



A Bitter Pill

Kelly Wallace

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Prologue

Trevor Scott sat in the too small plastic and chrome chair of San Francisco's St. Mary's Hospital holding his best friend's hand. Brian Campbell looked like a losing boxer in the tenth round. His complexion was chalky, his lips bruised and swollen. A long, purple gash sewn together with thick, black thread ran in a jagged line from his temple down to his chin.

He was a fucking mess.

"I want you to take care of Lil for me. I don't want her going to some goddamn foster home." Brian's voice was a strained whisper as he fought for his life.

Trevor tried to ignore the standing IV's, heart monitor, and other gadgets that were attached to his childhood buddy like long feelers of robotic insects. The sterile smell of disinfectant made his stomach churn as he took in a shaky breath. "Hey, man, you're not checking out just yet." Trevor aimed to keep his voice steady. "You can't leave, Bri, you're all Lil has left in this world. Hell," he laughed, "you're all *I* have left."

The Campbells had always been Trevor's second family. More of a family to him than his own parents had ever been. He'd known them since he was a five-year-old when they moved in across the street. He had been there when they'd brought Lillian home from the hospital two days after she was born; she was now a curly-headed, freckle-faced, seventeen-year-old tomboy. When his own folks died six years ago, the Campbells had taken him in, treating him like one of theirs.

He had already lost his natural parents, though there hadn't been any great love loss there, only horrific memories, but now he had lost his surrogate parents as well. He'd be damned if he was going to lose his best friend.

"Come on, buddy." Trevor lightly shook Brian's shoulder when he drifted off, eyes closed, breathing erratic. "Lil needs you."

Brian moaned in pain, letting out a few guttural coughs. Trevor nearly lost it. "Let me call the nurse. She'll give you something for the pain." He stood, unfolding his six-foot-four frame, years ago rail-thin, now muscle-bound, ready to make a run for the door. Brian's hold on his hand stopped him. His brown eyes opened wide, though incoherent.

"Trevor!" It was a hoarse whisper. "Promise me that you'll take care of Lil."

"Yeah." Trevor blinked several times. Pinching the bridge of his nose with his free hand, he fought against the emptiness gathering in his chest. "Of course I will." Brian's grip relaxed.

"Thanks, bud. Now I can go in peace." His eyelids fluttered shut again. A soft smile curved one side of his swollen mouth.

"You aren't going anywhere." Trevor didn't want him to give up hope.

"Hey, don't be bummed-out, man. I'm going to Heaven." His smile looked weak as he said, "Least I hope so." A laugh sputtered from his chest.

Trevor stood there by the chrome-framed hospital bed, looking down at pristine white sheets and the young man who was approximately the same color. The very man who had been his friend for the better part of their twenty-four years. He had never felt so helpless in his entire life. What was he supposed to do? Wait around until the cruel and uncaring hand of death claimed Brian Campbell just as it had Dorothy and Chester

Campbell? Just as it had his own folks?

Yes, dammit, that was all he could do. That, and pray. Neither activity brought him any comfort.

Trevor swore softly, clenching his jaw against the storm of pain he was experiencing once again. A pain so intense he had hoped to never again experience such soul-ripping torment. Yet here it was for the third time in only the past twenty-four hours.

When Brian had grown quiet, too quiet, Trevor's heart jumped into his throat. Seeing that the heart monitor was still beeping at regular intervals, he let out a long, shaky sigh and relaxed a little, but was too tense to sit back down.

He was glad Lil wasn't here to see this. She had flipped out last night after she heard about the car wreck. He'd nearly done the same.

Trevor's gaze followed Brian's labored breaths, the shallow rise and fall of his chest. *The lousy drunk might add another notch to his belt before the night's through.* Brian looked bad. Real bad.

He and Lil had been invited to go along with them last night, but he'd had to work and Lil wanted to get some extra sleep before pitching at the baseball game that was to be held at the high school she attended.

She didn't go to the game. He didn't go to work. If they had gone to the barbecue last night, they would both more than likely be dead.

The way he felt right now, he wished he was.

Tonight Lil would go back home with him. Perhaps she would be staying at his place for the next who-knows-how-long. She'd be eighteen in just a couple of months. Knowing her, she'd double-up her hours at the department store and find a place of her own. Lil was that independent. That damn stubborn.

"Trevor?" Brian frowned as he tried to focus.

"I'm here." Trevor bent down, closer to Brian's pulverized face so that he could be seen. "What do you need? Just tell me. I'll get it for you."

"Just one more thing." He gave a short laugh. "I sure have a lot of requests for a man whose dying, don't I?"

"Nah. What are friends for?"

"When I go, I want you to have a *Corona* for me. I hear God doesn't allow liquor in Heaven." He smiled again, a boyish dimple appearing in his left cheek. A reminder of how young he was. Too damn young to die.

Trevor gave an amused snort. "I'll tell you what, Bri," he tried to keep the tears from showing in his voice, "I'll down an entire case."

Brian lifted a weak hand in the thumb-up position.

The next thing Trevor heard was the blare of the heart monitor. Felt Brian's hand slip lifeless from his own. He didn't have to look up at the howling machine to know it was flat-lining.

Brian Campbell, captain of his college football team, future psychologist, heartbreaker to at least five women a month, his very best friend, was dead.

I am not going to start bawling, Trevor counseled himself, resting his forehead on the side rail of the bed. He forced away any and all ballistic thoughts, when all he wanted to do right now was go kill the scumbag bastard that did this. But he couldn't. Violence never solved anything, as he well knew. Absently he ran a finger over the bump on his nose, sliding the appendage under his left eye to wipe away a tear that had spilled.

Besides, he needed a clear head. He had to tell Lil. From this day forward he was now her family—and she his. They were alone in the world. All they had from this moment on was each other.

Before Trevor had a chance to ponder over any more grim thoughts, the door burst open, a froth of white and drab-green pouring through the opening, spilling over to the bed where Brian lay so still.

Somebody pushed him out of the way so they could attempt resuscitation. Voices were loud as directions were shouted. The whole scene soon reached a crescendo of frustration.

Limbs quaking and brain numb, Trevor turned around and left the medical personnel to their vain efforts of bringing back the dead.

As he stumbled down the endless corridor, he headed toward the exit, knowing he would soon be facing the toughest situation he had ever encountered: Telling Lil that her brother was dead and that he would be watching over her.

Too damn bad they'd never gotten along.

Chapter One

Eleven years later

Lil sat cross-legged on the floor while Trevor lay draped over her sofa like tinsel on a Christmas tree. Both held a white quart-sized container of their favorite Chinese food. Lil had sweet and sour shrimp with steamed rice, while Trevor devoured his Kung Pao chicken—extra spicy. This was their customary Friday night dinner get-together and in-depth conversation that was guaranteed to get the old brain cells puffing and panting.

Tonight's topic: single motherhood.

"I mean, I'm nearly thirty-years-old," Lil said, pointing at him with a white plastic fork. "I've all but given up on finding a husband. My biological clock is in its final hours. I don't want to waste what fertile years I have left waiting for Prince Charming to come along and sweep me off my feet." She snorted, placing the fork and empty cardboard container on the coffee table in front of her. "I could be dead and buried before he ever came along. In fact, I seriously doubt that there *is* a man for me out there in the world."

"I know what you mean," Trevor said around his last bite of chicken. "I think I'll stay solo too, but my decision is by choice."

"I could be a single parent." Lil leaned back against the couch, drawing her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. "A lot of women have done it. Why not me? I'll just find some guy I know reasonably well, that way I won't be taking the risk of contracting some god-awful disease, ask him to go to bed with me, and when I get pregnant, cut off the relationship." She shrugged, looking right at him. "All I want is a baby."

"I don't know whether or not to take you seriously."

Lil frowned. "What do you mean by that?"

A slow shrug lifted Trevor's shoulders. "I don't know. Women have a strange way about them occasionally, especially at certain times during the month. They either get pissy, weepy, or, in your case, melancholy."

"You know, you can be a real ass sometimes." She sniffed, absently twining a finger through one of her curls.

"Okay, okay." Trevor held up a hand, munching on his last sauce-covered peanut. "You're looking for a surrogate father in order to create a baby. To add the final building block onto your well-structured life."

Lil nodded.

Trevor lifted his brows. Okay, he'd go along with her on this. "You'd make a great mother. You seem ready. Fine, I'll help you choose a father." Lil smiled then stuck her tongue at him when he said, "Even if I do think this is a crazy-assed idea. How about Joe Reinhold over in automotive?" he asked, setting his empty container next to Lil's on the table. He shifted into a more horizontal position, his head resting on one arm of the couch, his shoeless feet propped up on the other end.

"Have you seen his hands? All that grease?" Lil shuddered. "I wouldn't let him touch me with a ten-foot wrench!"

Trevor let out an amused laugh.

Lil stood, lifting his sock-clad feet so she could sit on the sofa. When she was seated and comfortable, Trevor rested his legs on top of Lil's thighs, looking at her through lowered lashes. "Comfy?" she dryly asked. When he grinned, she rolled her eyes at him, but didn't attempt to remove the big hairy legs that were sprawled all over her.

Trevor stuck a finger in his mouth, deep in thought, then pulled it out and snapped, "I have an idea!"

Lil groaned. "Please, not another one of your lousy ideas."

"Since when have I ever had a single lousy idea?"

She lifted a brow at him. "Oh, how about the time when you vowed to make us both rich, insisting that homemade silk was the perfect market? So, without warning, you brought over two thousand silkworms in ten different aquariums, looking at me with those sad, brown puppy eyes of yours, begging for my help. As if I knew what to do with two thousand silkworms! A number of weeks later we had a whole herd of white moths, three-hundred cocooned corpses, and not even the tiniest scrap of silk."

Trevor grimaced. "That was different."

"Okay. How about the time you rented a hotdog cart and had one of your blonde bimbos push it along the streets of downtown as she wore a string bikini?"

"Hey," Trevor interrupted, "I made five hundred bucks that day selling those hotdogs."

"True. You also lost every penny when you had to pay the fine you received for peddling without a license, and whatever-her-name-was was arrested for indecent exposure." Lil laughed. "I do have to admit though that your gym project has come along quite well. I'm amazed at all of the arrogant muscle-heads who've joined in the past two years. *Men!*"

"Now do you want to hear my idea or not?"

"Let's hear it, Einstein."

Trevor feigned indignation. "How about Frank over in Electronics?"

Lil wrinkled her pert, freckled nose. "Strike up another lousy idea for Trevor Scott. He's too wimpy."

"Kevin Greene?" As soon as he'd said the man's name, Trevor knew it was a bad idea.

"Kevin Greene, huh?" Lil's lips curved in a seductive smile. He didn't miss that wicked spark in her eyes either. "You mean hunk-of-the-month, Playgirl-centerfold, hurt-me-bad, Kevin Greene?"

Trevor frowned. "I don't like the way you just said that."

"Now what are you talking about?"

"In all the years I've known you, not once have I seen your libido kick in. It definitely *won't* be Kevin Greene."

"Oh, stop acting like a jealous brother."

Trevor was wide-eyed as he pointed to his chest. "Jealous? Me?" He went silent before saying, "Oh, hell, maybe I am just a tad jealous, but I have to watch out for you. That man has an ego ten times bigger than his two-hundred-plus pound body and twice as many women lining up to worship him."

"So?"

"*Not* Kevin." Trevor was getting edgy.

"Why not?" Lil absently trailed a short-trimmed nail over the scar in his right knee.

The surgery had been ages ago, yet he still walked with a limp whenever he was overly tired or the weather got too cold. Living in foggy San Francisco played havoc with him quite often. "It would be a night I'm sure I would never forget." She indulged in a moment of fantasy centered on her and hunky Kevin, sweaty and tangled amongst her bed sheets. Focusing back on Trevor, she pulled one of his leg hairs, making him yelp. He knew she did it on purpose, just to bug him.

"Hey!" He reached down to rub his leg. "Better watch it, Pill."

Lil ignored his warning and went on, saying, "I wouldn't have to worry about getting emotionally involved with him since he only loves himself." She grinned, displaying the same set of dimples Brian had possessed. "Besides, I'll be getting a beautiful baby out of it." She sighed.

"Not Kevin." Trevor swung his feet to the floor, missing Lil's nose by a fraction of an inch, and sat upright.

Lil frowned. "And why not, may I ask?"

Leaning forward with his forearms on his knees, fingers steepled under his beard-shadowed chin, Trevor thought hard and fast. "He's ... uh... he's gay." He snapped his fingers, jerking his head in her direction. "That's it, he's gay!"

Lil's mouth dropped open. "Kevin Greene? Gay? But he's so hunky!"

Trevor got up to get himself another lite beer, mumbling, "Yeah, well, people can shock you these days." He felt like scum telling Lil that lie, but he couldn't bear the thought of Kevin manhandling that little body of hers as if she was nothing more than a piece of meat. Another one of his adoring groupies. Lil needed to be treated gently, worshipped tenderly, even if it was for only one night.

He opened the fridge, extracting a clear, long-necked bottle, twisting off the cap and swallowing long and deep as he studied the woman in the living room who was clearing the table of their dinner debris.

She was wearing a blue, faded football jersey. *THE PILL* and the number sixteen were on the front and back in big white numbers and letters, though they were now pale and cracked. He had given her that jersey for her sixteenth birthday, and was surprised that she still wore it after all these years. Each time he saw it on her he figured it would head for the garbage rather than another washing. But she was a sentimental one and continued to hold onto it.

When Lil was younger she had inherited the title of *Lil the Pill*; a nickname given to her by Trevor himself. He was always complaining about how she got in the way, was always a pest following him and Brian around when they were all kids. A royal pain in the ass. A pill.

As the years passed, The Pill name stuck, but Trevor no longer found her to be a pest. On the contrary, she was his very best friend. His companion. His solace. She was also a freckle-nosed, curly-headed pip-squeak who got on his nerves from time to time.

Brushing past him as he lounged in the kitchen doorway, Lil dumped the empty cartons into the orange plastic garbage can that sat next to the fridge; closing the door he'd left open, retrieving the cap off the floor that he had tossed in the general area of the trash, yet missed. "You really are quite a slob."

She went to stand next to Trevor, absently taking the empty beer bottle he handed her, discarding it in the trash can. She walked back over to him, chewing thoughtfully on her lower lip. "That only leaves old Mr. Dower over in Linens. I'm not *that* desperate!"

A sigh seeped from her lungs as she went back into the living room, plopping down on the leaf-print couch. “Everyone else is married, spoken for, or otherwise unsuitable. I really want a baby, Trevor.” She cast him a woeful glance. “Isn’t there anybody who’d be willing to sleep with me a couple of times so I could get my baby?”

Pushing himself away from the doorframe, Trevor went to sit next to Lil, their bare thighs touching. “How about me?” he suggested, surprising them both.

Chapter Two

“Pardon?” Lil arched a dark red-brown brow at him as if he were insane. Unlike her, Trevor often jumped into situations without giving a second thought to the potential outcome.

Trevor stayed silent a moment, looking a bit shocked, but ultimately said, “Think about it. You’ve known me your entire life, all about my family background, so there wouldn’t be any genetic throwbacks. We’re best friends, so we wouldn’t have to worry about getting emotionally involved, aside from friendship and trying to get you pregnant. I’m charming, humorous, handsome...”

“You left out humble,” Lil supplied.

“That too.” He smiled widely, flashing her with those white, if not slightly crooked teeth of his. That smile had won more than his fair share of women, though Lil had never been one to fall under Trevor Scott’s hypnotic charms. Probably because she knew it was all a big act. She liked honesty; Trevor liked to say what one wanted to hear.

Although, if she were truly honest with herself, she would admit that on more than one occasion she *had* thought of Trevor in the lover role, especially since her twenty-first birthday. At the most unexpected times that evening would dig itself out from her attic of memories and pop into her mind heating her blood all over again.

He had brought over a bottle of champagne and some burgers to celebrate her official leap into adulthood. After they had finished their meal and a couple of glasses of the pale pink liquor, Trevor had leaned over, brushed his lips lightly over hers, and kissed her—long and hard.

She was sure that he had meant it to be a chaste birthday kiss, but it had resulted in the most erotic thing she had ever experienced. It had been slow and deep and exquisite.

And Trevor had broken it off but quick.

Not once since then had Trevor, or herself, mentioned the unexpected kiss. Lil took it as pure rejection and tried to put it behind her. It wasn’t that Trevor was cold-hearted, it was simply the fact that she wasn’t his type in the least. Fine. She accepted that. Still, her fanciful head continued to relive the episode more often than she would like.

“Think about it, Lil.” He was excited now, up and pacing in front of her, bringing her out of the bittersweet memory.

Her question was weighted with disbelief as she said, “Do you *know* what you’re suggesting?” Oh lord, Lil thought, he was really getting into this harebrained idea, and she was at the core of it!

“It’s the perfect solution. You don’t want to get married and neither do I.” He stopped his back and forth movements, looking down at her, hands planted on his lean hips. “We’ve come to terms with the fact that we will forever be spouseless. And I’ll always be around whenever you need a baby-sitter. You don’t have to worry about contracting any diseases since I’ve always been a firm believer in using condoms and getting regular check-ups. So how about it?”

Lil’s eyebrows felt glued to the top of her forehead. “You’re serious, aren’t you?”

He crouched down in front of her, taking her hands in his. They were callused from hours of lifting weights. Strong, solid, dependable hands. It felt good, and that bothered

her. She had long ago accepted that he only thought of her as a sister, and he had always been like a big brother to her.

If that was true, then why was she suddenly having hot flashes? Why was her blood spinning out of control at his suggestion? Why was there an insistent throbbing between her thighs at just the thought of Trevor making love to her?

Because you find him attractive, the little voice inside her accused. *And haven't you often wondered what Trevor would be like in bed?* Her hot flashes became a head-to-toe blush at her line of thinking. *He has to be joking*, she counseled herself. Trevor often had an odd sense of humor.

"I've never been more serious about anything in my life," he said almost solemnly. And Lil believed him. Trevor might be a lot of things, but when he got that certain look on his face, when the macho facade slipped—which wasn't very often—he was telling the truth.

"I—I don't know." Though her words were hesitant, a sharp thrill ran through her at the very prospect. Trevor Scott and Lillian Campbell ... lovers?

The idea was rather intriguing. Trevor was ruggedly handsome—if you went for rock-hard bodies, a crooked nose that had been broken more than once, dark hair that was a tad too long, heavily-lidded eyes that made one think of sex, and a personality that could charm the scales off a dragon—and she just so happened to go for that sort of thing. At least she wouldn't have to put a bag over his head when they had sex.

Lil looked him up and down as if seeing him for the first time. He wore cutoff sweat shorts, a raggedy tank top and a pair of white sweat socks, nothing else. His body was magnificent now that she allowed herself the opportunity to really look. She knew he'd be gentle in bed. He was, after all, her best friend and now, soon to be lover—at least until she got pregnant.

Then another thought ran through her mind and settled in the pit of her stomach. What if they had to have sex more than once? What if it took months to get her pregnant? Lil's wry smile was inward. *Would it be all that bad?* No. In fact, it would probably be wonderful. All of the physical aspects, but no strings, no involvement of the heart aside from friendship.

Of course, she would make sure she didn't lose her head over this thing. It would be business only.

"Well, do I meet up with your standards?" Evidently Trevor hadn't missed her scrupulous inspection of his body. "I could take my clothes off if you'd like to see what you're getting into." He flashed a toothy crocodile smile.

"Not just yet." She tried not to appear too eager. "How about you? Would you like me to strip so you can view the wares?" She batted her lashes, trying to act coy and seductive. She made him laugh instead.

Trevor stood up, reaching down to tweak her nose. "I've already seen you naked," he stated, replanting himself on the other end of the sofa. "Quite a few times, in fact."

"What are you talking about?" Her brow wrinkled in concern.

"I used to change your diapers." He grinned widely. "Gave you a bath on more than one occasion, too."

Lil rolled her eyes. "I'm sure I've changed since then, don't you think?"

It was Trevor's turn to frown before exhaling a sharp breath through his nose. "Uh ... yeah ... I guess you have."

“Anyway, I’ll wait until the night we decide to follow through with this deal.” She kept her gaze on him, appearing cool and levelheaded, though she could feel her entire body catch fire.

Trevor sat up ramrod straight. “You’re accepting my offer?”

“As you said, it’s the logical thing to do. No strings, just two friends making a baby.” She hoped she sounded businesslike and not like an infatuated adolescent.

“Great!” He was on his feet again. “I’m ready when you are.” He started to remove his once-red-now-bleached-pink tank top and Lil caught sight of the thick downy hair covering his abdomen.

She wanted so badly to reach out and run her fingers through the nest before her—she bet it felt like springy silk—but resisted the temptation. “Don’t be such an eager beaver.” Her voice was small and just a little bit breathless. “I need to get an ovulation test from the drug store, then, when the time is right, we’ll do it.”

He grimaced. “All business, huh?” Trevor plopped down on the couch like a sulking child. “You know I hate waiting, and I really hate not getting my own way.”

“Afraid that once you have a chance to think about it, you’ll come to your senses and take back your offer?”

“I’m not like that, and you know it. Once I commit to something, I stick it out to the end. No matter how horrid it happens to be.” He pinned her with a wide smile.

Lil slapped his arm and said, “I don’t want any hit or miss. After all, you’ll be doing most of the work.” She felt her body flame once again as her mind envisioned Trevor on top of her, his hard body slick with the sweat, his hard dick filling her. “Anyway,” she cleared her mind of the haze-inducing images, “I’m sure that having sex with Lillian-Tomboy-Campbell isn’t your idea of a thrilling evening.” Not that she was putting herself down, it’s just that Trevor’s taste in women ran toward the blonde, leggy type—just as his mother had been—which she herself definitely wasn’t.

“Hold on a second.” He lifted a big, square hand in a stopping gesture. “First of all, I don’t *have sex*, I make love.” His tone was indignant. “Second of all, you’re no longer a tomboy.” He crooked a finger under her chin, lifting her unpainted face to him. “You’ve grown into quite a woman, Lil. Try looking in a mirror sometime.”

