



# *Cheating With Randy Two*

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Cover art by Yvette A. Lynn © September 2007

Amira Press, LLC

Baltimore, MD 21216

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“Happy Birthday to You!” I sang with all my heart, tearfully watching my tiny little two-year-old dig into her birthday cake with her fingers.

Every day, she looked more and more like Randy, with those wide grey eyes watching me as if she could report back to her daddy all that I said and did. It was a stupid thought, but one that haunted me sometimes. It had been two years since I’d seen Randy and Kate. I had never contacted them to inform them of where Lamont and I had moved. I guess if Randy was really interested, he could have hired a private detective or something to find me. Deep inside, I had hoped he would come chasing after me, begging me to come back to him. That never happened, and so I built a life without him. Just Lamont, Raine and me.

Glancing at Lamont as he smiled down at my baby girl, I realized I could have started this latest tale of my life with the words “what goes around, comes around”. In other words, what I did to Kate was now happening to me. For a few weeks, I’d suspected Lamont was cheating. All those damn late nights at the office couldn’t all be true. His position wasn’t *that* vital. But knowing my own past, I didn’t really want to face the truth. So, I never called him on it.

I suppose I was getting what I deserved after banging Kate’s man like I’d lost my mind. Sure I had permission, but I didn’t have to fall in love. I didn’t have to run away with Raine.

“Ma, doot.” Raine called to me, with a proud look on her icing-coated face. She’d managed to grasp a hunk of cake on her baby fork. Never mind all the crumbs along her eyebrows, in her hair and crammed between her chubby fingers.

I grinned, shaking my head. Taking Raine was necessary to my own sanity. I could never have lived without her. And with that thought, I wondered how Randy could be living without her. It hurt like hell thinking about it. Despite everything, he was a good man. He deserved to be a part of his daughter’s life.

Lamont got a page and I stiffened, watching him. He looked up with an apoplectic expression in his eyes. “Sorry, baby. Work. Gotta go.”

I could have punched him in his face right then. Even if it was work, it could wait. Raine was more important. I sighed. Who was I kidding? There was no doubt that he loved my daughter, but we both knew she wasn’t his. Lamont was as dark as anything and I’d never lied to say she was his. He’d never been under any illusions. One, we’d always used protection. And two, we hadn’t been intimate in months when I’d gotten pregnant. I never admitted that Raine was Randy’s though.

Still, he was the only daddy she knew and he could act like it. “I can’t believe you’re going to work. This is Raine’s birthday. We’re supposed to take her to the park.”

He shoved away from the table and stood, wiping his hands. “Don’t start, Lee. You know what I’m trying to accomplish here. Besides, with one income coming in right now—”

“You agreed,” I shouted. “Just until Raine is three, and then I’ll put her in daycare.”

“Yeah, I agreed. So don’t give me all the lip when I have to work my ass off at the office to pay for everything.” He stomped toward the door and snatched it open. “This project will take me awhile. Don’t wait up.”

I felt my throat close. Of course. Don’t wait up. Whatever hootchie he was seeing couldn’t wait one day to let him enjoy time with his family. I picked up a plate and threw it at the door, smashing it into a million pieces.

When Raine began to cry, I stifled the tears running down my cheeks and scooped her up. Some mother I was, scaring my baby. I sighed again at all the crap laying about—the wrapping paper, baby dolls and dirty dishes I’d used to make the cake. My cramped kitchen looked like a cyclone hit it. But right now, I didn’t care. Me and my little one were going to shower, change and go play on the swings. She deserved it even if I didn’t.

\* \* \* \*

I loved this playground, three blocks from our house. They still had those tot swings where the metal bar came down in front of the child, with the arm rests on both sides. You don’t see those as much around our way. As I pushed a squealing Raine, I thought of my life as it was now.

I spent my days running behind a toddler from sun up to sun down, and no matter how much I ran, my body refused to let go of the extra weight. Sure my breasts were bigger, something I liked. I’d gone from a C cup to a D. That was a bonus, considering that I liked having big boobs. But my ass was bigger too and that was a bad thing. I’d refused to go up to the next size recently, so I was always walking around struggling to drag in a breath to fill my squished lungs. It was a freakin’ shame what a woman did to hide her true size. The messed up part was that I was sure anyone walking for more than five seconds behind me knew all my secrets. It was depressing.

And since Lamont had had no hormonal change in his hard muscled body, he didn’t have my issues. He still looked as good as he did the first day I met him years ago. I guess I shouldn’t have been surprised when the whispered conversations and the late nights out started. Still, whether I felt I deserved a little cosmic payback didn’t mean I was going to put up with that shit forever. As soon as I decided on what to do about Raine, I would call Lamont’s ass on what he was up to. That was a promise to myself and to my baby.

“Ma, doot!”

I focused on my little girl. Her stumbling speech was so cute. I could eat her up. Saying “doot” for “look” got me every time. I scooped her, swing and all, into my arms and kissed her chubby cheeks. She smelled of baby powder and vanilla cookies. I don’t even know when she’d gotten up on the chair to steal cookies. She was certainly fast.

“Hello, Alicia.”

My giggles died so fast, it was as if they’d never existed. Two years. Two long years of aching nights, laying in another man’s arms when all I craved was the loving embrace of a man I

couldn't have. And now, he stood just a few feet ahead of me. I didn't even have to look up. Truth, I was terrified of looking. I thought I might fall at his feet and kiss his toes for giving me the time of day. *Damn!* You'd think I would have more self-respect. How did he find us? And why?

It took a huge effort, but I finally lifted my head to meet his gaze. At least, I tried to meet his gaze. Instead, I got stuck on how hot he looked. His hair was shorter, sexier. His clothes, always pressed and neat, were wrinkled slightly. The blue jeans still hugged narrow hips and the faded tee stretched across a chest so solid and muscled, I could have paid it homage.

