talk about anything else, but not that. Okay?”

Peter pulled back slightly. Then he wiped the tears off of her cheeks. Putting his fingers under her chin, he gently tilted her head back so that she looked at him.

“Okay, little one?”

Wendy’s lips trembled, but she managed to silently nod her head. Peter’s mouth broke into a wide smile. His whole face lit up, and Wendy couldn’t help smiling back.

She never asked him about his mother again.

“Wendy?” Jeffrey’s voice interrupted her memories. “Did you hear what I just said? You have that faraway look in your eyes again. Is everything okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine, Jeffrey. And don’t worry about the wedding. I’ll only be gone a few days, and I’ll be back before you know it.”

Wendy managed to book a flight through a small, fairly new airline company called Neverland Airways, which served locations from the west coast into the mid-west. It had gotten good write-ups in the papers and had great a on-time service record during the two years it had been operating. Unfortunately, because she had booked so last minute, she would have to change planes before reaching her hometown, and the flight would take six hours instead of four.

During the first leg of the trip, Wendy thought about the man she was leaving behind. Jeffrey and she had met at a charity ball six months ago. He was handsome, charming, financially comfortable, and well respected by his peers. If he was sometimes a little demanding and selfish, she could forgive him that. As an only child, she knew he never had to share with or think much about others. And Wendy felt she could handle the situation with Jeffrey's mother. Growing up with two brothers, she had learned early on how to stand up for herself.

During her last visit home, her parents had expressed concern about her lack of prospective husbands. Her mother and father thought it was time she settled down. They were proud of the fact that she had become an attorney, but they still felt she needed a husband and children. In other words, they wanted her to grow up.

Wendy was enjoying her career and social life. On the weekends, she went out with a small group of friends, most of whom were men. She had been a tomboy growing up, liking pirates, playing sports, and going on wild

adventures. Dolls and playing house weren't of interest to her. And as she got older she just tended to gravitate toward guy friends instead of girl friends. She enjoyed being feminine, pampering herself with manicures and pedicures, but she also liked watching and going to sports events, as well as playing in her company's intramural baseball team. But none of these things had kept her from marrying. She just hadn't met the right man yet.

Until Jeffrey.

The night they met, he had seemed like everything she should want in a man. So they started dating and she had come to care for him. Their shared interests and careers made them very compatible. She knew that she could comfortably spend the rest of her life with him. It would be a stable relationship that would allow her to continue with her career. And when and if children came into the picture, they were financially secure enough to hire a nanny.

Satisfied that her life was heading in the right direction, she relaxed and lost herself in the romantic suspense novel she had brought with her as the plane took her home. Wendy arrived in her connecting city on time and managed to catch her next flight without any glitches.

Her problems started after she got on the plane. It was a full flight, with overhead bins crammed to the limit, and bags that were supposed to be tucked under the seats sticking out into the aisle. Tripping a few times during her search, she finally managed to find a place to put her carry-on

suitcase. Now to find her seat. Staring down at her ticket, she spotted the row and found it. Someone was sitting there.

A man slept with his head down, oblivious to the world. She scanned around her desperately, but could see no other empty seats. She checked her ticket one more time, then attempted to get a flight attendant's attention. Two were occupied with young mothers with babies, and a third was listening attentively while an elderly lady loudly complained about her bag not fitting in the carry-on compartments.

Seeing no other option, she laid her hand on the sleeping man's shoulder and gave it a light shake. Other than making a few grumbling noises, the man didn't stir. Biting her bottom lip in indecision, she debated on her next course of action. She could try to wake the guy up again, or she could look for another seat.

The pilot took the decision out of her hands. His announcement blared over the intercom.

"If you've just joined us, welcome to Neverland Airways. I'm Captain John Clark. We've been cleared for departure, so the sooner you take your seats, the sooner we can head out. If you haven't found your seat yet, please do so now and buckle up. Thank you."

Wendy gave the man's shoulder a second, firmer shake. This time he slowly lifted his head and rubbed his eyes. His blond hair stuck up in all different directions. She knew that was the latest style for men, but it

reminded her of a little boy just waking from his slumber. Bending down toward his ear, she spoke softly.

“Excuse me. I’m sorry to wake you, but you’re in my seat.”

The man raised his face to look at her. The image of a little boy vanished. The intense, green, eyes staring up at her were all man. Wendy straightened abruptly and stepped back, trying to put some space between them. She bumped into a flight attendant who had finally come her way. Turning around, she apologized.

“Sorry about that. I didn’t know you were behind me.”

“It’s fine,” the tall, perfectly coiffed blonde said with a plastic smile that told Wendy it really wasn’t fine. “You need to sit down, miss. We’re preparing for take off.”

“I know. This man is in my seat, and I was just trying to wake him.”

The attendant turned to look at the man.

“Sir, would you mind checking your ticket? It seems we--uh, oh!”

The attendant stopped mid sentence, mouth hanging open, and stared wide-eyed at the man.

“Oh, I’m so sorry sir. I didn’t realize--”

“Don’t worry about it miss, uh, miss?” The guy inquired with a charming smile as he rose to his feet. He was tall, over six feet. And his voice was low and rich. The sound of it tingled up and down Wendy’s spine.

“Um, Bell, sir. My name’s Bell,” the attendant stumbled over her words. “It is such a pleasure to meet you.”

“Thank you, Bell. It’s nice to meet you also. Would you mind seeing if there are any other seats available?”

“Of course not,” the woman said with a smile. This time, Wendy noticed, it was real, no plastic anywhere.

What was going on? The attendant was stammering and blushing like a schoolgirl. The guy was good looking, but this was ridiculous! She just wanted to sit down, so that they could be on their way.

“It’s great that the two of you are getting acquainted and all, but I’d really like to sit down so our flight can leave,” Wendy said, trying to slide passed the man, into her seat.

He didn’t budge. Neither of them acted like they had heard a word she said.

“I’ll go check and be right back. Please make yourself comfortable until then, sir.” Miss Blond Schoolgirl made her way toward the front of the plane.

“Thank you, Bell,” her seat snatcher said with a smile full of dimples. A girl could get to like seeing those dimples. But not Wendy. Dimples were out. Jeffrey was definitely a no dimple kind of guy.

Jeffrey was forgotten the minute the man turned and looked at her. The full brunt of his good looks hit her hard. Mr. Spiky Hair carried a punch that left her breathless. And his square jaw, strong nose, and bright green

eyes were somehow familiar to her. Maybe the guy was a model she had seen in a magazine or on TV? That would explain the flight attendant's actions.

"I'm sorry about the inconvenience. I caught this flight at the last minute and just grabbed the first available seat." His voice ran over her like smooth honey.

Who had a voice like that? It made her think of things she shouldn't be thinking about in the middle of a plane packed with people--candle light, soft music, and sex. She gave herself a mental shake. What was wrong with her?

"Didn't you have a seat assignment?" she blurted the first thing that came to mind.

"No, I didn't," the man said, looking at her curiously. His eyes lit with interest as he studied her face. "Have we met before?"

Wendy studied Mr. Dimples in turn. There was something familiar about him, but she just couldn't place it. Maybe it was his eyes. It was as if she had seen them before.

"I don't think so. My name's Wendy. Wendy Thompson," she said holding her hand out to him.

At the mention of her name, the man's face changed. The playful, easygoing look changed to intense interest. His brow furrowed, and his dimples disappeared as he studied her face. Ignoring her hand, he stared at each feature as if trying to memorize them. Though she was in a plane full

of people, his hungry gaze was disconcerting enough that she lowered her hand and took an unconscious step back.

He stepped closer. And closer still. Until his face was only inches from hers.

“Have you learned how to fly yet, Wendy?”

Chapter 2

Her eyes were exactly the same. Even though it had been over fifteen years since Peter had last seen Wendy, they hadn't changed. Big and soulful, giving away every emotion she felt. A rich chocolate brown he wanted to lose himself in, surrounded by long feathery lashes. Even as a kid, her eyes had always drawn him to her. There was something there, calling to him, like a siren's song.

Now that she was a grown woman, those eyes pulled at him in a way he had a hard time resisting. He stepped closer. Tearing his gaze from hers, he noticed her pert little nose was also the same. He had the urge to kiss it, like he had when they were children, but managed to resist. Her lips parted in a gasp, drawing his attention. His body flared to life. Those lips. They had been full and pouty when she was little. That hadn't changed. Their lush ripeness made him crave to taste them.

Her stubborn chin quivered and drew his attention. He smiled. Peter used to call it her pirate's chin. She would lift it defiantly when he pretended to be an enemy threatening to board her ship. She had always

wanted to be a pirate queen. No dolls or dress up for Wendy. Give her a good adventure any day instead. The childhood memory of all those magical days they spent playing pirates came back to him. Even though she was a girl, and younger than him, she had put up a good fight and battled him to the end of each game.

Wendy was a tomboy back then. As his eyes drank in her chestnut brown hair falling in shining waves past her shoulder, and her voluptuous body perfectly filling out the flared skirt and lacy blouse she wore, he knew she was now all woman. And she was just the right height. The top of her head barely reached his shoulders.

His body hardened.

Peter had always liked curvy, petite woman. There was something right about the way they felt against him. When they made love, it was a perfect fit.

Frowning, he realized the women he had been dating over the last several of years were neither curvy nor petite. They tended to be tall with very little in the way of shape. He wondered why his tastes had changed as his gaze ran over Wendy once more. He couldn't get enough of her. It was like he was dying of thirst and she was water. Damn, he had missed her. He didn't realize how much, until that moment.

The last time they saw each other she was ten and he was thirteen. Peter's mother had decided to send him to boarding school. His grandparents had told her it was the best thing for him. They felt it was time

for him to grow up. And since his mother depended on them for the house they lived in, as well as the food they ate, the clothes they wore, and the alcohol she couldn't get enough of, she listened.

"But I don't want you to go, Peter," he remembered Wendy saying as tears pooled in her beautiful, soulful eyes. "Why can't you stay?"

