

# His Sister's Kiss Kate Hill

After surviving captivity in a Vietnam prison camp, Master Sergeant Abraham Marley Forbes longs more than ever for a loving family life. It's a dream he doubts will ever come true, until a promise to a deceased friend sends him straight into the arms of the one woman who can fulfill his deepest desires.

Publisher's Note: Originally published in the By Honor Bound anthology.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

His Sister's Kiss

ISBN 9781419925948 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED His Sister's Kiss Copyright © 2004 Kate Hill

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication 2004

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

# HIS SISTER'S KISS

Kate Hill

**Chapter One** December 23, 1967 North Carolina

Oh goodness.

Angela Christine Franco stared at the six-foot-three-inch hunk of Marine. Deep set blue eyes gazed at her from beneath an almost primitive brow. Broad shoulders, set straight and proud, filled her doorway. Beneath the uniform, his powerful chest tapered to a lean waist and the longest legs she'd ever seen on a man. Her heart fluttered and desire coursed through her as her mouth suddenly went dry.

"Miss Franco? I'm Abraham Marley Forbes." His deep voice made her toes curl and her body tingle in all the right places.

Guilt washed over her. Lust should be the last thought inspired by this man.

Two months ago, Angela had learned her brother, Jim, a gunnery sergeant in the corps who had been missing in action in Vietnam, had died in a prison camp. Abraham, Jim's good friend, had been with him at the time.

In spite of his handsome looks, captivity shone in the thinness of his big-boned frame and the scar above his right eye.

She grasped the hand he extended and shook it. Warmth spread up her arm and her temperature rose from his touch. "Please come in."

With a slight nod, he stepped into the hallway and followed her to the parlor.

"It's good of you to come by," she said.

"I'd hoped you wouldn't object. Jim spoke so much about you and Polly that I almost feel I know you."

Angela smiled. "I understand. He mentioned you several times in letters."

"I wanted to see for myself that you're both all right and let you know you can depend on me for anything you might need."

Angela drew a deep breath, thinking she needed to know if his lips felt as soft as they looked. *Damn you, Angela! Get a hold of yourself. It's certainly not the first time you've seen a man in uniform!* But she'd never seen one quite like this. Virility oozed from his every pore. He emanated such power and authority. Those cool sapphire eyes fixed on her and she resisted the urge to squirm in her seat. Her belly tightened in an unaccustomed feeling of sexual desire.

"That's generous of you, but we're fine. It was rough going at first, trying to make Polly understand that Jim's gone." Angela paused, shaking her head and swallowing hard. "God, usually I handle it better than this."

"It's all right." His voice softened a bit. "Jim was a damn good man. He saved my ass – I mean my life – more times than I can count."

"He said the same about you."

"There are some things Jim wanted me to tell you. I promised that if I ever got out of there, I'd make sure you'd know. Polly, too. Is that her?" He glanced at the picture on the coffee table.

"Yes. She looks like Jim, doesn't she?"

"Sure does." Abraham touched the brass frame.

"As you probably know, her mother died shortly after she was born."

He nodded, his penetrating gaze fixing on her again. This time she noticed emotions burning beneath the calm surface of his eyes.

"How are you?" she asked.

"I'm fine, ma'am."

"I can't begin to imagine what you must have gone through."

"That's good. I'm glad you can't and hope you never have reason to find out."

"Are you on leave?"

"Yes, ma'am. For the next three weeks. I just got out of the hospital a couple of days ago."

"It's nice you'll be able to spend the holidays with your family."

"No family, ma'am."

"None?" She felt a twinge of sadness. How awful that this man who had been captured, tortured, and finally rescued had no family to welcome him home.

"No, ma'am. The holidays never meant much to me anyway. I'm not one for celebrations."

"This year Polly and I are keeping it quiet. Making a big fuss so soon after Jim's death just wouldn't feel right."

"I—"

"Hi!" called a small voice. A girl of about five ran into the room. She stopped in front of Abraham, her blue eyes wide.

"Polly, this is Master Sergeant Forbes," Angela explained.

"He looks like Daddy." She crawled onto the couch beside him, sitting close.

Abraham swallowed visibly, his eyes gleaming with emotion that broke free for all of two seconds.

"Polly, why don't you come sit with me and give him some room?"

"It's all right." Abraham placed an arm around the girl who gazed up at him. "Polly, I came here to talk about your dad. He and I knew each other for a long time and he told me a lot about you and your aunt."

"I miss him."

"I know. So do I."

Abraham spoke to Polly for about an hour. As Angela listened to him relay her brother's messages, part of her wished it was Jim sitting with them while another part of her was grateful Abraham had survived.

She knew a good man when she saw one, and she had no doubt that Abraham was one of the best.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Polly, go get washed up for dinner," Angela said.

"Is Abe staying?"

Angela's gaze met the Master Sergeant's. Her mouth went dry. Standing, she moistened her lips. "If he wants to."

"No. I have to go." He stood and straightened his jacket.

"Oh." Angela wondered if she appeared as disappointed as she felt. Not that it mattered. Polly looked disappointed enough for both of them. "It would be no problem for you to stay."

"I wouldn't want to be any trouble, ma'am."

"You won't be. There's plenty of food, but if you stay I must ask you one favor." He lifted an eyebrow and she grinned. "Stop calling me ma'am. Polly, wash up and set the table. Abe, you can help me peel potatoes."

"KP I can handle." He smiled, following her into the kitchen as Polly hurried upstairs.

Moments later, Angela and Abe stood side by side. He washed and peeled potatoes in the sink while she chopped them. In between cutting, she glanced at him from the corner of her eye. He'd removed his jacket and rolled up his sleeves, revealing powerful wrists and sinewy forearms dusted with dark hair. His huge, long-fingered hands were far more graceful than she'd expect from a man like him.

"Would you like to spend the holidays with us, Abe?"

He paused and turned to her, holding her captive with his deep blue gaze. He drew a long breath and released it slowly. "I don't think it would be appropriate."

"Jim's dead. Neither of us are in the mood to celebrate, so why don't we be miserable together?"

8

A slight smile touched his finely drawn lips. "When you put it that way, it's hard to say no."

"We're eating at four o'clock tomorrow night, but come early if you want. The weather is supposed to be bad."

He nodded. "Thank you for the invitation."

"You're welcome."

Angela resumed chopping. Her belly fluttered at the thought of spending Christmas with him. Polly obviously adored him, so Angela told herself it was for her niece's sake that she'd invited him. She didn't want to admit how much he stirred her libido.

\* \* \* \* \*

Abe inhaled deeply, cold air filling his lungs. The weather was surprisingly harsh for these parts, even for wintertime.

For months he'd dreaded the thought of visiting Jim's family. Few people had meant anything to him in his life, but Jim had been one of them. They'd gone through much together – boot camp and two tours of Vietnam. It was that last time they'd been captured – the only survivors of an ambush. How many times had they wished they'd died with the rest of their squad?

Abe considered himself a strong man and a good soldier. He thought he'd seen just about everything, but nothing had prepared him for the hell of the prison camp. Shitting himself while chest-deep in swamp muck became a way of life along with beatings and other abuses he didn't want to remember.

About a month after their capture, Jim died of an infection. Abe had actually envied him, except for one thing. He had a family, a daughter in the care of his sister, a young woman who earned her living as a tutor. Jim talked about them often, sharing with Abe a family life he'd only dreamed of. In spite of his decent looks and a body most men would kill for, Abe couldn't seem to hold onto a woman. He just couldn't relate to most

people. Orphaned as a boy, Abe had spent his life shuffled among distant relatives until finally ending up in a home where he lived until joining the Marines at eighteen. Always a focused young man, he'd taken well to military life. He'd never regretted joining, even while suffering in that Vietnamese shit hole. The Corps was his life, the only place where he'd ever really belonged, so he couldn't help admiring Jim's family life. Before Jim died, Abe had promised that if he ever made it home, he'd see that Jim's sister and daughter never wanted for anything.

Almost a year after his capture, Abe was rescued. Nearly dead from starvation and disease, he'd spent the past couple of months hospitalized and in counseling to help him "deal with" what he'd gone through. He'd rebelled at first, wanting to work through his ordeal in his own way. The Corps didn't agree, however. Unless he wanted to continue as a prisoner in his own country, he'd take the counseling provided.

Abe had needed it more than he realized. Anger, fear, and pain were bottled inside him. Those emotions still hadn't dissipated and he doubted they ever would. Then there were the nightmares. At night instead of resting, he was back in 'Nam, fighting for his next breath. The leave hadn't been his idea. The last thing he wanted was three weeks of nothing to do but think about where he'd been and what he'd seen.

That was why Angela's invitation was so welcome. Normally Abe would never have agreed to spend Christmas with anybody. Hell, he didn't even celebrate holidays. Ever. The minute he'd looked into her beautiful hazel eyes, the second he'd stepped into that warm, cheery little house, he'd felt strangely comfortable. Perhaps it was because Jim had spoken of her so much, but he felt as if he and Angela weren't strangers at all.

*It's her terrific body,* he told himself. Those gorgeous breasts that filled out her black and white checkered dress belted at her waist and draping hips so shapely that his mouth watered. Damn, his health must be returning after all. It had been quite a while since he'd thought about taking a woman to bed. What the hell is wrong with you, Forbes? This isn't some two-dollar whore from the docks. She's your deceased friend's sister, so don't treat her like anything but a lady.

Then there was Polly. Looking at the kid breached the icy barrier years of loneliness had erected around his heart. She had eyes like Jim and Angela. Talking to a child at an age when she was so honest and wondering refreshed him in a way he never imagined possible.

Jim should be here instead, enjoying his family. Why was Abe, a man with no strings attached to anyone, alive and Jim, a man with so much to live for, dead?

Just one of those questions to which there would never be an answer.

## **Chapter Two**

Angela's stomach churned so much she wondered how she was going to eat the Christmas Eve dinner she'd spent the day preparing. Whenever she thought of Abe, heat rose in her face and her heart raced like a love-struck teenager's. Something in the man's steady blue eyes and sexy Texas drawl did things to her emotions she never imagined possible.

Most women her age were married with families of their own. She'd had offers from several decent young men her parents loved, but they hadn't stirred her.

"You're throwing your life away searching for a dream," her mother often told her. "Romance is an illusion. Marriage is about hard work and sacrifice. It's about not growing old alone, like what's happening to you."

Angela refused to make sacrifices for someone she didn't love. Jim and his wife had love. They'd been happy together, but where had it gotten them? At least now they were rejoined in death.

Shaking her head, Angela finished sprinkling cheese over the pan of baked macaroni and placed it in the oven to keep warm. This season without Jim was depressing enough. Why make herself even more miserable and ruin the night for Polly and Abe?

Abe with his broad shoulders and long, hard-muscled legs. Abe who weakened her with a single look.

"How's that, Aunt Angela?" Polly gestured toward the table she'd just finished setting.

"It looks lovely. Why don't you get Abe's present and put it on the coffee table?"

Polly hurried to retrieve the gift they'd shopped for that morning. Unsure of what to buy on such short notice for a man she scarcely knew, Angela had decided gloves were a safe enough choice. Besides, his large, long-fingered hands would look rather sensual in the black leather gloves.

No sooner had Angela placed the basket of sliced bread and butter on the table when the doorbell rang.

"I'll get it!" Polly shouted, racing ahead of her aunt and pausing in front of the door. "Who's there?"

"It's Abe."

Polly tugged open the door.

Angela grinned at the sight of the towering Master Sergeant carrying two boxes wrapped in red and green paper.

"Abe, you shouldn't have," Angela said, taking the gifts he handed Polly.

Shrugging, he met her gaze. A shiver ran down her spine. She told herself it was from the cold, but would the cold make her tingle and buzz in places that made her blush?

"Come in and sit. Dinner's ready." Angela glanced at him over her shoulder. "I hope you like macaroni."

"When it comes to food, I like just about everything, but I must say, Angela, your cooking smells especially good."

"I hope it doesn't disappoint you."

"It would be hard for anything about you to be disappointing..." He held her gaze and looked almost sheepish before adding, "ma'am."

Angela's pulse skipped. This man liked her. She was sure of it. Not just any like. This was the deep-down, giddy, I'm-thinking-of-the-wedding-night kind of like she'd always dreamed about.

Drawing a deep breath, she took the food from the oven and told herself to get a grip on her emotions. Her brother was dead. This was his best friend who had come to

offer some comfort. Maybe her mother was right. She was a dreamer getting desperate with longing for the impossible relationship she'd imagined.

Polly sat at the table, nabbing Abe's attention with a flurry of questions and stories about school and tomorrow's visit to her grandparents.

Though Angela didn't get along well with her parents, she felt Polly deserved a relationship with them. Jim had felt the same, which was why he'd made Angela his daughter's legal guardian.

"I hope we don't get a storm tomorrow," Polly said. She glanced at Abe. "Aunt Polly won't drive to Grandma and Grandpa's in bad weather."

"Don't worry. We'll get there." Angela tugged the girl's ponytail. All day long the news had been filled with stories of the ice storm moving toward North Carolina.

"I'd be glad to drive you," Abe said.

"We wouldn't want to impose."

"It would be no imposition."

"I'll call Grandma and tell her Abe's coming." Polly darted for the phone.

"Would that be a problem?" he asked. "Because if you think they wouldn't want to see me, I don't mind giving you the ride. I don't want to upset them any more than they must already be."

"If you're driving us, then you're coming to eat. Besides, I think they'd like to meet you." Angela dished out the macaroni, giving Abe an extra helping. "You look like you can use this."

The corners of his lips tugged up in what might have been a smile. He always looked so serious and stern it was hard to tell. "I haven't had a home-cooked meal since I was about nine years old. Mess hall food's not bad, though. I kinda like it, especially after the shi—" He glanced at Polly. "I mean garbage I was eating this past year."

Angela shuddered to think about what he and Jim had gone through. She had the strangest urge to offer him comfort in every way imaginable. This man was getting

14

under her skin and no matter how she tried keeping her thoughts decent and pure, it just wasn't happening.

After dinner, the three sat in the living room and exchanged gifts.

"It's a dog!" Polly beamed, tugging the shaggy brown stuffed animal from the box.

Angela smiled. "She loves dogs."

"I know. Jim said so lots of times." Abe glanced at the present on Angela's lap.

She tore off the paper and opened the box.

"Oh!" She lifted out the snow globe with a deer family standing in front of a log cabin with a pine tree nearby. "It's beautiful. Thank you, Abe."

Again that faint smile flickered across his mouth as his gaze held hers with such intensity that her belly tightened. Thank goodness for the heavy sweater disguising her pebble-hard nipples. The beauty and depth of the man's eyes turned her to liquid.

"Are you going to open yours?" she prodded, anxious for his gaze to fix on something other than her.

He unwrapped the gloves and tried them on. "These are great, ladies. Just what I needed."

"Polly, it's time for you to get ready for bed."

"Can I sleep with my dog?"

"Sure can," Angela said. "Don't forget to brush your teeth."

"Goodnight, Aunt Angela. See you tomorrow, Abe."

"Goodnight, darlin'."

Angela smiled. Though that particular darlin' was meant for her niece, the sound of his deep, sexy drawl caressing the words made her tingle with desire.