I told myself not to look down at his crotch, but my eyes weren't obeying the mental command. Checking him out was as vital to their health as moisture. Randy's shaft actually jumped as if it knew that my hands itched to stroke it, to play with it. A flash of memory bolted across my brain, reminding me of how he tasted—salty and satisfying. *Oh, I want him so bad! After all this time.*

Wounded, like it had all happened just yesterday, I looked into his eyes. It hurt more that he wasn't looking at me. His attention was fully on Raine. Of course, his daughter, whom he hadn't laid eyes on since she was an infant. Fresh guilt washed over me. Now was as good a time as any to make things right with him.

"Randy, this is Raine. Our daughter," I whispered.

His expression locked in place for several moments, and then I thought he was going to cry from the wetness in his eyes. But he blinked away the moisture before tears formed as he took a step nearer. Raine, lost in her own world, kicked her little feet in the air. "Puss, Ma."

"Wait, baby. Look up. This is your daddy." I didn't really plan it well. From the beginning, selfishly, I had avoided naming Lamont for her. He'd felt the awkwardness too and didn't call himself daddy to Raine. We were just as screwed up as anything. My little girl had no idea what *daddy* meant.

I was feeling awkward and scared, and Randy's movements were jerky. We lifted the bar together to release our daughter from the swing. Then Randy caught her gently under the arms to lift her free. She screamed and wriggled, hating to have her fun cut short, and I would have intervened except that Randy was a natural. He'd said it was in his genes. He was born to be a daddy.

He gathered her close and stroked her back, crooning to her. I stood there like a complete fool, feeling unneeded for the first time. It was strange and unwelcome. I had to fight not to grab Raine away from him. I had suffered through the long labor, not him. How mature, right?

Randy's hair glinted in the sunlight. It was different than I remembered it, littered with a few grey hairs. Had it been worry over our safety that put them there? Or...

"Where's Kate?" I blurted.

I saw him stiffen. He didn't answer right away. She had to be okay. Not sick? Had they separated? I hated the small hope that lifted its ugly black head inside the pit of my stomach. What a horrible thing to wish for. If I was going to be honest, I'd admit that I still wanted him as I'd wanted him then. Nothing had lessened. If anything, it had intensified and right then was nearly out of control.

I had to dig my fingers into the palm of my hands to keep from running them through his hair as he bent his head over our daughter's. It was a good thing that I kept my nails cut short dealing with Raine, as I'd have sliced my hands in half with all the tension build up going on.

Randy kissed Raine's cheek before he answered. "She's back home. I let her think I was on a business trip for the day."

"What? You call her right now and tell her the truth. There can be no more lies between the two of you, Randy." Wasn't I the moral one?

The flash of anger in his eyes was unmistakable. "No more lies? What the hell do you know of that, Alicia? You ran out, remember? With my daughter. We've heard nothing from you in two years. It didn't occur to you how much we'd suffer—how much we *still* suffer?"

"I—"

He stood, tucking Raine onto his hip. "You denied me the right to know my own baby. I didn't see her first step, her first tooth. If you had your way, I wouldn't even see her graduate high school."

I frowned, "That's painting it on a little thick, isn't it? I had every intention of calling when..."

"When what?" His eyes blazed. Oh God, couldn't he just kiss me and take care of the itch real quick? No, he was way too pissed off. "When did you plan to call, huh? Sorry if I don't believe you."

He turned on his heel and began to walk away. I ran after him, reaching for Raine. "Where the hell do you think you're going? You don't just come and take my daughter away from me."

He stopped. "I had no intention of doing that. Unlike you, I realize the value of her knowing both her parents."

The gibe hurt, and I wanted to get a bit of my own back. "She *has* two parents. Lamont and I."

I thought he was going to hit me then. That might be the biggest no-no to a man ever, calling another man the father of his child. But Randy wasn't the violent type. Before that outburst, I didn't think he was the yelling type either. My ears were still ringing at his raised

voice, deep and sexy as hell, but angry. I didn't like him being mad at me. I think I'd lost a bit of my edge being a mother.

Randy stepped right up into my face, breathing dislike—it might be more true to say hate here, but I couldn't bring myself to admit it—like I'd never seen. "If you ever have my daughter calling another man daddy again, you'll be sorry. She *will* know me as her father, whether you like it or not."

I figured I still had a few cards of my own to play. "Oh really? Well, how do you intend to manage that when we live half way across the country?"

"I'm banking on you moving back home."

I sniffed and then laughed in his face. "And just why should I do that, Randy?"

He stared at me a minute, as if weighing his words. "Because Kate is dying."

\* \* \* \*

*Kate, Kate, Kate.* I was still crying as I packed Raine and my things. Randy was right, as always. There was no doubt that I'd go back. I told myself I wasn't going to move permanently, just for a while. Until I had assured myself that my best friend was going to be okay.

*No.* I sobbed over my suitcase again, useless to get anything done. She wasn't going to get better. The cancer had come back with a vengeance, spreading rapidly throughout her body. She'd avoided her regular checkup. *Damn stubborn woman!* No, they wouldn't have caught it in time, even if she had gone to the doctor as she was supposed to. The big C had it in for Kate.

"It's not right. It should be me." I swiped at the snot running down over my top lip, mingling with the salty tears already there. "It's just not the way things should be."

Randy, who'd been sitting on my bed, stood and came to wrap his arms around me. I stiffened, terrified of my desire in this awful time. It was a good thing that Lamont had been making himself scarce since we'd had an all out war at my leaving. I hadn't told him the whole story between Kate, Randy and I, but I know he guessed some of it based on my stupefied expression every time the man's name was mentioned.