“I have.” She swiped his hand away, crossing her arms over her chest. “I still look like a tomboy. The only difference now is that I have breasts.” She hiked her chin up a few digits. She watched as Trevor’s gaze drifted to the front of her faded T-shirt.

“Besides, I’m like a sister to you.” Lil tried to get her head on straight.

“Yeah, but you’re not *my* sister,” he said in a low, wicked voice that had her insides melting. Trevor shook his head. “All this talk about sex is getting me hot.” He jumped to his feet.

“Where are you going?” Lil asked in bewilderment.

“Home,” he managed to choke out, looking down at the lower half of his body. His dick was pressing against his shorts, testing the elastic quality of his briefs to the extreme.

Lil pretended not to care that he was aroused, though her pulse flipped at the sight. “Why?” She stood also.

“Let’s just say that certain parts of my body are very eager to start making that baby. I’d better leave. All business, remember?” He bent over, slipping on his fatigued running sneakers that had somehow lost their laces over time.

“All business?” Unfortunately, she did remember. Damn! Why did she have to tell

him about the ovulation test? If she hadn't, they could be in bed right now having sex. Correction, *making love*, Trevor didn't have sex. She then remembered that the whole idea behind this arrangement was to get her pregnant, not to satisfy a sudden wave of intense desire and curiosity.

"All business," she reconfirmed, walking over to where Trevor stood stiffly by the front door, hands thrust into the pockets of his shorts. "Besides, you might want some time to think this thing through." Lil was sorry she'd said that, but knew it was sound advice. She didn't want any regrets when the baby of her dreams was a reality—and half Trevor's. The thought caused a little shiver to erupt in the core of her.

"Don't worry, I'll have plenty of time to think things through tonight. Hell, any night." He smiled weakly. Though Lil knew he'd never thought anything through in his life, she did know what the comment meant. Night times were bad for Trevor. Insomnia had plagued him since childhood.

"You want to sack-out here tonight?" Lil offered.

"Nah. My head's in a spin right about now."

She sensed the air of tension between them and it had her spirits taking a dive. "I'll let you know when I'm ready." She attempted a relaxed smile.

Trevor shrugged. "Sure." He grabbed his windbreaker from the small table beside the door then bent his head to receive Lil's customary kiss on the cheek. Instead of turning her head as she usually did, she let her gaze linger on his lips. She heard him make a noise in the back of his throat that sounded like surrender. And his lips touched hers. At that moment she felt a current of electricity course through her body. He didn't reach out to grab her, didn't slide his tongue into her willing mouth, but his soft, open-mouthed kiss left her utterly boneless.

Trevor pulled back only slightly, his eyes mere slits. He cleared his throat before saying, "Bye, Pill."

"Bye." She followed him out the door to stand on the small porch, absently waving as she watched Trevor climb into his hardtop Wrangler and drive off to his place only a few miles away, near the Civic Center.

When he was no longer in sight, she went back inside, closing the door behind her. Placing a finger over lips that still burned from their kiss, she went to get ready for bed, anticipation flowing heavily through her veins, hoping she wasn't getting in over her head with this thing. She prayed she had made the right decision in accepting Trevor's offer.

Chapter Three

A week later Lil was officially ready.

She was also nervous as hell.

Since last Friday she had thought and re-thought over Trevor's proposition. As they had both concluded, it was logical. It was also very weird. Before, she and Trevor would be completely at ease in each other's company. Now, they still were, to a degree, but there was also something lying just below the surface. Something that she often caught glimpses of in those dark, sleepy eyes of his. Expectation. Anxiety. Desire.

And it was driving her bonkers!

Trevor had been patient, though he continually tossed her one of his lady-killer smiles every chance he got while they were at the gym. She wanted to be the one in charge of the situation, yet she felt like a helpless mouse being stalked by a big, lanky, smooth-talking feline.

Of course, it was just pure nerves on her part. Trevor was still only Trevor. He hadn't changed one iota since making his generous offer. Yet she felt as if she was beginning to change. She was seeing things—seeing *him*—through different eyes. She was thinking things she had never thought of before. Well, not much, anyway.

She wondered what his kisses would be like—she only had two to base herself on and they were cut short. Would they be calm and chaste, as the one they'd shared last Friday? Or soul-deep and wet, as the one they had shared eight years ago? How did he look when naked and aroused? How would he be in bed? Would he be soft and gentle, or wildly passionate? Would he hold her afterward and whisper sweet nothings, or would he fall asleep, exhausted? Would he try to bring her pleasure also, or would he simply let the moment carry him away and think only of himself?

And the thing that really scared her was the fact that she hoped it took far longer than one time for her to get pregnant.

Why? Because Trevor was deeper inside of her than she cared to admit. He was the man who had watched over her like a doting father ever since her parents and brother had died. The same man who nicknamed her Lil the Pill because she tagged along with him and Brian so much. The same man who threatened to wring her neck because she came home ten minutes past midnight on the night of her senior prom—an event which she hadn't gone to only because she hadn't been invited.

Trevor had spent eighty dollars on a dress for her and she hadn't had the nerve to tell him that none of the guys wanted to be seen with a tomboy. So she had stashed the dress under her bed, and sneaked out while he was at work. When she came back she faked her way through a whole fairy tale night of magic, and had never told him different since then.

That beautiful, wonderful man was going to be her ... lover. It was mind-boggling.

Now she had to tell him that the time was right in her cycle. That they could start in on making that baby this very evening.

She would be sure to keep her perspective through the whole affair though. Wouldn't get all star-struck and start thinking of Trevor in the father and husband role. This was strictly a business deal. She was getting a baby, and he was getting...

What *would* Trevor be getting out of this? This went way beyond the duty of a friend. Even as close as they were. She frowned, grabbing her cell phone and keys. That was one question that continued to plague her. She would be sure to ask him this morning.

Her shift didn't start for another hour, so she figured now was the time. She would go over to Trevor's place, get his lazy bones out of bed, tell him the news, and hope he would take it from there. She had no idea how these things were supposed to work. Would they simply make love once and see what happened? Would he want to take her out to dinner before they went to bed? She snorted at the very idea. Yeah, right, as if she was a real girlfriend?

Oh, well. She would simply follow his lead and protest if she didn't agree with anything she felt was demeaning or unfair.

After running her fingers through her hair to spruce up her curls, she opened the front door, knowing she would come back home tonight a changed woman—perhaps, a pregnant one also.

* * * *

"Trevor," she called as she opened his door with her duplicate key. Her ears only took in silence; her eyes, the junk scattered from here to eternity. A pair of dirty socks hung from a lampshade. A set of dumbbells sat on the kitchen table and were half-hidden beneath the Sunday funnies. Yesterday's breakfast—swollen, mushed-out cereal in a wooden serving bowl—sat on the floor near the television. Yes, Trevor was certainly a slob.

Going into his kitchen-living room combination, she rinsed out his coffee pot and put a fresh batch on to drip then washed two coffee cups since none were left clean, and placed them on the counter. While she was at it, she stuck a load of dishes in the dishwasher.

"This man has to hire a maid," she said with a disgusted gasp as she opened the refrigerator and got a whiff of an open can of sardines. Retrieving bread and butter, hoping they wouldn't taste of the strong smelling fish, she laughed to herself, thinking that any housekeeper who walked into this battlefield would turn right back around and run screaming for the door—if she didn't trip and fall over something on her way out.

A few times a week she stopped by to dig him out of the mountain of rubble and make him coffee and toast—her one and only culinary masterpiece. Trevor always appreciated it as he was a bigger dunce in the kitchen than she was. Although he had mastered the use of his microwave, his coffee still tasted like battery acid.

While they had lived together for those few months until her eighteenth birthday, they had existed on TV dinners and fast food. The same was true now that they lived apart. She always blamed her misfortunes in the kitchen due to faulty cookware. Trevor was more honest, saying that they both simply hated cooking.

As she was musing over mundane thoughts and buttering the toast, she heard bare feet slapping against linoleum. Trevor, king of the walking dead, was stumbling into the room. She felt her blood go hot and sneaked a peek at him as he opened the fridge, pulled out a plastic half-gallon container of orange juice, unscrewed the cap and took several large swallows before putting it back—minus the cap, letting that drop from his hand and onto the floor.

Coming up behind her, he put his big arms around her waist, resting his chin atop her head as if they were an old married couple. "I had a dream about you last night," he mumbled before yawning. "About us." A low hum came from his throat, vibrating against the back of her skull; a sound that soon turned into soft snoring.

"You don't say?" Lil didn't believe him for one minute. Sure, he probably had a dream, a very erotic one as his cuddle-up behavior proved, but of her? No way! He had probably dreamt of Raquel; the woman who came into the gym three times a week to have Trevor assist her on the Nautilus machines. She was tall and blonde and had legs up to her ears. And she had the hots for Trevor. Lil always wondered why Trevor hadn't nibbled her bait. She shrugged. Probably just waiting until the time was right to make one of his customary smooth moves.

"Trevor." She jabbed him in the ribs with an elbow as she was pressed against the edge of the counter, the rim gouging into her stomach as he leaned heavily against her. "Wake up. Do I look like a bed to you?"

His body jerked back to consciousness. "No, but I expect to have you in mine sometime soon." His voice was low and slow and husky. It was a deep, rumbling sound that seeped from his naked chest and into her back, winding its way downward, slithering into her lower abdomen, coiling between her thighs. She inhaled a sharp breath as a wave of desire washed over her. Why hadn't she noticed before how sexy his voice sounded in the morning? Probably because she had forbidden herself to think of him in such terms.

"Well, as a matter of fact." She set the knife down, turning around in the confines of his slumberous embrace to look up at eyes that were more than half closed—and she thought about sex all over again. This was definitely getting out of hand, she reprimanded herself, reconfirming the fact that this was strictly a business deal and nothing to get spellbound over. "I came over to tell you that we can begin whenever you'd like. I'm at my monthly peak, and well..." Her boldness suddenly deserted her and she ducked out of his arms to place the plate of toast on the small table a few feet away from the stove.

Taking up one of the two chairs, she turned to see Trevor leaning against the refrigerator scratching a lethargic hand through his sleep-mussed hair. He yawned two more times before attempting to walk the entire six feet to the table, dressed in his usual sleeping attire of ancient running shorts and nothing else. At one time they had been gray and a whole lot thicker. Now they were more white than gray and looked like a bunch of weft threads held together by nothing short of a whisper and a prayer.

"Good lord, don't you own any pajamas?" Lil looked over the ragged things that showed off his muscular thighs and had somehow become snugger since the last time she saw them on him—which was last week.

And when had he sprouted all of that glorious chest hair?

He slumped into the empty chair across from her, scrubbing his hands over his face in an attempt to revive himself. After shaking the cobwebs loose, he frowned, looking down at the little-bit-of-nothings in question. "They never bothered you before." He looked back at her. Reaching across the table, he took one of her hands in his. "What's wrong, Lil?"

She shoved a mug of coffee at him. Trevor mutely thanked her with a nod of his head before wrapping one big palm around the cup, lifting it to his lips and drinking long and deep.

"Nothing's wrong." She began picking toast crumbs off the table, sprinkling them

onto the floor. “I just ... don’t know where to start with this ... arrangement.” Her eyes were everywhere except on the half-naked man across from her.

“Hey.” He smiled, coming out of his nocturnal daze. “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of everything.” His hand was still holding hers, his thumb stroking the underside of her wrist where her pulse beat wildly. “You’re scared, huh?”

“Yeah.” She looked up at him, her gaze resting on that silken mat of chest hair.

“That’s why I wanted to be the man for you, Lil. You don’t have to be afraid of me. I won’t take advantage of this ... arrangement.” A sleepy smile spread across his lips.

“Thanks.” Her own smile was a tremulous one.

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“No prob.” He let her hand go, taking a slice of toast, consuming it in four clean-cut bites as he leaned back in the chair, portraying a cool-headed exterior. Truthfully, he was nervous as hell. For one thing, Lil kept staring at him. His chest, his legs, his shorts—the front of his shorts, more precisely. It made him uneasy.

The other thing was that he found himself staring right back at her. Her snug jeans that sculpted her hips, thighs and perfect little ass. The T-shirt which she wore tucked in accentuating her full breasts. When *had* Lil developed full breasts? Her halo of cinnamon curls shining atop her head and framing her smooth, pretty face void of any concealing make-up.

And he couldn’t get the feel of her out of his body as he had pressed up against her while she stood at the counter less than five minutes ago. She was now forever emblazoned upon his front; all the way from chest to thigh and every place in between. Especially the places in between. His dick jolted at the thought. It seemed to have a mind of its own, and pointed straight in Lil’s direction like the needle of a compass. He hoped she didn’t take a peek under the table right about now. Then again, he hoped she would.

He had indeed been dreaming about her, and he’d been physically aroused when he’d rambled out here, plastering himself to her backside. Had she noticed?

This was very, very weird. When he’d made his gallant offer as a surrogate father, he thought it would be a piece of cake. Boom, boom, and be done with it. Put it behind him just like that damned kiss eight years ago. But ever since last Friday, he’d started thinking of all the ways he could make love to Lil. In his bed, in her bed, on this very kitchen table. Her on the bottom, her on the top, side by side, standing up. His libido seemed to be stuck in overdrive.

“Well, I’d better get going.” Lil got to her feet. “I have to open the store this morning. I’ll be doing inventory most of the day,” she said to explain the lack of her customary blue slacks and blazer that was uniform for all supes.

“Oh,” he mumbled as she went to stand next to him, her body heat mingling with his own. Trevor noticed she was wearing perfume this morning. Lil never wore perfume. He wished she hadn’t adopted this new practice as the soft, wood-floral drifted to his nostrils, enveloping his brain in a blanket of sensuality.

It was hard to think with her so close, but he put it down to the unique avenue their close friendship would be taking. A business partnership as she’d put it. A partnership that would be consummated this very evening. Just the thought of it had him fighting off another wave of desire that lanced through his loins.

He looked up at her, appearing the epitome of confidence. As if he’d done this sort of thing a thousand times before. “How about if I pick you up at eight tonight? I’ll have

Rick baby-sit the gym. He *is* the assistant manager. He'll probably love being in charge." He shrugged. "Maybe we could do something before we ... uh ... you know." Trevor actually felt himself blush.

"Sounds good." She bent her head to plant a kiss on his cheek as she usually did when leaving, but Trevor didn't turn his face this time to offer up the spot. As if payback from Friday's kiss, he kept his steady gaze on her as her lips came closer, hesitated, then ultimately touched his.

Trevor wanted to pull her down onto his lap, to deepen the soft pressure of her mouth upon his. To rekindle the memory of that long ago kiss. To find out if she affected him as badly now as she had that night. But she was scared. And he had to admit that he was too—just a little. So he let her call the shot, leaving his lips pliable, yet firmly closed, though his tongue was ready to break through the barrier of his teeth.

And he nearly melted in his chair.

One kiss. One soft little touch from Lil's mouth had him worked up like the dirtiest French kiss he'd ever experienced in the past. *Too, too weird*, he thought again.

When she broke the feather-light contact, she stood upright, placing a trembling hand over her lips. "Oh, my." She looked slightly bewildered. Evidently she was feeling the same strange connection that he was.

And now he knew that the eight-years-ago kiss hadn't been a fluke. They affected each other like a match to gasoline. And now he knew he had been right to break that kiss off. But now he had brilliantly volunteered to impregnate Lil. He couldn't back out. He'd given his word. He just prayed he wouldn't be consumed in the flames they created and would come out of this thing uncharred.

"I'll see you tonight then," she said on a low, breathy sigh.

"Tonight," Trevor whispered, watching her firm ass with great admiration as she made her way to his front door. She didn't saunter. She didn't swish or sway. And still, he felt as if he'd fall out of his chair at any second.

If he looked inside himself he would find that he was quite excited about their coming date this evening. More eager than he'd been in a long time. He kept reminding himself that it was only Lil.

Maybe he'd been burying himself in work for too long. Ever since he'd opened the gym, he'd only had one or two dates a month—if that. Hadn't had sex for a good six months. That had to be the reason for all of these erupting hormones.

"Bye." Lil waved and she was gone.

Not bothering to finish his toast or coffee, Trevor bolted from the table, overturning his chair in the process, and ran to bathroom for a cold shower. An *ice-cold* shower.

Chapter Four

“Shit, Lil!” Trevor closed the bedroom door, pressing her against it, his legs in a wide stance to accommodate her height and to fit her more snugly against the hard bulge in his jeans. “Why didn’t you tell me it could be like this?” His mouth was all over her at once.

“I never knew it could be like this.” She hung on to his shoulders as he practically devoured her whole. “Oh!” She gasped as he found a particularly sensitive spot behind her left ear.

Trevor made grunting noises of satisfaction, continuing his exploration of her neck while inside his emotions fluctuated between profound passion and downright terror. He couldn’t be feeling this way toward Lil. Could he? Perhaps he *shouldn’t* be feeling this way about the woman he had grown up with. It didn’t seem right. And yet, at the same time, nothing had ever felt so right in his life.

He tried to pretend that he was with somebody else. Even went so far as to superimpose Raquel’s sultry face and willowy body over Lil’s. It was no use though. In his mind, in his heart, and especially his body, he knew it was Lil who had him feeling this passionate, this alive, this wanted.

“Shouldn’t we be taking our clothes off?” she offered when he had felt and licked and kissed every inch of her through the silken barrier of her pant suit.

“I want to make this night special,” he murmured in her ear, thinking that if he’d known she was this passionate, he would have made love to her the second he’d laid his lips on her all those years ago.

“It already is,” she whispered.

“It’s so good.”

“Yes.”

He cupped her ass in the palms of his hands, bringing her closer to him. Pressing her tight against the length of his dick. He rubbed up and down, bringing a gasp from her lips. Trevor smiled in the darkness of her bedroom, happy as hell he was bringing her to such heights of lust. “I want it to last.”

“It will probably take me a while to get pregnant,” she reasoned. “We’ll more than likely have to do this again.”

He growled. “No problem.” Trevor lifted her into his arms, walking over to the bed. He then let her slide down the length of him until her feet touched the floor.

With practiced ease, he stripped off his shirt and shoes, his jeans, briefs and socks. He then went to work on the small pearl buttons of Lil’s blouse, letting it fall to the floor at their feet. Her pants and sandals were next, leaving her in only a lacy white bra and equally lacy panties. “I don’t usually indulge in such fancy whims as sexy underwear, but thought that tonight called for satin and lace.” She gave a nervous laugh. “Cotton undies, though comfortable, aren’t very romantic.”

He switched on the lamp at the side of her bed, covering her body in a soft glow. “Mmm ... that’s better.” He looked her up and down. “Nice,” Trevor murmured, running a finger inside the lace waistband. The contrast between her soft, warm skin and the lacy material created a slow burn in his balls.

Before Lil could blink, her bra and panties were gone, whisked away by Trevor's deft hands. Suddenly his eyes widened and he stopped stone-still. "Merciful heaven above," he hoarsely whispered.

Lil looked at him. "Is something wrong?" She reached up to cover her breasts, but Trevor brushed them aside.

"You're absolutely perfect, Lil. I never knew you had hips. Or breasts, for that matter." He took hold of her hands, holding them out to her sides. "Why do you keep a body like *this* hidden beneath jeans and T-shirts? Hell, why do you wear clothes at all?" He grinned.

Lil sighed. "Quit giving me your sugar-coated baloney, Trevor Emery Scott, and make love to me." She lay back on the bed, not bothering to peel back the spread and sheet.

"That glib remark really hurt." Sure he was used to saying the right things to get what he wanted. "I'm not trying to butter you up." He never had to butter Lil up. He was speaking the truth. She truly was the most sexy, sensual woman he had ever been with. Evidently, she wasn't ready to believe the truth just yet. He never realized before how vulnerable she was. She always appeared to be strong-willed and confident, but once in the bedroom, Lil was definitely off balance.

"We've got a baby to make." She didn't look totally convinced by his admission. "Come here," she whispered, holding her arms open wide and Trevor went to her. For his pleasure as much as hers, he worshipped every inch of her tight, perfect body. From the top of her head to the soles of her feet, concentrating on a few important areas in between. He suckled and tugged at her breasts then kissed the honeyed area between her thighs.

Lil moved around, moaning his name, making him harder and hotter than he ever thought possible. If he didn't know better, if they weren't such close friends, if he didn't know that this was all purely a business arrangement, he would actually allow himself to believe that he and Lil could be dynamite lovers on a full-time basis.

When she was clutching at his hair, when she was slick and ready for him, Trevor moved up and over her body. Poised at the entrance to her, his dick pulsed with anticipation, his heart pumping blood overtime. He felt her fingers digging into his back as he entered her. He stopped, frowning down at her. "You should have been wine and dined."

"We were too eager." Her breathy chuckle was hot in his ear. "Pizza and beer were fine. More my style, anyway."

He looked into her eyes, not sure of what he was looking for. "No turning back now."

"No, no turning back now," she softly offered in return, the smallest of smiles touching her lips.

Trevor kissed her deeply, his passion at an all-time high. "Ah, Lil, I know I'm sounding territorial, but I'm glad you chose me," he whispered into her mouth.

"Don't get all sentimental on me. This is business," she reminded.

Trevor didn't buy it for a minute. It was more than business between them now. He could see it in her face. Could feel it inside of himself. The way they fit so perfectly together. The way they had turned to molten lava when their lips first touched. Whatever this was, he fully intended to milk it for all it was worth. And when the lust was

eventually spent...

"Your business just happens to be my pleasure."

"Are you trying to make me cry or make a baby?" she said tartly.

"Both." He brushed back the damp curls from her forehead, planting delicate kisses there as he slowly entered her until his entire length was gripped tightly by Lil's core.

She bowed her body. "I need you closer." She pulled Trevor down on top of her so she was bearing his entire weight. Trevor wished he could physically crawl right into her soul. Her legs went around his trim waist. He surged deeper. Soft moans and whimpers came from her throat.

"Oh, baby, you're so hot, so beautiful..." His words were mumbled praise. Soon sensations started to twist and weave at the base of his shaft, spreading to his lower abdomen. Tighter the feelings wove themselves, bringing upon him a sense of anxious wonder. When he felt he could stand it no longer, he cried out.

