



CHRISTMAS CHILD

By

GABRIELLA BRADLEY

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Christmas Child

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Foreword

The lovers card focuses on love and sex and represents both. It indicates a moral or ethical crossroad, making decisions in life where one must choose between good and bad, right and wrong decisions, listening or not listening to those who offer advice. It symbolizes temptation and the dilemmas we face when choosing to give in or not to give in.

It focuses on bonds, forming a union, acknowledging kinship, making connections and being intimate.

The card also focuses on personal beliefs, how and if we question received opinions and figure out where we stand. To stay true to ourselves and setting our own philosophy, our own standards, and making up our own minds.

The lovers card can indicate a struggle with temptation, facing ethical or moral choices refusing to let the end justify the means and finding out what we care about.

This story deals with all such issues and secrets, secrets that can destroy as evilly as they took root. The rape scene in the beginning of the book may disturb some readers, but it's of essence to the story and the card.

Gabby

Dedicated to all lovers...

CHAPTER ONE

It was a beautiful spring evening. Crocus showed their colorful faces in the grass and daffodils bloomed all over, dotting the farming fields surrounding Cedarville with colorful patches of bright yellow and white. Nestled between the mountains, it was a small town, its population below two thousand, which mainly comprised of farmers. Its town center was just a main street. Some stores, a service station, a bus stop, a snack bar, a pub and a church. It was a quaint little town with a European quality. Its houses were built in a style reminiscent of Switzerland and Austria, a tradition some early immigrants had started. Its people all knew each other. Most of them had lived there all their lives. Some stayed to take over their parents' farm, others moved away to find their future in the big cities, rarely to return, and some, who didn't find their fortune in Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, or wherever they went, returned to settle in their hometown. Dusk fell early in the valley because of the surrounding mountains. The main street was hulled in darkness for lack of streetlights, but here and there a storefront had their lights ablaze, lighting up the silent road. Not a car moved in the evenings. Most

people, after a hard day's work, stayed home near their fireplace to relax for the evening. Few cars ever drove through town in the evening or the night. Set back from the highway was a town that really belonged in another century, a town overlooked by thriving economy and progress. The local grocery store was in darkness, its owners not believing in waste of electricity, but in the house beside it the lights burned brightly.

Susan flopped down on her bed with a big sigh. *Finally!* Her hours in the store were done and she could relax for a while. She sat up and stretched. *Far better to get out of these clothes,* she thought as she kicked off her shoes. With a grimace she watched them land on the opposite side of the room. They seemed uglier than ever. She was almost nineteen—why couldn't she wear the same clothes and shoes as everyone else? Why did her parents have her so late in life? They were so old now, almost old enough to be her grandparents. Ancient and old-fashioned. But she was a good daughter. She'd always obeyed her parents and kept her secret fantasies and dreams to herself, and she dutifully wore the clothes her mother sewed, knitted and bought.

She turned the radio on, very softly, for if her parents heard the music, they'd be angry. They didn't like modern music and expected her to listen to country and western. Standing up, she stretched again, then carefully locked the door. The lock was loud, and in the stillness of the house you could hear it as far as downstairs. Her mother was always suspicious and paranoid of locked doors.

Though her mother wouldn't allow her to keep up with fashion, in her own way she tried and sewed long skirts for Susan. But, they were made from such horrible material, old-fashioned knits that her mother had bought years ago, and in such dowdy colors, that Susan hated them anyway. Virtually none of the girls at school wore long skirts. They wore jeans or mini skirts. Jeans were not ladylike, her mother told her, so she'd never owned a pair, and the mini skirts were far too revealing and against her parents' principles. Sometimes Tracy lent her a pair of her jeans and Susan would wear them at school and feel normal, like the rest of the crowd.

After taking off the hated skirt and home-knitted sweater, she twirled before the long mirror on the back of her bedroom door. The simple bra followed the skirt and sweater. Yanking the elastic band off her braid, she undid it and brushed her long black curls. For moments she gazed at the reflection in the mirror, at the one and only pair of bikini panties she owned. She'd bought them secretly and hand washed them herself every evening so her mother wouldn't know. It was her private little secret, one she could at least hide and one she felt good about. The hated 'decent' underwear her mother bought for her, she only used at night or at that time of the month. The naked girl in the mirror smiled back at her. "You're not so bad, Susan. Matter of fact, you look pretty good!" she told the reflection and touched it for a moment, tracing the outline of the breasts. Her finger left two round smudges on the shiny surface and she quickly stepped back. She felt a little guilty, for she had

always been taught that to admire oneself was bad and to expose the body too much, was sinful. Yet, personally, she didn't see anything wrong with admiring one's own figure in the privacy of the bedroom and being proud of one's own attributes.

Flopping back onto the bed, she peeled off the panties and opened her legs. Twirling her black pubic hair, her fingers stole slowly down to her clit. She rubbed the hard nub and felt a growing ache settle in her belly, a need, a want, a desperate longing for the real thing. She tried to imagine what it would be like to have a boyfriend do this, and a long sigh escaped from her parted lips. Opening her legs wider, she rubbed her throbbing flesh, spreading the lips she inserted her finger, then two and squirmed as she started to twirl them to bring herself to a climax. With her other hand she kneaded her breasts, tweaked the nipples until they poked out hard as pebbles. Wave upon wave of utter pleasure coursed through her until with a shudder, she finally came. Still stroking her cleft, feeling the warm cum on her fingers, she closed her eyes and conjured up the image of Scott, the most popular guy in her class and much sought after by the girls. If only he knew she existed... She'd had never had a boyfriend. Her best friend Tracy, her one and only friend, had so many boyfriends and she always told Susan about all her adventures.

Susan loved Tracy like a sister. They had grown up together, and they were as close as sisters. Susan was often secretly jealous of Tracy because she had such young parents and they were so cool, so with it. Tracy had a brother and a sister, and things were so

different at her house. For a moment she pictured her friend, her long blond hair, laughing brown eyes and sexy body. No one at school could understand why she hung around with Susan, neither did anyone at school know about the close bond that existed between them.

She wished she had a phone in her room, so that she could call her. The only phones they had were the ones in the living room and the one in the store. The store was locked after closing, and in the living room it would be a very one-sided conversation. Her parents were always there, and she couldn't really talk without them hearing every word. Again she sighed. She loved her parents and wouldn't hurt them for the world, but their way of life, their strictness, was stifling her. She didn't want to cause them pain, but she had made up her mind that once she graduated she would go away to live in the city.

Over the years, as she became older, her parents had her help in the store, and they paid her a wage. That wage had increased with each birthday, and she had lately been paid one hundred and fifty dollars a week. She jumped off the bed and carefully moved it, trying not to make any noise on the wooden floor. Under the bed she kept a pile of books. She shoved them out of the way and pried the loose floorboard open. Inside the hole, together with cobwebs and the occasional spider, were several, neatly rolled bundles of money held together with elastic bands. Her life savings. Grabbing her purse off the bed, she took out the money she had been paid that evening. She added it to the pile and counted it. It came to just over

nineteen thousand dollars. It was rare that she spent any of it. She couldn't spend it on the clothes she yearned for, make-up or other luxuries, so she diligently put it in her secret place. Her parents never asked what she did with her money. They probably thought she banked it. She bundled the money up again and then remembered the party the next evening! Oh Lord, she didn't even know if she could go. She had been hesitant to ask her parents. It was Tracy's nineteenth birthday and she wanted her best friend to come to the party so badly.

"Oh, Susie, you haven't been to one of my birthday parties since you were twelve. Can't you slip out somehow? Please?" Tracy had pleaded with her.

Susan put some of the money back into her wallet and covered her hiding place. She pushed the bed back and quickly put the hated sweater and skirt on again. She walked softly down the stairs. Her parents were quietly sitting in the living room. Her mother in her own chair by the fireplace was knitting and her father sat at the table working on the accounts, his balding head bent deeply, his glasses perched on the tip of his nose. She took a deep breath. "Okay, Susie, here goes," she whispered, knowing how against these parties her parents were, she'd give it one more time. Not that she really needed their permission. She was old enough, an adult. She could defy them, but knowing her father's temper...

"Mom, Dad, I'd like to talk to you."

Her parents looked up in surprise. Susan usually stayed in her room after nine. This interruption was unusual. Her mother put down her knitting and took

her glasses off. "Come and sit by the fire, Susan. What's troubling you?"

Susan sent her mother a smile and watched her sweet face break into crinkles as Susan sent back a loving glance. Her gray eyes were filled with curiosity and her work worn hands rested in her lap on top of the knitting. Susan walked over to the fireplace and sat down on the floor beside her. She always felt closer to her, more at ease.

"Eh...its Tracy's birthday tomorrow. She's turning nineteen."

"Doesn't time fly," her mother said. "I can remember when you both started grade one. You started a year late because Tracy was so sick and couldn't start school yet, and we wanted you and Tracy to start together. Tracy was so ill. It was a thankful time when she recovered from that horrible illness. Well, missy, what is it? You'd like to buy her something special. Am I right? You'd like us to pitch in?"

Susan knew the story well. Just before they were ready to start grade one, Tracy came down with meningitis. It was touch and go for a while and for some months Tracy was weak and couldn't play with her. But she recovered fully. "No, Mom, it's not the gift. It's just that she's having a big party and I'm invited. As I've always been invited to all her parties," she couldn't help adding. "This is her nineteenth and it's sort of special. I'd really like to go."

There, she had said it. Her father took his glasses off and folded them slowly, almost deliberately, his

face stern, as always and his brown eyes without much expression.

“Will there be young men at this party, Susan?”

She hesitated. She couldn’t very well lie about it. “Yes, Dad, some guys and girls from school, but Tracy’s parents will be there to supervise.”

A soft snort came from her mother. She disapproved of Tracy’s parents. Susan knew that, and didn’t understand. Once, long ago, when Tracy and Susan were little, they were good friends.

“Susan, go to bed. Your mother and I will discuss this, and we’ll tell you our decision tomorrow,” her father said in his usual brusque tone.

Susan felt tears welling up and she swallowed hard so not to show that she was upset. She quickly kissed her mother on the cheek and mumbled a soft goodnight, then ran up the stairs. Once in her room, she locked the door, tore off the hated clothes and fell on the bed. Why did she have to be so honest? She could have sneaked out of the window, like she had done before, when she was younger, and always ended up being plagued by guilt. Why did she even bother asking them? She knew she silently had hoped they would agree she should attend the party. She lay on the bed and reasoned with herself trying to justify her honesty and it wasn’t hard. She loved her parents, even though they were old-fashioned and old and super strict. They were good people, had raised her well, and didn’t deserve being lied to. Neither could she lie easily, unlike some of the younger girls at school who sneaked out of their parental homes constantly and lied all the time about their

whereabouts.

Her thoughts drifted back to her childhood, when Tracy's parents and hers were still good friends. Why did it stop? What happened to kill that friendship? She'd asked questions so many times of Tracy's mother and her own, but they never gave her answers. Her mother would just clam up and either change the subject or pretend that she had things to do in the store. Tracy's mother always answered evasively.

"We're just different people, Susan. We have different views on life. The age gap you know, that's what did it," is the most she could get out of Tracy's mother. Something else had to have happened, something they didn't want to talk about. But if it was just a disagreement, why not make up? She remembered all the times she and Tracy had fought about stupid things, but their fights never lasted long.

That thought brought her mind back to the party. What would she do there anyway? Boys never looked at her and she couldn't dance. She'd be like a fish out of water. The only one who would talk to her would be Tracy, and she'd be too busy with her other friends and the boys who constantly danced attention on her.

A tear trickled down her cheek and she swiped it away angrily. Tears didn't help matters. She didn't have a bad life and no reason to cry. She'd be nineteen herself soon, and she had enough money to get away and live her own life...

CHAPTER TWO

Struggling out of her sleep and her dream, Susan jumped out of bed. A fire alarm was going off; she had to call the fire department! Once her feet hit the cold floorboards, she realized she'd been dreaming. It was only her alarm clock going off full steam. She looked at the time and noticed that it was almost ten. She had to start work in a few minutes, so she had to hustle. Her hours on Saturdays were from ten till two. Since her sixteenth birthday, her parents left her in charge of the store on Saturday mornings. It gave them a chance to do other things. She ran to the washbasin in the corner of the room and gave herself a lick and a promise. Putting on the same ugly sweater and skirt she'd worn the day before, she quickly braided her unruly curls, put on the hateful shoes, and ran down the stairs.

Her father had already opened the store, and customers were steadily coming in and out. She had no time to think. Automatically she took over, as she had done every Saturday over the last few years. Her father left the store without a word or even a glance at her, and she was on her own.

It was very busy that morning, but she was used to it. It was no busier than other Saturdays. Their store was the only general store in town and a lot of farmers' wives came to do their shopping on Fridays and Saturdays.

At two, her parents returned and her father relieved her. Her feet ached and she felt frustrated and fed up. Occasionally it had gone through her mind that her parents wanted her to take over the store once she turned twenty-one. A shudder ran down her spine. Just the thought of always being stuck in her small hometown, standing in the store six days a week, revolted her. She hated all the small talk, which was usual. Especially on Saturdays, gossip ran rampant. All the silly complaints, the petty little remarks the women often made, lately got on her nerves. She wanted to be a nurse, not a storekeeper. It was just another problem she would soon have to deal with, something she hadn't dared tell her parents. They counted on her taking over the store and she didn't have a clue how to break it to them that she wanted to go to nursing school. Why was she such a spineless ninny?

Shaking off the depressing thoughts, she left the store to help her mother unload the station wagon and put everything in the storeroom. They unloaded in silence. Very seldom did she have conversations with her parents. She could talk better with Tracy's mother.

When they were done, Susan went back inside and started to go up to her room.

"Susan..." her mother called out. "Sit down. I'll go

and take care of the store. Your father wants to talk to you."

Good grief, now what? she thought, as she sat down on one of the dining room chairs and waited for her father.

He came in and sat down opposite her. He took off his glasses before he spoke and went about polishing them. Without looking at her he said, "Susan, your mother and I discussed your request last night, and we decided that since you're almost nineteen and you've proven yourself to be very responsible, we'll allow you to go to the party."

Susan's mouth fell open. She had expected anything but this. She stood up, still staring at her father.

"Sit down, young lady. Not so fast. I don't think I need to talk to you about young men. Just keep in mind what we've always told you and warned you about. No drinking and we expect you home by midnight."

He stood up and started to walk back towards the store. Susan stopped him. She grabbed his hand and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. "Thanks, Dad."

He awkwardly patted her on the head. "Okay, girl, just remember: Be good and be home by midnight."

The ache in her feet forgotten, she virtually flew up the stairs, and down again just as fast. *Tracy, I have to call Tracy!* She dialed the number, and Tracy's mother answered the phone. She told her that Tracy had gone shopping, so Susan told 'Auntie', as she had always called Tracy's mother, the good news and asked her to tell Tracy. She hung up the phone and looked at

her watch. *Three o'clock already and I've got so much to do!* She skipped happily up the stairs and into her room.

Her first thought was about clothes and what she should wear. Throwing open the closet, she eyed her wardrobe. It was limited. She had a number of Sunday dresses, but they were all very church style, and homemade. She threw them on the bed and examined them. They were all so proper and prim. What could she do? She pulled her light blue dress out of the pile, her favorite out of them all, and held it up. She could do something with that one.

Taking her nail scissors out of her purse, she started ripping out the stitching and removed the sleeves. Then the prim little lace collar and the wide sash. After she took off her clothes she pulled the dress over her head and turned to look in the mirror. It didn't look too bad, but it needed a belt, and she had no belt. Her hands shook as she tried to thread a needle to seam the neck and armholes. Finally she got the thread through the hole and started to stitch, thinking all the time about the party. The large grandfather clock downstairs chimed, interrupting her thoughts. Glancing at her watch, she noticed the time and she still had to go to the store to buy Tracy a gift and a belt for her dress. Deciding to do that first, she bundled the dress into a paper bag so she could try and match the color to a belt, grabbed her purse and ran down the stairs. Her mother was busy in the kitchen. Quickly, she told her where she was going.

The only clothing store in town wasn't far from their grocery store. She ran all the way and was

thankful that the store was quiet. Most everyone would be getting ready for the party and the older women seldom shopped there. After hunting around for a while, she found a nice wide belt with a hint of blue, which matched the color of the dress. She also bought some sheer pantyhose.

After she finished paying for her purchases, she ran to the jewelry store. She wanted to buy something really special for Tracy. On her way to it, her eyes fell on the new little dressmaking shop. *Should I? Why not?*

She asked the dressmaker if she could fix a dress in a hurry, and yes, she had time. Opening the paper bag, she showed the dressmaker the dress. Susan was not tall herself, but she felt like a giant compared to the little dressmaker. The woman was new in town, so she wouldn't know her mother to tell her that Susan had paid to have the dress altered. After leaving the dress, with the promise that it would be ready in half an hour, she ran to the jeweler's.

With the dressmaker looking after her dress, she now had lots of time, so she took her time in picking out something special. Her eye finally fell on a nice gold chain with a little heart pendant. The jeweler gift-wrapped it for her in a pretty little box and pasted a large bow on top.

Susan let out a huge breath. Everything was going well. She looked at her watch. It was just after four and she time to kill before picking up the dress. What could she do until her dress was done? She decided to go for a soda. She wasn't supposed to go to that place; and her parents would be furious if they found out,

because it was the local hangout for all the teenagers. Susan didn't care. They wouldn't find out if she sat far away from the front windows and passersby couldn't see her.

The popshop, as always, was filled with young people, and rather noisy. Some young kids were playing video games and most of the tables were occupied, so she sat on a stool at the counter. She knew some of the young people from school, and she could hear them whispering and giggling behind her back. She didn't care. Other times it would have bothered her, but today nothing could bother her. Finishing the last few sips of her soda, she saw that it was time to pick up her dress. It was finished, and the dressmaker only charged her ten dollars.

She ran home, and not finding her parents in the house, straight to her room. Meanwhile, it had turned five. She still had lots of time to have a bath and get ready. She filled the bathtub, and dug up her own special shampoo. While she relaxed in the bath, she thought about the party. Would she look okay? Would they laugh and whisper, like they always did and like the young people in the popshop had done that afternoon? *I just don't care*, she thought. *This is Tracy's big day, and for a change, I'll be able to participate.* She took extra care in washing her long curls. She carefully shaved herself, another thing of which her parents weren't aware and would highly disapprove of if they knew. At first her excitement bubbled as much as the bubbles in the tub, but the bath calmed her down a little, so she wasn't as shaky anymore. She dried her hair and grumbled when the curls

wouldn't settle down. Her hair was so long and springy. What on earth could she do with it? She pulled some of it back, away from her face. "Okay, that will have to do," she said aloud, inspecting it once more. Digging deep inside her purse, she pulled out her only lipstick. *Make-up. No, not here. I'll do that at Tracy's*, and she hid the lipstick again. She looked at the clock. *Six-fifteen! Goodness, I was in the tub longer than I thought.* Quickly, she dressed and inspected the finished result. What would her mother say about the dress? She didn't look so bad, with her best white flat shoes. Maybe no one would laugh at her this time.

She walked down the stairs to find her mother alone in the dining room setting the table and she guessed her father was still busy in the store. She looked up at Susan as she entered and frowned.

"Gracious, child. You're going to catch your death this way. Here." She opened the large hope chest, took out a white shawl, and put it around Susan's shoulders.

"This will do nicely. I like what you've done with the dress, Susan. It's very nice." She inspected Susan once more. "You can't wear your hair like that, it's too messy. Come here, I'll braid it for you."

Susan let her do what she wanted. She could change it again at Tracy's. "Hurry, Mom, the party starts at seven and it's a twenty-minute walk."

Her mother finally finished with her hair, and after giving her a hug Susan was on her way. She was only ten minutes late when she arrived at Tracy's. A lot of young people were already there, and feeling a little scared, she decided to go through the back door.

Auntie was busy in the kitchen preparing food for the party. She looked up at Susan as she came through the back door.

"Susan, I'm so happy you were allowed to come." Her glance had taken in Susan's appearance in a second, and she was just trying to figure out a kind way to tell Susan to wear some of Tracy's clothes when Tracy burst into the kitchen.

"Susie, way to go, girl." She gave Susan a big bear hug. "Girlfriend, you can't wear that. Here, come with me." She almost dragged Susan to her bedroom. "That dress looks a hell of a lot better than it used to, but do me a big favor and wear this?" She pulled some clothes out of her closet and threw them on the bed. "I'll be back in a minute. Change, okay?"

Susan felt a little hurt, though outwardly she couldn't help smiling at her bubbly friend. She had done her best to look presentable, but deep down she knew that Tracy was right—she would still look of place. She put on the skirt. It felt strange. Her legs felt so bare, and it was rather tight. When she put on the top, she noticed how low it was and that it showed the swelling of her breasts, it also showed parts of her bra and the straps, so she took it off. She stared at the reflection in the mirror. Yes, that sexy girl was her, but she felt totally naked. She knew that all the other girls wore clothes like these, but was it for her? Wouldn't she look just as silly as she did in her old clothes? Just as she was contemplating putting the bra back on because her nipples showed clearly through the thin fabric, Tracy bounced back into the room.

"Oh, Susie, you look absolutely stunning. Now

let's do your hair." With deft fingers, Tracy undid the braid and brushed the waist-long curls. "Now those gorgeous eyes of yours. Let's put on some eyeliner, mascara, and some lipstick, that's all you need. Your cheeks are pink already," she said and swiftly applied the make-up. "Heavens, Susie, you're beautiful!" She swung Susan round to face the mirror. "You could be a model."

Susan couldn't believe the difference, thought she still felt very strange. As a finishing touch, Tracy gave her some black high heels to put on. "Isn't it lucky, we're the same size, Susie?"

"Tracy, I'll break my neck on these and my boobs show too much."

"No, you won't, and your boobs are fine. Come on, let's go."

"Tracy, wait, I haven't even wished you a happy birthday yet. You haven't given me time to breathe. Come here." She hugged her friend tightly. "Here, this is for being my best friend for nineteen years and something to remember that friendship by in case we should go separate ways after we graduate." She handed her the small gift.

Tracy opened the little box and exclaimed when she saw the beautiful chain and locket. "Oh, Susie, that's so sweet. I'll always wear it. Now, let's go." After putting on the chain, she grabbed Susan's hand and virtually dragged her to the living room. All the furniture had been moved near the walls, and some young people were dancing in the middle of the floor. Others were sitting down. The patio doors were open, and there were also a lot of young people outside.

"Hey, everyone! Here's Susan," Tracy yelled, trying to shout above the loud music. Susan felt a little silly, and very self-conscious. Some of the young people turned around and looked, but then continued on with their conversation. A small group of young men turned around and stared at her. Susan tried to pull loose from Tracy's firm grip.

"No you don't, Susie. You're staying right here," Tracy shouted in her ear. Two of the young men who had been staring, walked up to them.

"Where is Susan? Tell us so that we can have a good laugh," one of them snickered.

"Who the hell wants Plain-Jane Susan? Come dance with me, Tracy." The third one of the group had wandered up to them and was staring at Susan.

"Shut your mouth, you goof. This *is* Susan," Scott said and handed her a glass of orange juice.

Susan sipped from the glass. It wasn't orange juice, it was punch, and tasted a bit fizzy. She vaguely wondered if they'd spiked it. Butterflies crept down her throat and entered her stomach at the knowledge that it was Scott who had recognized her.

Paul looked at her again. "My God, Susan, you're fuckin' beautiful! Where the hell have you been hiding?" He went to grab her hand, but Scott pushed him away.

"Get lost, buddy. She's mine for the evening." He pulled Susan towards him. "Come, baby, let's dance."

Susan quickly drank the rest of the juice and tried to protest; this sudden attention from young men felt awkward, embarrassing and yet, she felt flattered, but he wouldn't let her refuse. It was a slow dance, and

he pulled Susan into his arms. She felt really uncomfortable. She couldn't dance, but he had such a firm hold on her that she just glided with him to the beat of the music, and it didn't take long for her to let herself sway to his rhythm.

"Scott, I can't dance," she shouted in his ear. He pulled back and looked down at her.

"Hey, babe, you're doing great. You don't need to know how to dance for this kind of music. Just enjoy the tunes and let your body do the rest." Once again he pulled her against him and put his cheek against hers. Suddenly Susan felt her skin prickle as his face touched hers. Feelings surged through her body, which she had never felt before. He was so good-looking, so cool. She let herself go totally, and before she knew it, the song was over and another started.

After they had danced for some time, he said; "Well, pretty lady, let's go outside and talk a bit, it's getting a little hot in here." He took her hand and pulled her through the dancers and out to the patio, which was rather crowded. He continued to guide her through the dancing couples, to the back of the garden. Susan looked back anxiously as he pulled her along.

"Don't worry, Susan, you're in safe hands." They reached a secluded spot, and he stopped. He put his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes. "Now, I demand an explanation."

"W-w-what d-do you mean?" she stammered.

"What the hell? Look at you. One minute you're a future librarian, the next minute you're ready to step out of Playboy."

She felt herself blushing to the roots of her hair. She had seen Playboy magazines, so she knew very well what they contained.

"Well, my parents are old-fashioned, as you know, and quite old, and they've kept me really protected and sheltered all this time. They would have an instant heart attack if they saw me wearing these clothes." The color rose to her face again, she felt. "These belong to Tracy."

He grinned at her.

"Well, babe, from now on, I don't care what you're wearing, but you're *my* girl." With that, he pulled her into his arms. He kissed her gently on the cheek and then found her lips. At first she wanted to draw back, because there was a small doubt nagging at her. Now that she looked like the rest of the girls, he suddenly had an interest in her. But she was still the same person... As the kiss deepened, the doubts vanished. This felt so good, so right, and she melted in his arms and returned his kisses. She felt his tongue probing, searching, playing with her, dancing inside her mouth, and her mind swam. He kissed her throat, her ears, and she vaguely felt his hand go down her top. She didn't care. Her whole body felt as if she was on fire, and thrill after thrill surged through her.

"Mmmmm, no bra," he murmured. He fondled her firm breasts, her erect nipples, and she sighed at the thrills he sent through her.

"Scott, I've never..."

"I know, baby, I know. I won't do anything to hurt you. We can love each other by feeling and touching. I'll teach you. Trust me, honey, trust me..." He spoke

in a husky voice, all the time stroking and fondling her, then guided her hand to his erection.

She shied away at first, but finally gave in to these new, wild feelings. She knew what to do; she'd secretly read books, seen movies and listened to Tracy's experiences. She wasn't totally ignorant, and she was very curious about what a real cock felt like. Carefully, her fingers shaky, she encased it with her hand. It felt very big and hard. She could feel the blood pulse through it, and it matched the rhythm of her heart. Her fingers traced swollen veins beneath the silky skin that covered it. All she could do for now was feel it, but she longed to see it, to view his lean body in its naked glory.

Scott eased her down on the grass and slowly slipped the panty hose to her knees. His hand found the soft triangle between her legs, and he started to stroke her very softly, occasionally bending down to kiss her erect nipples and suck them gently. Again he guided her hand to his cock, whilst he continued to stroke her softly. When she slowly started to move her hand, his fingers found her already moist vagina. He parted her and entered her with his fingers, and started feeling, searching and moving them within her. She started to move her hips towards his hand and thought she would burst with the passion coursing through her body. Suddenly she felt a surge of release, and she felt content for the moment. At the same time, Scott had put his hand over hers and guided her hand to swiftly move the skin back and forth, and she felt his cum spilling over her hand. Then his cock slowly shrunk in her hand until it was

soft and pliable. He took her in his arms and kept kissing her while she continued to fondle him.

Susan's feelings overwhelmed her. Was this love? She opened her eyes, and looked at him, and took his face between her hands. She said softly; "Scott, is this wrong? We didn't actually do it, so was this bad?"

He smiled down at her. "Oh, honey, you're so innocent, so sweet. No wonder your parents have hidden you under those awful clothes. Look at you! You're a princess. You're beautiful! Nothing is wrong when two people fall in love, but, my precious, I want to save the ultimate moment for later. This isn't the time or the place." He kissed her gently and played with her hair. "This glorious hair, don't you ever dare cut it. Honey, I've fallen madly in love with you. From now on, you're going to be Scott's girl, and anyone who laughs at you will get their teeth kicked in." He kissed her again and again, until he told her it was time to get back to the party. "Come on, let's get decent. We have to get back to the party or people will start wondering where we are." He pulled her up and helped her to straighten her clothes.

"What about my face? I don't have any make-up with me."

"You look just beautiful as you are. Come on."

They returned to find Tracy frantically searching for her. She pulled Susan away from Scott. "Where the hell have you been, Susie? I've been looking all over for you! You've been gone for more than an hour." Susan smiled and Tracy noticed the glow on her face and the flushed cheeks. She hugged her. "Oh, Susie, you and Scott?"

She whispered shyly; "Yes, he wants me to be his girl."

Tracy jumped with excitement. "You've got to be kidding. No girl in the school has been able to catch him, and you do it in one evening? Is it for real?"

Susan nodded shyly. "Do you think it's wrong, Tracy? I hardly know him. I mean...I do know him, but..."

"Hell no, Susan, he's the greatest guy. He's not only one of the best students, athletes and he's good-looking, but he's also really nice. You lucky duck, I'm jealous." She laughed and gave Susan a gentle push. "You'd better go back to him; you'll have to guard him with a gun from now on. Just because he's hooked up with you, that isn't going to stop the other girls. Matter of fact, they're sending you dagger glances already."

Susan joined Scott, who was talking to some of her classmates.

"Here, babe, let me introduce you to Larry, Dale and Stuart."

Susan smiled. Of course, she knew them all and they knew her.

"Hey, guys, this is my girl. Susan Davies."

They stared for a minute, and then started to get on Scott's case, giving him a really hard time about snapping her up, though it was all done in a friendly way.

"You dog, you snapped her up. It's not fair."

Scott just laughed and whisked her away to dance.

"They're so jealous," he whispered in her ear, and he kissed her on the lips in full view of everyone.

"There, it's sealed. From now on, they'll know that you're mine."

Time went by too fast for her. Susan finally looked at her watch and saw with a start that it was just past midnight. "Scott, I have to find Tracy. It's after midnight, and I'm supposed to be home."

"I'll drive you home, Susan," Scott said.

"No, my parents are probably up and waiting. They would freak out on me if a guy brought me home. Thanks anyway. I'll see you at church tomorrow, or school on Monday."

"I'm sure your parents would approve of me," Scott grumbled. "Okay, I'll help you find Tracy." They searched, but Tracy had disappeared somewhere, probably with her latest boyfriend. Susan looked at her watch again. *Shit, almost twelve-thirty.* Her parents would never let her go out again. She met up with Scott and kissed him goodbye. He wanted to at least walk her home, but she declined. Some of the neighbors could see them together, and she knew that the walk home would take too long if he was with her. There wasn't time to change her clothes. She would have to risk getting into even more trouble. She flew out the door, pulling off her shoes and stripping off the pantyhose as she ran, hardly feeling the cold. Spring had started, but the nights were still frosty. *The shortcut.* She hesitated for a moment, but no, she had to. The shortcut meant saving almost ten minutes. She ran quickly through the path that wound through the fields.

As she came to the end of the path and started on the sidewalk, a car pulled up beside her and she

stopped. For a moment she thought that Scott had followed her, but it was a car she'd never seen before in town.

"Do you want a ride?" a deep male voice asked her. She started to say no, but then she thought about it. What the hell, her parents didn't know this car. Why not? Nothing ever happened in this town, there was nothing to be scared off.

"Yes please." After climbing into the passenger seat, she told the man where to go. For a moment she reasoned with herself. She could have walked the rest of the way. It wasn't that far, but she felt cold, her feet hurt from dancing in the high heels, and now they felt sore from running through the fields. She didn't even look at the man behind the wheel. The excitement of the evening was still with her, along with the fear of her parents' anger. She leaned her head against the back of the seat and closed her eyes, thinking back to Scott and the strange feelings she felt when she thought about him and his touch in places where no one had ever touched her but herself. She allowed her mind to drift and dreamed about that evening.

The man behind the wheel was silent, and as she snapped out of her dreams she realized that the five minutes it would have taken to get to the store in a car were taking a long time. Her mother's warning never to accept rides from strangers, flashed through her mind. She opened her eyes and looked out of the window. "Where the hell are we?" He was pulling into the gravel pit, about twenty minutes outside of town. "Shit, what the hell are you doing, man? Take me home!" she yelled at him.

He turned off the lights and turned towards her. All she could see were his eyes. They looked like two dark coals. The rest of his face was just a blur in the darkness of the night. "Mister, I don't know who you are. You're obviously a stranger in town. Please take me home?"

He turned towards her again as she tried to open the door and found it locked. She looked for a release button, but it wouldn't work. He had locked it from his side and held her wrists tight. *Shit, now what?* She was really scared. He grabbed her and she thought desperately for a way out. *Stay calm, Susan, stay calm. Don't panic, don't scream, that'll make him mad and he'll kill you,* she thought, remembering the lectures from her parents, lectures at school about rape and murder and what to do and not to do.

The man pushed the backrest back and crawled over to her side and crouched in front of her, all the time hanging onto her wrists. She couldn't move, there was no room to kick him. She tried to stay calm, and kept telling herself not to fight, not to scream. He came down on her. He felt so heavy that she could barely breathe. He reeked of stale beer. He forced her mouth open and tried to kiss her. She could taste the alcohol, and felt nausea welling up in the pit of her stomach. He held her wrists with one hand and with the other hand roughly pulled her skimpy top down to expose her breasts. His head came down and he roughly sucked and bit her nipples.

She tried to wriggle loose, but the grip on her wrists tightened, and his free hand pulled up the short little skirt and tore off her panties. It hurt. She

could feel the nylon and elastic snapping against her skin. He never once uttered a sound. Susan wished that he would just get it over and done with and throw her out of the car. She could feel him undoing his jeans, and she forced herself to stay calm, to not fight him. She had heard of too many rape victims who ended up getting killed that way, because they screamed and fought their assailant. She tried to will herself to be oblivious to what was happening to her. Her stomach turned at the sour smell of stale alcohol as he breathed closely to her face and his mouth came crashing down on her lips. His fingers entered her forcefully, feeling her, hurting her. She was still wet from her experience with Scott, but it didn't help. He pulled his hand away, and with one thrust guided himself into her. She experienced a second of sharp pain, then nothing as he spent his lust on her very fast, angrily. A grunt, and then he let her go.

A tear spilled down her cheek, trickled down her neck and down her chest. He leaned against her, breathing heavily. She thought she heard him muttering what sounded like "I'm sorry," but she couldn't be sure. It didn't matter anyway. If she'd heard correctly, sorry didn't make it right, and if he was indeed sorry, then why had he raped her in the first place? Drunk, she knew he was pissed out of his mind and shouldn't even have been driving.

He got off her then and climbed back into the drivers seat and leaned his head on the steering wheel. Susan stayed calm, as calm as she could, although inwardly she shook. She pulled her skirt down, wiped the tears off her face and pulled her top

back on as he finally started the car. She didn't look at him. She didn't want to. Her purse had spilled onto the floor. She bent to pick it up and put the contents back.

His voice was gruff. "I'll take you home. Where do you live?"

"Unlock the damn doors and I'll walk home." She didn't care that it would take her more than an hour to walk home. All she wanted was to get away from the bastard.

"No. I want to know that you get home safely."

Susan laughed, her own voice sounding shrilly in her ears. "After raping me? That hardly makes any sense."

"Never mind. Just tell me where to take you."

"The main drag. The grocery store."

Without another word, he started the car and drove her back to town and stopped in front of the store. The locks clicked open, the sound almost like a gunshot in the silent car. It startled her and she quickly got out, purse and shoes clutched tightly in her hand. Susan said a silent prayer of thanks when she noticed that all the lights were out. Her parents had trusted her. They had gone to bed early, like they usually did.

Without looking back at the car or even thinking to write down the license plate number, she quietly entered the house and went straight up to her room. She had to have a bath, a hot bath. But she couldn't. Her parents would wake up and wonder what she was doing in the middle of the night.

She threw herself on the bed and cried softly for a

long time. After her beautiful experience with Scott, was this the way she had to experience sex for the first time? Her parents had been right all along about wearing skimpy clothes and exposing too much of her body. She cried most of the night, could hardly wait till morning so she could scrub that night away, wash it from her body and out of her mind. Eventually, emotionally exhausted, she drifted off into a restless sleep.

* * * *

Mike Stuart was sitting in his car outside Susan's house. "Shit...shit...shit! You bastard!" At first glance he had thought her a whore, a slut, looking for some action. What the hell had he done? He leaned his head back. The barrier he had encountered when taking her was for real. Why the hell had he gotten so drunk? It wasn't his habit to pick up sluts, and now look what he had done to this girl. After he'd realized that she was a virgin, he had spilled his seed almost immediately. It had been too late, he'd already broken through, but it had sobered him up in a hurry.

"Oh God, what have I done?" He sat up and looked at the address, the store and looked for lights, but all was in darkness

As he started the car again, he noticed something on the floor. He bent over to pick it up and saw the torn panties. He picked them up and crushed them in his hand. "Shit, man! You asshole! All because of that stupid bitch you married! No excuse, Mike, no excuse," he shouted aloud. Maybe he was going

crazy. He noticed something white on the floor and picked it up. It was her driver's license and her medical card. He looked at her birth date. She was eighteen. He should be castrated. Looking at the picture on the license, he saw she was very pretty, not just pretty, hauntingly beautiful. In the dark he had not noticed; all he had been concerned with was releasing his pent-up emotions. He stuffed the cards in his pocket and looked at the house and store once again. She was so young. He hoped that she would be able to handle this mentally, being raped by a bastard like him. He put the car in gear and drove away in the direction of home.