I tried pulling away from Randy, hoping to get my mind clear, but he held on. "No, don't. I know this is hard on you, just as much as it is me. Probably more so."

I stopped struggling and stared up at him. He was so beautiful. I reached up and stroked his cheek, looking into his tired eyes. After he'd helped me to bathe Raine and put her to bed, I heard him pacing much of the night in the guest room. It was only the fact that Lamont was asleep in our room that stopped me from going to him when I heard him crying. It tore me apart. He loved Kate, just as I did.

It didn't seem right that I should be struggling with feelings for her husband when she was fighting for her life. Or maybe he wasn't struggling as I was. I studied him, wondering. And then my wonder turned to assurance. He covered my mouth with his. The sweet taste of his tongue as it met mine was like heaven.

I dropped the dress I had been clutching and wrapped my arms about his neck. He lifted me to meet the hard force of his erection through his jeans. He wanted me. My heart soared as I hung on to him for dear life. His mouth only left mine to trail gentle pecks along my cheek, until he was nibbling at my ear lobe.

"Randy," I sighed, needing so much more.

With no hesitation, he swung us so that my back was to the bed, and he lay me down, quickly following. His knee separated my legs, and I lamented that I was still wearing the damp sweat shorts I'd bathed our daughter in. He didn't seem to notice as his weight came down on me, pressing me into the soft mattress.

You're wondering if warning bells were going off in my head, telling me that Lamont could come in at any second. Or if I felt guilty that Kate was in her present condition while I was yet again, enjoying her man. Well...no. My mind was filled up to its capacity with thoughts of Randy. I didn't even think of Raine just then, sleeping in her crib in the next room. My mind, my body, every part of me screamed "I love you, Randy." I may have even yelled it out myself, because in the next instant he echoed my thoughts.

"Licia, how can I love you this much? I wish I understood it." He studied my face as if the answer was found there, but I didn't know any more than he did.

"It's the sex," I blurted stupidly. "We're such an incredible match, that we aren't thinking straight. Maybe we don't love each other in that way at all. Maybe it's all physical."

He nodded. I think he was hoping that was the case. At least it explained the lack of control. Sex had gotten more than one person in trouble. We were no different. Yet, even as we lay against each other, neither daring to move, I think we both knew the truth. I didn't feel like I could survive another separation from him, and that wasn't sexual desire speaking.

He leaned back away from me and inched his hand down across my belly to the band of my shorts. I trembled.

"We should do the right thing," I mumbled.

He nodded. His fingers inched inside my shorts and worked their way to my panties. He stroked me until I was so wet, I knew I'd need a shower and fresh underwear. When he dipped inside of me, there was no turning back. In seconds, I was stripped of my clothes from the waist down and Randy had plunged his hard-on so deep inside me. I bit down to keep from screaming.

Our fingers entwined together, and I wrapped my legs around his waist as he drove deeper and deeper inside me. I whined and pleaded for more, nipping at his ear. I think I would



have cried had Lamont walked in just then. Not from guilt—though I would suffer that later—but from disappointment. All I could think of was reaching that place of absolute satisfaction when we exploded together. Oh did it come, again and again. We should have stopped, grateful for getting away with one climax. But we were greedy. We both needed more. I think I came four or five times before Randy came to his senses and dragged himself off me.

I was so sore, and so happy for that moment. The man I loved, the father of my baby girl, loved me as much as I loved him. I could see it in his eyes. And I let him see what I felt in return. He stroked my face. I curled lovingly into his palm.

No words passed between us as we dressed. He left to go back to the guest room, and I gathered some things for the shower. There was nothing to say. We'd sinned again. It seemed inevitable.

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"Kate." I breathed her name, watching her. All the ache I felt inside was infused into my face. I couldn't believe she was as thin as she was, shrunken and smaller than I'd ever seen her. Right then it wasn't about me. It was all about Kate. I threw myself on the couch beside her and gathered her gently into my arms. I feared she'd push me away in disgust, but she held on. Just as if she'd missed me as much or more than I'd missed her.

Coming home had been like an insurmountable mountain, but here I was finally. It was the right thing to do. I belonged here, in our old house, ensconced on the too big couch in the too tiny den. "How could Randy have left you even for a moment to fly across the country?"

Kate grinned, an exhausted curving of the corner of her lips. "I always insisted that he get away sometimes, even if it was on business for the day. He'd only be hanging over me worrying anyway. Besides, I have a nurse." She examined my face, my hands, my clothes. "Forget all that. How you doin', sistah?"

I couldn't help but chuckle. Even ill, Kate was putting on her slang as one would toss on a coat. One that didn't fit. "Oh Kate, I've missed you."

While I watched her, kissed her face and hugged her, guilt was tearing my ass up. I could barely breathe around it. Randy'd taken Raine to my old room, to give me a chance to reunite with Kate, but there I was longing for him to come back. I should have been shot.

Later, dinner was strained. Raine, oblivious to it all sat shoveling finger foods into her mouth and chatting nonstop around it. I could understand a few mumbles, but Randy and Kate sat fascinated and probably wondering what in the world my little one was going on about. I don't know if she sensed my nervousness with Kate or what, but Raine didn't take to her at all. She whined to get away when Kate wrapped an arm around the baby's shoulders. I glanced at Randy and his face was red. Raine and he were fast becoming friends. I tried not to examine it too much.

Kate smiled, "She looks just like you, Randy. So sweet and cute too." Then a shadow crossed her face. I think she was remembering why little Raine looked so much like her husband. Not that she could ever forget.

Randy looked embarrassed, and I just stared down at my mashed potatoes. After only one bite, I knew I didn't have much of an appetite. I was just making a show of eating. I couldn't wait until it was over, and I could hide out in my room with the excuse of putting Raine to bed.