Lil smiled in the pale lamplight that swam around the room. "Does it feel good?"

Trevor slipped in and out again and again. "Shit, yes." The two words were an urgent whisper.

"Same here," she confirmed. Trevor claimed her lips again with another devastating kiss. Soon he felt her gripping him tightly as she came. "Trevor!"

That propelled him to follow in her wake, shooting into that perfect place where nothing outside of intense pleasure existed. With a long, broken groan, he called for her; planting his seed deep within her pussy. "Yes!" he rasped against the side of her neck as his body convulsed with the sweet spasms of release.

A moment later he rolled over, placing Lil's boneless body atop of his. Trevor wrapped his arms around her, knowing that they had shared in something truly special.

He held her for a long while, neither one speaking as they floated in the aftermath of their lovemaking. Trevor's heart felt funny, as if it were about to burst. He figured it was due to his protective instincts over Lil. His hold on her tightened and his passion blazed anew, amazing himself that his body was ready to take her once more.

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Lil wriggled on top of him when she felt his arousal spring to life, knocking against her inner thighs like an insistent salesman. She didn't have to be sold, she was a satisfied consumer. "Mmm ... can we do that again?"

Trevor blinked several times. "You really want to?"

"How could I not?" She laughed softly, resting her chin on her fists which were on his damp chest so she could look at him. His eyelids were heavy. *Sex* popped into her mind and coursed through her body. *Making love* seized her heart. "It was wonderful, Trevor. *You* were wonderful."

"I had help." He twined a curl around his index finger. His other arm was bent under the pillow at his head.

"I didn't do much," she countered. "You were the blazing fire of passion."

"I think we both did some blazing there." He winked.

She trailed her fingers through his underarm hair. She liked the soft, thick tufts. Somehow it was so ... male. So goddamned sexy. "Okay, we'll share the credit."

"Deal." He ran his hands down the length of her spine now, swirling his fingers in the two dimples just above her bottom. "Speaking of deal." He looked thoughtful. "This is your show."

She frowned in puzzlement. “Meaning?”

He shifted her so that she lay in the curve of his arm at his side. She snuggled up closer to him. He pulled her closer. “Well, we have an unusual relationship. I’d like to know what the rules are. I certainly wouldn’t want to do anything out of line, take advantage of you, or step over any boundaries where I wasn’t welcome.”

“God forbid,” Lil murmured, wishing he would do something out of line, take advantage of her and overstep a few boundaries all at once.

“I’m serious.” He stared at the ceiling. “I should put a mirror up there. I bet we look like dynamite while making love.”

Lil slapped at his chest as she felt his cock and her pussy pulse at the images he ran by her of the two of them entangled together. She needed to keep this in perspective. No hearts involved—except for their mutual friendship, of course. The hell with her heart! Her libido was involved beyond belief. At least that’s what she put these intense feelings down to.

Who knows, maybe she was just so damned hot for Trevor because it had been over a year since she’d had sex. That was it, denied hormones. Wasn’t it? Damn, now she was confused! She didn’t like being confused. She was also starting to feel scared. She liked that even less.

“Spell it out for me,” he said roughly. “My mind’s doing hairpin turns right and left. Are we going to do this again? If so, how often? What are the stipulations to this arrangement? Are we still allowed to see other people?”

Lil sat upright, grabbing the corner of the sheet closest to her and draping it over her lap. Trevor looked so serious. She doubted if she’d ever seen him this concerned over something in the past. “Well,” she began slowly, running her fingers through her hair like a female Sampson gathering strength from the gesture. “As a matter of fact, I have thought this thing through.”

Trevor nodded, urging her to elaborate.

“I don’t know how long it will take me to get pregnant, and since I can’t afford to buy ovulation and pregnancy tests on a daily basis, much less run to the doctor every time I feel a new twinge or sensation...” She took in a fortifying breath, mentally crossing her fingers in hopes that he would go along with her plan. Trevor hadn’t thought past this one night, she was sure. “I figured we could make love for the two weeks during my peak times, and take two weeks off on the down times, hormonally speaking.” She wanted to look away, fearing what his reaction might be, but found herself glued to that drowsy, puppy-dog expression of his.

Trevor nearly jolted himself into a sitting position, making Lil jump. “Are we supposed to do this every day for those two weeks?” He pointed at the area below her waist and then his.

Lil cringed. “Is that too much?” Maybe he couldn’t handle performing every night?

“No. Not at all,” he said quickly. “In fact, I could even manage two or three times a day.”

Lil swallowed hard. “That—that would be good.” *That would be fantastic!* she wanted to shout, but didn’t want to appear so utterly thrilled. He’d probably run scared, or be completely turned off. “As for our relationship on an everyday level, we’re still friends. You can see other people, if that’s your wish. I certainly don’t want to be in the way of your social life.” She said it with as much dignity as she could muster up and

swallowed the painful lump in her throat when he nodded, obviously agreeing with her levelheaded plan.

She didn't want to be levelheaded, damn it! She wanted to stake her claim on him. Wanted to jump into this wondrous thing with both feet. She wanted it to last as long as possible. But she was smart enough to know that the only reason she was feeling this way was because she'd known Trevor for so long. There were strong ties that bound them. It couldn't possibly be anything more than that.

After all, this was the man who used to give her noogies and Indian burns that lasted a week at a time. The very man who told her to go home and bake cookies whenever she attempted to weasel in on one of the neighborhood boys' baseball games.

And he was the same wonderful man who took care of her when she'd had the Beijing flu when it had been going around a couple years ago and hadn't disowned her when she threw up all over him—four times.

He was the same man who tried to talk to her about the facts of life when she was eighteen and moving out on her own. He had come into her bedroom one morning, sitting anxiously on the edge of the bed. What prompted him to come and talk to her about that particular subject, she would never know, but she remembered it clearly.

"Lil," he had said. "Now that you're a young woman and venturing out into the world on your own, I thought it was time I tell you about certain things concerning women and men. In your case young women and guys..."

"Oh, I know all about that stuff." She waved a hand breezily through the air as if she had all of the answers.

"Now I'm not talking about that birds and bees business." He started pacing the small room that had once been his bedroom but had given it to Lil when she'd moved in. His bedroom then consisted of an extra dresser in the bedroom and him sleeping on the couch at night.

"Speaking from a guy's point of view, I want you to know that they will say anything to get what they want. They will do anything to get what they want. They will make you feel like you're the only woman for them. Tell you that their balls would literally shrivel up and fall off if you didn't help them through their overabundance of hormones." He stopped directly in front of her, his eyes piercing, a stiff finger pointed in her direction. "Don't you dare believe it. And don't give in until *you're* sure you're in love. *Love*. Got it? Not curiosity, not peer-pressure, but love."

She had only nodded, words evading her as she thought how hard it must have been for him to tell her that. Of course, her mother had given her the same discussion when she was thirteen, minus the shriveling-balls scenario. But, somehow, it had been different coming from a man. And he had been right, Lil discovered as the years went by. Men would say and do anything to get what they wanted. And what they always wanted was a woman in their bed, or front seat, or any reasonably secluded grassy or sandy area.

Lil now looked at the man beside her who was giving a long perusal of the unconcealed parts of her body. Was Trevor included in that list? Yes. She had heard him work his charm on a multitude of women over the years. Was she included on that list? Probably. And the knowledge hurt, but shouldn't be surprising. Trevor was doing her a favor, not falling in love with her.

Her blood stopped in her veins for a second before surging ahead at an alarming rate. Was that what she was doing? Falling in love with Trevor? After only one night, one

session, of lovemaking?

She refused to muse over such somber thoughts, knowing that falling in love with him would be the biggest mistake of her life simply because she wasn't his type in the least. Besides, she seriously doubted if Trevor could actually be tied down to one woman. Lil reached out to touch his face, holding back the tears of confusion. "Shall we try again?" she asked, her throat suddenly feeling tight.

"Is something wrong?" Wrapping a big hand around her wrist, he lowered her palm, pressing it against his lips, and planting a tender kiss there.

The tender gesture burrowed its way into her heart and Lil bit back the urge to start bawling. "Everything's just dandy." A small smile curved one side of her mouth.

He didn't look convinced, but let it pass. "Maybe you'd like to do some exploring before we get to the heavy stuff," he offered, lifting both hands above his head, grasping the bars of her headboard, looking like a perfectly willing prisoner. "We kinda sailed through the first time."

Lil's passion began to mount, her gloomy thoughts forgotten as she watched the great big man on her little bed. "It might take me a while." She ran a finger over the bump on the middle of his nose where it had been broken.

"I'm in no hurry." His voice was a raspy whisper. "Take your time."

"Let me know if I hurt you, okay?" Lil said, trailing a hand over his taut body.

Trevor smiled and let his eyelids drift closed. "Make sure you hurt me bad, okay?"

Lil shook her head and chuckled.

Chapter Five

When Lil awoke the next morning, the first thing she saw was Trevor's face on the pillow next to hers. His hair was mussed, his upper lip and chin whisker-shadowed, and he was sleeping like the dead.

At that moment she knew she had never felt so blissful in all of her life.

They hadn't gone to sleep until the wee hours of the morning and that had been after four bouts of lovemaking. Not that she was complaining. In fact, she wouldn't mind waking up like this every day. Going to sleep the same way, too.

As she viewed the man who had her feeling so female, her fingers itched to trace the lines feathering from the outer corners of his eyes. The lines that turned into happy crinkles whenever he smiled that captivating smile of his. She was amazed that some lucky woman hadn't snatched him up in all of these years. At thirty-six she would have thought he'd be settled down by now. Have a wife and a couple of kids.

But then the women he dated weren't wife material. And Trevor seldom dated a woman for more than a month before growing bored, coming over to her place, claiming that, "She was getting too possessive. She doesn't understand me. I can't carry on a decent conversation with her. Why can't there be one woman out there like you, Lil? You understand me. We never run out of things to talk about." Then he'd punch her in the arm just like he did when they were kids, reminding her she wasn't a woman to him, merely a kid sister.

Lil sighed, untangling herself from Trevor's limbs. Just as she thought, he didn't budge. Trevor had always been a chronic insomniac—except on the nights when he slept over her place. Of course, he had always taken the couch in the past. She supposed he was just the kind of person who didn't like being alone. In fact, he spent more time over at her house than his own. Although big, bad Trevor would never admit such a wimpy thing.

When she had first moved out on her own his constant presence had irritated her, she felt he was hovering and that she would never have her freedom. But she had held her tongue, and never told him she felt that way. And she was infinitely grateful. Though at first he had been a royal pain in the ass, now his friendship was dear to her and his presence comforting. Never more so than now.

After gazing down at him for at least ten minutes with an idiotic smile on her face, she went to the bathroom for a long, hot bath. She was sore from head to foot, never realizing all of the muscles she'd used while they'd made love.

What was wrong with her? she wondered, running a hot-as-she-could-stand-it bath, then dumping in a cup of baking soda, intending to drown her aching body. Looking in the mirror she examined her face to see if she looked any different. She grimaced. She looked the same as always. Mud-colored eyes, freckles spattered over her too-small nose, and a head full of mousy-brown/red curls that would look better on a poodle.

Maybe she had PMS, she thought, slipping into the tub, moaning as the water began to seep into her pores, making her aware of just how tender she was between her thighs. Leaning her head back against the edge of the tub, she closed her eyes, placing a hot washcloth over her face, leaving only a small opening so she could breathe. She then let

all that had happened over the past twelve hours or so soak into her brain just as the warmth of the bath soaked into her knotted muscles.

She felt tremendously happy, overtly miserable, weepy, irritable, giddy, jealous. Definitely PMS. It had to be. If not, she didn't want to ponder over what it could be. What it could never be. *Love*.

There was no room in her perfectly designed plan for the upheavals that love would bring to her life. Especially in loving Trevor. She'd had too much misery in her past to get her heart involved with a man who only lived for his gym and fleeting relationships. She was a woman who craved permanence. A stable family life.

And though she would someday like to have a husband in that perfect portrait in her mind, for now, her future would only contain herself and her child.

Oh, Trevor would also be around. Like a stray cat that once fed would keep coming back, so, too, would Trevor. And he would always be welcome. Trevor was very special to her. Even more so since last night. But ... love?

* * * *

Love.

There was that ridiculous word again. She chided herself as she prepared a pot of tea after dressing in shorts and a T-shirt. She was not some naive young girl. She was a woman who'd had her share of hardships in life. A woman who had been around the block more than once—emotionally, if not physically. Yet here she was, thinking about a cozy family life and Trevor coming home to her every night, even when she continued to tell herself it was an asinine thought.

Between her parents, her brother, Trevor, and herself, she thought she'd blossomed into a realistic, easygoing and rational person.

She was also having sex with her very best friend and getting flighty over the whole thing!

Maybe this had all been a bad idea. She felt tears surfacing again. It was rare that she cried, yet since accepting Trevor's offer, she had nearly burst into tears twice now. This wasn't turning out as she had planned. She was getting all wrapped up in a charade her subconscious had craved for so many years and was ultimately forcing her to believe it was now her reality—that she had finally found the man of her dreams.

A bitter laugh burst through past her lips. She'd probably be feeling the same way about Kevin Greene if she'd slept with him. Talk about possessive! Damn it all! Why couldn't she follow along with her own rules? Now she found herself wanting to take back every commonsensical thing she had ever said regarding this arrangement. But she couldn't.

Only two choices were available to her. She could either break this thing off before she got even more ditzy over the whole situation, or she could carry out her sensible plan and look upon it with a tad more maturity than she'd been exhibiting since last night.

It felt too good being in Trevor's intimate company. She wasn't about to sever that part of their relationship before time was due. All she had to do was tuck away any silly, frivolous thoughts that had her mind in a jumbled mess.

Frowning when she realized she was actually primping, fluffing her hair while peering into the side of toaster, she pursed her lips at her uncommonly vain display. Grabbing her cup off the counter, she filled it with the steeped tea and went to the living

room to read the morning paper.

*

Sunshine blanketed Trevor's bare body, glowing warmly over his face. In his dream he'd seen Lil standing at the side of the bed, a halo of light all around her naked body, her smile warming him from the inside out, making his entire body pulse and throb with a heavenly sensation.

With instincts that had been aroused just since last night, he reached out to cuddle the woman of his dreams, only to have his hands encounter cold, rumpled sheets. Opening his eyes a mere slit, he saw her side of the bed was empty.

He grunted, not happy with what he found. Or, more precisely, what he didn't find: Lil.

Mind still hazy, he tumbled out of bed, slipped on his white, ribbed jockeys and went in search of his woman. When he got to the doorway he stopped. His brows puckered as he ran that last thought through his dull brain and a lazy hand through his hair. *His woman?*

He shrugged. What the hell? He continued ambling toward the living room. She *was* his woman, in a strange sort of way. For a while she would be his until she got pregnant. Knowing him, he'd probably grow bored by then anyway. He always got bored with the women he was involved with. Usually after only a week or so, never longer than a month. He didn't expect this time to be any different. He knew himself too well.

Trevor stopped for the second time. What if he didn't get bored with Lil? What if every single night was just as exciting as last night had been? What if sliding into her was as intoxicating to his senses the hundredth time as it had been the first through fourth?

Nah. That would be impossible. Like a Christmas toy, the newness would soon wear off. Right? He nodded his drowsy head in affirmation, feeling better now he had his feelings in perspective. He would enjoy this while it lasted, and when she was fertilized, they would go back to being pals.

Platonic pals.

There she was. He smiled, his sleepy gaze roaming over the sight before him. She was standing at the window, reaching up to unhook a potted fern that hung there. It was Saturday so she had on her usual lay-around-and-vegetate attire of a humongous white T-shirt and cutoff denim shorts that were frayed around the hem. The light from outside shone through the window, illuminating her slender body like a shadow puppet on the wall.

He tried to muffle the purr-like sound of appreciation he felt rising in his throat at the sight. And he wondered ... would he ever get bored with Lil? If one went by the reaction his body was having in regards to merely the sight of her at this moment, one wouldn't think so.

The thought made him feel uncomfortable so he put it out of his mind.

Not wanting to waste a perfectly good erection, he silently walked up behind her, reaching up with one hand to unhook the plant she was having so much trouble with, setting it on the end table to his left, while his other hand snaked around to cup a breast. He grunted with satisfaction: No bra. He nuzzled the side of her neck making little purring noises again. She smelled like Irish Spring and woman. "Why do you keep creeping into my dreams?" He meant it playfully, but the words came out as he really felt: confused beyond reason.

Lil twisted around to face him. Trevor felt something slip inside of him when their eyes met. Either in or out of place, he wasn't sure, but there was definitely something going on inside of his chest. And his briefs.

"I don't know, you tell me." Her hand drifted up to brush away a lock of hair that fell across his forehead. She smiled at him.

"You're supposed be the brains. That's why I have you working over at the gym for me doing all that paperwork and answering phones." He reached behind her, twisting the rod that closed the blinds a bit, bathing them in striped shadows.

"You're the brawn," she countered. Her arms slid around his neck.

Trevor backed up, taking Lil with him, until he rested against the back of the couch with her wedged between his thighs. "You can't think with muscle, and I sure as hell can't think in the morning."

"Why think at all?" She reached down, rubbing her palm up and down his shaft through the cotton of his briefs.

"You always were the smart one." Trevor smiled at the sound of her zipper being pulled down.

* * * *

"I was thinking," Trevor leaned back against the arm of the sofa in his usual couch-potato position. His hair was still damp from the shower they had just taken after having eaten a variety of leftovers that had been sitting around in Lil's refrigerator.

"Oh? So you're able to think clearly now? I thought muscle couldn't think," she teased, sitting at the opposite end of the sofa with his sock-clad feet propped up on her thighs.

"Intelligent and witty. What a perfectly awful combination," he jeered, rolling his eyes.

Lil proceeded to pull one of the hairs on his right leg, making him yelp. "Serves you right." She sniffed.

Trevor reached down to rub the stinging area. "Better watch it, curly-locks, I can bench press three of you." He flexed his pecs, watching Lil's as she stared at his muscles beneath the white T-shirt she'd let him borrow. On her the cotton garment fit like a nightshirt, on him it fit like a second skin. He couldn't help the surge of pride that shot through him when she ran her tongue over her lips. "Do you want to hear my idea or not?" He sat up to avoid any more hair pulling from the wench who was smiling snidely at him.

She made a sweeping gesture with her hand. "The floor's all yours, Mr. Scott."

"Well, since we'll be spending a greater portion of our time together, at least for two weeks out of the month until we finally make that baby, I was thinking that maybe I should move in here with you."

He saw Lil pale and felt like an ass for bringing up the idea. She probably thought he was a sex fiend. Hell, he was beginning to think the same thing about himself. Since when had he been able to—inclined to—make love five times in less than twelve hours? And he was ready to go again. Wasn't he supposed be on a sexual decline at his age?

"It was just a suggestion," he said quickly. "Don't faint on me. I just thought it would be more convenient with me staying here. Forget it. I can see it was a bad idea. You know how I have a habit of coming up with shitty ideas." When she didn't answer,

he looked away, wanting to crawl under the first piece of furniture he saw.

“You mean, you’d like to move in here with me? Like we were some married couple?”

It was Trevor’s turn to pale. He felt the color drain from his face as he swung his head around in her direction. “I—I...”

Lil bit on her bottom lip. “I’m sorry, I went and said the M word, didn’t I?”

Trevor fought to drag oxygen into his lungs. Just talking about other married couples made him break out in a rash, and here she was suggesting that they would be living together like a lawfully wedded husband and wife? For some reason he had an aversion to serious relationships. He figured it was because his parents hadn’t gotten along with each other very well. Hell, that was an understatement! Lil didn’t know much about his childhood since he never talked about it. Not even when they were younger. And he intended to keep it that way.

He felt lightheaded and was afraid he’d keel over at any second.

Lil jumped to her feet and went to him, patting his cheek. “Are you okay?” He nodded. “I didn’t mean it the way it sounded,” she assured him. “I meant it in the way that you did.”

Trevor shook his head to clear it of a clinging nightmare. “You scared the hell out of me there for a minute. I thought you were getting the wrong idea about my offer.” He relaxed, the muscles in his neck and shoulders drooping like warm taffy.

Lil sat next to him, patting a denim-covered knee. “Now why would I ever do that?” After a moment of heavy silence she finally asked, “So how did you mean it?”

*

Trevor stuck a finger in his mouth, looking thoughtful. After a second he pulled it out and snapped. “Like I said, it makes perfect sense. What logic is there in hauling myself over here each and every night for two weeks? Especially since we both know that we’ll be making love more than once a day. It’ll be pretty late by the time we finish. It just seems a little asinine to go back and forth each night.” He shrugged, waiting for her reply.

When she didn’t answer, he continued, “I’ll bring some of my stuff over. We’ll share meals, maybe showers, too.” He waggled his brows. “We’ll live together. Sleep together. And have loads more baby-making time on our hands.” He grinned.

Throwing up her hands in surrender, realizing that *he* probably didn’t even know why he made the offer since most of what Trevor said and did was spur-of-the-moment, Lil said, “Why not? Sounds like it could be interesting.” She tried very hard not to think of what would happen once she finally became pregnant.

Before, that was all that had been on her mind; making a baby, having a baby, being a mother. Now, that very child represented the cessation of her and Trevor’s intimacy.

Well, Lil, you can’t have it all. Just be happy with what you can get for the time being and you’ll have a beautiful baby for the rest of your life to remind you of this wonderful time.

Her mind conjured up a picture. She was in the forefront, holding a baby with Trevor’s wavy brown hair and sleepy eyes. And there was Trevor, too, far off in the background with his arm around the slender waist of a blonde Amazon. That picture represented reality. She had to remember that.

She knew she was setting herself up for heartache, but found herself saying, “When

do you want to get your stuff?”

Trevor was instantly alert, looking like a cat ready to pounce on its prey. Or perhaps a wild dog who was dying for a morsel of food and a loving pat on the head, but was too afraid to accept it. *Yes*, Lil thought, frowning inwardly. She felt her heart clench at her strange interpretation of his expression.

Maybe it was because they had made love, but Lil felt she was seeing a whole other side of Trevor she never knew existed. It was still buried beneath his macho persona, but it was there, just below the surface. Something sad and lost and lonely that called out to her without words or actions, but could still be felt.