Sitting on her end of the couch, Angela folded her arms beneath her breasts and smiled.

"What?" he asked.

"You're not what I was expecting, that's all."

He tilted his head to one side and narrowed his eyes. "That a good thing?"

"Feels that way."

"Me too," he murmured and stood. "I should go, ma'am."

"Why?" Angela's brow furrowed and she approached. Maybe he didn't like her after all? Why was that thought so alarming? She couldn't have any real feelings for him. For heaven's sake, they'd only just met!

"Because." He drew a deep breath and released it slowly. Emotions gleamed behind the cool sapphire surface of his eyes. "I want to kiss you, Angela, and that would be a despicable thing right now."

Angela's heart fluttered and her mouth went dry. Kiss her. That was exactly what she wanted and felt just as guilty about it as he looked.

"I'm sorry," he said, reaching for his cap and jacket hanging on the brass coat rack by the fireplace. "I don't know why I said that."

"Maybe because it's true."

"You must think I'm some kind of snake in the grass, coming here with Jim dead and –"

"Jim was my brother, not my husband." Angela placed a hand on his forearm. Beneath his sleeve, his arm felt so hard, so powerful. What was wrong with her? She'd met this man once and already she couldn't imagine life without him. Was this fate or desperation for both of them? He'd just gotten home after a year in hell. He had no family, no one besides military shrinks to share his problems with. In a strange role reversal, Angela found herself concerned that *she* was taking advantage of *him*.

"Please don't go," she said, vowing not to do anything either of them would regret. "It's Christmas Eve."

"You heard what I just said."

"Yes."

"And you don't care?"

"I care. I just don't..." She sighed, shaking her head. "I don't want you to go."

For a long moment they stood, their gazes locked. Simultaneously they walked to the couch and sat, though not at opposite ends this time. One of his long, hard thighs pressed against her leg, distracting them though they talked of the coming storm and other trivial matters.

Suddenly his hand cupped her face, his thumb gently stroking her smooth cheek as he stared deeply into her eyes. His warmth seemed to reach out and enfold her in powerful yet invisible arms that refused to let her go.

Angela's heart thumped against her ribs and she moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. As Abe leaned a bit closer, his firm lips parted slightly.

God, she thought. *He really is going to kiss me.* 

He gently drew her face closer to his. Angela's eyes slid shut when his mouth touched hers. The sensation was unlike anything she'd ever experienced. Abe's firm yet soft lips moved tenderly against hers. She'd never imagined sensing a man's emotions through a kiss. Lust, yes, but nothing else. Not like what she felt from Abe. How could a man she just met pour so much affection into a kiss?

Warmth from his body spread through her. She edged closer, slipping her arms around his neck. God, she'd never been in the arms of a man this big and strong. The back and shoulders beneath her palms felt like steel. Her breasts flattened against a chest of warm granite. Her nipples swelled, aching for his touch. He smelled so good, too, so clean and male.

Abe kissed both corners of her mouth then buried his face in the hollow of her shoulder. As he licked her neck, a shudder rippled down her spine. Heat emanated from her belly, spreading lower and settling deep in her pussy.

In the midst of her rising passion, she felt something hard and oh-so-arousing pressing against her stomach. In all her life, she'd never felt a man's erect cock. The sudden urge to unzip him and touch all she'd been missing was almost overwhelming.

He stood suddenly and ran a hand through his ultra-short hair. "I'm sorry about that."

"Are you?" Her pulse racing, she approached and touched his arm.

"No. Actually I'm not." He reached for his jacket and cap. "Thank you for a lovely Christmas Eve, Angela."

"Thank you for coming, Abe."

Angela's belly fluttered. He'd only held her once, but she missed the sensation of his embrace and his soft, moist lips against hers. Somehow she knew the rest of the night would seem empty without him.

God, she was falling in love just like a schoolgirl.

"I'm glad you can join us tomorrow," she continued, walking him to the door. "I have to warn you about my parents, though. They can be a little difficult."

"I can take it."

"I don't know. Jim used to say boot camp was nothing after Ma and Daddy."

A smile turned up the corners of his mouth. "I believe I recall him saying something like that, but you're lucky to have a family."

"Oh, I appreciate them, as long as they're not complaining about how I'm not married yet."

"To be honest, I've wondered about that myself." His gaze held hers and Angela's pulse raced. "Just tell me to mind my own business, ma'am."

"Actually it's because I haven't found a man I could imagine spending the rest of my life with."

*Until now*. The image of her and Abe married with a bunch of kids appealed to her almost too much. Another image of him disappearing overseas and never coming back shoved her out of her reverie. He was a Marine. There was always the chance that, like Jim, he might lose his life while serving his country.

18

"Goodnight, Angela." His warm, callused hand curved around her nape as he kissed her again.

If Polly wasn't upstairs, she might just consider asking him to stay a bit longer. If her mother only knew the thoughts running through Angela's mind at the moment, she'd probably faint.

"Goodnight," she said, watching him slip on his new gloves. "Drive safely."

Nodding, he held her gaze as he opened the door and stepped outside. Halfway across the driveway, he glanced over his shoulder at her.

Angela waved again, cursing the tingling warmth that enveloped her body each time he so much as looked at her.

## **Chapter Three**

"I hope my coming here isn't any trouble, ma'am." Abe broke the heavy silence. He, Angela, and her parents sat in the living room. Polly settled on the floor next to the stuffed dog Abe had given her and played with a deck of cards.

"Of course not." Mrs. Franco forced a smile. "Any friend of Jim's is welcome here, even if he did choose to leave our grandchild with a young, single girl instead of a proper two-parent family."

"Ma!" Angela snapped.

"It's true. I can't say any more, though." Mrs. Franco nodded in Polly's direction. "Big ears on little people. I wouldn't want to confuse the child."

"Damn it, Patricia," Mr. Franco growled from where he sat on an easy chair, staring at television with the sound turned down. "Can't we get through a single holiday without an argument? And who knows, maybe Abe here will marry Angela and we won't have to worry."

"Dad!' Angela glared, then turned her gaze to Abe. "I'm sorry about this."

He shrugged, amusement gleaming in his eyes.

"Are you married, Abe?" Patricia asked.

"No, ma'am."

"Have you ever been married?"

"That's enough, Mother!" Angela stood. "Isn't it about time to eat? I'll help you get the table ready."

Patricia touched Abe's arm as she stood. "She's basically a good girl, but can be a bit pushy."

"And too damn stubborn for her own good," Mr. Franco grumbled.

"Grandpa, will you play cards with me?" Polly approached.

"Sure."

"Abe, you want to play, too?" Polly gazed up at him.

If Angela hadn't been so embarrassed by her parents, she would have laughed at Abe's expression of relief. At least if they were playing cards the stupid conversation would end.

Dinner wasn't much better. Though Mr. Franco was too busy eating to be much of a conversationalist, his wife talked enough for both of them. Angela had to admit Abe's patience impressed her. By the time dessert was served, Angela had taken about all she could of her mother's innuendos and her father's sarcasm.

"Looks pretty icy out there," Angela glanced out the window over the kitchen sink as she washed the last of the dishes.

"Thank goodness Polly is staying with us for the next few days," Patricia said. "I hate to think of her in a car with all that ice out there. Maybe you should stay, too, Angela."

"No!" Angela exchanged glances with Abe. This time he couldn't help smiling. "I'd much rather go home. I have planning to do for some students."

"Honey, you could do that here."

"No, Ma. I'm better off at home."

"You mean with him?" Mr. Franco jerked his head in Abe's direction.

Angela's teeth ground. She was about to snap when Abe said, "You don't have to worry, Sir. I have the utmost respect for your daughter."

"Uh-huh. I know what young Marines are like."

"I appreciate your concern, but I'm no longer a young Marine, Sir."

"I think we should go now." Angela dried her hands and walked to the closet, grabbing her coat and Abe's. "Before the rain starts and everything freezes even worse."

"But we haven't had dessert yet!" Patricia said.

"We'll get it later."

Abe's brow furrowed as Angela threw his coat over his shoulders and dragged him toward the front door.

"Polly, you have fun and be good for Grandma and Grandpa," Angela called.

"Bye, Aunt Angela." Polly rushed to the door and hugged her Aunt. She tilted her face up to Abe. "Bye, Abe."

"Bye, darlin'." He ruffled her hair then turned to Mr. and Mrs. Franco. "Thank you for dinner. It was delicious, ma'am."

"You make sure Angela brings you by more often. You need to get fattened up a bit."

"Yes, ma'am." Again his eyes gleamed with repressed laughter.

When they reached the car, he chuckled, the deep, amused sound warming Angela to her toes and soothing her frustration after visiting with her parents.

"I told you!" she said. "Now do you understand why Jim didn't want them to raise Polly? I'm surprised the two of us grew up without losing our minds completely."

"I think they mean well."

"They drive me crazy!"

"Your Ma's a good cook."

"Food. Is that all men care about?"

"Not *all*." He glanced at her. The look in his eye made her shiver with desire. It was exactly how he looked last night before he kissed her. She had the feeling that if he hadn't been concentrating on maneuvering the car down the icy road, he would have done so again.

It was dark with they reached her house. The freezing rain had stopped and moonlight bathed the front yard.

"Thank you for inviting me for Christmas," he said as he parked the car and turned to her.

"Thank you for the ride."

"You're welcome."

His eyes burned into hers. In spite of the frigid weather outside, she'd never felt warmer.

"Would you like to come in, Abe?"

"Would you like me to come in?"

She swallowed, her gaze sweeping his handsome face as she recalled the softness of his lips and the hardness of his body. "Yes, very much."

Brushing a fingertip across her lips, he drew a deep breath. With a slight nod, he stepped out of the car. As Angela searched through her purse for the house key, he opened her door and held out his hand. She looked up, feeling almost like Cinderella stepping out of a pumpkin coach into the arms of her prince.

She took his hand. Her high-heeled boots slipped on the ice, but he steadied her, one arm wrapped around her waist and holding her close to his tall, steely body.

"I...I'm fine. Just clumsy." She tilted her face up, feeling the warmth of his breath against her lips.

His mouth covered hers, his lips soft and moist, his tongue gently caressing hers. Angela's arms wrapped around his neck and she giggled as he literally swept her off her feet.

"What are you doing? Put me down."

"I don't want to let you go."

She swallowed hard, her heart racing. God, she didn't want him to let her go! Never in her life had she experienced such a reaction to a man. It was as if their souls were intertwined. Though she couldn't explain how, she felt she knew Abe, that somehow they belonged together.

*You're being a fool, Angela. He's trying to get you to bed. That's all.* In truth, she wanted to get him in bed as well. All through her teens and her adult life, she'd never slept with

a man. She'd always told herself when the right man came along, she'd know it and there would be no hesitation. Now here he was and she knew without doubt it was right.

When they reached the door, he placed her on her feet so she could open it.

"It's cold in here," Angela said as she stepped inside. "Would you like coffee or tea?"

"Whatever you're having is fine."

Angela rubbed her hands together to warm them. "I think I'll build a fire."

"I'll do it." He headed for the living room. "Might as well make myself useful."

Oh, he was going to be useful all right, Angela smiled.

Her head spun as she stepped into the kitchen to prepare tea. Just when she thought her life would settle down, something completely unexpected had to happen. Her attraction to Abe was so powerful that she couldn't help feeling the elation of new love, yet part of her feared the future. What if she did fall madly in love with him and, like Jim, he left her far too soon? Yet, that was the risk everyone took. Life had no guarantees. She knew that well enough.

She jumped as arms encircled her from behind and Abe's stubbled face and warm lips nuzzled her neck. He moved so quietly for such a large man.

"Don't think this is a common thing for me," she said, trying to keep coherent thoughts as he kissed her neck and hugged her close to his powerful frame. Her eyes half-closed, she reached up and stroked his face. "I don't usually act like this with men I just met."

"I know."

"How do you know?"

"Just a feeling. Sometimes that's all you have to go with."

She turned, gazing up at him. His sapphire eyes stared intently into hers. Her hands slid up his arms and across his impossibly broad shoulders. What did he feel like under all those clothes? Was his chest smooth or hairy? Did he have scars? He must. What did his cock look like? Was it big and veined like the ones in dirty magazines her girlfriends had gotten hold of in high school? Was it ruddy or pale? What would it feel like? She couldn't imagine.

"I won't lie, Angela," he said in a hushed voice. "I want to take you to bed."

"I know."

"I should go."

Clasping the back of his neck, she tugged his face closer as she stood on tiptoe and whispered against his lips, "No you shouldn't."

"The fire's going."

Taking his hand, she walked to the living room and knelt on the rug in front of the fire. Abe unfastened the top buttons of his shirt and stretched out on his side. He tugged her alongside him and stroked wisps of hair from her face. He kissed her forehead and each eyelid.

"Abe?" She slid her hands up his torso and began undoing the rest of the buttons on his shirt.

"Yes, darlin'."

There it was. That endearment spoken in his deep, sultry drawl just for her.

"What's going to happen tomorrow?"

His brow furrowed.

"I mean, what's going to happen to us tomorrow?"

"You're not getting rid of me fast, if that's what you think."

She smiled. "No, that's not what I thought."

"Yes, you did." His eyes glistened with amusement. "Like your Daddy said, you think I'm some wild Marine with bad intentions."

"What if I'm the one with bad intentions?"

He smiled slightly and kissed her, pushing her gently onto her back and stroking the column of her throat. Covering her mouth with his, he parted her lips with his tongue. Hers met it, so warm and tender, as they caressed one another with long, slow strokes. His deft fingers unbuttoned the front of her dress. The tops of her plump breasts were exposed above the neckline of the cream-colored slip she wore beneath. He kissed the soft, pink-tinged flesh while stroking the slight swell of her belly and the curve of her hip.

Angela kicked off her shoes and slid her foot up his calf.

"You're a beautiful woman, Angela," he said.

"Thank you." She caressed his smooth nape. "You're not so bad yourself."

He sat up, shrugged off his shirt, and tugged his T-shirt over his head.

Angela's mouth went dry at the sight of his long torso. Without a pound of spare flesh, every bone and muscle shone like a granite statue chiseled by the most talented artist. Scars marked his torso, some faded white, others still pinkish. Closing her eyes, she swallowed past tightness in her throat. The idea of him suffering combined with the knowledge that Jim had died enduring the same tortures was almost too much to tolerate. She drew a deep breath and shook her head. If Abe had lived through it, then she wouldn't turn chicken on him now.

Instead, she concentrated on the light dusting of hair that covered his chest, tapered down his flat abdomen, and disappeared beneath the waistband of his trousers. She sat up and splayed her hands across his back, her fingertips tracing several jagged scars.

"Are you going to be cold down here on the floor?" he asked.

"Somehow I doubt that."

While he finished undressing, Angela did the same, rolling off her stockings and sliding out of the dress. She was about to remove her slip, but her gaze riveted to Abe. For a moment, she was unable to move, only stare. She'd never seen a naked man in the flesh, but Abe was far better than anything she'd looked at in those stupid magazines.

#### His Sister's Kiss

His legs were incredibly long, dusted with hair, and curved with rock-hard muscle. With narrow hips and buttocks big and tight enough to make a woman's heartbeat skip, he personified male beauty.