No such luck. Despite the guilt he was obviously feeling, Randy had not backed down in being a part of Raine's life. He settled Kate on her own bed and then stepped into my room. The walls closed in the moment his foot crossed the threshold. That place was not big enough for the two of us to occupy it at the same time. I felt like an unseen force was pushing me up against him.

In the bathroom, we knelt side by side, playing with our soap-covered offspring. Randy couldn't get enough of just watching her. "She's so small and cute. I-I get scared that I might break her."

I laughed. "Then you'd have fainted if you bathed her as an infant. I was scared then too. My heart raced every time I picked her up."

I could have bit my tongue off when I saw his expression change at my words. He was remembering the fact that I'd kept him from that experience. There was no doubt he was bitter at my decision.

"You have to realize..." I began.

"I don't have to realize anything." He turned away and busied himself with soaping Raine's washcloth. "This can't be replaced by anything. Listen to her words. I don't even know what she's saying, but I need to hear her talk to me. It took my breath away when you taught her to say "daddy" on the plane. It's not right, Licia. You can't justify what you did."

"I don't." Tears welled in my eyes. "I truly don't. But, I just want you to see where I'm coming from too. You wanted to raise her with Kate. Our baby would call Kate mommy and I'd be nobody."

"You would have still been a part of her life," he insisted.

"Not good enough!"

He sighed. "Let's not fight. I vowed that since Kate got sick, there would always be peace here, and I will to keep it that way."

I wondered what he meant by that. Had there not been peace before she got sick? After I left? I was too scared to ask him to clarify. He didn't look too keen on continuing the conversation, so I let it go. Besides, Splashy Smurf was beginning to nod off in the bubbles.

After we put the baby to bed together, I ducked out on Randy standing over the crib watching Raine, and headed to the kitchen. Pretending that my appetite had returned was just an excuse. Unfortunately, Kate heard me and recognized my step.

“Licia, can you come in here for a minute?” she called from her bedroom. I froze mid-step. My stomach dropped to my feet. That earlier meeting with her had been quick. The resentment she must feel over my leaving hadn’t had a chance to surface. Any more time in Kate’s presence could mean disaster. But what could I do? I couldn’t avoid her forever. I needed to take it like a woman. I would have chuckled at that thought if I didn’t feel like throwing up.

I stepped through the doorway and glanced around. Anything to avoid looking her in the eye. The room was different. Their old bed was replaced by a hospital bed, a narrow one. There was no way Randy fit in that thing.

She guessed my thoughts. “Since I’m in pain a lot, Randy thought it best I have a hospital bed and that he sleep in the den on the sofa. Well he did sleep in your room until you came back.”

Yeah, I heard it. The resentment. I walked inside and sat in an armchair in the corner, probably where her nurse watched over her in her worse times. “Ok go ahead, Kate. Let me have it. I know you’ve been holding it for two years.”

I thought she might deny it but when I peeked up at her, her face was red. Her lips were compressed and her fingers fought with the covers. “You walked out. Didn’t give us an address or anything. You didn’t call. You could have been dead. The only person I figured might know anything, I discovered had gone with you. I..I almost hated you, Alicia.”

Now, my stomach was turning so much, I swallowed convulsively. Tears welled in my eyes and spilled down my cheeks. For a while, I couldn’t say anything in return. What defense could I give? The truth. It was time for the whole truth. I slid higher in the chair and gripped the armrests. “I know. I’m sorry, Kate. There aren’t any words I can say to change what I did. But I’ll tell you the truth. If I had to do it over, I’d still take Raine.”

She gasped.

“I would call, let you know we were safe, and if you agreed to visitation, understanding that she is my daughter, then and only then I would allow you in her life. I know that’s harsh, sounds unfeeling. But believe me I have cried for the choices I’ve made and the pain I’ve caused you. So many nights I cried.”

“Pardon me if I don’t feel sorry for your tears, Alicia,” she snapped. Her breathing increased. I wondered if we should pick it up later. She continued, “She was *my* daughter, not yours. If I knew where you were, I would have come after you. I would have sued you for custody of her and raised her as my own. You agreed!”

My eyes widened at the bitterness spewing from her tongue. This wasn't the Kate I knew. I expected her to be upset, take her time forgiving me. But in all my mental scenarios, not once did I think she would have... Then again, maybe I did, and that's why I stayed away.

"Randy hired private detectives to find you, but they never did. I don't know what you did to hide. It was a fluke that he got a lead from a friend this last time. You better know if I wasn't dying, I'd have you in court right now."

No words formed in my mouth to rebut her attack. What happened to the sweet "I missed you" from earlier? Where were the smiles and tears, the love in her eyes, the "sistah?" More confusing was the knowledge that Randy had hired PIs to find us. Lamont and I didn't hide. The apartment we'd been staying in was in his name. Since I'd dated him off and on for years, Randy and Kate knew his first and last name. So why was it so difficult? Shoot in this day and time, anyone could get on the Internet with a social security number and find anyone else. It just didn't ring true. But I'd discuss that with Randy later.

"Don't you have anything to say for yourself?" Her eyes were hard, hate-filled.

I wanted to say I was sorry again, try for the peace that Randy had insisted on so that we could possibly move forward, but that wasn't happening. So, like a damn fool, I decided to dig my grave a bit deeper by confessing more of my sins. Suffice it to say I had clearly taken a leave of absence in the sanity department.

"I want to confess everything to you, Kate. I need to make it right in a time like this." I sounded like an idiot, but I shoved on. "I...I had feelings for Randy. It wasn't intentional, but it happened. It seemed best for everybody that I go away. At least you had your marriage still solid and I had Raine."