Lil gave a mental shrug. Hell, maybe her mothering instincts had started kicking in early and just figured that Trevor needed some TLC. Still, she couldn't shake the bone-deep feeling.

“You wanna go get ‘em now?” he suggested.

“Sure.” Lil got to her feet, resisting the overwhelming urge to take this mountain of a man in her arms and soothe away the shadows she had seen on his face. Shadows that were quickly hidden, replaced by that spunky grin she had come to expect from him.

Chapter Six

Two weeks later Lil held the thin white stick which had been included with the pregnancy test between trembling fingers. Two lines. She was pregnant. Hence the unusual tenderness in her breasts and puffiness around her middle.

Feelings of intense joy and sorrow filled her. She now had implanted within her the baby she had so craved, but she was in imminent danger of losing Trevor as a lover.

These past days and nights had been wonderful, comfortable, peaceful. As much as Trevor hated to admit it, they were indeed behaving much like a married couple. They spent all of their free time together; sometimes making love, sometimes going out to dinner or the movies, lots of quiet nights just talking and cuddling in bed.

And she had been happier than she could ever remember.

Of course, she had finally admitted to herself last week when she had been hanging a new stock of lingerie at the store and thought about wearing some of the impractical confections for Trevor, the magnitude of her feelings for him.

When she caught herself constantly daydreaming about him coming home to her each and every night, creating more children together, growing old with him, she admitted the proportions of her love.

In fact, she had loved him for a very long time. First as a brother, then a dear friend, and finally a lover.

Things would be great if he felt the same way about her, but she knew he didn't. Couldn't. Aside from the reality that she wasn't his type, Trevor shied away from any sort of commitment. The only reason they had lasted this long was because he was under the distinct impression all of these years that they were only friends. She had been too, up until a couple of weeks ago.

So here she was, standing at the bathroom sink with her future grasped between her fingers. Trevor's baby, their baby, was growing within her. Should she tell him? Take the giant risk of him moving back home and continuing on with their previous platonic relationship as if they'd never shared in the most wondrous episodes of lovemaking? As if those passionate sessions hadn't been proof of their intense feelings for each other? Her feeling of love, his of ... of what? Duty to make a child? Letting off some over-accumulated hormones?

She didn't rightly know.

And she never had asked him what *he* was getting out of this arrangement.

Placing the test items and instructions back into the box, she closed the lid and went downstairs to the kitchen to toss it in the trash.

It wasn't fair to Trevor for her not to tell him. Have him keep living here under the false pretense of getting her pregnant when she already was. She would feel guilty. Happy, but guilty.

"Well, Lil," she said to the empty kitchen, wrapping her arms around her elbows to ward off the sudden chill that seeped into her soul. "Looks like it's over. Your levelheaded plan has officially blown up in your face."

The silence around her pressed in from all sides. And Lil had never felt so lonely in all her life.

* * * *

All day long while at work she tried not to think about the inevitable. In just a little over an hour she would drive to the gym and tell Trevor. She had to tell him in public. If he came back to her place without knowing first, she would chicken out and not say a word about her pregnancy. Would wait until they had shared in another evening of passion, and still she might not tell him.

No, being in an air-conditioned, sweaty-smelling, fluorescent-lit gym, surrounded by equipment, weights, and bustling patrons was the only way she could get this thing said.

Her parents had had a close, loving relationship and she liked to think that they still carried on their previous way of affection up in heaven. She craved a relationship like theirs had been. Being with Trevor, she could almost believe they could be so happy. But, he wasn't hers to lay claim on. Trevor belonged to nobody except himself. And, as hard as it was, she had to accept it.

"Lil?" Tracy Brown called, bringing her out of her thoughts, a look of stress on the young woman's face. Tracy was only nineteen, but she was her best cashier. Prompt, courteous, and she always balanced out at the end of her shift.

Since Lil was head of the Ladies department, she was in charge of handling all aspects of it, from the stock people to the six part-time cashiers. She had been with the store for eight years, been a supervisor for three. The pay was good, the benefits excellent—including three months paid maternity leave which she would be taking soon enough—and she rarely had to work overtime.

"What can I do for you, Tracy?" Lil walked over to the counter that was situated in the Nightwear department.

"I know I really shouldn't be asking this, but do you think I could knock off a little early today? My shift ends in forty-five minutes and..." She blushed. "I bought a sexy nightie and baked a batch of cookies for my boyfriend Sam, and well..." She couldn't finish her sentence.

Lil stood there in her navy flats and matching box-jacket with her nametag on the lapel, chewing thoughtfully on her bottom lip. "Cookies and a sexy nightie, huh?"

"You know what they say; the way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Tracy leaned over the counter and added in a whispered tone, "and his pants!"

Lil couldn't help laughing. "Sure. Go ahead. I'll watch the register for you."

Tracy beamed, already sprinting from behind the beige counter. "Thanks, Lil." She gave her a hug.

"No problem. Now get out of here before Mr. Hennesey lumbers out of his office and finds me being such a softy."

Lil's mental wheels turned as she waited on the spattering of customers until her shift ended. An idea started to form. Once in her Honda, her destination the Pump 'em Up gym, she had her plan all worked out.

Naturally she had to tell Trevor of her pregnancy, and most probably he would move out—a fact she wasn't looking forward to—but maybe she could capture that buffed-up beefcake's heart.

It would be tricky, and perhaps she would be wasting her time, but she had to give it a try. Lillian-Tomboy-Campbell was going to try her damndest to transform herself into Lillian-Homemaker-Campbell. She would woo Trevor with a home cooked meal, candlelight, and a slinky, sexy nightie. Make him see what could be his each and every

day and night for the rest of their lives.

Would it work?

She had been rejected by Trevor once before after he broke off that fateful kiss so many years ago. It had hurt badly and it took a long time before she got over it and could look him in the face again. Before the pain in her heart had ebbed enough so that she could put the incident into perspective and put it behind her.

Now that they had become lovers, now that they had shared in the creation of life, if her plan failed she might never fully recover. But it was a risk she was willing to take.

She glanced heavenward, hoping her parents and Brian would send her some angelic intervention that would have Trevor giving her his heart and soul, but knew it would be a battle all the way and with no guarantees as to the outcome.

* * * *

Lil walked into the air-conditioned building, stepping onto the smooth, blue carpeting. The place was nearly empty as she spotted only five people in the whole room, which was twice as big as her home, and was filled with the latest in workout machines as well as free weights.

It wasn't surprising that the gym was so sparsely filled though, since most people preferred partying and going out on Friday and Saturday nights rather than exercising. But they'd all be back on Sunday or Monday, she knew, vowing to work off their overindulgences.

Kevin Greene was running on the treadmill in his usual attire of micro-shorts and nothing else, and gave Lil a salute as she rounded the reception desk to her customary post. Lil waved back, still in a state of disbelief over Trevor's revelation that he was gay.

For a few minutes she busied herself with the paperwork needed for new patrons who had signed up earlier in the day before she'd arrived. She smiled as she again glanced over Trevor's note that begged her to handle the contracts for him. He did loathe paperwork.

When she looked up and caught sight of Trevor standing in front of the leg-press machine, she figured that now was as good a time as any to break the news of her pregnancy. She wondered how he would take it.

Giving a quick fluff-up of her hair, butterflies in her stomach and dread in her heart, she started walking over to him when she noticed who was straddling the bench, thighs open wide, adoring smile on the man—the grinning man—towering over her. Raquel.

Lips pressed into a grim line, Lil now knew how absurd her plan had been. And she ragged Trevor about his harebrained schemes? What had she been thinking? Win his heart? Hah! The only thing any woman had a chance of winning when it came to Trevor Scott was a few wrestling matches in the bedroom—if she was lucky.

Why had she let her goddamned heart get involved? Now she was paying dearly, already, for the mistake. And she simply stood there, feet molded to the carpet, unable to turn away from the sight that caused those silly, romantic dreams of hers to fade into oblivion.

*

Trevor was listening patiently to Raquel's complaints of how she couldn't manage to work off "these last five pounds." When she had called him over ten minutes ago, he had plastered on a smile and hadn't been able to get away since. The thing that had him

completely baffled was, why was he trying to get away at all?

Raquel was the type of woman he usually went for: vampy, outgoing, and on-the-make. But in the last six months or so, and especially after taking up with Lil, he hadn't had the desire to date. He was tired of empty conversation, and even emptier sex. Tired of running the singles circuit.

When he and Lil ultimately went back to being just friends, he had a feeling that he would hole up in cave somewhere—turn into a hermit who never ventured out unless he absolutely had to. Maybe he'd have Lil share his cave, he mused, shutting off his impatient senses to the droning woman in front of him.

When he thought he couldn't stand one more boring syllable coming from Raquel's pretty painted lips, he looked up into the mirrored wall in front of him and his heart stopped beating for the better part of three seconds. Lil was standing directly behind him.

The false smile that he had been wearing was instantly wiped off of his face. His casual posture that had been forced was replaced with rigid awareness. And he just stared, as if in a trance, at the woman he had been making love with for the past two weeks. The woman he was living with. Sharing a bed with. And so much more.

And that something in him began to stir again. Longing? Excitement? Yes, both emotions were there, but there was another feeling that ran deeper. Too deep for him to grasp. Like trying to recall a dream that held an important message, but the more he thought, the more elusive it became.

Turning on his rubber-soled heels, Trevor walked the five strides over to Lil, leaving Raquel babbling on by herself.

Up until now, they had kept their personal life to themselves, leaving any affectionate displays for when they were alone. But when Trevor reached her, Lil stood up on tiptoes and planted a kiss on his lips.

"Hi," she said brightly.

"Hi, yourself." He bent down to whisper in her ear, "Any more kisses like that and you'll have me walking around here hard as a rock." He grabbed her close, pressing his pelvis against her, uncaring as to who saw. "Is something up?" he asked when she continued to stand there without saying a word.

"Up?" She blinked. "Why do say that?"

"You just looked like you had something on your mind." He frowned, noting the flushed look on her face. "Are you sure you're all right?"

"Yeah," she said absently, looking to the right and in back of him. "Well, I can see you have your hands full. I'll catch you at home," she said a little louder than necessary.

Trevor's frown deepened before saber-long nails painted bright red dug into his arm, distracting his attention. He turned to see Raquel standing at his side. She and Lil glared at each other for a second before Lil turned and stalked away, going to her post.

"Oh, Trevor, sweetie. Could you help me out with my sit-ups?" She fluttered long, flirty lashes at him. "I need someone to hold my ankles and count for me."

Trevor looked at Lil, who seemed absorbed in paperwork, and back at Raquel. "Uh ... sure."

* * * *

Lil got home before Trevor did. Naturally, Raquel had hung around until closing time, following Trevor out to his Jeep. She didn't wait around to see what would

transpire between them. Trevor knew that he was more than welcome to date other people if he so desired. But, damn it all, she wanted him to desire only her!

Taking a couple Lean Cuisines from the freezer, she took them out of the box and popped them into the microwave, hoping that Trevor would show up, and then went to slip into something more comfortable. For her, that meant cotton shorts and another unimaginative T-shirt—both in white. Maybe she should invest in some of those sexy nighties she had seen at the store.

On a whim, she took off her bra and underwear before sliding into the thin garments, and tied her T-shirt in a knot at her right hip. This was as close to seductive as she could get.

Now wasn't that pathetic? Especially when she was positive Raquel had a whole closet full of silk, satin and lace. Knowing that woman, she more than likely had a leather bustier and handcuffs, too.

Trevor walked in twenty minutes later just as she was pulling some bake-and-serve rolls from the toaster oven. She tried to keep her hands from shaking and her heart from thudding right out of her rib cage.

Actually, she was shocked that he had come back so soon, but kept to her task of withdrawing the cookie sheet, not wanting to appear like a clinging housewife.

"Mmm ... something sure looks good." That deep, husky voice slid through her veins like a bar of soap on the bathroom floor.

"It's beef stroganoff," she informed him, placing the hot rolls in a serving basket.

Two huge arms wrapped around her waist, while soft lips nuzzled her neck. "I wasn't talking about the food."

Lil wanted to play along, but she was still miffed about the way Raquel had practically climbed all over him this evening, and her question came out sharper than she had intended. "Would you take care of these hot rolls?"

Before she had a chance to grab the basket and shove it at him, he had turned her around in his arms and was crushing her lips beneath his. "Sweetheart, I'll take care of any hot rolls you want me to. In here, in the bedroom, in the bathroom, on the couch," he breathed the words into her mouth, the act of it affecting Lil like a drown victim who was being given mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

She simply couldn't stay mad. After setting down the basket of rolls, her arms went around Trevor's neck and he lifted her up onto the counter so that she was more even with his height. After several minutes of soul kisses that had them both panting for more, Trevor stepped back to take a look at Lil's attire.

"I wasn't aware that cotton could be so damned sexy." His gaze devoured the rosy crests of her breasts that showed through the thin material of her shirt and the dark shadow that was clearly visible through her shorts.

Lil couldn't have asked for a better reaction from him. "What? These old things?" she said coyly. That prompted Trevor to growl in her ear. And then his stomach proceeded to growl.

He raised his head slightly and grimaced. "You wouldn't mind if I satisfied the hunger in my stomach before I satisfy the one in my jeans, would you?"

"Not at all." She rubbed her nose against his. "What kind of woman would deprive her lover of a hot meal before making love?"

"Not a very nice one." He planted a quick kiss on her nose then placed her back on

the floor.

Lil's mood took another nosedive. She couldn't help it, Trevor's last comment made her think of Raquel all over again.

Why couldn't she get that woman out of her head? Raquel was after Trevor, yet it was Lil's mind that was constantly haunted with the Amazon's memory. Low self-esteem had never been a problem with her before. And it wasn't now. It's just that she was feeling so possessive. Something she knew that drove Trevor nuts. With a noiseless sigh, she forced away all depressing thoughts and went to take her seat at the table.

Trevor grabbed a lite beer from the fridge, retrieving juice and a glass for Lil. They sat at the table in silence. Trevor ate like a demon while Lil picked at her food, shoving the plate in his direction when he had finished. Those depressing thoughts were back.

"I saw you talking to Raquel," Lil commented, sipping on her grapefruit juice. She felt like throwing up. Was she experiencing morning sickness already? Even though it wasn't morning? And even though she couldn't be more than two weeks pregnant?

"Yeah," he said absently, digging into the second plate of food. Lil was amazed that he kept his firm physique when he drank beer with dinner every night and lived on frozen and fast food. She knew what dedication it took to keep up a body like his and she had to admire his willpower. She worked out three times a week at his gym and even then she had to push herself. She'd much rather join in on a baseball or soccer game, but hadn't had the chance in eons. Between working eight hours at the store and four more with Trevor at Pump 'em Up, she was lucky if she caught an occasional game on TV.

"What did she have to say?" Lil grabbed a roll, buttering it for him, feigning concentration in her task and not on his words that she awaited.

"She wanted to go out with me tonight." He took the roll, nodding his thanks.

Trying her utmost to remain calm, she asked, "What did you say?" She watched as he got up to retrieve another beer. It would be his last. Trevor was a two-beer man. Any more and he was Silly Putty.

"It would seem obvious." He twisted off the cap, tossing it at the trash can. Lil noticed he nearly made it, too. He sat back down, taking a long swallow before adding, "I'm here with you and not her, aren't I?"

"True, but what about tomorrow night?"

He set the bottle on the table, his brows bent together. "I'll be here." His voice came out smooth, his head cocked to one side as if trying to interpret her sudden barrage of questions. He soon gave up trying. "Besides," he broke out into a seductive grin, "you wear me out, woman! I should leave here on a stretcher every morning."

Lil blushed. She was truly flattered and feeling as giddy as if she had just downed a couple beers herself. Then another thought crossed her mind. "What about the off weeks?" They were coming upon that very soon, Monday, to be exact. Forever, as of this very moment if she told him she was pregnant.

"You don't give up, do you?"

Lil met his hard, steady gaze with one of her own. "Nope."

"Well, I was thinking about those off weeks." He leaned back in the chair, regarding her with heavy lids, bottle of beer clutched between his outstretched right hand. His thumb was caressing the smooth side of the bottle, wiping away the dew that collected there. The act reminded her of the way he teased her nipples the same way until they were tight, sensitive peaks.

Clearing her thoughts of the erotic images that had her brain overheated, she concentrated on Trevor's words as he said, "Why don't we make love on those off weeks, too? I mean, it's only logical."

Trevor was being logical again? "Perhaps you should spell it out for me," she said. Was it too good to be true? Too much to hope that he wanted to be her lover on an everyday basis?

Those drowsy eyes were still on her. His left shoulder lifted in a lazy shrug. "I figured that if we made love every night, my sperm would stay fresher. It'll probably get stagnant waiting around for two whole weeks. Then, when you're at your peak, your fresh egg gets my stale sperm." He grimaced, directed his gaze to the label on the beer bottle then added in a serious voice, "If we make love every night, you'll always be sure to get grade-A semen."

Lil didn't buy that mumbo-jumbo for one minute. She knew that Trevor simply wanted to make love every night, to stay with her and not have to go back home alone. He was just too macho? Too shy? Too *afraid* to admit it? Yes, that's what it was. The only snag in his whole wonderful plan was that she was already pregnant.

Pushing that knowledge aside in her mind, ignoring the niggling little voice that called her a dirty, rotten liar, she said, "Sounds logical to me. You might want to bring some more stuff over, though."

"Yeah, I guess I should," he whispered staring straight at her.

* * * *

The peaceful, empty void of sleep that claimed Trevor was shattered by a thundering voice. "Wake up, boy!" A dark, towering figure swayed into Trevor's bedroom, grabbing him by the hair, jerking him awake. "Wake up, you good for nothing piece of crap!"

Trevor fought against the all-too-frequent nightmare that plagued him. His entire body flinched in his dream as a heavy fist came down on him, breaking his nose in one fell swoop.

Wham! Another fist pummeled him. "Where's that slut you call Mother?" The whiskey on his father's breath made his stomach churn.

"I don't know!" He scrambled up against the headboard in a fetal position, hands wrapped around his head to avoid any more blows to his face. Blood ran out of his nose and into his mouth, the metallic taste making him gag.

"You're lying!" Trevor heard the sound of a belt buckle being unclasped, being slipped from belt loops. *Snap, snap*, went the leather; a cruel, teasing sound that instilled terrifying expectation.

In the next second it slapped down across his back leaving a hot welt behind.

"No! I don't know!" When would he learn not to let his guard down and fall asleep? *Wham!* The belt came down again, buckle side, ripping through the thin cotton of his pajamas, digging into the flesh of his back like a razor. He bunched his hands into tight fists, trying to will away the searing pain. One day he would be bigger than his father. One day he would be stronger. And he would fight back. But he was only thirteen. Skinny. Scrawny. Scared.

In Trevor's nightmare everything became jumbled. His father had been beating him, hurting him, making him cry. And then his mother had appeared in the doorway of his bedroom. His father had a gun in his shaky hand and shot her then himself in a drunken,

jealous rage. Both things had actually happened in reality all those years ago.

But then Raquel had appeared before him and he was a man, not a child. He was cocky, full of macho pride. Raquel was beautiful, blonde, and phony as her silicone tits; just as his mother had been.

And then there was Lil. Raquel faded away and he was glad, she offered him no true comfort. Lil walked over to him, to Trevor the child, calming his fears, kissing away his physical pain, soothing away his tears. Now he found himself a man again, lying with Lil on her bed. They were naked and she was just as loving, still calming his fears. "Trevor?"

Lil said his name again and Trevor finally swam out of the black fog. He blinked several times and noticed that he was clinging to Lil's small, bare body.

"Are you okay?" Lil whispered in the darkness.

He cleared his throat before attempting to speak. "I'm fine now," he muttered gruffly. "Just a bad dream." He attempted to withdraw from her embrace, intending to spend the rest of the night on the couch, but Lil's hold on him was too strong. Not her physical hold at the moment, but the mental hold she had on his heart and soul.

"You aren't going anywhere, Trevor Emery Scott. What happened?" Her voice was gentle yet demanding. "That wasn't just a bad dream, was it?"

Marshaling his strength, Trevor let out a low sigh. He never talked about his abusive childhood. Never. Even when it had been going on, when he would wake up in the morning discovering a new bruise, or a broken nose, he made excuses to his teachers, to his friends, to the Campbells. It hurt too much to think about it. He sure as hell didn't want to talk about it. Not then, not now, not ever.

"I—I had a dream about my folks," he said in a whisper, offering her only half the truth. "About the night they died."

"Oh, darling, I'm so sorry." Lil held Trevor in her arms, his head pillowed by her breasts. She stroked his tense shoulder muscles. "I bet it was an awful shock for you when that thief broke into your house and shot them. Must be equally hard to have to relive it in your nocturnal mind."

Trevor swallowed hard, still tasting his own blood as if the beating had just taken place. "Lil, there's something you don't know." He was running an index finger over her abdomen, noticing that it was slightly soft and just a little swollen, but didn't put much thought into it.

Before continuing on with his story, he dragged in a shuddering breath. He couldn't tell her everything that had happened while he was growing up, but he could tell her one thing.

"It wasn't an intruder who killed my parents that night." His throat threatened to close off. "It was my father who pulled the trigger." He heard Lil gasp, her hands clutching his shoulders tight. "He and my mother always fought. Mom was always running around on Dad. Dad was an alcoholic, though in public he hid it well. One night he came home from the bar demanding to know where Mom was. I said I didn't know."

Trevor left out the beating he had received, just one of the thousands over the course of his childhood. "A minute later she walked into the house; tight dress, high heels, make-up, reeking of perfume, the works. Dad knew she had been sleeping around. He finally snapped, grabbed his gun. Shot her three times, then himself. I watched it all." He tried so very hard to keep the memories tamped down.

When he looked up at Lil's soft face, he saw that she was crying. This was the one

woman who felt his own pain. The only one who understood him. The very woman he could never have. The one woman he shouldn't want. He could never love Lil the way she deserved. He came from two people who didn't know the meaning of the word. He wasn't conceived out of love. Had never known love as a child, nor an adult. What he and Lil had was precious. The closest he could ever get to loving anybody—and it wasn't enough. Not for her. Not by a long shot.