Again, he stretched out beside her. Angela inched closer as he drew her into his arms. Closing her eyes, she rubbed her cheek against his chest and inhaled his sexy scent of clean, male flesh. His body was so warm and hard. Nothing compared with being wrapped in the arms of a man like this!

"I want you so bad, Angela," he said in a husky voice, one of his hands pressed against her back, the other buried in her hair, stroking tenderly.

"Then take me, Abe." She tilted her face upward and gazed into his eyes, her pulse racing. "Take me."

Abe's hand swept down her shoulder and arm. It slid across her lower back then cupped one of her smooth bottom cheeks. He kissed her temple and cheek before claiming her lips in a kiss that made her forget everything else.

"Oh, Abe," she murmured, refusing to take her hands off him even as he sat up.

Angela's breathing quickened. He looked so gorgeous, kneeling there, his lips slightly parted and his eyes burning with lust. Reaching up, she caressed his chest and brushed a fingertip across one of his flat, pink nipples peeking through the crisp hair. It felt soft, the nub scarcely visible. Her hand trailed lower, feeling his ribs and the hard, defined abdominal muscles.

Her gaze fixed on his cock. It stood, thick and pinkish, above a nest of dark hair. The balls dangling below were large and looked so full, so alluring, that she couldn't resist taking them in her hand. They spilled over her palm as she gently squeezed, loving their softness and warmth. He drew a deep breath as her fingers ran up and down his cock. Now *that* felt hard. Stiff and hot, like steel covered in warm velvet. The little eye in the smooth, bulbous head fascinated her. She ran her thumb over it and around the underside.

"Do I pass the test?" he grinned.

"Looks good to me," she replied, gazing at him through her lashes and tossing him a coquettish look. "Not that I have anything to compare it to."

"You know, Angela," he slid the straps of her slip down her shoulders and inched toward her feet where he tugged off the entire flimsy piece of satin and lace, "I kinda hope to keep it that way. Are you going to take off those undergarments, or do you want me to do it?"

Her heart leapt and she licked her lips as a sudden case of nerves struck her. In moments, she would be completely naked with a man who stirred her like no one ever had. Was she nervous? Of course. Did she still want him? More than anything she'd ever wanted in her life.

Sitting up, she unhooked her bra. The heat of his gaze was almost tangible as she bared her breasts and tossed the bra aside. They were full, rounded globes tipped with rose-colored nipples now elongated with desire. Her entire body was covered in smooth, creamy flesh tinted delectable pink. She was pleasantly rounded with flaring hips and long, curvaceous legs. Abe could scarcely wait to be buried deep inside her. But he would have to. He knew without question this responsible and pretty tutor was innocent in the ways of love. Though he sensed no fear in her, curiosity such as she exhibited, as well as the naïveté of her touch told him she had little experience with men.

Damn, he felt lucky. It was as if after a year of the worst kind of hell, he was being rewarded by finding the woman of his dreams. Reaching out, he brushed his hand down her arm. Her skin was so soft and warm. Not only did she arouse him physically, but she reached inside him and touched upon buried emotions. All his life he'd longed for the true affection only offered by a family. As a child he'd been denied the love of his parents. Into adulthood, no woman had ever breached his cool, warrior's heart. Maybe it was fear, like one of the shrinks had suggested. Fear that if he did love

#### His Sister's Kiss

somebody, they'd be snatched away. He protected himself with his loneliness. What he didn't have, he couldn't miss.

Now he realized exactly what he had been missing. This woman did things to him he'd never felt before. She twisted his insides and wrapped his soul in hers, breaching his mental defenses when even the VC couldn't.

A slight blush on her cheeks and a sexy little smile on her lips, Angela lowered her eyes as she hooked her thumbs in the waistband of her white satin panties and slid them off. The triangular patch of dark hair between her legs made his breath catch. It seemed everything about her was beautiful.

He cupped one of her calves in his hands and stroked upward, over her soft, smooth thighs and ran his fingers through the arousing thatch of curly hair. With one of her hips in his hand, he used his other to continue stroking her soft mound. His thumb found the ruddy peak of her clit and he stroked over it. She drew a sharp breath at his touch.

Tenderly, he parted her thighs and circled her clit with this fingertip, pushing it in slightly. She felt so hot and wet that his erection leapt. It seemed he turned her on as much as she aroused him.

Removing a wet fingertip, he circled her clit.

Angela shivered and fell back on the rug, closing her eyes as he stroked and caressed where she was so warm and aching. Her clit throbbed as he stroked faster.

"Oh, Abe!" she gasped. His free hand moved up her ribs and found her breast. His thumbs rolled over her nipple and clit simultaneously. Angela was going to shatter, but she didn't care. He was giving her something she so desperately needed. So desperate –

"Ahh! Oh, God! Oh, Abe!" she panted, her entire body convulsing in hot waves of throbbing pleasure. As they crashed over her, she couldn't see. Her heartbeat echoed in her ears. Every muscle in her body convulsed in the most exquisite manner imaginable.

29

She lay still for several moments, her eyes closed as her breathing returned to normal. Angela had orgasms before. She enjoyed masturbating every now and then, just to rid herself of natural sexual urges. Never in her life had she dreamed an orgasm so intense. It must have been because she'd been under Abe's control. The thought of him touching her was as exciting as the actual sensations. The combination created almost unbearable pleasure.

"That had to be the most beautiful thing I've ever seen," Abe said, lying beside her and stroking her throat.

Opening her eyes, she smiled. "That had to be the most beautiful thing I've ever felt."

"It will get even better, darlin'. I promise."

"I know." She cupped the back of his neck and drew his face closer for a kiss. "I want to feel you inside me, Abe. I want to know what it's like."

Reaching for his trousers, he tugged something out of his pocket. She watched as he opened the condom and rolled it on.

With a raised eyebrow she asked, "You always come prepared or were you planning this after all?"

"I won't lie. I was hoping for it."

"Well, you are honest." She lay on her back and stared at the ceiling.

"But I wasn't hoping just for tonight, Angela." He turned her face toward him. "I can't explain how I feel. I'm a man of action. Always have been. I can't rightly put these emotions I have into words."

"Try."

"The other day when you opened the door, I felt like somebody had kicked me in the gut. You grabbed hold of my heart and you're not letting go. That's never happened to me before."

30

"Me either, but I always hoped it would." She smiled. "Either I'm the biggest fool in the world or I'm right about you being..."

"Being what?"

"If I say, I'll probably scare you off."

Lying beside her, he pressed her body close to his as he stared deeply into her eyes. "You're never scaring me off, understand? I'll go if you ask me to, but other than that you're not getting rid of me any time soon. How do you feel about a broken-down Marine set on making you his woman?"

His woman!

"Abe, we're moving too fast, aren't we?"

"Way too fast." He smiled, nuzzling her neck.

"You know, I don't care. This is the first time in my life I've ever been this happy."

His gaze held hers. "I'm glad, Angela."

"So am I." She clutched his head as he kissed her.

Looming above her, his hands braced on both sides of her head, he gazed deeply into her eyes as the tip of his cock pressed against her pussy lips.

Abe resisted the urge to groan with pleasure as he inched his way inside. She was so warm and soaked with passion that he longed to plunge in hard and fast, but he couldn't. Angela was not some two-dollar dock-hanging whore. Beneath him, she stiffened a bit and drew a sharp breath as her tight, virginal pussy rebelled a bit against his thickness and length.

"Try to relax, sweet thing," he murmured against her lips.

Her arms slid around him and she gripped his back tightly as he moved with agonizing slowness. Finally he remained still, buried hilt-deep. After a moment, she relaxed and wiggled her hips. A smile curved her delicate lips and her hands stroked

his back. It felt so damn good buried inside her that it was all he could do keep his thrusts slow and easy.

Angela's eyes slid shut as Abe thrust. Wrapping her legs around him, she pressed her heels against his calves as her hips joined his rhythm.

"Oh, Abe!" she gasped, clinging to him tightly.

His thrusts quickened. Other than the rasp of his breath, he remained a quiet lover, his lust and desire simmering inside, waiting to burst forth.

"Ahh!" she cried, convulsing in waves of pleasure.

A couple more thrusts and he came, his silence broken with a throaty groan of pure ecstasy. "Damn it, woman! Angela, oh, God!"

Orgasm shot through him, wrapping him in pleasure from head to toe. He collapsed atop her and listened to the slowing of their breathing.

Lifting his head from her shoulder, he gazed at her.

"You all right?" he asked, stroking wisps of hair from her forehead.

She smiled. "Better than all right."

Angela snuggled close. Wrapped in each other's arms, they gazed at the flames crackling in the fireplace.

## **Chapter Four**

Angela awoke to the aroma of coffee and the sound of rhythmic chopping. Flinging off the covers, she smiled as cool air fanned her naked body. What a marvelous night it had been. The memory of Abe's gorgeous, powerful body claiming hers with such tenderness and affection was better than any fantasy. Running a hand over his side of the bed, she longed to see him again as soon as possible.

Reaching for her robe, she slipped into it as she walked to the window to find out the cause of the annoying chopping sound. Tugging up the shade, she blinked against the sunlight. Again she smiled. Abe shoveled ice from her front walk. As if sensing her stare, he turned, his lips curving up in the slightest half-smile as he waved.

Feeling giddy as a schoolgirl, Angela waved back and disappeared into the bathroom where she washed and fixed her hair and makeup.

Naked, she walked into the bedroom just as he stepped inside. Gasping, she covered her breasts, then realized how silly that must appear after last night.

"Sorry," he said, his gaze sweeping her. "Should have knocked."

"I guess it's a little late to be shy." She tried sounding nonchalant in spite of the blush heating her face.

"God, you look beautiful."

She placed a hand on her hip. "So are you going to keep looking or let me get some clothes on?"

"I apologize, ma'am." He looked amused as he left her to pull on her underclothes and a sleek black-and-white polka dot dress with a red belt that matched her lipstick. Slipping her feet into black pumps, she glanced at herself in the full-length mirror behind her door. It must have been the happiness she felt being with Abe, but she hadn't looked this good in weeks.

In the kitchen, he stood, barefoot and shirtless, making more coffee. Angela licked her lips, her pulse racing. The sight of his big bones and hard muscles had her more than ready to head right back to the bedroom.

He glanced at her over his shoulder as she approached and ran her hand from his forearm to his shoulder.

"Took off my shirt and shoes. Picking ice can be as messy as shoveling snow. I drove back to my place early this morning. I needed a change of clothes and you needed salt for your walk."

"Thanks for doing that. Would you like eggs with your toast?"

"Scrambled."

"Fine."

As Angela cracked eggs into a bowl, her heart fluttered as she asked, "How many days' worth of clothes did you get at your place?"

He chuckled. "Is that 'cause you're afraid I'll overstay my welcome?"

"Actually I was hoping you'd stay for a few days. Polly will be with my parents for the rest of the week."

His arm slid around her from behind and his hand folded over hers as she used a wire whisk to beat the eggs. Taking her earlobe in his teeth he licked it gently then kissed her cheek.

"If I stay here for a week, it'll be awful hard to leave."

"Maybe not." She turned, gazing up at him. "We might find we can't stand living with each other."

"So maybe we should make like a couple of those long-haired hippies and try out living together."

"Excuse me, Master Sergeant, but just because I slept with you doesn't mean I'm a-"

#### His Sister's Kiss

"Hold on, darlin'." His brow furrowed and he grasped her shoulders, turning her to face him. "That blood on those sheets this morning surely wasn't from some twodollar whore practicing free love and all that. I guarantee if I stay here I won't want to go."

"You'll have to. With Polly –"

"I'd never do anything to hurt your reputation or expose that girl to a damaging situation."

"Then what are you saying, Abe?"

He dropped his hold on her and walked across the room, running a hand over his peach-fuzzed head. What the hell was he saying? That the short time he'd spent with her had given him a taste of what he'd been missing all his life? That he was tired of having no one to come home to after spending months in strange places having his ass damn near blown off by enemy fire? Was it really Angela he wanted or the illusion of what she offered? No. He'd never been a man ruled by dreams and fantasies. He was thirty-three years old and had never gotten this close to any woman. Sure, he'd had sex, but he'd never hung around afterward to chop ice off her front walk and look at her whip up scrambled eggs. Just seeing her in that prim, high-necked dress with a strand of pearls around her neck and her hair combed just so as she cooked breakfast made his gut twist with tender feelings he'd never experienced. Earlier, when he'd walked in on her, the sight of her blushing face and gorgeous naked curves had not only given him an erection that would have shamed a breeder bull but stirred his emotions.

"Abe, I really want you to stay," she said, "but I'm afraid."

"Of me?"

"Of doing something I've been told all my life is wrong."

"Then I'll go." He cupped her face in his hand. "Just tell me we can see each other again?"

Angela sighed and took his hand. She kissed his palm. "And I'm afraid because – "

"What?"

She was falling in love with him. Falling fast and hard. Unless she stopped herself, he'd probably end up breaking her heart. Not intentionally, but as a side effect of his duty. Losing Jim had been terrible, but she couldn't imagine losing a husband to war. Something told her that if she and Abe continued as they were, they would undoubtedly marry. She didn't buy for one moment her insinuation that after living together they'd find they weren't compatible. Like any other powerful emotion, love was often immediate. The brain registered hate, pain, hunger, thirst, and jealousy right away, so why not love?

The phone rang. Glad for the interruption, Angela reached for it. "Hello?"

"Sweetheart, it's Mother."

"Hi, Ma. How's Polly?"

"Just wonderful. She's playing with her Christmas gifts. I wanted to make sure you got home all right."

"Is the Marine there?" Her father shouted in the background.

"That's none of our business if he's there!" Patricia snapped. "Just as long as you don't do anything you'll regret later, sweetheart. Remember, if a man can get his butter for free, why pay the dairyman?"

Angela gritted her teeth. "I got home fine, Ma. I was just about to eat breakfast. Can we talk later?"

"Uh-huh." Patricia sounded all-knowing. "He's there, isn't he?"

Yes, Mother, he's here and after breakfast he's going to take me upstairs and fuck me even better than he did last night.

Abe glanced at her with a raised eyebrow as he placed aside his coffee mug and squatted beside her, sliding a hand up her skirt and stroking her clit through her satin underwear.

*Stop it,* she mouthed the words silently, resisting the urge to giggle.

"Sweetheart?"

"Mother, I have to go before my eggs get c-cold." Angela's pulse raced and she tried to keep her voice steady as Abe tugged down her panties and stroked her clit with his index finger while his thumb slipped partway into her damp pussy.

"Angela, are you all right? You sound strange."

That was probably because Abe was now under her dress, his tongue and lips toying with her clit. Shock combined with sensation almost knocked Angela off her feet.

"I'm fine, Ma. Just st-starving. I need to eat. Bye."

Angela slammed down the receiver and leaned against the kitchen cabinet, panting, her pulse racing.

"Abe, stop it!"

His tongue thrust into her pussy then ran down her clit and circled it with sinful skill.

When he pulled back, she thought she'd die from need. This man's touch was becoming an obsession. Her body ached for him as much as her spirit cried out for him.

"You really want me to quit it, Angela?"