You've heard the expression before, "if looks could kill..." If they could, I'd be a lump of charcoal turned to ashes in that chair. Kate threw back the covers, let down the side rail of her bed and slid to the edge. I jumped to my feet. She didn't weigh two ounces, yet I was scared.

"You dirty whore."

It was my turn to gasp.

"You always wanted everything I had. My parents, my home, my clothes, my money. I befriended you because you had nothing, and I felt sorry for you. And now you tell me that you wanted my husband too? Bitch!"

She lunged for me. I screamed. She paled and looked like she was falling. I shouted for Randy. He ran in, swept Kate in his arms and commanded me to get out. I burst into tears and ran for my life. That night was like every other night. I cried and cried, not sleeping. A few times, I heard Kate wail and Randy's deep voice, obviously soothing her. It was a mistake to come here. I wasn't mending fences, I was ripping them up and setting them on fire.

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Randy found me packing the next day. “What are you doing?”

I rolled my eyes. “I’m leaving.”

“The hell you are.” He snatched the blouse I was folding from my hands. “I already told you, Licia, you’re not running away again. You’re not taking my daughter from me.”

“Oh calm down!” I growled, tired of being the bad guy throughout this whole shit. “I am not running away. It’s just obvious to me that I need to stay in a hotel and not under this roof. Kate hates my guts. I can’t sleep here. It’s better for Raine and I to stay somewhere else, and you can visit with her whenever you want.”

He seemed about ready to argue, but thought better of it. “Fine. You’re probably right. Last night wasn’t easy on any of us.”

I wondered if he heard me crying. I tried to muffle it. Then I wondered how hard it must be for Randy to be torn between two women. Sure a man bedding two women was a nice fantasy for him, but what about the reality of it? The jealousy, the hurt. It was no wonder his hair was going grey.

Before I could do something stupid like throw myself into his arms, I swung back to my packing. “Kate told me something interesting.”

He sat on my bed, watching me. “What was that?”

I hesitated, not knowing what to think. “She said you hired several private detectives to find us, that they found no trace. I don’t understand. We weren’t in hiding or living with new identities.”

Randy didn’t look like he wanted to answer. He twisted to pick up a pair of my panties, I’m sure unintentionally. I swiped them to stuff in my bag, then waited for his answer. He blew out a resigned breath.

“Her parents didn’t come back, even after I told them about how hard she was taking it, not being able to have kids. I can’t believe how unfeeling they are. Too many things have hurt Kate. Too much has come against her. Fighting cancer and then becoming sterile from the treatments. After you left with the baby, I thought it was best that we just rebuild a relationship together.” He ran a hand through his hair, leaving it wilder than usual. “I understood your reasons, though I didn’t condone them. I knew it was unfair to ask you to let Kate call Raine her own.”

“You didn’t act like that when you found me.” I couldn’t resist my own anger.

“You took her from me too. I am her father. I deserved to be in her life. I had a right.”

We fell silent. I put down the clothes I was folding and sat beside him. Without warning, he leaned across and kissed me. I pulled away, then kissed him back. Our tongues locked hungrily for several minutes. We muttered words of love, and would have gone further.

“Randy?” It was Kate, from her room.

I nearly landed on the floor, and Randy sprung up from the bed. At the door, he stopped to turn back to me. “I let her believe I’d contracted the detectives, all the while hoping you would at least contact me. You never did.”

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Over the next few days, things were one moment tolerable, the next unbearable. Guilt drove me to continue trying to reach Kate. It was pathetic what a person would do clear their own conscious. I was no different. Sure I still loved Kate, but I also didn’t want to suffer *what ifs* or *why didn’t I*... after she was gone. It seemed impossible, but I wanted to fix our relationship. That possibility was likely to stay beyond my reach when every time Randy came to my motel room to visit with Raine—something he insisted on paying for—he landed in my bed. If it weren’t so damn sinful, it would have been cute. Us, a little family of three.

I flipped over to my side, facing away from Randy. “You shouldn’t be here. Where does Kate think you are?”

He slipped a hand around my waist to pull me back against him. His fingers grazed the hair between my legs, sending chills rippling over my skin. A peck and a nip on my earlobe before he answered, “I know. I know. I tell myself that every time I come here. I tell my dick I’m here see my sweet daughter, but then I see her mommy with her sexy hips and her round booty.”

I laughed, “Yeah her too big booty.”

“Perfect booty,” he insisted. “And I can’t keep my hands off you. I don’t know how this is going to work, how we’re going to fix this mess. Every time I tell myself okay, Randy you’ve tasted Licia’s sweetness...Enough. Be faithful to your wife. I end up making love to you again. For the life of me, I just can’t stop. I love you so much. Being apart from you has been hell.”

Tears sprung to my eyes. “I know. Oh God don’t I know, Randy. Just one more taste of your mouth, is what I say to myself too. Make love to me just this last time, then we’ll both be strong.” Even as I kept saying the words, I knew I was being a fool. Randy was my drug. I wasn’t going to up and walk away from him unless I was dragged, kicking and screaming. And where would that leave our baby?

*One last time...* I allowed Randy to flip me to my back and lift himself above me. My legs fell apart like they had a mind of their own. We didn’t have to wait until I was wet. My body was already on fire, and after making love half the evening, I was ready. He pushed deep inside me, causing tremors to surface across my belly. I mentioned before how big Randy is. Our

time apart did not lessen him one inch. His thrusts sent me into orbit. Fast and rough, then gentle and slow. I squeaked my pleasure as not to disturb Raine sleeping in her crib.

“Deeper, Randy. Baby, please,” I begged.

“Tell me you love me.” His love-drugged eyes were intense gazing into mine. It wasn’t even possible that I not tell him again how I felt. The words seemed branded on my tongue.