"My grandparents think it's time for me to grow up. So they're sending me away to a school that will teach me how to do that," he had explained, gently holding her hand.

Wendy bit her quivering bottom lip, as if holding back a sob.

"B-but I thought y-you didn't want to grow up," she stuttered as the tears overflowed and slid down her cheeks.

Peter gently wiped them away.

"I'm not going to grow up, Wendy. I'll just let them think I am, but I won't. Never, ever, *ever*."

"When will I see you again?"

"Don't worry, little one. We'll see each other soon," he assured her with a smile. "You just keep practicing your flying."

Wendy had smiled at that, then hugged him tightly.

"I'll wait for you, Peter," she had whispered in his ear. "I'll look out my window each night, find the brightest star, and wish you home again."

Peter spent the remainder of his youth at a private boarding school for wealthy boys. Then he went on to graduate and receive his MBA at an ivy-league college on the east coast. In the beginning, he and Wendy wrote to

each other, but as time passed and distance separated them, the letters eventually stopped.

His grandparents paid for all his expenses, but only visited him once a year. They checked on his progress and sternly lectured him on the need to be mature and responsible. His mother visited occasionally, but she usually ended up sobbing about her life most of the time. He never went home or saw Wendy again.

Until today.

Wendy lowered her outstretched hand in shock.

It couldn't be.

Could it?

Narrowing her eyes, she carefully studied his face. Same square chin, same strong nose, and ... his eyes. She would never forget those eyes--bright green, mischievous, and full of life. Just looking at them had always made her want to smile. Now was no exception.

She felt the corners of her lips curl up.

"Peter?"

"At your service, my lady pirate," Peter said, bowing dramatically. He straightened and gave her a dazzling smile.

That smile.

It was just the way she remembered it. The kind of smile that made you ponder what wonderful secret the person was hiding. As a child, she always thought of it as Peter's mysterious smile. As an adult, that grin held

something more. The secrets it promised made warmth pool in her abdomen. The term roguish grin was created for such a smile.

She needed to get hold of herself. She was acting like Miss School Girl Flight Attendant, and that was *so* not her. She was a corporate attorney. She met men who could and would rip her apart with their words, if she let them. She always handled herself with the utmost professionalism and viewed the men she encountered as part of her career in a practical way. Doing so made conducting business with them easy and smooth. That approach had never failed her.

So why did her knees suddenly feel weak?

She had never felt like this with a man, professionally or personally. Even her relationship with Jeffrey had been smooth, neat, and clean. No messy uncontrollable hormones acting up or heartache to deal with. They had met, become friends, and gradually came to care enough about each other to get married.

Tearing her eyes from his seductive lips, Wendy met Peter's gaze. Reining in her emotions, she gave him her best professional smile.

"How nice to see you again, Peter." She took a step back and held out her hand once more.

He took it this time, but instead of shaking, as she expected, he lifted her hand to his mouth and placed a light kiss on the back of it.

"It's a pleasure to see you again, Wendy. I just wish it were under better circumstances," he said, gently releasing her hand.

His mother.

In the shock of seeing him again, she had completely forgotten about his mother's death. But before she could give him her condolences, the flight attendant returned.

"I have a seat available in first class for you, sir. Will that do?"

"Thank you, Bell. Your warm welcome and accommodating actions tell me how much of a commodity you are to Neverland Airways," Peter replied with a charming smile.

"You're welcome Mr. Kelley. I'm glad to do it for you." Miss Schoolgirl blushed. She looked like she was about to melt.

For some reason, that irritated Wendy. Thoughts of offering her condolences to Peter somehow slipped away.

"Well, isn't that nice?" she said in a sickly sweet voice. "The two of you really should talk about this more. I'll just take my seat back, while you two stroll up to first class and get settled in. Then the plane can take off. That works for me. How about for the two of you?"

Wendy's smile couldn't get more saccharine.

If the two of them wanted to drool all over each other, they could do it elsewhere.

Peter glanced over his shoulder at her. Winking, he gave her a wicked smile that the flight attendant couldn't see, then turned back to Miss Schoolgirl.

“Bell, are there two seats available in first class? I’ll cover the upgrade.”

“That really isn’t necessary, Peter,” Wendy jumped in before Bell could answer. What was he doing? The look in his eyes told her he was up to something.

“Of course it is, Wendy,” Peter assured her with a knowing smile. “Well, Bell?”

Bell hesitated. She was gazing at Peter with adoration in her eyes, but then her gaze found Wendy, and something like distaste crossed her face.

“Well, yes there are, Mr. Kelley, but--”

“Good. Then it’s settled. After you, Bell,” Peter said, waiting for her to slide by him. As soon as she did, he followed without waiting for Wendy.

Wendy thought about refusing, but curiosity got the better of her. She wanted to know what had happened to Peter during all those years they were separated. They had written to each other a few times, but he had eventually stopped writing back. Toward the end, she remembered writing him five or six letters before finally giving up. That was the first heartbreak in her life. And it was one she never forgot.

Once they reached their row, she packed the remainder of her things in the roomy upper compartment. Peter had wanted the aisle seat, so Wendy slid past him and sat down. She looked around. Once the attendant pulled the curtain between the two classes closed, she and Peter were almost alone. Other than a few people in the rows ahead of theirs, first class was relatively

empty. And what a difference in space compared to coach class. Though she did quite well at the law firm she had joined, first class wasn't something she normally indulged in when traveling.

"If you need anything else, anything at all, Mr. Kelley, please feel free to call on me," Bell said sweetly.

"Thank you, Bell. I'll remember that," Peter replied with a smile that Wendy knew was curling Miss Schoolgirl's toes as she walked away.

The urge to kick him was strong, but Wendy held back. She had no claims on Peter. Why was she so uptight all of a sudden?

"She seems nice," Wendy said, trying to act normal.

Peter just sort of grunted his agreement.

The captain announced their departure moments later. Wendy leaned her head back against the seat and closed her eyes. This was something she had done since she was small. The shimmying plane and loud roar of its engine had always frightened her. As she got older, she grew out of that fear, but she still closed her eyes on every take off and prayed the plane would make it into the sky.

"I see you still haven't learned how to fly yet, little one," Peter whispered in her ear.

Chapter 3

Peter held her hand as the plane swept up into the sky. Though she stiffened at his words, Wendy didn't pull away. He enjoyed the soft feel of

her palm against his. Would she feel like that all over? His imagination went into overdrive. Groaning, he imagined her naked beneath him, all that creamy, smooth skin open to his touch.

Once the plane leveled off in the sky, Peter turned her hand palm side up. Placing his thumb in the center of it, he made small circular designs in the soft pads. He stared at Wendy's face, willing her to open her eyes.

As if reading his mind, they slowly fluttered open. The impact of her soft doe eyes hit him like a punch to the stomach. Desire slammed into him. He needed to touch her. Her gaze widened as he skimmed his fingers up her arm, but she didn't pull away. The almost sleeveless blouse she wore left him plenty of skin to relish. Slipping his fingers higher, he felt goose bumps crop up under his touch

Wendy's lips parted in a gasp. Her eyes darkened with desire, and she bit her lower lip. Focusing on her lush mouth, he imagined kissing her so thoroughly she became breathless. Sucking in a sharp groan, his body hardened and strained against the jeans he wore. He wanted her in a way he hadn't wanted a woman for a very long time. And if her actions were any indication, she wanted him too.

He would have her.

He had learned from past experience that if he wanted something bad enough, he got it. All it took was hard work, patience, and perseverance. Looking into Wendy's beautiful face, he knew she would be worth the wait. The hunter in him roared to life. He had found his prey.

She must have sensed something in his gaze because she pulled her hand out of his grasp and scooted closer to the window.

“Thank you, uh, for arranging this. First class certainly beats the cramped quarters back there,” she commented glancing back at coach.

“It’s my pleasure. I wanted to talk with you, catch up during the remainder of our flight home,” he said, sliding closer to her. “Where have you been for the last twenty years of my life?”

Wendy knew that the question he asked was innocent enough, but the heat in Peter’s eyes wasn’t. She tried to back away from him again, but she was in the window seat and had nowhere to go. When his mouth spread into a sexy, satisfied smile, she knew he was well aware of that fact.

“Tell me about your life. What have you been doing since we last saw one another?” he asked in a voice that was pure velvet. Though the sound of it made her heartbeat speed up, she ignored it. His question irritated her.

“Oh, you mean since you left home, went away to boarding school, wrote to me a few times, then forgot about me? Or do you mean after you promised to come back and never did?”

The bitter words spilled out. Wendy didn’t know where they came from. It was like a switch turned on and she had no control over it. And as each word spewed from her mouth, her anger built and built until it was a blazing fire.

“Do you know how many nights I sat in front of my window wishing on that bright star, waiting for you?” She moved her face close to his, so

that their noses almost touched, and looked him straight in the eye. “Do you care?”

The last question was no more than a whisper. It might as well have been a roar. The stunned look in Peter’s eyes said it all.

“Of course I care, little one. I always cared,” he whispered as he slid his fingers behind her head and gently pulled her forward.

The minute their lips touched, Wendy’s anger dissolved. It was replaced by a burning hot desire that threatened to consume her. His lips tasted, sipped and nipped. His fingers gently massaged her head. When he lowered one hand to her back and pressed her toward him, she let him. When he slid his fingers under her blouse and touched the curve of her waist, she let him. When his hand slipped higher, skipping along her ribcage, she lost the ability to breathe.

“May I offer you a warm towel?”

Wendy jerked away from Peter. Looking wildly around her, she noticed Bell giving out towels two rows ahead of them. But the woman’s eyes weren’t on the other passengers. They were narrowed on Wendy. Burning bright with malice, Miss Schoolgirl looked like she wanted to murder Wendy with just a look.

Wendy tore her gaze from the flight attendant’s hateful stare back to Peter. He had moved away, but his heated interest stayed firmly fixed on her.

“Do you know that you have the most luscious lips I’ve ever seen?” Peter’s voice had changed. Low and seductive, it sent tingles of awareness down her spine. “They’re lush, soft, and taste like honey. I could worship them for hours.”