CHAPTER THREE

Susan woke up feeling washed out and tired. She looked at her clock, but it was only seven. Too early to get up. When she turned over and felt the soreness between her legs, she suddenly remembered. She sat up. She just had to have a bath and scrub off the memory of the night before, although she could never wash it out of her mind. She sat and thought about it for a moment, and decided that she could be thankful that the only thing she lost was her virginity, and not her life. That she had not been mutilated in any way. She saw the bloodstains on the inside of her thighs and shuddered. She felt dirty, used; treated like a slut. But, it was her own fault.

After running the bath and relaxing in the hot water, she thought about her parents. If she would have worn her hated clothes and her hair braided, the horror of the night before probably would not have happened. The only reason she got raped was because of the attire she was wearing and the late hour she was walking on the street dressed in such a fashion. But, if she had been wearing her own clothes, Scott would never have noticed her. Neither would the

man have stopped, though, and offered her a ride. She should have had Scott drive her home, or at least allow him to walk her most of the way. No, it wasn't just the clothes. It was definitely her fault. She should have known better than to get into a stranger's car. She was upset, hurt. She felt degraded, but she decided that it wasn't the end of the world. She was strong, a survivor. She wouldn't let this get to her. She wouldn't allow it. She would condition herself to deal with it, and forget. She scrubbed herself until she felt she had no skin left, and crawled back into bed until her mother came to wake her for church.

"Susan, it's time to get up, church starts in an hour."

Susan groaned. "Mom, I have a sore throat, do you mind if I stay in bed for a while?"

Her mother felt her forehead. "Yes, honey, you do look flushed and you feel hot. Just stay in bed. I'm sure God will forgive you." She made Susan feel guilty about the lie.

She stayed in bed most of Sunday and dozed, and thought, and thought some more. She fought with herself and came to the conclusion that this was all just a bad dream and she would put it out of her mind. So, she had lost her virginity. Didn't many girls lose it from riding horses and bikes? It wasn't that bad. At least she was alive. Most of the older girls she knew weren't virgins. She would just concentrate on her newfound love, on Scott.

* * * *

At school on Monday morning, Scott was waiting for her.

“Susan, you look lovely.”

She grinned as he took her arm, knowing full well that she didn’t look ‘lovely’ in these clothes and he was just trying to make her feel good.

“Now I know what’s hidden under those clothes.” He squeezed her arm and made her blush. She still felt shy with him. The thought of her experience crept back in her mind, but she quickly pushed it back and leaned into him as he put his arm around her shoulders.

“Let me walk you to class.” At the door of her class he gave her a quick kiss. “I’ll see you after school, honey.”

He was waiting for her when the final bell rang and while they walked home slowly, arms around each other, they talked about upcoming graduation. When he asked her to be his graduation date, she felt very proud. She would be with the most popular guy in school. Susan and Scott were both part of the graduation committee, and as they wandered into the quiet forest, they discussed arrangements for the dance. Once hidden between the density of the trees, Scott took her in his arms and kissed her. He threw his jacket on the ground, and they sat on it. Scott peeled off the sweater, her bra and exposed her breasts. His lips teased her nipples, his hands underneath her skirt. For a moment she felt ashamed of the decent cotton underwear, but he didn’t even look at them as he peeled them off and continued his explorations. Only, this time Susan did not enjoy his

hands on her body. She had no feelings at all. As he touched her clit, images of the rape flashed before her eyes and through her mind. When his fingers entered her, she almost pulled back, only in a split second remembering that this was Scott. Even his kisses left her numb, and she didn't enjoy any of his attentions, his hands on her body. The words he whispered in her neck, she didn't hear. The beautiful feelings she'd had with him the night of the party were gone. She felt empty, lifeless, as if her heart had become nothing but a bottomless void. Outwardly she acted as she always had, so Scott didn't really notice anything.

"Baby, you're so beautiful and I love you so much," he said softly against her lips while his fingers tweaked her nipples. She felt like pushing his hands away. His amorous advances now felt dirty, his kisses just something she endured.

He was too absorbed in playing with her and jerking off to feel her withdrawal. He continued his play and grabbing her hand placed it on his cock. She half-heartedly moved the skin back and forth while wishing deep within that it was over. Why didn't she just tell him she didn't want any of this anymore? No, she liked Scott, and right now she desperately needed a friend, someone, anyone. She'd endure his play.

He walked her home afterwards and chatted happily with her and just before they got to the store, he stopped and held her for a moment. "Can you sneak out later on?" he whispered in her neck.

Susan shook her head. "No, I don't think so. I'll see you tomorrow."

Scott pulled back. "You know, it's crazy how your

parents keep you cooped up. Why do you listen to them? I know they're good folks, but this is overkill."

"You're right. They're good folks. Mom hasn't felt so well lately and as long as I live at home, I'll do as they say. We can see each other after school, Scott." Had she alienated him now? She pulled back and looked at his face, but though he looked disappointed, he leaned forward to kiss her on the tip of her nose.

"Our time will come, princess."

She spent a lot of time with him, as much as she could. She liked him, he felt good to be with. Safe, for Scott had kept his promise. He never went farther than touching, feeling. He told her often that he loved her and it made her feel guilty. She didn't feel that way about him. As a matter of fact, she felt very little at all. Fondness, yes. But, was that sufficient for a lasting relationship? She came to the conclusion that perhaps her experience had made her incapable of loving that way. She often felt like confiding to Scott. To be able to tell, talk about what had happened the night of the party, but she was so ashamed. She couldn't even talk to Tracy about it. Tracy, whom she had always confided in, her whole life. Tracy, who always told *her* everything. Tracy had noticed that Susan was more quiet than usual and had questioned her a number of times, but Susan would just laugh it away. She would stop the questions by changing the subject, and blame it on the coming exams and graduation stress. Stress and pre exam nerves, one could blame a lot on that. Her exams didn't bother her at all though. She knew she would pass quite

easily.

Her mother had agreed to let the little dressmaker make Susan's grad dress. She had gone through the Sears catalogue with Susan, and they had ordered the material. Her mother approved of the plain sapphire-blue material, and the matching satin shoes and gloves Susan had chosen. She found a picture in a fashion magazine of the dress she liked, and even though her mother protested somewhat at the plunging neckline, she gave in.

"Soon you won't have time for any pretty dresses, girl. You'll be busy at the store every day." her mother had said when they had lunch together one day. She had almost told her about her wish to become a nurse, but then decided that she would deal with that issue after graduation. She got totally caught up in the excitement of it all, in the preparations. She had little time anymore to think and brood.

* * * *

Finally the big day came. The ceremonies, as always, were very boring and took a long time, due to the teachers and principal and all their lengthy speeches. Then the handing out of the diplomas, which seemed to take forever. Susan was glad when it was finally over. Her parents had been so proud of her at the ceremonies, their faces beamed and it made Susan feel really good when she looked at their smiling faces. Afterwards, they all had fruit punch and cake and went through all the rituals of shaking hands,

photographs and meaningless chatter.

Tracy finally managed to find her in the crowd: "Come on, Susie, we'll be late for our hair appointment." Tracy had her mother's car, which made it easier for them to get around.

Susan stared at herself in the mirror whilst they were working on her hair, and she promised herself a new wardrobe as soon as she got accepted at college. She got the works: A facial, her nails and she splurged on a bottle of Opium, her favorite perfume.

When they were done in the salon, Tracy drove her home. "Susie, you're so quiet, what's the matter?" Tracy was smiling. Bubbly, full of life, but she couldn't pass her excitement on to Susan. Susan was always the quiet one, the responsible one, and Tracy had decided a long time ago that it was because Susan was an only child.

"Come on Susie, surely you're just a little bit excited?"

Susan jumped out of the car. "I'm just a bit tired, that's all. Don't worry about it. I'll see you later, okay?"

She presumed that her parents were both still at the school, for the car wasn't back and the house was quiet. She went upstairs and ran the tub while she undressed. She didn't look in the mirror, she didn't want to until she was fully dressed in her finery. She poured a few drops of the expensive perfume in the hot water, and not being used to having her hair pinned up she almost dunked under the water like she usually did, but stopped herself just in time.

"Just a bath from the neck down, Susie. Can't spoil

your make-up and your hair," she told herself and giggled because she was talking to herself. She relaxed in the steaming water until her mother knocked on the door.

"Susan, it's six-thirty, you'd better get dressed. Aren't they picking you up at seven?"

Good grief, was it that late? She jumped out of the tub and felt a little dizzy. *Too much steam in here*, she thought as she wrapped a towel around herself and went to her room. She dried herself off, and put on the lacy underwear she had bought, and the silk pantyhose. Finally she slipped the dress over her head and slipped into the matching satin shoes, and looked at herself in the mirror. She couldn't believe her eyes when she saw her reflection. She felt like Cinderella, like a princess. Her hair was swept up, with some of the curls cascading down her back. A few tendrils framed her face. The make-up was subtle, she didn't need much, but the blue eye shadow brought out the blue of her eyes even more and almost made her look mysterious. The gown was very simple, a flowing low neckline, tapering down to her small waist and fitting snugly all the way to the floor. There was a slit on the side, just showing sufficient leg. She pulled on the long matching gloves, and grabbed the little clutch purse. As a final touch, she sprayed some of the perfume in her neck, and she was ready.

Finally, she felt a little excited as she descended the stairs slowly. She felt very regal, almost like a queen. Her parents heard her coming down and they looked at their daughter coming slowly down the stairs. Her

mother stared, and her father slowly took his glasses off and stood up.

"It's like reincarnation," he said softly. His eyes were moist and he made a big issue out of cleaning his glasses and then wiping his eyes with his handkerchief. Her mother cleared her throat a few times as she got up from her chair and went to the hope chest. Susan knew it contained her mother's wedding dress, and probably other personal things. She had never questioned her, not even when she was small. Her mother had always taught her that everyone had a right to certain private, personal things. Even within a family, and she had always accepted that. She wondered why her mother would open the chest now. She hoped not for the stole, it really wouldn't go with her gown.

Her mother took out a small wooden box, exquisitely carved and very old. She handed it to her husband.

Her father gazed down at it for a moment before opening it. "Susan, this belonged to your great-grandmother. My grandmother. There were only boys in the family, as you know. My father was an only child, I was an only child, and my grandmother gave me this to pass on to a daughter. If not a daughter, then perhaps a granddaughter. You are the first girl since your great grandmother, and so you were named after her. Susannah. This is the only picture I have of her. She was the same age as you are now."

He handed her the picture and Susan stared at an almost replica of herself. The same nose, chin and

hair. "What color were her eyes, dad?"

"The same as yours, Susan. Very blue. I also feel that on this special occasion, you are ready to receive these. You'll be nineteen in two weeks and have shown yourself to be a very responsible young woman, so your mother and I decided it was time to give them to you. Take care of them and pass them onto your daughter." As he was speaking, he took out a beautiful sapphire and diamond necklace and put it around her neck. He handed her the matching earrings.

"Here, put these on yourself," he said gruffly. Her father could never show emotion very well. He gave her a quick peck on the forehead and sat down again. "There are some more trinkets in the box. Take it. It's yours."

Susan smiled. She knew he was moved and tried to hide it. Her mother been very quiet all this time and her eyes, too, looked suspiciously moist.

"Susan, you're so pretty, I don't know what to say. It's almost scary."

She kissed her mother and hugged her. "Scary? I'm growing up, Mom. I'm an adult now. That shouldn't be scary, but you don't have to say anything. It's okay."

Her mother sniffed: "Phew, what's that smell? It's a very potent perfume. Did you have a bath in it?"

The doorbell rang. "There's my grad date, I've got to go." Susan opened the door and for a moment they stared at each other. Scott looked very handsome in his tuxedo, completely different from the jean clad tousle haired young man she knew. He handed her a

beautiful wrist corsage — a white rose, surrounded by forget-me-nots and a sprig of baby's breath.

"To match your eyes," he said softly. "Susan, you're beautiful, you look like you've stepped off the cover of a magazine. I'm so proud of you. Everyone is going to be green with jealousy. Goodnight, Mr. and Mrs. Davies, I'll take good care of her."

Her parents wished them a good time and her mother called after them: "Susan, there's no curfew tonight." Susan quietly closed the door and took Scott's arm. She couldn't wait to get to the dance and show Tracy the necklace and earrings.

"What's that you're carrying Susan?" Scott asked her.

She hadn't realized she was still holding the little box and wished she'd left it at home. She told him what her parents had given her. "It's a little scary Scott, to have something of such value around my neck."

The usher brought them to their table, which they shared with Tracy and her date, and two other couples. Susan sat next to Tracy, who looked like a pink and white doll. Her brown eyes sparkled and her blond hair, which was piled high, shimmered like gold. Susan showed off the jewelry and then showed Tracy the little box and the picture.

"What else is in there?"

"I don't know. I haven't had time to look. They gave it to me just before Scott came." Susan opened it and together they took out each piece. There was a strand of pearls, some more earrings, a plain gold wedding band, some gold chains and a beautiful,

with sparkling gems that looked like diamonds, bracelet.

"You shouldn't be carrying that around with you. That jewelry is worth a fortune."

"I didn't even realize that I still had it in my hand when I left the house. Anyway, I wanted to show it to you." She took out the gold locket, which contained a miniature of her great grandmother, and put it around her neck, too.

"I'll ask the principal if I can put it in the safe until after the dance." She approached the principal, who looked at her without recognition.

"It's Susan Davies, sir."

"Good Lord, girl, where have you been hiding? You're beautiful. I never would have known you."

For an instant she felt insulted, but then took it as a compliment and told him about the box and the contents, and how she should have left it at home, and he agreed to put it in the safe for her.

Dinner was smorgasbord style, and was delicious. The tables were laden with all foods imaginable. The ladies guild and school board members had really outdone themselves. After dinner, the lights were dimmed and the dancing began. Scott kept her on the floor most of the evening and time went by as if in a dream.

Towards the end of the dance, Susan was dancing with Scott, when she suddenly felt dizzy and almost fell. Scott was full of concern.

"Susan, are you okay?"

"I think I ate too much, I feel a little sick."

"You look very pale, let's sit down."

They sat down and just talked for a while. Susan's dizzy spell and wave of nausea passed and she felt good again. She enjoyed the remainder of the evening and was almost sorry when the final dance was announced and it was over. They went to Tracy's house afterwards, just the four of them and sat and talked about their school years. Tracy's mother had left an ice bucket containing ice and a big bottle of champagne on the coffee table. The bottle had a big bow on it. It was Susan's first taste of champagne and she didn't care for it too much. She sipped it slowly and noticed that after a while it made her feel a little silly and giggly.

After they finished the bottle of champagne, and it was almost dawn, Susan said she wanted to go home. After all, Tracy and she were leaving for Vancouver that morning. The trip, which they had planned for years, was finally happening. Tracy had a cousin in Vancouver whom they could stay with.

"I don't think so, Susie. You're in no condition to walk home and since no one can drive, I guess you'll all have to stay here. Susan, you can crash with me, and the guys can crash on the couch."

* * * *

When Susan woke up a few hours later she had a splitting headache and her stomach had knots in it. She had to run to the bathroom and made it just in time.

Tracy woke up to find Susan hanging over the toilet. "Oh, oh. Too much champagne. Wait, I'll get

you some aspirin." She soon came back with some Tylenols and a bottle of pink liquid.

Susan gulped the medicine down and took the Tylenols. "I'll never drink another drop of that stuff, I swear. Tracy, I have to get home and pack. Our bus leaves at ten, remember? Lend me some sweats will you, and a pair of shoes?"

The guys had already left, so Susan ran home as fast as she could to pack her bag. She didn't pack much, for she planned to buy new clothes. Clothes that would fit. Clothes that were in style, though she had already made up her mind that mini skirts and sexy tops were not on her list. She intended to stay a little more conservative.

Her mother had breakfast ready when she walked into the kitchen. As usual, it smelled delicious, but her stomach still felt weird. She sat down at the table. Her father had already gone to the store, and as her mother put a glass of milk in front of her and a plate of French toast, she asked her daughter, "You look a little pale this morning, Susan. Are you all right? You're not coming down with something, are you?"

"Just the excitement, Mom, and a late night. I'm not used to that. I really don't feel like eating this morning. I'll just have the milk."

She told her mother about the dance, and then they chatted for a while about the trip

"I worry about you going off on your own. You've lived such a sheltered life here. Will you be extra careful, Susan?" her mother asked.

"Don't worry, Mom, I'll be fine. I'll phone you every day. I promise. I suppose I'd better call Tracy,

and have a bath and pack some things.”

After her bath, she felt better, and while packing the few necessities she would take, she started to feel the anticipation of their trip.

CHAPTER FOUR

Susan said goodbye to her parents and took off to Tracy's house. Her suitcase wasn't very heavy with the few things she had packed. Her purse was just a little bulky, because of the envelope containing the fifteen hundred dollars for her new wardrobe, and she hung on to it for dear life. On the way to Tracy's house, Scott pulled up beside her.

"Hey, pretty lady, get in. You're not taking off to the big city without kissing me goodbye. Aren't you just a little afraid to be going off to the city all on your own?"

She smiled. "Don't worry Scott, I won't see anyone else." Before going to the bus stop, he pulled over in a quiet spot and they kissed and necked for a little while. As always, his hand crept under her skirt, but she wriggled away. The fondling was more habit than anything for her, and right now she wasn't in the mood at all.

"Scott, it's getting late, I have to go."

"Okay, we'll go and get Tracy and I'll take you two to the bus."

In a way she was glad of the ride because she still

didn't feel all that well. Tracy was packed and ready when they arrived and she walked to the car lugging an impossibly large suitcase. Scott quickly jumped out to help her and put the suitcase in the trunk. "Sure you've got enough clothes with you?" he asked, sending Susan a wide grin and winking at her.

* * * *

When the bus finally pulled out they grinned at each other with satisfaction. It was actually happening. They were off on their own. For the first few hours they chatted excitedly about what they were going to do once they were in Vancouver, but after the long night before, they were tired and both soon drifted off to sleep and woke with a start as the bus pulled into the Vancouver bus depot.

Tracy's cousin, Melissa, met them at the bus depot. It wasn't hard to spot her. She looked very much like Tracy, except an older version and more sophisticated. Melissa was in her early twenties, and had moved to Vancouver two years before to go to college. She was now a successful secretary and had her own apartment.

After the initial greetings, Melissa quickly drove them to her apartment building. Susan looked at the tall buildings they passed, the throngs of people, and wasn't quite sure if she'd like city life. But once she was a registered nurse she could apply anywhere for a job in a more country like setting. It was so long since she'd been to the city. Her parents went often to order supplies, and when she was younger, they'd

taken her along sometimes. But then her homework piled up and instead of an hour, she'd spend whole evenings studying, plus working in the store, so she hadn't been to Vancouver for a very long time.

The first thing they did was to freshen up. It had been a long trip and they both felt sticky from sitting for so long. Melissa had decorated her apartment nicely, though everything was ultra modern and Susan found the walls quite bare, and there was a lack of plants. The sliding doors and balcony looked out over English Bay, so Melissa had a wonderful view.

They sat and talked till the early hours of the morning. Melissa told them which stores to go to and the location of the college, which Susan wanted to visit. She wanted to register for her nursing course. They planned their first day in town and their schedule was already full before they even started. They slept soundly on the hide-a-bed, and when they woke up, Melissa had left for work. She had left a key for them on the coffee table with a note and a street map.

"Have fun you guys, don't get lost unless it's with a hunk!"

Susan started to feel nauseated again. She stayed in the bathroom for a while, and thought she'd be okay, until she walked into the kitchen and smelled the bacon, which Tracy was frying. She made a dash for the toilet and barely reached it in time.

Tracy was full of concern for her friend. "Susan, you're as white as a sheet. You must have some kind of flu. We're going to find a doctor. Maybe he can give you something to make you feel better. We don't

want to spoil our trip.”

Susan agreed with her. This was the third day in a row that she had vomited and felt ill, and she really wanted to have a good time. They showered and dressed, and after locking up asked the manager of the building where they could find a good doctor. There was a clinic not far away, just a block down. That was to be their first stop. Susan felt a little better, but her stomach still felt queasy, so she decided it was best to get some medication. It was a walk-in clinic, and no appointment was needed. The receptionist took all the particulars and asked for her medical card. Susan dug in her purse for the small wallet that held her cards. She couldn't find it. She turned her purse just about upside down on the counter, but no cards.

“Susie, did you forget them? Did you have them in your clutch purse on grad night?”

Susan tried to remember. She suddenly knew. Tracy's birthday, that's when her purse had spilled on the floor of that man's car. She felt a moment of panic, but pulled herself together.

“I'm sorry, I seem to have left it at home, but I can phone my parents and get the number.”

The receptionist let her use the phone, but instead of phoning her parents and getting them all worried, she phoned the receptionist of her own doctor back home for her medical number.

The doctor was an older man and she felt quite comfortable with him. He asked her a number of questions, also about her menstruation. Yes, she had missed her last period, but that often happened. Was

she sexually active? No, she wasn't. He asked her to take off her clothes and put on the white gown he handed her, and then to lie on the examining table. He directed her to change in the washroom and asked her to bring back a urine sample. She changed fast and handed him the sample, which he took with him to his office, whilst he left her to get up on the table. He wasn't gone very long and had a thoughtful expression on his face. He started to examine her and felt her breasts, which she found very embarrassing. The most she had ever seen a doctor was for a cold or the flu. She had always been very healthy. He then proceeded to prod her abdomen and finally asked her to pull her legs up and put them in the stirrups.

"I'm sorry my dear, you'll have to take your panties off." Susan blushed. Why would she have to take her underwear off for a stomach flu? She quickly peeled them off and he asked her again to pull her legs up. She felt even worse when she saw him pick up a metal clamp.

"This may hurt just a little, but I have to use it to examine you properly."

He inserted the cold clamp. It did hurt. She tried to detach herself from what he was doing, but she couldn't. He turned the light to shine between her legs and looked. Then he took a swab and sort of swirled it around inside of her and put it in a test tube. He then took the clamp out and inserted his finger and felt inside her, whilst his other hand felt her abdomen. Susan thought this had to be the most embarrassing time of her life. He was very professional though, and she was glad he was and

older doctor, rather than young.

"You may get dressed young lady and I'll see you in my office."

After putting her clothes back on, she entered his office and sat down. He cleared his throat.

"First of all, you're not a virgin." It was a statement, not a question. "You're also approximately two and a half months pregnant and the urine test I just did confirmed it."

Susan stared at him. She hadn't heard this. It couldn't be. Stunned, she sat frozen on the chair and didn't say a word. The doctor continued to talk. Most of it went by her. She was numb with shock. He gave her some little pills to take for her nausea, and a pamphlet with information about childbirth, nutrition and exercises and told her to go and see her own doctor in a month.

She left the office in a daze. Tracy asked her what the doctor had said, and the only word she could utter was, "Flu." With that, they left to go shopping, but she was not in a shopping mood anymore. She was quiet, withdrawn and had little pleasure in buying anything. She actually needed to be alone. She had to think, and that, with Tracy's constant chatter, was virtually impossible. She tried to pull herself together so as not to spoil Tracy's day, and managed to at least let Tracy have a good time. She was glad when Tracy decided they should have an early night so that they would be fresh and rested for their shopping the next day.

Melissa had left a message to say she was spending the night with her boyfriend, and they settled down

to go to sleep at nine thirty. Tracy fell asleep quite soon whilst chattering to Susan, and she finally had a chance to think.

Pregnant! From that one lousy time? From that jerk? She hadn't even seen the guy's face, and she was carrying his child? Not only had he taken her virginity, but saddled her with an unwanted pregnancy. Abortion? It briefly entered her mind, but just as fast left it again. She was totally against abortion. It was murder. She didn't want this baby. It wasn't conceived in love, not even in passion, but in rape. Adoption—that was the only way. She would have to wait with college. If her parents would help, she could stay there, work in the store, and then after the baby was born, she could go on with her life. *Oh my God, my parents, what will they say? How will they react?* she thought. She felt anger and an intense hatred for this thing that had invaded her body, this creature growing inside her. Resentment. This would ruin everything. Scott would hate her and she would grow fat and ugly. What would everyone say? In a small town, gossip spread like wildfire and people wouldn't stop talking for years.

She finally drifted off to sleep. And when she woke the next morning, she felt no nausea. The tablets had helped and she no longer had morning sickness.

* * * *

Her week in Vancouver went by fast, but in a haze. She pretended to have a good time for Tracy's sake, and she did buy some clothes, although not as much

as she had intended, because her figure could be different after she had the child. She bought shoes, jeans, make-up, underwear, nighties, some really pretty sweaters and tops. She had her hair trimmed and layer cut, which made it more manageable. *No more braids for me*, she thought. When Tracy questioned her about not going to the college, she gave the excuse that she had no birth certificate or license, and she couldn't apply without them. Tracy accepted the excuse.

Before she knew it, she was back home and showing her parents what she had bought. Her parents were happy with the gifts she brought home for them. A new shirt for her father, something more stylish than he was used to wearing, and some expensive cologne. For her mother she had bought a new Sunday dress and a sweater. They protested that it must have cost way too much, but they were pleased. Susan could tell. They weren't too impressed with the clothes she had bought for herself, but didn't say too much.

Susan kept her condition to herself. She had decided to wait a few days before telling them, so she went to bed, leaving her parents quite happy. She stayed awake for a while wondering how she was going to break the bad news to them. She didn't sleep much again that night and came to the decision she should tell them that day rather than put it off.

* * * *

The next morning she approached her mother first,

while she was having her breakfast, which she really enjoyed for the first time in days. Since taking the tablets, her appetite had fully returned and she could eat normally again.

"Oh, Susan, while you were away, this came for you."

Susan took the envelope and looked at the postmark. Vancouver? She opened the envelope and out came the little wallet with her cards. Her mother looked at it in surprise. Susan thought this would be a good opportunity to talk to her mother and tell her what had happened to her. She asked her to sit down and have a cup of tea with her. She told her mother everything, about the party, what happened afterwards, and her visit to the doctor. Her mother just listened quietly, and when Susan was finished, a tear rolled down her cheek, which she quickly wiped away, probably thinking that Susan hadn't seen it.

"Susan, I'll help you, you know that, but sweetheart, your father... I don't know about your dad..." She stood up and quietly started doing the dishes, leaving Susan sitting at the table feeling rather lonely and scared.

Her father came bustling in. "It's quiet in the store, Lucy, how about a quick cup of coffee? Is it ready?"

Her mother asked him to sit down and she poured him a cup of coffee. "Susan has something to tell you Harry."

He looked at her. "So, girl, what's up?"

Susan felt awkward. She blurted it out. She couldn't talk to him about personal things at the best of times, and now, she just couldn't figure out the

right words. There was no other way to tell him.

"Dad, I'm pregnant." She might as well have dropped a bomb.

He jumped up and slammed his cup on the table. "That bastard! He's going to marry you, even if I've got to drag him to the altar!" he shouted.

His word cut to the very core of her. She stood, sending the chair almost tumbling to the floor. She caught it just in time. "Dad... Calm down, it's not Scott, he's not the father. I need to tell you..." But her words were cut off. He stared at her for a second, allowing her words to sink in, and then his anger broke loose.

"You slut, you little whore, you're out of this house today, and I never want to see you again!"

"Harry..." Her mother tried to intervene.

"Lucy, I have spoken. She's shamed us. She has to be gone today, or I'll personally throw her out."

He walked away still muttering and banging his fist on things, talking about his good name, the family name. She'd seen her father angry, but never this bad. His face was contorted and his eyes black as the night. He kept calling her a slut and a whore. He threw the newspaper into the kitchen, and it almost hit her. Susan flew out of the kitchen, up to her room where she fell sobbing on her bed. After a while, she stopped crying, dried her tears and sat up. There was no way out. Life at home would be a living hell. She knew her father's anger, his stubbornness, and he wouldn't back down for a long time. Maybe never. She had to go before he physically threw her out. Not that he'd hurt her. Her father had never laid a hand on her, but

he would force her to leave the house.

Half an hour later her mother knocked on the door and talked to her. "Susan, give him time to calm down. Just stay out of his way," she said, her eyes red from crying and still pooling.

But she'd made up her mind. "Mom, please leave me alone for now?"

"Honey, please...don't do this..."

"I have to, Mom. You heard him and you know him even better than I do. If I don't leave on my own accord, he'll throw me out himself."

"Go and stay with Tracy for a while, then. You'll be welcome there, I'm sure."

"No. I don't want anyone to know about this. Will you promise me not to tell?"

Her mother shook her head and hesitantly left the room. Susan gazed after her, wanting to run and throw herself into her mother's arms and sit on her lap, like she did when she was little and had hurt herself. But she wasn't little anymore. She was a young woman now.

After shoving the bed aside, she pried up the board and took out her savings and her treasures. She packed the new clothes she'd bought in one suitcase and was just about to close the second one when she thought about the baby she carried and what pregnancy would do to her body. She quickly packed some of the ugly skirts and sweaters.

She'd just finished when her mother came back. "I talked to him, but he's determined that you leave. Where will you go, Suzie? How will you live?"

"Don't worry about it, Mom. I'm a big girl now. I'll

survive.” Hauling the heavy suitcases, one in each hand, she walked out the room and down the stairs, her mother following.

For a moment, before she opened the front door, she looked at her mother’s distraught face, her wringing hands. “Mom, I’ll be fine. Tell Tracy I’ll write”, as she kissed her mother and hugged her briefly. She took off, slamming the door behind her and not looking back.

Scott saw her running down the street, just as he was driving up to the store. He pulled up.

“Sweetheart, I thought you came back yesterday, what are you doing? Where are you going?”

She felt she owed him an explanation, so she got in his car and told him everything. Scott was silent after she had finished her story, but then took her in his arms and told her he didn’t care. He loved her and would marry her and raise the baby as his own. No one needed to know.

She swallowed hard and wiped the tears that soaked her face. “Scott, I really appreciate this, but, no. I can’t let you make this sacrifice. It would ruin your future, your education, your career. I’m going away to have the baby somewhere else and have it adopted. That’s the best thing for everyone. I don’t want a child conceived under such circumstances.”

She had been sorely tempted to accept his offer, but no, she couldn’t ruin Scott’s life as well as her own. She didn’t love Scott the way she should, and it would never work. Neither did she feel anything for this unwanted child except hatred. If she had to raise it, it would be a constant reminder of that horrible

night.

"Scott, thank you so much and I really do appreciate your offer, but just let me go. Promise me that you'll never tell a soul?"

"But, honey..."

"Promise?"

"Okay," he said reluctantly. "But, Tracy..."

"I don't want her to know. I don't want anyone to know."

"But what do I tell her?"

"I don't care. Make up a story. Anything but the truth. I'm so ashamed..."

"It wasn't your fault, Susan."

"Yes, it was. Maybe I'll come back afterward. I don't know yet. Right now, my father would rather see my heels than my face."

"He'll simmer down. Please don't do this?"

"I have to. I'll go to a strange city where no one knows me and the baby will be adopted by people who really want a child and it will receive the love and care it needs, the love I can't give it."

At her insistence, Scott drove her to the bus station. He demanded to know where she was going, but she wouldn't tell him. He waited for her to get on a bus, so she took the first bus that came along. It was going to Toronto. She got off at the next stop, and waited for the bus to Vancouver.

CHAPTER FIVE

Susan looked at the beautiful scenery flying by, the mountains, some of them still capped with snow although it was summer. She could hardly believe she had actually left home. Left friends, family, everybody... She thought about the money in her purse. Her mother had tried to give her money just as she left, but she'd refused it. She'd saved up enough herself to be able to survive for a few months. If she was careful, she could live on that for a while, but then if she was lucky, she could find a job right away and be able to hang on to her money for later. The long trip on the bus gave her lots of time to think about everything, and a plan started to take form in her mind. The details were a little vague as yet, but once she got settled, she would be able to work on them. First and foremost, she had to find a cheap place to live and a job. Her savings she'd have to try and hang on to as much as possible, and add to them if she could.

* * * *

The bus arrived in Vancouver early the next morning. It had been a very slow trip, stopping in every little town, but at least she had managed to sleep quite a bit. She bought a newspaper at the depot and sat in the coffee shop drinking a coffee to look through the paper for accommodation. All she really wanted was a room. She marked a few ads, and called them to get the addresses. They were mostly downtown, so it wasn't that hard for her to find them. The first one she went to was terrible. It was dirty, debris everywhere, even in the lobby. Even though the rent was cheaper than the rest, she moved on to the next one. It was a fairly large complex. They had one furnished bachelor suite available on the ground floor, and it didn't look half bad. Three hundred and seventy five a month included all, except her food. The room was fairly large, and she had her own bathroom and even a TV. The furniture didn't look bad and the mattress on the bed looked quite clean. It was all she really needed. She took it. She didn't feel like looking anymore. She paid the deposit and a month's rent and sat on the chair looking around the room. *I'll have to make a list, get some things. Towels, linen, some knick knacks to make it look like home*, she thought, but was interrupted by someone knocking on the door. It was the landlord.

"Miss, some-one is moving out today and selling some things. Are you interested?"

She was, and swiftly followed him. She bought blankets, sheets, some prints to hang on the wall, some silly little ornaments and kitchen things, like plates, utensils, a couple of pots and pans, all for fifty dollars. She was quite happy with her purchases. The

bedding had just been washed, the man told her, so she made up the bed. Her first thought was to start settling in, but she felt really tired and wanted nothing else but to sleep for a while, so she fell on the bed and closed her eyes.

She slept for a few hours. When she woke up, she felt rested and her first trip was to the bathroom, but she looked at the tub with distaste.

"I'll have to get some groceries first, before I'll even put a foot in that," she told herself. She washed herself by the sink, and left to look for a grocery store and investigate her new surroundings.

As she ventured out into the street, she took better notice than before and saw that it was kind of a sleazy neighborhood she had ended up in. Strange characters lurked in dark corners and doorways, some of them obviously hookers. A group of greasy, dirty little kids ran past her. Shrugging her shoulders, not caring about the neighborhood, but more focused on trying to live as cheap as possible, she continued on. She found a small grocery store just a block down, and noticed the sign in the window, 'Help wanted.' First she stocked up on cleaning aids and easy, fast dinners. She'd have to buy a small microwave, she decided, rather than a hot plate, as the building manager had suggested. After she finished her shopping and paid for her groceries, she asked the salesgirl behind the counter, "Is the owner around? I see he's looking for help?"

"I'll get him for you," the girl said and disappeared through a door in the back of the store.

Soon after, a man appeared. He seemed to be in his

late sixties and sported a mop of silver hair and a matching beard and moustache. His eyes were a piercing blue and very alert as they studied her. He looked like the typical grandfather. She took to him immediately and he apparently to her, as he told her right away she was hired. As she went to pick up the bags of groceries, he threw in some extras.

"You seem like a nice girl, Susan, and you came along at just the right time. I'd given up on finding suitable help, and it's Tammy's last day here. I think we'll get along fine. See you in the morning."

Once back in the apartment, she set about getting her room in order and cleaning the bathroom. She had not had time to think, all she could concentrate on was getting the tub cleaned and taking a hot bath. When she was finished, she felt quite proud of her little place and thought it looked cozy.

The bath felt good and it relaxed her, and while she was soaking, she thought about the luck she'd had so far. Everything had gone so smoothly. The job would clear her about a thousand a month, so if she lived carefully, she would be able to save at least four to five hundred dollars every paycheck. After her bath, she dried herself and looked at her body reflected in the full-length mirror in the bathroom. She didn't look any different. Running her hands over her belly, she could feel no swelling yet. Only her breasts looked bigger, and the area around the nipples was much darker than it had been before. There were also blue veins she had never had before.

Without realizing, the day sped by. In the evening she watched TV for a while, until she decided to go to

bed and crawled under the blankets naked. It felt good. Something she had not really been able to do at home. For a moment her thought wandered to her pregnancy, to her parents and Tracy, but just as quickly, she pushed them out of her mind. She needed to concentrate now on the present, on starting her life anew and she had to cut all ties with her family and friends.

At least for the time being.

* * * *

The next morning she got up bright and early and arrived at the store an hour before she was due to start. She started work immediately without being told. Jake didn't have to show her anything. Susan was very much at home in a store like this, and after he had observed her for a while, Jake was thankful that luck had sent Susan his way. After she had worked for a few hours, he brought her a cup of coffee and looked at her with his twinkling blue eyes.

"Gal, you're the first who's ever been on time. Matter of fact, I think I can leave you in charge of the store. I've been watching you, and you know what you're doing. Why don't you call me Pop? Everyone else calls me that."

Susan liked him a lot. He was so the typical grandfather type, and from day one she could chat with him as easily as she did with Tracy. Sometimes she allowed herself to think about Tracy and she felt sad, troubled that she couldn't confide in her, couldn't even get in touch with her. She felt sad that

she had to keep everything so secret, and bad that she couldn't tell Jake about her condition. In the months to come, she would have to lie to him too, and leave her job, but if her plan was to go smoothly, she had no choice but to keep her secret buried deep within.

She settled in fairly easy. She watched her diet and seemed to be losing weight rather than gaining, so she didn't show at all, at least not to other people. She had gone back to wearing the big skirts and the big sweaters, and they helped to hide the slight thickening of her waist. One day, whilst she was busy in the store, she bent down to pick up a dropped nickel. When she stood up, in a flash she saw a pair of black eyes staring at her through the window. Then they were gone. A shudder went through her. The eyes reminded her of her assailant. She had only seen his eyes in the darkness of the night and they had seemed as black as coals. Walking home that night she kept glancing behind her, with the eerie feeling that she was being followed. She was glad when she was in the safety of her room and she locked the door carefully behind her.