Trevor reached up to caress her cheek, brushing away the saline trail. "Hey, you're supposed to be cheering me up, Pill, not crying."

Lil smiled tremulously. "What other memories haunt you? I know there's more." After he remained silent for too long, not willing to expose that part of himself, Lil said, "Never mind." She took his face between her palms, bringing him toward her to place a tender kiss on his lips.

This time, Lil made love to Trevor. As his passion mounted, he thought that just maybe with her ... but soon all thoughts ceased when she wrapped her warm hand around his shaft and took him into her mouth. He looked down at her as her lips and tongue worked their magic over his dick. "That's it, baby, take me all in." He held her head gently, guiding her until she found a rhythm that had his balls clenching. "You know," he gasped as he began to tense, "we can't make a baby this way."

Lil stopped only for a heartbeat. "Shut the hell up and just enjoy this, okay?" She went back to licking him up and down.

"Yes, ma'am." Trevor smiled in the darkness.

Chapter Seven

All day long Trevor thought of Lil. It had been nearly three months since they'd started making love and there was no progress yet in the baby department. Lil had been bummed-out on and off for the past few weeks. He figured it was because she wasn't getting pregnant fast enough. He was kind of worried too, but liked the new facet of their relationship. When she got pregnant, he would have to move back out. And, as much as he wanted Lil to have her baby, he wasn't ready to leave just yet.

Ever since she had found her own place all those years ago, he'd been lonely. That's probably why he had bugged the hell out of her every day since then, always showing up at her place whenever the mood struck him.

It had struck him a lot.

Now he was never lonely. And he was never alone. Solitude only managed to make him good and depressed. It gave him too much time to think. Reminded him of how empty his life was and probably always would be.

He leaned against the treadmill, timing Rick on his progress. There were no more scheduled training sessions for the rest of the day; maybe he should take Lil out some place special. All they usually did was work, come home, laze around and make love. Not that he didn't like the peaceful simplicity of their relationship, but Lil needed to know that he thought of her as a woman, too. Not just a business deal.

"Hey, buddy." Rick wiped the sweat from his face with the towel draped over his neck. "By the looks of that goofy-assed grin on your face, I'd say you were thinking about a broad." The young Latin man flashed perfect, even teeth at Trevor. "Am I right?"

Trevor shook his head free of the heated scenarios that had taken up permanent residence in his brain. "No, not a broad. A woman. A very special woman." He still leaned against the machine, enjoying the serenity that filled him whenever he thought of Lil. "I think I'll knock off early and take her out someplace nice."

"Ah-ha." He swatted Trevor in the arm with the towel. "You give her a nice dinner and she gives you a nice dessert. You're really planning on making out tonight, eh, buddy? Who is it? That fox Raquel?" Ricardo Sanchez nearly drooled. "Man, I wish she had the hots for me."

Trevor pushed himself away from the machine, his eyes on the door as Lil walked into his place unexpectedly. "You can have her. She's not my type."

"You're shittin' me? Since when?"

"Since awhile now. And for your information, Lil and I aren't *making out* as you so mildly put it, we're making a baby." His gaze was still on Lil as she dropped her car keys on the carpet and bent down to retrieve them. She looked disheveled, and she was impatiently pushing back some stray curls off her forehead.

Rick tugged on Trevor's T-shirt sleeve. "Are you *loco*, man?" he said in a hushed and slightly horrified voice. "I did that once. It was a real blast until she got pregnant. Once the kid popped out my old lady left me. Been paying child support ever since. That's why I work two jobs. I tell you, those leeches can suck you dry."

Trevor shrugged Rick away. "Lil would never do that to me." He was smiling again. He could feel it from one ear to the other. He probably looked like an idiot. Damned if he

could do a thing about it, either.

“Okay, don’t say I didn’t warn you. They’re all angels in the beginning, but once she knows you’re hers and that kid shows up, bam!” He slapped his hands together. “The bitch from hell takes over her mind and body.”

Shaking his head in amusement, Trevor left his friend with the overactive imagination and went to go see why Lil had shown up during her lunch hour. “Hi, babe.” Trevor walked up to her, planting a soft kiss on her lips. She looked surprised. He couldn’t help it. Although they had talked about hands-off in public, all he could think about was hands-on twenty-four-seven.

“I came to bring you lunch.” She held up a brown paper sack. “Your favorite, too.”

“Don’t tell me.” He grabbed the bag from her hands, set it on the reception desk and peered inside. “Sardine and onion sandwich, dill pickles and Fritos?” He inhaled the strong aromas drifting from the bag, closing his eyes in bliss.

“Yep.” She beamed.

Lil was the only one who had been privy to his odd, yet favorite lunch. He was glad she had come over to surprise him. Although he had already eaten a burrito from one of the local fast food joints, he was touched that Lil had gone out of the way to do this for him. “Thanks, sweetheart.” He rolled the sack back up then turned to look at her once more. “After you’re done at the store I want you to go home and get dressed up. We’re taking a night off from the gym.” He laughed softly at her surprised look. “That silk outfit you wore to the drive-in is perfect. I thought we could go out tonight. Maybe take in a movie then go to Chinatown, perhaps do a little dancing, although you know I’m not very good at it.” He pressed his lips together in thought then added, “Guess we’ll just have to slow dance.” He grinned. “How’s that sound?”

She paused for several seconds and he thought she was going to turn him down, but she ultimately said, “That sounds great. I’ll be ready.”

“Oh, so will I.” He pulled her close and cherished her mouth with his, leaving them both breathless.

* * * *

By eight o’clock, Lil was as ready as she would ever be. She still hadn’t told Trevor that she was pregnant, and she was beginning to show slightly. She had gone to her second prenatal exam and she was doing fine. So was the baby. Next time she went she would be able to hear the heartbeat, the doctor had said. She wanted so badly to have Trevor come along with her, but still she had avoided telling him. She was scum. She was worse than scum; she was a liar.

Tucking away her guilt for the moment she gave herself a quick check in the mirror. She looked like a completely different woman. After she’d finished work, she went to the cosmetics department and had her friend Brenda paint up her face. She looked pretty darn good, although she was afraid to laugh or smile for fear of cracking the layer of goop all over her face.

She had bought a pair of heels and thigh-high stockings to wear with the velvet prom dress Trevor had given her. It still fit, even if it was a tad snug in the tummy. Her curls were tamed at the sides with two pearl combs. A dab of perfume behind each ear and at the base of her throat completed the fairy tale image she wanted to live out, if only for this evening.

She might have lied to Trevor about her senior prom in order to save face, but tonight would make up for it ten times over.

When Trevor walked through the door, Lil was coming down the hallway fiddling with one of the barrettes in her hair. She looked up at him, holding her breath.

"You look so good my heart hurts." He took her by the hands, holding them out at her sides so he could take in every inch of her. "You look fantastic."

This time Lil knew it was no sugarcoated baloney. The look on Trevor's face said it all. "Thank you." She averted his gaze, feeling modest all of a sudden. As if she was pretending to be something she wasn't.

She was, she reminded herself. She was pretending not to be pregnant when she was. She was pretending that Trevor could someday be hers when he probably wouldn't. She was pretending to be some fair princess and that he was her knight in shining armor.

And she would continue pretending at least for this one night.

"You look pretty nice yourself." He wore pleated khaki slacks, a wine-colored shirt that bloused at his lean waist and matched her dress to perfection, and leather mocs. Evidently he had stopped by his place to change since the only clothing he had brought with him here was jeans, T-shirts, and sweats. "Does this dress look familiar to you?" she asked, turning around so he could see the back as well.

Trevor frowned, trying to place it. He snapped his fingers. "That's the dress I got you for the prom. It still fits after all these years?"

"A little tighter here and there, but, yeah."

"Well, those here and there places look pretty good to me. If I promise to be a gentleman until after we get back home, will you let me take all of that stuff off you?" His lids lowered suggestively.

"Not only that," she smiled, but a sadness loomed in her heart, "I have a secret I want to tell you later."

"I love secrets," he declared, pressing her up against the door, wedged between his powerful thighs. "Tell me now."

"Nope. Gotta wait." She sighed, awaiting his kiss. It was quick and tightly reined.

"Then let's get going. I want to get back here as fast as we can." He leered at her, pulled her away from the door, opened it, and ushered her out into the crystal-clear night.

* * * *

After the movie they went to eat at their favorite Chinese place, Sam Wo, where they always ordered the fit-for-the-gods raw fish salad. They had walked through the main thoroughfare of Chinatown admiring the tearooms, temples, Chinese schools, theaters and grocery stores that lined each side, then had gone upstairs to the long established restaurant and stuffed themselves.

When they had finished dinner they skipped dancing at Lil's request. She wasn't used to wearing heels and her feet were killing her.

Instead of going straight home though, on a spur-of-the-moment decision, Trevor drove over to Twin Peaks, where they now stood silently in each other's arms, mesmerized by the view of downtown San Francisco and the East Bay. Standing at the hilltop, watching the fog swirl through the Golden Gate and looking at the city's skyline with Trevor's arms around her, Lil could almost believe that she was in Heaven, positive that nothing else could feel so utterly tranquil and just plain good.

"This night has been one of the best I've ever had," Trevor whispered against Lil's temple. "Correction, make it *the* best night I've ever had."

"Mmm... Me too," Lil murmured. "I couldn't ask for anything more." Not true. She could ask for a whole lot more, but kicked those thoughts away.

Soon the fog turned into a fine mist. Since both had only light jackets on, they reluctantly opted for the dry warmth of Lil's place over the cold dampness that was quickly seeping into their bones. Lil knew that Trevor's knee would start aching if they didn't get him warmed-up, and it would be her pleasure to provide the heat.

By the time they reached home and climbed out of the Wrangler, Trevor came over to Lil, his limp already noticeable, and pressed her up against the door, devouring her with a long kiss—he did like pinning her against things.

When they finally came up for air, he looked at her through nearly closed eyes and said, "I behaved myself the entire evening as promised. Now, first I want to hear this secret you have, and then we're going to go inside where I get to peel each and every article of clothing off that ripe body of yours."

"You did not behave yourself," she playfully accused, wanting to prolong the inevitable: To finally tell him of her pregnancy. "You stuck your tongue in my ear twice while we were at Sam Wo and at the movie theater your hand slid up my dress quite a number of times. And I won't even mention where it wandered to after that."

"Okay, so I'm a bad boy." He grinned. "Tell me anyway."

Lil immediately sobered. "Your knee's bothering you," she commented, not wanting the night to end so soon. Wanting to spend just a little more time in Trevor's company before he left her—perhaps for good since she had lied to him for so long.

"Yes," he said impatiently, "but I'd like to get on to bigger and better things than a bothersome old injury. In fact, I can think of a few things that will take my mind off the nagging pain." He started to incline his head for another kiss, but stopped just a fraction from Lil's mouth. "But first," he softly slid his lips back and forth over hers, creating an erotic rhythm of friction, "you owe me one secret."

Lil wanted to sink to the grass beneath her feet and cry. Was it going to end already? She had to tell him. She promised him a secret and she fully intended to reveal her pregnancy. She had kept it from him for too long and would be very lucky if he didn't get so upset that he ended up severing their relationship on the spot as lovers *and* friends.

Once again, though, she chickened out. Looking up into eyes she craved to make all sleepy and lust-drowsy for the rest of her life, she told him the only secret she could drag from her wicked soul. "Remember when I went to the prom?"

"Yes." He started running feathery kisses over her forehead. "You also came back late and I gave you a lecture that lasted three days. You scared the hell out of me." His last words were strained. "I thought that something awful happened to you, or that the guy you had gone with had taken advantage of you."

"Thankfully, neither one had happened." Lil clutched his shoulders as he swirled his tongue in her ear then made a wet trail down the length of her throat. "I'm sorry I made you worry. Especially since I didn't go to the prom like I said I did."

Trevor stopped. His head slowly came up, gaze piercing. "If not to the prom, then where?" His voice was low and measured. If this teeny lie affected him so badly, imagine what he would do when he found out about their growing infant. She'd be lucky if they even remained civil acquaintances.

Lil sagged against the car, feeling subdued. “You were so upset with me that night you didn’t even notice I wasn’t wearing the dress you’d bought.” She sighed, her voice sounding far away. “Nobody invited me to go, Trevor. All the guys said they wanted to go with somebody prettier, more popular.”

He reached up, holding her face between his palms. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I was seventeen. You bought me this beautiful dress. And...” She dropped her gaze. “I was hurt because no one asked me to go.”

“Is that why you dressed up like this tonight?” He tilted his head to the side, as if trying to understand, his big hands cupping her shoulders. “You think you aren’t pretty enough as Lillian Campbell?”

She shrugged, looking up at him when he placed a finger under her chin. “No. I’m quite over the angst of being an awkward teenager.” She sighed. “I never had my fairy tale night that all girls look forward to. Every girl wants a perfect, magical evening. Even baseball pitchers.” She smiled a wobbly little smile. “I was claiming a night that had been denied me those years ago. And you gave it to me.” She whispered, “Thank you.”

“Aw, Lil.” Placing a hand behind her knees and one at her back, Trevor lifted her into his arms and started toward the house. “It isn’t over yet, babe. Not by a long shot. Tonight, I’ll show you just how incredibly beautiful you are. You, Lillian Ethyl Campbell.” He kissed her nose. “Just as you are. And trust me, a fairy tale will pale compared to what I do to you.”

Lil’s heart crumbled just a little bit more knowing that it wasn’t going to last. Knowing that her love was all one-sided. Knowing that, though he was going to be a father within the next six months, he would be nothing more to their child than “Uncle Trevor.”

Chapter Eight

“Tell me again why we’re standing in your kitchen, wearing aprons, and attempting to—yuck—cook.” Trevor looked as if he had just sucked on a lemon.

Lil laughed, handing him three potatoes and the peeler. “Because, don’t you think it’s awfully sad that we’re neophytes when it comes to kitchen duties?” She was busy chopping carrots at his side.

Trevor turned to growl in her ear, “It’s not so sad when you consider what top pros we are when it comes to bedroom duties. Why don’t we order a pizza and make love on the couch till it arrives?”

Lil made a little sound of protest, looking at him with pursed lips. “Trevor,” she groaned in dismay.

“Doesn’t that sound like more fun than cutting up veggies?” In his usual maneuver, he had her backed up against the counter, crushed against the hard, pulsing bulge in his jeans.

Removing the small paring knife from her right hand, the peeled carrot from her left, Trevor tossed them on the sink then proceeded to move his hips back and forth, rubbing his evident arousal against her.

“Trevor,” Lil said breathlessly, “when you do that I can’t think.” Hell, she didn’t want to think. She had been trying—without success—to lead Trevor down that domestic path with her ever since they’d had that wondrous night together last week. She had thought that sharing in the preparation of dinner would set into motion his familial wheels. All it managed to do was get him sexually stimulated. Her, too, for that matter.

“Who’s asking you to think? Making love is purely a thing to be experienced, not thought about.” He was untying her apron, lifting her T-shirt over her head, removing her bra, cupping her breasts in the palms of his hands. “Forget about the pizza for now,” he said while unzipping her jeans.

Lil moaned her approval, stepping out of her pants and undies.

With one swoop of his hand, Trevor had the counter cleared; potatoes, carrots, and an assortment of other fresh vegetables falling into the sink and onto the floor. Lifting Lil by the waist, he set her on the counter, tore off his apron, slid down his own zipper and made love to her there in the kitchen.

Several minutes later, Trevor rested his damp forehead against Lil’s, his breathing just as ragged as hers. “Wow.” It was a hoarse whisper. “Nobody’s gonna convince me that I’m on a sexual decline just because I’m thirty-six.”

“It’s probably the vitamins you take,” she said, rubbing her nose against his.

“It’s probably my partner.” His tone was low, so low Lil almost missed it, but she hadn’t. And her insides melted into a gooey, sticky mess of feminine mush.

When she was positive that she would break out into another episode of tears, the phone rang, shattering the tender moment.

“Why don’t I get that,” Trevor suggested. “You can go to work at putting your clothes back on. ’Course I don’t know why, I’ll probably just take them back off again. In fact,” he pulled away from her, zipped his pants back up and started for the ringing phone in the front room, “I’m sure of it.” He grinned at her, picking up the receiver.

“Hello?” He scrunched up his face in consternation as Lil slid off the counter and pulled her T-shirt back on. But his expression melted then froze into a grim mask as he listened to the person on the other end of the line. “Yeah, I’ll tell her.” With stiff movements he hung up and walked back into the kitchen.

“Who was it?” Lil missed his hard expression, the taut way he held his body, as she pulled on her shorts.

“Your obstetrician.” His voice was cooler than an Arctic wind. “She didn’t want you to forget your prenatal appointment for this Friday.”

Lil’s head shot up, her stomach in her throat. The room seemed to tilt and her legs felt like they’d been severed with a machete. With great effort she stumbled over to the dinette table, slumping into a chair. She couldn’t look at Trevor when he stood so near. He was glaring down at her, she could feel it. Could *feel* the anger shooting out from his pores like thousands of electrical currents. She had lied to him. Her best friend. Her lover. The father of her unborn child. And now she was facing the consequences.

“How long have you known?” Lil could tell that he kept his voice calm with only the utmost restraint.

“Almost three months.” She cringed when she heard his sharp intake of breath. And still she could not look at him, her culpable gaze remaining riveted to the far end table in the living room where a picture sat of her, her parents, Brian and Trevor. They were smiling, all bunched together so they could fit into the scene. The picnic at the lake. It had been the last place they had all gone to together before the accident. “I got pregnant right away,” she added quietly.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Lil had never heard such an emotionless monotone come from Trevor’s lips. Oh, yes, he was upset, and had every right to be.

Taking the risk of looking at him, she turned her head in his direction, meeting her nemesis straight on, her hands clasped in her lap. “I—I don’t know.”

She couldn’t tell him that she had fallen in love with him. That she cherished their time together so very much that she had kept this secret from him. That she was ready to fall apart like a meticulously put together jigsaw puzzle that had been dropped to the floor. She lowered her lashes, shifting her gaze to the sunny-yellow linoleum, staring at the gold veins running through it.

“I do.” He crouched down in front of her, taking her hands in his.

“You do?” She slowly lifted her head. Could he know how she felt about him? Did he feel the same about her?

No. The look in his eyes, a look she hadn’t seen since twelve years ago, told her that he was assuming his guardian role once again.

Still holding her hands in his, he reached up to trace the curve of her jaw with a pointed forefinger. “You got wrapped up in this thing, just like I did. I hadn’t had a woman for half a year or more, and you hadn’t had a man for at least that long.” His wry smile looked small and broken before his expression went serious again. “It was physical. It was sweet. We accomplished our mission.” He nodded to her stomach. “Now it’s over.”

All Lil wanted to do was throw herself in his arms and tell him it wasn’t over. That it could never be over. To give their relationship a chance. That he could learn to love her. But she didn’t. Instead, she whispered, “You aren’t mad because I didn’t tell you?”

He turned his head and inhaled a slow, deep breath through his nose before letting it

out again. When he looked at her again, she saw how distant his eyes were, as if he was detaching himself from all they had shared for the past few months. It was the same look he had pinned her with after that kiss on her twenty-first birthday.

When he spoke, his voice was heavy and thick. “No, Lil. I could never be mad at you.” He then added, “You’re like a sister to me.”

Lil felt her entire world, her silly dreams of the future, fading to black. A sister. A tomboy. And no longer Trevor Scott’s lover.

Trevor released her hands and got to his feet. “I’ll pick up my stuff tomorrow.” He grabbed his keys off the top of the refrigerator. “I’ll be around.” He was at the doorway of the kitchen. “Take it easy, Pill.” And he headed toward the front door.

It couldn’t end like this, Lil thought desperately. How could he just put their intimacy aside as if there was a switch inside him that read Brother/Lover and could be turned on and off at will?

“Trevor, wait.” Lil sprang to her feet, following him to the door. He stopped just as he had the door open. When he turned back to her, his expression was dark and serious. “Can we still have our Friday night dinners like we used to?” She was proud of herself for not letting her tears show on her face and in her voice.

He shrugged. “Sure. Whose turn is it?”

She swallowed hard. “Yours, I believe.”

A thoughtful expression passed over his sober features. “I’ll be expecting you Friday night then after I close up the gym.”

Lil nodded, then added on an impulse, “I was wondering if you’d like to go with me to the doctor on Friday afternoon. You might like to hear what she has to say, just in case I forget to follow any instructions in regards to my and the baby’s health.” She saw his jaw clench tightly and thought he would shatter the bones there at any second.

After what felt like a decade of silence, Trevor finally asked, “What time?”

“One-thirty.”

He gave a quick nod. “I’ll pick you up at work.”

“Okay,” she murmured. Then he was out the door, closing it softly behind him.

Lil collapsed to the carpet. How was she going to convince Trevor that she needed him to be more than a brother figure? That she loved him and wanted him to be hers forever?

Placing a hand over her slightly swollen abdomen, she knew she had to win Trevor’s love—for her and their child. She had to prove to him that they were meant to be together. She had to uncover those demons that kept his heart in a fearful grip, refusing to let him believe in love. She had to make him learn to love himself.

Lil shook her head, feeling overwhelmed, yet determined. It was a tall order to fill, but by the very heart that beat in her chest and the tiny life that grew within her, she would do it. If it took her from now until her dying day, she would win Trevor’s love.

* * * *

When Lil stepped out of the air-conditioned store she was greeted by a wave of summer heat that smelled of hot asphalt. Though not as scorching as most cities got in September, it was still a shock to her system after being in the artificially cooled environment she worked in all day.

Looking around, she quickly caught sight of Trevor’s Wrangler parked just ahead on

the bottom level of the double-decked parking lot. He was looking in her direction but his expression was unreadable from where she stood. He must have seen her though, because she noticed the way he shifted in his seat before looking away.

Ever since he had found out about her pregnancy things hadn't been the same. She only saw him when she went to the gym each night and then he treated her with quiet courtesy, or avoided her altogether. His clothes had promptly been removed from her bedroom, evidently while she had been at the store so he wouldn't have to face her. He didn't call her anymore. They no longer laughed together. He no longer looked at her in that sleepy-eyed, sexy way of his.