"No. God, no." She closed her eyes as his hands cupped her buttocks and he resumed licking and sucking her swollen, aching clit.

"Crazy, I must be crazy!" she gasped. "Oh, Abe! Oh!"

Her words turned to a high-pitched cry of fulfillment as he rested the flat of his tongue to her clit and pressed with quick pulsations until she came. If not for his hands clasping her bottom, she probably would have fallen on the floor. Smiling, she rested limply against the cabinet, warmed from the inside out. The man roused giddy yet sensual feelings from deep inside her. He nourished them with loving caresses, masculine, throaty whispers, and tenderness reflected in eyes that had seen the worst life had to offer. Knowing that he could treat her with such care, that he hadn't grown completely hard in spite of all he'd endured, touched her profoundly.

37

Abe ducked from under her skirt and slid up her body, holding her close. The thickness of his erection pressed against her and she couldn't resist reaching down to trace it through his pants.

"Never in my life have I imagined anything like that, Abe." She touched a hand to her cheek. "I must be blushing like crazy."

"Yeah." He grinned. "Your pretty cheeks are about as red as the devil's hiney."

She grasped a dishtowel and playfully slapped him with it. "That was a wicked thing you did! I was on the phone with my mother!"

"And you looked mad enough to say something you might have regretted later. I was just trying to save you from yourself, darlin'."

Angela laughed. "You, Master Sergeant Forbes, are incorrigible."

"And damn hungry. So how about those eggs?"

While Angela finished preparing breakfast, Abe switched on the small television at the end of the table and turned to the news.

"Maybe they'll say something about when this ice will melt," he said.

"Good idea. I hope it's not too—" Angela's voice faded as she approached the table, spatula in hand, and stared at the television screen. Rage boiled inside her at the sight of police attempting to restrain a group of screaming war protestors. Shouts of baby killers and murderers accompanied hand drawn signs depicting anti-war symbolism.

"Stupid bastards!" Teeth clenched, she turned off the set.

"I suppose that's why we fight, so stupid bastards like that can have the freedom to protest if they want to."

She turned to him, her stomach twisting. "I really don't give a damn about them. All I know is my brother is dead while these protesting weasels sneak across the border or sit in some college lecture hall to avoid their duty."

"Not everyone has the guts to do what Jim did."

"Or what you do." Some of her anger faded as she slipped her arms around his neck and he tugged her onto his lap. "Don't get me wrong, I have no problem with anyone who's against fighting, but they have no right to treat you badly. I shudder to think what would happen to this country without soldiers protecting us."

"I knew a boy from the Army against fighting in 'Nam. Nice kid. He protested by not carrying arms." A far-off expression clouded Abe's eyes and Angela nearly shivered. "I watched him die. Legs blown off. He had guts, though, in his own way. I have to respect him for holding onto his beliefs but not shirking his duty."

"I can't stand to think about what you went through over there, Abe. When I see those *people* shouting, waving signs, and spitting at soldiers, I feel mad enough to wring their necks!"

Lifting his head he smiled and took her chin in his hand. "I'll be damned if you don't have quite a temper, Miss Franco."

"When it comes to people I care about not being treated right, I can get riled very easily."

"So it's safe to say you care about me, even though we haven't known each other long?"

"I care about you, Abe." She held his gaze. "If I didn't want to sound like a fool, I'd say I'm already in love with you."

"You could never sound like a fool, Angela." His lips hovered over hers. "Not to me."

His lips grazed hers when she jerked away, startled by the scent of burning food.

"The eggs!" She jumped off his lap and raced to the stove where smoke rose from the charred eggs in the bottom of the frying pan.

While she turned off the stove and flung the pan in the sink, he opened the kitchen window to clear the air.

Raising an eyebrow, he said, "So much for scrambled eggs."

"I'm not usually such a bad cook. I guess I'm distracted by a handsome hunk of Marine sitting in my kitchen."

A hint of a blush colored his ears, yet he teasingly said, "The ladies find us boys irresistible."

"And modest." She winked. "Jim was just a shy wallflower, too."

He couldn't resist another hug and kiss. Keeping his hands off her was next to impossible. Why hadn't he accepted Jim's offer years ago to visit his family? He and Angela would have gotten together long before now and been able to spend time with Jim, too. Abe mentally chastised himself. What good would have come out of them meeting sooner? Then she would have had two POWs to worry about.

*Damn it, Forbes? How dumb are you?* He swallowed hard. If this relationship continued, it certainly wouldn't ease her concerns. He was a United States Marine. It was all he knew how to be. Would she want to spend the rest of her life with him, traveling from base to base, waiting months, sometimes years, for him to come home, hopefully alive and in one piece?

"Keep kissing me and we'll miss breakfast completely." She gazed at him with those big, beautiful eyes and his heart, frozen by battle, melted. "How about some hotcakes?"

With a nod, he released her and watched as she opened the cupboard and got out supplies for making hotcakes. He imagined what it would be like if they were married. What would she look like plump with his baby inside her? How would it feel knowing that no matter where he was or what happened, she was waiting for him?

*Selfish son-of-a-bitch.* But he couldn't help it. Master Sergeant Abraham Marley Forbes had fallen in love.

40

### **Chapter Five**

Knees bent, crouching as low as seventy-five pounds of equipment strapped to their backs would allow, Abe and his unit moved silently through the jungle. Their senses so heightened by survival instinct they could almost hear their heartbeats, they knew death was out there, waiting. They smelled it, felt it. How many times had they already escaped it and when would their luck run out?

Abe motioned with his head for them to start moving in the direction of a clearing. The village was ahead. They were friendlies. The unit had lived with them for a while, providing some much-needed medical care and getting to know some of the families. If they were lucky they could stop there now.

It took only moments to reach the village. Strange. No one was around, even though it was the middle of the day. Abe tensed, sweat trickling down the back of his neck, his gear suddenly too heavy. He took a step closer to one of the huts and the gear pushed him ankle deep into the muddy ground. Glancing around, he noticed several of the others were already waist-deep in the muck. Another step and Abe was in it to his knees. His hand tightened on his rifle and his pulse raced. He tried licking his parched lips, but his tongue was just as dry.

A little more and he'd be at the nearest door.

He reached out to push on it and shouted, shielding his eyes as the door blew off. His skin burned, but to his surprise he was still in one piece, though waist-deep in mud. Pushing through what was left of the door he stared for a moment at the carnage. Severed heads, the eyes wide in horror, scattered around him. Scraps of wood, dark with blood, lay amidst piles of bloody feet, arms, legs, and hands.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Abe!" Angela shook his shoulder, her pulse racing.

He turned so fast she didn't have a chance to react and pinned her beneath him, his eyes glaring into hers. Sweat misted his face and his breath came in short pants. His anger faded suddenly and he sat up, glancing around the room.

"I'm sorry." He rubbed his eyes with his thumb and forefinger. "Must have forgotten where I was."

Still shaken, Angela also sat up, pulling the sheet around her. Moments ago, she'd awakened to his groaning and thrashing. Moonlight bathing the room told her it was late and Abe was having one hell of a nightmare.

"Are you all right?" She cupped his cheek in her hand. "Want to talk about it?"

"No." He jerked away from her touch.

She rested her hands on his chest. "But—"

"I said no!" He grasped her wrists and placed them firmly at her sides before lying down with his back to her. "Go back to sleep."

Angela gritted her teeth. A smart woman would have been afraid of an angry sixfoot-three Marine, but a smart woman wouldn't have slept with him so fast in the first place.

"Give the orders to someone else, Master Sergeant," she snapped. "I'm not one of your damn soldiers!"

Not bothering to see if he'd reply, she left the bed, taking the covers with her, and trudged to the living room.

She'd just settled onto a corner of the couch and closed her eyes when she felt the cushion beside her sink. Abe wrapped his arms around her and held her to his chest. Still angry, she contemplated shoving him away as he had done to her.

"I'm sorry," he said, kissing the top of her head. "I shouldn't have turned you away like that."

42

"I was just worried about you, that's all. When I woke up I wasn't sure what was wrong at first."

"It was only a dream. I get 'em sometimes."

"Was it about what happened to you?"

"It was about 'Nam, if that's what you mean."

Slipping her arms around his waist, she tilted her face up to his. "Isn't there someone who can help you with...with that kind of thing?"

"What, you mean a shrink? I've been talking to them. They can't just fix it, though. The mind isn't like some broken part of an engine or something. At least that's the kind of shit they tell me."

"I'm sorry."

"I don't need pity. I'm proud of the job I do."

"I don't pity you. I guess I'm sorry we need people like you to experience those horrors so the rest of us don't have to."

He cupped her face in his hand and stroked her cheek with his thumb. She was so soft, so gentle, yet there was underlying strength to Angela. Not only was she getting over the loss of her brother, but she was raising his child on her own while dealing with those crazy parents of hers. She shared her thoughts and feelings with Abe, and she encouraged him to do the same. How many other women would take some battlescarred Marine into their bed and want to know about the nightmares haunting his sleep?

"It's late. We should go back to bed," he said. "Unless you're afraid to sleep with me now."

"Terrified." She smiled, grasping his wrist as she stood and tugging him to his feet. "Let's go. Maybe I can think of something to get us both tired enough to collapse into a deep, dreamless sleep."

Raising an eyebrow, he followed her to the bedroom and remade the bed.

43

She slipped beneath the covers and settled between Abe's spread legs.

"Umm," she moaned with lust as she slipped an arm beneath his rock-hard thighs and pressed her lips to his balls. His cock twitched awake from where it lolled in its nest of hair. She laved it and traced the head with her tongue.

His fingers wove through her hair and he bent his knees. Sliding her hands from his legs, she cupped his balls in one fist, squeezing gently, and clasped the base of his rapidly stiffening cock in her other, pumping the shaft as she continued licking and sucking the head.

"Damn it, woman, you're a fast learner!"

She smiled around his cock, loving the warmth of his soft skin textured with veins, the muscle beneath rock-hard. Taking the head between her lips, she sucked quickly over and over until his breath rasped. One thing about Abe, he wasn't a man who moaned and groaned as passion grew. Only at the final moment would he let loose a cry that made her shiver from head to foot just from hearing it. Knowing that her kisses and caresses provided enough pleasure to shatter the control of this modern day warrior thrilled her. She waited for that cry of surrender, that audible proof of his need for her touch.

Taking his cock so deep into her mouth that the head brushed the back of her throat, she withdrew it slowly. It popped free and she kissed the tip before sliding lower, wrapping her arms around one of his thighs and rubbing her breasts against it. The sensation of his curling hair and hard muscle hardened her nipples and made her wet with need.

"You have the longest, sexiest legs of any man I've ever seen," she breathed, kissing him from thigh to knee. "I feel like I'm making love with a granite carving of Odin or Zeus or something."

"I guess I'm a classical beauty, huh, darlin'?" Amusement laced his voice.

"From what I can see." She kissed his hips and lapped his hard, muscle-ridged belly. God, she could kiss him day and night and never grow tired of it! "And taste."

### His Sister's Kiss

"And feel?" He grasped her arms and hauled her up his body until her breast dangled over his mouth. He took her nipple between his lips and sucked it gently. As his tongue swirled over the sensitive nub, she gasped. Clasping his sides with her knees, she took his cock and slid it inside her.

"Umm," she groaned, reluctantly pulling away from his teasing mouth so she could ride his big, sleek body as fast and hard as she liked.

As she bucked and writhed atop him, her hot, drenched pussy filled by his thick, hard cock, he fondled her breasts. Pleasing him inspired such passion within her that she couldn't leave him even if it meant her life. She needed him so badly! His thumbs rolled over her nipples and he watched her through half-closed eyes.

God, she was beautiful, with her head thrown back, lush breasts thrust toward his hands, and curvaceous hips working against him. The soft, smooth expanse of her bottom continually brushed his thighs. So many sensations had him panting, his cock straining as he tried holding off his climax just a little longer, just a little –

With a throaty cry of fulfillment she came, her face and breasts flushed, her moist lips parted, and her eyes tightly closed. Abe's eyes squeezed shut and he groaned deep in his chest as his hips lifted and he pumped into her. Intense pleasure shot through his entire body.

Angela melted onto his chest. His arms wrapped around her, and he murmured, "I love you, Angela Franco."

"I love you, too, Abraham Marley Forbes," she whispered in a drowsy voice before they both drifted into a deep, contented sleep.

### **Chapter Six**

"Angela! Where are you, darlin'?"

"Abe?" she shouted from the basement. He opened the door, watching as she trudged up the steps, her rubber boots squeaking. "It's flooded down here! One of the pipes broke."

He opened the door, his brow furrowing as he glanced from her to the water on the floor below. She could only imagine the sight she made, dressed in her old dungarees and plaid shirt with her hair tied up in a red kerchief.

"You look cute."

"Sure I do," she muttered. "I look like a mess!"

"Fine to me." He kissed her.

"I talked to the plumber. He's had so many calls that he won't get here for a while. I hate to think what the basement will look like by then."

"I'll take a look." Abe walked down the steps. "See if I can stop the leaking until he gets here."

Angela smiled, relieved. "Thank you. I'll get cleaned up and fix lunch."

Nodding, Abe stepped into the water with a splash. It took him a moment to find the problem, but Angela had nothing in her house to patch a broken pipe. He went to the store to pick up some supplies, and when he stepped back in the house, the scent of chicken, vegetables, and biscuits struck him like a shot in the gut. He inhaled deeply and smiled. What the hell was he going to do when he had to return to the barracks where there wasn't a home-cooked meal in smelling distance? Even worse, what was he going to do without Angela warming his bed and waiting at home when he got in?

"Smells good," he said, stepping into the kitchen.

#### His Sister's Kiss

His gaze fixed on Angela who stood by the stove, an apron covering the front of her gray and pink flowered dress with a dainty lace collar. The scarf was gone from her head and her hair was arranged in soft waves about her face. Just looking at the woman warmed him from the inside out and made his cock come alive.

"Will it take long to fix the leak? Lunch will be ready soon."

"Shouldn't be long."

He opened the basement door and switched on the light. The steps creaked a bit as he walked down. His booted feet sank into water that was now to his knees. Moments later, in a dim corner of the basement, he was absorbed in repairing the pipe.

As he moved his boot, water slapped against the wall. A prickle ran up Abe's spine. Someone was there, behind him in all the water and muck.

He spun around, his heart pounding as he stared around the basement. It was empty.

What about under the stairs?

Grasping a wrench in his hand, his senses sharp, he slowly made his way to the stairs. The swamp smell was thick in the air. Winter chill turned to jungle heat. Sweat beaded on Abe's brow and upper lip. It trickled down his neck as he clutched the wrench harder and raised it high as he stepped under the overhang, knowing the scrawny son-of-a-bitch waited, ready to blow his brains out—

Abe turned as someone touched his shoulder. He shoved the plump, red-haired man in white overalls against the wall and cut off his breath by pressing his forearm across his throat.

The man gasped and sputtered, his eyes wide.

"Abe!" Angela splashed through the water. She pulled on his arm, her expression frantic. "What are you doing? This is John, the plumber!"

Abe released him immediately. "I'm sorry. You snuck up on me."

"My mistake," John choked out, rubbing his neck.

47

"Are you all right?" Angela asked, touching the man's shoulder.