She had planned everything very carefully. She didn't speak to any of her fellow roomers, made no friends, and didn't go anywhere, except to work and home. She had picked up a number of medical books and books on childbirth and read them thoroughly. Following the guidelines in the books, she bought everything she needed, and a scarce supply of baby clothes and diapers, just enough to dress the baby and keep it warm. She knew a couple back in her hometown who desperately wanted a baby and

who'd had their name down for adoption for a long time. They were good people, and if everything went well, she would travel home and leave the baby on their doorstep. It would be like a gift from heaven for them. She had invested in headphones to wear so that she could watch TV without anyone hearing her. She stocked up continually on canned foods, books and anything she would need to see her through at least two months. Every penny she had left over she saved, and her little stack was growing all the time. She had also managed to get a small secondhand microwave for only ten dollars. Her hair was pulled back into the hated braid, and once again she looked like dowdy Susan. Every day she would examine her thickening waist, and, in the big skirts, she managed to hide her rounded belly nicely. She took vitamins every day, because even though she didn't want the baby and resented it, she was determined to at least give it a healthy start in life. Sometimes she felt very lonely, and she longed to be able to call Tracy and talk to her. They probably all thought back home that she had vanished forever. If she could only talk to her mother, but she didn't dare phone in case her father would pick up the phone.

The only one who brought a little light in her life was Jake. Good old Jake fussed over her, and sometimes insisted she'd leave early and he would give her money to go to a movie.

"A young pretty lass like yourself needs friends, people. You keep too much to yourself, lassie," he would say.

She would smile at him. "I've got you, Jake. You're

my best friend."

"I'm just an old man, lassie. It's not good for you to be with old people. You need people your own age."

When she was almost six months into the pregnancy, she felt movement, quite distinctly, while she was watching TV late at night. It startled her. She felt no emotion, rather annoyance, that now she had to put up with that as well. She realized as she examined her belly that she was getting quite big, and she would soon have to quit work and set her plan into action. It was the end of October. Winter had set in quite early and it was cold and frosty outside. With the cold weather it wouldn't be so bad, having to stay inside for the last two months. She had calculated her time to be around the first week of January. She checked her list over and over, checked all her supplies, and went over her plan once again in her mind. She would pay her rent in advance up till the end of January and she'd tell Jake that her mother was sick and that she had to go home for a while to help out. She hated the thought of lying to the old man, who had been so kind to her, but it had to be done.

* * * *

Towards the end of the month, she told Jake she had to quit. He was really sorry that she had to go and he told her she could come back after her mother was better. He would manage on his own.

She spent a week gathering last supplies, and while she was going from store to store, once again she had the uncanny feeling that she was being watched. She

would stop sometimes and pretend to look in a window, and glance behind her, but she saw nothing but strangers hurrying by. Yet she couldn't shake the weird feeling.

After she felt she'd bought everything she'd need, she closed all the drapes in her room, made sure the windows were locked tight and left a small light burning. She took a small suitcase, locked her door in full view of a number of roomers, spoke to the landlord and paid him the rent in advance for the next few months. She wished him Season's greetings and told him she would see him in January.

She took a bus downtown and had a good warm meal. *Probably the last decent meal I'll have for a while*, she thought wryly. Then she went to see a movie. It was over too early, so she decided to sit through it for a second time.

After the show, she took the bus back and slowly approached the boarding house. She didn't see a soul. She would have to be fast and very quiet. All was dark, and most people having to go to school or work were probably in bed. The landlord quite often stayed up late, so she had to slip quietly past his door. She looked at her watch. It was one in the morning. "Okay, Susan, here goes," she said softly to herself. She carefully unlocked the front door and held it so it wouldn't slam. She tiptoed as fast as she could to her room. She startled when she heard a sound and froze for a moment and her heart started to beat faster. "The cat, the silly cat," she whispered. Grinning to herself about her fragile nerves, she bent down to pat the purring animal. She felt like a thief breaking into

her own place.

Once inside, with her door locked and bolted, she put her keys in her coat pocket and leaned against the door for a moment. Beads of perspiration dotted her forehead, and she slowly let her breath out, not even realizing that she had been holding it. There. It was done. She undressed and crawled into bed, but left the reading lamp on, as she had told the landlord that she was leaving a light on. She slept quite soundly. She felt exhausted, tired from the tension of it all, the months of waiting and planning, and her wait to sneak back into the boarding house. But though she felt so worn out, her sleep was restless, plagued by the movement of the baby in her belly and dreams of dark eyes that followed her wherever her dreams led her...

CHAPTER SIX

Michael James Stuart leaned back in his lazy boy in the study of his home. He closed his eyes and his mind went back to late March, to that fateful night, the night his wife, drunk as usual, had come home with another man and calmly told him that she was leaving, packed her bags and took off with the man. Mike had stood by helplessly. He didn't really want to stop her anyway. Life had been hell since the day they were married. Six years of pure hell. All she had ever wanted was to be a doctor's wife. A specialist's wife. The title, that's all she had cared about. The money he'd earn as a specialist, the social standing. She didn't love him, she never had. It had all been a big act, just to catch him and he had fallen for it, hook, line and sinker. Fallen for her beautiful face and body. In the beginning she had still allowed him to make love to her. Love? Sex, that's all it had ever been. She would talk along with him, about a family, and pretend that she wanted children just as much as him. Then the drinking became more and more evident. She didn't try and hide it anymore and it got worse to the point where she was an alcoholic.

She had started to stay away nights and would come home totally wasted and looking like she hadn't slept for days. His social life became nil because she would make such a fool out of herself as well as him in the presence of his associates and friends, that he wouldn't invite anyone anymore, or even accept invitations. Even his mother didn't visit anymore if Donna was home.

The night she took off with her new boyfriend he would never forget. After she had left, he let his rage vent itself on her picture, some furniture, and whatever he could lay his hands on. He hurt his hand by smashing the wall. He hadn't been angry because she had left him. He had been angry at himself for having married her in the first place, for not listening to his mother's advice, to the whispers...

He'd felt the need to get away and had called his secretary at home and told her to cancel all appointments for the next few days. He had gotten into his car and driven aimlessly for hours, before he finally hit a motel. The next day he had continued to drive. It was the only way he could think, to try and make some sense out of his marital mess. He tried to figure out the cause, the root of it all, to see if he was to blame, but could still come up with the one and only conclusion—she had never loved him in the first place. She was nothing else but a gold digger. She must have also had the alcohol problem before he met her, but had hidden it well during their brief courtship. Why the hell hadn't he dated her longer? Why hadn't he run a background check on her? He had been so smitten by her that the thought had never

even occurred to him. After all, it wasn't usual for people in love to run background checks on their prospective partners. He grimaced. "Maybe they should make it a law," he said aloud. "It might stop a lot of divorce and misery..." his words trailed off and he sank back into thought, down memory lane.

After driving for hours and thinking, he had entered a small town, and stopped at the local pub for a beer. He sat at the bar by himself for a long time. After a while of drinking shooters on an empty stomach, and being unused to so much alcohol, he had become very drunk. He never drank in excess as a rule, just a nightcap, and socially, but being stressed out and drinking on an empty stomach, the alcohol had really hit him. He'd been so drunk, he had fallen asleep on the bar, until the bartender shook him and told him he was closing up. He had gotten into his car and at that point, didn't care that he was drunk. He had not given a damn about anything. As he had started to drive, he didn't know where, he had spotted the slut. She had been wearing a very short skirt, a skimpy top with half her breasts showing. When he pulled up next to her, he thought that she looked pretty good for a slut. He had been without a woman for a long time and in his frustrations and his drunken mind, he needed someone, anyone. He didn't care who it was. He picked up the girl without any trouble and drove her to the gravel pit, which he had spotted on his way into the small town. Even in his drunken state, he had noticed that she was very beautiful, and he remembered thinking that it was a shame, a waste of such a gorgeous creature. She had

struggled a bit, but in his sodden, befuddled brain, he thought that she was playing a game, that she was teasing him, and it had aroused him even more. He remembered when he had entered her how surprisingly tight she was and how it had brought him to a climax almost before total entry. When he broke through the barrier it sobered him up instantly. He recalled the shock he'd felt. The girl had been a virgin. He had felt like the lowest scum on earth. The girl hadn't said anything, she had just straightened her clothes, picked up her purse and belongings, and very softly said, "You got what you wanted, now drive me home."

She told him to drive her to the main drag in town and when he dropped her off in front of the store, he remembered it, for he had bought a pack of cigarettes at the store before he went to the bar. He had a photographic memory, which had served him well in his studies, but on a personal basis, had often irritated him, as well as others. While driving her home, the girl had not looked at him once, and he had dropped her off in total silence because he didn't know what to say or do to make it right. There was nothing he could have said anyway, which would have made things right.

Her face was etched in his memory. He couldn't forget her. She haunted him, night and day, and he felt low, felt like a total bastard. Why hadn't the girl resisted more? Why hadn't she screamed? Unless she was scared that he would hurt her. It could be. He must have been a real sight that night. He was drunk, smelly, unshaven and unwashed. She probably

thought that he was some rapist. But, when he thought about it now, he *was* a rapist, wasn't he?

When came home that night and had slept off his drunken binge, he had decided to clean up his car. He had found the small folder with her driver's license, birth certificate and medical card. It had dropped out of her purse and she hadn't noticed it when she picked up her belongings. The birth certificate showed her age as eighteen, almost nineteen, and it had shocked him. There was a need in him to know if she was all right, if she had coped with the rape and he wondered if she'd reported it to the police. But surely he would have heard from them by now if she had? Then again, she could have been in utter shock and not remembered his license plate, or even thought to memorize it.

He went to Vancouver and hired a private detective and asked the man to mail the cards to her and at the same time to keep an eye on her and report back to him. He wanted to know that she was okay, that this episode would not affect her life, and, if it had, then he would help her somehow.

In the beginning, the reports were good. She graduated and the detective had taken a Polaroid and sent it to him. Michael stared at the picture often. She was so beautiful. So young yet, and he had to be the bastard to spoil her innocence. In this day and age, how often did one hear of virgins? Sex was common, even with the danger of STD and AIDS, young people were promiscuous. He often discussed it with his associates, how loose society had become.

Everything seemed to be fine with her. He had

decided that she had managed to deal with it, and that her life would continue as normal, and was just about to call the detective to tell him to quit and start looking for his wife instead so he could serve her with divorce papers, when another report came in. The girl had left home and moved to Vancouver. She was living in a cheap boarding house in a rather sleazy neighborhood and working at a small grocery store. He phoned the detective and told him to keep watching her and report anything unusual, also giving him instructions to find Donna. The reports, which came in for a few months, were all fine. Susannah, as he called her in his mind, was working and spending most of her time in her room. He had received another picture, which showed her leaving the grocery store. He was amazed at the difference. It showed her wearing baggy clothes, and she seemed to have gained weight. With the baggy clothes it was hard to tell. She also looked pale and there was a dull expression in her eyes.

He decided to go to Vancouver himself and sneak a look at her. He hung around the store for a day and watched her. He even managed a closer look through the window. She had just stood up from bending over and looked him straight in the eyes. He had pulled his cap down and hurried away, but he'd seen enough as she stood up. She was pregnant. He knew immediately, even if it wasn't that noticeable to other people. He gave instructions to have her followed more closely and the reports indicated that she wasn't seeing a doctor.

Then, the last report came in. She had quit her job

and reportedly gone home to look after her mother, but when the detective made inquiries in her hometown, no-one knew where she was. Not even her parents, who were quite worried about her, knew. Mike asked the detective to check all the hospitals in the area and in Vancouver, but he came up with nothing. Michael ordered a twenty-four hour watch on the boarding house, but again it was a dead end. No leads. She had just vanished as if she never existed in the first place. It didn't satisfy him.

Mike felt disturbed. He was sure that she was carrying his child, that her pregnancy was a result of his raping her and he wanted to help her, but if she couldn't be found, how could he help? Did she even want the baby? Why hadn't she seen a doctor? He had ruined her life. He had to do something for her. Doubts entered his mind. Perhaps she had sex with others after him. Maybe the child wasn't his, but then he decided, no, she looked too far along for that. How could he help her? Where was she? The detective investigated the homes for unwed mothers, but nothing turned up. He also questioned adoption agencies, but he drew a blank everywhere. Mike feared that she was planning abortion, which was dangerous in this late stage of pregnancy. The abortion clinics drew a blank too. He was at a total loss. He phoned the detective and told him to keep a constant watch on the rooming house. She couldn't just disappear.

When the phone rang, it startled him out of his thoughts. "Good grief, Mike, look at the time, I'll be late for my hospital rounds." He grabbed his briefcase

and jacket and quickly ran to his car, putting all thought of Susannah out of his mind and tried to concentrate on his patients.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Time seemed to crawl for Susan. It was the end of November and she had gained weight tremendously. Every time she looked in the mirror, she felt and looked like a balloon. It had not been easy, having to be totally quiet, taking a bath the same time as her neighbor so no one would hear her taps running. She tried not to bump into furniture or drop things. Food was a problem too. The only method of heating food was the little microwave, and it quit on her the first week, so she had no way of heating the food she had left. She was sick of cold canned food. The garbage bags filled with empty cans were piling up in a corner of the room. At least they didn't smell, for she kept her bathroom sink full of water and would rinse out the cans before disposing of them. Sometimes she was bursting to go to the bathroom, and had to wait for her neighbors to flush the toilet, before she could flush hers. At times she thought she'd go nuts. Often, she questioned herself if this plan of hers had been such a great idea. She was sick of watching TV, game shows and soap operas. Her ears were starting to ring from wearing the

headphones all the time. At night she would spend her time reading. She'd read the medical books so many times, she almost knew them off by heart. She never watched TV at night, for the reflection of the light from the TV could be seen through her drapes, and she didn't want to chance anyone spotting it. She virtually lived in her old flannel nightgown. Why bother dressing, when no one could see her anyway?

Susan relaxed on her bed. She felt particularly down this evening. As she stared up at the ceiling, the baby decided to become very active. She pulled up her nightgown and put her hands on her belly. *I'm sure I've got a baby with ten arms and legs*, she thought. She patted the bumps. "Come on, baby, quieten down," she whispered. She smiled. She had been whispering to the baby quite often lately. After all, she had no one else to talk to. She felt a sharp kick against her hand. "Hey, don't kick your mother." Mother? Yes, after all, she was its mother. She felt a growing closeness with the baby, something she had not counted on. She had made all her plans, but now she was slowly developing doubts. After all, it was her own flesh and blood, the baby couldn't help the way it was conceived. Should she go through with her original plan? Could she actually do it? Could she, or should she keep the baby? Should she give up this crazy plan of hers and go to a doctor and a hospital? She had enough money to pay the bills. Would she be able to manage? Lots of other women did. They managed to have a job *and* raise a child. Some women even managed to get an education. All these thoughts kept rolling through her mind and

kept confusing her. If she had the baby here as planned, what if something went wrong? Would she be able to get help, or would the baby or she die? Or maybe even both of them. She had studied the books so often, she knew exactly what to do, but would she still be so calm when the time came? What if she needed stitches? Well, people in the olden days healed without stitches, so she could too. If she decided to keep the baby, she'd have to register it. She could never go home again. She didn't know what to do.

She got up and paced the floor, feeling restless. She was thinking too much lately. She looked at her watch. It was two in the morning and she had been lying on her bed, thinking, just worrying, for hours. She didn't feel sleepy at all. Surely no one was up this late at night? Maybe she could watch a late movie to take her mind of things. She put the headphones on and turned on the TV. *An action movie. Good.* She watched the whole movie and finally felt tired enough to go to bed and go to sleep. Before she crawled under the blankets she peeked through the side of the drapes. It was snowing quite heavily. Susan sighed. She loved the snow. She saw a small light across the street. Someone was lighting a cigarette. She tried to see better through the thick snow flakes. A creepy little man was standing across the street. Why the hell would anyone be standing on the street at four in the morning in the snow smoking a cigarette? He seemed to be staring directly at her windows and she quickly let go of the curtain and crawled under the blankets. She shuddered.

Vancouver sure has some weird characters lurking around, she thought as she closed her eyes.

* * * *

It was December the first. Her room was very light when she woke up, and Susan knew that it had to be pretty white outside. Her neighbor was home and she could hear the bath running. She quickly ran her own tub, emptied the sink and filled it with clean water, and then relaxed in the hot bath. She was starting to feel so awkward. She lay back in the tub and watched her big belly move around.

I look just like a huge pear, she thought. She washed her long hair and felt regret when she heard the gurgle of the tub next door. It was emptying. She quickly cleaned the tub as the water slowly drained. The next time she would have to be a lot faster and wash her nightgown. She softly moved around on her knitted slippers and tidied up. Then she sat back to watch the soap operas she had been following. After they were over she got up and moved around. She had to keep walking or the delivery would be hard for her. Softly, she paced up and down the room. She looked at the pile of garbage bags, and counted nine. They were irritating her and she wished she could get rid of them. She wondered if she stayed up late enough, whether she could climb through the window without anyone noticing so she could get rid of the messy pile.

Her day went by as usual. TV, reading, and again studying the medical books. Evening came early now

that it was winter and when darkness fell she fell asleep fairly early and woke up in the early morning hours. She remembered the garbage and went to the window to peek outside. All was dark and quiet, and very white. It was still snowing. She didn't see anyone and all the windows were dark. Dare she risk it? She opened the window carefully and looked down. She was very close to the street. It wouldn't be so hard, if her belly would let her. She pulled on the baggy skirt over the nightgown, then her sweater and pulled the boots on. It was awkward, she had to sit on the floor and they were tight because her ankles were swollen. She softly put the bags under the window, so she would be able to reach in and grab them. It made her think how easy it would be for someone to break in to her room if she forgot to lock the window. They could just climb in from the street. In this neighborhood, if by any chance someone was still up and looking out their windows, they wouldn't take any notice anyway.

She opened the window as wide as she could, and managed to get her leg over the sill. Now to pull the other one over and slide down. She sat for a moment with her legs dangling, catching her breath when she heard a sound. Across the street was the same little creep she had noticed the night before. He was watching her. *Shit*, she thought, *I hadn't counted on him being there again. Where was he when I looked out before? I can't do it now. What if he tells someone?* She hesitated for a moment. *Maybe he's just a homeless, or a drunk. Maybe he just chose this place to hang out for the night...* But she decided against climbing out anyway,

just in case he was sober enough to tell someone. She tried to pull her legs back in again as fast as her body would allow her. Her belly was in the way. She watched the creep out of the corner of her eye. He was still standing there, his eyes seemingly focused on her antics. She softly slid back into her room and closed and locked her window. She fell on the bed, totally out of breath. Finally, she'd had the courage to do it and the little creep had to spoil it. What the heck was he doing there anyway? Obviously he was watching someone. Couldn't be her, no one knew where she was. Well, she would just have to continue the way she had been doing for the last weeks and keep the bags inside. After all, they didn't stink. They were just an eyesore and a nuisance. She suddenly remembered that she had forgotten to put the stick in the window's rail. Quickly, she picked it up and put it in the sliding rail and made sure it was jammed tightly. Then she took her clothes off and crawled back into her warm bed, her heart a staccato rhythm. It took her a while to get back to sleep, but eventually she managed to drift off.

* * * *

The creepy little man outside, threw his cigarette on the ground and put his foot on it. He put his hands in his pockets and smiled. Whistling a tune, he started to walk away. He would phone Mr. Stuart first thing in the morning because he finally had something to tell him, along with the news that his associate had located Donna Stuart.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Michael was gathering some papers in his study and getting ready to leave for the office, when the phone rang.

"You have a collect call from..."

"Sinclair."

"Please push one if you want to accept the call, push two if..." he quickly pushed the one to shut up the computerized voice.

"Well, Sinclair, I hope you have some news for me."

Sinclair told him what he had seen. That he had seen the tell tale light of a TV screen, that he had seen the drapes move and that he had witnessed the young lady trying to climb out of her window at four in the morning. "Very pregnant, I might add, sir." He also gave Michael Donna's address.

Mike was a little stunned. "Okay Sinclair, you've done well. Send me your bill. You'll have a check by return mail. You'll find a bonus in it as well, because you've done a good job and I thank you."

Mike flopped down in his chair. He picked up the phone and checked his appointments with his

secretary and asked her to call one of the other doctors on call to take over his hospital rounds with the excuse that he was coming down with the flu. None of his appointments were urgent, so he had her re-schedule them throughout the latter part of the week. He slowly took off his coat and jacket and poured himself a whisky. "It's a bit early for this Mike, but damn it, you need it." His hand shook as he brought the glass to his lips and downed it in one gulp. First things first. He phoned his lawyer and gave him Donna's address. That at least would get the divorce rolling. He had already signed all the necessary documents. All they had been waiting for was Donna's location.

"Are you okay, Mike? You sound a little nervous." Gordon was not only his lawyer, but also his friend.

"I'm fine, Gordie. I'm coming down with the flu I think." He put the phone back. That was done, now the other matter. He sat down and leaned back. A plan was slowly forming in his mind. If he could get his urgent patients dealt with later this week, he could take a month off. He'd not taken holidays for a long time, so he was sure that his associates wouldn't gripe. He grabbed his briefcase and took out his day-timer and quickly started re-arranging things. At the end of February, he had to go to a medical convention in Europe. If he took the rest of December and part of January off, he would still have time to deal with his caseload. Today was the third of December, Tuesday. If he worked Saturday morning, he could get it all done and take off on Sunday. Vancouver wasn't that far from Abbotsford, about an hour's drive, if the

roads were clear. He phoned his secretary again and started re-arranging his schedule with her. She was surprised.

"You're going to be away for Christmas, Dr. Stuart?"

"Eh...yes...I've located my wife. It seems she is about to deliver our child and doesn't want it, so I've agreed to take the child in return for a divorce." He had started the ball rolling. The lie was out. Now that he had started it, he had to continue. If he couldn't convince Susannah to give up her baby, he could always get out of it easy enough by saying that Donna had changed her mind, or that she had lost the baby. Once his appointments were re-scheduled, he sat back to think. How was he going to convince Susannah to give him her child? What if she really took off in the meantime? Maybe he should have Sinclair watch her, until he could get to Vancouver himself. He phoned Sinclair and gave him instructions. He also had to deal with his mother. He phoned her and asked her to come over to the house. She said she would be there in half an hour, and it gave him time to think some more.

So Donna was also in Vancouver. Apparently she had gotten into a car accident whilst under the influence and had lost her license. She was being sued for damages. She was still with the same man, still an alcoholic and she had pawned all her jewelry. That was how Sinclair's associate had found her. If he offered her money, she would sign the application for a birth certificate. It'd be a fair trade. To do it that way, would avoid a lot of legal complications. He had

a buddy in Vancouver Hospital who would probably sign it for him as the attending doctor. But, to convince the girl, that was a problem he hadn't found a solution to yet. And how would he approach her? What would he say to her? Oh, hi, I'm the father of your child? I'm the guy who raped you? What was she doing anyway, climbing out of her window in the middle of the night? What if she had hurt herself? That was *his* child, *his* son she was carrying.

Michael felt a sudden burst of excitement. He so badly wanted a son and now he could make his wish come true. It could be a girl, but then who cared. Boy or girl, it didn't matter. The child was his and his wish was coming true. He would finally have a child of his own. What if she refused to give up the baby? Nonsense, why would she be hiding like this? She was obviously up to something. Maybe she planned to smother it at birth. One often read about those things—babies found in garbage bags, in public toilets, or in dumpsters. No, then she surely would have had an abortion? Nowadays such drastic measures weren't necessary. There were abortion clinics all over the place. *But it still happens*, a little voice spoke in his mind. He took the picture out of his wallet. She didn't look cold-blooded enough to do something so cruel. It was strange though, very strange. He was sure that she was planning something and he didn't have a clue what it could be, or... how to solve the problem of making himself known to her. He calculated her time to be in the beginning of January, so he had lots of time yet.

He also decided to rent a car instead of taking his

own and leave the station wagon for his mother to use.

The doorbell chimed breaking his train of thought. He would deal with the rest when he got to Vancouver. His mother came walking in.

"I'm sorry, Mom, I should have made some coffee." He pulled a chair up for her and gave her a hug. "Sit down. I'll put a pot on right now."

"No, son, that's all right. I just had some. What's wrong? You sounded rather anxious on the phone."

"Sit down and I'll tell you. Mom, I won't be home for Christmas."

She started to protest.

"No, hear me out, please. I've located Donna."

His mother looked up at him with surprise written all over her face, her blue eyes filled with caution. He'd always admired his spunky mother. She'd been so disappointed in his marriage and was happy when Donna left for good.

"You're not getting back together, are you?" she asked carefully. She didn't like Donna. She never had, but always remained polite to her for her son's sake.

"Good grief, Mom, no, but eh...she's pregnant, and having the baby soon. She doesn't want it, so I'm going there to make sure she doesn't do anything stupid. She wants me to take it." There, the lie was out. He hated to lie to his mother, but if his plan was to work, it had to be. His mother took off her glasses and stared at him for a moment. Then she calculated on her fingers.

"Are you sure the child is yours, Michael?"

"Yes, I figured it out. It has to be."

"Are you sure the baby will be all right, with her drinking and doing drugs and all that?"

"Mom, yes, I've thought of that, but it's my child and I want it."

"Michael, nothing could make me happier than to finally be a grandmother, you know that. I've waited a long time for this, but how will you manage? You're always so busy."

"At first I'll need you, Mom. Surely you could cope, after all, you had me."

"Yes, son, but you're all I had. Having only had one baby, I'm not really very experienced and it's been thirty two years."

"Mom, I trust you. It will come back to you, you'll see."

"Well, I suppose, but are you sure this will all work out okay?"

Michael smiled. "Mom, I love you, now let's go and pick a room for the nursery and I'll give you carte blanche to decorate and buy everything we need. Of course it has to be near my bedroom and close to the nanny's room. Definitely new carpet. A nice soft color—baby carpet. Come on, let's go. Cancel whatever you had up your sleeve for today, because this is the only day I can go shopping for my son. I've got a busy schedule the rest of the week to get all my work done and urgent patient appointments dealt with. I'm leaving on Sunday."

CHAPTER NINE

Susan was getting aggravated. Every night that little Creep had been standing there across the street, watching the building, her apartment, she was sure of it. She was getting so big now, that it would be impossible for her to climb out of the window anymore. Just the thought of the creep being there haunted her. She wondered who else he could be spying on. Maybe an unfaithful wife or husband? But his eyes seemed riveted on her window...

She had not been able to take a bath for a few days because the person next door was either away or had moved out, so she had to make do with washing at the sink. She'd noticed the vacancy sign out the front when she peeked through the slit in the drapes. She felt dirty and sweaty, but she was stuck until someone moved in next door or her neighbor came back.

"Not many people move around Christmas," she mumbled to herself. The food was really starting to get to her, too. She would do anything for a hot meal.

If only the little creep wasn't there all the time, she thought. What was she thinking of anyway. She was

like a huge beach ball. Time seemed to be going slower than ever and the baby was growing fast. It scared her a little for he had to be a big baby. She marked each day on the calendar. It was December the seventh, Sunday. She had a month to go, or maybe more. First babies were often late, it told her in the books. It was getting close to Christmas and she was feeling very homesick. Even though Christmas at home had usually been quiet, she had always loved it—the atmosphere, the tree, the candlelight service at church, and the traditional singing at home, and then the opening of their gifts on Christmas Eve. Even going to church together on Christmas morning was always special. In her mind she could almost smell the turkey. This was her first Christmas away from home and what a position to be in. Her lonely existence was really getting to her. It was evening, and as usual she turned off the TV and picked up a book and settled back on her bed to read. The baby was so active and really pushing on her bladder that she felt that she had to go to the bathroom every five minutes.

While she was reading, she heard noises in the room next to her. She rolled off the bed and tried to peek carefully through the slit. She saw a couple of suitcases on the sidewalk. Someone was moving in. *It has to be next door, please let it be next door*, she thought. When she heard the door open and close and heard movements in the room, she heaved a sigh of relief. Would that person take a shower or a bath that evening? She fervently hoped so. She had also spotted the little creep across the street and wondered if he

was ever going to leave. She crossed her fingers as she listened to the noises next door. Putting her ear to the wall, it sounded like someone unpacking. She could hear drawers opening and closing and the closet doors. Suddenly the TV was switched on, very loud. Good, that would kill any little noises she might make. The person next door was allowed to be as loud as he or she wanted. She didn't care. *Use the damn bathroom*, she thought. And as if in answer to her thought, the new tenant next door flushed the toilet.

"Yes, yes..." she waddled to her toilet and flushed it quickly. She hoped that it wouldn't plug, but she had been very careful with paper. She held her breath. For a moment she was afraid that it might. The water rose dangerously to the top, but then a few bubbles and it went down. She quickly sprinkled bleach in the bowl and pulled a brush through it. She was lucky someone had moved in. She would have had to flush it eventually and risk someone hearing her and the landlord coming to check who was in her room. She waddled back to the bed and picked up her book again. She actually felt tired and knew that she should go to sleep, but the TV next door was so loud that she wouldn't be able to. It was just as well that she wanted the noise, or she would be banging on the wall. She tried to concentrate on her book and get back into the story.

The TV next door was still on loud at two in the morning and she finally put the book away and tried to go to sleep by putting her head under the blankets. It didn't work. After half an hour she had to go to the

bathroom again. There was so much pressure on her bladder that she had to go constantly. Again, she waddled back to the bed. She felt like a waddling duck. Before she crawled into bed, she peeked outside. *Gone, the creep's finally gone. Maybe he finally needed some sleep.* She cuddled under the blankets and tried to find a comfortable position, which wasn't easy anymore.

After she finally made herself as comfortable as she could and started to doze off, there was a sound near the window. It was so loud she could hear it over the noise of the TV next door. It startled her. She thought of the creep and got out of bed as fast as her fat body would let her. She stood behind the curtain, listening. There wasn't a sound outside. Maybe it had been a cat. Should she look? She waited a while longer, but heard nothing. She peeked carefully and saw nothing outside her window. She opened her window just enough to poke her head outside. The smell of pizza drifted into her nostrils. Someone had dropped a large pizza box, right under her window. The smell teased her nostrils and made her stomach growl. She noticed the footprints in the snow. Maybe a drunk had dropped it. Well, whatever, it was hers now. She quickly snatched the box up. Her belly was in the way, but sideways she could just reach it. She quickly closed the window and put the pizza on the table. There was no bill attached to it. She lifted the lid, and sniffed the delicious aroma. For a second, the thought entered her mind that the food might have been tampered with, but then she thought, *I don't care*, and delved into it. It was the best pizza she had ever

tasted. It had everything on it, ground beef, salami, peppers, pineapple and lots of cheese. She was sure that it was the best meal she had ever eaten and she was almost sorry that she couldn't eat all of it. She closed the box. The pizza would still taste good in the morning, even cold.

Susan felt full and satisfied. "Thanks, whoever you are, you silly drunk," she laughed softly. After the warm meal, she actually slept quite well. The baby was quiet for a change and the TV next door had been turned off.

* * * *

Mike softly closed the window and smiled. She'd taken the bait for the second time and picked up the bag of food. What the girl was up to by hibernating in her room, he had no idea, but she couldn't have much food in the house, not nourishing food. She did exactly what Mike had intended her to do. He couldn't leave food every night without arousing suspicion so he'd buy enough to last her a few days. He still didn't know how he was going to approach her and he had been wracking his brain to find a way. As long as the food disappeared, he would know that she was still there. He would continue to drop the food under her window on an irregular basis, always making sure she would have sufficient to last her a day or two. Satisfied with his plan that was so far going so well, he turned off the TV and went to bed.

* * * *

She woke up the next morning from her neighbor's TV and the sound of water running in his or her tub. She didn't know how fast to get to the bathroom. Finally she was able to take a bath. She relaxed in the hot water, washed her hair and after drying herself, washed her nightgowns and hung them on hangers to dry. Underwear she didn't even bother with anymore. None of it fit, anyway. She cleaned the sink and filled it with new water, and cleaned the tub and toilet. Her neighbor was taking a long time. She could have stayed in the bath a lot longer. She stood in front of the mirror and brushed her long hair. When she was done, she looked at her protruding belly, her breasts, which had become very large, as well as her nipples. Would she ever have a normal figure again? Her skin would be stretched out of all proportion if she kept growing like a house. Yanking the nightie back over her head, she relaxed on the bed. She had the left-over pizza for breakfast and it tasted good, even though it was cold.

She spent her day the same as always. At times she got a little irritated with the noisy person next door, but if she had her headphones on, it didn't bother her.

That night the same thing happened. This time she found a bag containing Chinese food. She loved the stir fry vegetables, the rice and the pork. She pigged out first and thought about the strange appearance of the food later. It had to be her new neighbor who was dropping his or her food. He had to be a real drunk. That's why he was so noisy. The loud TV, the late hours, bathing in the middle of the day. He or she had

to be so pissed out of their mind that they didn't even notice or remember their missing food. It was the only conclusion she could come up with. What on earth he was doing by the windows in the middle of the night, she had no idea, unless he could barely walk and had to hold the walls to get to his destination. There was plenty left, so she saved some for the next day.

Susan was very grateful for the drunk living next to her. The only thing, which still bothered her, was the pile of garbage bags. Besides cans, she now had chicken bones, pork bones etc. in them. She triple bagged each bag containing food that could spoil and stink, but she could still smell a faint odor after a few days. Well, it was almost over. It was already December the twenty fourth, Christmas Eve, and she was determined not to let herself get down in the dumps. She had some Kentucky Fried chicken left, and salad, and she munched on that as watched TV. No one that evening would take any notice of her room. A lot of people would be away for Christmas, and whoever wasn't, would probably be out to parties. So she watched Christmas shows and a good movie. The drunk next door was obviously home too, for his TV was very loud, as usual.

He's probably passed out already, she thought. After midnight, she went to bed, but she couldn't sleep. Once again she heard the familiar sound outside her window and she carefully picked up the bag. This time it contained turkey, vegetables, potatoes and a surprise, Hägen-daz ice cream. *Christmas dinner,* she thought, *I'm eating someone else's Christmas dinner at one in the morning.* She devoured the ice cream as if

she'd never had it before in her life. She had to eat all of it, or it would melt. Most of the dinner, she left for the next day. She felt a little guilty. She probably ate the drunk's dinner, but then he would probably go to the Salvation Army on Christmas Day. They always put on a dinner for street people and drunks.

By two thirty in the morning, she still couldn't sleep. She didn't hear a sound anywhere, not even next door. Suddenly the thought of spending Christmas day locked in her room stifled her and brought tears to her eyes. She had to get out, even if it was only for half an hour. She had not seen the little creep again, so should she try? Surely no one was up now? She looked outside. All she saw was the still white street. She could see snowflakes still coming down in the light of the street lamps. She didn't know if she could get out of the window, but she would try. She put on the widest skirt she had, the only one with an elastic waist. It barely fit around her huge belly. She put on a big sweater and then tackled her boots. It was quite a chore to put them on. She could hardly reach her feet and her ankles were very swollen. She put on her jacket. She couldn't button it, but she didn't care. Her sweater was a thick one. It would keep out the cold. She pulled a chair over in front of the window and carefully climbed on the sill. Her legs were dangling outside and the gush of cold air underneath the skirt felt good. Very slowly she slid down and landed on the soft snow. It worked. She was outside. She breathed in the clean, crisp cold air and tilted her face up and looked at the sky. She let the snowflakes caress her face and it felt great. She

looked around and didn't see a soul, then carefully closed the window and waddled into the night.

She looked at all the Christmas lights on balconies, lobbies, store windows and it gave her a bit of Christmas feeling, then continued on to the big church not too far away. She'd often looked at it on her way to work, tempted to go in and talk to a minister... a priest, as it was a Catholic church, but she never did.

There was huge tree in front of the church and it was beautifully decorated with lots of little lights. She walked over to a bench near the tree and sat down. Her thoughts drifted to home, singing Christmas carols around the tree and she softly started to sing *Silent Night*. She came to the line, *Holy Infant so tender and mild*, and paused. Her throat constricted and her eyes pooled, the tears soaking her cold cheeks mingling with the snowflakes. It was then that she made up her mind that she would keep her baby. On Boxing Day, she would find a clinic, somewhere, and she would go and see a doctor and have the baby properly, in a hospital. Suddenly, she felt love flow through her heart for her unborn child. A love, which she didn't realize had been growing slowly and now finally surfaced. Without realizing it, she'd bonded with the baby. By thinking of baby Jesus, she knew this baby was part of her, this was a creation by God and she promised that she would be the best mother any child could have. Peace washed through her and happiness. Gone was the depression and tension. It was as if Jesus Himself had come down from Heaven to touch her. Unconsciously, she patted her belly.

"It'll be okay, little baby, everything is going to be fine now."

* * * *

Mike was watching her from a little distance. He had heard her window open and when he looked out, he saw her carefully climbing out of the window. He knew exactly when she was up and when she was resting, for with his stethoscope, he picked up every sound in her room. He had even pushed his bed against the wall and slept with his stethoscope on and taped to the wall. As he watched her walking down the street, he noticed how big she was. *Good Lord, she's having one huge baby*, he thought. He decided to follow her to make sure that she would be all right. She never noticed him, or heard his window open and close, or his feet as they landed on the snow when he catapulted through the open window. The snow deadened his footsteps and he stayed close to the walls of buildings. He watched her sit down near the tree, and heard her sing. He also saw the peace and tranquility wash over her face. As she got up to leave, he followed her again. It was a fairly long hike back and he didn't want anything to happen to her. In this neighborhood, one never knew.