His words made heat pool low in her belly. She didn’t know what to say. Losing herself in his fathomless green eyes, all she could do was let him move closer once more.

“Hours. That’s perfect,” he practically purred in that sexy voice. “We have a few hours ahead of us until this flight reaches home. Let’s make the best of it.”

Wendy was lost. His eyes took her to another place. A place where just the two of them existed and everything else faded into nothingness. Her eyes fluttered closed just as his lips were about to touch hers.

“Towel?”

Wendy jumped back as a warm, wet towel slid between them. Barely catching it, she glared up at the flight attendant. Bell paid no attention to her. She only had eyes for Peter.

“Would you like me to wipe your hands for you sir?” Bell said with adoration in her gaze.

“No. But thank you, Bell. I appreciate the kind offer,” Peter said with a warm smile that left Wendy hot under the collar.

“Yes, thank you, Bell. You’re so, uh, *helpful*,” Wendy said with her own saccharine sweet smile. “*I’ll* certainly call on you if I need anything.”

Bell glanced up and gave her one last glare before moving on to the next passenger.

Peter's low chuckle caught her attention.

"What's so funny?"

"I can see your claws."

Wendy bristled with irritation but managed to remain calm.

"I don't know what you mean," she said with an indignant sniff.

"Of course you don't," he said, grinning wickedly.

No man had a right to look so good when he smiled. His whole face changed. It became bright, mischievous, irresistibly adorable, and sexy at the same time. Wendy fought not to return his smile. Peter left her feeling like no other man ever had--dizzy, confused, and giddy all at once. She struggled to find some solid ground.

"So, what have you been doing for the past twenty years, Peter?"

There. That sounded normal. Like the old her. The one in control. Not the one who had just kissed a man she hasn't seen for twenty years.

"I attended that private all-boy school my grandparents thought would benefit me the most. Then I graduated and went off to college. After graduation, I got a job, then another. That's it. Not much to tell."

"What about your mother? Why didn't you ever come home to visit her? She seemed sad without you."

Peter's face hardened and his eyes grew distant.

“My mother was sad about nothing but missing her own childhood. She came to visit me every once in a while but never let me come home for the holidays or summer break. I stayed at the school with the other lost boys.”

“Lost boys?” she asked. Her heart was breaking for him as he told her of his childhood.

“Yeah. That’s what the other boys and I who were left at school during the holidays called ourselves. All of us had parents who were too busy or didn’t care enough to share the holidays with us.”

Though the hard look on his face was solid rock, the pain and resentment in his eyes glittered bright.

“I’m so sorry, Peter.”

“Don’t be. Those guys and I had a lot of fun together causing trouble at that school. I formed some good friendships, which I still have today,” he replied with a shrug and a grin.

Wendy wasn’t fooled by his indifference. His feelings for his mother were strong. Her death was probably weighing heavily on him right now.

“I’m sorry about your mom.”

“That really isn’t necessary, Wendy. I already mourned the death of my mother a long time ago. When she left me in that boarding school year after year.”

“What did you do after graduation?”

“I went on to get my MBA.”

“Your grandparents must have been proud of you.”

“Proud? I wouldn’t say that. They were satisfied that they had done their duty visiting me at the boarding school occasionally and making sure I got a good education. Beyond that there was nothing. Once I received my MBA, they just kind of disappeared from my life.”

“Was that by their choice or yours?”

Peter’s eyes flared with anger. Grasping her shoulders, he brought Wendy’s face close to his. The fury in his low voice shook her to the core.

“None of it was my choice, Wendy. Not one damn day of it. From the minute I left you crying your little eyes out on that street curb to the moment I graduated from that boarding school, my life was not my own. I guess I could have disappeared after that, gone my own way, but I wanted more from my life. I wanted to be something more than a man who walks out on his wife and son, or a woman who drinks to get through each miserable day of her existence.”

Wendy didn’t know what to say. His harsh words left her speechless. He held so much anger and pain inside.

Peter couldn’t take it. Wendy was doing it again. She was looking at him with those soft, wide, chocolate brown eyes. Her expression was filled with compassion, caring, and pity. He gritted his teeth. He didn’t want her pity. He wanted her lush, ripe body. That was all he needed. All he ever needed.

Tightening his hold on her shoulders, he dipped his head and covered her mouth with his. She tasted so good. Like cotton candy and the lazy summer days before he went to boarding school. Growling low in his throat, he gently parted her lips and explored her mouth. When she met the tip of his tongue with her own, he almost lost it. Engaging in a dance older than time, they circled, touched, and retreated.

Wendy pressed closer. Desire pounded through him. He reveled in the feel of her soft breasts against his chest. He could feel her nipples harden through the thin blouse she wore. He needed to touch her. Gliding his hand under the lacy material, he found her bra and gently pushed it up. Though she stiffened when he cupped her fullness with his hand, she didn't pull away. Alternating between each breast he ran her stiff nipples between his thumb and index finger. Wendy moaned and arched into his touch.

That moan turned him inside out. He wanted more.

Peter muffled the sound with his kisses, as he leaned closer, pushing her back against the seat. Placing his free hand on her knee, he waited. Good. She didn't push him away. Sliding his fingers beneath her skirt, he gently nudged her legs apart. Skimming along her stocking-covered inner thigh, he drew close enough to feel her woman's heat. His body twitched painfully. He wanted to plunge into that heat.

He had almost reached her hot core when Wendy pulled away. She pushed against his chest hard enough to loosen his hold. Lost in the desire

that was burning through him, he tried to bring her close again. Until the sound she was making registered in his lust-filled brain.

She was giggling!

He jerked back in surprise and studied her.

Her whole face transformed. Her wide soulful eyes lit with humor, narrowed, and crinkled at the corners as she laughed. Her mouth curved up and parted as the sweet sound of it left her lips. Her cheeks flushed and rounded as she smiled shyly up at him.

“Sorry,” she said between laughs. “My legs, well, I’m just very ticklish.”

Stunned by Wendy’s transformation, he couldn’t breathe. Gone was the attractive but solemn woman who had sat beside him. In her place was the little girl he had once known, a girl who sparkled with a kind of magical glow, like a fairy or a mermaid. Her beauty was more than he could bear.

Unable to stop himself, he reached up and stroked her cheek with his fingers.

“You’ve grown into an incredibly beautiful woman, little one.”

He cursed himself as her face grew serious once more.

“I think we need to back up, Peter,” she said in a low, no nonsense voice, straightening her clothing as she looked around. “I find you very attractive and I want to talk with you more, but I can’t do this. Making out in a plane full of people is not a normal occurrence for me.”

“So, let’s go into the bathroom,” he suggested with a roguish grin and a wink. “Haven’t you joined the mile high club yet?”

Wendy didn’t crack a smile.

“We move on to another topic, or I’m going back to coach,” she said firmly.

Peter shrugged good-naturedly while inside his body ached to touch Wendy, again and again. He would just have to be patient. He could do this.

“Okay. Tell me about you. What have you been doing with your life since we last saw one another?” he asked.

“Like you, I finished school and went on to college. I worked part time at the library until graduation, then went on to law school. I’m an attorney now.”

Peter could tell she was proud of her accomplishments, as she should be.

“What type of law do you practice?”

“I’m a corporate attorney. I specialize in contract law.”

Peter nodded. “Not an easy field. Why did you choose that?”

“I love to read, and the process of interpreting the written word has always fascinated me. Contract law just seemed to be a good fit.”

“If I remember right, you also used to love to tell stories.”

“I still do. That was my part time job at the library during college. I would tell children stories. I still do readings at my local library, but with my schedule being so tight, I don’t have as much time for it as I used to.”

“That’s too bad. I distinctly remember a little girl who kept an older boy glued to his seat while she told tales of bold pirates and action-packed adventures.”

Wendy flushed red.

Peter couldn’t remember the last time he had seen a woman blush. The sight of it stirred him to the point where he knew he better change the subject or he’d be carrying her to the airplane bathroom.

“So, where are you living now?”

“Arizona.”

“The Wild West, huh?” he teased.

“Not so wild anymore. But I enjoy the nice weather and open spaces. How about you? Where are you living now?”

“California. I enjoy the weather, and in my line of work, it’s a great place to be.”

“Oh, I never asked you what you did. With your MBA, I’m sure you had lots of choices,” she said.

“I did. But you remember how I always talked about flying?”

Wendy smiled. He knew she was remembering their conversations about him showing her how to fly.

“Well I decided to follow through on that. I started--”

“Excuse me, can I offer you a cocktail, sir?”

Bell bent forward so that Peter had a clear view of her ample cleavage. He smiled. Though he appreciated the view, he knew Wendy was watching him like a hawk.

“I’ll just have a beer.”

“Of course, sir. Anything you need,” Bell said fluttering her eyelashes and smiling seductively into his eyes. Before he got on this flight and met up with Wendy again, he would have already gotten Bell’s number and set up a date by now. The woman was tall, blonde, and very attractive.

But he didn’t want her.

He wanted the petite, curvaceous woman beside him--more than he had wanted any woman in a long time. Everyone else paled in comparison to her at the moment.

“Would you like anything, Wendy?” Peter asked.

Satisfaction shot through him when he saw the way she was looking at Bell. Wendy was jealous. Good.

“I’ll just have a glass of Chardonnay.”

“Fine.” Bell said through gritted teeth. She was supposed to be smiling, but Peter thought it looked more like she was baring her teeth at Wendy. As Bell walked away, he could hear Wendy muttering under her breath.

“Miss Schoolgirl witch.”

“What was that?” Peter asked.

“Oh nothing,” Wendy said, glaring at Bell’s back. “I think this airline needs to be pickier in the flight attendants they hire. That woman is downright rude.”

“I hadn’t noticed,” Peter said, trying to keep a straight face.

“You wouldn’t,” she replied dryly. “If this airline wants to stay afloat, they really should teach their employees the meaning of customer service. I mean, without that, where would they be? I know a little bit about this company. They’ve grown substantially over the last couple of years, and their on time record is great. However, I have to say, I think their customer service is severely lacking.”