"I think so."

"I'm real sorry," Abe said, placing the wrench aside and climbing the basement steps. He'd nearly reached the front door when Angela grasped his arm.

"Where are you going? Abe, what happened down there?"

"They call it a flashback, Angela." He glanced at her, noting her shoes, stockings, and the hem of her dress were soaked with water from the flooded basement. "I can't stay here with you."

"Why?"

"Last night. Just now. That stuff's going to keep happening. I don't know when – or if – it will ever stop."

"So you're just going to leave?" Her brow furrowed. "I didn't think Marines ran from anything. I know Jim never did, and somehow I doubt you ever have, either."

"I'm not running. I'm doing what I have to for you and Polly, too."

"I love you, Abe! I said it last night and that wasn't just pillow talk, damn it! I meant it! Didn't you?"

"Yeah. I meant it." He took her face in his hands then dropped them before he stepped out the door. "That's why I have to go."

"Abe!" she shouted, but he ignored her as he slid into his car and sped off.

\* \* \* \* \*

Angela sat in the diner, fidgeting with her spoon and glancing at the door while trying not to appear anxious.

A week after Abe had stormed out of her house, she'd given up on trying to forget him and sent him a letter. Enraged at him for waltzing out of her life after a couple of marvelous days and feeling stupid for believing he was actually going to show up, she'd asked him to meet her at one of the only decent diners in town. The place was tiny and showed wear and tear since its construction back in the twenties, but the owner, Rosemarie Simons, kept the place spotless and served the best food in the state. Rosemarie had been a good friend of Angela and Jim for years.

"Another cup of tea?" Rosemarie approached, her plump frame covered in a flowered dress and white apron.

"Thank you." Angela glanced at her and smiled.

"All right." Rosemarie dropped into the booth and tapped her fingertips on the back of Angela's hand. "Are you going to tell me what celebrity is supposed to walk through that door so I can roll out the red carpet and such?"

Angela looked surprised. "No one. I was just looking in that direction."

"No, baby, you was fixed in that direction like a dog fixin' on a hunk of steak."

"I guess I should try looking less obvious."

"So who is he?"

"Just a friend."

Rosemarie raised a bushy brown eyebrow.

"A friend of Jim's."

"Oh," Rosemarie looked thoughtful. "Another Marine?"

"Yes. He's in the Corps."

"You know you get a gleam in your eye when you talk about him?"

"Do I?"

"Sure do, and I—" Rosemarie jumped up and smiled. "Abe! When did you get back?"

Angela swallowed hard, her pulse racing and hands trembling so much she nearly dropped her fork. *Calm, Angela. Appear calm and disinterested.* 

Abe, wearing a blue T-shirt tucked into snug jeans that hugged every long, muscular inch of his legs, strode inside and accepted a hug from Rosemarie.

"Damn, it's good to see you, baby." Rosemarie tugged his face down for a kiss on the cheek. "I was so worried when I heard you was missin'."

"I got out of the hospital a couple of weeks ago." Abe said, though his gaze strayed to Angela. His expression revealed nothing, but his throat moved as he swallowed.

"Couple of weeks? The least you could have done was let ol' Rosemarie know you was all right."

"Sorry. Thought you'd be glad not to have me here every week eating you out of house and home."

"Shit, boy, I know you since you was a skinny eighteen-year-old private, and you thought I wouldn't care what happened to you?"

Abe smiled at her, though his gaze again wandered to Angela. This time Rosemarie noticed. She watched as Abe approached and slipped into the seat across from Angela.

"He's a good man." Rosemarie rested a hand on Abe's broad shoulder.

A powerful shoulder that led to a long, gorgeous arm of rock-hard muscle. Angela's mouth went dry. *Don't let him know he's got you, Angela. Look nonchalant.* 

"And she's a good girl." Rosemarie shook the shoulder she clutched. "You treat her right, hear me, Abraham Forbes?"

He glanced at her. "Yes, ma'am, I do and I couldn't agree more. She is a good girl."

"If you two are finished talking about me like I'm a pet dog, Abe and I have to discuss some things."

Rosemarie raised an eyebrow. "I'll make myself scarce and fix you some lunch. Want the usual, Abe?"

"That'd be fine, Rosemarie. Thanks."

"How about some of my House Special Stew and a nice chunk of sourdough bread for you, Angela?"

"That sounds good. Thank you."

Rosemarie left them staring at one another.

Abe's pulse raced like he was about to hit the beach into a storm of enemy fire. Angela was even more beautiful than he remembered, with her large, innocent eyes and luscious curves beneath her blue and white striped dress. She did things to his insides no one had ever done before. That was why he had to meet her today. Her letter had gotten under his skin and pissed him off, though his anger was mostly directed at himself.

"How's Polly?" Abe asked.

"She's fine. She talks about you a lot."

"She's a good girl."

"Like me. A good girl?"

"Not like you, and you know it, Angela."

"I assumed you thought of me as a child, since you treated me like one."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means you don't think I can decide for myself the sort of man I want to see."

"I told you it's for your own good. I'm a Marine."

"Don't you tell me about Marines! My brother was one. I'm raising his child. I know what you do and the risks you take."

"And you want to tie yourself up with that all over again? Jim was your brother. Think real carefully about what it would be like with a husband in the Corps. Imagine yourself with two or three kids along with Polly, raising them for months while I'm away. What do you think of that picture?"

"I'm not some delicate flower who'll shrivel at the first sign of frost, Abe!"

"What about what happened in the basement with the plumber?" He lowered his voice and drew a deep breath. "What if that was you I'd grabbed instead?"

"I'm not afraid of you."

"Maybe you should be." She held his gaze and he shook his head. "You're a damn fool, woman. And what the hell did you mean in that letter when you said I used you?"

She shrugged, flinging him a haughty look. "I figured all that line about you leaving for my own good was just an excuse for you to take off after you got me in bed."

"There's not a bit of truth to that."

"So did you plan on never seeing me again?"

"At the time I thought it was best."

"And now?"

Abe's gaze switched to Rosemarie who approached carrying plates of food. As if sensing the seriousness of their conversation, the woman said nothing as she placed their meals on the table and left.

"Abe, if you don't want to see me, I can handle it, but only if it's because you decided you don't like me after all. If it's because you're protecting me, then you're making a mistake. I've waited my whole life for the right man. I don't care if he's a businessman who'll be around all the time or if he's a Marine whose life is on the line. There are no guarantees for anybody."

"You have one guarantee." He took her hand and raised it to his lips. "That I'll love you until the day I die."

Angela's throat constricted and she blinked back tears. No one had ever said anything so beautiful to her. God, if anything ever happened to him, it would tear her heart out, but it would be worth it. Whether she had him for a single day or the next sixty years didn't matter, as long as they spent what time they had together.

"Want to have dinner with me and Polly tonight?" she asked.

"Yes, I do. Where is she now?"

"Back in school this morning and Daddy picked her up afterward."

### His Sister's Kiss

"You know I missed you a lot this past week," he said.

"I missed you, too."

"I want to spend as much time as I can getting to know you and Polly."

She smiled. "I'm glad, Abe."

He held her gaze and nodded. "Good. That's good."

"You know what I'm thinking about right now?" She blushed a bit and cast her eyes down to their fingers entwined on the table.

He lifted an eyebrow. "I'm hoping it's what I'm thinking."

"Then let's finish lunch and get back to my place before Daddy drops off Polly."

Abe grinned and reached for his knife and fork. "That's even better inspiration to eat than pure hunger."

### **Chapter Seven**

"How's the leak?" Abe asked as he followed Angela into the house.

"Fixed." She switched on the light, stepped into the living room, and sat on the couch.

A wry smile played around his lips. "How's the plumber?"

"He was fine, Abe. Just a little shaken up." She slipped off her shoes and cast him a sultry look. "Aren't you going to ask how I feel?"

"No." He sat next to her and pulled her into his arms, nuzzling her neck. "I'm going to find out for myself."

"Abe!" She giggled as he tickled her ear with his tongue. Though it had only been a week, it seemed like years since they'd held each other like this. It was such a deep, incredible feeling that no words could fully express it and only his touch could satisfy it.

Settling her onto his lap, he tucked his head in the hollow of her shoulder and gazed at his hands as he began unfastening the front of her dress. "There sure are a lot of little buttons on this thing."

"There sure are."

She ran her hands over his sinewy forearms lightly dusted with hair and he continued with her dress. When she stood almost naked, his gaze lingered over her soft belly and full, plump breasts nearly spilling out of her bra. Abe bent and took one of her nipples between his lips while taking the other between his thumb and forefinger. He sucked and stroked simultaneously while she clutched his head tightly.

"Oh, Abe, I want you so much. I've missed you so much," she breathed, her nipples aching with pleasure from his touch. Her pussy turned to liquid and she squirmed, more than ready for his cock to fill her. From her position on his lap, his hard staff pressed against her bottom in the most teasing, delicious manner. Such overwhelming desire for this one man overshadowed everything she'd ever wanted or needed. Love was the most glorious feeling in the world!

"I want you, too, darlin'." He gently pushed her onto the couch and stood, lifting his shirt over his head and baring his magnificent, steely chest and well-defined abs.

Her breathing quickened as he kicked off his boots and jeans. Oh! He wore no underwear beneath! The sight of those full balls and thick erection tightened her nipples even more. She slipped off her panties and tossed them atop her dress. Angela's pulse skipped as she watched him roll on a condom and sit beside her. Grasping her hips, he tugged her onto his lap. She knelt, one smooth leg on either side of him, and slid onto his cock.

Angela closed her eyes, moaning with pleasure as every hard, marvelous inch slipped into her. While she used her knees and hips to guide their passion, he fondled her breasts, his callused palms rubbing and fingers gently pinching her nipples. It amazed her that he could inspire such wild, hot passion yet remain a tender, caring lover.

"Abe, oh, Abe!" she panted as he sucked first one nipple then the other.

Unable to restrain her movements, Angela flung her arms around his neck. He kissed her, thrusting his tongue into her mouth and exploring as she gyrated upon him.

Orgasm burst within her and Angela cried out into his mouth. His arms tightened around her as he lunged up several times then stiffened, every muscle hard against her as he came.

Angela let her head drop to his shoulder, her lips against his neck as they rested a moment, wrapped in contentment.

The sound of a car pulling into the driveway roused them.

"God! My father and Polly!" Angela leapt off his lap and threw his jeans in his face as she reached for her panties and dress. Abe smiled as he dressed, his gaze fixed on her.

"Damn all these little buttons!" she said, her fingers trembling so much she couldn't fasten one. Instead she ran for the bathroom, managing to lock herself in just as the front door opened.

"Abe!" Polly shouted as she stepped inside with her grandfather.

"Hey, darlin'." Abe accepted her embrace.

Mr. Franco cleared his throat. "Didn't expect to see you here, Abe."

"Angela asked me over for dinner."

"It's just after lunchtime."

"I'm early."

Mr. Franco made a sound that might have been a growl just as Angela stepped out of the bathroom.

"Hi, Daddy. Polly, did you have a good day at school?"

"Yes. We had to draw a picture from Christmas so I drew this."

She handed Angela a picture in crayon of the family sitting around the table eating dinner.

"See. I drew, Abe, too, and my dog."

"She loves that dog you gave her. Hardly lets the thing out of her sight," Angela said.

"So you asked him to dinner," Mr. Franco said.

"Yes, I asked him to dinner."

"Are you going to marry Aunt Angela?" Polly gazed up at Abe.

"Polly, you know better than to ask a question like that!" Angela said.

"I just thought he was going to because Grandpa said if he didn't, he was a lowdown snake in the grass looking for one thing." Mr. Franco looked properly embarrassed as he edged out the door. "If I'm late, your mother will kill me. See you all later."

"What's the thing Grandpa was talking about?" Polly asked.

"Nothing, honey. Grandpa was just teasing." Angela forced a smile. If her parents ever learned to mind their own business, it would be a miracle. "Go get cleaned up and I'll hang your picture on the refrigerator."

Polly hurried upstairs and Angela turned to Abe. "If you can take me with my parents then I can surely take you and the Marine Corps."

He grinned as he followed her to the kitchen, knowing better than to agree but unable to disagree, either. There were times when it was best to just be the strong, silent type and Abe was smart enough to know it.

\* \* \* \* \*

A few days later, Angela had just sent her Friday afternoon student home when a note arrived at her door.

She grinned, immediately recognizing the bold lettering on the envelope. Tearing the edge, she slipped out the note.

My Darling Angela, I would like to escort you to dinner tonight at seven o'clock. Until then, I'm thinking of you. Abe

Her smile broadened and she tingled inside. She'd never gotten an actual love letter before.

Seven o'clock! It was four o'clock now. She'd have to hurry. Abe must have remembered Polly was spending the weekend at her parents' house. It was also the last

57

weekend of his leave. Come Monday, she wouldn't get to see him nearly as much. For the past week, he'd eaten dinner at her house every night, taken her to breakfast almost every morning, and picked up Polly after school while Angela had been doing some extra tutoring for a child who was home recovering from surgery.

She'd gotten quite accustomed to having the Master Sergeant around. Though Abe promised to visit her and Polly every moment of his free time, she was going to miss him terribly. Her niece felt the same. Abe had the knack of relating to a child without spoiling her. Polly obeyed Abe like she did Angela and Jim, when he'd been alive. Finding a man who was a good father figure for Polly was just as important to Angela as relating to the man herself. Abe seemed to be the wonderful combination of both. Yet in spite of what she'd told him about not caring if he was in the military, she couldn't help thinking how hard it would be for both her and Polly when he was sent away again.

Enough of such thoughts. He wasn't going away tonight, and she had a date to get ready for.

Angela spent the next few hours bathing, shaving, rubbing on lotion, painting her finger and toenails, and arranging her hair and makeup. Finally, wearing her black dress with a full skirt and a rope of pearls around her neck, she glanced at herself in the bedroom mirror. The results pleased her. She looked pretty good.

The doorbell rang and she hurried down the steps. Abe waited outside, looking handsome in his uniform and carrying a bouquet of red roses.

"They're beautiful, Abe," she said, taking the flowers and closing her eyes as she inhaled their scent.

"I thought they were, until I saw you."

Angela smiled and gazed at him. "I know what you're trying to do. You want to make sure I'll never love another man like I love you."

"Damn right. Are you ready to go to dinner?"

"Just let me put these in some water."

The small town only had a couple of diners and a drugstore lunch counter, so Abe took her to the only decent place around he could think of. Angela had been to the NCO club once before with Jim, but with Abe everything seemed completely different. She didn't really care where she was since all she could see was the blue of his eyes and the warmth of his smile.

After dinner, they drove to the beach and parked nearby, watching the waves lick the shore.

"Angela?" He turned to her, his gaze even more intense than usual.

"Yes, Abe."

"I know we haven't been together very long, but I love you. I said it before but I'm saying it again just to make things real clear."

She nodded, tingling inside. "I love you, too, Abe."

"I care a lot about Polly, too. I think of her like a daughter."

"So do I. She's my niece. She means the world to me."

"How does she feel about me, do you think?"

"She's crazy about you, Abe. You know that."

"Good. You know next week my leave is over."

"Yes."

"I've never spent such a terrific three weeks in my life."