* * * *

Susan wasn't worried about any shady characters. She was happy, but, as she was making her way back, she suddenly felt a burst of water down her legs, accompanied by a cramp. She stopped and found her

breath. It went away again. She leaned against a wall. "Oh no, I've started labor," she whispered as she slowly continued the trek back to her building. She had to get back to her room and call an ambulance.

She got to the window, but she realized that she couldn't get back up without something to stand on. She'd have to use the front entrance door. Fortunately her keys were still in her coat pocket where she had left them when she had locked her door behind her in October. She'd had no need for them all these months. She looked at her watch. It was five in the morning. No one would be up this early on Christmas Day. She softly unlocked the front door and tried to get to her room as quietly and fast as her awkward body allowed. She unlocked her door and closed it quietly. She had to get cleaned up first. She felt wet and sticky. After she had washed, she would call an ambulance. The ambulance would cause a commotion in the neighborhood, curiosity, and questions from her landlord, but she didn't care anymore. Usually first babies took a long time, according to the books, so she had time to get ready.

As she took off her coat, she had another contraction, a lot worse than the one before. She sat down and took a big breath. *That was rather fast*, she thought. She pulled off her wet skirt and sweater and washed herself. While she was in the bathroom, she had another contraction. She gasped and hung on to the towel rack. *Help, I have to get help*, she thought. She hung on to the towel rack and waited for the pain to subside. *This is wrong, it's totally wrong, they're not supposed to be coming this fast*. This was her first baby.

Labor was supposed to take a long time. After the contraction subsided, she remembered. She had had backaches for two days. "Oh no, I've been in labor all along," she whispered as she remembered what she had read in the books about back labor. She started to make her way to the bed and collapsed on the floor as another contraction tore at her body. She had the urge to push. The baby, it was coming and she had to get help, but how? It hurt, it hurt like hell and she felt dizzy and faint. Somehow she managed to pull herself onto the bed and through her haze of pain, she vaguely saw a figure approach. Her mind registered a gown, a mask and green, lots of green. A cool cloth was placed on her forehead, and a needle pricked her arm. She felt herself drifting away. A contraction, she had to push, push...two dark eyes looking at her, someone bending between her legs, a green cap, she felt herself sinking...the dark eyes the last thing she saw as she passed out, eyes that were engraved in her memory...

CHAPTER TEN

Michael had followed Susan back to the boarding house. He had noticed her sudden stop and her hands holding her belly and the big breath she took, and how she slowly continued on and he knew that she was in trouble. “Good Lord, she’s started labor,” he muttered to himself. He increased his pace and followed her more closely. She never noticed him. He saw her enter through the door, rather than the window, and he wondered what she would do. Once she was in the hospital and had had the baby, he’d have to approach her. Her labor had started early, much earlier than he’d calculated. For a moment the thought entered his mind that he’d imagined taking her virginity, that she’d had intercourse with someone before him, but had been just very tight. But he didn’t care. He wanted a child, someone to care for, to love, a small human being who would love him unconditionally in return. No, he hadn’t imagined anything, he felt sure of that. With that thought, he worried about the premature infant, although she wasn’t that premature. Perhaps two or three weeks.

He expected a taxi to pull up, or an ambulance, but nothing came. As he went back to his room, he listened at her door for a moment, but all he heard was running water, so he presumed she was washing herself. He paced restlessly up and down his room. Finally, when he saw nothing happening outside, he held his stethoscope to the wall and he heard her moan and moan again. "She's in trouble." Thanking the gods that he'd put his garb in his medical bag, for some unknown reason, which he'd wondered about, he grabbed his gown, mask and cap and pulled them on with the speed he was used to. He scrubbed his hands and pulled on a pair of gloves. All this only took moments—he'd had to do it so many times. He grabbed his bag and hurried to her door. He heard a loud moan. He wondered if she had locked the door and carefully felt the knob. Good, in her hurry to get inside, she had forgotten to lock the door. She was on the bed. He could vaguely make out her shape in the semi-dark of the room. He didn't want to scare her, so he carefully approached the bed. She hardly noticed him. She stared at him with scared, glazed eyes. She was babbling, moaning and was pushing, boy was she pushing. He quickly gave her a shot of Demerol. It would help her relax and take away some of the pain which was worse, because she was so scared and tense. He felt her belly and timed the contractions. They came fast and strong. Barely a minute between them. As he opened her legs, he saw that she was fully dilated and he could see the baby's head. As Susan gave one more push, with a loud groan the head came out. He had arrived there just in time.

He gently eased the baby out. The baby was breathing, but not crying. He quickly cleaned the little mouth of mucus and gazed down at the squirming infant. He was a beautiful, perfect little boy. The baby was small, probably no more than five pounds but by the looks of it, healthy. He gently laid the baby between her legs on the bed. He didn't need to help her dispel the afterbirth for it soon followed and Michael clipped the cord.

He let out a breath of relief and checked her quickly to see if he got all of the placenta when he suddenly felt another contraction. Surely, it couldn't be? A deep moan from Susan, and Michael was holding another baby, a little girl this time. "Good Lord, Susannah, you had twins." He had no time to think, he had to work fast. He suctioned the mucus from the baby's mouth and laid her on the bed, too. Susan's eyes were closed and he made a sudden decision. He took a hypodermic out of his bag and gave her a heavy sedative. She would sleep for at least twelve hours and it would give him plenty of time. He eased the second placenta out and looked at it. It, too, was intact. He noticed the box of garbage bags and pulled one out and disposed of both the afterbirths into the bag, as well as his soiled gloves.

He went to the bathroom and cleaned the sink with bleach and then filled it with warm water. Gently he awkwardly washed each baby. He was used to dealing with adults, and certainly not washing them either, so handling such tiny human beings, so fragile, was very strange to him. They were good, they didn't cry. He wrapped them in a towel and laid them on

the bed near Susannah while he searched the room for something to dress the infants in, or wrap them. He found a suitcase with some diapers and sleepers and couple of baby blankets. He dressed them both and wrapped them snugly in the blankets and laid them on the couch. He examined the girl. She was fine. She needed no stitches because the babies were quite small. He looked around for a bucket or a basin and found one. He bleached it first, then filled it with warm water.

After turning on the lights he looked down at the naked girl on the bed. She looked so young, so vulnerable. Little drops of perspiration still beaded her forehead. After taking off her skirt and sweater, he washed her from head to toe and placed towels underneath her. He carefully disinfected her pubic area and applied a pad. He had found everything he needed in the suitcase, plus a small carved box filled with trinkets. He opened the box and looked inside. Fingering a gold chain, he noticed the locket attached to it and opened it. The picture inside was faded, but it was almost a replica of Susannah. Without thinking, he pocketed the chain and locket and put the box on the shelf in the closet. He closed the empty suitcase and looked for clothing to put on her. After going through the closet and the chest of drawers and only coming up with some long skirts and sweaters, he decided to investigate the second suitcase. It was packed with nice modern clothing, pretty nightwear and panties. He dressed her in one of the new nighties. He also found clean sheets in the bathroom cupboard. He wasn't that practiced in making a bed

with a body on it—that was usually the nurse’s job. As he rolled her on her side, he made a mental note that she had been well prepared for the birth of her baby and presumed she’d planned to have the baby at home all along and then get rid of it somewhere. The mattress was covered with plastic. He pulled it all off and stuffed all the soiled linen and plastic in a garbage bag and then re-made the bed and tried to make her as comfortable as possible. He even brushed her long dark curls. When he was finished, he pulled the blankets over her, tucked her in and cleaned up everything. He threw all the garbage bags out of the window, jumped out and brought them to the bin then came back in through the front door of the building. He went to his room and quickly packed his things. His car was parked right in the front, so that was convenient. After throwing the suitcase and bag in the trunk, he started the car and turned on the heater and left it running to warm up. He could hardly put two newborn infants in an icy cold car.

He went back into the building, to Susannah’s room, and checked her once more, but she was sleeping soundly. Then he quickly went to his own room to do one last check. Lastly he fetched the twins. The car was nice and warm and to be sure, he wrapped them both in his heavy overcoat before he put the seat belt around them. He looked at his watch. It wasn’t even seven yet. He could be back by noon if the roads had been cleared. At the last minute he remembered to call his mother.

“Mom, she delivered this morning at home, and I’m bringing the baby home right now. Is everything

ready?" When his mother confirmed that all was ready, he cut off the questions quickly. "Good, I'll see you soon."

The drive home was smooth. There was very little traffic on the road, and the roads were white, but not too slippery. He noticed the salt trucks already salting in some areas. His mother was waiting for him as he carefully carried his bundle into the house. He went straight to the bright new nursery and his mother followed him impatiently. As he laid the bundle on the change table and gently opened the coat, his mother's mouth fell open.

"Michael, there's two of them."

The little boy was asleep, but the girl's eyes were open and squinting at the bright light.

"Oh, Michael, they're beautiful. Twins, who would ever have thought that horrible woman could produce such exquisite babies..."

Mike proceeded to examine them properly and thoroughly this time and found them both to be in perfect health, just a little small. They were very pretty babies for newborns and each had a fuzz of jet-black hair. He gave the baby girl to his mother to hold and proudly looked down at his son.

"When they're dressed I can't tell who's the boy or the girl." He grinned. "Mom, I'm going to leave you with them for a few hours. There are a few things I have to take care of."

His mother started to protest, but Michael wouldn't let her. "You'll be fine with them. They'll probably sleep for a while, and if they wake up, I'm sure you know how to feed and change them. I'll be

back in time for Christmas dinner." With that, he left the nursery.

Before he went back to the car, he grabbed the cooler and raided the fridge. He threw anything he could find in the cooler, fruit, milk, ham, bread, butter, fruit juice and he would pick up some other things on the way and a bag of ice. On his typewriter he typed a quick note, and he remembered to grab some pills to dry up her milk, and some sleeping pills. He put the cooler in the car. He would look for an open service station in Vancouver. One was more likely to find an open one there, as well as a restaurant.

He was right. There were a few places open. He bought a block of ice for the cooler, filled up the car, and then he searched for an open restaurant. He found one, but they wouldn't sell him a meal.

"Hey man, people are eating Christmas dinner here. This is not a fast food place." He waived a one hundred dollar bill under the manager's nose, and the manager quickly told him that they could make an exception and shouted some orders to his waiter. Within minutes they had a platter ready. It was a Christmas dinner wrapped in foil.

"Keep the plate, Merry Christmas," the manager said while happily accepting the money.

Michael drove back to the boarding house. As he suspected, Susannah was still sound asleep. He went through the room and bathroom once more and this time cleaned everything properly. His green gown was still on the floor. He picked it up and disposed of it in a garbage bag, along with the rest of the baby

clothes. He only left whatever she would need for herself. He placed the note and the pills on the nightstand next to her then pulled the coffee table over next to the bed and placed the dinner on it, as well as a carton of orange juice and some cutlery. He had picked up some more milk and juice at the service station and he knew that she would be all right for a few days, and by then she would be back on her feet and could continue with her life.

He pulled the blankets back to examine her one more time to make sure she was okay. He pulled the nightie up, then pulled down her panties and looked at the pad. No excessive bleeding. That was good. Then he took the panties off, spread her legs and carefully examined between the folds. The lips and vaginal area were still swollen, but he'd been right. No stitches needed. He looked down at her, for the first time seeing her as a man and not a doctor. She looked like Sleeping Beauty with her black curls tumbling over the pillow, her pretty, heart-shaped face, which had returned to its natural color and a faint pink blush on her cheeks. He looked at her beautiful breasts, which showed through the thin nightie, her body, which looked slim again and young and he felt a vague stirring within his body. He didn't know why, but he bent down and kissed her gently on the lips. For a fleeting moment, his hand rested on her breast causing his cock to jump to attention. His finger circled her enlarged nipples and more than anything, he wanted to bend down and suck them, to caress her breasts, to hold each one and squeeze them until she'd moan in ecstasy. Her belly, still slightly

swollen was free of stretch marks and would return to normal quite fast. His fingers strayed to the black ringlets that hid her clit from his eyes. He twirled one and felt hot desire to touch her clit, but he yanked back his hand. He imagined her blue eyes looking up at him in adoration, her hands on his now throbbing cock. For the first time since Donna, he felt real desire for a woman. But she wasn't a woman yet, not in that sense of the word. "Thank you, Susannah, thank you for my children. I wish we could have met under different circumstances, but then, you're still so young. You have a whole life to live yet..." he said softly as he stroked her cheek. He stood up abruptly, pulled her panties back up, inserted a clean pad, pulled the nightie down, and covered her with the blankets. She would be all right now. He placed a small pile of money next to the note and the pills, took one last look at her and left the room.

He couldn't lock the door without taking the keys with him, so he only locked the bottom knob. He knocked on the landlord's door. The man wasn't home, probably out for Christmas. He took his day-timer out of his pocket and scribbled a note giving notice. He was paid up till the end of January, so it should be okay. He threw the garbage bag in the bin and finally felt at ease once he was behind the steering wheel and on his way home.

It was strange how everything had fallen right into place. Even Donna, when he had approached her, had signed the papers without protest. Of course the five thousand dollars cash he had put on the table had been a very good bribe. She had been drunk and a

total wreck. She had no interest in what she was signing. All she wanted was the money. An old friend who worked in Vancouver Hospital had signed the birth registration for him without asking any questions. Everything was done. The twins were his and now he could go home and enjoy his new family and Susannah could get on with her life. He had to name the little ones. Susannah had played a big part in producing his son and daughter and it was a pretty name, so Susannah it would be for the girl. Susannah, and Maria after his mother. James Stephen for the little boy. Now all he had to do was mail the papers to birth registry and everything would be legal. As he pulled into the driveway of his house, he smiled contentedly and eagerly jumped out of the car to go and spend time with his son and daughter.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Susan struggled hard to open her eyes. Boy, was she ever tired. What time was it? She'd had one hell of a dream. She dreamt that she had the baby and all this green stuff surrounding her, suffocating her. It was too weird. She sat up and felt a little dizzy. She turned on the night light and out of habit her hands went to her belly. There was no belly. It was flat and soft. It was no dream. It was real!

She swung her legs out of bed and almost hit the coffee table. After pushing it away with her feet, she stood up and swayed for a moment. She steadied herself on the rail of the bed. What the hell was going on? Her eyes scanned the room. Everything was clean and tidy. The pile of garbage was gone. In its place was a big red cooler, and she had no idea how it got there. She noticed the dinner on the coffee table and a note, which was on the nightstand. It was typed. She picked it up and read it.

'I'm sorry, your baby died at birth. I got rid of the body, so no one ever needs to know. You needed no stitches, so you'll be fine. Just rest for a few days,

make sure you take the little pills I left for you or your milk will come in and you'll be sore. I also left you some sedatives in case you can't sleep, and there is some money for you too. Good luck, kind regards, Doctor J.'

Sitting back on the bed, she tried to comprehend it all. Who was this doctor? Where had he come from? Had she called him? The last thing she remembered was being in the bathroom and having contractions, one after another. What was the green she kept remembering? She noticed she had on one of her new nightgowns. Whoever he was, had looked after her well. But since when did doctors leave money for a patient? A cooler filled with food?

Suddenly reality hit her. Dead, her baby was dead. Without a funeral? Without a name? The tears started and she buried her face in the pillow and wept. It had all been for nothing and this was her punishment. She should have gone to a doctor and had her baby in a hospital. She'd had a Christmas child, but it was taken away from her that same day.

She cried and cried until the sedative, which was still in her system, allowed her to fall asleep again. The food was left untouched on the coffee table. She woke on Boxing Day, and stayed in bed for a while, hoping that it had all been a nightmare. But, as she once again put her hand on her belly, she knew it was not. She felt so empty and she missed the kicking, the constant movement.

She sat up with a start. "Bullshit," she almost shouted. "My baby moved yet when I was having contractions. He's not dead. It's a lie." Someone had

stolen her baby, that's what had happened. She'd heard about black market babies, which were sold for a lot of money. She would go to the police. She got up and looked for a skirt. All her big old skirts and sweaters were gone. Instead, all her new clothes had been carefully hung in the closet and placed in the drawers. *What a thoughtful baby snatcher*, she thought. She remembered the little freak who had been constantly watching the building. Perhaps he was the one. She shuddered. She couldn't imagine that little creep touching her in such an intimate fashion.

She went to the bathroom and had a bath and changed her pad. There wasn't much flow, and she felt fine. She felt a little tired, but apart from that, she felt normal. She pulled on a pair of her new jeans. They were a little snug, but then she wasn't used to clothes that fit. She put on the pretty white sweater she had bought. After brushing her hair and putting on some make-up, she looked in the mirror. She was pleased with what she saw. Indeed, no-one would ever know to look at her, that she'd had a child.

She picked up the money from the nightstand and counted it. Twenty-five-hundred dollars. This was all crazy. Doctors didn't leave tips, nor did they get rid of bodies. Something was really fishy here. She had to go to the cops. As she started to put on her coat, she stopped. They would ask her a lot of embarrassing questions. She slowly went back into the room and sat down.

"Think Susie, think." The cops were always finding newborn babies, sometimes dead. What if they had recently found one? Then they would start

investigating her and if, by chance, that baby had the same blood type, they could even blame her. She decided against going to the police. What the heck could she do? She had a gut feeling that her baby was alive, not only because she had still felt movement, but just a feeling she had deep down. Everything was too strange. Why couldn't she remember actually having the baby? Why had she slept so long and slept through someone cleaning up her room and washing her? She had to have been drugged. Why would anyone drug her? Who on earth even knew she was pregnant, besides her parents and Scott, and they didn't know where she was. Who on earth would leave that much money, except as payment for the baby? She would search and she would find her child. Where would she start, though? Should she look for the little creep? How could she look for him, she didn't have a clue who he was. On a sudden impulse she went to the phone in the hall and placed a collect call to her parents. Her mother answered the phone and she got a lump in her throat when she heard her mother's voice.

"Susan? Susan honey? Is it really you? Oh Susan, come home. We've been so worried about you." Her father had picked up the extension in the store, and he said gruffly: "Susan, I'm sorry I flew off the handle, come on home, girl."

She cried. They did not ask her about the baby and she didn't volunteer any information. She promised that she would visit them soon. She needed time to think, to get her mind in order and to form some kind of a plan. The red cooler was another puzzle. She

opened it and looked inside to see quite a lot of food and a melting block of ice. She poured herself a glass of cold milk. The cold dinner on the table didn't really appeal to her, so she put it away in the cooler. Maybe she would eat some of it later. She still had little appetite. She was just very thirsty. Maybe she should go for a walk. After all, all the stores were open today with their big sales. She also needed some personal items, so she put on her new ski jacket and as she was going out, she ran into the landlord.

"Ms. Davies, I didn't know that you were back."

"I came back this morning," she lied. "I won't be staying long though. I'm planning to go away."

"Pity," he shook his head. "I hate to lose good tenants. Not like the noisy fellow next door to you. He only stayed a couple of weeks. Left again yesterday. Very noisy man. I had to knock on his door several times to ask him to turn his TV down. I'm glad he's gone. Got nothing but complaints about him. Not that he didn't pay his rent mind you. Didn't even ask for any money back when he left and he paid me a few months in advance plus a damage deposit."

Susan thought about what the landlord just told her. Was this just co-incidence? Yesterday, that's when she'd had her baby. On impulse she asked, "Was he a creepy little fellow?"

"Well, depends what you call creepy. He wasn't so little."

"Where was he from, do you know? What was his name?"

The landlord looked at her showing surprise at her interest in a total stranger. "Well, eh...I don't know

where he was from Missy. He drove a fancy car. Had a Clearbrook dealership name on it. I know, cause we're not used to fancy cars around here, so I took a good look."

"What color was it?"

"Eh...let me think. Blue maybe, or grey, or was it green? I don't know, I'm colorblind, you see. Could have been red, for all I know." He roared at his own joke. "His name was John Smith, at least that's what he registered under. As long as they pay their rent, I don't ask questions." With that, he walked away.

Susan's mind was spinning. Did she have a lead? This couldn't be co-incidence. Clearbrook wasn't a small town. She needed more information than what he had given her, if that was indeed where the man had come from. She would talk to the landlord again when she came back from shopping.

She roamed around the stores for a while. After she bought some really nice clothes at half price, she went to the drugstore to buy some deodorant and toothpaste. She spotted a breast pump, and on impulse, bought it, too. While she was walking, she had made up her mind that she was going to try and keep her milk. She didn't know if it would work, but she would try anyway for as long as possible. When she found her child, she wanted to be able to breastfeed him or her. She also suddenly realized that she didn't even know if she had a boy or a girl.

She picked up a burger and fries and took them back to her room with her. The warm food made her feel better, and she also took a vitamin. Maybe it would help her heal faster and get her strength back.

Later, she tried the landlord again, but he was drunk. He laughed when she asked what the man looked like, to give her a description.

“Ha, I told you I am color blind. Maybe blond, brown or grey. I don’t know, missy.”

He slammed the door in her face. Well, so much for that. Surely the man could tell the difference between dark or blonde? Dark eyes or light eyes? She didn’t have much to go on, but something was better than nothing. She was convinced that this so-called John Smith had something to do with it all. How had he known about her though? It was a puzzle and probably would remain so, unless she could find her baby. If she ever would. She started to cry again so she took one of the sedatives that night to help her get a good night’s rest. She need to have a clear mind the next day and be fully rested if she was going to actively search for her child...

* * * *

The next morning, she decided to pack up and go home. She would spend New Year’s Eve at home with her family and friends, and after that she would start her search. The pill had helped her get a good night’s rest and she felt a lot better as she packed her clothes. She knocked on the landlord’s door who was sober this time, and told him that she was moving out. She sold him all the things she had bought for her room for one hundred dollars, as she couldn’t very well pack them in her suitcase.

After she arrived at the bus depot, she had just

missed the express and had to take the slower bus, but she didn't mind that. It would buy her more time to think and come to terms with what had happened and try to make sense out of it all. She bought herself a book and a newspaper, and settled back in her seat for the long trip home.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The bus pulled into the Abbotsford bus depot. There would be a twenty-minute stop and it gave Susan a chance to stretch her legs and go to the bathroom. She didn't particularly care for the dinky little washrooms on the bus, and avoided their use if she could. She roamed around the station to stretch her legs. She looked at the magazine stand to buy some magazines to read on the bus, and decided to buy the *Abbotsford News* instead and read it. This was the area where she had to start her search, so she thought she could scan the classifieds to see what was available work wise and how expensive it would be to rent a room or bachelor suite.

The bus left again and she spent most of her time reading the classifieds. Accommodation was cheaper in Abbotsford, a lot cheaper than Vancouver. She also noticed some advertisements for Clearbrook. There were quite a few jobs offered, and she decided that after her visit she would move to Abbotsford. It neighbored Clearbrook and would make her search easier.

The bus pulled up at the bus stop in her hometown

in the early hours of the evening. She breathed in the cool, clean, fresh air and decided to walk home. She had missed the clean country air.

When she arrived at the store, she stood and looked at it for a moment, then went around the house to the back door instead, rather than run into nosy neighbors. She looked through the kitchen window. Her mother was busy washing dishes. She looked older and had more wrinkles. Her hair had become quite white, Susan noticed, and she felt guilty because she knew that it was because of her. She opened the back door, which was rarely locked, except at night, and startled her mother. Her mother turned around with a start, and promptly dropped the plate she was drying.

"Ohhhh," and she put both her arms around Susan and cried.

"Ssssh, Mom, it's okay. I'm here now." Susan patted her on the back. Her father walked into the kitchen.

"What the heck is all this noise..." her father stopped dead in his tracks. With two big strides he was in front of her. Awkwardly, he patted her on the shoulder and planted a kiss on her forehead.

"Susan, I'm glad you came home."

They talked for a long time. She told them where she had been, about Jake, about Vancouver. Not a word about the baby. They didn't touch the subject, and neither did she. She was just glad to be home, glad her parents had forgiven her, and that they were talking to her again.

She excused herself towards eleven, and found her

room exactly as she had left it. She unpacked a few things, and when she undressed she found her bra rather wet. It was time to start using the pump. She read the instructions carefully before she started and she sat on the side of the bed and pumped each breast for about five minutes each. It produced half a glass of milk. She was supposed to increase it by a minute a day, and do it at least four times a day. She went to the bathroom and washed and brushed her teeth. She also washed her bra. She couldn't just leave it because it felt all sticky and would start smelling. She needed no sedative this time. Her head hit the pillow and she was out like a light.

* * * *

She slept in. When she woke up, it was nine-thirty in the morning and she found her breasts sore and swollen, and leaking badly. She quickly got the pump and had to pump longer this time to relieve the pressure. She filled up a whole glass this time. She held up the glass of milk and looked at it. "Guess I'm a good cow!" She giggled. When she was done, she scanned through the instruction booklet again. It was apparently normal in the beginning to have a surplus of milk and it would regulate itself after a few weeks.

"Thank goodness, just imagine if they kept on growing," she muttered to herself. She had a bath, and after her bath washed her nightgown and panties. She hung them in her room to dry. She put on her jeans and the pretty blue sweater she'd bought on Boxing Day.

When she walked into the kitchen her mother commented on how nice she looked and quickly made her a bacon-and-eggs breakfast. Susan was hungry. She'd missed her mother's cooking while living in the city, especially the last few months... She asked her mother about Tracy, and heard that Tracy had called almost daily to see if they had heard anything. Her mother also told her that Tracy was engaged to Scott. As she told Susan this piece of news, her mother looked at her face carefully, but Susan just smiled and said: "Scott is a really good guy, I'm happy for them"

She heard that Scott and Tracy had gotten together because she had gone away and they had consoled each other.

"Susan, while you were gone, this funny little man was here. He said you owed his company money. What was that all about?"

Susan stared at her mother. "What did he look like Mom? Did he leave a card or anything?"

"He was a strange looking little man, in this big overcoat. No, he didn't leave a card, or his name or anything."

So, the little creep who had stood across the street from her apartment had *really* been watching her window, and had even come here to see her mother. No one in this town knew where she was. No one in Vancouver knew where she was from. How the hell did he know where to locate her parents?

"I just told him that I didn't know where you were, and that I didn't know of any debts. Then he left. Do you have debts Susan?"

"No Mom. He was probably just a salesman or something."

She tried to change the subject and they chatted on for a while about the town gossip.

"Susan...the baby..."

Susan interrupted her, before she could go on. The temptation was there to tell her mother, but she squashed it. Her mother didn't need any more worries.

"The baby is dead, Mom. I don't want to talk about it."

Her mother came over to her and put her arm around her shoulders. "I'm sorry Susan, you know I loved the idea of having a grandchild. Your father..."

Susan interrupted her again. "It's okay, Mom, don't worry. You'll have grandchildren one day." She stood up. "Mom, I'm going to go and see Tracy. Is she working now?"

"Yes, she works at the hair salon. She's quite good, I hear."

"I'll see you later on today then, okay, Mom?"

She walked to town. It felt so good to be back in the country, to be free. To be away from the busy, stifling city, with all its tall buildings and always rushing people. She walked into the hair salon. Tracy was busy with a customer and glanced in the mirror to see who had just come in. She dropped the comb on the floor, knocked over a tray of rollers, and just about killed Susan in a bear hug. Then, brushing the tears off her face, she stood back.

"Look at you. You walk in here as calm as a cucumber, looking more beautiful than ever. You

bitch!" She smiled through her tears, which belied the harsh expression. Susan knew that it was just frustration, emotion and happiness all combined. Tracy called out to the back.

"Joan...Joan..." Joan, who was on her lunch break, came out to the front.

"Joan, can you take over for me, please? I suddenly feel very ill." Joan looked at Tracy's blotchy tear streaked face and said: "Okay, go home. You'd better be okay tomorrow. We have a busy day!"

Once they were outside, Tracy bubbled over with questions. Susan smiled, and grabbed her by the arm.

"Come on, Tracy, let's go for a soda and we'll talk there."

They settled down at a little table in the corner. It wasn't very busy. It never was around that time of the day as most of the school kids would be in class. Tracy looked at Susan.

"You've gained some weight, Susie. Anyway, now tell me, why did you take off like that? Both Scott and I have been baffled about you not letting anyone know where you were. You supposedly took a bus back East and we've been searching for you there. Do you realize that your parents hired a detective in Toronto to find you? He got too expensive, so they had to stop. Then your mother told me you had phoned from Vancouver, of all places. What the hell were you doing there?"

Susan waited patiently until Tracy finally closed her mouth, and she told her a believable story. She'd had a bad fight with her parents and was afraid that if Tracy knew where she was, her parents would

somehow get it out of her. She talked about everything. Anything and everything, except the baby. It was obvious that Scott had kept his promise and never breathed a word about her pregnancy.

"You know, Susie, you really broke Scott's heart."

Susan smiled. "It's okay. I know about you and Scott, and it doesn't bother me. He's a great guy. I hope you two will be very happy! Hey, I expect to be your maid of honor. Don't you forget that."

"Okay, but don't disappear again, promise me that."

Susan promised she would stay in touch from then on, but she did tell Tracy that she had to go away again. Tracy protested heavily.

"There are some things I have to take care off. Things I have to sort out on my own. No one, not even you can help me with them. I promise I'll phone you. Okay?"

"Susie, come for dinner tonight, please? Mom will be so happy to see you. Don't worry, I'll fill her in so she won't bombard you with questions. You know, it's funny, but since you disappeared, your mother and mine are really close again. They're as thick as thieves. Whatever happened in the past seems to be gone."

Susan agreed to come to dinner.

"Susie, you've spilled your soda. Your sweater is all wet."

Susan glanced down. Darn, she would have to stuff something in her bra from now on, at least until the flow settled down. Tracy gave her a peck on the cheek.

"See you at six, girlfriend."

Susan walked home slowly. It was so good to be back. To feel loved. She quickly ran to her room when she got home and pumped her breasts. She would have to do it again before she went out, so she wouldn't have the same problem. She also cut one of her pads in half and stuffed the halves inside her bra. She changed into the pretty white sweater and told her parents where she was going.

When she got to Tracy's house, they were waiting for her, including Scott. He was someone she had not quite counted on seeing. No-one said anything out of place or asked her any questions. Tracy must have filled them in with everything she had told her and threatened them with their life, for not one question was asked.

Auntie hugged her. She looked at Susan and asked, "Are you okay, Susie?"

Susan smiled. "Yes Auntie, I'm fine." Deep down she suspected, if, as Tracy told her, her mother and Aunty had become that close again, that she might know about her pregnancy, but wisely didn't ask questions.

Dinner was great, just like old times. Scott acted a little awkward at first, but when he noticed that Susan didn't mind his involvement with Tracy, he loosened up. He was obviously very much in love with Tracy, and that she adored him in return was evident. Susan was glad for them.

Her parents had gone to bed when she got home, and she planned to spend the next day with them, and as much time as possible before she left. Tracy's

parents were having a New Year's Eve party. Susan was invited. They'd pretty much told her she'd better be there, and at the same time told her that her parents would be there too. She had been very surprised at this news. Her parents at a party?

* * * *

Time flew by fast, and before she knew it, it was the last day of the year. Susan decided to go to the party fairly casual, but put on the pretty low necked blouse she had bought. It was made of pale blue silk and it really suited her. She took extra care in pumping and padding her bra so she wouldn't leak that evening. As a final touch, she decided she would wear the gold locket. She opened the little box and looked for the locket. It wasn't there. She had never worn any of the jewelry in Vancouver, so how could it have gone missing? She remembered that the box had been in the same suitcase as the baby clothes. After she'd had the baby, whoever emptied the suitcase of baby clothes had put the box on the shelf in the closet, so whoever took her baby, also stole the chain and locket! Why would that person have taken the locket? A locket that was so easy to identify. Susan stored the memory of the missing locket it in her mind and put on a different chain. She checked the rest of the jewelry, but nothing else seemed to be missing.

The evening was a great success. Susan had a wonderful time. There were a number of young people there besides the parents, and before she realized, it was time to leave. Back home, in bed, she

decided to wait until the second of January before she would leave for Abbotsford. She told her parents gently the next day that it was almost time for her to leave, and even though her father showed a little disappointment, he didn't say anything.

"Just remember, Susan, this will always be your home," he said, his voice gruff with withheld emotion.

She had told them that she wanted to be on her own for a while, before she settled down. Perhaps to travel, to experience life. They had accepted her explanation.

This time, her parents drove her to the bus. She told them where she was going and she promised them that she would phone and give them her address as soon as she had found a place to live.

Scott and Tracy were at the bus station too. Susan didn't really like all the fuss, but she went along with it. She didn't want to hurt them again. The bus came, and after she got on, it pulled out almost immediately. She waved to the four people until she couldn't see them anymore.

She slept most of the way, and was surprised to find herself almost in Abbotsford when she woke up. She had caught the early bus, so it was still early evening when the bus pulled into the depot. She took a taxi and told him to take her to a good motel. Once at the motel, she showered and pumped. It had been really awkward on the bus in the shaky little washroom. She went to bed early, planning to get up in good time to go job and house hunting.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Susan stretched. She opened her eyes and for a minute, she didn't have a clue where she was. Then she remembered. She was in Abbotsford, in a motel. After showering, and pumping, which was almost becoming a ritual, she went out to buy a paper. She had to search for a job first, that task was number one on her list. She spent most of the day in pay phones and pounding the pavement. She dropped off a few applications at stores nearby and was told soon as a position was available they'd be in touch.

When she got back to the motel, she felt somewhat depressed. She wished she could find another friendly Jake. She did her little routine with the pump and it went a little easier this time. Doing it in public washrooms wasn't quite the thing and she was starting to wonder if keeping her milk was really a good idea. It could take her a long time to find her baby. She poured herself a glass of Coke and spread the paper out on the bed and started at the very beginning of the 'employment opportunities' ads. She had seen and re-acted to most of the ones that would be suitable for her. Her eyes rested on the 'Baby

sitters wanted' column. She thought about that for a moment. Why not? She loved kids. If it was full time, at least it was a job. A few of the ads had phone numbers, the rest were all box numbers. She decided to stick with the phone numbers. Writing would take too long and she could wait forever for a reply.

She went to a pay phone and started phoning them one by one. One after another had already hired someone. There was only one ad left. A fairly big one. It was kind of cute, but it was a live-in, and she was a little hesitant about that, for she needed time—free time to investigate and search. Yet, she also needed money, for she planned to spend her savings on a detective. But she needed money to survive before she could spend her savings. She read the ad through once again.

Hi, our daddy is going away to Europe and we don't have a mommy. We're very little, and our grandma is getting a little old, so could you come and care for us every day and every night? We're very good and we don't cry a lot. The phone number followed.

Susan chuckled. She thought the ad was really cute and eye-catching. She wondered just how 'little' 'we' were, and the night and day bothered her some, but she thought she would try anyway. She could always look for another job later.

A lady answered the phone. An elderly lady, by

the sound of the voice. She asked Susan a bunch of questions and Susan answered them all honestly. No, she had had no experience with children, but she had taken childcare and family studies in school and she had to start somewhere. Boyfriends? No, no boyfriends. No, she didn't drink or smoke. The lady identified herself as Mrs. Stuart, grandmother of the children. She surprised Susan by asking to meet with her. They arranged to meet at Earl's the next day. Susan had seen the restaurant on the main drag, and it was the only place she could think of, which was easy to find for her.

Her night was restless again, yet she didn't want to take one of the pills for fear that she would sleep in.

* * * *

She dressed carefully the next day. Jeans wouldn't do. She tried on one of the new dresses she had bought, exactly for the purpose of job interviews, and it made her look very smart. It wasn't a dowdy dress, yet it was quite plain. Dark blue, set off with white cuffs and a white lace collar, which was reminiscent of a spinster's dress. But on this dress, it looked great. Okay, that was fine. She French-braided her hair and wore no make-up. She was flushed enough anyway. She just hoped that her breasts wouldn't leak. She had tried to put the pads in, but it made the dress too tight, so all she could do was stuff some toilet paper in her bra. She wore the modern, classy raincoat she had bought. When she looked in the mirror, she wondered if she was perhaps overdressed. Well, it

would have to do, she had no time left to change into anything else.

She went to Earls and mentioned to the hostess that she was there to meet Mrs. Stuart. The hostess took her to a table, and Susan looked at the little woman with the white hair and twinkling blue eyes and her heart slowed down a little. Just on sight, she liked this old lady. Mrs. Stuart stood up and extended her hand.

"Miss. Davies, I presume? Please, sit down." Her face and eyes belied the tone of her voice. She was sharp, this old lady. She questioned Susan about everything, her childhood, her upbringing, her home life, her relationship with her parents. Susan decided the only way to go with this lady, would be to be honest. She tried to be as honest as possible under the circumstances. She needed a job desperately and babysitting was probably the only thing she could do for the time being. Mrs. Stuart asked her if there was anything she was hesitant about, if she had any questions of her own. Susan explained that the night and day put her off a little. Not that she wanted to go out or anything like that, but there were some things she had to do and needed some free time. Mrs. Stuart looked at Susan for what seemed to be a long time.