“Really?”

“Yes. You know what happens with these big businesses. They make good money, and the owners get all high and mighty. Soon they forget about the little things, like caring about the way the customer feels.”

“I see,” he said, struggling to keep a straight face. “That is something to consider.”

“Anyway, you started to tell me what career you chose. Please continue,” Wendy said.

“I own Neverland Airways.”

Wendy’s eyes widened and her mouth dropped open.

“Here are your drinks,” Bell said, setting both drinks on his tray table.

“Thanks, Bell. I’ll cover the cost of both.”

“Of course,” Bell said easily, but the slight tightening of her mouth gave her away. She snapped around and headed back up the aisle.

Wendy closed her mouth, but still didn’t speak as he set the wineglass on her tray table.

She grabbed the glass, took a big gulp, and turned toward him.

“I’m sorry, Peter. I, um, I had no idea you owned this airline.”

“No apology necessary,” he said with a low chuckle. She looked like a kid caught with her hand in the cookie jar. A blush crept up her throat and spread across her cheeks. He loved to see her blush. “I like to hear how people feel about my airline. You were right when you said that customer service is important. That, and being on time are the two main priorities of Neverland Airways. And I’ll strive not to be so high and mighty from now on.”

His last, teasing comment darkened Wendy’s already red cheeks. Peter took a long swig of beer. He needed to put out the fire her blushes lit inside him.

“Peter, I didn’t mean... Well, I mean, I didn’t know--”

“Don’t worry. I knew what you meant,” he assured her with another chuckle. “Let’s just enjoy our drinks and get to know each other again. Sound good?”

Wendy gave him a weak smile but nodded her head.

Chapter 4

Wendy was feeling a little warm.

Three glasses of wine later, they were well on the road to getting to know each other much better. Both of them skipped the onboard snack as they had each eaten on the previous leg of their flight and still weren't hungry.

As she enjoyed Peter's charm and quick wit, her attraction to him grew. Something about him called to her, made her want to draw closer. It was the old moth and the flame idea. He was a flame that she shouldn't get near. He was a charmer; there was no doubt about it. And if Miss Schoolgirl was any indicator of how women acted with him, she knew he had to be something of a playboy.

Jeffrey wasn't a playboy. Although he was handsome in a frat boy kind of way, she knew he was loyal to her. He would make a good, steady husband with whom she could share their mutual interests.

When she looked at Peter, interests were not what she pictured sharing with him.

"What are you thinking about?"

Wendy felt like she had been caught doing something she wasn't supposed to. A blush climbed up her neck and to her cheeks before she could stop it. It would not be good to share her thoughts with Peter.

"Nothing much," she lied, biting her bottom lip to keep from blurting the truth out.

“Are you sure?” Peter asked with a knowing look in his eyes that had her blushing all over again.

He knew. How could she get herself out of this? She said the first thing that came to mind.

“I was thinking about you. About how I had a very big crush on you before you left. I think I was, what, ten? And you had just turned thirteen. I wasn’t sure what a crush was back then, but I knew I wanted to spend as much of my time as possible with you.”

“Really?” Peter’s voice held the kind of male arrogance that put her teeth on edge.

“Of course, that *was* a long, long time ago.”

“How do you feel about me now, little one?”

That endearment. Every time he said it her heart did a little flip flop. He had always called her that when they were kids. Then it had made her feel special. Now it held a different meaning. It pulled at her in places she couldn’t talk about.

“I don’t know. You’re an attractive man, Peter. I won’t deny that. But I’m already committed to someone.” Wendy held out her ring for him to see. “I’m engaged to be married in a few months.”

Peter showed no emotion at her comment. He just slowly nodded his head and took another swig of his bottle of beer.

“Who’s the lucky guy?” he asked after swallowing.

“His name is Jeffrey Hook. He works at the same law firm as I do. He and I have a lot in common, and share similar interests.”

“He sounds great,” Peter said in a voice that clearly said he thought otherwise.

Wendy’s defenses immediately went up.

“He is. We both enjoy so many of the same things and always have something to talk about, whether it’s work or pleasure.”

Peter took two more swigs of beer, finishing the bottle, then slapped it down on the table.

“Pleasure is important. Does he give you plenty of that?”

“What?” Wendy gasped.

“Another beer please, Bell, honey,” Peter ignored Wendy as he got the attention of the flight attendant. She immediately walked to their row and beamed. Bell was obviously pleased at being called “honey.”

“I wish I could, Mr. Kelley. But we’re getting ready to land. I’m collecting all the glasses and bottles now,” the woman said, looking at Peter hungrily and licking her lips. “But, I’ll be glad to buy you a beer once we’re on the ground. I have a layover here overnight.”

“I have an early appointment tomorrow, but I just might take you up on that, sweetheart,” Peter said in a low seductive voice.

Bell smiled triumphantly, glancing at Wendy with a superior look.

Wendy clenched her teeth. *I will not let the rude woman bother me. I will not let the rude woman bother me. I will not let the rude woman bother*

me. The chant helped. A little. Once Bell walked away with their glasses, Wendy released an angry breath.

“Do you always make a habit of picking up your employees?”

“If you were watching closely, you would have seen that I wasn’t the one doing the picking up,” he responded with an arrogant smile.

“Whatever,” Wendy said with a wave of her hand. “She’s your employee. Isn’t there some rule against dating your employees?”

“No.” Peter snapped back. “Isn’t there some rule against you dating your fellow worker?”

The two of them were almost nose to nose as they glared at each other. The pilot’s announcement broke their staring contest.

“We’ve begun our descent. Please fasten your seatbelts and bring your seats to their original upright positions.”

Neither of them spoke after that. Once the plane landed, they silently gathered their belongings. Peter hesitated as other passengers began to disembark. Wendy waited patiently, until she noticed that he was making no effort to enter the line to leave. As the last person went past them, he still didn’t move. She glared at his back a moment longer, then finally broke her silence.

“Are you planning on getting off the plane anytime soon?” she asked through clenched teeth.

She wondered at the wisdom of her words, as Peter turned around. The look in his eyes was dangerous. Before she knew what to expect, he

dropped his bags, grasped her shoulders and pulled her against him. His mouth descended and her knees went weak. Holding her in place, he kissed her like he was starving and she was food. Desire spiked through her, heat pooled at her core, and she felt dizzy. She tried to catch her breath, but the minute her lips parted he began his onslaught. Letting go of her bags, she wrapped her hands around the back of his neck and brought him closer.

Growling, Peter met each thrust of her tongue with his own parry. Then he delved into her mouth again and again, imitating a much more intimate act. She moaned in pleasure when he released her shoulders and slid his hands down her body. She felt like panting when he took her bottom in both hands and began kneading it. Pulling her against him, she felt his hard arousal against her belly.

He pulled away then. If he hadn't, Wendy wasn't sure what would have happened. She stood there with her eyes closed. It took her a moment to realize he had stopped kissing her. Opening her eyes, she saw Peter's satisfied smile and arrogant look. He knew how much he affected her.

"Pleasure, Wendy. Does your Jeffrey give you pleasure like that? If you were mine, I'd pleasure you every day, at least once, but most likely more than that."

Wendy didn't know what to say. Her libido was skyrocketing. The man had just turned her into putty in his hands. Before she could respond, Peter turned and walked away.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, little one. Dream about me. About us. Flying together,” he said over his shoulder before stepping off the plane.

Wendy shook her head to clear it. She gathered her belongings and disembarked. Peter was nowhere to be found. He was probably with Bell having a good time. The nerve of the guy! Wendy couldn’t believe what she had let him do to her on a plane full of people. Granted they were pretty isolated and most likely no one saw them, but, not once, not twice, three times she let Peter kiss and touch her on the plane. And she knew, if she hadn’t been as ticklish as she was, she might have let him do a lot more.

She had never lost control of herself like that. And she had never let a man get that intimate with her that quickly. But Peter had made her forget about everything and everyone else when he touched her. And if it felt that good just to kiss and touch him, she couldn’t help imagining how good their lovemaking would be. Explosive, breathtaking, unforgettable. Those were only a few of the adjectives that came to mind.

After collecting her luggage, she caught a cab home. The drive through her old neighborhood to her parent’s home brought back a lot of memories. Peter was at the center of each and every one of them.

Wendy’s parents were glad to see her. The three of them shared a quiet dinner catching up on each other’s news. Before going to bed, she phoned Jeffrey to let him know she had arrived safely. His voice was curt, the way it always was when he was pouting. She knew it was because he wasn’t happy about her making this trip, but she ignored it and got off the

phone as quickly as possible. The plane ride and encountering Peter had left her exhausted. Unfortunately she tossed and turned most of the night. When she finally did fall asleep, her dreams were filled with a sexy man with dimples and bright green eyes.

Peter declined Bell's request to join her for a drink. She wasn't happy about it. But despite her good looks and great body, he just wasn't interested in her. A certain brown-haired seductress had taken hold of his mind and didn't want to let go. He grabbed something to eat at the airport, then spent the night at a hotel. He could have stayed in his mother's place but chose not to. That house held no good memories for him, unless Wendy was in them. She was the light of his existence back then.

Even when he turned thirteen and all his friends at school were on the hunt for girlfriends, he held back. He'd enjoyed Wendy's company. Their adventures and her storytelling had kept his interest despite his age. But that last year they were together, things had started to change. He began having feelings for her he didn't understand. He had always cared about Wendy, wanted to protect her from harm, and make her smile. But then his feelings began to develop into more complex, confusing emotions.

Though they remained friends, he started hanging out more with other friends his own age. He had discovered that if he spent too much time with Wendy, he became uncomfortable. She didn't seem to be aware of his feelings and had been confused by the fact that they spent less time together,

but she had accepted it. So when they were together it became more special and unique. He would never forget those times.

And now he had more memories to add to those. That last kiss on the airplane had left him shaking. It had taken everything he had to break it off and walk away. The feel of Wendy in his arms, her ardent response to his touch had almost driven him over the edge. He'd stayed aroused until he got to the hotel. He just couldn't get her out of his mind. Lying in bed in his room, he stared up at the ceiling and wondered if she was thinking about him. He eventually fell asleep to dreams of Wendy and he flying and making love in the clouds.