"Neither have I."

"I don't want to rush you, so I think we should give it some time before we set a date—"

A smile touched her lips. "Abraham Marley Forbes, what are you asking me?"

He reached into his jacket pocket and withdrew a ring box. Opening the lid, he held it out to her, revealing a single, pear-shaped diamond. "I'm asking if you'll marry me, Angela."

She laughed, excitement coursing through her.

"Are you poking fun at me, or is that laugh because you like the idea?"

"I don't like it, Abe. I love it!"

"Good." He took the ring out of the box, grasped her hand, and slipped it onto her finger. "I tried getting the prettiest ring I could find, but it's nothing compared to the hand it's resting on."

Angela's heart fluttered as he kissed the back of her hand. Tugging her close, he covered her mouth with his. Angela wrapped her arms around his neck, loving the warmth of his body against hers and the moist, tender stroking of his tongue as it explored her mouth.

"When should we set the date?" he asked.

"Late this year? That should give us more time to get to know one another as well as plan a decent wedding."

"Sounds good to me."

"Now comes the hard part."

His brow knitted in question.

She laughed. "Telling my parents without letting them take over all the plans."

"Let's tell them tomorrow." He nuzzled her neck. "I have some plans to celebrate on our own tonight."

Angela uttered a soft moan of pleasure as he kissed her neck and gently traced the shape of her breasts through the fabric of her dress. "Let's go back to my place."

"You're right." He kissed her upper lip then her lower. "We're a little old to be making it in a car."

She smiled, massaging his inner thigh and stroking his cock with her fingertips. She longed to hold the warm, velvet-skinned rod and run her lips over the smooth head. The thought of feeling it deep inside her again, of being wrapped in his steely arms against his hard, naked body, made her wet with desire. "A bed is much more comfortable." After one more kiss, he turned on the ignition and headed for her house. She smiled as he took a hand off the wheel to adjust his cock. It was nice knowing he was as hungry for her as she was for him.

During the ride, Abe's hand rested on Angela's knee, stroking gently. If she hadn't been afraid of distracting him, she'd have continued fondling him through his trousers. *Oh well, not touching him just helps build anticipation*.

Not that they needed anything more to spur them on. As soon as they stepped into the house and closed the door behind them, they tore at each other's clothes. They walked up the steps in a tangle of arms and hands, unbuttoning, unzipping, and untucking.

Giggling, Angela stumbled on the steps, but Abe caught her and swept her into his arms. As he carried her to the bedroom, he covered her face with kisses.

He placed her on the bed and removed his clothes while she undressed.

When he searched his pocket for a condom, she purred, "Just think. This time next year you won't have to bother with that anymore."

Grinning, he rolled it on. "I can hardly wait."

Naked, except for her stockings, she began slipping off the thigh-high silk, but Abe grasped her hands.

"Let me," he whispered against her lips.

Nodding, Angela leaned back on her elbows, lifting first one leg then the other as he slid off the silk, kissing from her knee to the top of her foot. After tossing the stockings aside, Abe spread her legs and settled himself between them. Closing his eyes, he pressed his lips to her inner thighs before covering each with kisses. Brushing his thumb through the curls partially concealing her clit, he stroked gently while thrusting his tongue into her pussy, tasting and exploring. Her warm flesh, so soft and

61

quivering, squeezed his engorged cock. God, every time he took her, instead of satisfying his need for her, he wanted her more.

She moaned, the sexy, high-pitched sound exciting him. Her buttocks felt so smooth yet firm as he squeezed them, pressing her soft mound close to his face as he swirled his tongue in her pussy then lapped her clit. His lips fastened on the warm, swollen flesh and sucked tenderly.

"Oh, Abe," she panted. "I love it when you do that! You know just how to touch me."

She squirmed, her buttocks tightening and pussy throbbing as she neared her peak. How he loved touching her, pleasuring her! With Angela, he could explore a strange and wondrous side of himself. Emotions, long buried, sprang alive when she looked at him, held him, and panted for his touch. Bringing her joy was his top priority. Her excitement and happiness inspired his own.

Abe knew her body as well as she knew it herself. Just before she came, he entered her with a long, slow thrust. By the time he reached his hilt she throbbed around his cock, her arms and legs clutching him in the most wonderful death grip.

As her orgasm ebbed, he began thrusting in a steady rhythm while he kissed her neck and traced the shape of her ear with his tongue.

Abe resisted the urge to groan. She felt so damn good. Her pussy was hot and wet. Her breath fanned his shoulder, and her fingers kneaded the taut muscles of his back. Every lusty sound that escaped her throat increased his excitement. With a racing pulse, he kept his thrusts slow and steady, ignoring the need to ram into her and satisfy the magnificent, torturous lust building inside him.

"Oh, Abe, sweetheart, I love you so much," she breathed, her hips joining his rhythm and her legs wrapping around him as she approached her climax.

He knew by the rasp of her breath and her frantic squirming that she was about to come. Increasing his pace, he managed a few more fast, hard thrusts before orgasm washed over him at the same moment he felt her erupt in pulsations of pleasure. Angela cuddled against him, stroking his chest while he ran his fingers through her hair.

"This has been the nicest night of my life," she said.

"Mine too."

Gazing at the ring on her finger, she asked, "How does Angela Forbes sound?"

"Sounds great to me."

"Have you ever asked a woman to marry you before, Abe? Don't answer that. I don't want to know."

"No, Angela. You're the only woman I've ever asked to marry me."

"Really?"

He nodded and kissed the tip of her nose. "You're the only woman I've ever felt this close to. I've never been good at making relationships last, even friendships. Don't get me wrong. In the Corps we'd die for one another, but it's not like what you and I have. This is... I have no words for how I feel about you."

"I know what you mean. When I'm with you, I feel good inside, like you've touched a part of me I didn't even know existed. I had lots of fantasies about what it would be like when Mr. Right came along, but they were all childish compared to what we have."

"I hope I can make you happy, Angela. You and Polly."

"You will. I hope I can do the same for you."

"You already make me happier than I ever thought possible."

She cupped his face in her hand and drew a deep breath. "Just..."

"What?"

"Just be safe wherever you go, whatever you do."

He held her gaze. "I love being a Marine, Angela."

"I know. I'd never ask you to give it up. You'd only end up resenting me."

"I could never resent you."

Smiling, she kissed his lips. "That's sweet, Abe, but you could and you would. I'm smart enough to know it. It's more than a job to you. It's part of who you are. I'm proud of what you do."

"Thanks, darlin'." He squeezed her tighter. "That's good to know."

It was true. She admired Abe and men like him. The Corps meant as much to him as she did, and asking him to give it up or whining because he decided to stay wouldn't be fair. From the moment they'd met she knew what he was. She didn't have to stop him that first night when he was going to leave because he wanted to kiss her, nor did she have to write him that letter when he'd left her after that incident in the basement.

"So tell me, Master Sergeant." She straddled his hips, her hand splayed across his chest as she gazed into his eyes. "Do I get one of those weddings with Marines lined up on either side of me, drawing their swords?"

"If that's what you want." He ran his hands up her sides and cupped her breasts. Amusement gleamed in his eyes as he bucked a bit, his hardening cock rubbing against her. "Speaking of swords, I got one right here that can use a special kind of sheath."

"Maybe I can help," she purred.

"Darlin', I believe you're the only one who can."

Angela's eyes closed with pleasure as she curled her fist around his cock and guided him deep inside her warm, waiting pussy.

## Chapter Eight

Two weeks before the wedding

"I think that looks just beautiful." Patricia Franco gazed at Angela who stood in front of a full-length mirror wearing her wedding gown. It was cream-colored satin with a long train decorated with pink seed pearls that matched the pearls sewn along the edge of her veil. "Sweetheart, Abe is such a lucky man."

"I can't wait to marry him, Ma."

"I know. All you and Polly do is talk about him. She's going to make the cutest little flower girl."

"She's all excited about being in the wedding."

"I think it's a wonderful idea that you and Abe are adopting her once you're married."

"He loves her like his own child, Ma."

"I believe he does. You know, when your father and I first met him, we weren't so sure about him, but he's a good man."

"He's the best." Angela smiled. When he'd proposed and she suggested they wait almost a year for the wedding, she thought it would fly by, but waiting so long to become his wife seemed to take forever. Just a little longer and she, Abe, and Polly would be a family by law, though in their hearts they already were.

For the past year, Abe had spent all his free time with Angela and Polly, planning the wedding. They'd decided that after they were married, instead of buying a new home, Abe would move into Angela's. Already he'd made so many of the repairs on it that Angela had been putting off. Her parents were happy about the forthcoming marriage and, as a wedding gift, offered them a generous amount of money to help pay for the expenses.

Angela and Patricia glanced out the window as Abe's car pulled into the driveway.

"He's here early," Patricia said. "Sweetheart, you'd better get out of that dress. You know it's bad luck for the groom to see the bride in it before the wedding."

"Tell him I'll be right out, will you, Ma?"

Patricia closed the door behind her as she left. While Angela undressed and carefully packed away the dress, she heard voices from the kitchen. As usual, her belly fluttered at the thought of seeing Abe. She wondered if she'd ever completely get over that giddy feeling almost every time she saw him.

As she stepped into the kitchen, she knew by his expression he had something to tell her. Even Patricia appeared uncharacteristically quiet.

"I'll go pick up Polly at school," Patricia said, patting Abe on the arm. "I'll see you two later."

"What was that about?" Angela's gaze followed her mother as she left.

Abe approached. "I got orders today. I'm going back to 'Nam at the end of the week."

Angela drew a deep breath, stunned. She shouldn't have been. All along she'd known he could be sent back at a moment's notice.

"I'm sorry, darlin'." He took her in his arms. "I know the wedding's planned and all, but—"

"How long?"

"Eighteen months."

She nodded, forcing a smile. "Are you going to marry me first or wait until later?"

"If you don't mind getting married without the big wedding, I would love to have you as my bride before I go."

"I want that more than anything."

Taking her in his arms, he kissed her forehead and lips. "Then let's tell Polly and your parents."

Angela clung to him tightly, closing her eyes. She wished that moment could freeze in time, so the end of the week would never come, and Abe would never have to leave her.

\* \* \* \* \*

The day before Abe was to leave for Vietnam, he and Angela were married by a Justice of the Peace with her parents and Polly as guests.

Patricia cooked a delicious meal at Abe and Angela's, but the Francos left early, giving the new family privacy before their separation. That night, Angela listened from the doorway as Abe read Polly a bedtime story.

"Abe, are you scared to go?" the girl asked as he tucked her in.

He sat on the bed and held her gaze. "Everybody gets scared about something at one time or another. When I do, I'll have you and Angela to think about instead. Goodnight, darlin'."

"Goodnight, Abe."

He kissed her cheek and walked to the door. Taking Angela's hand, he switched off the light.

Angela swallowed hard, willing herself not to cry. That would only make it harder for Abe and she certainly didn't want Polly seeing her all teary. What kind of an example would that be? Tomorrow, when Abe was gone and Polly was off playing with her friends, she'd get upset. She could hold back until then.

In their room, Angela climbed into bed while Abe locked their door and pulled the shade. She heard him unzip his jeans and kick off his boots. When he slipped into bed, she snuggled close to his warm, naked body, her cheek resting against his chest. His heart beat steadily against her face. The thought that he might be wounded or killed in action suddenly overwhelmed her. No! She would not let this night be ruined. It belonged to them and she would not poison it for him by succumbing to her fears.

His arms enfolded her. Kissing the top of her head, he slid one of the straps on her nightgown down her shoulder and caressed the smooth flesh.

"Abe," she murmured, straddling his waist and pressing soft kisses to his chest. She licked his nipples and splayed her hands across the hard pectorals, rubbing and squeezing the plates of muscle. Sitting up, she raised her arms, allowing him to lift her nightgown over her head. She wore no underclothes beneath, so her curves were bared to his touch.

"So beautiful, Angela," he whispered, resting his hands on her waist and stroking upward, tracing her ribs with his fingertips. Cupping her breasts, he gently squeezed the full globes. His thumbs rolled over her nipples, circling over and over until they stood out stiff and aching.

While one hand continued stroking her breasts, his other found her clit. He circled it with a callused fingertip, feeling her grow wet against his belly. Rising onto her knees, she lowered her drenched pussy onto his cock, swallowing him inch by delectable inch. She wanted to make him happy tonight, so he could remember the warmth and love they shared whenever he was stuck somewhere terrible, surrounded by danger and yearning for home. Still, keeping her passion under control long enough to tease and please him was difficult when she wanted him so, so badly!

Their hands locked as she rocked upon him, keeping her mewls of desire trapped in her throat, as she didn't want Polly to hear. It was so hard, not verbally expressing her lust as passion grew. Her heart beat frantically and her clit and pussy ached with desire.

Abe strained to see her in the darkness. He made out her silhouette, her gorgeous body gyrating astride him, her breasts so full and thrust forward as she moved sensuously.

Pleasure built deep inside him, centering in his cockhead. She enveloped him like a hot, wet velvet glove sliding over him, loving him on all sides.

Her breath rasped and he knew she was trying like hell to keep silent. Angela was normally a very vocal lover, but with the little girl in the next room, they'd both have to alter their ways a bit.

Abe grinned. It could be fun.

He gently rolled her onto her back without his cock sliding from her. Pinning her hands above her head, he covered her mouth with his and thrust with short fast strokes, pushing her toward a quick orgasm. Just when he sensed she was about to come, he slowed his movements, drawing out their pleasure. All the while he rimmed her lips with his tongue and thrust it into her mouth in time with his hips.

She panted, her body hot as her legs wrapped around him and her hips lifted to meet his.

For the first time, he felt a bit sour about leaving for a tour. Knowing he wouldn't see Angela for eighteen months... Eighteen months! What if they never saw each other again? He wouldn't think that way. He couldn't. When had Master Sergeant Abraham Marley Forbes gotten so soft? Yes, he loved this woman with his heart and soul, but he was also loyal to the Corps. In order to do his best for both his woman and his country, he would give her a happy memory of her wedding night, then go and perform his duty with the single-mindedness that had gotten him through hell many times before.

His thrusts quickened and he immersed himself completely in her soft, feminine body. With her eyes closed and her limbs tight around him, she gasped as she came.

Her hot, wet pussy throbbed around his cock. In a burst of pleasure that stole his breath, Abe stiffened and strained in climax. Tearing his mouth from hers, he gasped against her ear.

"I love you, Angela," he whispered.

"I love you, too, Abe."

"When I come home, you give me a night just like this."

"I will."

# "Promise."

"I promise." She hugged him tightly and kissed his cheek.

**Chapter Nine** December 1969 Vietnam

Abe sat on the floor of a hut where the army had set up an infirmary. He'd arrived that morning with what was left of his unit. Most had been picked off by snipers a few weeks ago. Many suffered bullet wounds that, while not fatal, left them weak from pain and blood loss. A couple more had fallen prey to traps made of shit-smeared spikes disguised by leaves and branches, rendering them helpless from infection. Abe and those left uninjured took turns carrying the wounded through the hot jungle, infested with vermin, traps, and enemy soldiers.