"Susan Davies, I like you. You're honest, straightforward and you're very young and strong. Here's how it is. My son is divorced, or getting there. He has two very young babies, twins, and I'm too old to be there for them all the time. Too old to be woken up at night and be walking the floor. Even though I love the twins, my body won't co-operate. My son

was supposed to go to Europe in February, but dates were changed and he left two days ago, much to his disgust for he wanted to be with the twins. Yet, he had made a commitment he couldn't break. He left the care of the babies in my hands and the responsibility of finding a nanny. A heavy responsibility, I must add." She sighed. "Susan, I like you. I don't know why, because you have no experience, but I go by intuition and feelings, and I have a good feeling about you. Your wages will be twelve hundred a month flat. Free room and board, and any time you need to take off, I'll baby-sit for you if you need to go somewhere. That's all I have to say. You can make up your mind from here. Now order something for us to eat, the girl is waiting."

Susan felt tongue tied and flabbergasted. She shyly ordered a salad and a Coke.

"Nonsense, bring us a bottle of your best wine, girl." Even though Susan protested against the wine, Mrs. Stuart poured her a glass anyway.

"A toast to your decision, my dear." Susan drank the wine slowly. It made her feel a little giddy. She ate her salad in silence. Mrs. Stuart finished before her and finally broke the silence.

"Well, Susan, you've been very quiet. What do you say? I'll take a chance on you, if you'll take a chance on me."

Susan almost choked.

"Could you excuse me, please, Mrs. Stuart?" She went to the washroom and quickly checked her bra. Everything was fine. Could she do this? The money was great, even better than what she would make in a

grocery store. She would have to pay no rent, buy no food, she could save almost all her money. Could she handle the responsibility of looking after two babies? She decided she could, for it would be good practice for when she found her own baby. She returned to the table and sat down again.

"Well Susan, have you made up your mind?

"Can I see the twins first?" she asked shyly.

"Of course, of course. How stupid of me not to think of that. Come with me, I'll take you to them right now. I should go back anyway because the housekeeper is looking after them."

Mrs. Stuart paid the bill and took Susan to her car. Susan didn't have a clue where they were going, except that it was out of town. They drove for a little while and then pulled into the driveway of a large estate. Susan looked at the mansion which loomed up before her eyes. It was beautiful, like a mansion a movie star would live in.

"This is my son's house. I don't actually live here, I have my own house." Mrs. Stuart told her as they left the car.

They entered the house and Susan felt awed as soon as she set foot in the large entrance. It was beautiful. She looked at the wide stairs and almost imagined elegant ladies in long gowns descending from those stairs. She followed Mrs. Stuart to the kitchen where she spoke to a stern old woman with grey hair. She overheard part of the conversation.

"They were crying, madam, I didn't know what to do. I gave them some honey." Mrs. Stuart shook her head.

"Come Susan, let's go to the nursery and see what's up." Susan followed her up the long wide stairs to the nursery. Mrs. Stuart's face softened as they entered, and she bent over the two cribs.

"Ssssh, I think they're asleep, I don't know what the housekeeper was freaking out about."

Susan looked at the beautiful nursery. Just like the house, it was like something out of a magazine.

"Come over here, Susan, and look at the little angels."

Susan, who had kicked off her shoes in fear of soiling the thick white carpet, walked over to the cribs and looked. She had expected older babies, perhaps nine months or so, but these were newborn babies. Perhaps even younger than her own baby. They were so tiny, so small. Mrs. Stuart glowed.

"This here is Susannah, Susie, as I call her, and this is James. I call him Jimmy."

A shock went through Susan. Susannah was an old-fashioned name, how quaint that the little girl had the same name as herself. Maybe it was meant to be, maybe she *had* to accept the position. She looked down again at the sleeping babies and whispered softly: "They're so small."

"Yes, that's why my son was so upset that the date of the convention had been changed."

Susan ached to pick one of them up. She made up her mind and told Mrs. Stuart.

"Yes Mrs. Stuart, I'll take the position. I would love to look after them." Mrs. Stuart was more than happy. She wouldn't even let Susan go to the motel to pick up her things, and arranged to have them picked up

and brought to the house.

"My dear, I'll stay for a week to help you and at the same time I'll keep an eye on you. I'll judge whether you're capable of handling the twins on your own. After that, if you satisfy me, you're by yourself."

Susan couldn't believe her luck. With staff to do all the work, all she had to do was care for the little ones. They were so sweet and so good, they rarely cried. She had been given the room right next to the nursery. An intercom was connected to her room and at the slightest whimper, she would wake up.

Everything went great for that first week. The first couple of days Susan felt a little awkward with the twins, for they were so small, but she soon became deft in changing diapers, washing them and just crooning to them in the white rocking chair. Mrs. Stuart was more than happy with her and returned to her own home, with the promise to Susan that she would check on her regularly. Susan almost forgot about the reason she had come to Abbotsford, except when she had to use the pump and express her milk. The twins managed to fill the emptiness of her heart.

After Mrs. Stuart had gone, one day she sat in the rocking chair with Jimmy and was softly singing to him, when his little eyes opened and his little mouth hungrily started searching against her breast. A funny feeling went through her body as she looked down at the baby. They were so young, they still had the natural instinct to search for a mother's breast. A thought entered her mind. Wouldn't it be easier if she got rid of her milk the natural way? She slowly bared her swollen breast, and Jimmy attacked it like a little

wolf cub. Oh, it felt so good, the feeling of his little mouth hungrily sucking at her nipple. She stroked the soft hair and watched him drink.

She thought about what she was doing while Jimmy was feeding. Was this wrong? Didn't mothers donate their milk to hospitals for premature babies? Wasn't this sort of the same thing? Mother's milk was better for babies, wasn't it a waste to throw her milk away when the twins could benefit from it? She was healthy, clean, and she had so much. Wasn't it better to give it to them and give them a healthy start in life?

Jimmy had finished feeding and she put him on her shoulder to burp him. She noticed that Susie was awake too and ready to be fed. There was a knock on the door. It was Sarah, the housekeeper. She told Susan that there was a call for her. She had been so absorbed in what she was doing that she had not even heard the phone ring.

"I'll take it in my room, thank you Sarah." She put Jimmy in his crib and picked Susie up and went to her bedroom. There was a door between her room and the nursery, which was really convenient. She left it open all the time, and at night, she didn't even need the monitor for the babies to wake her. She picked up the phone and waited for the click, to indicate that Sarah had hung up downstairs. It was her mother. Soon after she got settled in at the house she had called her mother and told her where she was and to give her the phone number. She had promised to call soon, but she had been so busy with the twins that she had not had the time. She felt a little guilty.

"Hi, Mom." She apologized for not calling and at

the same time, arranged Susie at her other breast. They talked for about ten minutes and Susan told her all about her job, about the twins and the lovely mansion she was living in.

"What about the mother, Susan, where is she?"

"I don't know, Mom. I really don't know too much about the family as yet and I don't want to ask any questions that could be delicate. Maybe she died. I suppose I'll find out one of these days, as the grandmother becomes more comfortable with me. The father had to go to Europe for six weeks, and it was too much to handle for the grandmother, so he told her to hire a nanny. Mrs. Stuart stayed with me for a week, and now she only visits, and if I want to somewhere, she promised me she'll baby-sit."

"It sounds good, honey, but it's an awful big responsibility for you. You're so young yet."

"Mom, I won't be doing this forever. For now it's an income, and I'm enjoying it. It's a good experience for me." She almost added that she was also gaining experience for when she found her own baby. She asked her mother to give the phone number to Tracy and she hung up the phone.

The baby had finished feeding and had fallen asleep at Susan's breast. She gently took her breast out of the little mouth. The little gums still had her nipple sucked tightly, and it wasn't easy to get her off. Susan looked down at the tiny girl, at the perfect little features and at the small hand against her breast. A longing went through her body, a longing to hold her own baby and watch him suckle.

It's time to start searching, I've waited too long already.

I'm missing all this with my own baby, she thought. If she did it in between feedings, it would work out. Sometimes the twins slept for five hours. After she put Susie down, she phoned Mrs. Stuart and asked for a few hours off. Mrs. Stuart agreed happily to come over that afternoon, after the two o' clock feeding. She breast-fed the twins at two, and Mrs. Stuart arrived just as she put Jimmy back in his crib.

"Shucks, they're always asleep when I get here, Susan. Off you go. Here, take these keys, my car is parked in the front, you're welcome to use it."

Susan drove to Abbotsford. She had already picked the name of a detective agency out of the yellow pages in the phone book and had found one called: "Sherlock Detective Agency."

It sounded quite impressive and was easy to find. She looked at the piece of paper in her hand. They were situated on the main road.

She entered the office and did not have to wait long. The receptionist showed her into a large office and she faced a middle-aged man. He introduced himself as Al Patterson. She told him her story, everything from beginning to end and why she hadn't gone to the police. When she was finished, the detective shook his head.

"You've given me very little to go on, Ms Davies. You know, babies are stolen all the time. Sometimes when they're older, and nine out of ten times they are never found. It's sad, but true. You have nothing, absolutely nothing to go on, but I can talk to the landlord and see if he can remember anything at all that he didn't tell you. It will cost you though. I need

a thousand dollars deposit for starters. Also, since you don't even know if you had a boy or a girl, or what your baby looks like, perhaps you can give me a baby picture of yourself. Your child may not look like you, but then again it may. Don't get your hopes up, this is a difficult one."

She took her wallet out of her purse and counted the money out for him. He wrote her a receipt and told her he would contact her if he came up with anything.

She left the office feeling depressed. The detective had mentioned that the car sounded like a rental and that maybe he could get a lead that way. It was a slim chance. She picked up some personal necessities at the drugstore and headed back to the Stuart estate. She had not been gone very long, and Mrs. Stuart was surprised to see her back so soon.

"Susan, you could have stayed away longer, you know. You're entitled to some time off—you should have taken advantage of me being here, and of the use of my car."

"It's all right Mrs. Stuart, I enjoy being with the twins. I only had to do a couple of little things."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The twins were flourishing. Susan weighed them daily and they gained an ounce or two almost every day. She kept a careful record of their progress. Jimmy gained faster than Susie, he was more robust. Susie's black hair had grown a little and was starting to curl, whereas Jimmy's was developing an auburn tint. They started to look less alike, and were developing their own little personalities. They started to be awake more often, and were starting to make little gurgling sounds. The cloudiness had gone from their eyes, and they now followed her movements as she would move around the nursery. Jimmy's eyes had a very dark glow behind the blue and Susan suspected that he would have brown eyes. Susie's were a very clear blue.

Mrs. Stuart had given Susan a camera, a camcorder and lots of film. It was one of her daily duties, to take pictures, some video and record everything. Every little move, every change, so that when Michael Stuart came home, he would have a full record of their development. He was due back soon, and Susan was

a little apprehensive. Right now, she had the run of the house. She was in total charge of the twins, but things would be different if their father was there. She wondered what kind of man he was. There were no pictures anywhere in the house. She also wondered often about the mother. Whatever happened to her? How could any mother give up two adorable little babies? She would reason with herself. She had wanted to give up her own baby, but then that was totally different. She had no idea who the father was, not even what he looked like. He could have had red hair, for all she knew. She dared not ask any questions, although she and Mrs. Stuart had become friends. She didn't want to jeopardize her job by becoming too personal and nosy.

She had phoned Al Patterson twice, but he had come up with nothing. He had checked all the rental places, but had drawn a blank. The only information he could come up with was what she knew already. He had asked her if she still wanted him to continue with the search, but she declined. She did not think she would ever find her baby. Perhaps the note had stated the truth and her baby was dead. Maybe the cord had wrapped around its neck at birth.

She often argued with herself, kept thinking about the strange circumstances, tried hard to think about the night she had her baby, something, anything she could remember which would help. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't remember anything specific. She tried to think of her baby as dead and tried to accept that fact.

On one of her excursions into town, she visited the

college. They had a nursing program right there in Abbotsford and Susan registered for it. She was told that there was a fairly long waiting list and that she might have to wait at least a year. She didn't care. It suited her fine, for she could continue to be a nanny to the twins and it would give her time to wean them. She could also save almost all her money, which would amount to a tidy sum after one year.

She looked at her watch. It was a few more hours before the twins were due to be fed. She had never been to the stables and she knew from the housekeeper that Michael had horses. She checked the twins and found them sleeping soundly. She told Sarah where she was going and asked her to keep an eye on the twins.

"Okay, Susan, I'll look after them if they wake up." Sarah didn't mind. She felt that Susan should get out more. She was in the house way too much and too serious for such a young girl, and she often voiced that opinion.

Susan went to the stables and made friends with the horses. She liked them all, but she fell in love with a white mare and decided to take her out for a ride. Susan rode all over the property which seemed endless and she wondered how many acres the grounds were. It had to be a lot. She came back just in time to see Sarah struggling to give the twins a bottle.

"They must be sick, Susan, they won't eat," she said, with a worried expression on her face.

"It's okay, Sarah, thank you for taking care of them. I'll look after them." Sarah left the nursery, still muttering under her breath. Susan had not realized

that she had been holding her breath.

"Phew...one of these days they'll catch me, and then what?"

As a precaution, she locked the nursery door. She quickly gathered up the crying infants, pulled up her sweater and fed them both at the same time. They attacked her nipples and sucked greedily, their little eyes looking up at her with a woeful expression in them. Susie still had a tear clinging to her dark eyelashes. Susie was finished first. She let go off Susan's nipple and smiled. Susan thought she had imagined it, but as she softly crooned to the baby, yes, there it was again. Susan was so proud that she had received the first smile from the little one. As soon as Jimmy was finished, she burped them and changed their diapers, but no matter how hard she tried, she could not get Jimmy to smile. She got the video camera and managed to get Susie to smile for her while she taped and took pictures. She phoned Mrs. Stuart, who wanted to come over immediately, but since the twins had full tummies and had already fallen asleep, it wasn't much use. Susan persuaded her to come just after next feeding time.

In between caring for the twins, Susan always managed to occupy herself. She took it upon herself to do the dusting. She had also brought home flowers and plants and a beautiful plant arrangement which graced the entrance and the dining room. There were also lots of plants in the living room now and it made the house far cozier. If Michael Stuart objected, she would get rid of them, but for the time being it gave the house a more personal touch. Susan was just

finished with the twins, when Mrs. Stuart arrived.

Just in time. One of these days, I'll get caught, she thought. Mrs. Stuart took some more pictures of Susie, and together they tried to get Jimmy to smile, but without success.

"Too serious, just like his dad," Mrs. Stuart said. "He's so like Michael, when Michael was a baby."

"Who does Susie look like, Mrs. Stuart? Like her mother? You know, there's not a picture to be found in this house." Mrs. Stuart opened her purse and brought out some photos.

"This is Michael by himself, and this one is of Michael and Donna in happier days. No, Susie doesn't look like her mother at all. I don't really know who she takes after. Maybe she'll just look like herself." Susan studied the two photographs. A serious face looked back at her with auburn wavy hair, very dark brooding eyes and a sensitive mouth. He had a very strong face, a very handsome face, but not a happy one, she decided. The other picture showed Michael and his wife on their wedding day. Michael was much younger in that picture, but decidedly happier. The girl on his arm was a bleached blonde. She looked back at Susan with an artificial smile and very icy green eyes. She couldn't see any resemblance to the twins in this woman. Her hair was very straight, so obviously Susie had inherited her curls from her father.

She looked at Mrs. Stuart and said: "Well, the hair could be dark under the bleach, but there's no likeness as far as I can see. At least not at this point."

Mrs. Stuart was thoughtful. "No, and I hope they

don't develop any characteristics of her, either. Come, I must go. I've arranged to go out with some of my friends this evening."

Later that evening the phone rang. "Is Mrs. Stuart there, please? I've tried her at home and there's no answer." said a man's voice.

"No, I'm sorry. She was here, but she went out for the evening. Can I give her a message?"

"Who am I speaking to?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'm the nanny."

"Oh, okay, nanny, can you tell my mother I'll be delayed another two weeks? I'll phone her to tell her which flight I'll be on. Now, since I have you on the phone, tell me all about my son and daughter." Susan told him of their progress and that Susie had smiled for the first time.

"I hope you're recording all this for me. I really hate being away so long and missing all this, but it can't be helped." After he had hung up, Susan pondered about the conversation for a minute.

He didn't sound so bad, a little businesslike maybe, but then, he had had very little time to get used to being a father.

The next morning, after she had given Susie and bath and was playing with her on the towel, she noticed a mark on the little bare belly. She rubbed it with the towel, thinking it was a smudge of some kind, but it wouldn't come off. She hadn't really noticed anything there before. She looked closer and it seemed that Susie was developing a beauty spot. Maybe it had always been there, but now that Susie was growing and developing baby fat, it had grown

too and become more noticeable. She was finished with Susie when Jimmy woke up. After feeding and bathing him, she looked for a similar mark on Jimmy, but could find none. The next time she changed Susie's diaper, she looked and of course, the mark was still there. It almost looked like a little moon and stood out quite vividly against the creamy white baby skin. She took no further notice of it, and went about her daily routine.

She had started the twins on fruit and cereal, and they were napping longer and starting to sleep through the night. After their last feeding that night, Susan decided to try out the hot tub. It would be her first time in. She had not allowed herself the time to sit and soak, but now that the twins slept through the night, she could allow herself this luxury. For the first time, since she'd lost the baby, she allowed her mind to drift, to fantasize about a possible future lover, someone who would worship the ground she walked on and love her. Since Scott and the unfortunate rape, she'd had no thought about men or about sex. Closing her eyes, she conjured up an imaginary prince. He came galloping into her life on a magnificent black stallion, his wild mane of black hair flying behind him. He reined in his horse, jumped down and caught her bathing naked in the stream. She imagined him scooping her out of the water. He placed her gently on the grass and stood and looked down at her while he took off his clothes. She moaned as she admired his muscular frame, glanced at his cock that throbbed steadily against a flat abdomen, his tight balls... His hands were on her body, on her breasts, his fingers

probing, feeling, his lips nuzzling her neck. She squirmed in the bubbling water and rubbed her cleft vigorously. Desperately she looked around for something she could use to satisfy herself with, but saw nothing. Her fingers would have to do. Rubbing her clit, she entered two fingers and swirled them until she found some release. Letting out a deep sigh, she determined to buy some toys the next time she went to town.

As she stood in front of the full length mirrors drying herself, she looked at her body. She had her figure back and she looked almost the same as she had before she had the baby. She didn't notice an extra ounce of fat anywhere. Even her breasts, though much bigger, and her nipples were large, were still very firm. She examined herself for stretch marks, but there weren't any that she could see. She ran her hands over her flat belly and stepped closer to the mirror. It was firm and flat with no marks, except for her birthmark. Susan stared at it in the mirror. She had grown up with the mark and never took any notice of it, but she thought it co-incidental that she had a brown moon, in exactly the same spot as Susie. Could two total strangers have exactly the same birthmark, in the same location? She had to phone the doctor the next day anyway to make an appointment for the twins to get their first shots and she would ask him about it.

Susan wrapped herself in a large towel and before going to bed, checked on the twins. They were sleeping peacefully. She stared down at Susie and stroked her black curls. Maybe they were related,

some really distant cousins or something. But as far as Susan knew, there had only been one only child in the last four generations. There were no brothers, sisters, aunts or uncles, nothing. Maybe some distant relatives had immigrated and started a new line in Abbotsford. She would phone her mother and ask her. She kissed the twins and tucked them and crawled into her own bed.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The next day she was kept rather busy. Jimmy was a little fretful, and so she spent a great deal of time in the nursery. She tried to remember what she ate the previous day. She had eaten peas; that had to be it. Jimmy had gas and it gave him a sore tummy. She had to be more careful what she ate in future. After he finally settled down, she made her phone calls. First she phoned the doctor and made an appointment for the twins to come in for their shots. She also asked him about the birthmark. He explained to her that newborn baby skin is often somewhat blotchy and birthmarks are so small that in the beginning, they usually go unnoticed. He didn't find it unusual that she had only noticed it now. Then she asked him if two strangers could have an identical birthmark and he told her that it was very unusual, unless there was a bloodline. She then called her mother and asked her about their family history. As far as her mother knew, there were no relatives other than her parents and herself. But, her mother said the same thing that had occurred to her, that perhaps some distant relatives from Scotland had immigrated

in the past and started a new line in the Abbotsford region.

"But, what about the mother, Susan? She could have inherited the mark from her."

Susan agreed, but had to admit that she didn't know anything about the mother. She asked her mother for her baby album.

"I was going to give it to you when you had your first child, Susan, why do you want it now?" She couldn't very well tell her mother that she wanted a baby picture of herself to try and locate her own baby, that is, if he or she looked at all like her.

"It's just nice to have pictures, Mom, a conversation piece, you know."

Her mother sounded a little puzzled, but she agreed to send the album. It arrived a few days later. As soon as Susan had some free time, she poured herself a coffee and opened the parcel. It seemed a little bulky for just the album, but when she opened it, out came two cute little outfits her mother had knitted, both white. She smiled. It was just like her mother to do something like that.

She opened the album. It started off with her birth information, a little curl of jet-black hair, and the hospital picture, which was somewhat faded. She turned to the next page, which had eight photographs—one taken each week of her first eight weeks of life. She gazed at the photos in total shock. That was Susie, that wasn't her. She looked closer, and then stared. How was this possible? She had not seen the album in a long time and had not really remembered the pictures. Now, as she stared at them,

she realized that Susie was a tiny replica of herself. She knew that everyone had a double somewhere, maybe Susie was her double? No, what about the birthmark? There was something really fishy going on here. Where was the children's mother? She looked at the eight pictures again, and got out the albums she had started for the twins. She compared their early photos and even Jimmy's in the first few weeks looked the same. As they got older, Jimmy's photos changed, but Susie remained a replica of herself. Could it be? A small flame of hope lit within Susan. Had Michael bought these babies? Was Susie her baby? Was the name Susannah sheer coincidence?

Susan stood up and slowly walked to the nursery and looked down at little Susie. She looked so peaceful, so angelic. Was this really her baby? Had God helped her and brought her to her own child? All kinds of doubts entered her mind. Michael was a reputable specialist. Would he stoop to something like that? She could not imagine it, and what about Jimmy? Jimmy looked like Michael. Where did he get Jimmy from? She tried to fit it all together, but nothing fell into place. Maybe she was just imagining it all. Babies often looked alike and it was all coincidence. She had to talk to Mrs. Stuart. She had a good excuse, she needed information for the twins' baby albums. She called Mrs. Stuart and asked if she could come over that evening. When Susan explained that she was putting the albums together of the twins and their development, she was more than eager to come. She asked if after nine would be okay and Susan agreed quite readily, for it gave her time to feed

the twins.

They were still awake when Mrs. Stuart arrived, and after Susan had taken some pictures and video of grandma and her grandchildren, they put them to bed together.

"Susan, you'll make a great mother some day. You've worked absolute wonders with the twins. I just hope and pray that Michael will find a good mother for these two." Susan experienced a pang of jealousy at these words. She couldn't picture anyone else caring for the twins. They could never love them as much as she did. She got out the albums she had started and they went downstairs to the living room.

"Mrs. Stuart..."

"Susan, I wish you would call me Mom, or Nana. I feel very close to you, you know. You're everything I would have wished for in a daughter."

Susan felt a little shy. What should she call her? Mom or Nana? She decided on Nana, feeling more comfortable with that for now.

"Okay, Nana, then," she said shyly. "I need to know what time the twins were born, their birth weight, their length, their full names and of the parents and grandparents."

"Well Susan, I'll start with the parents and grandparents. I can tell you a little bit about the twins, but you'll have to ask Michael the rest." She proceeded with two sets of grandparents, then Michael's and Donna's information.

"Jimmy was five pounds and one ounce, and Susie was just under five pounds. They were so tiny. You know, they just swam in their diapers. We had to get

special small ones for premature babies."

"Were they premature, Nana?"

"I believe they were, a little, but twins often are, you know, and the lifestyle Donna led, it's no wonder they were early. As for the rest, you'll have to talk to Michael."

"Nana, what about their birth date?"

"Oh, yes, Susan, they're Christmas babies. They were born on the twenty-fifth of December. I'm not sure what time, Michael never told me. All I know is that it was the best Christmas present he could have ever given me."

Susan sat there, numb with shock, her heart pounding like crazy, so loud that she was sure Nana could hear it. *Her* baby was born on the twenty-fifth, *her* baby was a Christmas child.

"Susan, what's the matter, you're as white as a sheet. Don't you feel well?"

Susan tried to pull herself together. "It's my period. It's due and giving me some problems. Nana, what happened to Donna? Michael's wife?"

Mrs. Stuart sat in total silence for a few minutes. "It's not something I like to talk about, Susan, but you're so good to the twins and so sweet, I guess I can tell you, but, let me get a glass of wine first."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Mrs. Stuart started talking. She told Susan how Michael and Donna had met, that she had never trusted Donna from the start, but that Michael had been blinded by her cool, blond beauty. She had never interfered in the relationship, or later in the marriage. All she had wanted was Michael's happiness. At the wedding, she, as his mother, could tell already that Donna didn't really love her son. The misery started soon afterwards. Donna was an alcoholic. Michael had built this beautiful mansion for her and planned to raise a family, but he soon found out that Donna was on the pill. She knew that Donna was cheating on Michael, but she didn't have the heart to tell him. She told of Michael's growing unhappiness, his burying himself in his work, finding Donna drunk when he got home.

"Susan, he was so unhappy. She made his life absolutely miserable. A living hell." She paused for a moment. "Last year she actually brought one of her lovers home and flaunted him before Michael. That night she packed her things and disappeared. Michael started divorce proceedings and hired an investigator

to find her so that the papers could be served on her. He found her, but it turned out that she was also pregnant. Pregnant, very broke, and she had also been in a car accident. She didn't want the child. She was going to use the baby to get money out of Michael. So, Michael paid her a great deal of money to give the child to him when it was born. He stayed with her the last weeks, and as soon as she gave birth, Michael brought the twins home the same day. The hospital allowed it, because he's a doctor and the twins were very small, but healthy. Michael had already committed himself to go to Europe and there wasn't any way to get out of that. It really bothered him to leave the twins you know."

Susan was totally confused. She had been so sure that Susie was *her* baby, but things just didn't fit together.

"Look, here are their birth certificates. Michael left everything with me, just in case something happened to him."

Susan looked at the two certificates. They stated both Michael and Donna as parents. Maybe the twins weren't even Michael's. Maybe they were Donna's lover's. She asked the question hesitantly. "Could the twins be someone else's, rather than Michael?"

"No, because when Donna must have gotten pregnant, Michael had her locked in her room for a while. She still managed to bribe her maid to slip in alcohol, though, and one night she seduced Michael. They made love and Michael believed her promises and he let her out of the room. That's when she went to the bar, disappeared for a few nights, and finally

arrived back home with her new lover. That's the night she left for good. Having the twins turned Michael's life around. He's finally happy again, after so many miserable years. Anyway, look at little Jimmy, he's the image of his father. Come my dear, it's getting late. I'm an old woman and I talk too much." Susan smiled at her.

"I'm a good listener."

"That you are, my dear." She kissed Susan on the cheek.

"I've become very fond of you, Susan."

Susan walked her to the door and watched her drive away. She slowly went upstairs and fell on her bed. She had been so sure, but nothing fit together after listening to Nana's story. She was probably just imagining it all. She wanted her own baby so badly, that she imagined Susie to be the image of her. Maybe babies started to look like the person who cared for them. Babies changed constantly. In a few months, Susie could look totally different. She had come to love the twins so much. She loved them as much as if they were her very own. Perhaps it was a misplaced love. Maybe she was just transferring her motherly instincts, and with the breast feeding and all, they had become almost a part of her.

She thought about Michael and everything Nana had told her. She felt desperately sorry for him. If he was anything like his mother, and the way his mother talked about him, he had to be a good man. How could a woman be so selfish and cruel? But then, when Susan remembered the photograph of Donna, the cold icy eyes, the cool, cold face, she had noticed

that there was no love in that face, no kindness. Only cruelty. She wondered how, when they had met, Michael could not have seen through that cold smile, that cold mask. Some women were like that though. Cold, calculating and would use people for gain, and end up destroying them. How could such a woman have given birth to the beautiful twins? Why would she even have bothered going through with the pregnancy? She wondered if Michael's divorce had gone through yet, and if she had signed custody papers giving custody to Michael. Would he have had time for that, before leaving for Europe? She found the thought a little scary, because, what if the woman showed up suddenly and demanded her babies? Well, it was really none of her business anyway. Her only concern was for the twins.

She looked at the albums again and then her own. She still couldn't believe the likeness, and deep down the doubts still gnawed at her. A blood test could prove it once and for all, but how could she initiate something like that without arousing suspicion? If the test proved wrong, she would lose her job and never see the twins again and besides, she couldn't just take Susie to the doctor and demand a DNA test. She had no authority to do that. If she went to the authorities, and she was wrong, she would never see the twins again. She was torn in many directions, suspicions, her doubts, and then everything pointing to the fact that Donna had given birth to the twins. What if she hired the detective again? Would he be able to do something for her? She would sleep on it and maybe the next day she would be able to think rationally.

She checked the twins once more, to make sure they were comfortable and dry. She felt an overwhelming feeling of love as she sat in the rocking chair between the two cribs and looked at them. That's how she fell asleep. At six in the morning, Susie woke her up. She felt sore and stiff, her neck hurt like hell and she still felt tired. She had slept in the rocking chair all night. She changed the twins and fed them. Jimmy went back to sleep immediately, but Susie was restless. Susan took the baby to her own bed and cradled her in her arm. That's how they fell asleep, until Susie let her know that she was hungry again. Susan fed her lying down on the bed. She had undressed before lying down, and she was naked. She didn't even have to guide her nipple to Susie's little mouth, Susie found it on her own. She curled around the baby as she sucked greedily on her full breast, the little hands kneading her breast in pleasure, the blue eyes looking up at her. Susan noticed that they were changing color. Were they going to turn icy green, like Donna's?

Jimmy had also woken up.

She put Susie in her crib without changing her. It was almost bath time anyway. Jimmy was soaked and she quickly stripped him and put a clean diaper on him. She fed him in bed, too, and laid his little body on top of her. She watched him drink his tummy full. Oh, it felt so good, so right. Jimmy was done, and she almost felt regret that she couldn't stay in bed with them. She quickly prepared their bath and dressed them in the little outfits her mother had knitted. She showered and told Sarah that she wasn't hungry. She

had a cup of coffee, and when she noticed the glorious sunny weather outside, she decided to bundle up the twins, and take them outside for a walk in the fresh air. It also gave her a chance to think about everything and to try and clear her mind.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A week had gone by. Susan had been wrestling with herself the whole week and still hadn't made a decision about what to do or what to make of it all. Susie's eyes were not turning green, they were starting to turn turquoise, just like her own, and the little moon on her belly was becoming more distinctive every day. Susan was seriously convinced that something was very wrong. She was also convinced that Susie was her own baby. She just couldn't figure out where Jimmy had come from. He was starting to look more like Michael every day. Susan still couldn't make head or tail of the situation, and she quit trying to figure it out. All she planned on doing for now, was to concentrate on how to get her baby back. But how? What if she just took Susie? But, could she take just Susie and not Jimmy? She loved him just as much. What if she went to the authorities and demanded that they investigate. That could take a very long time. Court battles would ensue, and meanwhile she wouldn't be allowed near the twins, or even the Stuart home. She was torn in so many directions. Could she just take off with Susie, and

leave Jimmy? What would it do to Nana? She had become quite fond of the old lady. The phone rang, and it was Nana.

"Susan, Michael is coming home on Friday. I just thought I'd let you know he phoned."

She slowly hung up the phone. If she was going to do anything, she would have to do it on Thursday. Okay, that was it. She made up her mind there and then. Thursday afternoon, she would leave and take Susie with her. She would take a bus back east where no-one could find her. She phoned the bus depot, and yes, there was a bus leaving for Toronto at two thirty in the afternoon. That was excellent. She spent the next few days planning everything very carefully.

She packed her suitcases, and hid them inside her closet. She always cleaned her own room, but then you never knew. Sarah could bring some clean washing in or something. She had also packed some things for Susie and enough diapers to last her. In between planning and packing, she went about her daily routine as usual. When feeding Jimmy, she would look down at him and feel very sad, but then, Jimmy would have Michael. What else could she do? Jimmy was Michael's. She knew that for sure, and he belonged with his father.

The days crept by slowly, and the nights even more so. Her nights were sleepless, for once again she was going to take off and disappear. Her parents, Tracy, no one could know where she was going. Susan felt terrible about it, but it had to be. She had a right to her child. She pondered on how to get a birth certificate, but she didn't have a clue. She would deal

with that when they arrived in Toronto. Maybe she could even assume a false identity herself and get fake identification for herself and the baby. People did it all the time, all she needed to do, was to find the right connections.

Thursday afternoon was Sarah's day to go shopping. She would feed Jimmy just before leaving, and he should be all right until Sarah came back. Sometimes she would stand beside the crib and look down at the sleeping baby with tears in her eyes. When she fed him, she would watch his trusting eyes looking up at her, the little fists either kneading her breast, or holding her long hair and she would cry and her heart would ache. She loved him just as much as Susie. The thought of leaving him behind tore her apart.

Nana came to visit her Wednesday evening and commented that she looked very pale and tired. "You need a break, Susan. Why don't you go home for a few days when Michael is back? I'm sure Michael and I can manage the twins for a few days.

"Susan said that she would consider it.

"Susan, the house looks so nice since you've been here. You've turned it into a home. Donna never cared at all. She had no interest in anything but herself."

When it was time for the twins to be fed, Nana played with them for a little while, and left Susan alone to feed them. Susan was glad that Nana went home, for she felt really guilty. Nana trusted her, and she felt that she was betraying the old lady. But, as she cuddled Susie, she thought: *No, this is my baby, and*

I have my rights.

She packed some last things. She would have to wait until Sarah was gone and then she would leave. She would call a taxi. What if the gardener or the stable hand saw? That was something she would have to risk. They probably wouldn't pay attention anyway, as she could just be taking the baby to the doctor. They were mostly out back and chances of them seeing her leave were quite slim.

She was up virtually the whole night. Even the little ones were restless. It was almost as if they sensed that something strange was going on. Jimmy especially fussed during the night and she ended up taking Jimmy to bed with her. Did he sense that she was going to leave him? She held the little body in her arms and gave him her breast. He took the nipple eagerly and fell asleep with it still sucked tightly in his little mouth. His little hands were wound in her hair. How could she do this? What kind of a nanny would they get for him now? She tried not to think about that. She would just love him and cuddle him for this last night. The next afternoon she would have to say goodbye to him. It was the only way, the only thing she could do.

Morning came soon enough. Jimmy had automatically started to suck at her breast and she could hear Susie making gurgling sounds in her crib.

Thursday had finally arrived.

She bathed the twins and put them in their cribs, and she decided to relax in the hot tub one last time. She had really been spoiled while living in Michael's house. The tub helped to calm her nerves a little. She

showered afterwards and washed her hair. Then she dressed, put on some make-up, and checked all the drawers to make sure she had not missed anything. Last, she packed Susie's album. She had a right to Susie's first pictures. She scanned the room. She did not think she had forgotten anything. She would get Susie ready later, just before leaving. She thought about Jimmy, how he would have to learn to drink from a bottle again and how much trouble they would have with him at first. Neither of the twins wanted anything to do with the bottle. It was either a spoon, or her breast. She shook her head, trying to clear her mind. She would go and say goodbye to Snow, the mare who had become her friend. She decided to take her for a last ride and she quickly told Sarah that she was going out riding for a little while.

She let the mare have her way and closed her eyes as they galloped through the fields. She let her mind go blank and put all the worried thoughts out of her mind. She gave herself up to the wind, to nature.

When she led Snow back to the stables, the mare whinnied softly and nuzzled her ear. Horses were very smart animals and very sensitive. The mare, too, felt that something was wrong. She kissed Snow and patted her, softly talking to her and telling her how sorry she was that she had to leave. She wiped the tears from her eyes, walked back to the house, and went up to her room and sat before the mirror and brushed her hair. The time seemed to go so slow. She looked at her watch again, Sarah would leave soon and the twins should wake up soon to be fed. There wasn't much time left before she could put her plan

into action. Her heart was starting to beat faster as the minutes went by. Some fear set in when she thought about what she was doing. What if the police found her? She'd be arrested. Could she get away, without being found? She tried to shake the negative thoughts out of her mind and opened the closet to get her suitcases.

But suddenly she heard voices downstairs...

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Susan hurried downstairs and to the living room, where the voices were coming from. Who could it be? *Not now*, she thought. *I can't have visitors now*. There, in the middle of the living room, stood Michael. Susan came to a dead stop. Michael was in the process of paying the taxi driver, and had not seen her yet. Susan felt a sinking feeling. *So much for my plan*, she thought. *Now what am I going to do?* The taxi driver left, and Michael turned around to face her. He stood stock still and she wondered why his face turned so pale.

"Hi, I'm Susan. The nanny."

He stared at her, he didn't say anything.

"The twins, they're sleeping," she stammered. She felt very awkward. Why didn't the man say anything? He just stared at her with piercing black eyes—eyes that stirred a memory she'd suppressed, eyes that had haunted her for more than nine months. He was very tall, and she felt small and insignificant, like an ant. He was a very handsome, elegant man, his eyes the most disturbing she'd ever seen. *More disturbing than...* He finally cleared his throat.

"Mm, the nanny. Yes, my mother told me about you, but she never told me how young you were. I'll be in my study. I have some business to attend to. Please ask the maid to unpack my suitcase and call me when the twins are up." With that he turned around and disappeared into his study.

Well, so much for that, she thought. *He's sure businesslike and brusque.* She would have to think of a different plan now. Once back in her room, she quickly unpacked the suitcases and put everything back in place.