The next morning was his mom's funeral. Peter dressed in a somber dark charcoal suit. On the drive to the cemetery, he wondered why his mother had chosen to be buried here instead of in her family's plot. They practically had a mausoleum at a cemetery half an hour from here. Instead she had chosen a simple burial at the small cemetery close to her house.

He drove through his old neighborhood and right by his mother's house. An ache he thought he was long over pulled at him. How many times that first year at boarding school had he hoped and prayed to come home again? Every night he stared out his room window, looking for the brightest star, and thinking about Wendy. He would picture her beautiful face and wish he could fly home. He never did make it back, until yesterday.

But that longing was what lead him to start Neverland Airways. That, and a customer niche he knew wasn't being filled by the airline industry.

He'd had a hunch, and with the help of some investors and the money his grandparents had left him when they died, it had paid off. Most of the investors were old classmates, the Lost Boys, from boarding school. Many of them had gone on in life to become very successful. But the bond they had formed with each other remained strong.

As did their pledge to one another.

Never grow up.

It seemed stupid now. But he and his friends had vowed that no matter what happened in their lives, they would not grow up. They would have fun and enjoy life without getting too serious. None of them wanted to become what their parents had been. And none of them wanted a family. They all knew, from past experience, the pain having a family caused.

That was why he had stopped writing Wendy so long ago. Her letters were a painful reminder of his mother and his past. And he knew, even at that young age, Wendy was the type of girl who wanted true love and happily ever after. He couldn't give her that. So he tried to forget about her. Instead, he focused on meeting girls who just wanted to have a good time. And he had continued wanting those kinds of women.

Until last night.

Until he met the beautiful brown eyes of the only girl who had truly touched his soul. The only girl who had ever made him feel free. And the one woman he now needed to stay far, far away from. Though many years had passed, and Wendy had grown and changed, she was the same in one,

specific, dangerous way. She was still a true-love, have-a-family, happily-ever-after kind of girl.

Despite the chemistry between them and the longing he felt when he looked at her, he would not give in. He was not a happily-ever-after kind of guy. He was a have-fun, work-hard-and-play-hard kind of man. That was his life. He had accepted and enjoyed that lifestyle for many years.

Arriving at the cemetery, Peter got out of the car. His mother hadn't wanted any kind of religious memorial service. She had requested that a few friends come to her burial and speak. Looking around the site, he saw that she had gotten what she wanted. There weren't a lot of people there, just enough to know she had some friends and family. But that was about it.

He saw Wendy's parents. Though they had aged, he remembered them. Next to them stood Wendy. She looked somber in her simple black dress. Knowing he should, at least, say hello to her parents, he started toward them. That was when he noticed the man standing next to Wendy. He was tall, with dark hair, tanned skin and a smile that reminded him of a snake.

Peter stopped in his tracks.

The minute the man put his arm around Wendy's waist, jealousy ripped through Peter. The predator in him roared to life. *Mine! She's mine.* The force of his thoughts surprised, but didn't deter him. Forgetting his determination to stay far away from her, he planned his strategy.

She belonged to him, and he would have her.

Chapter 5

Wendy forced herself to smile up at Jeffrey. He gave her waist a reassuring squeeze as they stood around Judith Kelley's grave. She had been more than a little surprised to see him that morning. Surprised, and a little irritated. She had hoped he wouldn't join her on this trip. When he had said he couldn't make it, she had been relieved. She just wasn't in the mood to deal with Jeffrey right now. Her encounter with Peter had left her emotions raw and mixed up.

The death of Peter's mother and Wendy's trip back here had started her thinking about her life. Funerals and weddings always affected her that way. Seeing Peter yesterday only enhanced that feeling. Was she making the right choice in marrying Jeffrey? Yes he was charming and handsome. Yes they had similar interests. But would she be happy with him? Peter's words had played over and over in her head as she tried to sleep last night.

Pleasure is important. Does he give you plenty of that?

She had been shocked by his question at the time, but the more she thought about it, the more she wondered. She cared for Jeffrey, but were there sparks between them physically? No. Not a bit. It was pleasant enough to be with him, but he didn't make her lose her train of thought, or feel like she was going to melt into a puddle. No, he didn't make her feel like that at all.

But Peter did. He made all coherent thought flee her mind. He made her knees weak. He made her want him in a way she had never desired Jeffrey.

Pleasure, Wendy. Does your Jeffrey give you pleasure like that? If you were mine, I'd pleasure you every day, at least once, but most likely more than that.

His words rang through her mind again and again as she tossed and turned in her bed last night. Imagining him fulfilling his words left her breathless with desire. Thoughts of him finishing what they started on the plane made her ache with need.

What did she want? What did she *really* want?

I'll see you tomorrow, little one. Dream about me. About us. Flying together.

Peter's parting words had struck home. Wendy was a practical woman. She had left her dreams far behind as a child, when Peter stopped writing to her. Since then, she had gone forward in life focusing on the goals she wanted to attain.

Yet the minute Peter barged back into the picture, that all changed. She spent most of last night thinking about him and Jeffrey. Dreams of flying with Peter became crystal clear, while the image of she and Jeffrey blurred and faded. Jeffrey offered her a stable, safe future. Peter offered her nothing more than a fantasy filled fairy tale.

But it was a wonderful fantasy. She imagined it would be filled with excitement and adventure. And heart-stopping, knees-shaking, breathtaking moments. Could she take the risk? Dare she follow the delicious temptation Peter offered, or stay the course with Jeffrey?

That question kept her awake most of the night. If she had gotten a couple of hours of sleep, she was lucky. And she was still undecided. Seeing Jeffrey the next morning, sitting in her parent's kitchen in the glaring light of day had not been a pleasant surprise. Every fault he ever had seemed to surface as they shared breakfast.

"You would not believe what it took to get here, Wen."

Jeffrey was the only one who chose to call her by that nickname. She didn't particularly like it, but knew Jeffrey did.

"Despite it being a red-eye flight, the plane was packed, and people were obnoxious. I almost didn't want to get on the plane. But I knew how much you wanted me to be here. Just keep in mind that I will need to do some work during my stay, but I'm sure you understand. You know how important this case I'm working on is."

Wendy just sat there in stunned silence, listening to him ramble on about his flight, as if he were the only person inconvenienced by this trip. As if she hadn't left work to be here too. As if someone hadn't just died. She knew Jeffrey could sometimes be callous, but his total lack of empathy in this circumstance shocked her.

“Would you make me another slice of toast, Wen? I’m really hungry. The food on that flight was minimal to nonexistent. And not a peanut in sight. Can you believe it? No peanuts. I complained to the flight attendant, but she was too busy helping an old lady having some sort of panic attack. She just shot me a look and told me to sit down, for my own safety. And the noise on the plane. What a racket...”

On and on Jeffrey raved. Wendy wondered why she hadn’t noticed what a whiner he was until now. He had always been a very demanding and picky person, but it hadn’t bothered her before. And he didn’t even ask her once how *she* was doing. He just went on and on about himself, his case, and the flight over.

“One more thing, Wen. I didn’t get a chance to have my pants pressed on my way here. Could you do that for me?” Without waiting for a response he continued. “And don’t forget to make sure the creases are even. You know how much I hate it when they’re uneven.”

Wendy pasted a smile on her face.

“Of course, Jeffrey,” she said between gritted teeth.

After Wendy had ironed his pants, they went to the funeral. Her parents stood talking with them for a time, as they waited for the ceremony to begin. They excused themselves when they spotted Peter.

“We’ll be right back, dear. We want to give our condolences to Judith’s son before the burial begins,” her mother explained.

Wendy scanned the area and found Peter standing alone by a tree not too far away. She started to go to him also, but remembered that she had already told him how sorry she was about his mother. He hadn't wanted to hear it. She would wait until after the burial and go with Jeffrey to speak to him one last time. After that, she would forget about Peter Kelley. She needed to marry Jeffrey and get on with her life. That would be the best thing to do.

Wendy's shoulders slumped.

The best thing for whom? No. She had to do this. Just cut things off cleanly with Peter and continue her life with Jeffrey, as planned. That was the practical thing to do, the safe thing to do.

That decided, Wendy focused on the ceremony as it began. The burial consisted of a few of Judith's friend's speaking about her. The last person to speak finished, then stepped aside for Peter.

"I'm sure your mother would have liked you to say a few words, Peter."

Wendy saw Peter's face transform in that moment. Gone was the confident, cocky man. Vulnerability, fear, and doubt shined in his amazing green gaze as it found and locked with hers.

She couldn't look away.

Something came over her then. Instead of the practical, no nonsense woman she had become, she reverted back to that little girl with dreams in her heart and stars in her eyes, all for a boy named Peter. As they stared at

each other across Judith Kelley's grave, it was as if all the years suddenly melted away. Back they went to that time so long ago when they were just Peter and Wendy. When the lazy summer days were filled with magic and adventure. When each sunrise brought with it the anticipation of what lay ahead. No regrets, no worries, and no yesterdays. Only the here and now.

Wendy remembered the fun that they had. They laughed each day from morning until night, it seemed. And when they weren't laughing, they just were. Together. Enjoying their friendship. The rest of the world was forgotten as they ran through those sun-dappled forests, jumping over logs, climbing trees, and exploring caves. As they built forts, fought enemies, and saved the world.

It was never supposed to end. Wendy suddenly understood that. Peter should never have gone away. If he hadn't gone, she was sure their lives would have been much different. They had loved each other in the pure way children did--completely--mind, body, and soul. And she knew deep in her heart that the love they shared would have grown as they grew older.

Maybe that was why Peter had broken her heart so badly when he stopped writing. Maybe that was why she had never forgotten him. Why she had never married. Deep down, perhaps Wendy knew there was only one man out there for her: a boy who taught her how to fly, how to imagine herself in a million different places on a million different adventures. He was her partner in crime and the one who had always understood her dreams. She had pledged herself to that boy during those sweet days in the

seemingly endless summer of their youth. Not consciously, not verbally, but it was just as real nonetheless.