No, things weren't going along well at all. In fact, they couldn't possibly be worse.

After her tremendous lie shouldn't she have expected such behavior from him? Hadn't she been telling herself all along that keeping her pregnancy a secret would build a chasm between them? Now that the results had come to pass, she only had herself to blame.

Drawing in a shaky breath, she crossed the graying asphalt in the direction of the morose man in the blue Jeep. No, things were not going along well at all. She wanted Trevor as a lover, someday, hopefully, more. But as of now, she didn't even have him for a friend. And it hurt. Bad.

As she reached the vehicle, Trevor leaned across the seat and opened her door for her. Mumbling a word of thanks, Lil climbed in, her heart in her toes. He looked gorgeous as always. Wearing snug, old jeans and a decrepit T-shirt, Lil thought he never looked as good as he did now. Even with that grim expression marring his sexy mouth and the violet shadows beneath his eyes.

"Your insomnia's back, isn't it?" she asked out of genuine concern, wanting to soothe away the pinched look on his face.

"Yeah," he replied, obviously not in the mood for conversation. "Where to?" He sounded like a man being dragged off to war.

Lil sighed. So much for attempting to bridge that chasm even the tiniest bit. "The same doctor I've always gone to. You know, the one across the street from St. Mary's." Trevor nodded, indicating he knew which office she was referring to. He ought to, he'd taken her there enough over the years.

"I thought she was just a general practitioner." The statement was short and Lil wondered why he even attempted to talk to her, be with her at all, if he couldn't stand the sight of her as his icy mien proved to be true.

"Lucky for me she's also an ob/gyn." She kept her voice breezy, her gaze straight ahead, as if his somber mood didn't bother her in the least.

Trevor gave a little grunt of comprehension, and that was the end of their conversation.

After fastening her seat belt, Lil settled in for what she was certain would be a silent and strained trip.

Trevor didn't surprise her. He kept his mien black and distant as they drove along the bustling one-way streets. Occasionally she would glance his way, catching sight of the ticking muscle along the right side of his jaw. It frightened her to see him like this. In all of the years that she had known him, he had never exhibited such a hard, unemotional persona.

Tears were gathering at the back of her throat and a tiny sob escaped her as she tried

to hold it back. She should be used to crying by now. Ever since she and Trevor had become intimate, since she had gotten pregnant, and more so after he had left, she had cried her own pond full.

Hormones. Her doctor had told her she would be experiencing a multitude of emotions while going through her pregnancy. “Imagine having PMS for nine months,” were her exact words. “Times ten.”

Lil brushed an annoying tear from her cheek as she gazed out of the side window, blind to the city around her, thinking that her life was once again in a state of ruins. Only this time, Trevor wasn’t there to help her pick up the pieces.

*

A heavy sigh seeped from Trevor’s lungs as he stared straight ahead at the traffic moving along in front of him. He felt different now that Lil was pregnant. He was slightly bitter that he had been denied any more time with her, though he knew it was a ridiculous emotion to be experiencing. The whole purpose of their intimacy had been to create the child that lay in her belly right now.

He slid a sideways glance at the particular part of her anatomy. How would he feel once she started showing? When the product of their once close relationship made itself known with tiny kicks and hiccups? And finally when the child was born, would it bring them closer together, or farther apart?

They had been the best of friends before all of this had happened. He had promised himself that he would keep his head on straight. Didn’t think there would be any problem with going from friends, to lovers, and back to friends again. But there was a problem. A big one. And he was damned if he knew how to fix it or why it was even there in the first place. All he knew was that something was different now. In him.

Four nights of intense insomnia, pacing the floors and beating his head—literally—against the wall hadn’t uncovered the whys of his strange turn of feelings toward Lil.

She seemed to accept their readopted roles as friends-only with great ease. Naturally, it was his attitude that had her down. She was being calm and mature about the whole pregnancy thing. Just as he knew she would handle it. This was something she had planned for quite some time. He was just her source to help her achieve her goal.

So what was his hang-up?

With a muttered curse, he changed lanes and took a right, going to a nearby park and pulling into the small parking lot underneath the shade of a large, drooping weeping willow. The picture that sad old tree projected suited his own mood right about now.

“What are we doing here?” Lil asked, her voice sounding small, keeping her face toward the passenger’s window.

“We need to talk.” Trevor killed the motor and sat there, the silence between them stretching to infinitum. He wanted to pull Lil into his arms, sit her on his lap and kiss away every tear he knew she was shedding, but he didn’t. Couldn’t. They couldn’t go back to what they had before. Living together, sharing the same bed without any thought of the future. It was fun while it had lasted. Hell, it had been fantastic. But it was physical and it was over. He simply had to get over it. He had to stop thinking about her in that intimate, erotic way.

Why? Because he was very close to asking Lil if he could move back in with her—on a permanent basis. He had never been in a serious relationship even once in his life, but had seen firsthand what a marriage could decay into. And though Lil wasn’t a bit like

his mother, there were doubts in his mind as to whether or not he possessed the same wrathful genes as his father had. The very same blood ran through his veins, after all. Was it so foolish to think that buried within him lay dormant anger just waiting to explode? In fact, hadn't he felt it simmering just below the surface on more than one occasion? Thankfully, he had kept it tamped down so far.

Besides, there had to be more to a relationship. Great sex and making a baby was a long way from everlasting love. Not that he believed any such thing. Maybe for Lil someday, but definitely not for himself. Ever. Of that he was certain.

"Lil?" he said softly, severing the quietude around them.

"Yeah." She kept her face to the window.

"Look at me." It was a whispered command.

"I look like crap."

Trevor gave a wry snort. "No worse than I do, I'm sure."

"It's over between us, isn't it?" She still didn't look in his direction.

"You're pregnant, Lil. That's all you wanted from me. That was our agreement." He sounded so calm and rational to his own ears.

"Just like that," she said bitterly. "After all we've been through, especially in the last three months, it's that easy for you to cut off that part of our relationship?" She then added with a harsh laugh, "Of course, you should know about rejecting people."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Before she could answer, he said, "If you're referring to the women I've gone out with in the past, they knew right from the start not to expect any sort of commitment from me. I told them there would never be anything serious. Just fun..."

Lil swung her head around, her liquid eyes piercing. "I'm talking about me, Trevor," she interrupted, jabbing an angry thumb at her chest.

"You?" He frowned. "When have I ever rejected you?"

She turned away again. "I'm sure it was no big deal to you. In fact, you probably don't even remember such an insignificant thing such as that. But there was that kiss we shared on my twenty-first birthday."

He swore softly under his breath. "Like hell I don't remember." He reached over, took her chin in his palm and turned her head so she was forced to look directly at him. "I remember the night as if it happened yesterday." His voice was suddenly low. "Your hair was long. On a whim you'd dyed it ash-blonde that day. We laughed earlier, both deciding it didn't suit you. I brought over that stupid stuffed dog you still have on your dresser, burgers, and pink champagne later that evening. After we polished off the food and the bottle of bubbly, I fully intended to give you a friendly birthday kiss, say goodnight and leave."

His eyelids dropped to half-mast before closing completely, viewing the scene in his mind. "The instant I touched my lips to yours, though, I don't know what came over me." He looked at her. "I tried to blame it on the champagne. You felt so good in my arms. You tasted so damn delicious. I couldn't help stealing a little more. Couldn't resist sliding my tongue into your warm mouth again and again."

"God," he groaned, releasing her, letting his head fall back against the seat, his hands gripping the steering wheel tightly, fighting for control he didn't feel at the moment. "It was the wildest kiss I'd ever shared in. It was hot, gut-deep, pure. And then it hit me. This young woman in my arms trusted me, depended on me. I was her guardian, her big

brother. Brian begged me on his deathbed to take care of her. And here I was ready to pick her up and carry her to bed.”

“You were?” Lil’s words came out on a sigh.

“Hell yes!” He was looking at her again.

“Then why didn’t you?”

Trevor dragged a hand through his hair, letting out an impatient breath through his nose. “For the very reasons I just told you. We were practically raised like brother and sister, Lil.”

“But we’re not,” she countered. “Not by blood, not by marriage, if anything, mostly by circumstance.”

“You’re impossible,” he muttered.

“Just tell me the truth. You didn’t act upon your urges simply because I don’t fit your prerequisites as a lover. You like thinking of me as a kid sister because it’s easier to give a reason to why you don’t want me. It’s easier than saying it’s because I’m plain and short and lack good etiquette in feminine wiles.”

Trevor leveled his gaze on her, hard and determined. “That’s a bunch of bullshit and you know it.”

“You have a better suggestion?”

He nodded ever so slightly. “Yeah. Yeah I do.”

“Then tell me.” She turned her body toward him, leaning forward in a pleading gesture. “Why did you reject me then?”

“Because ... that kiss, Lil. That one little kiss scared the fucking hell out of me,” he admitted. “I felt something when I kissed you.” He gave a vigorous shake of his head, trying to unclutter his thoughts. “I don’t know what it was, but I’ve never felt it with anyone before then.” His voice came out on a whisper as he said, “Or since. I knew it was bad to feel that way, so I broke off the kiss before it went any further, and swore I’d never mention it again.” His lips curved into a derisive smile. “I’ve thought about it though. A lot.”

“I’ve thought about it a lot, too.” When he shot her with a hard look she softly asked, “If that kiss scared you so badly, then why did you agree to make love with me all of these months?”

“Hell, I guess I’m a masochist.” He then said almost desperately, “It was supposed to be business. You wanted a baby. I would provide the means to give it to you. I didn’t think about the future. Didn’t even stop to think for a minute how hard it would be to break it off after you finally conceived.”

“Would it be so bad? To be lovers again?”

“Holy shit, woman!” Lil jumped at his harsh tone. “Haven’t you been listening? Haven’t you been nagging me all of these years about my lifestyle? That I have no direction in life, that I’m incapable of settling down, that I don’t take life seriously enough. I have nothing to offer *you*, let alone a baby.” His tone became softer as he reached out to caress her cheek and said, “You need love, Lil. A soul-deep, forever love. And I can’t offer you that.”

“I see.” She pulled back from his touch, readjusting herself so she sat facing straight ahead, fiddling with one of the gold buttons on her blazer.

“We’re still friends, though,” he said with forced cheerfulness.

Lil turned to face him, nose red, her expression bleak. “Are we?” Her tone indicated

that she didn't believe it for one second.

Trevor frowned. "Of course we are. You don't throw away nearly three decades of friendship just like that. As far as I'm concerned..."

"Just shut up," she snapped. "I don't want to hear any more of your logical assessments concerning our relationship. For three months things were wonderful between us. Okay, I got what I wanted, a baby—as per our agreement. Then you cut things off between us, moved out and have been treating me like a thorn in your side ever since. *Why?*" The last word was a torn whisper.

It was Trevor's turn to look away, taking absent interest in a pair of young lover's necking on the grass a few yards away. The scene called to mind several such encounters he and Lil had shared that ended on a much more passionate note. He cleared his throat, tearing his gaze away and back to the woman seated next to him.

"I don't know," he said truthfully. "I guess I got in over my head and now I don't know where we're supposed to go from here."

"Is it impossible to go back to being friends like we were before? Has our being lovers fractured what we used to have?"

He took in a shaky breath. "No. And it's not impossible to go back to being friends." A tiny smile pulled at his lips. "I'd like that."

"Me too."

They sat there staring at each other for several minutes until Trevor finally said, "Friends?" He held his arms open for a hug.

"Friends," Lil said breathlessly, leaning into him.

When Trevor broke the hug that lasted far longer than intended, he looked at Lil with drowsy eyes. "I made you miss your appointment with the doctor." His soft, husky voice rolled off his tongue.

"I'll make another one," she murmured. He brushed back a few curls from her face, made a little sound in the back of his throat, and just when he was about to lean forward and kiss her, he sat up stiffly and switched the ignition on.

"I'd better get you back to work," he said gruffly.

Lil sighed, slumping against the door. "Why don't we skip our Friday routine this once," she said. "I'm a little tired."

"I understand." There was something in her voice he didn't care to speculate on at the moment. It was probably relief.

With that thought stomping around in his mind, he drove her back to work in complete silence.

* * * *

That night Lil went home, took a shower, slid on a pair of shorts and a T-shirt and went to the kitchen to make herself some warm milk. She'd called the gym earlier and left a message with Rick, asking him to tell Trevor she wouldn't be in this evening. She was still upset over their conversation at the park. He'd have to make do without her tonight.

There was one consolation to crying so much; you eventually ran out of tears. Now she was just numb and confused.

Hormones: Her doctor's assurance of what caused her emotions to seesaw filled her head.

Trevor: Her heart countered.

Both: Was her own conclusion.

Just as she was about to sit down with the nine o'clock news, a knock on the door stopped her before she took her first sip of milk. She didn't dare hope it was Trevor. Lord knew he had practically done a back flip when she called off their customary get together. Still, she couldn't help the sudden drumming of her silly, immature heart as she walked to the door.

And it nearly burst when she opened it and found him standing there with one white sack clutched between his teeth and two in his right hand. His left hand was held up in a fist, bent at the elbow, ready to knock again. He jerked his arm back when she opened the door, and sucked in a quick breath.

"I didn't mean to scare you," Lil said as bubbles sparkled in her blood. She hadn't really wanted to be left alone this evening, and was glad he had come over. She laughed, taking the bag from between his teeth, forgetting her glum spirits of just thirty seconds ago.

"I thought maybe you were in the bathroom and hadn't heard me. I didn't take my key with me." His whole body seemed uptight. She'd never seen him look so uneasy. Trevor was usually the epitome of confidence. In fact, aggravatingly so. But right now he looked a thousand times more uncertain than she felt.

"Come in," Lil offered, stepping aside as he entered. He was limping. Had he been out in the damp night air too long?

"I know you said you wanted to be alone." He stood in the middle of her front room like it was the first time he had been there. "I hope you don't mind me just showing up like this, but I bought too much food at Sam Wo and didn't want it to go to waste." He looked everywhere but at her, hands thrust into the back pockets of his jeans, taking in his surroundings as if seeing them anew.

Trevor was worried about just showing up? That man thrived on appearing on her doorstep without notice. He *must* be feeling off balance. Lil knew she had to do something to put him at ease.

"Is there sweet and sour shrimp in here?" She walked to the kitchen, placing the sacks on the counter, reaching in to extract the white containers.

"Yep. And raw fish salad, among other things."

Lil smiled wryly. Trevor hated sweet and sour shrimp. Which only proved that he had bought this stuff on purpose, fully intending to come over and have dinner with her. The knowledge sent her heart into fluttering motions.

Previous misery and anger forgotten, she asked, "Are you going to help me or stand in the middle of my front room looking lost?" She cast him a glance and noticed he was staring at her before his gaze drifted to the corner of the counter where they had made love before—on more than one occasion. During one of those episodes she had been wearing the same outfit she had on now, although she now wore underwear and a bra.

"Sure." He shrugged, pulled his hands free from his pockets then joined her in the kitchen, standing stiffly next to her at the beige tiled counter.

"You want to eat in the living room, or shall we obey good etiquette and eat at the kitchen table?" Lil reached into a drawer, retrieving a serving spoon and two forks. She figured he'd choose the kitchen since it represented a less cozy atmosphere and about three feet of Formica between them.

"The kitchen is fine."

Did she know that man, or what?

She looked over at him and he seemed a bit woozy. "Are you okay?"

He nodded. "I just need to sit down. I haven't been sleeping enough lately, and eating hasn't been high on my list of priorities. In fact, I've devoted most of my waking hours to the gym." Stumbling over to the small oval table, Trevor scraped a chair back and dropped his bulk onto it. Lil stared in his direction. His head rested on his forearms. He looked pale, the bruises under his eyes more pronounced. And she knew fatigue and not the night fog caused his limp.

Setting down the two plates she had taken from the dish drain, she went to him, worry creasing her brow. She placed a hand on his back and he jumped as if she'd stuck ice down his shirt. His head shot up. "You really need to take better care of yourself."

His only answer was a shrug. She felt like wringing his neck, or dragging him to her bedroom and replacing that stark look with one of rapture. She did neither.

Lil knew Trevor was always a man in control of his emotions, only allowing those around him to see the lighthearted, slightly arrogant side of his personality. But this man before her was one she had never seen before. And the thing was, she recognized that haunted look only too well, for she had worn it once herself.

After her folks died she had worn a mask similar to the one she saw on Trevor's face. It was a veil of depression. She couldn't help but feel responsible. Perhaps her perfect plan for at last getting the baby she'd always craved was a selfish one. Perhaps she should have thought over Trevor's offer more fully, even turned him down flat from the start. Look where it had gotten them.

Sure, she would be blessed with a child, but now she found herself irrevocably in love with the father of her unborn infant and that man's life was now in turmoil.

For the very first time in her life she hadn't thought over the possible repercussions of her actions. Didn't think how it would affect Trevor once he realized that they had created another human being together.

"Trevor?" she said in her softest tone. "How long has it been since you've had a decent night's sleep?"

"Since I left here." He looked away from her sympathetic gaze.

"It's the nightmares, isn't it?" *And me*, she wanted to add but didn't. She laid a hand on his left cheek, exerting only the slightest pressure, forcing him to make eye contact.

"Yeah," he finally said, "among other things."

"How long has it been since you've eaten a decent meal?" She ran a finger over a slightly hollowed cheekbone. Could anybody look like walking death in only four days?

Evidently Trevor could.

He laughed. "I don't know, it's still sitting on the counter."

She held his face between both palms now. Memories passed through her mind at lightning speed. Trevor had always been the take-charge type. When they had lived together it was he who took care of her, tended to her cuts and bruises, dried her tears, catered to her needs when she had been sick.

And who had taken care of Trevor?

He had often said his mom hadn't been into the nursemaid role. Throughout the years, he'd had his share of cuts and bruises, the flu and colds. If he'd ever shed any tears, she hadn't been witness to them. And through it all he had been a tower of strength,

claiming he didn't need to be treated like a baby. Didn't need anyone hovering over him. That might be true, but if there was anyone who looked like they were in desperate need of TLC, it was Trevor Scott.

A faint ember of hope burned in the very center of her. An idea blazed to life in her mind. Would it work?

Though she couldn't change the past, nor divine the future, she most certainly could guide the present.

Love. So simple for her to give, but how easy would it be for Trevor to accept it? To someday return it?

If she laid it on too thick, Trevor would wall himself up in that macho man demeanor of his and scoff at the idea of him needing any comforting. The only way she could manage it would be to play it his way. And maybe, by doing so, he would see just how much they really needed each other. How much their child needed them—both.

"Well then," she said brightly, releasing her hold on him. "Why don't I dish up some food?" She turned back toward the counter and could feel his gaze on her. "I must admit I haven't been taking proper care of myself, either. Now that I'm expecting, I have to be more careful in regards to my health." She laid the heaping filled plates on the table, Trevor looking at her with a small frown between his brows.

"That's not good." She could hear the deep concern in his voice.

"No, it isn't." Lil sighed. "It's so hard to shop for one, cook for one. By the way, I've been trying my hand at cooking." She saw him lift a brow in disbelief. "Believe it or not, the queen of frozen dinners is learning to prepare home cooked meals. I figure a child needs more nutrition than burgers from the local takeout and Lean Cuisines."

Treading the five paces back to the refrigerator, she pulled out a Corona, left there since Trevor had moved out, and set it in front of him. She lingered by his side, a serious look on her face. "Now that I'm pregnant I need to watch what I eat, but buying one apple, one orange, one steak, then having to come home and fix something to eat and share it with the early news..." Another breath sighed through her lips. "Don't you think it's awfully hard being alone sometimes? Do you ever find yourself talking to a wall simply because nobody else is around?"

He shrugged, taking a long swallow of beer.

When everything needed was on the table, she sat down and picked up a fork, noting that he was already devouring his Kung Pao chicken, fried rice, and raw fish salad like a stray dog.

She smiled to herself. "Soy sauce?" He shook his head, unable to talk since his mouth was full at the moment. Lil continued her previous line of conversation. "I guess you never really think about being alone. To tell you the truth neither had I until very recently. I suppose that expecting a baby can make you rethink a lot of things. Makes one sit up and take notice of situations, of their life in general. Like the fact that I'm here by myself when so much crime is running rampant." She added in a matter-of-fact tone, "Didn't they just catch that cat-thief a couple blocks away from here last week?"

"Yeah. I remember reading something about that on the Internet." He frowned again, but his attention was on his plate.

Now that she had properly primed his mind, using the I'm-alone-and-pregnant-tactic at least five or six times in her little spiel, she would spring her idea on him and pray it wouldn't backfire.

Trevor laid his fork on the plate and looked at her with worry creasing his brow. “I never thought about all of those things before. Now that you mention it though, I don’t like the idea of you being here alone, especially since you’re carrying my child.”

Lil’s blood sped through her veins at his statement. He wasn’t laying claim to her, but he was at least declaring that she held a part of him within her. “Exactly,” she said, trying not to appear too eager.

She stuck a finger in her mouth for a thoughtful moment then snapped in his I’ve-got-a-terrific-idea gesture. “I know. Maybe you could move back in here with me, at least until the baby’s born. That way you could make sure I’m taking proper care of myself, chase away any crooks who may try to sneak in and steal my precious microwave.” She smiled, reaching across the table to clasp his hand. “I’d really appreciate it.” She lowered her lids and peered through her lashes, trying to appear like the height of feminine helplessness.

He cocked his head to one side thoughtfully and seemed to be concealing a smile. “It’s only logical, isn’t it?”

“Of course. What could make more sense?” Lil took her hand from his, consuming a bite of rice, smothering her own grin.

“I suppose I could sleep on the couch again.”

She nodded. “You could.” Lil wanted to squelch that idea, but didn’t want to pounce on him all at once. She had to take things nice and slow if she was going to win this giant’s skittish heart.

“What about my place though?” That frown was there again.