“I love you, Randy Devereaux, with all my heart.” How many times had I paired my name with his? Alicia Devereaux. It was silly and wrong, but I’d done it thousands of times. And since Kate had accused me, I questioned whether her hurtful words were true. Had I really coveted her life all these years? I didn’t like to think so. But here I was lying in bed with her husband’s shaft plunging in and out of me. It was so wrong...and so good.

Randy lifted one of my legs over his head, to close them together at his side. It made me squeeze him tighter, so that it was tougher for him to slide in and out of me. It was even better. He pounded against me and leaned down for our mouths to meet. I began to shake knowing I was climaxing. He was right there with me, shooting his warm seed inside me like he’d done so many times before. How, oh how could this be wrong?

Later, we lay curled in each other’s arms, Randy promising to leave in another minute. We drifted to sleep only to be wakened at an incessant pounding on the door. My chest tightened and my heart thumped wildly when I heard Lamont calling me.

“Oh my God. No.” I sat up in bed, the covers clutched to my chest and stared at the closed door like it was a monster. We were caught.

Raine began crying, snapping me out of my daze, and I tossed on my nightgown to grab her up. Beside me, Randy dressed quickly. His face was a mask of calm, though I wasn’t sure what he was thinking. He knew Lamont somewhat from the past, our dating days. I imagined he was trying to remember if Lamont was likely to kick his ass for cheating with his wife. Both men were powerfully built. I was scared too.

Randy opened the door to Lamont. My fears went into overdrive at the sight of him. His face looked rough, like he hadn’t shaved the entire time I was gone. His clothes looked slept in, and his eyes were bloodshot. He pushed past Randy to stomp into the room and look around.

“What the hell’s going on here, Lee? No, scratch that.” He swung back to Randy. “I can smell what’s going on. Just who the fuck do you think you are putting your hands on my wife?”

Raine screamed louder. I bounced her on my hip. “Look, Lamont. You’re scaring Raine with all the yelling. Okay, we all know what happened. You and I have needed to talk a long time.” I gave him my I-know-all-your-shit look, and he had the grace to pale. “Maybe you should leave, Randy.”

I wanted to hug him and kiss him on his way out, but didn't figure that would sit well with my husband. Randy hesitated. "Maybe I should take Raine with me. I'll sleep in your old room with her. She'll be fine."

I felt nervous about being away from my baby, even for one night. But Randy was probably right. With Lamont fit to bust a damn blood vessel, it might be better for her. I nodded, placed Raine in Randy's arms, and swirled to pack her a quick overnight bag. Randy trailed behind me.

"Are you sure you'll be okay? I can stay until he calms down," Randy whispered.

I grinned. He was sweet. I leaned forward to kiss him and then caught myself. God, I was an idiot. This whole thing had to be straightened out quick. Having it out with Lamont was a long time coming. It was no more fair to him than it was to Kate. But he wasn't getting off scot-free either. He'd been banging some other woman if I wasn't mistaken. This was time for confessions.

I led Randy to the door, but kept myself from touching him. "It will be fine. He's not violent. I'll call you in the morning."

As soon as the door closed, Lamont lit into me. "Lee, what the fuck is up with you?"

I held a finger up, tapping the air like I would tap a person. "Okay, first of all, you're not talking to me like that. Second, you're nobody to be accusing me of anything."

"I don't have to accuse you. The funk of sex is all in the air. It was obvious what you were doing, and with your best friend's husband," he sneered. "Now I know who Raine's father is."

"Go to hell. And don't get all high and mighty. You've been having an affair for a while now." I set my hands on my hips, ignoring any guilt that was riding on his words. "Don't deny it. I'm not a fool."

His countenance slumped. "I-I'm sorry, Lee. I never meant it to happen..."

"Of course not. Who is she?"

"Does it matter?"

I rolled my eyes and sat on the bed to cross my arms. "I guess it doesn't. I suppose we should have known this was coming from the start, when we married for all the wrong reasons."

He sat down beside me and tried to pull my hands into his. I resisted. "We can start over, Lee. Everything will be fine. I promise."

I thought he'd lost his mind. How could everything be fine when I still wanted Randy? When I'd have given almost anything to have him back here instead of my husband. "No,



they're not going to be fine. Just look at our marriage. And while I don't feel good about what I've done, the fact that you cheated just confirms that our relationship isn't worth a thing."

"Don't say that!"

I stared. He'd jumped to his feet and started pacing.

"The only reason I started seeing someone else is because you pushed me away from the start. I could never be good enough for you or good enough to be Raine's father. You made that clear in everything you did."

"Don't you pin your cheating on me. We were still intimate. I admit I have issues. It was hard to make you Raine's father when I'd taken her away from R...her real dad. But I didn't make you fuck another woman."

"Now who needs to watch their mouth?"

I wanted to spit out some other choice words to ring his ears, but resisted. I was wrong. Okay. I accepted that, but it didn't excuse him cheating. He could say what he wanted. I wasn't buying that load of crap. I already admitted to myself and maybe sometimes to him that I had trouble figuring out how to deal with him being Raine's stepfather. We were at this point partly because of it. So now, we had to deal.

"Okay, so with both of us wrong, it's time to face the music. You have no obligations to me. I do want to get all of Raine's things and the rest of my clothes from the apartment. You can have everything else. I'm probably going to live back here until I figure out what to do." I sighed, hating that I'd handled so many things in the worse possible way. "I wish you all the best in your life, Lamont. And if the girl is someone special, well I hope that works out too."

"No."

"I...What?" I was thinking I didn't hear him right, expecting that he would be in agreement with a clean break.

It took him a minute to speak again. "I said no. We're not getting a divorce. You're not staying here. I'm not losing you to that white man. End of story."

\* \* \* \*

So there I was sitting next to Lamont, in his car—crying because he'd kidnapped me. Yes, you read that right. He kidnapped me. Could my life get any more screwed up?