Wendy had forgotten that. Just as she had forgotten how to fly. But as she lost herself in the emerald pool of Peter's eyes, it all came back to her. And Peter sensed it too. His gaze suddenly twinkled with mischief, his mouth curved into a secret smile and his face lit up with joy.

"Thank you." Peter said to his mother's friend, then returned his gaze to Wendy. "My mother. Judith Kelley, did what she thought was best for me in my life. I'm thankful for the opportunities that gave me. But more than that, I appreciate the fact that my mom moved here, to this small town, and to one particular neighborhood because that's where I met the most amazing little girl with long, wavy brown hair and big, soulful eyes. A girl who told me stories that left me mesmerized each and every time, but who also led me on the most fantastic adventures I could imagine. Without that little girl, I wouldn't be who I am today. I thank my mother for that."

Wendy lost the ability to breathe.

"I always told Wendy it was me teaching her to fly, but I realize now, that wasn't true. I never showed her how to fly. She showed me. With her dreamer's heart she knew how to reach the stars. I just helped her realize that. And I hope I'm helping her realize that again. You know how to fly, Wendy. Don't forget that. And don't let anyone convince you otherwise," he said, glancing meaningfully at Jeffrey by her side.

Peter went quiet after that. And with a signal to one of the men, his mother's coffin was slowly lowered into the ground.

Peter waited long enough to see that first shovelful of dirt being thrown on the coffin, then accepted the condolences from his mother's friends. When he thought he couldn't take much more of it, he scanned the crowd for Wendy. She and Jeffrey were headed his way.

As they reached him, Wendy immediately gave him a hug.

"Thank you, Peter. Your words were beautiful, and I appreciate them," she whispered in his ear, then pulled away.

"Peter, this is my fiancée, Jeffrey Hook. Jeffrey, this is Peter."

"How's it going," Peter said, extending his hand to shake. Jeffrey gripped his hand, twisting it slightly and squeezing it harder than necessary. Obviously, Wendy's fiancée had some confidence issues.

"Good to meet you. Sorry about your mother," Jeffrey said curtly before releasing his hand. Then something caught his eye behind Peter. "Would you excuse us, Pete? Your parents seem to be waving us over to them, Wendy."

"You go ahead, Jeffrey. I want to speak to Peter a minute more. I'll be right there."

Jeffrey frowned and narrowed his gaze on Peter. He studied the other man for a minute, then nodded his head.

"Okay. But don't be long, Wen. I've wasted enough time. You know I have to get back to your parent's house to work on my case."

Wendy winced at Jeffrey's callous words as he walked away.

"I'm sorry. Jeffrey is usually very charming and well mannered. But sometimes he can be a little tactless. I don't think he means to be. He just is so busy with his own life that it's hard for him to realize what's going on around him."

Peter knew almost immediately just the kind of bastard Jeffrey was--selfish, demanding, and callous. The worst kind of man for Wendy. He would take over her life, crush her dreams, and cause the stars to fade from her eyes. But he couldn't tell Wendy that, not yet.

But soon. Soon she would know that she belonged with him, not Jeffrey.

"No problem," he said easily.

"Listen, about the plane ride over. I had no business telling you who you could and couldn't be with," Wendy said.

"It's okay, little one," Peter said, running one hand gently down her cheek. "I don't want to talk about that. I want to talk about us. About what just happened as we looked at each other over my mother's grave. You felt it too. I know you did."

Wendy hesitated, searching his eyes for something. Finally, releasing a sigh she nodded her head.

"I felt it Peter."

He took her hand in his and held it.

"Tell me about it," he urged her.

“It was strange, like a magical dream. All these memories about you and I came back to me. All the fun we had together. All the adventures we went on. All the incredible things I felt. I loved you Peter,” Wendy said with a shy smile. “You were my first crush.”

Peter grasped her other hand and brought both of them up against his chest. The slice of time they had shared together while looking over his mother’s grave had been magical. It had helped him understand the truth. Staring deeply into Wendy’s beautiful eyes, he spoke the words that he had only now come to realize.

“And you were my first *and* last love, Wendy.”

Wendy looked up at him in wonder. Her mouth parted and he couldn’t resist the pull of those lush lips. He bent his head toward her, only to be interrupted before they could touch.

“Peter. I’m so glad you called me this morning. I came as soon as possible.”

Wendy practically leapt away from Peter and swung around.

Bell stood behind her with a seductive smile on her lips. When she saw Wendy, her smile faded, and her eyes met his in question. Peter had forgotten that he had called Bell this morning and invited her to meet him after the ceremony. He knew he would need some company and had at that point written off Wendy as too risky to pursue.

“What’s going on Peter? I thought you said that you wanted to spend the day with me,” Bell said, sidling close to Peter.

Wendy turned back toward him and sparks of anger practically flew from her eyes.

“Yes, what *is* going on, Peter? I think Bell and I both would like to know,” she said in a low angry voice, crossing her arms over her chest as she waited.

Before he could explain, Jeffrey walked up to them and put his hand around Wendy’s waist.

“What’s keeping you, Wen? Your parents and I are ready to go.” Jeffrey turned to Peter. “Again, nice to meet you, Pete, and, uh, I’m sorry we weren’t introduced. I’m Jeffrey Hook, Wendy’s fiancée.”

Jeffrey held his hand out to Bell and smiled charmingly. Bell placed her hand in his, and he brought it to his lips for a light kiss.

Bell giggled and interest lit her eyes as she smiled at Jeffrey.

“I’m Bell. Peter’s date.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Jeffrey said with a charming smile.

Jeffrey released Bell’s hand and started to steer Wendy away from them.

“It’s been great meeting both of you, but we really do need to go,” he said.

“Yes. We need to go *now*,” Wendy said, glaring over her shoulder at Peter. “I’ve seen and heard everything I need to. Good-bye Peter.”

Peter watched Wendy walk away.

He had blown it, really blown it. The finality of Wendy's good-bye wasn't lost on him.

Wendy's mom gave him a smile and a wave as they all left the cemetery. Peter smiled and waved back. She had always been nice to him when he was a kid, encouraging him to strive for more in his life.

An idea suddenly took shape in his mind and his smile transformed into a knowing grin.

Wendy planned to never see him again.

Good thing plans had a way of changing.

Chapter 6

Wendy held back the tears as they drove back to her parent's house.

She would not cry over Peter. He wasn't worth it. Okay, so maybe she could picture them laughing and enjoying life together, treating every day as an adventure and spending every evening in each other's arms. Maybe she could imagine Peter as a good father, twirling his children around in his arms, or running through the woods laughing with them as they had done when they were children. She could almost see their kids and him sitting around her as she told them a story. Peter would hold their little girl on his lap and keep his boys by his side. They would all sit wide-eyed as she told one outrageous tale after another.

She had thought she still loved Peter. Back at the cemetery, she had thought she had seen something in his eyes, but now, well, it didn't really

matter what she had thought. It was obvious he was just a player. A man out to score with as many women as possible.

Suddenly a childhood memory popped into her mind.

“I’m never going to grow up, Wendy. Never, ever, *ever*,” Peter had said, shaking his head adamantly.

And he hadn’t. Despite the fact that he had become a successful businessman, he still wasn’t ready to grow up. The appearance of Bell at the cemetery proved that to her.

“I almost forgot to tell you what happened with the Jacobs case, Wen,” Jeffrey said, interrupting her thoughts. “We won.”

Her mind switched gears instantly. The Jacobs case.

She had been very concerned about it. Especially because of whose side her firm was taking. She knew this wasn’t the first time they stood on the wrong side of the fence, and it wouldn’t be the last. But something about this particular case bothered her. Several years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs had entered into an agreement with a large, private, long-term care company. They had agreed to give them a huge amount of money on the premise they would be cared for when they go older. Neither of them had any living relatives, so they wanted to make sure they weren’t left alone without care, in case one or the other passed away.

As tends to be the case, Mrs. Jacobs outlived her husband. She tried to attain the care she and her husband had paid for, but the company refused. They claimed that the contract stated one or the other remaining

spouses had to be disabled to receive care. Though Mrs. Jacobs wasn't physically disabled in the legal sense, she was very limited in what she could do for herself, due to her advanced years.

When Wendy found out Jeffrey agreed to represent the long-term care firm in this case, she was horrified. She had expressed her feelings to him, but he had easily dismissed her.

"This lady is just trying to take the company for a ride, Wen. If she was really disabled they would approve her care. Don't worry, the truth will come out in court. And if she is actually unable to care for herself, the court will determine what to do. But in the meantime, the true intent of the contract wording needs to be interpreted and established. That's my job, and that's what I'm going to do."

Wendy had been disappointed in Jeffrey's callous attitude. But she had let it go, hoping that the truth would come out and Mrs. Jacobs would get her much needed long-term care. Jeffrey worked hard on the case. And it had paid off. The court had agreed that Mrs. Jacobs wasn't able to do most things by herself, but she wasn't legally disabled. The wording of the contract, as shown by Jeffrey, had been very specific. Mrs. Jacobs had lost.

"That poor woman," Wendy said shaking her head.

"Poor woman? She was out to get whatever she could from that long-term care company. She wanted a free ride. And like you and I know, there's no free ride in life. Our firm and I made sure she realized that."

As Jeffrey spoke those harsh words, she came to two realizations. First, she needed to rethink her career choice, particularly in terms of the company she was working for. Second, and more importantly, the man she had agreed to married was not her soul mate. He shared her interests, and was charming and good looking, but he wasn't the kind of person she could *like*. She'd thought she cared for him. Despite his often demanding nature and inability to empathize with people, she had assumed he was a man she could be happy with.

She was wrong.

Her knees didn't go weak when he was near. His touch didn't send her into a spin of desire. Forgetting about work and just enjoying the day seemed beyond him. Seeing more in life than just what was in front of him seemed out of his depth. She couldn't imagine him twirling their children around or playing silly adventures games with them. She couldn't even imagine him being tender with their children.