“Hmmm.” She pretended to think about it. “I’m sure you wouldn’t want to pay rent on a home you won’t be living in for the next six months.” She mentally crossed her fingers. Would he accept her hand and take the huge leap she was luring him to? “I know it’s spur-of-the-moment, but my place is plenty big enough. When you’re ready to move back out, the baby and I could help you find another place. You’ve wanted something better than that self-proclaimed hole-in-the-wall for ages. Think of this as a step in the right direction.” *My direction*, the words buzzed in her head.

She held her breath, waiting for his answer. Him giving up his home of nearly fifteen years and moving in with her would be just the right start in catching this Hercules for her own.

Trevor gave an unbothered shrug. “Sounds good. Will you help me drag my stuff back over? Aside from a few things other than my clothes, most of it’s ready for the dump.” He polished off the beer and was at the counter filling his plate again.

“First thing in the morning,” she assured him. “I still have your extra toothbrush and you could borrow one of my T-shirts.” She wanted to sound calm and rational.

“Sounds good.” Trevor sat back down and already looked ten years younger.

“Yes, it does, doesn’t it?” She smiled warmly at him, tamping down any feelings of desire—for the moment. “Thank you, Trevor.”

“No problem.” His gaze held hers. “After all, what are friends for? Am I right?”

Lil smiled, triumph slowly simmering in her blood. “You have your moments.”

* * * *

Lil viewed the huge man lying on her tiny couch. She made him a bed by taking off the back cushions in order to give him a few extra inches of sleeping space. A fluffy

pillow lay behind his head, a crisp sheet lay beneath him and a floral comforter veiled his briefs-only body from view.

If she had her way they'd both be cuddled up on her bed naked right now, but vowed to take this thing slow and steady.

She wanted this too much to louse it up with getting Trevor more confused than he already was. He needed time to think things through. Decide what he really wanted from life—from their relationship.

She wasn't putting any more hope in the future than what she could accomplish one moment at a time. Having him here was more than she could have hoped for. Having him living with her again was something ethereal. Destiny would have to take care of the rest, though she fully intended on giving it a healthy shove.

"All comfy?" she asked, standing at the back of the couch, already dressed in a short cotton nightgown in a pale peach color.

Trevor nodded, his arms folded beneath his head, exposing the downy hair of his underarms that had Lil's knees melting like a crayon in the sun. "Thanks, Lil." She didn't miss the husky tone in his voice, revealing the fact that he was thanking her for far more than making him a bed on her sofa. Although, he didn't realize her motives were purely selfish.

"My pleasure," she murmured, her soft gaze following the outline of his full lips. Her voice grew serious with her next words. "If you have another nightmare don't hesitate to wake me." *You can even crawl in bed with me if you'd like*, she mutely offered.

He rolled his eyes. "Shit, I'm not a baby. I'm a grown man."

"I don't think anything less of you than as a man. We all have something in our past that haunts us," she whispered. "Just remember that I'm here if you need me. Never forget that." She reached out and caressed a stubbled cheek.

"I know," he whispered in return, their gazes locked.

For several seconds they stayed that way, Lil waiting for him to make the first move that would have them making love either here on the couch, in her bed, or any place in between.

Finally she moved away, going to the end of the couch where she switched off the lamp, plunging them into darkness. "Night, Trevor."

Trevor sighed then yawned. "Night, Pill."

Lil let out a short breath of amusement. It was going to be uphill all the way.

Chapter Nine

Three weeks went by in a blur. Trevor was still staying with Lil after having vacated his old place, though they had mutually adopted their previous roles of friends-only. Which was perfectly okay with Lil—for the time being.

She had asked him to accompany her to the doctor's office, saying he'd be able to hear the tiny heartbeat of their infant if he went along, but he had declined. Evidently he wasn't up to that yet. She figured it represented something too familial for him to accept just yet, so she had gone alone.

He had relieved her from her duties at the gym, telling her she needed rest and shouldn't be working twelve-hour days. Actually, he tried to get her to quit working altogether. He assured her he had enough money to support her, but she refused. If she had to stay home around the clock she would probably go insane. Besides, she was his friend, not his wife. Not yet anyway.

She still popped into the gym to do a light workout each day after work as recommended by her doctor, but went home right after that, trying not to appear too clingy.

Cooking was going along smoothly and Lil was amazed to discover that it hadn't been her cookware all of those years after all. Indeed, it had been her complete innocence in the kitchen that had been holding her back. It was really quite simple—with the right cookbook.

She was slipping into this domestic role with ease, and actually found herself enjoying the task of preparing dinner for her and Trevor each night. It gave her something to do aside from dwelling on the fact that her bed was still empty of his presence each and every night and that any future for them together was still uncertain.

Tonight she was trying out her culinary skills with Chicken Garden Stew.

The familiar sound of Trevor's Jeep pulling into the driveway had her heart beating a cheerful rhythm of anticipation. Ladling some of the rich stew into the glazed, earthenware bowls, she placed them on the table, along with the rolls she had heated up, just as he walked through the door.

"Something sure smells good," he commented, heading straight for her.

"I certainly hope so, I've been slaving over a hot stove for the past hour," she said in her best woebegone housewife voice while holding the backside of her left hand to her forehead.

Obviously forgetting his vow of hands-off, Trevor laughed, placing a light kiss on the tip of Lil's nose. Up until this very moment he had remained at least three feet away from her at all times. The gesture caused Lil's hand to drop to her side, while desire flooded her veins. His eyes were lust-drowsy—from one simple kiss on the nose.

It felt like an eternity since he had touched her and the small gesture had her lust bubbling to the surface. Trevor reached out to caress her cheek, making Lil's breath catch. His hand slid around to the back of her head where he grabbed a handful of silky curls. He came closer to her, his breath hot and moist over her cheek. Lil opened her mouth in invitation, awaiting the delightful feel of his lips on hers.

His eyes drifted closed and a groan of surrender vibrated deep in his throat. But in

the next heartbeat he released her, looking down at her with an intensity that could only match hers. His breathing was quick and labored.

"I'm going to take a shower. Will dinner wait?" It was more of a brisk statement than an actual question as he backed up toward the living room.

"Yes," she said in a gentle voice, one that belied the raging storm of disappointment that was ready to swallow her whole. She had hoped he was finally going to cave in and succumb to the desire between them. No such luck. Two steps forward and at least as many back was how their relationship seemed to progress. "Dinner will wait."

Trevor nodded, turned, and went down the hall.

Lil emptied the filled bowls back into the pot on the stove, keeping it on a low simmer.

She sat at the table, staring blankly down the hallway as she heard the distant sound of running water. Was it their child creating this unbreakable wall between them? An invisible wall that prevented him from being able to carry on their previous role as friends, much less lovers? But that was silly. It had been for the very reason to conceive this child that they had began making love.

As her thoughts twisted and turned, Trevor came back out; damp, smelling great and achingly gorgeous. How much longer would she be able to keep her desire under lock and key? Keep her love for him only to herself?

Getting up to re-serve the food, she started feeling a little frustrated at his constant way of avoiding any physical contact with her, and felt a whole lot frustrated because she couldn't decipher what was going on in that head of his.

Placing the bowls on the table, she tartly asked, "How'd you like your cold shower?"

He took his usual seat opposite from her. "Just fine, thank you." Their eyes met and held. Trevor was the first to look away, picking up his spoon, poking at his food.

"I'm sorry." Lil swallowed the lump in her throat that felt like a splintered chicken bone. "That was uncalled for. Just because I want..." she stopped herself, looking up at his handsome face had her stomach dipping again.

"What do you want?" he asked on a whisper. "If it's in my power I'll give it to you."

God, Lil thought, he was serious. But she was certain he wasn't willing to give her what she wanted most: Himself—mind, body, heart and soul.

He was clearly waiting for an answer, so she grabbed the quickest thing she could find lying around in her cluttered brain. "I'd really like to watch a movie, eat popcorn, and drink hot cocoa." Then added in a much quieter tone, "With you by my side."

"Tonight?" he asked, looking relieved that it was something he could handle.

"Why not?" she said around the irritating nugget of emotion that had decided to take root in her esophagus.

"Okay. After dinner I'll run over to the video store and pick up a movie." He dug into his food with new enthusiasm. Lil looked at him in disbelief. And they said *her* hormones were in an uproar?

"What kind should I get?" he asked. "Horror? Action? Drama?" She noticed he was certain to leave out the romance category.

"You choose," she said, knowing he would pick a bloody action/adventure movie. She usually went for horrors or a good comedy, but had more fun when he enjoyed himself. His pleasure was hers also.

"Okay." They shared a moment filled only with silence and mutual smiles. Lil felt

her throat tighten with unshed tears and directed her attention to her bowl.

Trevor did the same.

The rest of the meal was eaten in silence.

When Lil got up to carry the empty dishes to the sink, Trevor got to his feet also. "Here, I'll help you." He stuck the milk back in the fridge. "It's kind of weird now. Usually we just throw the boxes and trays away. I don't remember ever having more than a couple plates and forks to wash." He tried to lighten the somber mood.

"People can change." She reached up in the cupboard for a plastic container to store the remainder of the stew.

Without a word Trevor retrieved the bowl that was just out of Lil's reach, being careful to avoid touching her.

Lil thanked him and went on with her task. "Feelings can change, too." She hurriedly continued, "I mean, ordinary people can be friends one day, then lovers the next, and even end up falling in love with each other." She sneaked a look at him to see if he'd gotten the hint. While he seemed to be pondering over her statement, he obviously didn't apply it to their case.

"Yeah, I suppose so." He shrugged, offering to wash dishes while she rested.

"Thanks, but I can manage." She tried to keep her voice from sounding like she felt; angry and broken. Maybe it was a big mistake asking him to come back here. Maybe nothing would ever change. "Why don't you run over and get the movie while I clean up here and make the popcorn?" After dinner's remains were stored in the freezer, she faced the sink, absently running hot water in one side before sliding the dishes in.

"Sure." Lil heard him take his keys from the top of the fridge; felt him as he lingered behind her. A moment later he said, "I'll be right back."

Lil gave a little nod of her head, listening as he walked out the door, closed it behind him and started his Jeep. Only when she heard him pull out of the driveway did she allow a few tears to spill and mix with the soapy water her hands were immersed in.

How much longer could she handle this constant state of turmoil? It was bad enough knowing she was in love with him and that the feeling wasn't reciprocated, but nothing between them was the same anymore. Nothing.

After washing the dishes, she pulled the plug on the sink, watching as the dirty water swirled down the drain like a small whirlpool. How she wished her problems could disappear so easily.

* * * *

After they had polished off the bowl of popcorn, washing it down with large mugs of cocoa and little talk as they were too absorbed in the movie, Lil fell asleep half an hour before it was over.

They sat close together on the couch, Trevor completely engrossed in the action on the television screen until he felt Lil's slack body lean against his shoulder. For a moment he just sat there; motionless, his breath trapped in his lungs, heat pooling into his groin.

This woman had him in a constant state of awe. Here it was, four months now and he still desired her with every fiber in his taut body. A first for him. He had usually worked his way through three women within the same time period, keeping his radar on for the fourth one to come along. But Lil was on his mind day and night, leaving no room for any other women. And he couldn't figure it out.

Was it because she was pregnant with his child? That could very well be it. He'd never been faced with such a situation before. What role did she expect him to play in the child's life? Uncle Trevor? Or would he be in their lives at all? Would another man marry her someday and be father to his child, husband to his Lil? Maybe Lil would never tell the child that he had impregnated her. That he was her or his natural father.

Something twisted in his gut, causing him to inhale a sharp breath as if he had just been impaled. *A father.* My God, he was going to be a father!

A chill ran through his spine as the knowledge finally seeped into his dormant brain. He was strangely elated, yet completely terrified at the same time. He was also starting to feel possessive. He, the very man who dumped women faster than he could blink because they had gotten possessive, was in fact experiencing the very same emotion.

When he had offered to be the surrogate father for Lil's future kid, all he had thought about was helping the woman who meant so much to him. Didn't want her making love with another man ... any man except himself. The only thing that had occupied his mind from the first night they had lain together and all along those three months was the sheer joy of burying himself deep within Lil's tight, eager body. Each and every time they had come together as lovers it was nearly devastating. Feelings he'd never experienced before with any other woman had wrapped around him until he was willingly caught within Lil's web of seduction. And he longed for that intimacy once again.

More than once he had almost come right out and asked her, begged her, if they could make love. But what reason would he give? That he needed to release some of his hormones? That he couldn't get enough of her and went to bed each night and woke up every morning hard and yearning and ready to go out of his mind with want of her? That his taste for tall, leggy blondes had turned into a raging hunger for a little squirt with freckles? And what would she say to that? To get his dirty mind off his dick, he was certain. That is, after she stopped laughing. All she had wanted from him was a baby. Right?

If so, then why had she kept from telling him she had conceived? Why did she let things go along for so long, continuing to make love with him two or three times a day, if she only wanted a kid out of their deal?

Trevor raked a hand through his hair. Damn he was confused. He wished he had somebody to talk to about this whole confounding situation, but the only person he was that close to was Lil—and she was part of his confusion. The biggest part.

Trevor shifted Lil's weight, laying her head on his lap. He switched off the TV, leaving only the dim table lamp at his side to illuminate the room; the soft glow making her golden skin shimmer, her cinnamon curls shine. Her lashes were the same hue as her hair, that same unique brown/red. The silken curls between her thighs were just as uniquely colored.

As he stared down at the woman sleeping on his lap, he realized he really didn't know her at all.

Sure, he knew her likes and dislikes, knew what time she went to bed and got up, what kind of toothpaste and shampoo she used, but he didn't know who she was inside her heart. What were her dreams and aspirations? How did she feel about facing the future as a single mother? How did she feel about the turn of events in their relationship? How did she really feel about him?

Trevor ran an unsteady finger over her top lip, tracing the half-inch scar there. She

was ten and he had been seventeen. It was a hazy day in February; she was tagging along with him, her brother, and Tommy Monroe. By then he and Brian were used to her constant presence, but Tommy hated the idea of a girl dogging behind them. Tommy turned around, pushed her in the chest and told her to buzz off.

“Suck an egg!” she’d retorted around the huge wad of gum in her mouth, sticking her tongue out at him for good measure. Tommy started chasing her away, picked up a rock and threw it at Lil, hitting her right in the face. Before Brian could make the first move, Trevor was already on Tommy, beating the crap out of him. Even then he had watched out for her.

Three stitches. That’s what it had taken to sew her split lip back up. Trevor loved that little scar. He trailed his finger over the light dusting of freckles sprinkled across the bridge of her nose. He loved those too. They made her look young and innocent, though he had been the recipient of her full-fledged, grown-up passion.

His gaze roamed to the front of her T-shirt; the smooth fabric stretched across her ripening breasts. She had certainly come a long way from that little tomboy Lil the Pill. She was now a shapely woman, though she tended to keep her figure cloaked beneath three-sizes-too-big shirts. Trevor ached to taste her lips again. Craved the feel of her growing breasts in his palms. Longed to slide into her; a place where he had come to feel complete.

Knowing she slept like the dead, he slipped a shaky hand under her shirt, slipping it upward, his lower body tensing as his palm encountered one bare breast. A thick groan lodged in his throat then was swallowed as he took a sleepy nipple between his thumb and forefinger and began rolling it gently. Instantly it roused to his touch, blooming into a tight bud. His dick pulsed beneath Lil’s slumbering head. He had never hurt as bad as he did now. Never wanted a woman so intensely.

His hands trembled. Goddamn! What was he doing? What was happening to him? With Lil he exhibited all of the symptoms of a man losing his grip on sanity. And here he was fondling her in her sleep like some pervert?

He had to get out of here! Needed time to think, to cool off, to get his head and hormones back in line. Lil was his dearest friend, and because he couldn’t keep his libido on that side of the track he was in danger of losing her with all of his bizarre behavior.

He would put her to bed first. It was the logical thing to do, he convinced himself, since she was occupying his bed.

Her weight was minimal in arms as he made his way down the small hall, hesitating in the doorway when he saw her bed. They had made love on that very bed so many times.

No. He shook his head. They hadn’t made love. They had made a baby.

On unsteady legs he ambled into the room, laying her down. She definitely wasn’t a tomboy anymore. His greedy gaze roamed over her body, his memory recalling the satin skin that lay beneath the barrier of clothing. His gaze traveled over her face, her breasts, her hips... Then something else caught his attention, something a little further up. Her once flat stomach was now slightly rounded. Nobody else would notice the small change, but he did.

The baby was there inside of her. The baby they had made together. And this time, his heart pitched. A lump grew in his throat. He laid a gentle hand on her abdomen. The baby was there, growing within her, bigger and stronger as each day passed.

Their baby.

Trevor studied the woman on the bed. Yes, they had indeed made a baby. But they had also made love. With that love they'd created the tiny life lying under his palm, within Lil's womb.

"Lil the Pill," he softly murmured. When they were younger, she had definitely been a pest. A bitter pill that was always there and in the way. Now she was a different kind of pill. She was an aphrodisiac and a love potion all in one. And Trevor found that pill much harder to swallow.

As fast and as gently as he could, he laid her beneath the covers and turned out the light. He had to leave here. Quick!

Silently he walked back out to the living room, switched off the lamp and slipped out the door, closing it softly behind him. Crumbling to the top step of the small porch, the thick night air pressing in on him from all sides, he fought to catch his breath. Laying his head in his hands, he moaned as the realization hit him: He was in love with Lil.

Chapter Ten

Lil was just stepping out of the store, on her way to a light workout at the gym, when she spotted Tracy walking toward her from the parking lot, waving a hand in the air to catch her attention.

Tracy had quit her job two weeks ago and Lil hadn't found a qualified replacement yet, which meant that she was the one handling both her job as supervisor and Tracy's vacant position as cashier. The extra work was a burden now that she tired so easily, but it couldn't be helped.

"Hi, Lil." Tracy walked up to her, giving her a fierce hug, her young face beaming with joy.

"Well, hi yourself," Lil squeaked before being released. "I hear you've taken an early retirement."

"News does travel fast around here, doesn't it?" They walked together to Lil's car.

"Only good news," Lil assured. "So I take it your night of seduction paid off?" She raised a brow in mock disapproval.

Tracy laughed. "The cookies got me to first base. The nightie got me an engagement ring and a wedding date for next month."

"Wow. How'd you get Sam to do it?" They were standing at the side of Lil's car now, the early evening sun obscured by a few cotton clouds.

"He had to." She grinned. "I'm pregnant!"

Lil hid her envy, giving her friend another hug. "I'm so happy for you," she said, feigning utter joy and elation. Being pregnant hadn't gotten her anywhere with Trevor. Not to first base, not even to the dugout. Of course, she had been the one to make the rules regarding their arrangement. And, damn him, he was following them to the T. Not once since he'd discovered her secret had he attempted to touch her at all, let alone in any intimate way.

She was still rueful over waking up this morning and finding herself in her own bed. Evidently she had fallen asleep on the couch during the movie and Trevor had seen to it that she was comfortably put to bed. It appeared he had no trouble at all in resisting the desire to be with her since she'd still been fully dressed.

The same man who had made passionate, unbridled love to her while in his Lover mode, was the same man who could put her to bed, the very bed they had made love in numerous times, and not be tempted in the least to get intimate while in his Brother mode.

"Well, I'd better get going," Tracy said, bringing Lil out of her somber musings. "I just wanted to tell you the good news."

"I wish you two the best of luck," Lil said, and meant it. Tracy and Sam had only known each other a little over six months and they were quite young. What chance did any marriage have of making it in these turbulent times, much less a teen-aged couple? But she hoped they would beat the negative odds.

"Maybe you could come to my bridal shower. My baby shower, too." Tracy grinned.

"I'd be happy to."

After they'd said their good-byes, Lil got into her car feeling lower than she could

ever remember. Resting her head against the steering wheel, she silently cursed herself for feeling this way. She had gotten exactly what she'd asked for and not one ounce less.

Trouble was, she wanted so much more.

Turning the key in the ignition, she pulled out of the parking lot, turning left in the direction of Pump 'em Up.

Maybe she should just come right out and tell Trevor how she felt. What was the worst thing he could do? Laugh in her face, move out, and never speak to her again? She snorted softly. Even that sounded better than his strained silent treatment and even more strained attempts at conversation of late.

When she arrived at the gym, she didn't see Trevor, so went to change in the ladies locker room then began her warm-ups. When she had finished, she walked over to the stationary bikes, blind to the people milling around her, and climbed onto an empty machine.

When that was completed twenty minutes later with still no sign of Trevor, she frowned, wiping the sweat from her brow with the towel draped around her neck.

Where was he?

Maybe he decided to stay home today, she mused, recalling how he'd still been asleep—in his clothes—when she'd left for work this morning.

Espying Rick Sanchez, she dismounted the bike and went to talk to him as he lingered near one of the treadmills where a pretty dark-haired woman obviously ignored him as he attempted to lay on the charm.

"Hey, Lil." His white teeth gleamed beneath a black mustache. "How's the *bambino*?" Rick had been the only one who was let in on the little secret. Lil hadn't even told her boss yet, and she wasn't close to anyone else aside from acquaintances here and at the store.

"Just fine." Her own smile was small and forced. "Have you seen Trevor?"

"Yeah, he's back in that waste can he calls his office." Rick jabbed a thumb in the direction.

Of course, why hadn't she thought of that? Trevor rarely entered his office, saying that paperwork and phones gave him a rash. Since she had been relieved of her duties as receptionist, Trevor had brought the paperwork home for her. He was always eager to know whether he was in the red or the black, that way he knew if could afford a sirloin steak instead of Hamburger Helper. Trevor lived on steaks now that she'd been cooking for them both. His gym was doing well. They even discussed the possibility of him expanding during a rare moment of unstilted conversation they'd had while lounging around one Saturday afternoon.

"Thanks, Rick."

"No *problema*." He winked at her then whistled as he caught sight of Raquel dressed in her usual workout attire of pink fluorescent string. *Didn't that woman have a home? Or clothes, for that matter?* Lil tramped off in the direction of Trevor's office.

When she came to the door, she saw it was closed, so she knocked.

"It's open. Come in." His velvety voice seeped through the wood and into her bone marrow.

Lil turned the knob and walked in to the small, cluttered room. Trevor's head was bent over some papers, deep creases marring his forehead. From his dour expression, she figured that rash wasn't too far from coming.