"Lamont, please don't do this. You're taking me away from Raine. She'll wonder where her mother is and be really upset," I pleaded.

He held on to my arm across the car as he drove with one hand. It was painful and unbreakable. I'd tried to jump out of the car a few times, despite the fact that we were speeding down the highway. "Why are you doing this?"

Lamont's thumb stroked my arm. I wanted to cringe, but held it inside. He glanced at me with tears in his own eyes. "I love you, Lee. I've always loved you. And I can't stand the thought of us not being together."

"You love me, but you're kidnapping me?"

His head shook back and forth. He looked like a bobble-head. "No. No. I'm just taking you somewhere where you can think clearly. We'll have a nice romantic dinner, and you'll see, once you get that fuck Randy out of your head, that you still love me."

I yanked my arm, pried at his fingers. God, how did a man's hands get so strong? One minute you're admiring all that male muscle, the next you're cursing it. I was *cursing* big time.

"Love you? Are you crazy? You're forcing me to go with you. I want to go back to...I want to pick up Raine and get on with my life. You won't let that happen. Damn it, Lamont. Stop acting crazy and let me go."

My voice was getting louder. I was panicking more and more as the miles flew by. From the looks of it, we'd already traveled twenty-five miles. I had to do something to get free. I had tried using my cell to call Randy, but Lamont tossed it out the window awhile ago. In the rear view mirror, I'd seen another car roll over it and smash it to bits. My heart sank.

I thought of something. "I'm hungry. When are we stopping to eat?"

He grinned, "See? Now we can discuss *us* over dinner. I'll find somewhere nice and quiet where we won't be disturbed."

I rolled my eyes and turned away. A tick later his cell rang. I don't know why I got excited. It wasn't like Randy had his number. Lamont glanced down at the display and frowned. From the look of apology and embarrassment in his eyes, I knew it was the other woman. And he thought I was going to make up with him. He was a fool.

Not answering, he put the phone back in his pocket. "I'm so glad Kate called me when she did. She was worried about your relationship with Randy. Said you were throwing yourself at him. Maybe because I was neglecting you." He shrugged. "Actually she didn't put in that neglect part. I did. I figure if I hadn't been working so much, none of this would have happened."

"And by *working* you mean fucking another woman," I told him.

"Lee!"

I ignored him.

A short time later, we pulled into a restaurant parking lot, just a couple miles from the highway. He finally let go of my arm, and I rubbed the spot where his fingers had left a painful groove. As soon as he twisted to unbuckle himself, I bolted. I was inside the restaurant screaming bloody murder within seconds. A guy I figured was a manager rushed toward me with a horrified look on his face. I guess he was thinking this black woman is outside her mind. I didn't care. I darted behind him and yanked the man bodily in front of me.

"Call the police. Call the police," I cried. "This guy has kidnapped me."

So picture what I looked like in that classy restaurant with the crystal glasses on the table, linen napkins and chandeliers gracing the ceiling. My hair was a mess, not being able to find my comb or brush in all the rush. I was still dressed in my nightgown, because apparently kidnappers don't let you get dolled up when they grab your ass. I did have a chance to slip my feet into sandals, but I know I still looked wild. I was hoping the manager had compassion on me in spite of all that.

Lamont rushed in. The manager looked from him to me, and all conversation in the restaurant stopped. I wasn't scared of Lamont at that point, but I did need help getting away from him. If we were thrown out for disturbing the peace, who knew when I'd get free again.

The manager's mouth opened slowly. My stomach dropped. "I think that you two need to step outside to..."

"Licia!"

I turned toward the entrance, and there stood my knight in shining armor, lugging my baby who thought it was funny that her daddy was running and bouncing her along. I couldn't believe he was there, even knew where we were. It was late. Come to think of it Raine should have been asleep hours ago.

I sidestepped Lamont and the manager to get to Randy. "What is she doing up, Randy? What are you doing here?"

He frowned, his handsome face warming my heart. "I thought I was saving you."

"I know. Thank you. I guess we can talk on the way back about how you got here. Right now, I need to hold our daughter." I took Raine, cuddled against her baby soft cheek and fled from the restaurant. Randy could handle everything else. Any more of this drama in my life, and I was going to have a nervous breakdown.

\* \* \* \*

I was avoiding everybody. I holed up in a new motel and didn't open the door or answer the phone. It was getting old for Raine, because she was cranky most of the day. I think she was missing Randy, but so was I. Determined to punish myself past the whole crazy episode of a

few days ago, I wasn't giving anyone the chance to kidnap me or make love to me. It was pure hell.

Unfortunately, that didn't include Kate. When I couldn't resist checking voice mail, I got her message. It made me feel pretty low hearing how much weaker she sounded after the short period I'd been in town.

I gave in and went to see her. Something was screaming in my mind "*run like hell*," but I ignored it. Randy wasn't around. Her nurse let me in.

Kate lay prone in her bed. Her skin was so pale, I thought she'd passed already. I was scared to go inside her room. The nurse shuffled me along and closed the door. *Thanks a lot!*

"Kate?" I kind of hoped she'd stay sleep and I could leave knowing I tried. Yeah right.

Her eyes fluttered open. "It's you."

*I love you too.*

"You asked me to come," I huffed. "What is it?"

"You mean you took time out of chasing my husband to come." Her words were mean, but they came out in short puffs of air like she was struggling to catch her breath. I didn't want to upset her or argue.

"Is there something you want, Kate? I don't think it's good for your health to lay there railing at me. What's up?"

I thought she wouldn't answer. She lay with her eyes closed so long, I turned to step quietly from the room. But she called me back.

"You can't have Randy."

It was a statement. I stood there silently.