No, he wasn't the man for her. And before it was too late, she needed to tell him that and get on with her life. She had tried to pretend Jeffrey was Mr. Right, but Peter showed her what she really should be feeling with a partner. And despite the fact that things didn't work out with Peter, she knew there was someone out there for her. She would find him one day.

If nothing else, Peter helped her remember her dreams.

* * * *

“Jeffrey is meeting me for lunch?” Wendy asked in confusion the next day. She glanced down at her watch. “But I thought he would already be on his way back to Arizona. He called me to say good-bye this morning and said he was catching the earliest flight home possible.”

Her mother shrugged.

“Your father just called and said Jeffrey wanted to meet you down by the lake for a picnic lunch.”

“Jeffrey? Are you sure we’re talking about Jeffrey Hook? He just isn’t the picnic kind of guy. Expensive restaurants, yes, picnics, no.”

Her mother shrugged as they pulled into their driveway. Wendy had wanted to spend the morning with her mother. She loved to spend “girl time” with her mom, because they didn’t see each other often. They had breakfast, then spent the rest of the morning window shopping. It had been a lot of fun.

Before her mother could get out of the car, Wendy leaned over and gave her a hug.

“I’m so glad we got to spend this time together. I really miss you guys.”

Her mother smiled.

“We miss you too dear, but if you’re happy there, then we’re happy for you.”

They both got out of the car and walked up the pathway to the house.

“And thank you for understanding about Jeffrey,” Wendy said. “He just isn’t the man for me.”

“Of course I understand, honey,” her mother said smiling tenderly. “You need to find a man who is going to fill your heart with love and your head with dreams. I don’t think Jeffrey is the man to give that to you. How badly did he take it last night when you told him?”

“Not well. You saw him when he stormed out of the house and went to stay at a hotel. That’s why I’m surprised he wants to meet me for lunch. He just couldn’t understand why I didn’t want to be with him. But what really seemed to bother him the most was that his mother would be unhappy, and he’d have to deal with her. His mother is going to be furious, of course,” Wendy said, stepping into the house. “But I guess she’ll just have to get used to it. After all, we really hadn’t made any concrete plans yet. We had reserved a hall and talked to some florists, but that was about it. But Jeffrey acted like his mother was going to have a really hard time with this.”

“I think Jeffrey will survive,” his mother said dryly. “And, even though I’ve only met her twice, I’d have to agree with you about his mother. Marion Hook seems like a woman who likes to be in control of everyone’s life, including her son’s. The fact that she has no control over your decision will not sit well with her. But that’s something Jeffrey and his mother will have to deal with. And to be honest with you, I’m relieved that *I* won’t have

to deal with that woman as a family member. She reminds me of, well, of a--
”

“Crocodile? All grinning teeth and snapping jaws?” Wendy provided with a smile.

Both of them burst out laughing.

“Yes, that’s exactly what she reminds me of,” her mother said, still chuckling. “I don’t envy Jeffrey trying to extricate himself from her jaws.”

“I wouldn’t worry too much about him. He’s kept one step ahead of that crocodile for some time now. I’m sure he’ll manage,” Wendy assured her.

“Well, you better get to your lunch,” her mother suggested.

Wendy almost asked her mother to come with her. Knowing now how she truly felt about Jeffrey would make this lunch uncomfortable for her. But she needed to face him on her own. It wasn’t fair to ask her mother to step into the situation.

“I guess you’re right. I’ll go change into some comfortable clothes, then head down there.”

After putting on jeans and a T-shirt and pulling her hair back into a ponytail, Wendy headed to the lake. Nostalgia filled her as she found the trail Peter and she use to take on their many adventures. Walking through the sun dappled woods with nothing more than the sound of crunching leaves beneath her feet was like taking a trip back in time. She could almost hear Peter laughing and running ahead of her. She saw a large rock and

remembered hiding behind it many times while Peter searched for her during a game of hide and seek.

Their days together had been wonderful, but now they were over. She needed to accept that. Peter had not become the man she thought he would, and she had changed too much from the stars-in-her-eyes little girl she had once been.

Slowing her pace, she spotted the lake just ahead. She really didn't want to have lunch with Jeffrey. It would only end in another argument when she refused to change her mind. She didn't want to do that here, not in this magical place. Her childhood memories were too joyful and pure to mar them with that.

Wendy started to turn back. But then something caught the corner of her eye. A movement to the right of her, not too far away. But when she turned in that direction, she saw nothing. Chills ran up and down her arms and she froze in place. She thought she had seen something, but what was it? She waited, but the forest remained still. Maybe she had imagined it.

The only sound she heard was the whispering of blowing leaves as the trees told each other their secrets. That's what Peter and she had decided one day as they lay side by side on the ground looking up at the tall trees around them. They were whispering secrets to each other.

As if her memories had conjured him from thin air, Peter appeared at the end of the path by the lake. He waved for her to follow, then turned

around and continued walking. She hesitated. Why was *he* here? Where was Jeffrey? What was going on?

All the questions disappeared from her mind when Peter looked back over his shoulder and smiled. It was a mischievous smile, one that made his eyes twinkle with untold secrets. Wendy felt her own mouth curve up at the corners. What was he up to now?

She needed to find out.

Moving forward, she felt a laugh bubble up out of nowhere. Letting it free, the sound of it filled the quiet forest. Her heart no longer felt heavy. It was just as light as her step as she sped up to reach Peter.

Reaching the end of the trail, she stopped in her tracks when she saw what lay ahead by the lakeside. Peter reclined on his side, leaning on one arm. He lay on a blanket covered with a large picnic basket sitting in one corner. Walking slowly toward him, she couldn't tear her gaze from his face. His dimpled, come hither smile made her heart do somersaults.

"Peter? What are you doing here?" she asked, stopping at the edge of the blanket. Her heart kept beating wildly, as if she were running a marathon.

"Meeting you for lunch," he said, as if she should already know the answer.

"But my mother told me I was meeting Jeffrey."

"Your mother was my accomplice. She agreed to help when I poured my heart out to her."

“I’ll just be she did,” Wendy said dryly.

Her mother always had liked Peter. Even when they were children, she had told her so.

“That boy is different, Wendy. He’s going to go places in his life. You’ll see. Peter’s not one to let his misfortune keep him down.”

And her mother had been right. Peter had done something with his life. But he wasn’t the kind of man she needed. Commitment and love were now magical words to her. She wasn’t sure they were words Peter had in his vocabulary.

Or were they?

“So, why did you want to meet with me?” Wendy asked, sitting down across the blanket from him. She knew what she wanted his answer to be, but she didn’t dare hope. Did she? Maybe she had been wrong about him. Her heart was beating so hard she thought it might burst from her chest any minute.

Peter’s face grew serious as he stared deeply into her eyes.

“I think you know the answer to that.”

Anger flared to life inside Wendy as she shot to her feet. She would not play guessing games with him. Not now.

“No, Peter, I don’t. What I *do* know is that Bell met you at the cemetery yesterday. *That*, I’m very clear on.”

Peter muttered a curse under his breath and ran his fingers through his hair.

“Yesterday morning I wasn’t sure what I wanted, Wendy, so I called Bell and asked her to meet me at the cemetery,” Peter said, coming to his feet and walking across the blanket toward her. “But when I saw you at my mother’s burial. When we stared across her grave at each other, the years fell away, and I finally knew.”

Stopping right in front of her, Peter reached out and lightly brushed her cheek with the back of his hand.

“I don’t want Bell. I want you. *Only* you. I love you, Wendy.”

Wendy closed her eyes when Peter ran his fingers softly down her cheek. As he spoke the words she longed to hear, she released the breath she had been holding in a long shuddering sigh.

“I love you too, Peter. I’ve always loved you.” Tears pooled in her eyes as they fluttered open. When they spilled over and slid down her cheek, Peter was there to catch them with his kisses. He covered her whole face with them, until she was giggling instead of crying.

Peter pulled back, but held her chin up with one finger so she was staring up at his gorgeous face.

“Even ticklish on you face, huh?” he teased.

“My body is one big tickle zone,” she replied with a chuckle.

Peter raised an eyebrow at that. His grinned turned wolfish, and his eyes twinkled playfully.

“Your *whole* body? Hmm. I think we need to test that theory, don’t you?”

And before Wendy knew it, he laid her gently down on the blanket and taught her how to fly all over again.

Chapter 7

Wendy looked so beautiful lying on the blanket, her hair spread out around her, her mouth parted in anticipation, and her eyes wide with love. She was his lady pirate. His fellow adventurer. His love. She would be his now. Only his.

Peter wanted her so much that his hands shook. That hadn't happened to him in a very long time. Wendy affected him in a way no other woman had. When he began raining kisses all over her face and neck, she giggled again. Grinning, he slid his mouth lower, down the "V" in her sweatshirt. When he could go no further, he growled and returned to worshipping her sweet, lush mouth.

Sliding his hands under her shirt, he rested on the soft expanse of her stomach. It fluttered beneath his touch. Wendy moaned against his mouth as she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer. Good. She wanted him, wanted this. Groaning with satisfaction, Peter skimmed his fingers up over her ribcage before encountering the edge of her bra. He slipped her bra up, over her breasts, then hesitated. Wendy made soft mewling noises in her throat and arched her back so that her breasts thrust up toward his hand.

He needed no further urging. He covered one breast, savoring its softness. Wendy arched up again into his touch. Running his thumb and finger back and forth over her nipple, it soon puckered and hardened. After doing the same to the other breast, he lifted her shirt, so that he could see more of her beauty. His mouth went dry at the sight of her tight, hard berry-colored nipples.

He had to taste her.

Tearing his lips from her mouth, he lowered his head and laved each nipple in turn, until they were puckered and glistening from his tongue. Lust crashed through him. He needed more. Covering one nipple with his mouth, he suckled deeply, then went to the other breast and did the same. Wendy's moans turned louder, as she tilted her hips up to meet his.