* * * *

In his study, Michael poured himself a stiff drink. "Good Lord, how the hell has she ended up here?" he muttered as he downed his whisky. He called his mother, who was surprised that he had come home a day early. He asked her about Susan, and found his mother full of praises for the girl.

"Mom, she's too young. We'll have to get someone older. A nurse maybe."

"Don't be silly, Michael. Susan is fantastic with the twins. You can't just fire her for no reason at all."

"I suppose you're right. I'll keep a close eye on her for a while. Come on over tonight. I'm dying to see the videos and pictures. We'll watch them together." He slowly replaced the receiver and poured himself another drink. This one he drank a little slower.

She has to go. She can't stay here. With my mother rooting for her, how the hell am I going to do that? his thoughts were muddled and confused. His mother

was so taken with the girl. He had to admit to himself, that after the initial shock, he had to admire her beauty. She had changed. She looked a lot more mature, but her eyes had looked sort of sad, with a hint of fear in them, as she had stood before him. Why the fear in her eyes? Was she scared of him? She had looked so small and vulnerable as she had stood there and stared back at him.

When he regained his composure, he decided to call Susan down to the study. He pushed the intercom.

"Susan, can you come down to the study, I'd like to talk to you."

Susan entered the study, her face a mask of apprehension. He didn't ask her to sit down.

"It's almost time to feed the twins Mr. Stuart."

"Good, when you're done, I'd like you to bring them down. I'll be in the family room. Now, young lady. Tell me a bit about your background, your experience, and how you came to apply for this job."

Susan told him some of her background and that she had come to Abbotsford and couldn't find a job anywhere, so she had decided to try babysitting. She had tried for this job, and Nana had hired her.

"You have no experience with children at all, then."

"I took child care education and family maintenance in school. One has to start somewhere. The twins are fine. They're growing, they're healthy and I really care for them."

"Yes, yes, no doubt you do. You're very young. My mother speaks highly of you, but I totally disapprove of her employing someone so young to care for the

twins and of her taking such a chance with someone with no experience at all. I'll watch you for a while, but keep in mind that I would still prefer someone older. You may go now."

* * * *

Susan shuffled her feet like a schoolgirl being dismissed by the principal. He was so stern. She would have to be doubly careful now. She could not afford to get fired, not now. She had to find a way to get her baby out of this house. She quickly went up to the nursery and locked the door behind her. She fed Jimmy first. "Well, baby, looks like you'll have me at least for a little while longer," she whispered softly, and kissed his soft hair. She fed Susie, changed them both, and brought them to the family room.

Michael was waiting for her. She carefully placed them in both his arms and watched his face. The stern expression disappeared. The black eyes softened and turned to melted milk chocolate as he smiled down at the twins. If Susan had thought he was handsome before, she now thought that he was gorgeous.

"They've grown such a lot. It goes so fast when they're so small." Susie, who had at first just stared at this strange face, gurgled and suddenly smiled at him. He kissed her gently.

"You're daddy's little princess, aren't you, and you know it already. That smile is going to twist me around your little finger." Then he looked down at Jimmy. "And what about you little man, no smiles from you?" Suddenly, there it was. A dimple

appeared in Jimmy's cheek. He finally smiled. Susan had brought the camera down. It was hanging around her neck, and she quickly took some pictures.

"You can leave now, Susan. Take a free hour or so. I would like to spend some time alone with the twins. Don't worry, I'll put them to bed this time." He felt uncomfortable having Susan there, and he felt almost guilty at sending her away. He noticed the resentment on her face and wondered about it. She couldn't know. He'd covered all his tracks carefully. It was impossible she knew. Then why that look of resentment? Possessiveness? *She's becoming too fond of them, too possessive*, he thought. He tried to soften his next words a little. "You've done a good job so far Susan. The twins look very well, very clean, and they're obviously thriving. Now that I'm home, I intend to spend a lot of time with them, so you'll have more time for yourself."

* * * *

Perhaps he could wean her away slowly. Maybe he should take her out a few times, and introduce her to some young people. He watched her leave the family room with reluctance, glancing back at the twins a few times. What was he going to do about this situation? What had made Susan decide on Abbotsford, of all places, to settle? What manner of providence had landed her as the nanny to the twins? He was at a total loss. He concentrated on the twins and found Susie staring at him, but he saw Susan's eyes, not Susie's.

Good grief, she's the image of Susannah. That makes it even worse.

* * * *

Susan had gone to her room. She fell on her bed and sobbed softly. All her plans were ruined. What was she going to do now? She had seen the love in Michael's eyes, the tenderness as he looked at the twins. This man had been through a lot, how could she put him through more? She tried to harden herself, but the picture of Michael's face, as he had looked at the twins, wouldn't leave her mind. She heard a noise in the nursery and she softly opened the door. She glanced in the mirror to make sure that he couldn't see that she had been crying. Michael had put the twins in their cribs and was covering them up. "They're sound asleep", he whispered. "Come downstairs with me, let's talk some." He put his arm around her shoulders and propelled her towards the stairs. A tingling sensation went through Susan's body as she felt his touch and smelled his cologne. She ignored it. In the living room, he looked around and noticed the plants and the flowers.

"Nice touch. Is this your doing?"

Susan nodded shyly.

"Looks great. Okay, now tell me, what kind of a schedule do you have the twins on. What do you feed them?"

She told him: "Newborn cereal, fruit and eh...formula. No specific schedule. I believe in demand feeding, but I do give them their cereal and

fruit, at breakfast, lunch and dinner time.”

“Sounds good. I’d like to participate in some of that. How do they sleep?”

“They sleep all night and most of the day. They’re such good babies.”

“Of course. All small babies do. Now what about yourself, have you made any friends here in Abbotsford? Mom tells me that you never go out.”

“Eh...no. I’m not much for going out.”

“Okay, we’re going to change that. You’re much too young to be stuck here with an old man and a couple of kids all the time. You need to go out and have some fun.”

“You’re not old, and I’m almost twenty.”

“Mm, maybe so, but you still need friends. Tomorrow night is Friday night. I’ll get Mom to baby-sit and I’ll take you out and introduce you to some young people.”

She started to protest.

“No Susan, don’t even try. I won’t take no for an answer. Just put on your prettiest dress tomorrow night and be ready by seven. We’ll go and eat first.”

His invitation totally bowled her over. She wasn’t interested in making friends. That would only interfere with any plans she would make. Well, she would play along with him. It was the only thing she could do under the circumstances without arousing his suspicion. She went back to her room and dug up her pump. She pumped sufficient milk to fill two bottles with about six ounces each. She would do it again later that night, so that there were four bottles in the fridge. She heaved a sigh. She would have to

pump again on a regular basis, just in case Michael wanted to feed the twins himself. The twins hated the bottle. She had tried them a few times with some juice, and they just wouldn't go for it.

When Nana came that evening to see the videos, Michael told her what he proposed to do. She was full of enthusiasm.

"Michael, what a good idea. It won't just be good for Susan, but it's good for you to have some fun, too. You haven't been out for a long time."

"Mom, I'm doing this for her, not for me."

They watched videos and looked at pictures until Susan brought the twins down to say goodnight. Michael helped her put them back to bed, and as Susan herself went to bed, she thought about the unexpected arrival of Michael, and her ruined plans. She tried to think of a new plan, but she was mentally exhausted from the week of tension and she couldn't think straight. She soon fell in an exhausted sleep.

* * * *

It was Friday evening and she didn't know what to wear. She had bought a very smart blue cocktail dress when she still lived in Vancouver. She decided to wear it, for he had asked her to put on a pretty dress. It had long fitted sleeves and a low draped neckline. The dress was very slim fitting and made her look and feel really smart. She pinned up her hair, and wore the sapphire necklace and earrings her father had given her. High heels completed the picture. She put on very little make-up. Her cheeks were already

pink. A dash of perfume, and she was ready. Michael was waiting for her downstairs. He looked more handsome than ever, in his dark suit and white turtle neck. Her heart beat faster as she carefully came down the stairs.

"You look lovely, Susan. I'm proud to be your escort." She blushed at the open admiration in his eyes and written on his face. Michael took her to a fancy restaurant. She didn't have a clue where the restaurant was, she had taken no notice of where he had driven, she'd been so lost in her own thoughts. It was a lovely dinner, and during dinner they chatted mostly about the twins. There was also a dimly lit dance floor and a band. Some couples were dancing. Michael stood up.

"May I have this dance, fair lady?" She had not expected this.

She stammered: "I...I...c...can't dance."

"Nonsense, come on." He took her hand and she had to follow him. She couldn't protest anymore without making a fool of herself in public. Once on the dance floor, he held her very close. His cheek touched hers. She followed his feet automatically and let her body listen to the soft romantic music and she inhaled his male scent that mingled with his cologne. Michael lifted his head and looked down at her.

"You're so beautiful, Susan. I think I'll keep you all for myself tonight." She blushed. She didn't understand the feelings which were surging through her body. She had not felt quite this way with Scott, and then after the rape, she had no feelings left at all until that time in the hot tub with the imaginary

perfect lover. She couldn't believe herself. She was attracted to Michael, she felt desire for him. She had thought that she could never have feelings for anyone again, that that part of her had been killed. She fought against her feelings, but as he looked deep into her eyes, she felt herself losing the battle. They danced virtually all evening.

He drove home in silence, and Susan too was lost in thought. After he pulled into the garage, he said, "I'm sorry. I had planned this evening differently. I was selfish I'm afraid. It's been a long time since I've been out with a pretty woman and had such a good time."

She looked at him. "I had a good time, too, Michael. I don't really want to make new friends. I don't have time for socializing. Thank you for a wonderful dinner and evening." He leaned over and brushed her lips lightly with a kiss. She leaned forward and suddenly she was in his arms. She felt her lips part under his and his tongue probing and caressing. His lips kissed her neck, the hollow between her collarbones. Her coat was open, and his lips traveled further down. He stopped suddenly and stared. He saw the blue veins, the swelling of her breasts above the dress. She still had milk. It couldn't be. He had given her tablets. He straightened up suddenly. What the hell was he thinking of? He had been too long without a woman.

"I'm sorry Susan, I shouldn't have done that. I hope you're not angry." She felt confused. She looked at his dark brooding eyes and wondered what went on in his mind. Her body had betrayed her. If she

became involved with this man, escape would be more difficult. But he didn't make it hard for her as he obviously regretted having kissed her.

"It's okay Mr. Stuart, it was my fault too. I guess the dinner and romantic music sort of got to me."

"Let's try and forget this ever happened, okay? You can still call me Michael, though, Mr. Stuart makes me feel ancient." he said gruffly as he helped her out of the car.

Nana rose when they entered the living room. "I fed the twins, Susan, but they were a little fussy, perhaps because there were new nipples on the bottles. Babies usually hate that." Susan had been afraid of that. She thanked Nana for sitting and left her with Michael.

* * * *

His mother asked him about the evening.

"Wonderful Mom, just lovely. We had a good time."

"You'll have to do this more often, son. I'll baby-sit for you."

"Okay Mom, thanks." He saw her out, and flopped down in the recliner in his study. He drank the whisky he had poured for himself, and tried to sort out his feelings. He was falling in love with Susan. He had stared at her picture so often. He still carried it in his wallet. She had become part of his life, and now she was living in his house. He took the picture out and stared at it again.

"This wasn't the plan, Susannah, this wasn't part of

the deal.” Good grief, his divorce hadn’t even been finalized. He had called Gordie earlier that day, who informed him that Donna was after a lot more money than he had given her initially. It was going to be a major battle. Susan had to go. He couldn’t allow himself to get involved with her. She was too young, and very vulnerable. He couldn’t take advantage of that, and it was too dangerous. If she ever found out what he had done, he could lose everything.

* * * *

Susan had undressed and was lying on her bed. Was she falling in love with Michael? How could one fall in love with a man so quickly? It wasn’t part of her plan. She wouldn’t and couldn’t allow her feelings to dominate everything else. On his part it was probably just desire, and she wasn’t the calculating type to take advantage of that, to be with the twins. She would have to leave, leave Jimmy, and somehow take her own baby. How on earth had her baby ended up with Michael? He had to have bought her. It was the only thing she could think of. He had wanted a son and a daughter. It seemed kind of silly, though. He was young enough to get married again, have more children. She was still very confused. She thought back to his lips, to the whole evening, and her body started to burn with desire. She had never felt like this with Scott. She wanted Michael, she wanted him to make love to her.

When she finally slept, she dreamed about the twins and about Michael. Michael was walking away

with the twins and she was tied down and couldn't get loose. She screamed, as loud as she could. If someone heard her, they would untie her and she could rescue the twins. She screamed again...

"Susan, Susan, wake up. You're having a nightmare. Ssssh, you'll wake the twins." A cool hand was on her forehead, someone was bending over her. It was Michael.

"Hush, honey, it's all right, it's only a dream."

"The twins," she whispered.

"They're fine, I just checked them. Ssssh, it's all right now."

She suddenly realized she was naked and that she had thrashed the quilt down with her feet. At the same time, Michael removed his hand from her forehead and stood up. He looked down at her and she saw the burning desire in his eyes as his eyes traveled over her naked body. Her hand started to grope for the covers, but his hand covered hers and he stopped her. Without saying a word, he lay down beside her and took her in his arms. He kissed the tears off her cheeks.

"Don't cry, baby, don't cry..." His hands stroked her softly, gently. His lips found hers and she felt herself drowning, falling into a pit that had no end. Her mind became a blank, her senses swam with a longing she could never have imagined. Her arms crept slowly around his neck and she pressed herself against his hairy chest. His hands kept stroking, teasing her. His lips traveled down to her full, swollen breasts. Because she hadn't fed the babies, they were hard and taut, the milk starting to run from

her nipples under his caressing fingers. He played with her erect nipples and then his lips closed over a nipple and sucked. For a moment she tensed, she thought of stopping him, but she couldn't. Her body was on fire under the onslaught of his desire. It was too late now. Her secret was out. Thrill after thrill surged through her body under his lips, his hands. Her breasts felt the blessed release of milk as he sucked, his fingers softly and gently caressing her moist cleft. She could feel her loins throb with desire as his fingers entered her. She vaguely felt that he pulled off his shorts. She watched him kneel between her legs and saw his throbbing erection as it came towards her, and she arched her hips to meet him. She wanted him, wanted all of him, needed him to fill her with his passion, to fill that empty void and bring her heart back to life. When he finally entered her, and his arms closed around her, he kissed her deeply, his tongue dancing a tango with hers, and he slowly started to move within her. She grasped his buttocks and pulled him tight against her. She matched his every move, until finally she gasped and found blessed release from the burning fire in her loins, their cum mixing.

They lay quietly in each other's arms for a moment, then Michael took a tissue and wiped the milk off her breasts, which were still over-full and the milk was trickling out slowly. He kissed her again.

"Susan, honey, I'm falling in love with you."

"Yes Michael, oh yes, I feel the same way."

This was her destiny. She felt it in her heart, in her soul. He pulled the covers up and took her in his

arms. He couldn't get enough of her. They made love again and again, until Jimmy made himself heard. Michael kissed her on the lips.

"I'll get him, you stay there." He brought Jimmy to her, and put him to her nipple. Then he sat on the side of the bed and watched his son drink his fill. Susan found it really strange that Michael asked no questions and that he readily put Jimmy to her breast. He grinned at her, and almost looked boyish as he brushed a curl of her face.

"He's a little wolf, isn't he? No wonder my babies are so strong and healthy."

Susie woke up too, and he brought her to Susan and put her at the other breast. Then he lay down beside them with his arm over Susan's waist. He watched as the babies both drank their fill, then he changed them both and brought them back to their cribs.

"Now it's my turn, and I can play with those lovely milk jugs for a change without having them spill over."

She blushed and he still asked her nothing. Didn't he find it strange that she had breasts filled with milk? That she had been breast-feeding the twins? Should she tell him? She started: "Michael, I..." He put his hand over her mouth.

"Sssh, no questions, no answers. I love you, you love me. That's all that matters right now." This time he made love to her more gently, their initial passioniated, they took the time to explore. She felt inexperienced in the art of making love. Hell, she'd only ever necked with Scott... But it came naturally.

Everything she'd ever read about and seen on TV happened as if she'd done it her whole life. Tracing a path down his chest, twirling the dark chest hairs along the way, she came to his cock. It jumped to attention as soon as she touched it. Wonderingly, she sat up between his legs and gazed at it, then put both her hands around it and kissed the tip. A clear droplet appeared from the hole. She licked it and heard Michael suck in his breath. His hands descended on her hair as she circled the bulbous head with her tongue and then pushed down gently. Taking him into her mouth, she sucked, twirled her tongue around the hole and felt him harden even more. She cupped his taut balls and squeezed them gently, then started to move her head swiftly up and down, sucking his cock deep inside her mouth. Vaguely, she heard Michael groan. She was so intent on what she was doing that all sound around her had almost ceased. His hands tightened around her head, his fingers entwined in her hair. Suddenly, he pulled her head away and up so she could meet his gaze.

"No," he said in a hoarse voice. "I want to be inside you when I come. Sit on me, babe."

She climbed on top of him and positioned her pussy above his cock. His hands were on her hips and he pushed her down, but she resisted, teasing, moving back and forth just barely touching the tip. Her fingers raked the mat of hair on his chest. Leaning forward, she brushed her breasts against his lips and watched milk trickle from the nipples and settling on his chin. He opened his mouth and she let the milk drip into it. Then she slid backwards and

slowly encased him within her vagina, tightening the vaginal muscles around him. Rotating her hips, she still teased and by his tension could tell that he could hardly contain himself much longer. Raising her body, flinging her head back, she started to ride him until he exploded within her. Silently, she sank down on his body, still holding his cock within her, and nestled against him.

"Where did you learn how to make love like that?" he asked softly.

"Reading. I had a lot of time to read when I..." she stopped herself just in time. "Reading and TV."

They made love until the phone rang and he finally with a look of regret left her bed.

"I suppose we had better get cleaned up and make an appearance or we'll have the staff wondering about us." He kissed her gently. "Let's keep this between us for now?"

She nodded and watched him put on his shorts.

"I'll see you in the hot tub." The twins had woken up again and Susan fed them. Her mind was whirling. She felt so happy. She had fallen in love. Really in love, but, this was too fast, and there were so many unanswered questions. Should she tell him? He had said, no questions, no answers. She had to tell him sooner or later. They couldn't have any secrets between them. It could damage their newfound love, their relationship. He could throw light on how Susie had come to be in this house and how Donna fitted into all this.

* * * *

Little did she know that as Michael was waiting for her in the hot tub, with a bottle of champagne, he was wrestling with his thoughts just as much. He had to tell her that it was he who had raped her, that the twins were really hers and that he had taken them. Did she really believe her baby was dead? Then why had she kept her milk? He decided to wait, to just enjoy this new love and reveal everything later when their love had grown stronger. He was afraid if he revealed the truth now, he would lose her, as well as the twins.

Susan came in and dropped her robe. She blushed as it slithered to the tiled floor and quickly climbed into the bubbling water. He looked at her beautiful body as she climbed in, her slim hips, the black triangle between her legs still damp from their love making and at her firm full breasts and immediately his cock answered his feelings.

“Come here”, he said in a husky, passion filled voice. He held out his hand to her and pulled her through the water and sat her on his lap. He guided his waiting erection into her as he sat her down, and holding her hips started to move her body up and down. She held his shoulders and automatically started to move with him. He cupped her breasts, and it wasn’t long before again, he spilled his seed within her. He had been so long without a woman and without real love that his lust knew no measure. Every time he looked at her, touched her, he felt desire. They played in the water like a couple of kids, until he took her in his arms.

"Susan, as soon as my divorce is finalized, will you marry me?"

She was quiet for a moment. Shouldn't they talk first? Shouldn't she tell him about the baby? About Susie? He kissed her and she felt her heart melting. She loved him, and if she married him, it didn't really matter anymore. She would be with her baby forever and no-one could take her away from her anymore.

"Yes, Michael, oh yes." He kissed her again.

"Until then, we have to keep it quiet, because if Donna found out, one way or another, and believe me, news travels fast, she would cause trouble. But, we *will* tell my mother, won't we?"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Nana was in seventh heaven when they told her. She embraced Susan in a motherly hug. "Now, you'll really be my daughter. Oh, Michael, now you'll have everything. A wonderful, beautiful wife who loves you, a good mother for the twins. This is just perfect. I guess I hired the right person for the job, didn't I?"

The weeks went by in a rosy haze. Michael had to go back to work, but every free minute was spent with Susan and the twins. They often went riding together and laughed and played like children. They were happy. Every now and then, Susan thought about telling him her deep secret, but she kept postponing it. She was scared to lose her new-found happiness. Maybe it should never be told, maybe it should remain a secret, buried deep within her heart. Unknown to Susan, Michael had exactly the same thoughts.

One day, when Michael was at work and Susan was busy with the twins, she heard someone coming in. She thought that Michael had come home early. She skipped happily down the stairs, to come to a

dead stop. She recognized the woman immediately. There, in the hall, stood Donna, surrounded by suitcases. Donna gave her a cool glance.

"Well, well, who are you, my dear? Michael does pick them young these days." Sarah had also come into the hall. Her black face was thunderous.

"Miss Donna, what are you doing here?"

"Don't you dare speak to me that way, you fat cow, or I'll fire you. Now take my things up to the master bedroom and unpack them. I've come home."

Fear gripped Susan, terrible fear and pain.

"Now, who are you?"

"She's the nanny," Sarah growled.

"Oh, yes, the nanny for my lovely babies. Where are they? I want to see them."

"They're asleep." Susan said softly.

"I don't care, I want to see them. Never mind, I'll find the nursery myself. Knowing Michael, it's probably right next to our room." She marched up the stairs and threw the door open to the nursery. Susan had followed her, still dumbstruck.

"Get lost, you little slut. I want to be alone with my children." Susan felt the tears welling up in her eyes. She ran down the stairs to the kitchen, where Sarah was busy cooking.

"Sarah, what am I going to do?" and she fell into Sarah's arms, sobbing.

"There, there, child. When Michael comes home, he'll kick her out. Don't you worry none now. Go and call Michael and tell him. I'll keep an eye on her."

Susan went to the study to call Michael. She listened for a moment at the bottom of the stairs, but

everything was quiet up in the nursery. She softly closed the door behind her and picked up the phone and dialed the number of Michael's office.

* * * *

Donna was standing in the nursery looking at the two sleeping babies. She had hired a detective to spy on Michael, to get something on him, that's how she had found out about her two supposed children. "Well, you little brats, I don't know where the hell he got you from, but I'm sure as hell going to use you to my advantage!" She went to the master bedroom and unpacked her clothes as she swore and muttered about the lazy servants. She changed into a pair of pants and a sweater and flopped down on the bed. "Christ, I need a drink so badly."

* * * *

After telling Michael's secretary that there was an emergency at the house, Susan finally got Michael on the line.

"What's wrong, honey, the twins..."

"Michael," in between sobs, "D...D...Donna is here...she's mean...she's horrible. She's moved in Michael."

"Fuck, she can't do that. Stay close to the twins, Susan, don't let her anywhere near them."

"She's already up there, Michael. She barged right in."

"Shit. Okay, I have one more patient to see and I'll

be right home. Don't worry, we'll work things out."

She left the study and went up to the nursery. Donna had left the door wide open and Susan quickly went in and locked the door behind her, as well as her bedroom door. She would stay locked in, until Michael came home. She could hear movements in the master bedroom. Donna was throwing things around and swearing. She heard her going downstairs and yelling for Sarah and she was glad when she finally heard Michael's car pull into the driveway.

* * * *

Michael entered the house full of apprehension. He heard Donna's shrill voice yelling at Sarah as soon as he opened the door.

"Where the hell did he hide the booze? Tell me, you bitch, damn you." He could hear something crashing to the floor. He quickly locked the study and stuck the key in his pocket. She ran into the living room, and quickly regained her composure when she saw Michael

"Michael, darling, I've come home. Home to you and my darling babies." She laughed loudly.

"You underestimated me, honey. I can hire detectives, too, and what did I find out? I brought two darling little angels into the world. You stole my babies, Michael."

Michael tried to stay calm as he answered her. "You know that isn't true, Donna."

"Of course I know that, darling," she hissed. "They

suit my purpose, though. You'll give me everything. The house, the money, the car, all of it. If you don't, I'll sue you for custody of my so-called children, and you'll never see me or them again. I'll tell the whole world, how you abused me, threw me out of the house and then stole my babies. By the way, what little slut of yours gave birth to them? How much did you pay her? For now, I'm back in, and I'll keep my mouth shut, as long as you agree to my terms. Now get me some booze."

"Sorry, you'll have to go and buy some." He threw her the car keys and a fifty-dollar bill. At least that would get her out of the house for a while. She drove off with screaming tires. He ran to the nursery and banged on the door. Susan opened the door for him, Susie at her breast. He put his arms around her.

"Is she gone, Michael?"

"No, honey. She's blackmailing me. I have to dance to her tune, or she'll sue for custody of the twins." A shock went through Susan.

"She can't have the twins, I won't let her." Tears sprang to her eyes, but she controlled herself.

"Please don't fret, sweetheart, we'll never let that happen. Let's just play it by ear for now. She can't see us together. It would just give her more ammunition to use against us. There she is. She's back already. Look at that, she must have had some money of her own. She bought two sixty pounders and more. I had better go downstairs and keep an eye on her. You stay here with the twins and lock the door."

He heard her lock the door behind him. What were they going to do? She couldn't stay locked in the

nursery forever.

Michael casually, sat on the couch and picked up the paper. Donna came in. She took a gulp from one open bottle, holding the other one under her arm. Mike looked at her in disgust. "Damn it, woman, if you have to drink, at least use a glass." She walked to the bar, devoid of everything except glasses, and grabbed a glass. She poured it full and downed it in one go. She poured another one. This one she drank a little slower. *Good Lord, she's worse than ever*, he thought. Those were twelve-ounce glasses and she was drinking it straight. She wandered around the living room restlessly, all the time taunting him. When she got no reply, she yelled at him, but he ignored her. If only he had told Susan the truth. Now he was stuck. If only he had not put Donna's name on the birth registration. If everything was exposed, he would probably go to jail. He would lose his license to practice, as would his friend who had signed the registration paper. He had gotten himself into quite a mess. And he couldn't go to anyone for advice or help. He had to try and get out of this mess on his own. Donna finally stumbled up the stairs with her bottle, drinking from it on the way up. An hour later he checked on her quietly. She had passed out on his bed. He knocked on Susan's door and she unlocked it.

"She's passed out. She'll sleep till noon tomorrow, at least." He took her in his arms and she leaned her head on his strong chest and sobbed.

"I'll see if I can re-schedule my appointments, so I can stay home with you. It's going to be hard, because I've been away so long already."

She told him she could cope. She would stay in the nursery and her room as much as possible and lock the doors. Sarah would bring her food.

"Come baby, let's go and relax in the hot tub and soak some of this tension out of our bodies. Lock the doors though and take the keys with you, just to make sure. I'm going to get some things from my room and I'll see you there."

Michael was already in the tub when she joined him. "Lock the door, honey, we don't need any surprises." She slid into the water beside him and he put his arms around her.

"She's still out cold, I doubt if she'll wake up for a long time. I've seen this happen so many times." He climbed out of the water and double-checked the door. He stood on the side of the tub for a moment looking down at her.

Michael saw the desire in her eyes as she stared at his body and he stood on the side of the hot tub for a few minutes on purpose. For the moment, Donna, and all their problems were forgotten as he took her in his arms and made love to her. Susan closed her eyes as he slowly moved inside her, teasing her, playing with her breasts and her hard nipples. She had to hang on to the rails and couldn't do anything, except let him love her and enjoy the moment.

Afterwards, they stayed in each other's arms and relaxed. They took a shower together and lathered each other. Michael took great pleasure in washing her hair, and threatened her to shave himself bald if she ever cut it. Then they snuck down to the kitchen and had a glass of warm milk and a snack before

going to bed. Michael crawled into bed with her.

"There's no way I'm going to sleep with that bitch. I want to be with you." He cradled her in his arms. This time there were no erotic feelings, no lust, just the need to be with each other, to seek comfort. He held her so tenderly and she snuggled against him, shutting out her fear, drinking in the feeling of being wanted, of being loved...

They fell asleep in each other's arms.

* * * *

At six in the morning, like clockwork, the twins woke up. Jimmy's lungs had developed very well, and he knew how to make himself heard. He bellowed loudly through the still house. Michael jumped out of bed. A voice came from the other room, loud banging on the wall. "Shut the fuck up. Fuckin' little bastards. Shut that fuckin' kid up."

Susan was shocked at the language the woman used about the babies. Michael brought Jimmy to Susan to feed and held Susie until Jimmy was done.

"I'm going to take a shower and get dressed and see what she's up to." He gathered the clean clothes he had put in Susan's room, and went to the bathroom in the hallway. He didn't take very long. He checked on Donna, and then went back to Susan and helped her with the twins.

"She's drinking already. That means she'll pass out again and sleep most of the day. You'll be all right. If she appears at all, lock yourself and the twins in, promise me that. Call me at work and let me know

how things are. I'll be at the hospital for the next few hours, but you can get me on my pager." He kissed her and she was left alone.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Susan kept a fearful eye on the door of the master bedroom. She kept the twins downstairs with her most of the day, so that Donna wouldn't wake up and hear them crying. She used the study to feed them. Towards evening, Donna came sauntering down the stairs in a transparent negligee. She had apparently taken a shower. Her hair was wet and she looked a little cleaner. Her eyes were bloodshot, but she seemed half sober.

"Well, if it isn't the little nanny. Tell me, honey, has he seduced you yet? He will, you know." She laughed and stood looking at the twins.

"Take the brats upstairs. I don't feel like dealing with them yet, but you come back, do you hear me? I need someone to talk to."

Susan picked up the sleeping twins, trying not to wake them, and took them to the nursery. She tucked them in carefully and waited for a minute to make sure they stayed asleep. She locked the door and put the key in her pocket and went downstairs to join Donna. She couldn't very well stay upstairs. The woman was likely to come banging on the door. She

sat as far away from Donna as possible, who in the meantime, had poured herself a drink. Donna suddenly started to cry.

"You don't know anything, do you, Susan? You don't know what a fuckin' asshole my husband is. You know, a year ago, he threw me out of the house. Then he found me and he stole my babies the day they were born. He walked right out of the hospital with them. You didn't know that, did you, girly? What was your name again? Oh yes, right. Susan. Mm, interesting. Susan and Susie." She looked at Susan suspiciously. She started to cry again, trying to make Susan feel sorry for her. Susan just sat there quietly, letting her rave on and cry until Michael came home. He looked at the two women sitting in the living room.

"Donna, go upstairs and put on some clothes."

"Why, darling? Does it bother you to see me naked?" She opened the negligee, displaying her nude body. "Look at me, baby, it hasn't changed. I'm just as beautiful as ever, even after two babies." She spun around and dropped the negligee to the floor, totally exposing her whole naked body and sliding up to Michael, she put her arms around his neck.

"Come, baby, make love to me, right here in front of little nanny. Maybe we can teach her something."

He disengaged the clinging hands and pushed her away, none to gently. "Go upstairs and get dressed, it's dinnertime." He looked at Susan, his eyes full of concern.

* * * *

Donna noticed his expression as she followed his glance. Her eyes narrowed to slits. So that's how it was. She would show the little slut who was the strongest and who was the sexiest. She hadn't lost her touch yet, except she would have to slow down with the booze. After all, she was still Mrs. Stuart. She picked up the negligee, and throwing her head back, she walked proudly up the stairs, stark naked. At the top she turned around. Michael had followed her, to make sure that she was going to the bedroom. She looked down at him and laughed softly. She put a leg up on the rail of the stairs, and slowly ran her hands over her body. She let her hand rest on her clit, then slowly let her fingers trail up and down her wide open cleft. Deliberately, she removed her leg from the banister and thrust her breasts towards him and stroked her nipples, then she turned around and marched into the bedroom.

* * * *

Michael shook his head. He had not been taken in by the little act. It hadn't done anything to him, it left him cold. She was just like one of his patients now. She couldn't stir any emotion in him at all, except disgust. He walked back to Susan and kissed her gently on the lips.

"Are you okay, honey? Sorry about the little display. That's Donna all over, she's a total slut. She'll be down again. I know her moods. Maybe you and the twins should go and stay with my mother for a

while."

He had barely finished speaking, when Donna walked in. She had heard his last words.

"Like hell, babe. My babies stay right here, and little nanny here stays to take care of them. I'm not into changing diapers. If I find them leaving this house, I'll have the police after them in no time flat. Let's eat."

Susan had no idea how she could have done it so fast, but she had changed into a smart cocktail dress. It was yellow chiffon, with a flared skirt. It was strapless and her breasts were pushed high above the bodice, showing a hint of aureole. She wore high-heeled yellow satin shoes to match the dress. The outfit must have cost her a fortune. Her hair she had quickly pinned up and she wore make-up. She looked like she had stepped straight out of a fashion magazine. The emeralds she wore were beautiful and brought out the green in her eyes.

"I can't believe you didn't sell that necklace along with everything else you sold," Michael said.

"Oh, I pawned it for a while, but got it out again with the money you gave me. I'm rather fond of this set."

Michael didn't trust her for a moment, and he wondered what she was up to.

"I'll eat in the kitchen," Susan mumbled.

"Oh, no, you don't, nanny. You'll eat with us, won't she, dear?"

Susan felt very insignificant beside Donna in her jeans and sweater. She didn't want to eat in the dining room, but she followed them anyway. Dinner was

consumed in silence. Donna behaved herself. She acted the perfect wife and hostess. She even drank coffee with them. Donna kept her eyes on Michael and Susan constantly. She watched them like a hawk. Susan avoided looking at either one of them and concentrated on her food. After dinner she excused herself, with the excuse of having to change the twins. It was almost their feeding time anyway. Donna remained calm and behaved quiet normal. She seemed to have sobered up considerably and she tried to act like the good little wife by showing interest in Michael's daily routine.

"How was your day, Mike? How many patients did you see?" This went on for a while with Michael giving short, curt answers. Michael finally stood up and said that he was going to say goodnight to the twins.

"Okay, dear, but don't be long."

What the hell was she up to now? He didn't trust her for a second, and wasn't fooled by her sudden change. In the nursery, he took Susan in his arms.

"Oh, Michael, I felt so uncomfortable."

"I'm sorry, honey. I don't know what she's up to. Be careful, okay? I can't risk sleeping with you tonight, because she's sobered up. I'll have to sleep in the study. I'll come and see you later, if I can." He kissed her once more and left.

Downstairs, Donna had poured them a glass of wine. She handed it to him when he sat down in his chair. He looked at the glass of wine suspiciously. Where the hell had she found the wine? He spotted the half open study door and she noticed him looking

at it. She laughed.

"I still have all my keys, darling. By the way, did you buy this for me?" She had gone through his drawers. She dangled the gold locket before his eyes.

He snatched it out of her hand. "That's for Susie." He stuffed the chain and locket in his pocket, and decided he would take it to the office with him. He sipped at the wine, trying desperately to ignore the woman.

Donna stretched and pretended a yawn. "I'm really tired, darling, let's go to bed."

"You go to bed, Donna, I have work to do." He went to his study and closed the door behind him. He locked it. He decided to call the locksmith first thing in the morning and have all the locks throughout the house changed. Thank God the lock's on the nursery and Susan's rooms were brand new. She had no keys to fit those two doors. He stayed in his study a long time, trying to figure out how to get out of this mess. Finally, he softly went up the stairs and peeked in the master bedroom. Donna was asleep. He went to Susan's door and opened it with his key. Susan was in bed, but she wasn't asleep. He locked the door softly behind him and sat on the side of her bed.

"I can't stay honey. I think she's asleep, but I don't trust her." He kissed her goodnight and held her in his arms but didn't tell her that he heard a sound outside the door. He knew Donna was outside the door, listening and his heart contracted. What was he to do?

After Michael had gone to work the next morning, Donna got up. She showered and dressed carefully.

When Susan came downstairs, Donna was sitting at the breakfast table, eating a piece of toast. She looked very much the lady of the house.

"Good morning, Susan. Come and join me, my dear." She sipped the cup of tea daintily, although her hands still shook a little. She needed a drink badly to get rid of the shakes. No, she couldn't have a drink. She had to behave. She had to stay sober, or she would louse up everything. Susan ate her breakfast in silence. She downed her milk and started to get up.

"Let's take the twins for a walk, Susan dear. The weather is so nice today. The sun will do them good, as well as the fresh air."

Susan looked up in surprise. "Maybe after their next feeding."

"Do you ride, Susan?"

"Eh...yes, I do."

"Well, isn't that nice. Maybe you and I can go riding later?"

Susan muttered a "maybe" and rushed up the stairs. She heaved a sigh of relief as she sat down in the rocking chair. She had not noticed that the key had fallen out of the lock after she closed the door. Jimmy had woken up and Susan picked him up and cuddled him.

"Phew, you smelly boy." She changed his dirty diaper and sat down again with him. She pulled up her sweater and gave herself to the sweet sensation of a baby suckling at her breast, his little hands kneading as he drank.

* * * *

Outside the nursery door, Donna was listening. She could only hear Susan murmuring softly to the babies. She bent down and looked through the keyhole. The key wasn't in the lock. She closed one eye and peered through the small hole. Susan was sitting right in her vision, with her sweater pulled up and her breasts bared. Donna hissed softly. "I don't believe it, she can't be feeding the brats, where the hell would she get the milk from? Mm, the girl must be getting her jollies out of it. No man to suck on them, so she substituted the brats." She was well satisfied with her spying and her own explanation of what she had seen. Half an hour later, she knocked on the door.