Shrugging his shoulders, Abe rested his head against the wall. His body had felt sore and sweaty for so long that he scarcely noticed anymore. That's what happened after almost a year in hell. Not that he was complaining. He could be stuck back in the prison camp like last time, getting the shit beat out of him and his arms busted while some bastard fired questions at him. Being stuck in isolation could be just as bad, sitting alone, wondering if you'd ever look at another face like yours again, your head telling you there was no way you were getting out while your heart said your brothers would not abandon you.

Nearby a kid started crying. Medics were too busy to do anything about it. Abe pushed himself to his feet and approached It was a skinny girl, a little younger than Polly, with bandages on her face and arm. He talked to her, using what Vietnamese he'd picked up, and she quieted a bit.

Funny he could be comforting this one today and busting in on another kid's village tomorrow. No point thinking about it. Unfortunately, there were more times than most people imagined that you could just ponder these thoughts, trying to figure

out what was right or wrong. Those concerns faded fast when faced with a deadly situation, though. Survival instinct seemed to win out over almost any other.

The kid fell asleep and Abe glanced around. Civilians gazed at them with wariness in their eyes, even the ones who smiled outwardly. Medics worked. Some of his men sat talking, others in silence.

Lying in a corner, a private, his chest swathed in bandages, glanced in Abe's direction. Abe remembered what it felt like being fresh out of boot camp. He'd been luckier than this kid and not been thrust into combat right away. Training prepared you for the motions, but nothing could prepare you for the *e*motions of the first real taste of enemy fire.

Abe squatted beside him. "How you doing?"

"Fine, Sir."

"Boring lying there."

"Kind of, Sir. Lots of time to think."

Abe nodded. "Home?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Where's that?"

"Texas."

"That's where I grew up. Near Austin."

"My girl's from Austin. We're getting married when I get home."

"Not too much longer, then."

"That's what I hope, Sir."

"This your first time here, private?"

"Yes, Sir. How many times have you –"

"This is my third." Abe rested a hand on the private's shoulder. "Rest up."

"Yes, Sir."

#### His Sister's Kiss

Looking at the youth's sallow skin and reluctance to move or even talk too loudly due to the pain of the injury, Abe could hardly believe his narrow escapes over the past year. Every time he got through a shower of bullets or discovered a trap before he stepped on it and got his feet punctured or his legs blown off, he was grateful. Being wounded was no picnic, but there were worse things, he well knew.

He stepped out of the hut and leaned a shoulder against the side of it. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out two letters. They were stained and tattered from being read so much, but just looking at them made him feel better. One was from Angela the other from Polly. They'd given him the letters the morning he left, knowing that it might be next to impossible to reach him during his tour. Polly's was short and sweet, the loving words of a little girl. Angela's was a bit longer and he knew it by heart.

#### My darling Abe,

You're not even gone yet and I miss you already. I keep thinking about the honeymoon we'll have when you get back.

Sometimes during the day when I miss you, I close my eyes and pretend you're close by. I can just about feel your arms around me and you lips against mine. That's what I'll do while you're away. At night, when I'm in bed, I'll close my eyes and imagine you beside me, stroking my hair, touching my face. I don't know if you'll be able to do the same. I'm sure you'll have too much else on your mind while doing your job, but if you can, think of me and know you're in my heart.

Miles can physically divide us, Abe, but our souls are joined forever. I love you with all my heart. Your Angela

He gazed at the letter and ran a fingertip over the words.

I think of you more often than you know, darlin'. I wish more than anything to be with you again, but the only way to do that is to concentrate on my job. That way I'll come home to you.

#### \* \* \* \* \*

### North Carolina

Angela gazed out the kitchen window from where she sat at the table with one of her students. The boy was busy working on math problems and it was a good time for Angela to daydream.

Always, her thoughts drifted to Abe. What was he doing? Was he safe? She hated to think about how tough life must be for him and the others over there.

The only person she trusted to discuss her fears was Rosemarie. She knew her parents wouldn't be difficult intentionally, but her father would just tell her to bear up because she married a Marine while her mother would go on about the lists of people killed and missing in action.

"Honey, even other veterans are protesting the fighting," she said one afternoon when Angela dropped Polly off to visit. "If not for the damn war, your brother would still be alive."

"Ma, don't talk to me about protestors. You know how I feel about it. No one wants Abe and the others home more than I do, but not supporting the troops and spitting on them -"

"Who's talking about spitting on them? I'm talking about ending this madness!"

Angela stormed out and took a long walk before stopping at Rosemarie's diner. The two women talked about Abe for a long time. Rosemarie even told her stories about him as a skinny young private with a hotshot attitude that made Angela laugh when she thought she'd forgotten how.

When Angela picked up Polly that night, she and her mother seemed to have gotten over their bad feelings, or at least buried them. She'd eaten dinner with her parents then she and Polly drove home. She and Polly had written to Abe often, knowing that the letters might not get through. Still, it made them feel better talking to him in the only way they could.

Mail from Abe had been scarce. Still, a few letters had gotten to them.

Angela reached into her apron and withdrew the most recent one, several months old. She gazed at his bold writing and felt somewhat comforted.

My Sweet Angela,

You know I'm not a man who finds it easy putting my emotions into words, but I want you to know how much I love you and Polly.

It's not too pleasant over here to say the least, but I won't get into that. I don't want to waste the time when I can be telling you how much I want to be with you again. Remember that honeymoon you mentioned in the letter you gave me when I left? You plan on it, honey. It'll be the best.

I know it's not like the real thing, but let me try giving you a kiss on paper. I'm taking you in my arms now and I can feel yours sliding around me. You're soft and warm. Our lips our touching. Moist, tender. Everything is dark and still. Our hearts beat together. I don't want it to end, Angela, but it does, everything must, but that's a good thing because it means eventually this will end and I'll be home with you again. Then we can have a real kiss and make new memories that I carry with me like the ones I have of you from before I left.

*Give my love to Polly and tell those parents of yours I will be back.* 

I love you with all my heart.

Your husband,

Abe

"Mrs. Forbes? Are you all right?"

Angela blinked back tears, pocketed the letter, and turned to her student with a forced smile. "Sorry, Ronny. Did you ask me something?"

"Can you help me with this problem? I don't get it."

"Sure." She picked up a pencil and leaned over the paper, focusing on her pupil though thoughts of Abe floated in the back of her mind.

God willing, he'd be home in a few months.

Please, God. Please let him come home safely.

# \* \* \* \* \* July 1970

## Vietnam

*This is it!* Abe thought, running through the clearing toward the chopper hovering in the distance. Pumped with adrenaline, he scarcely felt the weight of his gear and the injured man he supported. He'd feel it soon, that was for sure, when he tried climbing into that chopper. He was keenly aware of his men around him, all heading the same way, and even more conscious of the enemy fire that suddenly erupted around them.

One of the men turned to cover him and fell at his feet, his chest blown open. Abe and several others returned fire and one of the guys picked up the dead Marine. They were almost to the chopper but they sure as hell weren't safe.

*This is it. All I have to do is make it to the chopper and I'll be with Angela and Polly again.* His family.

The thoughts of them were fleeting, as he concentrated on survival. They sent the injured up first.

Abe's heart pounded as his turn finally came. He was the last man up. The gear weighted him down as he climbed upward, swinging in the wind as the chopper hovered.

He was going to make it! Pain erupted in arm. He was hit but didn't have time to think about it. He finally reached the edge of the chopper and felt helping hands pulling him in.

As he and one of his men tried staunching the flow of blood from his arm, Abe said a silent prayer of thanks. He'd made it. Again he'd escaped with his life. Angela would be waiting for him at home. He laughed in spite of the pain.

"Sir, are you all right?" the soldier helping him asked, concerned at the sight of a wounded man laughing.

"I'm fine, son." Abe drew a deep breath. He was better than fine. He was going on a honeymoon.

\* \* \* \* \*

## July 1970 North Carolina

The phone rang and Angela cursed softly, climbing down from the cabinet she'd been rearranging. It seemed whenever she had her hands in water, went to the bathroom, or climbed into some strange position for housecleaning, the phone rang.

She picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Angela, darlin', it's Abe."

Abe! Just the sound of that deep, sexy drawl sent her pulse racing. He was alive!

Angela laughed, giddy with pleasure. "Sweetheart, God, it's so good to hear you! Are you all right? Where are you?"

"I don't have long to talk, baby. I'm fine. I'm coming home. Friday morning."

*Thank you, God!* Angela felt happy enough to jump up and down like a love-struck teen.

"How's Polly?"

"She's fine, Abe. She'll be so happy to hear you're coming home. You don't know how happy I am. I love you so much."

"I love you, too, darlin'. There's so much I want to tell you, but I can't now. I have to go."

Go! It was too fast. They'd scarcely said anything to one another, yet it was enough. It would have to be. He would be home in a short while and they could talk for as long as they wanted to. Better than talk. They'd be in each other's arms.

"Bye, baby. I love you," he said again.

"Goodbye. I can't wait until Friday."

"Neither can I, Mrs. Forbes."

The receiver clicked as he hung up, but Angela held the phone for a moment. Tears stung her eyes and she told herself to get a hold of herself. Maybe someday she would grow accustomed to their forced separations, or maybe she wouldn't. It didn't matter. Angela had already learned to appreciate what was happening *now* instead of thinking about what might happen *then*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Angela's heart pounded as she and Polly waited for the returning soldiers to step off the plane. Abe should be there. He'd phoned. She'd actually talked to him. Hearing his voice over the phone had been like the best gift she'd ever received. Until now. This was even better. In a few moments, she'd be in his arms.

Panic set in when other soldiers stepped off with still no sign of Abe. Then she saw him. So tall and handsome, even from a distance, though thinner than she remembered. He turned and her stomach tightened when she saw his arm looked a bit stiff at his side.

"There he is, Aunt Angela!" Polly beamed.

Abe turned to them with a broad smile and waved his good hand.

"Abe!" Polly reached him first. He stooped and hugged her tightly. "Look at you, darlin'. You sprung up like a weed. Pretty soon you'll be as tall as your aunt."

"She did get big," Angela said, unable to contain her tremulous smile. She felt like laughing and crying at the same time. "You're hurt, Abe?"

"It's nothing, Angela." He stood and pulled her into his one-armed embrace, holding her close to his broad chest and kissing the top of her head. "God, I've missed you."

"Oh, Abe." She stood on tiptoe, took his face in her hands, and kissed him with all the love she felt. "I love you so much."

"I love you, too." He kissed her again. His gaze held hers for a long moment. They had so much to talk about, so much affection to share. Glancing at Polly he said, "You, too, girl."

"I missed you, Abe. I have lots of stuff from school to show you."

"I can't wait to see."

Abe drew a deep, contented breath and released it slowly. It was the first time someone was actually waiting for him to come home. It felt even better than he'd dreamed it would.

## **Chapter Ten**

After returning to the house, Abe spent time with Polly while Angela fixed dinner. They shared a meal of chicken, corn, and sweet potatoes cooked with brown sugar with blueberry pie for dessert.

Her parents phoned to welcome Abe back and asked the family to plan an evening at their house for dinner as soon as Abe was settled and rested.

Angela grinned. "Since you left, my father's been bragging to everyone about his Master Sergeant son-in-law who's just about the bravest Marine in the Corps."

"That's a shock." Abe chuckled. "I thought for sure that man had it in for me."

"No, Daddy just likes to talk a big show."

The three talked for a long time, catching Abe up with all that happened during the past eighteen months. Polly had an array of pictures and papers from school and Angela had taken plenty of photos in his absence.

"That's my best friend from school." Polly pointed to a picture of herself with a little red-haired girl. "Her Daddy's a Seabee but she's living here with her grandma while he's away. There's a breakfast at school next week for kids and their daddies. Can she come with us, Abe?"

Abe glanced at Angela, feeling a bit surprised and happy that Polly thought of him as a father figure. He'd better get used to it, since the adoption would hopefully go through soon.

"Sure she can, if it's all right with her grandma," he said.

Angela smiled, her fingertips brushing his as she handed him another photo album.

Finally, he and Angela tucked Polly in and retired to their bedroom.

"How would you like a nice hot bath?" Angela purred. "With a very willing woman ready to soap you down and massage you all over?"

"Oh, God." He grinned, his eyes slipping shut as she unzipped his trousers and slipped her hand beneath his briefs. His cock sprang alive in her hand.

"Hmm," she giggled and whispered against his lips, "that's one heck of a big gun, Sir."

Wrapping his arm around her waist, he pressed her close and wiggled his eyebrows. "How about later tonight I show you how good it fires, darlin'?"

"I can hardly wait."

While Abe undressed, Angela changed into the black lace nightgown she'd bought especially for his first night home. She brushed her hair until it hung, thick and shiny, down her back.

"You look so beautiful," he said, caressing her bare shoulders and kissing her lips. "I almost want to wait on that bath."

"Oh, you won't want to miss it," she grinned, taking his hand and guiding him to the bathroom where she ran the water in the tub and poured in a couple of capfuls of her favorite bubbles.

Abe's lips curved upward slightly as the basin filled and he sank into the hot water. "If anyone ever suggested that Abraham Marley Forbes would be sitting in a tub of bubbles smelling like roses, I'd laugh in his face."

"How does it feel?"

He glanced down, sniffing the water and brushing bubbles from his chest hair. "I think I kinda like it."

Angela was torn between laughter and lust at the sight of the big-boned, hardmuscled Marine with a shaved head and rugged features seated in a tub just a bit too small for him.

"Girl, are you laughing at me?"

81

Her self-control snapped and she covered her mouth to stifle the giggles. "Sorry Abe."

"Come here."

She shook her head and he stood, extending his hand, bubbles clinging to his waterslicked skin, his hard cock and weighty balls a feast for the eyes.

"You promised me a massage or something. So collect yourself and get on over here," he said, his face arranged in serious lines though his eyes glistened with humor.

"Sit back down." Taking a step closer while repressing more chuckles, she reached for a bar of soap. Her gaze swept his partially healed wound. "How's your arm?"

"Fine."

He dropped into the tub and stared at her, his lips slightly parted. Angela stood behind him and bent, dipping the soap into the water and lathering it over his chest. The sensation of hard muscle, damp hair, and wet skin made her tingle deep inside. God, it felt so good just to touch him!

Dropping the soap, she used her hands to wash and caress his chest. She kissed his neck as she leaned over him, her fingers sliding over his ribs and down his stomach. To better reach his cock, she walked around to the front of the tub, clasped his thick, wet rod, and pumped.

"That feels so good, baby," he said, cupping one of her breasts, his wet hand molding the satin to the flesh. The nipple strained for his touch and he accommodated, rolling his thumb over it and pinching it gently. Wrapping his arm around her, he tugged her even closer and pressed his tongue against her nipple, teasing it through the wet fabric. The nipple was so tight and sensitive that Angela couldn't control a gasp of pleasure. How wonderful it would feel when his lips and tongue played with the bare flesh without the nightgown between them!

As if sensing her thoughts, he pushed down the front of her nightgown, just enough to bare the breast he'd been fondling. His warm, wet tongue rolled over the nipple and she shuddered. A few more minutes of this, and she might come from the sensation

82

piercing her from nipple to clit. Her stomach clenched and unclenched and her thighs rubbed sensuously together.