"Even after I'm gone, you can't have him. He'll always be mine. I'll make sure of that. I'll tie him up in so much guilt, he'll be ruined for you or anyone else. I'll make sure to let him believe it was his cheating that drove me to getting sick again. After all, they say that our health can greatly hinge on our state of mind."

I couldn't believe what she was telling me. I closed my eyes and backed away. Okay, we were seriously wrong, Randy and I. But Kate had gone too far. I wondered if she and Lamont had been sipping on the same loco juice. Maybe scientists should have said that our health can make us delusional and vindictive.

"Why would you do that, Kate? I thought you loved Randy and would want him to be happy."

“I did.”

It was all the explanation she would give. I couldn't get another word out of her or get her to take back what she said. She was going to hurt Randy. Right then, I'm sad to admit that I wanted her dead. Randy was my heart, as close as Raine. If him being happy meant me walking away, then I would do it. Kate's plan was to ruin him forever. I didn't feel like I could tell him what she was going to do. Knowing she felt that way about him would hurt him just as much. Seriously, life stunk.

I returned to my self-made prison to wallow away the time. What I was waiting for, I don't know. Randy was still paying my bills. He knew where to find me because of it. I felt like such a loser. Before Raine, I was on the fast track to success. Now, I didn't know what I wanted. Many a single mother raised their kids and attended school. It was more than possible. The motivation was what I lacked. It was like I was dying right along with Kate.

\* \* \* \*

A couple days more and I was awakened at six in the morning with pounding on the door. My heart slammed against my chest. It couldn't be Lamont again. I lay considering what to do, hoping the lock held. But then Randy called out to me. Was Kate okay?

I flung open the door, not bothering to slip on any clothes. I was in my nightgown again, and Randy's eyes made a beeline to my breasts. I didn't cover my protruding nipples, wanting him to want me.

He stepped in as if to pass me, but stopped close. For moments, his mouth hovered above mine, then he pulled back. He ran a hand through his hair as he moved to Raine's bed to watch her sleep. I waited silently for him to speak.

“I told her.”

My legs gave. I slumped to a nearby chair. “What?”

“I told Kate that I love you. I told her I'll do any and everything to make her comfortable, but I can't go on like this. I can't live under guilt for what we've done, for what I ache to do every day.”

“She doesn't have long.”

“Don't you start too,” he growled.

I fell silent. I knew without him admitting it that she had started her plan. She didn't have long. She was dying, and he was telling her he wanted another woman. That seemed low, but it was reality. I figured out real quick that Kate had been manipulating Randy for a long time, even before I got pregnant. His next words confirmed it.

“I know Kate has been your best friend for years, long before I came.” He hesitated, then continued. “Maybe you saw one side of her. I saw another. Kate's parents had always

neglected her. They were always traveling and leaving her with sitters. You came and it was perfect...seemingly. But Kate started wanting more.”

I nodded, imaging just where he was going. “She needed to control the world around her. She needed to control you, and I guess...me.”

“Yes. Today when I told her I was leaving, she said I caused...” His voice faded. I wondered if she’d succeeded. I stood and rushed to kneel at his side.

“Don’t believe it, Randy. Baby, you should live your life exactly as you want. We can’t control others no matter how much we want to. It’s wrong.”

He stroked my cheek, a loving look coming into his eyes. “Don’t worry. I love you too much to let you go, even for guilt. I can’t do it again. I did it for two years. No more. That’s why I followed you and Lamont. I thought at first you were going willingly, that you chose him over me. I guess I lost it. I was going to—I don’t know, serenade you or something.”

I burst out laughing. Suddenly, I realized what he said. “You have chosen me?”

He nodded. “With all my heart. I want to be with you, Licia. Whether we live in sin, unmarried whatever. I need you and Raine. There’s no way I’m letting you go again. I said as much to Lamont and somehow convince him to let you go. I know it’s bad of me to be thinking this way, making these decisions while my wife lays on her deathbed. I do feel guilt over that. In fact, though I’d decided on you, I wasn’t going to tell Kate. I planned to stay at her side and wait until...after. But then she laid in to me, making accusations, saying things about you. I blurted out the truth of what I felt.”

“Oh boy.”

“Oh boy is right. What’s done is done. Besides, our Kate seems to be stronger than we give her credit for. She didn’t pause in her insults for a second after my news. It was like she was some other person, someone who’d been hidden all this time.” He looked sad, and I climbed up next to him to wrap my arms around him. He nuzzled into my neck. “To be truthful, I suppose I did see signs of it. Over the years, she didn’t yell or threaten or even accuse. She just cried and made little comments with a smile. They always got me to change whatever I was doing that she didn’t like. She knows how to use the guilt to her advantage. Not this time. This time, I will *not* give in.”

He took me by the face and made me look up at him. “My beautiful Licia. Tell me that you love me. Tell me you won’t leave me, that you’ll stay by my side no matter how hard it gets through all of this.”

I can’t say I didn’t want to run. Just as Randy said, Kate was stronger than we realized even in sickness. The kid gloves were off. She was trying to rule us from her bed. But I’d done all my running. If dodging the verbal attacks was what I had to do to be with Randy, then so be it. I even had plans to visit her. Well, maybe.

I couldn't believe it. Randy was going to finally be mine. We wouldn't have to sneak or feel guilty...not too guilty. Maybe one day we could take that step and marry, even have other children. Well, after I got my advanced degree. All of a sudden life was full of possibilities.

"I love you, Randy Devereaux. I'll never leave your side again."

THE END

## *About the Author*

Tressie Lockwood is a new author though she's always loved books. *Cheating with Randy Two* is her sequel to reader acclaimed, *Cheating with Randy*, and she hopes that her readers will enjoy it. She writes straight from her heart, reaching out to those who find it hard to be completely themselves no matter what anyone else thinks.