The feel of her pressed against his hardness was almost his undoing. Growling deep in his throat, he reached down and pinned her hips under his. He pressed himself against her, letting her know how much she was affecting him, then released his hold. Sliding lower, he ran his mouth and tongue over each rib, past her soft stomach, and lower still, until he encountered the waistband of her jeans. She ran her fingers through his hair and pulled his head against her.

Wendy was going to die.

She had never felt this way before. Every nerve ending in her body came alive when Peter touched her. Each spot he stroked ignited into flames of desire that spread from her head to her toes. The feel of his mouth pulling

on her nipples started an ache at her core that was growing stronger with each passing moment. When his lips and tongue trailed over her stomach, she forgot how to breathe. The ache pulsed as he drew lower.

When he reached her waistband, she wanted to tear her pants off for him. Instead, she pulled his head closer against her and lifted her hips in a wordless plea. In that moment, she needed him more than her next breath.

Peter lifted his head and looked up at her. His jaw was clenched and his eyes intense as he questioned her with his eyes. Practically panting in need, she nodded her head.

“Yes, Peter. Don’t stop.”

He stared at her for a few seconds longer, need burning bright in his eyes, then a seductive smile spread across his lips. Keeping his gaze on her face, he slowly unbuttoned her jeans. After flicking his tongue over the skin that was exposed, he took her zipper between his lips and pulled it down with his teeth. Raising up on his arms, he slowly slid her pants down her legs. He followed their descent with light kisses and nips to her thighs and calves. The combination of pain and pleasure had her squirming with need. Removing her shoes, he pulled her jeans off of her.

Sitting back on his heels, Peter did a slow perusal of her body. His emerald eyes darkened with desire. Feeling vulnerable with her shirt and bra pushed up above her breasts and nothing else covering her except the thin strip of salmon pink silk that made up her bikini panties, she tried to pull her shirt down.

“No. Don’t cover yourself. You’re so beautiful, I could look at you all day.”

Wendy blushed. It flushed her whole body a rosy pink. Peter gasped and his gaze heated up even more.

With a soft groan he dropped down and pulled her shirt and bra over her head, then stood back up and pulled his clothes off his body. He did it slowly, seductively, with a knowing smile on his face. The kind that told her he knew exactly what he was doing to her. Each piece of clothing falling to the ground left her panting with a need so strong she had to force herself not to get up and grab him.

When Peter’s last bit of clothing was off, he stood proudly before her. Her mouth dropped open at the perfection of his body, and before she could close it, he unclenched his fist and tore open the package he was holding. Without an ounce of shame, he placed the condom over his tip and rolled it up along his hard length. Wendy mouth went dry at how sexy he was. Peter was all male, in his prime, and he knew it.

She drank in the sight of him as if he were the last glass of water in a hot desert. The man obviously worked out. It wasn’t that he was big and bulky. He was more lean and muscled, toned and tight, with the kind of definition that made his body appear almost sculpted. Combine that with his dimpled smile and hungry gaze, and Wendy was lost.

Holding her arms out to him, she smiled, welcoming him the only way she knew.

Peter's gaze changed from knowing to hungry. Dropping down, he made his way up her body, kissing her as he drew higher and higher. As he got closer to her center, she felt goose bumps spread over her body.

"Mmmm. I like the feel of your goose bumps."

His hands slowly slid up Wendy's legs until he reached her womanhood. Covering it with his palm, he growled low in his throat.

"You feel hot," he said. Then he pressed his middle finger against the silk fabric of her panties, spreading her lips slightly. She felt her moistness saturate the material and his finger. "And wet. Very, very wet. Is that for me, little one?"

Wendy gasped and arched into his touch. She couldn't answer his question. She couldn't even think.

She just needed. And she needed it *now*.

Peter seemed to understand. He pulled her underwear down her legs and off. Running his hands back up her body, she could feel impatience in his touch. Good. He was feeling it too.

Then he cupped the center of her once more, and that was it. Coherent thought left the building. He gently nudged her legs apart. As his fingers delved between her slick, wet folds, she shuddered. Stroking her in a pattern that built her desire higher and higher, Peter touched her body as if he had known it forever.

When he pulled his hand away she cried out, but then his mouth quickly replaced it. He took her to another level as his tongue slid over her

tight nub again and again. A moan built up deep in her throat as the intensity of his touch brought her to the edge. She tumbled over, crying his name. Gasping, she saw fireworks explode behind her eyes as her hips bucked from the strength of her climax.

Before the last wave ended, Peter spread her thighs wide, tilted her hips up, and plunged inside. Her core clenched around his manhood as he repeatedly thrust into her then pulled out just until the tip of him was inside her entrance. Again and again he repeated the seductive motion. The pleasure of it was too much. Grabbing his firm behind to pull him deeper, she climaxed again with a scream that rent through the quiet lakeside scene.

Peter sped up his pace and lifted her hips to deepen each thrust. His manhood filled her so completely that she didn't think she could take much more. His roar filled the air as he plummeted over the edge and pulsed inside her.

She wasn't sure how much time passed before she floated back to reality. All she knew was that she had just had the most incredible experience ever. Never had she become so lost in the moment that she forgot who and where she was. And never had she felt so close, so intimate, and so in love with a man as she did right now with Peter.

As her eyes fluttered open, she met Peter's intense gaze. His face was only inches above hers. He rested his elbows on either side of her head so that his weight wasn't too heavy. He was still inside her. The feel of him, filling her up, brought a blush to her cheeks.

“I like to watch you blush,” he said with a knowing grin. His eyes were half closed as he spoke, lazy looking, like a tiger who had been well fed. But then she felt a twitch inside her. Okay, maybe not so well fed. Desire stabbed through her once more.

“Would you like to see me blush again?” she asked, smiling seductively.

“Definitely.” Peter’s sexy grin turned the heat up another notch. Lunch was forgotten until much, much later.

Walking hand and hand, she and Peter started back for her parent’s house. Entering the woods, Wendy felt the magic of the woods all over again. Peter gave her hand a squeeze. He understood. This place held special memories for them, magical times neither of them would forget.

“Stop for a minute, Wendy. I need to do something. And I think this is the place to do it,” Peter said breaking the silence. Setting the picnic basket and blanket down, he knelt in front of her and took her hand.

Peter raised his gaze to hers, and she drew in a sharp breath. All the love and desire he felt was there in his eyes, plain enough for her to see.

“I think I’ve loved you since the first time you looked at me with those big, beautiful, doe eyes of yours. Even as kids there was something there that drew me to you,” he said with a wry smile. “You were my best friend back then, and one of the best pirates I knew, boy or girl.”

Wendy smiled then. She couldn't help it. She didn't say a word, but she let her eyes tell Peter how much she cared for him.

"Stop looking at me like that, or I may not be able to finish what I'm about to say without making love to you again," he warned with a sexy grin and a hungry look in his eyes.

Wendy tried to look innocent, but that only succeeded in making Peter laugh.

"Nice try. But now that I know what a temptress you are, I won't be falling for that innocent look any time soon."

"What? I'm not--"

"Shh," Peter said reaching up with one hand to cover her lips with his index finger. "This is important. I want you to know what you do to me. You make me feel free and alive for the first time in a very long time. I spent a lot of years trying not to grow up because I didn't want to lose my joy of life. I realize now that the struggle itself was what made that happen anyway, without me knowing it. You brought happiness back into my life, Wendy. You taught me how to fly again. I love you. I want to spend the rest of my life flying with you. Will you marry me?"

Even though Wendy had expected it, had known what he was about to ask her the minute he knelt down in the middle of their magical forest, she was still shaken to hear the words. Her heart skipped a beat as he proposed. Then the answer was out of her mouth before she even knew it.

“Yes, Peter. I love you too. And I want to spend the rest of my life showing you how much.”

Peter’s face split into a wide grin and he shot to his feet. Wrapping his hands around Wendy’s waist, he lifted her into the air. Laughing, he twirled her around and around until her laughter joined his. She was flying. Peter was showing her how to fly again!

They both tumbled to the ground laughing and breathless. Wendy felt so alive, so happy for the first time in a long time. Laying on the ground, she stared up at the streaks of sunlight shining through the trees. Peter lay next to her, holding her hand and staring up as well.

“How do you feel about living in a different place?” he asked. His voice was soft, as if he didn’t want to break the magical spell that seemed to cocoon them in these woods.

Wendy didn’t hesitate.

“I can move to California, Peter. I had already decided the company I work for may not be exactly the type for me. I think I need a law firm with a little more awareness of right and wrong. Work is the only thing holding me in Arizona. I know I can find a firm in California that I’ll like,” she said turning to look at him.

He continued looking up.

“I was kind of thinking about building a nice cabin in the woods. Maybe close to a lake?”

He wanted to move back here? Was that what he meant? Move back to their hometown and build a house in these magical woods where they once played and had their adventures? Excitement filled her. Suddenly it seemed right. The way it should be. She could picture them raising a family here, close to her parents, with plenty of forest for their children to play in.

Peter slowly turned to face her.

“What do you think, Wendy? Would you be interested in starting our life together right here, in the place we first met?”

Wendy smiled and gave him a tender kiss.

“I think that sounds perfect, my love. But only on one condition.”

Peter smiled, but curiosity filled his eyes.

“What condition is that?”

Wendy jumped to her feet and skipped away with a giggle.

“That we still get to play pirates. And, that I always get to win.”

She shrieked and slipped into a run when Peter stood up and started after her.

He closed the distance between them quickly and grabbed her around the waist. Laughing, he pulled her close, so that her back pressed against his chest. Bending his head toward her ear, he whispered. “How about if we both win, my lady pirate?”

Wendy was breathless, and not only from running. She felt something hard nudge against her back and it ignited a fire in her she thought temporarily put out back by the lake.

“How can we both win?” she whispered, barely getting the words out.

“Let me show you,” Peter said pressing his hardness against her bottom, as he rained kisses all over the back of her neck.

And he did.

Her childhood friend, her fellow pirate, her first crush, and the one man who could complete her in a way no other could, Peter showed her again, and again, and again.

And they lived happily ever after.

The End