Now the nipple was between his teeth and he nibbled tenderly, every once in a while swirling his tongue over the berry-shaped flesh. He shifted position enough to slide his hand under her nightgown. She wore no panties, so his fingers found her drenched pussy and pulsing clit right away. Smoothing her juices over her clit, he rubbed and circled the ultra-sensitive flesh. Gauging her desire, he pulled away before she exploded.

Angela's pulse raced. Her clit ached and pussy throbbed. The sensation of his hands and lips upon her teased her to a fevered height. She felt so hot and wet, so desperate for his cock to fill her and his lips to cover her with kisses that she trembled.

Her breathing quick, she reached between his legs and felt for the bar of soap, unable to resist squeezing his balls and outlining his shaft with her fingers. Finally she found the soap and handed it to him.

"Abe, I think you better finish this bath yourself. And make it fast."

Turning, she hurried to the bedroom where she arranged the pillows and covers on the bed and lay down, waiting for him, her heart pounding with love and desire. Having him home felt unbelievable. She could scarcely wait to cuddle with him in bed, close to his warmth and feel his heart beating against her cheek, but only after he sated the lust raging inside her. Since he'd gone, she'd dreamed of waking with him near her, now it was happening. Her thoughts briefly drifted to men like Jim who never came home and she said a silent prayer for their families. Having Abe back was a gift, just as each moment shared with any loved one was a gift.

Her thoughts faded as Abe stepped into the bedroom wearing nothing but a towel around his waist. Though a bit too slim, he still had the most unbelievable body. All big bones and rock-hard muscles with legs long and steely enough to make a woman lose her breath.

"You are so beautiful," he said, a smile tugging at his lips. "Damn it, woman, do you know how much I've thought about holding you in my arms, of burying myself deep inside you?"

"As much as I thought about the same thing." She stared as he dropped the towel and approached the bed, his cock semi-erect and waiting for her fist to curl around it and her lips to caress its head.

"That bath made me hot as hell."

"Should have used cooler water."

"I'm not talking about the water."

Angela held out her arms to him as he climbed into bed and tugged her close, his mouth covering hers. He took her face in his hands and stroked her smooth skin with his thumbs while his tongue gently parted her lips.

She relished the sensation of his powerful chest beneath her searching hands, the crisp hairs slipping through her fingers. The beating of his heart against her palms seemed linked to her clit. It ached and pulsed with need for him.

"I want to taste every inch of you, Abe," she breathed. Though she still felt ready to burst from need, the thought of tasting and touching him was irresistible.

"I want to eat you up, darlin'. I can't get enough of you." He spoke while pressing kisses to her neck and shoulder.

He slid the nightgown straps down her arms and tugged the satin, still damp from the tub. The delicate black material dropped from her breasts and pooled at her waist. He took a warm, tender globe in each hand and bent, kissing the plump, creamy tops. Angela clasped his head as his lips fastened on the nipple he'd teased in the bathroom. As he sucked the hard, sensitive peak, she wanted to scream with passion. Licking the aroused bud, he guided her to her back.

Lifting his face, he whispered against her lips, "Let me touch you, baby."

Angela nodded, closing her eyes as his lips brushed her forehead and cheeks then fastened on her mouth, his tongue thrusting tenderly inside. He kissed her jaw and throat. His kisses swept across her collarbone and down one arm. Taking her hand, he licked between each finger and kissed her palm before following the same sensual pattern on her opposite arm. His tongue circled one breast, drawing smaller circles as he neared her nipple, which he took between his lips and sucked. Lapping beneath her breast, he moved to her other one and covered it with kisses, savoring the hard, aching nipple with his lips and tongue.

Angela's breathing deepened and her head tossed on the pillow. It was so hard not to moan and pant as the tip of his tongue trailed down her belly and dipped into her navel. His fingertips stroked the curls covering her soft mound before dipping into her hot, wet pussy. The muscles squeezed around his fingers. His cock leapt, yearning to be enveloped by her soft, slick flesh. Soon. Very soon.

With long, slow strokes, his tongue caressed her clit. Angela's lips parted in a silent cry and her fingers tightened on his scalp. Her breath came in quick sips as he licked and stroked. Thighs trembling and hips lifting, she burst in an orgasm that turned the world black.

As she lay catching her breath, her body marvelously satisfied and relaxed, she felt him stretch out beside her. His face rested against the hollow of her shoulder while his fingertips languidly stroked her hip and thigh.

"That," she whispered, "was too wonderful for words. And it deserves payback."

"I'm more than ready to collect, Mrs. Forbes."

Smiling, Angela slid from beneath his arm and knelt beside him. Abe rolled onto his back and gazed at her, one arm bent under his head, his injured one at his side.

"Close your eyes," she whispered, brushing her fingertip across his eyelids for emphasis.

He did as she asked. Angela stared at him for a moment, grateful that he was with her and captivated by his handsome features, those sharp cheekbones, perfectly shaped nose, and lips just made to kiss.

Edging closer, she touched her mouth to his, loving the firmness and slight moisture of his lips. She brushed her cheek against his, feeling the beginnings of stubble on his face. From the bent position, her breasts dangled over his chest, the nipples rubbing against the hair-covered muscle. Her fingers massaged his broad shoulders. She squeezed and caressed the rock-hard muscles of his good arm while gently stroking down the length of his injured one.

Abe's breathing remained soft and steady as her lips and hands traveled to his chest, though when she rested her cheek against its broad expanse, his heart thundered in her ear.

Fingertips danced across his flat belly and hip as they made their way to his cock. She drew a deep, pleasured breath upon grasping the hot, hard staff. She squeezed and stroked, feeling it swell even more against her fingers and palm.

Climbing between his legs, she bent, her hair sweeping his stomach, and took his cockhead between her lips. Her tongue laved and teased, tracing the underside before her lips sucked him fast and her fingertips fluttered up and down the staff. She reached for his balls. The big, warm sac spilled out of her grip.

Abe's entire body tensed. His breathing quickened and his heart pounded. The beautiful girl was going to suck him dry unless he stopped her. Time, he had time. He'd always been able to control the magnificent climb to orgasm.

Angela's tongue trailed over the thick vein on the underside of his cock and swirled around the head as she sucked harder.

"Oh, God, Angela," he panted, grasping her shoulders and pinning her to the bed. Her bath had aroused him, then licking her to orgasm had heightened his desire to the point of shattering. Having her use her hands and lips on him after was nothing short of torture. A man surely couldn't take much more. With a swift thrust he was inside her, stroking longer and faster than he imagined possible.

"Abe, sweetheart," she whispered in his ear before licking it and biting the lobe.

Ignoring the ache in his injured arm, he only felt the intense pleasure in his cock and the love for her warming his heart.

Her smooth legs wrapped around him and her arms clung to his shoulders and back. The hiss of her breath against his ear, the sensation of her soft breasts against his chest, and the sudden burst of her orgasm gripping his cock shattered what was left of his control.

Covering her mouth with his to silence both their cries of passion, he came, surging into her. Rolling onto his back, he cuddled her to his heaving chest and closed his eyes as he caught his breath. Damn, that had felt so good! Plunging into her soft, sexy body and feeling her love wrap around his heart was just what he needed, even more than he'd realized.

"Remember what I said to you the night before I left?" he asked, stroking her shoulder.

"You said a lot of things."

"I mean what I said about when I got back you giving me a night like the one we had then?"

"Yes," she smiled, cuddling closer, "I remember."

"Well, this was even better."

"You mean I outdid myself?" she teased.

"It seems every time I'm with you, every moment we spend together, things just keep getting better and I keep loving you more than I thought possible."

"I remember when you used to say you had trouble putting your feelings into words. You're getting really good at doing just that."

"Am I?"

"Uh-huh."

"I got plenty of practice writing you love letters."

"I kept every one. Polly and I wrote you a lot, too, Abe. I don't suspect you got them all."

"Probably not, but the ones I got, I read so much they're falling apart."

"Yours, too. I've been thinking, Abe, that maybe Polly could use a few brothers and sisters."

He grinned. "That thought has crossed my mind."

"Let's say we make it our duty to see that happens."

"You know I'm always devoted to duty." Abe loomed above her and kissed her lips. Gazing into her eyes, he smoothed wisps of hair from her face and said, "You're the best thing that's ever happened to me, Angela."

"That's exactly how I feel about you, Abe." She looped her arms around his neck. "Are you too tired to do some more honeymooning?"

His hips shifted and his stiffening cock brushed her belly. "What does it feel like?"

Angela's hand slipped between them and curled around his staff. "Feels like you're ready for action, Master Sergeant."

"Ready, willing, and able."

Before she could reply, his lips covered hers and he began showing her again how much he loved her.

## **Epilogue** Summer 1976

### North Carolina

"Son, do you know what it means to cook a burger rare?" Mr. Franco held his halfeaten hamburger under Abe's nose.

"Get that thing out of my face, Sir. Can't you see I'm trying to keep this grill going?" Abe told his father-in-law. He smirked as the man grumbled and took another bite of his food. Abe's brow furrowed beneath the white chef's hat Angela and Polly had bought him as a joke after he'd hosted their first family barbecue several years back. Angela thought he looked almost as cute in it as in his uniform cap. The white apron stained with barbecue sauce wouldn't have looked sexy on many men, but Abe carried it off like a magazine centerfold. Shirtless beneath the apron, every rippling muscle in his shoulders and arms and a good expanse of his powerful, hair-roughened chest was exposed. Snug jeans hugged his long, well-muscled legs.

"I told you to let me take care of the cooking, Abe," Rosemarie teased, trying to take the spatula from Abe's hand and nudge him aside. She didn't stand a chance. Abe had designated himself the official barbecue cook, and no one was going to take his duty out from under him.

Angela grinned from where she sat in a folding chair on the porch. Rosemarie should have known better than to try taking over a task from any Marine, let alone Abe.

"Blayne!" Angela shouted across the yard to her five-year-old son who rolled in the mud with his new puppy. Both were covered in filth but looked so cute she couldn't stay mad at them.

"Get out of that mud and under the water sprinkler, boy!" Abe called. "We can wash the dog later."

"But Daddy, we're just playin'!" Blayne stood, his large, intelligent eyes staring in his father's direction as Abe flipped burgers and toasted buns on the grill. The boy had inherited Abe's determined nature and sense of adventure. He looked so much like his father, too, though according to Abe, he was the spirit and image of Angela.

"Out of the mud!"

"Yes, Sir."

"I'll help him clean up," said Polly, now a lovely fourteen-year-old. The teen had so many boys knocking at the door that Abe teasingly threatened to sit in the front yard with his rifle, just in case.

Polly approached the grill and gazed at Abe with her most innocent expression. "Daddy?"

"Yes, darlin'."

"Dave asked me to the dance at the end of the week."

"The tall, thin boy with the freckles?"

"Yes, Sir."

Abe raised an eyebrow and Angela bit her cheek to keep from laughing. Polly was a good girl, but she wasn't known for sweetness and perfect obedience. She'd inherited Jim's wild streak, all right, and both Abe and Angela knew it.

"I told him I'd have to ask you first."

"I don't see any reason why you can't go to a chaperoned school dance."

"And the beach afterward."

"Not on your life, girl," Abe replied.

"But, Daddy!"

"Don't but Daddy me. He can take you to the dance, he can take you to the movies after school, but he's not taking you to any beach in the middle of the night."

"Mama?" Polly turned her frustrated gaze to Angela.

"I agree the beach at that time of night is no place for you. If Dave wants to come back here after the dance, that's fine."

Polly sighed, making a disgusted face before going to clean up Blayne and the puppy.

With the last burger finally flipped, Abe placed two on a plate, loaded them with mustard and piccalilli, and motioned for Angela to step inside with him. Their guests were busy eating and playing horseshoes, so the couple decided to sneak a private moment.

Angela followed Abe to their bedroom where he closed the door.

"Umm," Angela took a bite of her burger. "Delicious."

"That's what I say." Abe removed the chef's hat and apron and stretched, the hard muscles in his torso tightening in a way that made Angela's mouth go dry. At forty-two years old and after eight years of marriage, he still made her pulse race and her clit tingle.

"Do you think we were too hard on Polly?"

"Nope."

"Is that a father speaking, or a rational, impartial observer?"

"That's a man who remembers being a boy trying to get some girl to go to the beach at night."

Angela grinned. "I suppose I can't argue with that."

"I can think of things I'd much rather do than argue." Abe took the burger from her hand and tossed it alongside his in the dish. He placed the food on the dresser, grasped her waist, and pressed her body close to his.

"You know you are the most gorgeous woman."

"Abe, I am not! I got pudgy after Blayne was born and never quite lost it."

"You're sexy as hell and a whole lot hotter, darlin'." His mouth hovered over hers as he grasped her buttocks in both hands and squeezed.

91

Angela's heart fluttered as she gazed up at him and looped her arms around his neck.

"Abraham Marley Forbes, are you going to stand in here kissing me while we have a backyard full of guests?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well you better go ahead and do it before one of them decides to come looking for us."

"With my luck it'll be your father."

"He can't say anything now. We've been married eight years."

"Somehow I think he'd still find something to say."

Angela's giggle was silenced by Abe's kiss. His moist lips moved tenderly against hers before his tongue parted them. He tasted and explored every inch of her mouth while his hands roamed over her soft curves.

One thing both of them learned from each other, nothing tasted as sweet as true love.

The End

## About the Author

Kate Hill is a thirty-something vegetarian New Englander who likes heroes with a touch of something wicked and wild. Her short fiction and poetry have appeared in publications both on and off the Internet. When she's not working on her books, Kate enjoys reading, working out, and researching vampires and Viking history.

Kate welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her <u>author bio page</u> at <u>www.ellorascave.com</u>.

### Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

## Also by Kate Hill

Alien Affairs 1: Doing Thyme

Alien Affairs 2: Moonlight on Water

Alien Affairs 3: Menage a Tasia

Alien Affairs 4: Pandora's Box

Ancient Blood: Cryptic Trysts

Ancient Blood: Darkness Therein

Ancient Blood: Deep Red

Ancient Blood: God of the Grim

Ancient Blood: Handsome Bastard

Ancient Blood: Immaculate

Ancient Blood: In Black

Ancient Blood: Infernal

Ancient Blood: Revenge of the Court Jester

Ancient Blood: The Blood Doctor

Ancient Blood: The Holiday Stalking

Ellora's Cavemen: Jewels of the Nile I anthology

Forever Midnight anthology

Horsemen 1: Dream Stallion

Horsemen 2: Captive Stallion

Horsemen 3: Highland Stallion

Horsemen 4: Winter Stallion

Horsemen 5: Victory Stallion

Knights of the Ruby Order 1: Torn

Knights of the Ruby Order 2: Crag

Knights of the Ruby Order 3: Lock

Knights of the Ruby Order 4: Mica

Knights of the Ruby Order 5: Blaze

Licking Fire

Midnight Desires anthology

Moonlust Privateer

Northman's Passion

Raptvyn's Rogue

Vampires at Heart anthology

<u>Windswept</u>

*Like what you read here? Check out Kate's mainstream fiction titles at Cerridwen Press (<u>www.cerridwenpress.com</u>):* 

Back to Haunt You Rediscovering Thor



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

# www.ellorascave.com