"Susan dear, shall we go for that walk now?" Susan had just finished feeding Susie.

By all means, she thought. She dressed the twins warmly and brought them out. Once they were outside, Donna calmly pushed her aside.

"Let me push, they're my babies." She noted the flash of anger in Susan's eyes as she let go off the buggy and silently walked next to her.

"You know Susan, this feels good. I think we should do it more often. It's good for the children to have all this fresh air."

The day took so long before Michael came home. Susan had the feeling that Donna was everywhere. She had to restrain herself not to fly into Michael's arms when he walked through the door. Instead, Donna, dressed to kill, was waiting for him. She kissed him on the cheek.

“How was your day, darling? Oh, my goodness, you look so tired. Here, let me take your jacket and your briefcase, you go and sit down and get comfortable.” Michael pulled up his eyebrows and looked at Susan who shrugged her shoulders. Donna hadn’t missed the look Michael had given Susan. She was convinced that there was something between those two and she would use it, and also what she had seen through the keyhole that day.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Dinner was torture. Once again Donna acted the perfect wife and hostess. It had to stop, but Michael had no idea how to get rid of her. He couldn't stand the act she was putting on. He knew it was all a farce. What should he do? Just give in and give her everything she wanted? His house, the cars, the money?

"Sweetheart, the twins were just darling today. I took them for a walk, you know." Michael's eyebrows shot up in surprise and anger. He looked at Susan.

"We both did," Susan quickly commented.

Michael and Susan were both silent during dinner. Donna's idle chatter about nothing irritated them both. Once again Susan excused herself. Donna stopped her.

"No, dear, let's retire to the living room and chat, like the nice little family we are." Michael and Susan glanced at each other. Donna took the wine carafe and poured them each a glass of wine. Susan declined.

"No, thank you. I don't drink."

"Of course, dear, what am I thinking off, you're far too young and you have to be alert for the twins.

How stupid of me.”

Close to ten, Susan heaved a big sigh of relief when she heard Jimmy. She ran up the stairs and was glad to get away from the awkward situation.

Donna started a conversation with Michael about babies and that mother’s milk was much better for them. “Of course, mine dried up after you took the twins, dear. Pity, really.”

“Shut the fuck up, Donna. What the hell are you up to? You know damn well you’ve never had any milk, any pregnancy, so shut your fuckin’ bloody mouth.”

She stood up. “Michael dear, you’re angry. After all, you started all this. I didn’t, and now you have to deal with the consequences. Of course, if you give me what I want, you’ll be free to leave with the twins and your little nanny.”

“Like hell, you bitch. Whatever I’ve got is for my kids, not for you.”

“Well, darling, then I guess you’ll have to put up with me and I’ll have to be the dutiful little wife and doting momma. Well, maybe it won’t be so bad after all. You know, I finally realize that you’re not that bad looking. You seemed to have improved with age.” She started to untie the sash on her dress. The dress dropped to the floor and she was naked underneath. He looked at her. She left him totally cold. He pictured Susan doing this, instead of Donna, and felt the desire stir in his loins. Donna noticed the growing bulge in his pants and thought it was because of her.

“Oh, baby, so you still do want me.” Her voice had become husky. She pushed the coffee table aside and lay on the floor spreading her legs. She reached down

and pulling both lips wide apart, bared her pussy for him. Michael's erection had gone again, just as fast. He stood up and looked down at her with disgust.

"Get up and go to bed." He walked away. Donna was convinced that he still had feelings for her and she was determined to seduce him. She would wait for now. She had to take it easy. She would get her way, one way or the other. She always did. She used to be able to wrap Michael around her little finger, and she would do it again. She wrapped the dress around her body again, and went upstairs to the bedroom. Where the hell had Michael gone? She crept to the nursery door and peeked through the keyhole. The key was in it and she couldn't see a thing. She listened. She could hear Michael's voice, as well as Susan's, but they were talking so soft, she couldn't hear a word. She went back to the bedroom and poured herself a drink. As she sat on the bed, the phone rang. She picked it up the same instant Michael picked it up.

"Michael's mother. That bloody bitch hates my guts," she hissed softly, holding the horn away from her mouth. She stuffed a tissue over the mouthpiece and listened.

"Mom, I don't know what to do. She keeps threatening to file for custody."

"Michael, she would never get it. Everyone knows she's a drunk and a slut. You've got plenty of witnesses."

"Mom, I can't risk it, but she's really getting to us. Susan is a nervous wreck. Right now she's playing the perfect wife and hostess. I don't know what the hell

she's up to. If I give her what she wants, she'll be back for more later. It will never stop."

"Michael, what about Susan?"

"Mom, I love Susan, you know that. This is killing her. It's killing both of us and it's not good for the twins."

"Does she seem to care for the twins at all, Michael?"

"Of course not, how the hell could she? They're..." he almost bit off his tongue. He had almost told her that they weren't Donna's. and he'd stopped himself just in time. He said goodbye to her and hung up the phone.

Donna in the other room thoughtfully put the phone down too. So that was it. Michael loved the little nanny and wanted to marry her. Like hell he would. She would never allow that. She had too much on him, and he didn't know where to turn.

Michael went back to Susan's room. She had just finished feeding Susie. He helped her put the twins down for the night, then he carried her to her bed and gently kissed her. He told her what Donna had done downstairs, and how she disgusted him. Susan couldn't help it, but she did feel little pangs of jealousy and it showed. Michael took her in his arms again and assured her of his love.

"Sweetheart, I've never known real love. I think what I felt for Donna was infatuation, desire, not love. She was so popular, so dazzling, so sophisticated, I was obsessed with the idea of having her. You know we never made love before we got married? I thought it was because she was a virgin. On our wedding

night, she taunted me with all the lovers she'd had when I discovered that she wasn't a virgin. Finally I know what real love is, what it feels like."

Susan wrapped her arms around him. "Stay with me tonight, Michael, please? If we're really quiet, she won't hear."

He stayed, he couldn't resist the pleading look in her beautiful eyes or the need. Neither could he ignore his own need. Her hands were on his clothes, stripping him until he was naked. The only sound in the room was their heavy breathing as he leaned over her and rubbed his cock against her belly. Her eyes were luminous pools of sapphire water, a rippling ocean waiting to burst into a raging storm. He gazed into those pools, feeling immersed, touching her soul, her heart, her mind, and he knew the anguish she was feeling because it matched his own. Baby, if only you knew... if only I could tell you... Too late... too late... he felt the fear and uncertainty in his own heart at what the future held for them. It threatened to shadow everything that was so beautiful between them... "My love," he whispered. "My sweet, sweet love..."

"Take me, Michael, take me now," she whispered back. "I need you. I want you inside me. Join with me, please..."

A shudder ripped through his body as he pushed into her. He kneaded her breasts, still drinking from her eyes, their souls now joining in both pain and pleasure as he pushed all the way in and touched the core of her womanhood. He watched her eyes darken to the inky depths of the ocean, the storm raging

within now, a storm of passion and a storm of fear, matching his own.

Their union was quiet, only their movements and breathing disturbed the silence of the night. He kissed her as the dam burst for both of them and their cum flooded their thighs.

The kiss went on endlessly, desperately, their tongues dancing a slow waltz as they loved each other without words. Later, Susan fell asleep quietly in his arms, but he stayed awake for a while. He realized there was only one way out of this mess. If he told Susan the truth, she could claim custody of her babies, and Donna had nothing to blackmail him with. But then, he would lose Susan and his practice. Then what? What the hell was he going to do? Did Susan love him enough to forgive him? Should he take the risk? He stayed awake all night, trying to think of a solution.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Susan woke up with a start. Michael had gone to work and she was alone in bed with her thoughts. What a mess this was and how were they going to get out of it?

The door opened. Susan thought it was Michael coming back, but it was Donna. Michael had forgotten to lock the door. Donna locked the door and walked to the bed. She was wearing a gown, but she might as well have worn nothing. It was very sheer.

"Well, my dear, let's see what my husband finds so attractive." With that she pulled the covers off Susan. Susan, as usual, was naked. She stayed quiet and kept very still. Donna looked down at her, taking in every detail of Susan's naked body.

"Mm, not bad, not bad at all." She reached down and went to touch Susan's breast. Susan re-acted instantly and slapped the hand away. Anger flared in Donna's eyes.

"Don't do that, nanny. I can take your precious twins away from you and Michael just like that." She snapped her fingers and reached down again and felt Susan's breasts.

"Well, isn't that curious. They feel very full, almost as if they're filled with milk."

Susan felt very scared. She wanted to scream, but she was scared for the twins. She gritted her teeth and tried not to move. Maybe the woman would go away. She was wrong. Donna's hands roamed all over her body and then went back to her breasts. They were very full, the twins had not been fed yet. Suddenly Donna bent down, and taking one breast in her hand and squeezing it hard, she sucked on the nipple for a second. Milk came spurting out, and wouldn't stop.

"Just as I suspected. You're the mother of those little monsters, aren't you? Susan, answer me. Are you?"

Susan stayed silent. She glanced at the door and Donna laughed. A harsh, shrill, evil laugh. The green eyes flashed fire. She waved the key at Susan.

"Don't even think about it, honey. If you and Michael want to keep your little darlings, you had better co-operate with me." She dropped her gown and stood naked next to the bed. Susan had closed her eyes, but Donna slapped her.

"Look at me, Susan, look. Have you ever been with a woman? It's better, you know, much better than men." She grabbed Susan's hand and put it between her legs. Susan quickly pulled it back.

"You're not being co-operative, Susan, darling. I want to see what my husband finds so attractive about you." She roughly pulled Susan's legs apart and climbed in between them.

"I can see why he likes them young. You look very virginal yet, my dear." She proceeded to examine

Susan, and roughly inserted her fingers in the still moist wetness from Michael's and her love from the night before.

"What's all this wetness? My husband's come? I'll have to have a taste of that."

Susan groaned. She couldn't put up with this, she'd throw up. She tried to move away from the groping, feeling hands, but Donna had an iron grip on her leg. Again, she roughly inserted her fingers into Susan's vagina.

"See, honey, I knew you'd like it."

Suddenly, a loud wail. It was Jimmy announcing that he was very hungry. Donna jumped off the bed. Susan looked at her and said calmly, "If I don't go to Jimmy, Sarah will come. She has a monitor in the kitchen."

Donna swore. Damn kid, she was just having some fun. She picked up her negligee and took off, but she took the key with her. Susan cried softly. She felt so humiliated and dirty, so degraded. She quickly washed her hands, face and breasts and took Jimmy out of his crib. She carefully kept herself covered from the waist down. She felt filthy. Jimmy drank his fill. She looked at Susie, but she was still sound asleep. If Susie would sleep long enough, she could have a quick shower.

She scrubbed herself almost raw. She didn't know what was more degrading, the time she had been raped, or this. She thought about Michael. Donna had warned her that if she told Michael, she would hurt the twins. After her shower, she fed Susie and bathed them both. She tried desperately to forget about the

experience of that morning, but she couldn't. She now understood why Donna rarely allowed Michael to make love to her. She was a lesbian. If she was a lesbian, then why did she go out with other men? It was beyond Susan's comprehension. Maybe the woman was bisexual.

When she went downstairs, she first went and looked for the spare key to the nursery in the study and rushed upstairs to lock the door. Not that it mattered much now that Donna actually had a key, but at least it would delay her going into the room. She'd ask Michael to have the locks changed right away.

Donna was eating breakfast with cool composure. Susan sat down. "Donna, don't you ever do again what you did this morning. I'll kill you."

"What are you talking about my dear? You must have had a nightmare."

"I'll tell Michael."

"You'll tell Michael what my dear? About your nightmare?"

Susan gave up and kept her mouth shut. This woman was too clever for her. She ate her breakfast in silence. Even if she didn't feel like eating, she had to keep up her strength and give the twins proper nutrition.

The day went by in a haze. It seemed to take forever before Michael came home. As soon as he saw her, he noticed that there was something wrong, but when he had a chance to question her, she assured him that everything was all right. She went upstairs rather early and left Michael to deal with Donna.

Donna was drinking quite a lot, Michael noticed. He noticed the different color in the wine glass, but he didn't say anything. She chit-chatted about the twins, how proud she was of them and it made him sick to the stomach. Michael hated her. He was sick and tired of the game she was playing. She stood up and walked over to the stereo. He noticed that she was wearing the same dress as the night before. She turned the stereo on full blast. He stood up and turned it down, but she only turned the volume up again. She danced around the room, and as she was dancing and stumbling around, she untied the sash and dropped the dress to the floor. She also unpinned the long blond hair and danced before him stark naked, all the time running her hands over her body, trying to entice him. He started to get up from his chair to leave, but she jumped between his legs, and pushed him down. She grabbed him in the crotch, and he tried to pry her fingers loose.

"Come on baby, I know you still want me. I saw the bulge in your pants last night." She fell back on the coffee table and spread her legs. Michael felt sick.

"That wasn't for you, bitch, I was thinking about someone else." She jumped up and looked at him with hatred.

"I know, you bastard. I know. Your little lesbian slut. Ha! I licked the cum off her fanny this morning. She loved every bit of it. I drank the milk from her tits, you dirty asshole. You got her knocked up, didn't you? Those are her little brats, right? My name is on the birth certificate, and don't you forget it." She gulped down her drink. "You'll pay, you bastard, so

will your little slut."

Susan had been standing at the top of the stairs. She had overheard the last part of Donna's words. Sarah, too, had been listening through the kitchen door, just in case Michael needed help. Donna sent her glass crashing against the door.

"Get back in the kitchen where you belong, you nosy fat cow." She grabbed the bottle and went flying up the stairs, stumbling and falling and shouting obscenities. She shoved Susan so hard, that Susan could just barely grab the railing to stop herself from falling down the stairs. Donna disappeared into the master bedroom, after slamming the door so hard that all the lights shook. She continued to rant and rave and was throwing things. They could hear things crashing against the door, against the walls. They could hear glass breaking. Susan ran down the stairs and into Michael's arms. She sobbed. Michael took her tear stained face between his big hands.

"Honey, what did she do to you this morning?" In between sobs, Susan told him what had happened that day.

"That bitch. That's it, she has to go. I'm going to have her committed, she's crazy. She's a lunatic. Hush, calm down, sweetheart. I'll go and phone right now."

Neither of them noticed that Donna had calmed down and had been listening to them at the top of the stairs. "Like hell you will," she muttered. She went back in the bedroom and with lightening speed for someone who was drunk, she pulled on some clothes. She very softly went to the nursery. It was locked. She

tried Susan's room, but then remembered that she had the key. She opened the door softly and went to the nursery and looked at the sleeping infants. Taking Michael's son would hurt him the most, and she carefully picked up Jimmy. She didn't want the baby to wake up at this point and alert the whole house. She grabbed his blanket and rolled him in it. Then she walked down the stairs very quietly. She stumbled a few times, but she didn't make enough noise for anyone to hear. She could hear their voices in the study. They were talking. She quickly slipped out of the front door, after she had taken Michael's keys out of his jacket. She opened the car door and threw the baby on the back seat. Jimmy woke up from this rough treatment and started to scream. She punched at the bundle.

"Shut your fuckin' little mouth, you brat. Shut the fuck up." Jimmy screamed even louder. She jumped in the car and started it. She pulled the bottle of whisky out of her top and took a few gulps and drove off with screaming tires.

Michael and Susan were in the study. Michael was on the phone just giving the police directions, when they heard the screaming tires.

"Hold on a minute, please," he said to the police and put down the phone. They ran to the window, just to see the tail lights in the distance swerving from side to side.

"She'll kill herself," he muttered. He rushed back to the phone and told the police his wife had just driven off in his car in a highly intoxicated state. He gave a description of his car and the direction Donna

had been going. That took care of that. Hopefully the police would pick her up before she ended up in an accident and caused harm to innocent people. Susan had gone upstairs to the nursery to check the twins. Suddenly a piercing scream came from upstairs. Susan came flying out of the nursery. "Michael, Michael, Jimmy is gone. She took Jimmy."

"Oh, my God. Get Sarah to take care of Susie. Get your coat."

Michael had another car in the garage which was rarely used and lately he had not bothered to insure it. They took off in it and drove in the direction Donna had gone.

"She's got a head start on us by at least ten minutes and she was going very fast. I just hope the police have stopped her." About ten miles down the road, they rounded a curve and saw a number of cars and people. Michael stopped the car.

"Oh God, don't let it be," he said as they quickly approached the scene of the accident. At the bottom of the slope was Michael's car. It was upside down. The top was totally flattened and one of the doors had fallen off. Steam and smoke was coming from the engine. Sirens came down the road. It was the ambulance and the police. Michael, who had gone down to the car, was told to stand back.

"My son, my baby. he's in there, please, you have to get him out!"

They had to restrain him. One of the policemen went back to his vehicle and called in for the "jaws of life". Susan stood there, with tears rolling down her cheeks, wringing her hands. She was shaking and her

teeth were chattering. One of the ambulance attendants brought a blanket and draped it around her. It didn't help much, her shaking was caused by nerves, not because she was cold. Finally 'the jaws of life' arrived, and after they put up flood lights, they went to work.

They watched as Donna's mangled body was removed from the wreck and put on a stretcher. She wasn't a pretty sight. Her head had been partially severed so her trunk was covered in blood. The blonde hair was now a rusty color, the beautiful face a mangled mass of flesh and blood, unrecognizable. One leg was grotesquely twisted. Though the paramedics covered the body quickly and put a sheet over her face, they had seen. She was pronounced dead at the scene.

Suzie suppressed a shudder and feeling of nausea. Though she'd wanted the woman out of their lives, she wouldn't have wished such a death on her worst enemy.

The crew continued to work to rescue the baby. Jimmy's little body was put on the stretcher, but they didn't cover his little face. Instead they were giving him oxygen. She felt the weight drop from her heart. He was alive. Susan ran to the edge as they started to bring him up. Michael broke loose, and rushed to her side.

"He's alive, Michael, he's alive," Susan sobbed.

"You go with the ambulance, honey, I'll follow in the car." In the ambulance, she had to sit back as they worked on Jimmy. She listened to their comments.

"His heartbeat is very slow. He's lost a lot of

blood.” They gave him more oxygen and had him on intravenous. Susan looked at Jimmy’s still little white face, his blood-matted dark curls, and the stillness of his tiny body, and her heart ached, the pain she felt was unbelievable. She’d do anything to take his place...

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Once in emergency, they were told to wait in the waiting room. Michael nervously paced the floor. Susan sat quietly. The only evidence now of her tension was the constant wringing of her hands. Finally, after what seemed like hours, but in reality it had only been minutes, a doctor came to talk to them. He knew Michael and shook his hand first.

"Jimmy has internal injuries, which we have to attend to immediately. He's very small and he's lost a lot of blood. We have to stabilize him before we can operate. He's got a rare blood type and we don't have any here. Usually, for an infant that age, we can use the mother's blood, but since she passed away... We're trying to find some in other hospitals, so I'm afraid we have to wait. The plasma alone won't do." Susan had picked up bits and pieces of the conversation and when she heard the doctor mention the blood type, she became alert. She jumped up.

"I can help, that's the same as mine."

"You've got to be kidding. Okay, off to the lab with you." The doctor hustled her to the lab where they tested her blood, and it was the right type. Before she

knew it, they had her on a stretcher and took two pints of blood.

"Just lie down quietly for ten minutes or so. Don't go away, we may need some more later." But she couldn't just lie down quietly. There was no way in hell. She wanted to be there for Jimmy. Fighting off a wave of dizziness, she quickly joined Michael. They watched as Jimmy was rushed into surgery, where they had to remove his spleen, repair his bladder, and set his little leg, which was broken in two places.

Michael and Susan waited anxiously and were finally told that Jimmy was in intensive care, and that they could go to him. They looked down at the little body and the white still little face. A big black bruise discolored the small forehead and there was a cut just above the bruise, near the hairline, which had been stitched. Intravenous was attached to his foot, and he still had an oxygen mask on. The surgeon came in to speak with them.

"He's a strong little lad, this one. He'll be all right. He'll sleep quite a while, though. He's also got a heavy concussion, so we have to keep him as quiet as possible." Michael sat down beside the crib.

"Susan, why don't you go home for a while. Feed Susie, have a rest and then come back."

Susan didn't want to leave, but realized that she had another baby to take care of. She went home and showered first. Susie was sound asleep, so she first went down to see Sarah, who had a mug of hot chocolate waiting for her. She sat in the kitchen and told Sarah everything. Sarah shook her head.

"She was never any good, that one. Don't know

how Michael put up with her nonsense for seven years. He's too good you know."

"Yes Sarah, I know. I'm going to lie down for a bit till Susie wakes up. I'll feed her first and then go back to the hospital and sit with Jimmy." Sleep came fast. Susan was physically and mentally exhausted. She had peace of mind now that she knew that Jimmy would be all right. She slept through the night and only woke when Susie woke her up. She quickly fed the baby and hurried back to the hospital to relieve Michael. Jimmy's condition had not changed, though he was out of danger.

The three weeks which followed were very busy for Michael, and especially for Susan, who went to the hospital on a daily basis to take care of Jimmy and feed him, and then rush home to feed Susie. Michael had to put in long hours at the practice, to catch up on his patient load, but he would always visit Jimmy, in between cases and in the evenings.

Michael and Susan really saw very little of each other, except at night, and then both of them were too exhausted. They would fall asleep in each other's arms. At present, nothing else mattered except Jimmy. He was priority number one now. Michael was questioned by the police, but they were mainly routine questions. There wasn't any doubt as to why the accident had happened. They had found the half empty bottle of whisky. There was an official inquiry, but it was all very straight forward. The ruling was accidental death, due to intoxication. Michael also had to deal with the insurance company and the replacement of his car.

Finally the day came when they were allowed to take Jimmy home. He had healed fast and had only lost a little bit of weight. Apart from that, he was fine. Nana was waiting for them with the video camera. Everyone was happy to have the baby back home again, safe and well. Even little Susie was smiling more and gurgling more than usual. Nana had bought a big bottle of champagne, and Sarah had baked a huge cake. They were happy that it was all over and that once more everything could return to normal. It didn't take long for everything to fall back into routine.

One morning, as Susan was bathing the twins, she looked at Susie's birthmark again. She had not really paid any attention to it lately. All thoughts about her own baby and her suspicions had been forgotten with everything which had happened. She thoughtfully ran her finger over the mark, and after she was done bathing them and put them in their cribs, she took out the photo albums again.

She thought about everything that had happened since the birth of her baby. Since the episode with Donna, and Donna's insistence that they were *her* babies, she had become very unsure. Michael had asked her to marry him, she would always be with the twins, so was it really necessary to prove anything? She decided that yes, it was, because otherwise she would always wonder.

It stayed on her mind the whole day and night and when Michael asked her what was wrong, she just said that she was still tired. He fussed over her, and made her to go bed early.

The next day, when she was breast feeding Jimmy and enjoying cuddling with him again, she looked down at the little face, at the little mouth closing down on her nipple, and she was full of thankfulness as her mind went back to that awful evening. She thought about the blood transfusions he had needed and how fortunate it was that she had the same blood. Jimmy now had her blood flowing in his little veins. That sort of made him hers too. Wasn't it coincidence that he had the same rare blood type as herself? Then suddenly, reality hit her. Coincidence? Was it really that? Was it just pure luck? They were twins, so could Jimmy be hers too? That was impossible because he was the spitten image of Michael.

The questions plagued her more and more. How could Donna have gotten hold of Susie? But Michael had been there when the twins were born, according to Nana. Nana had said that they were born at home, but Donna had mentioned that Michael had taken them from the hospital. She was totally confused and as the thoughts whirled around in her mind, she got more and more confused. Nothing fit together. Did she just want her own baby so much, that she was now fabricating anything to believe that Susie and Jimmy were really hers? She was so disturbed that she didn't know what to think anymore. Should she talk to Michael? What if she lost him? She couldn't bear the thought of that. He must know that she'd had a baby. She had milk and she had been feeding the twins all this time, yet he never objected and he never questioned her. Wasn't he at all curious why

she had milk? Why would he never let her explain? How could she approach this?

She waited until one evening when Michael came home in a really good mood. They had a quiet dinner together, and afterwards he put on some romantic music and brought out a bottle of champagne. He poured them each a glass and toasted her.

"To a beautiful lady, and a wonderful mother." She blushed, lapping up the compliment. Then he took a little box out of his pocket and opened it.

"And this, my darling, is for my future wife." He slipped the ring on her finger. It was a beautiful ring. A sapphire, surrounded by diamonds.

"To match your beautiful eyes," he whispered as he took her in his arms. He pulled her up and they danced. She noticed that it was the same song which they had danced to the very first time in the restaurant. He showed her the matching wedding band and also the eternity ring set with sapphires and diamonds.

"You can't have these yet, sweetheart, but on our wedding day, you'll get both, instead of the traditional first anniversary ring, because on our wedding day, you'll be mine for eternity, not one year later." The champagne made her feel light headed.

"You know, Michael, I shouldn't be drinking this. Last time, when Jimmy came home and I had a glass of champagne, the twins slept for ages."

His brown eyes twinkled. "Good, they're due to be fed soon. That means they'll let us sleep in."

She grinned at him. "You're mean, it will also give

them gas, you know."

"Well, honey, pretty soon you can start weaning them."

She pulled him down on the couch. "Michael, there is something which has been bothering me. Was Donna really the mother of the twins?"

He felt uneasy. "Why would you ask me that honey? I was there you know, when they were born."

"I don't know, she just acted so cold towards the twins, calling them names all the time."

"Well, sweetheart, you know she didn't want them."

"Yes, I know, but they don't look anything like her."

"Let's go to bed honey. I'll bring you the twins to feed, and tomorrow we can stay in bed as long as we want."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

After Susan fed the twins, they made love, but Susan wasn't satisfied with her questioning. She had not really gotten anywhere. Michael stayed awake for a while too. Somehow the truth had to come out, but how? How could he tell her without losing her? They both stayed very still, both pretending to be asleep, but each one was wrestling with their own thoughts, and they both finally fell asleep this way. They woke up before the twins. They made love and afterwards, Susan, with Michael's arms around her, broached the subject again.

"Michael, were you actually with Donna when she gave birth?"

"Why, Susan?"

"I don't know. Something is really weird." Should she tell him? Yes she had to.

"Michael, last year, near the end of March, I was raped. You knew that I wasn't a virgin and you knew that I was breast feeding the twins, yet you never questioned me. I appreciate that, but the fact is that I gave birth to a baby, and that baby went missing. It's supposedly dead, but I refuse to believe that." She

jumped out of bed and showed him his own typed note.

Michael's stomach was slowly turning into a knot.

"Michael, I ended up here because I couldn't find any other job, but look at Susie. She's the image of me, and Jimmy has the same rare blood type as me. Isn't that weird? Susie has a birthmark, just like mine. Is that pure co-incidence? Michael, it's driving me crazy."

Michael was silent. He didn't know what to say, or how to get out of this situation.

"Michael, did Donna's baby die? Did she somehow buy my baby? Did she bribe the doctor to sign the papers? Honey, I'm so confused, so frustrated. Do you hate me, now that you know what's been troubling me?"

Michael took her in his arms and kissed her. "No, honey, no, of course not. I could never hate you, I love you more than life itself. You must know that by now." She was crying softly in his arms. He didn't know what to say or do. Donna was dead. He could easily blame her. Pretend that he had hired a detective and found out that Donna had bought the twins through some agency. Should he take this way out? He thought about the saying. "What a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive," and how true it was. If he told her a story about Donna, he would just dig himself deeper and deeper into the web. The truth would make her run away from him, he would lose her.

The twins woke up and kept them busy for a while. Susan's face remained troubled and she was

very quiet.

A few days later, Michael was busy with some paperwork in his study when he saw Susan riding out on the stallion. He watched her and noticed that the stallion was frisky. She never rode him, why hadn't she taken Snow? She always rode Snow. He had made up his mind that he was going to tell her the truth, because he couldn't continue deceiving her this way. It was destroying her. He wanted their marriage to be honest and to be perfect in every way. There should be no secrets to mar their happy relationship. If Susan had never suspected anything, he could have handled it all, but Susie was a miniature of Susan, even down to the birthmark. Now with the accident and the blood type, how could he keep silent? It wouldn't be long and she'd put the pieces of the puzzle together. It would be so much better if he explained everything himself and pray that she'd still love him.

He continued to work on his papers. After some time he glanced at the clock. It had been more than three hours and Susan hadn't come back. A knot of fear settled in his stomach. He tried to push it aside and concentrate on his work. The twins woke up for their feeding, but Susan still had not come back. Michael tried to feed them some formula, but they both howled. He became really worried. It wasn't like Susan not to be there on time for the twins. He thought back to when Jimmy was in the hospital and about Susan flying from the house to feed Jimmy, and coming home to feed Susie. Something was wrong, desperately wrong. Something had happened to her.

He managed to settle the twins by feeding them some solids, but he kept looking out of the window for Susan. Late in the afternoon, he suddenly saw the stallion. The horse had returned home, but without Susan. The stallion was agitated, and so Michael went outside and looked at the horse. He was okay. The horses all loved Susan. He got up on the stallion and turned him around. Maybe the horse would lead him to Susan. Horses were very smart. He had been right. The stallion led him directly to where Susan had fallen. It looked as if she had been knocked off by a branch. He gathered her up in his arms.

"Sweetheart, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry, honey. It's all my fault. I should have told you the truth a long time ago." Susan moaned in his arms. "Baby, if the truth will make me lose you, then so be it. I'll tell you all, but please, please don't go away. I don't want you to leave us, to leave your babies. Honey, I've loved you for so long. You don't even know, but I loved you I think before I even really knew you. Sweetheart, don't leave us."

The tears were rolling down his face. He didn't want to risk any more trauma to her body or head by placing her on the horse, so he carried her back home. The stallion followed them and found his own way back to the stables. Once he got home, he called his mother and asked her to come over. He put Susan to bed, cleaned her up and called an associate doctor to come and see her. He couldn't examine her himself, he was too emotionally involved with her. He knew what was wrong with Susan. He knew of her emotional disturbance, and he knew also that she had

a good concussion. It hopefully wasn't serious, but it was better that she was seen by someone else.

Larry arrived and examined Susan. He confirmed Michael's diagnosis.

"Looks like she was knocked off the horse by a branch. Look at the bump on her head. She's got a good concussion. Michael, you know the procedures and the treatment, what's the matter with you?"

"Just wanted a second opinion," he muttered.

His mother had arrived in the meantime. He asked her to look after Susan and to nurse her. His mother agreed and sent Michael to pick up some things for her. While she was tending to Susan, the twins woke up. She changed them, and deep down welcomed the opportunity to also spend some time with her grandchildren. She looked in the small fridge in Susan's room and saw the formula made up in two bottles. She tried to feed the twins, but they wouldn't accept the bottles. She didn't understand why they wouldn't take the bottle from her. She kept on trying and managed to get a little bit into them. They finally went back to sleep, and she returned to Susan.

Susan was soaking wet from perspiration. Nana got a bowl and started to give her a sponge bath. She pulled the wet nightgown over Susan's head. As she sponged Susan's chest, she suddenly noticed where the wetness was coming from. Both Susan's breasts were leaking milk very badly. She saw the blue veins which covered the breasts. She saw how taut and full they were and she knew immediately why the twins refused to take the bottle. Shaking her head, she went to the nursery and picked up the little bundles.

"You rascals, that's why you've been growing so well. That's why you're so healthy."

She held the babies to Susan's overflowing breasts, which they attacked immediately. She sat with them, until they had their tummies full and then changed them and put them back in their cribs. After washing Susan, she put her in a clean nightgown and she sat beside the bed, staring at the young woman of whom she had become so fond. The young woman who was to be her daughter in law. She decided to have a talk with Michael. Didn't people in the olden days hire wet nurses, because the women either didn't have any milk or didn't want to spoil their figures? There was nothing wrong really with Susan feeding the babies. She was going to be their mother anyway. But, if Susan had milk, then she must have had a child. Where was Susan's baby?

The next day, when Michael came home from work he first went up to see Susan and the twins. During dinner, his mother was very quiet, and she barely answered Michael's questions about Susan and the babies.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Nana was sitting quietly in the family room, waiting for Michael to come down from seeing Susan and the twins. She poured him a cup of coffee. Michael knew that something was up. Usually when his mother was so quiet, it was like the calm before the storm. She was leading up to a lecture of some sort. He walked in and sat down in his chair.

"What's wrong, Mom?" Nana handed him his cup of coffee, but remained standing. She always felt more comfortable standing up when she had to have a serious talk with Michael.

"Michael, how long has Susan been breast feeding the twins?"

"I don't know Mom, probably right from the start."

"Don't you find it strange, Michael, that she has milk, yet she has no baby? Michael, you know that I'm very fond of Susan, but there's something very strange here. Why did Susan ride so recklessly? Was she upset about something? Where is her child? Did it die?" Questions, one after another, she kept on firing them at him. Michael got up and came back with a drink.

"Sit down, Mom. I have to talk to someone. I can't live with the deception any longer. You remember last year, the end of March? When Donna took off? Do you remember how angry and frustrated I was? How disillusioned, how hurt? Do you remember that I took off in the car and disappeared for a few days? He told her everything. He told her of the girl he had seen walking in the miniskirt and of his booze befuddled brain.

"I know there is no excuse, Mother, but I honestly thought she was a slut. I picked her up, offering her a ride, and she readily got in the car. When I had sex with her, she struggled a bit, but I thought she was just doing that to turn me on, so I persisted. She stopped struggling and just let it happen. She was a virgin mother, and I virtually raped her. The girl remained silent, and she kept her eyes shut all the time. Later on I realized that she was probably scared that I would hurt her, and that's why she stopped struggling. She didn't look at me once. Afterwards she quietly asked me to drive her home, which I did. I felt very bad. I felt like a total heel, especially later, when I found her wallet on the floor of the car and saw that she was only seventeen. That girl was Susan, mother. I really don't know why she was walking on that quiet stretch so late at night, in such sexy clothing." He stopped and downed his drink. "I felt responsible. I hired a private detective to keep an eye on her and to make sure that she was all right. Some girls go off the deep end when they go through such an experience, and I would have helped her somehow, but she seemed fine. She graduated and

she looked like a princess, like a girl straight off the cover of a magazine.”

He pulled the snapshot out of his wallet and showed it to his mother and continued with his story. “Then suddenly, she disappeared. The detective traced her to Vancouver, where had rented a room in a cheap, sleazy area and she found a job in a small grocery store. I decided to go and see for myself, and saw immediately that she was pregnant. The detective kept watching her for me. She didn’t see a doctor or anything. Then, once again, no trace of her. She had quit her job, and supposedly had gone back to her parents, but there was no trace of her there. They had not heard from her and didn’t know where she was. I told the detective to keep a twenty four hour watch on the boarding house, because the landlord had said that she would come back. The detective finally spotted her. She was very pregnant, and about to climb out of her window in the middle of the night. I put two and two together and came up with the conclusion that she was going to have the child in secret. What she planned to do with it, I have no idea. I was afraid she would kill it and dispose of the body, but then, why hadn’t she gotten an abortion? She was obviously going to get rid of the baby, that’s why she was in hiding. So, I rented a room right next to her and watched her myself. I blackmailed Donna into signing a birth registration form, and a doctor, a buddy of mine, signed it, too.”

He told her everything that happened after that. How he had delivered the twins, and that he had given Susan a sedative and that’s why she didn’t

remember anything. After he had brought the twins home, he had gone back and cleaned up the few last things and left her food and a note saying that her baby had died. "I also left her money and some pills to dry up her milk."

"Which she obviously didn't take," said his mother dryly.

"You realize, Mother, my shock when I came home? The nanny you hired for my children was their very own mother. I was never so shocked in my whole life. I still wonder why she chose to move to Abbotsford. Was it sheer co-incidence, or did she moved here on purpose. I already know that she had not planned to take a nanny job, because she told me that she had applied at a lot of stores, but that no one would hire her. Then she decided to try for the nanny job. She said that ours was the last ad she tried." He sat down again, and rested his face on his hands.

"I don't know what to do now, mother. If I tell her the truth, she'll hate me. Yet I can't go into a marriage with this lie hanging between us. I've had several opportunities to tell her. She started several times to explain about her breast milk, but I stopped her and told her it wasn't important. I knew that if she told me, I'd have to pretend to help her find her baby, so I kept on stalling the issue. I love her so much." He sighed. "Maybe I shouldn't have done what I did, but I was so afraid that she had planned something stupid. Why would she pretend to disappear and then hibernate like that? Why didn't she go to a doctor or a clinic?"

His mother had been very quiet all the time he was

talking. She knew the anguish he had gone through with Donna. She couldn't condone what he had done, yet she, too, wondered why Susan had been out on the street so late in sexy clothes. It didn't sound at all like Susan. That was a girl asking for trouble. "Son, I don't know what to say, I really don't. The truth, I think, is vital, but I don't know if you will keep Susan, and of course you will lose the twins. I don't know what kind of advise to give you."

"Mom, I think I should leave. That's probably the best. I'll take someone to take over my practice. I know someone who would do it for me. I'll sign the house and everything over to Susan, and I'll provide for her and the twins. She'll never want for anything. For now, I'll go to Switzerland. I'll stay there for a few months to get over this. It's going to kill me to do this, but out of fairness to Susan, it's the best solution. When I come back, I'll sell the practice and start a new one, some place else. Maybe in time, Susan will allow me to see the twins."

His mother was thoughtful.

"Are you going to tell her the truth, before you go?"

"No, Mother. I wouldn't be able to bear the look in her eyes and the disgust and hatred she must feel for the man who raped her. I'd like to remember things the way they have been between us."

His mother understood. She knew how deeply Michael had come to love Susan, but she also thought that Michael was underestimating the depth of Susan's love.

"Mom, she's already figured out a lot. She's been

questioning me about the twins and about their blood type. Don't forget, she gave blood to Jimmy and she has the same rare type. Then Susie, she's a replica of Susan, right down to the birthmark on her tummy. Susan is very smart. She's got most of it figured out. All she needs now is total proof. Before long she'll demand a DNA. test, and then she would know for sure anyway. She thinks right now that Donna is the culprit and somehow bought her babies on the black market, but she will end up figuring out that it couldn't have been Donna. I could get out of this another way. I could say that I bought the twins, and falsified the papers, but what if she goes to the authorities with that story? No, Mom, I'm going to leave in the morning. It's become a convoluted mess. Let me remember the brief time of real love I had in my life, without having to see horror, disgust, and hate on her lovely face. Please, co-operate with me."

His mother heaved a big sigh. "Michael, this is breaking my heart. I was so happy that you two were getting married. It's a big relief to me that the twins are Susan's babies. I was so scared that some of Donna's ugly traits would surface eventually. Susan is so sweet, and such a good little mother."

"Mom, look after her for me. I'll get in contact with you and let you know the name of the hotel I'm staying at." He stood up and phoned to make plane reservations and arrangements for his friend to take over the practice. He made the excuse that he had only been notified that evening of a convention in Europe. That someone else had taken ill, and that they had requested he take the place of that person and

deliver the lectures. He also called Gordie and asked him to come over immediately. He kissed his mother. "Bye for now, Mom. Look after them for me. I'll be gone when you get up. Please stay here for a few weeks, okay? I'm taking a taxi to the airport and leaving the cars here for Susan."

As a last thought, he walked to his study and put something in an envelope and brought it back to his mother.

"Mom, please give Susan this when she wakes up." He hugged her again and went to his study and closed the door.

Nana sighed again. This was all too much for an old lady to handle. It seemed almost like a soap opera. How was it all going to end? How would Susan re-act when she woke up? She heard the twins, and she went slowly up the stairs, suddenly feeling very tired. Susan was still unconscious and Nana put the twins to Susan's breasts. Tears came to her eyes. What a traumatic experience for such a young girl. How brave, really, to try and do all of it on her own. But, what about Susan's parents? Maybe they hadn't known about the baby. Perhaps that's why Susan had left home. Like Michael, she was wondering what Susan had planned to do with her baby, wondered about the secrecy and the hibernation in her room. After she made Susan comfortable, and put the twins back to bed, she retired herself, but her night was a very restless one.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Nana slept through Michael's departure. The twins also slept late and Nana woke with a start when they let her know that they were wet and hungry. She quickly washed and put on her gown. When she entered the nursery and changed the twins, she looked at Susie's little belly and saw the moon shaped birthmark. She had noticed the same mark on Susan the day before as she had washed and changed her. Looking at little Susie, she now saw the strong resemblance to Susan: the black curls, the eyes which were close to turning turquoise, just like Susan's. She wondered how she could ever have missed it. It was there, obvious for everyone to see. As she brought Susie in to Susan, she noticed that Susan was awake. She put the baby in Susan's arm.

"Nana, what happened, I feel dizzy."

"First, I'm going to get you some breakfast young lady." Nana started to leave the room.

"Nana, please, just a glass of milk for now will be fine. I'm not hungry, just thirsty."

"Susan, you have to eat, whether you like it or not, or you'll have two very unhappy babies on your

hands. Now hurry up and feed that girl, she's starving."

She left the room with Susan staring after her. Susan's mind was still a little hazy. She had a rotten headache. She remembered going for a ride on the stallion, but that's all she could remember. What had happened? Absentmindedly and automatically she bared her breast for Susie. She didn't have a great deal of milk. Nana had been right, she had to eat and drink. How long had she been sleeping and how had Nana known? She must have looked after her. If Nana knew, then she had to tell her everything. Susie had finished drinking and Susan rested her head on the pillow. Nana came back with a tray, which had food on it anyway. A soft-boiled egg, milk, toast, cereal and orange juice. Nana took Susie and brought her back to the nursery. Susan eyed the tray. She wasn't hungry, but she ate most of it anyway. When she had finished her breakfast, Nana brought Jimmy to her and sat next to the bed. Susan was hesitant.

"It's all right, dear, go ahead. I know. Go ahead and feed him." Susan felt shy as she bared her breast and started to feed Jimmy. Nana watched her in silence. Susan was quiet, too and leaned her head back against the pillows as Jimmy suckled. What could she say to Nana? After Jimmy was done, Nana took him and brought him back to his crib. Susan got out of bed to have a shower. At first she felt dizzy, but the food had helped. She showered and dressed. When she was finished, Nana joined her again, and promptly admonished her for getting out of bed.

"The twins are clean and going back to sleep, why

don't we go downstairs then and talk." Susan allowed herself to be led down the stairs. She still felt a little unsteady on her feet and a little dizzy. Once in the family room, Nana settled her in Michael's recliner.

"Doctor's orders. You have a concussion and you have to be kept quiet for a few days." Sarah came in with freshly made coffee.

"Susan, you sure gave me a scare. Don't you ever do something stupid like that again. Those babies need you, missy."

Susan smiled. From someone else she would have resented the comment, but not from kindhearted Sarah. She looked grim, but had a heart of gold. Sarah poured her some coffee and added lots of cream.

"Gotta build that milk back up," she muttered. Susan raised her eyebrows at Sarah.

"You think old Sarah stupid?" Sarah snorted in disgust and left the room. Susan was left alone with Nana. She looked at Susan. "Are you going to talk to me, young lady?" She was smiling, so Susan felt comfortable to talk to her.

"Where is Michael? Has he gone to work? I fell off the horse, didn't I? You know that I'm breast feeding the twins." It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes my dear, I know. Of course I know. Now tell me how all this started."

Susan started to talk. She started off with her upbringing, her parents, her clothes, then the night of Tracy's birthday party. How she had been raped that night and the consequences of that rape. How her father had exploded and thrown her out of the house and her plans to have the baby quietly and leave with

people she knew who wanted a child desperately. She also told Nana how she changed her mind Christmas morning and going into labor, and then finding out that the baby was gone. That the baby was supposedly dead. After she stopped talking, she cried softly. Nana went to her and took her in her arms.

"Hush, honey, hush. It will all work out, believe me."

"I just remember his eyes. That's all, just the eyes. They were so black." She calmed down and seemed to regain a little composure.

"Susan, I have something for you. Michael asked me to give this to you when you woke up." She handed her the envelope. Susan stared at it thoughtfully, and then slowly tore it open. She took out the locket and held it up.

"Michael gave you this? How..." Suddenly she turned very pale and a wave of dizziness attacked her. As she stared at the locket, everything seemed to fall into place. Michael's eyes were very dark and they would turn black if he was upset or angry.

"It was Michael, Michael was the man who raped me. Michael took the twins. He's a doctor, the man in green, that was a doctor's gown. Michael took my babies." She stared at Nana with big eyes and jumped out of the chair.

"Susie, Jimmy, they're both mine. I knew it. I knew it all along. They're mine...really mine..." She fainted, slumping into the recliner.

Nana called Sarah, and together they brought her back to bed. Nana stayed by her bed until she woke up. She opened her eyes and looked at Nana.

"I had such a weird dream." She closed her eyes again. Suddenly she sat up. "It wasn't a dream, it's all true. Where's Michael, I want to talk to him."

"Susan, Michael is gone."

"Gone? What do you mean, he's gone? He's gone to work, I have to call him."

"No Susan, he's really gone. He left for Europe this morning." Susan stared at her. It took a minute before this information sank in.

"He's gone? Really gone?" Nana nodded.

"Susan, calm down. Lie back and I'll tell you what I know." She slowly told Susan everything Michael had told her.

Susan listened quietly, without interrupting. When Nana finally stopped talking, she said, "He was right in a way. I knew a family back home who desperately wanted a baby, and I was just going to leave my baby on their doorstep. Except I grew to love my baby, and on Christmas morning, I finally realized that I couldn't do it, that I wanted to keep my baby. As I was sitting there, beside the church, thinking of Baby Jesus, I made up my mind to keep my baby and raise it myself. I also made up my mind to go and see a doctor on Boxing Day and to have my baby in the hospital. But then, the contractions started and I couldn't even call an ambulance. I remember feeling faint, and the green, lots of green. When I finally woke up, my baby was gone and I found the note. I knew though, deep down I knew that it wasn't true and I was determined to find my Christmas child. I received the most beautiful Christmas gift of my life and I lost it. The only thing I found out from my

landlord was that my neighbor's car had a Clearbrook sticker on it. I decided to follow the only lead I had, and that's how I came to Abbotsford." Suddenly the reality really hit her.

"The twins, they're really both mine. I can't believe this is actually happening. I had twins instead of one. No wonder they kicked so much." She went to jump out of bed to go to her babies, but a wave of dizziness struck her. Nana made her lie down again.

"Susan, dear, you've got a concussion. You must lie down and rest." Nana had tears in her eyes. "Don't worry. No-one is going to take your babies from you ever again. Not Michael, not anyone. Tomorrow I'll go to the authorities, and we'll set the wheels in motion to have your name put on their birth certificates instead of Donna's. Now sleep for a while, dear. I'll wake you when the twins wake up." She pulled the covers up and tucked Susan in and placed a gentle kiss on Susan's bruised forehead. "I'm so glad you're the mother of my grandchildren, child, and I hope you'll still allow me to be involved with them, even if Michael is not." She closed the drapes and left Susan to take a nap. Susan could sleep though. Too many things were going through her still fuzzy mind.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Michael! He had been the one. How could he have done this to her? Then, to top it all off, to run away. To go and hide in Europe. To run away from the consequences of his actions. No, that wasn't entirely true. He told Nana that she could have the house and the cars, and that he would always provide for her and twins. What would she have done if he had told her personally? If he would have answered all her questions honestly? She argued and argued with herself. *I hate him*, she thought. *I never want to see him again*. Suddenly she remembered his touch, his lips, their love, the things they had shared, the happiness and the sorrow. The tears again started to flow down her cheeks. She felt so utterly lost and confused. Even though Michael had gone through hell with Donna, even though he had been drinking that night, he had no right to do what he did. She thought back to that night, to her first experience of innocent puppy love, and the first stirring of desire. She realized now that that's all it had been. Puppy love. Physical attraction. After all, if she had not changed into Tracy's clothes, would anyone, let alone

Scott, even have given her a second glance? She would have been a shy wallflower the whole evening. She would have left on time and safely walked home. She sat up and wiped the tears off her face. If she had not been wearing the mini skirt and the sexy top, Michael probably wouldn't have stopped and offered her a ride. Sure, lots of girls wore those clothes, but they didn't walk alone on the streets at that hour of the night. Only sluts did that, and she had gotten in his car of her own accord, readily accepting the ride.

I also didn't struggle very hard, I didn't even scream, she thought. *I was scared stiff, though, that if I struggled and fought, I'd get my throat cut.* But he had not hurt her. She'd never even thought about it, but the man seemingly had no knife, no gun, hadn't threatened her.

She had never allowed herself to think back to that night, about the man who had raped her. She had tried to bury it. But now she was forcing herself and making herself remember. She closed her eyes tightly, just like she had that night. Once again she went over the details, which she had buried in the depths of her mind. She remembered the man's hands pushing her legs apart, the sudden piercing of her virginity and a short sharp pain. It had been over in minutes. Then she remembered a soft whisper: "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."

At the time, his words had not really registered in her mind. She had been numb and shocked, but she remembered it now. She also remembered the eyes, the coal black eyes, which had haunted her, the eyes she had seen when she was working in the grocery

store. Michael's eyes. Michael's beautiful brown eyes, which had looked so haunted and so hard when she had first met him, which had slowly turned to soft brown velvet as they looked at her and the twins filled with love and which could turn black with passion and desire when they made love. Her body burned with sudden longing for him, but only for a moment. She heard one of the twins whimper in their sleep and other memories flooded her mind. Jimmy and Susie, they were her very own babies. She had really only lost a little over one week with them, the week right after their birth. She had watched them grow, smile, and nursed them at her own breasts.

Unconsciously, she stroked her breasts while she continued to think. The legal ride of it was going to be a hassle. She could go two ways: she could lay charges against Michael and win, or she could legally adopt the twins. Michael wouldn't fight her either way, Nana had already told her that, but, she also knew that if she placed charges and took Michael to court, his life would be ruined. But, to have to adopt her own flesh and blood, went against her every fiber. If she laid charges and the twins ever found out, they would hate her for what she had done to their father. Michael had told his mother he would leave her and the twins alone, but the twins, they would ask questions and they had a right to know who their father was. She was torn in so many directions. She finally fell into a restless sleep. She tossed and turned and dreamt. Her dreams were jumbled, beautiful one minute, as she dreamed about their love, and turmoil the next as Donna entered the dreams. When the

twins woke up and started to cry lustily, she was bathed in perspiration. Nana was already in the nursery, tending to her grandchildren, when Susan walked in.

"Susan, are you all right? Child, you don't have a fever, do you? You're drenched." She was fussing over Susan.

"It's okay, Nana, I had a bad dream." Nana looked at her with eyes full of pity. She could understand the hurt and turmoil Susan was going through. She herself had had a hard time digesting everything Michael and Susan had told her. She was still in a certain amount of turmoil and confusion herself, and she really couldn't give Susan any advice, because of course she was prejudiced. Michael was her son, she loved him and she understood why everything had happened the way it did. That didn't mean that she approved, but she understood. She also still had a very deep hope that everything would work out between the two of them.

As she was changing Susie, she said, "Why don't you have a shower, dear, and freshen up? I'll keep the twins happy." Susan readily agreed. She stood under the shower for a long time and tried to clear her mind. The hot water relaxed her and made her feel a lot better.

After she was done and dressed, she fed the twins. She enjoyed feeding them now more than ever. The realization that her she was feeding her own babies, her very own flesh and blood, that they were not dead, not lost, that her gut feeling had been right all the time, was overwhelming. When she fed Jimmy,

and he looked up at her with his deep brown eyes, she saw Michael's face. He looked so much like his father, this little one. Her heart suddenly ached again. It was as if a giant hand squeezed it. Would the tear in her heart and the pain in her soul ever go away again? Nana came in and took the now contented baby from Susan.

"I'll do the rest, dear. You go and lie down for a while."

"No, it's okay. I'm going to get dressed and do something. There's a lot I have to take care of."

Nana looked at her sharply. She hoped and prayed that Susan wouldn't lay charges against Michael.

"Mm, do you have to go to town?"

"Yes. This is my house now, and I'm going to turn it into a real home. I'll be back in time to feed the twins, is it okay with you, Mom?" Nana looked at her with surprise and relief. 'Mom', had it slipped out, or had she meant it? She also felt relieved that apparently Susan had no ideas on her mind of going to the police.

"No, Susan, that's fine. Go ahead. Michael left money for you..."

"I've got money of my own. I have quite a bit left, and Michael left me a tidy sum of money when he took the twins." Rather abruptly, she turned around as the memory cut through her like a knife, and went to her room to dress. Minutes later she returned, dressed in jeans with a purse slung over her shoulder. She planted a kiss on Nana's cheek.

"I'll be back in a few hours."

In town, Susan spent just about every penny she

had. She gave herself no time to think about anything. When she arrived back at the house, the car was loaded, but she had to feed the twins first. When she was done, she unloaded the car and got to work. Nana watched the transformation of the house in amazement. More plants, scatter cushions, paintings on the walls, ornaments and photographs of the babies in nice frames, were put everywhere. Some extra furniture was delivered and before long, it started to look like a real family home, not a clinical doctor's office. Donna had never had much interest in the house at all. It was just a place to boast about and to entertain her friends in.

When Susan was done, she sank down on the couch and grinned. "Well, Mom, you haven't said a word. What do you think? You know, if Michael came home now, he would probably have a bird."

"I like it Susan. You've turned it into a cozy home, but you're overdoing it. You're recovering from a concussion, remember?" She looked around the house. This was a place she could feel comfortable in and she knew she would visit a lot. If only Michael could see what Susan had done. The phone rang, and since she was standing right next to it, she picked it up and answered the call.

"Mom, I was hoping you would get it. How are things?" She hesitated for a moment.

"No, Christine, I'm going to be tied up for a few weeks. No, I can't really. I'll call you, okay? Bye."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Michael understood that his mother couldn't talk. Susan had to be near her. He had quickly told her which hotel he was staying at, and he knew that his mother would call him the first opportunity she had. He put the receiver back and put his hands over his face.

As Michael sat on the bed in his hotel room, he felt such despair. Why hadn't he stayed? Why hadn't he owned up to everything? Why hadn't he told her himself?

"Because I couldn't have taken the look of pain and disgust, probably hatred, in her beautiful eyes. I couldn't have stood another loss, another failure. I would rather it was this way. This way, I can remember the brief time of happiness we had. The brief time of being a father. Maybe this is all I was meant to have. This is my punishment, to spend the rest of my life alone, remembering and hurting."

He was talking to himself. He was losing it. What the hell was he going to do here anyway for the next months? Ski? He had no interest in doing anything without Susan. Get drunk? No, not again, not ever

again. This problem wasn't the same. Susan had not done anything. She wasn't anything like Donna. Oh, he loved her, and the twins, so much. Surely his mother would call him back soon? He knew she would as soon as Susan was either out of earshot or asleep.

Finally, after days, his mother phoned him.

"How are you, Michael?"

"I'm okay Mom. What about Susan and the twins? How did Susan take it all? Does she hate me now?" The questions were fired at his mother, one after another. Nana had a really difficult time trying to answer them all. She was worried about her son, yet there was nothing she could do to help. She could give him no hope. She felt so totally helpless in this situation. The only thing she could tell him, was that Susan was getting much better, and that the twins were fine.

"Mom, take videos, pictures, all the time. Please, and send them to me." She promised him that she would.

The weeks went by. Nana watched anxiously as Susan threw herself into a frenzy of housekeeping and gardening, in between tending to the twins. She never mentioned Michael anymore, or the past. Susan changed everything, even the garden, with the help of the gardener. Nana was very concerned, for she knew Susan was burying her feelings and hurts deep down, within herself. Little did she know that Susan's nights were restless, that they were full of thoughts and struggles. That even the hard work couldn't make her sleep. Every night her mind was a turmoil of

thoughts. She missed Michael so much, that her heart would twist inside her chest, her body ached with longing for him.

Susan had come to terms with herself, had dealt with her emotions, the past trauma she'd experienced and the present. She recognized her own mistakes, her own lack of listening to advice from those who knew better. It had gotten her into a heap of trouble. She'd also grown up in a hurry and learned to make her own decisions and be responsible. She'd come to terms with the facts as they had happened and as they were now, and had finally admitted to herself that she loved Michael with all her heart, that she had forgiven herself, and could and had forgiven him and that she wanted him to come home. Her life was so empty now. The work, the twins, nothing could fill that empty void, no matter how hard she tried.

Nana had told her that Michael had gone far away and would never come back. She wondered if Nana knew where he was. Of course she would know, and his lawyer would also know. How could she go about this? How could she let him know that she had forgiven him and that she loved him with her whole being? Did he even still want her? He never phoned, never wrote, not a word. It was almost as if he had never existed.

Whenever she talked to her parents or Tracy, she pretended that everything was fine. Sometimes she felt like confiding in Tracy, but decided not to. Her story was just too complicated and there would be too many questions to answer.

One day she was sitting outside with the twins

when Nana brought her a cup of tea. "It's so beautiful outside, Susan, I thought I would join you for a while. You've done wonders with the garden, look at all those flowers." She was worried about Susan. She looked withdrawn and pale, and she had dark circles under her eyes. They sipped their tea quietly, until Susan suddenly said, "Nana, do you think Michael ever really loved me?"

Nana was startled at the question. "Yes Susan, oh yes. I have never seen Michael so happy. That's why he went away Susan. He couldn't bear to see your hurt or your anger, or to feel your rejection. After his years of hell with Donna, and then his happiness with you, he felt that this was the only way he could cope with everything. To remember the brief period of happiness he had, without accusations, bitter arguments, and hatred in your eyes. Even though, his heart is breaking right now."

Susan stirred her tea with her finger and stared into the distance, at the horse quietly grazing in the meadow. She was quiet for a while. "In a way I understand his reasoning, because I was angry, very angry. You would have been too. You're a mother. How would you have felt if all this had happened to you?"

"Yes, child, I understand. I would have been beside myself, but even though I question Michael's wisdom in how he handled the whole situation, let's be perfectly honest. Didn't you play right into his hands by doing what you did? Try and think of the dangerous situation you put yourself into. What if Michael had not been there? Giving birth to a baby by

yourself can be very dangerous, for both mother and child, even fatal. Your decision to keep the baby and to go to a hospital, was made too late. What would have happened if Michael hadn't been there that night? You were so young, and you had no one to turn to, but I think both of you were wrong in every action you took. As fate would have it, you ended up right here, with your babies."

"I know I handled things wrong." Susan said softly. "I've been thinking a lot, Nana, and I miss Michael so much. I do love him, I really do, and I want him back. You know where he is, don't you?"

Nana sighed. "I promised Michael I would never tell. Why do you ask, Susan? What do you want to do?"

Susan thought for a minute. "Phoning is no good. I want to go to him, I want to see him in person and tell him face to face that I've forgiven him, and that I love him."

"What about the twins?"

Susan smiled. "They go with me. You would have a really hard time feeding them. I think it's the only way. Mom, will you help me?"

"Let's put the twins to bed and go inside and then we'll talk." Nana picked Susie up and started inside. Susan followed her with Jimmy. She planted a kiss on the baby's head and whispered softly: "We're going to your daddy, little man." Jimmy gave her a big smile, as if he knew what was going on.

Once in the living room, Nana briskly took charge. She phoned the airport and booked reservations on the next flight to Zurich, Switzerland. It was due to

depart the next evening. Then she called the hotel where Michael was staying, and swiftly cancelled Michael's room, and booked a family suite for the next evening. She also told the manager that it was to be a surprise for Michael, to have his wife and children arrive. Susan had not had a chance to get a word in, until Nana finally hung up the phone.

"Oh, my goodness. Nana, I don't have a passport, neither do the twins."

"Oh, dear. That means we have to look after that right a way. We can get temporary travel documents." They packed up the sleeping twins, who protested loudly at this interruption of their nap, and went to town. They had to pretend that there was some kind of emergency in order to get what they wanted. Nana had to do a lot of fast talking, but managed to get the papers. They were good for one month only. They also picked up suitcases and necessities. Once home, Nana sent Susan off to shower, and wash her hair.

"You have to look your best tomorrow. I'll pack for the twins. Off you go."

Susan was caught up in the hustle and bustle and the excitement of it all. Her cheeks were pink with excitement. It had all gone so fast, she hadn't had time to think. And that night, she had her first real night's sleep in weeks.

The next evening came fast, and it wasn't until they were on their way to the airport that Susan had time to think.

"Nana, what if Michael rejects me? What if he doesn't want me anymore? Maybe you should call

him, and tell him that we're on our way there."

"Don't worry, Susan. I know my Michael, I know how unhappy he's been. Everything will be fine. You'll see. Just be sure to call me once you get there. Okay?" At the airport Nana changed money for her and gave her a piece of paper with the address.

"Take a taxi once you arrive. Michael has rented a car, so once you're in the hotel and with Michael, you'll be okay for transportation. Just don't get yourself lost or something, or go falling off mountains. This old heart of mine couldn't stand too much more excitement." She hugged Susan and the twins, and brought them as far as she could. At the gate, Susan was on her own. For a split second she felt panic, but then she suppressed it.

The flight seemed to take forever and while the twins were sleeping, it gave Susan time to think. How would Michael react? Nana seemed confident that all would be well, but Susan couldn't help feeling a little scared. She tried to sleep, but couldn't, and breathed a sigh of relief when they landed in Zurich. Because she had two babies, she was hustled through customs quickly, and she received assistance from one of the stewardesses, all the way to a taxi. She gave the driver the address, and found out that it was yet another hour's drive to the hotel where Michael was staying.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Michael looked at himself in the mirror. He looked haggard. He had grown a beard, and his hair was unruly. "Michael, old man, you've got to smarten up. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. That beard has to come off," he muttered. He started hacking away with it with the scissors and grinned at the sight he presented in the mirror. He looked like some bum off the street. He had just put shaving cream on his face, when there was a knock on the door. "Damn, I haven't rung for room service," he muttered as he walked to the door. it was the hotel manager.

"I am really sorry sir, haf made ze mistake, ze room waz book for other people. We haf ze other room. Please, sir, follow." Michael had no chance to argue as he was ushered to a different room, but he noticed that they had put him in a family suite. He started to protest, at the same time trying to wipe the shaving cream off his face.

"Eh...sorry, this is too big, I don't want..." but the manager had already left, and maids were busy putting his belongings away. He sank down in one of

the luxurious chairs and waited till they were done. He locked the door and put up the “do not disturb” sign. This was too much. He would stay the night, and leave the next day. To be taken out of one’s room without warning, and dumped in a luxurious family suite, which must cost a fortune, what the hell! He didn’t need or want this luxury. Now if Susan was with him... he poured himself a drink and relaxed in the chair again. Susan, he missed her so much. What a bloody mess he had made of things. Look at the life he was living now. He had no interest in anything. He drank too much. He couldn’t concentrate on reading. The television was useless, since he couldn’t understand most of it anyway. What the hell was he going to do with his life? He couldn’t start a new practice, until he knew what actions Susan was going to take. If she laid charges, he would lose his license and that would be the end of his career. Well, whatever happened, he deserved every bit of it. Sure as hell, tomorrow he would find a different place to stay, while he waited on the outcome of his predicament. He finished his drink and decided to finish shaving and jump in the whirlpool bathtub. He poured another drink, and after cleaning his face of the final bristles, he relaxed in the bubbling hot water. There was a knock on the door. He ignored it. Again, a louder knock this time. What the fuck was the matter with these people? Were they stupid or something? That was it, he was going to pack up and leave immediately. He wouldn’t put up with any more of their bullshit. The knocking got louder yet.

“Mr. Stuart, this is ze manager.”

"Damn you. I don't care if you're the Queen of England. Leave me alone." he shouted. He climbed out of the tub angrily and wrapped a towel around himself. He was still dripping as he opened the door. "What the hell..." as a bellboy deposited four suitcases in the middle of the room.

"Take these out of here, right now. What's the matter with you people? Are you deaf?" he shouted.

"That's it, I'm out of here, now." He stalked over to the phone and almost dropped it when a soft voice spoke behind him.

"Mr. Stuart, will you take one of these, they're getting rather heavy." That was the last straw. He was going crazy. He was starting to hallucinate. That voice, it sounded like Susan's. He slammed the receiver on the phone and spun around. There, facing him, was the sweetest sight he had ever seen. He stood rooted to the floor, his heart pounding so loud he was sure everyone could hear it. If it pounded any louder, it would jump out of his chest and fall at her feet.

"Well Michael, don't just stand there. Take your son," and she deposited Jimmy in his arms. Michael was still speechless. Susan closed and locked the door, then, as she faced him, she burst out laughing. In the hassle, his towel had dropped to the floor, and he was standing there dripping, holding the baby away from him, and looking rather silly. Susan put Susie down on the big chair, bent over and put the towel around him. As she straightened, she faced him.

"Well, Michael Stuart, you don't look very happy

to see us. Please tell me, and we'll take the next flight back to Vancouver." Her heart was thumping. What if he said, yes, go back. He gently put Jimmy in the chair next to Susie.

"Eh...yes...I mean no...eh...how..." Before he had a chance to say more, she was in his arms crying and laughing and kissing him.

"Oh, Michael, I've missed you so, I love you so much." He didn't say anything. He kissed the tears of her cheeks and drank in the honey of her sweet lips. He gave himself to the miracle, the wonder of it all.

"Susan, Susie, you rascal, but..." She put her finger on his lips.

"Let's get the twins settled down first, before they fall off the chair. They're almost crawling you know, and they're hungry and tired and I'd really appreciate a hot bath. Then we'll talk." She kissed him.

He watched as she pulled her sweater up and bared her breasts for the twins. He had always enjoyed watching her feed them, but now he drank in the sight, as if he was seeing it for the first time. He helped her put the twins to bed, and only now noticed that the second bedroom contained two cribs. He had not even looked in the bedrooms, he had been so disgusted with the service.

"Susan, there's a whirlpool bath, it's quite big." As Susan dug in her suitcase for her gown, he also noticed an ice bucket with a big bottle of champagne and a card: "With the compliments of the management." He poured the champagne in the two glasses and joined Susan, who, in the meantime, had gotten in the tub. He handed her the glass.

"To us sweetheart, to our future." She raised her glass too, "And to the twins." After she finished her champagne, she joined him on the side of the tub and crawled into his arms. He shook his head. He still couldn't believe that this was happening. He was dreaming, this had to be a dream. In another minute he would wake up in his old room. He opened his eyes, but Susan was still there, and he felt a small hand circling his throbbing cock, that piece of flesh that had hung lifeless for the past while, had suddenly woken up and now begged for satisfaction.

"Oh no baby, not here," and he scooped her up and carried her dripping to the bed. He couldn't get enough of her body, her lips, her breasts. He made love to her like never before, until he had her begging, to finally enter her. His member was throbbing, aching to find that warm safe place where he could find release, but still, he waited. He parted her legs and looked at her warm moist pinkness. He parted the warm throbbing flesh and looked at the beautiful pinkness which had brought his son and daughter into the world. His fingers teased her as his mouth closed over her erect nipples. He couldn't stand it any more, when her hand grabbed him and guided him towards her. Her hips arched and pulled his hand away and guided him into her warm soft flesh. They moved as one, and then, blessed release. It didn't take long for his seed to release, but the second time was better, once their most ardent passion was released.

They talked all night, talked about everything, about where it had all started and they forgave, and promised each other, to never talk about it again, and

to be always honest with each other. They made plans. They discussed how to get a new birth certificate for the twins, with Susan's name on it, rather than Donna's. They made plans for the future, wedding plans and plans for how they were going to tell her parents everything. They also planned to stay in Switzerland for two weeks, as their honeymoon, for once they were back home, they just wanted to settle in the house and be a family.

Early in the morning, Susan remembered that she had to call Nana. They both called, and made her the happiest lady in the world. Michael and Susan rarely left the hotel during the whole two weeks of their stay. Michael promised her, that one day, he would take her back and they would go skiing and take in all the sights, for now, all they were interested in was being with each other, making love, talking, and tending to the twins. Susan almost hated to go back home, but this couldn't last forever, and Michael had a busy practice to return to.

CHAPTER THIRTY

As Michael and Susan came through the exit at the airport, not only was Nana there to greet them, but also Susan's parents, and Tracy. Susan was pleased but also very surprised. She guessed that Nana had arranged this, and even though she was pleased, she felt a little fearful at all the questions and explanations she was facing. The flight had been long, the twins had been irritable, and she was dead tired. They really hadn't had much sleep for two weeks.

When Nana said that her parents and Tracy were staying at her house and that they would all come back in the evening, after they had had a rest, Susan heaved a sigh of relief.

As the taxi pulled into the driveway, Michael looked at the garden with surprise all over his face. There was a rainbow of colors to meet them: tulips, daffodils and he saw new flowerbeds with roses and small trees in blossom. He couldn't believe his eyes at the transformation. When he walked into the house, he had the same experience.

"I've come home. This house is Susan," he said softly. He felt humble, grateful. He walked back out

and picked up Susan, who was carrying Jimmy.

"Michael, what are you doing? You'll drop us. Put me down." He carried them both over the threshold.

"A little early lady, but by the looks of it, we're home." They got the twins settled and went to bed. After a heated session of love, they both slept until the twins woke them up. It was also almost time to face her parents.

As the whole family was seated around the dining table and well into dinner, her father broke the ice. "Susan, I think you have something to tell us. Mrs. Stuart told us a bit, but the rest is up to you." Susan's mind worked overtime. There was a tactful way of telling this story. There had to be. She was thinking hard and fast, but her father started to talk and actually made it easier for her.

"Susan, we know you got yourself into trouble, and we know that the twins are your babies, as well as Michael's, so I presume you went out with Michael, and this is where it all started? Am I right?"

"Eh...yes."

"We also know that you came home and stated that your baby was dead, yet, here they are, very much alive. Now you can take over, because we're somewhat in the dark."

Susan told them that she had met Michael after Tracy's party. At least it was only a part lie. She told them almost everything, trying to spare Michael as much as possible.

Tracy bubbled over with all this news.

"Susie, you have to write a book. It's fantastic, a real fairy tale."

Her mother said softly: "The twins, Susan, they're beautiful. I wish we lived closer." Her father looked at his wife and spoke up, as usual when he was moved, in a gruff voice.

"I think it's time we retired anyway. If the kids have no objections, I'd like to sell the store and move closer, so we see our grandchildren grow." Her mother stood up and sat down again. Tears started to roll down her cheeks. She looked at Michael and Susan with a question on her face.

"Of course," Michael said. "Matter of fact, there's a cottage on the grounds, meant for the gardener. He doesn't use it. We'll fix it up, and you can live there if you like. You can make a vegetable garden, and relax there for the rest of your lives, and you'll be close to the twins. Now, honey, how about a wedding date? As far as I'm concerned, tomorrow will be fine."

Susan laughed. Her mother said, "Oh, no, Susan has to have a wedding. It only happens once, you know. Eh...well...most of the time."

The evening flew by. At feeding time, both grandmothers got involved and later her father held his grandchildren for the first time. Susan had never seen her father look so proud. She felt moved and very emotional. After everyone left, she also felt very tired. It had been stressful, and unconsciously Susan had been afraid of that evening. Now that all the stress was gone, she felt absolutely drained. Michael could tell. He also knew how to make her feel better.

They relaxed in the hot tub, with a glass of champagne and talked about the future, their wedding and the twins. They decided on a date, two

weeks from that day. Michael wanted her to have more time to arrange things, but when she said softly, "Michael, honey, I missed my period," his mouth fell open.

"No, already?"

"You don't want another baby, Michael?"

"Yes, sweetheart, of course, it's just hard on you, it's so soon. Yes, of course, we'll set the date two weeks from now."

Their wedding was beautiful, but quiet. Susan had Tracy as her matron of honor. Their parents were there, of course, along with a few close relatives and friends of Michael's. Scott was also there of course, for Tracy. They had a small reception at the house, and when they cut the cake, and looked at the two little cradles on top of the cake, Michael asked everyone to be quiet.

"I have a complaint. There are only two cradles here, but there should be three."

Susan blushed as her father said gruffly: "At least someone is finally going to expand this family."

Nana hugged her. Her mother was already planning what she was going to knit next, and talking about the move to the cottage.

Susan was with the man she loved, with two beautiful babies, and another one on the way. No lonely, only children for her family. She had a lifetime of laughter, tears, worries and happiness to look forward to. Nana took the twins home with her, so they could have a wedding night. Susan had stopped feeding them after Michael had found out she was pregnant. He had told her it wasn't good for her, or

the new baby.

Her wedding night was blissful, and as Michael made love to her, he gently stroked the still flat belly and rained kisses on her smooth skin. His love was kind, gentle, almost as if she were a porcelain doll and he was afraid he'd break her.

"Sweetheart, promise me that we'll be together forever?" she whispered against his lips as she arched her hips to meet his thrusts.

"Nothing lasts forever, babe, but I can promise you that our love will last throughout eternity. I'll never be willingly parted from you again."

"Nor me from you," she said, then with one wild thrust caused him to come.

"Now look what you've done. And you're pregnant. We have to be careful."

"Not that careful," she said, giggling. "And we have all night, remember? I want to remember our wedding night for the rest of our lives, so while I still have a figure, let's play..."

"Baby, I love your figure, even when it's blown up with our baby. And this time, I'm going to be with you all the way."

EPILOGUE

Nine months later, Susan got up to feed her two-week-old daughter. She looked outside and saw the snowflakes, and it brought back the memory of that Christmas night, the year before. She went to the nursery and looked down at the pretty baby in the crib. She was so good, this baby, but then, the twins had always been good, too. She heard a sound from the twins room, down the hall, and picking up little Jenny she peeked around the corner. They were both wide awake and greeted her with their baby chatter. Jimmy was busy trying to climb out of his crib, but his little legs, just couldn't make it yet. She sat down in the rocking chair in their room, and bared her breast for the baby and looked at her little family in contentment. She looked at the twins as the baby was suckling at her breast: Jimmy, a replica of Michael, and Susie, just like her. They would be celebrating their first birthday that day. She just wanted this little bit of time alone with them, the time she had been denied the day they were born. She wanted to enjoy this early Christmas morning with them. As soon as she finished feeding Jenny, she took the twins out of

their cribs and sat with them. Michael walked into the nursery and stopped. Susan was rocking the twins and softly singing "Silent Night" to them. He felt his throat constrict as he too thought back to that last Christmas night. She continued to sing as she noticed Michael standing in the doorway and her eyes looked suspiciously shiny. He walked up to her and stroked her hair softly. He knew that she was thinking about the same thing he was thinking about.

"I'm okay Michael, honestly, I'm okay." I'm just so thankful that somehow I was led to be with my babies, and I was thinking of all the mothers in the world who have never found their babies, who are still searching, and I was thinking how sad they must feel." He picked up the twins and put them on the floor, then pulled her out of the chair and into his arms and hugged her tightly.

"I guess Christmas morning is always going to have more than one special meaning for us, as long as we live. Merry Christmas, babe."