“Hi,” Lil whispered, her heart dropping to her toes as his head snapped up and his hard stare met her baffled one. “If you’re busy I could wait to talk to you until you get home.” She started backing up toward the door.

His expression softened somewhat, though his voice sounded as if it didn’t belong to him. “We can talk now.” His brows were still glued together. “What’s on your mind?”

Since there was no chair to be found, Lil sat on the edge of his desk because her legs felt weak. Being on her feet for eight hours at work, her workout on the bike, and Trevor’s unusually gruff persona all combined, making her feel physically unstable and mentally off balance.

“I thought maybe we could do something tonight.” She avoided eye contact, toying with a pen she picked up from the desk. The end was brutally chewed from going through one of Trevor’s thinking sessions.

She heard him exhale. Her gaze met his. “I ... have a date for tonight.” His steady gaze never wavered from hers.

The room around her tilted while the floor bottomed out. “A ... date?” she choked out, knowing she must look like a frog that had just been sat on at the moment.

Trevor nodded, getting up from his chair and turning to dig something out of his file cabinet. “I don’t recall anything said between us that would indicate we couldn’t see other people. Especially since we aren’t...” the words came out low, “making love anymore.”

“Oh, I see.” Lil tried to keep her tears from showing in her voice. She also tried so very hard not to be covetous. After all, this whole stinking mess had been because of her bright idea. No strings. No ties. No hearts involved.

Damn Trevor for listening to her!

“Anyone I know?” she heard herself asking, waiting for the final dart to hit dead center.

“Raquel,” was his tight reply.

Without a word, Lil slid from the desk and left the office, not stopping when she heard Trevor call her, not bothering to retrieve her clothing from the locker room as she plucked her keys from behind the reception desk, and went home.

* * * *

Trevor slammed the door of his office shut, thrusting all ten fingers through his hair. What the hell was wrong with him? Was he some kind of sadist who enjoyed seeing Lil hurt? Lord knew that was the only thing he’d been doing for the past month. And just now he had practically rubbed Raquel right in her sweet little face. What was he supposed to say? That he was going out with the other woman for her benefit? Even if it was the truth. Just to prove that he wasn’t in love with Lil. This, another one of his goddamn bright ideas.

He cursed under his breath for a good five minutes, hoping to find some logic in all of this, some inner alleviation as the foul words slipped and slid past his lips.

When that brought him no solace, he slumped into his chair and stared at the framed poster on the wall that Lil had gotten him. It was an outdoor scene of a mountain stream with tall spruce flanking both sides. A graceful doe sipped from the crystalline water and an eagle flew, suspended in the azure sky. She had given it to him the day he’d opened the gym, saying that since he didn’t have a window in the matchbox-sized office, she

wanted him to be able to have something beautiful to look at when he was stuck in here.

He recalled the way she had been dressed just moments ago. Black Lycra knee-length shorts had graced her firm legs and cupped her perfect ass. A yellow tank top had covered her blossoming upper body and was tied at the hip, bringing notice to the fullness in her four-month pregnant belly. She was flushed and glistening from her workout. The front of her top had been damp, and curls had stuck to the sides of her face. *She* was the something beautiful he wanted to look at when he was stuck in here. When he was at home. When he was in bed. When he was in the shower and anywhere else, for that matter.

Then why had he accepted Raquel's dinner invitation? Because he knew if anyone could convince him that he *wasn't* in love, it would be that buxom woman. Raquel could send any man into a state of sexual delirium and make him forget his own mother's name.

He'd accepted her invitation, hoping she would change his mind about Lil. It had been a long time since he'd dated. Maybe his feelings about Lil had to do with being out of circulation. Maybe he had latched on to Lil's caring ways and their intimacy simply because it hadn't been in his life for a while.

Hell, when had caring and intimacy *ever* been in his life?

But, love? Could he actually be in love with her?

He wasn't sure, but tonight he would find out. Raquel and Lil were worlds apart. Raquel was tall, blonde and built; the kind of woman he usually went for. Lil was short, dark-haired and freckle-faced, the kind of woman, the very woman, who had his life in a state of turmoil.

Trevor stood, exited his office, asked Rick to lock up for him and went home to prepare for his upcoming date.

"Whoopee," he said to himself, hoping that Lil didn't kick him in the nuts and forbid him to ever step foot in her house again when he started out the door, off to another woman this evening.

Chapter Eleven

Trevor drove home, scrubbing away any remaining lipstick that Raquel had left on his right cheek. His left cheek burned from the slap she had given him after he'd turned her down for a night of, "Let's play doctor."

He smiled, tugging at the gray silk tie around his throat, loosening it. That was the first time he'd ever been slapped for *not* taking advantage of a woman.

This night hadn't been a total waste though. As he had sat across from God's-gift-to-men, listening to her drone on about her many modeling assignments and watching her flirt with the underage waiter at every opportunity, Trevor wondered how he ever found plastic women attractive. The only woman he wanted in this world was Lillian Campbell. But there were a few things standing in his way.

As he neared Lil's place, headlights straining through the evening fog, the tension in him grew. He gripped the steering wheel tightly, memories and uncertainties floating within his jumbled brain. He had come a long way from that ninety-pound weakling who was once his father's battering post. He could beat the hell out of anyone who even tried to lay a hand on him now. But was he strong enough to face his demons of the past and let them out into the open? Was he brave enough to tell Lil of the pain he'd gone through for so many of his childhood years? Was he man enough to claim her love for his own? To claim their child? Most of all ... was he good enough for them?

With his mind in a state of chaos, he made a detour and went to the nearest bar and drank himself into a stupor. Maybe he shouldn't have resorted to such a weak act, but for just a while he needed the sweet oblivion that a couple of stiff drinks would bring.

Trevor finally stumbled into Lil's at a quarter past two. Closing the door behind him, he shrugged out of his jacket and sighed, tossing it on the back of the couch. He was wiped out and knew he'd have one helluva hangover come morning. His laugh was short. He never was a drinking man.

Feeling sedate and melancholy, he levered himself away from the door, beginning the journey toward the dark, empty living room and his bed of the past few weeks, knowing he should sleep his overindulgence off. His feet had other intentions, carrying him in the opposite direction: Lil's bedroom.

When he got to the open door, he stopped, his large body swaying. Grabbing hold of the doorframe for support, he struggled with his equilibrium and vision until they both stabilized. There she was. He smiled tenderly as moonlight shining through the window kissed her sleeping form in a way he longed to.

He must have made a noise, an awful lot of noise, because she stirred, blinked once, twice, and sat upright when she saw him standing there by the side of her bed. How he had gotten there, he could only guess, since the last thing he remembered was being at the doorway.

*

Lil scrubbed a hand over her face, wondering if the man standing next to her was an illusion. "Trevor?" she said in a sleep-heavy voice.

He frowned down at her. "Brian said that I had to tell someone." His words slurred slightly and Lil could smell the liquor on him. Trevor never drank, except for a couple of

beers, more than two and he was a wreck. Something must be wrong, she thought, noting the grim lines carved into his handsome face.

“What happened to Raquel?” she asked, reaching over and switching on the lamp. The light it offered was soft, yet allowed Lil to see every nuance of the man at her side. From his slightly rumpled dress shirt and silk tie that was a bit askew, to the ever-changing emotions flashing across his face and mop of disheveled hair. He looked like a man who had been mugged.

Or thoroughly made love to. The thought burned its way into her brain.

Trevor waved a hand breezily through the air and snorted. “I took her home hours ago.”

Just when Lil had a flippant remark on the tip of her tongue, just when she thought her bruised soul couldn’t take another beating, Trevor silenced her words with his next ones. “We won’t be seeing her around the gym anymore.” He smiled crookedly, his eyes suddenly becoming wide with indignation. “She tried to take advantage of me! Can you believe that?” He plopped down next to her on the bed and started removing his clothes while muttering, “Damn, it’s hot in here.”

Lil dragged her knees to her chest, wrapping her arms around them. Her questioning gaze was on the man sitting on her bed, wrestling with the buttons of his shirt. He was drunk and she was perplexed. “What happened between you and Raquel tonight?”

He didn’t look at her as he slid out of his shirt then proceeded to attempt the feat of removing his tie by pulling it up and over his head. He got it as far as his forehead, but his ears prevented him from freeing himself. He soon gave up, the ends of the dark material dangling at the side of his head.

Lil bit her bottom lip as her lust peaked. He looked very much like Sylvester Stallone’s character in *Rambo*, all muscles and sleepy-eyes and that warrior headband. But Trevor was real, not an imaginary character on a movie screen.

She followed his movements as he unclasped his belt, released the button from its hole then tugged the zipper down on his slacks. He pulled his pants over muscular thighs, struggling when he couldn’t get the pant legs over his shoes. After a moment or so of bicycle kicks, Lil unfolded herself, smiled at seeing his battle, and got off the bed. He was a mess.

Kneeling at his feet, she slipped off his shoes and socks then peeled his pants down the rest of the way, tossing them aside. She watched as Trevor fell back onto the bed, legs hanging over the edge, feet touching the floor. He looked huge on her small bed. He also looked completely at home.

Resuming her previous spot on the bed, she slipped the tie off his head. “What happened between you and Raquel tonight?” she asked again, carefully folding his tie and setting it on the nightstand beside her.

Flopping his head around in her direction, he held up a thumb and forefinger making an O. “Nothing. *Nada*. Zilch. I took her out to dinner, tried very hard not to fall asleep—I never met anyone so damned boring!” he declared, then shrugged. “I didn’t want to play doctor. That’s her cute way of referring to the sex act.” He gave a rough snort. “She got mad and slapped me.” He grinned.

“Said I should go back to my little plain curly-top if that’s what turns me on. I told her, Hey, Raquel, at least Lil’s a real woman. Told her she probably didn’t know who she was beneath the fake nails, dyed hair, and trampy personality. That’s when she slapped

me.” He grinned again, his features suddenly taking on a distant look as he murmured, “She told me I was a disappointment.”

Lil’s heart beat faster and she couldn’t deny the adolescent joy swimming through her. Trevor had given up luscious Raquel to be with her. But that didn’t explain why he was bombed out of his gourd and lying nearly naked on her bed.

“You’ve been drinking.” Concern was there in here voice.

“Only one little shot of scotch.” He held up five fingers. “Or was it whiskey?”

“How’d you get home?” she cautiously asked, not wanting to think he had actually tried to drive in this condition.

As if reading her mind, Trevor said in an incredulous voice, “You don’t think I drove home, do you?” His tone held a tint of hurt to it. “Of course I walked.” He turned his head away from her, obviously incensed that she could have thought such a thing. “How could I do that, especially after what had happened to your family? A family that had been as much mine as yours.”

Reaching out, Lil ran her fingers through his collar-length hair. “Trevor, what is it?” she said in a soothing voice. “Why did you go out drinking tonight?”

He turned back to face her. “Brian said I had to tell someone.” He repeated the words he had spoken moments ago.

Lil thought maybe he was having a drunken illusion. Some people saw pink elephants when they were inebriated. Perhaps Trevor saw and heard the dead.

Like a mother trying to coax the details of a bad dream from a frightened child, she asked, “What did Brian want you to tell?”

His expression looked vacant. “If you keep it in, pretending nothing happened, it’s gonna eat you up. Someday it’ll all come crashing down on you.” He tried focusing on her. “I never told anyone, Lil. Brian only found out because he walked in...” his voice faded.

“Come here.” She held her arms open to him, her breath catching as he raised his unsteady body from the mattress and slumped into her embrace. She trailed her hands gently through his hair, offering him her strength to purge the evil entity from his soul.

“Don’t you see?” His words sounded muffled as she held him close against her breasts. “My mother was never around, always going out on my father. My dad was a mean, fucking drunk. He said I was a disappointment. He...” Trevor looked up at her and Lil felt her heart twist. “He beat me, Lil,” he confessed. “All of those years, all of those bruises, they weren’t from falling down and rough play with my friends like I told everyone. I never broke my nose playing football. My dad did it.” His voice sounded as if it was being pressed from his lungs.

Lil tried not to gasp, but she couldn’t help it. All of these years he had held in this dark, painful secret. Why? Her parents would have taken him in—and prosecuted his parents! What kind of savage beasts gave birth to a beautiful child only to abuse it in every way imaginable?

“Oh, Trevor,” she whispered, holding him tighter, hoping to ease the stress of sixteen years of maltreatment and thirty-six years of withholding the gruesome knowledge. “Why didn’t you tell anyone back then? Why didn’t you tell me until now?”

“You came from such a happy family. I always felt inferior, embarrassed, ashamed. I didn’t want anyone to know about my screwed-up family life.” He ran a hand over her abdomen, as if caressing their infant growing there. It was a gesture that nearly made Lil

weep; for the frightened child Trevor used to be, for the anguished man he was now, and for the child they shared, because she now knew why loving was such a horrifying prospect for him

“What if I turn out to be as big a bastard as my old man?” His gentle strokes continued, causing Lil’s entire body to shudder with reawakening desire, despite the fact that Trevor’s face had the look of a horsewhipped dog.

“Listen to me.” She took his head between her palms, raising his face to hers. “You aren’t your father. Abuse and alcoholism aren’t hereditary; it’s learned behavior, if you allow it. I know you. Not once have you raised a hand in anger, and you’ve had plenty of provocation in the past, including from yours truly. You’re a wonderful, caring man, Trevor. You’ve made something of your life.”

She added in a soft whisper, “You’ve made a baby. *Our baby.*” The urge to tell him that she loved him was on the tip of her tongue, but she held back. He wasn’t ready to accept love. And she wasn’t ready to accept the fact that he would give up a lifestyle of flashy blondes. Being under stress and alcohol caused people to say a multitude of things they didn’t mean and rarely remembered the next day.

“Kiss me,” she murmured, needing to taste his lips on hers, dying to feel once again the sensation of him deep within her. Perhaps by physically expressing her love, she could chase away some of the shadows hovering over this big, rugged man’s soul.

“Oh, Lil,” he said on a husky sigh before sealing his mouth hotly over hers. Lil gasped at the savagery of the kiss, reveling in it. From her lips to the side of her neck, over her collarbone, down to her plump breasts and lower still. When he reached her abdomen, he lifted her gown, placing the most delicate of kisses there.

He trailed a finger over the growing part of her. “Our baby is in here.” It was a statement that revealed his awe over the reality of it.

“Yes,” she whispered, her throat becoming tight as he finally uttered those words.

“We made this baby that’s growing inside of you. Together. We made love. We made a baby.”

Lil felt a laugh rising in her, brought on by the wonder in Trevor’s voice. “Yes, we did. Are you sorry?” It was a question that had her serious once again. A question she had wanted to voice for quite some time.

When he didn’t speak right away, Lil thought his silence was answer enough, but he finally said, “No. I’m not sorry. But I am scared. Where will I fit in your lives?” He rested his head there on her stomach, his face turned away from her. “Who will I be in our child’s life? Will my son or daughter call another man Daddy? Will another man touch you as I have? Remember, Lil, this is *our* baby.”

He went silent. Lil felt Trevor’s body become loose and heavy, and knew he had drifted off.

“Yes, I remember.” She drew a deep breath into her lungs, turned off the lamp then scooted down to curl her body against Trevor’s. Her front to his back, one arm around his trim waist, she fell asleep whispering against his warm skin, “I’ll always remember.”

Chapter Twelve

Two months went by and not a word was spoken between them about the night when Trevor had come home drunk, confessing his terrible secret. Since then, Lil had taken it upon herself to shower Trevor with all of the love he'd never had—at her extreme pleasure.

Maybe if he realized how worthy of love he was, how much she truly cared for him and the potential future they could have together, he might want to pursue a more intimate, permanent relationship with her.

Of course those were only her hopes; the future might prove to be a much different reality. But for the time being she was willing to go against common sense and let her heart guide her and fight for Trevor. Fight against the past that still shackled his heart and soul.

To both their alleviation they had resumed their easy role as friends, and Lil was pleased to find that Raquel had indeed departed from the gym and their lives.

"Let's take the cable car today," Lil suggested as she and Trevor walked along the bustling street. The sun shone warmly down on them, though Lil sensed coldness within Trevor. He was being unusually quiet and distant today. Ever since he'd told her about his past, he'd had a few days such as this. Perhaps now that he had aired his secret, he had been forced to ponder over and examine it.

She hated seeing him like this, but she knew better than to broach the subject. Trevor would talk about it when he was good and ready, and not a moment sooner.

They had already gone to the grocery store to get the half gallon of milk she had convinced Trevor she so desperately needed, hoping to get his mind off internal speculation and lighten his somber mood.

It wasn't working.

"I have to get back to the gym," he quietly answered, mind focused on thoughts she was not included to know. "Maybe some other time."

"Okay." Lil sighed. She would give him the time and space he needed to sort out his feelings. Be there for him when he needed a shoulder to lean on.

Her one goal at this very moment, though, was to cheer him up and get his mind off his loathsome problems, at least for a little while.

"I know you have to get back to the gym, but maybe you could stop in at the corner ice cream shop and get a double scoop." Though winter was approaching, they had been blessed with this gorgeous, sunny day. Lil smiled up at Trevor, bestowing him with her perkier aura. Maybe some of it would rub off on him. "Sunshine and ice cream are always good together."

"Nah." He kept walking straight ahead in the direction of where they had left his Jeep. "Maybe some other time." They'd done a little window-shopping, at Lil's insistence, but he seemed eager to call it a day.

"Oh, come on." She took him by the hand, leading him to the small shop that was set up like an old-fashioned ice cream parlor. The tiled floor inside was made up of black and white squares like a giant chessboard. The small round tables that only seated two were flanked by red and white striped chairs, and the employees wore bow ties and straw

hats. She loved the place. She and Trevor had patronized it many times in the past.

They were both suckers for ice cream.

Trevor let out an impatient sigh. "Not now. I'm not in the mood." Though he let her drag him along with the greatest of ease.

Lil waggled her eyebrows at him. "I'll treat you to a double scoop of pistachio." Trevor never could resist a double scoop of pistachio.

He dug in his heels, preventing her from pulling him along another foot. He sighed in defeat, thought about it for a second then said, "All right. You win. But we have to make it a quick one."

Lil saw the beginnings of an ever-so-small smile tugging at his lips. "We'll eat it on the way back to the car, how's that?" They were in motion once again.

Trevor nodded. "All right."

When they reached the front of the small shop, there was a little blonde-haired girl standing outside. She was no more than seven or eight, Lil guessed. Her bottom lip quivered and tears rolled down her face as she viewed her strawberry ice cream cone, ice cream side down, on the sunny pavement.

Lil smiled as Trevor handed her the paper bag containing the milk, then crouched down to talk to the girl and to be on a more even level with her height. He was also a sucker for crying kids, Lil wryly mused. She held a palm over her stomach. He'd be a fantastic father.

"Hey, don't cry." His voice was low so he wouldn't scare her. He was a rather intimidating man. To adults he appeared like a barroom bouncer, to children he most likely looked like the giant at the top of the beanstalk.

"My ice cream fell." She let out a few tear-induced hiccups.

"I can see that." Trevor cast a glance to the pale pink ice cream that was quickly melting and making little strawberry rivers. "Where's your mom?"

"She's still inside." A few more sniffs. She gave a little kick of frustration to the cone. Ice cream now stained the toe of her snow-white tennis shoe.

Lil stayed back, letting Trevor handle the delicate situation, enjoying herself as she watched his paternal side surface.

"Here." He dug around in the front pocket of his Levi's, extracting some quarters. "Why don't you ask your mom to buy you another?" He held out his hand to offer the money, but the little girl took a step back from him and shook her head reluctantly, ponytails swinging.

"You're a stranger." She swiped at her nose with the back of her hand. "Mommy says I shouldn't take things from strangers. I'm not even supposed to be talking to you." She looked down at her ruined ice cream then longingly at the shiny quarters lying against Trevor's big bronze palm.

Trevor pursed his lips and seemed to be thinking something over. "I have an idea. Why don't I have Lil here give you the money?" With the mention of her name, Lil took the two steps forward, bringing her to Trevor's side. "She's a real nice lady. I don't think your mother would mind if another girl gave you the money, do you?"

She chewed on her bottom lip before looking up at Lil and saying, "I—I guess it's all right if *you* give me the money." Then added for justification, "Since you're a girl, too."

Trevor stood, took Lil's free hand and placed the quarters in her palm. A knowing look passed between them, a look that said they, too, would soon be facing their share of

ice-cream-cones-on-the-sidewalk traumas with their child.

Lil directed her gaze to the girl. "Here you go. You've got enough there for some candy sprinkles on top if you'd like." She smiled down at her.

"Thank you." The little girl beamed at Trevor and Lil.

Just then a tall, blonde woman who was awkwardly holding a pint container of ice cream while digging around in a reptile skin purse came out of the shop.

"Mommy!" The girl tugged on her mother's slim-fitting jeans. "I dropped my ice cream, but these nice people gave me some money to buy another."

The woman quit fishing around in her purse to sternly look at her daughter.

"Amanda, what have I told you about talking to strangers?" She then looked suspiciously at the *nice people*.

"Oh my!" She let out a surprised gasp. "Trevor Scott." Her perfectly made-up face broke out into a broad grin. After freeing one hand, she snaked it out in Trevor's direction. "It's been so long."

Trevor accepted the woman's hand, but the puzzled look on his face clearly said he did not remember her. "Yes, it has been long." He pasted on one of his killer smiles that was guaranteed to melt any woman's limbs on the spot. This time was no exception; all three women present were enchanted by that smile.

"Maybe you don't remember me. Jill Elliot. We dated about nine years ago." She was still holding firmly on to Trevor's hand.

"Of course, Jill Elliot." He might have fooled Blondie, but Lil could still tell that Trevor didn't know this woman. And why not? He'd probably dated over half the female population of San Francisco, yet this woman expected him to remember their nine-years-ago dating as if it had only happened yesterday?

"You're looking great," Trevor offered, prying his hand away.

"Mmm," she let out a little purr. "So are you." She looked him up and down with great interest. "Still working out, I see?" Lil thought the woman would start drooling at any moment.

"Yeah. I've got my own gym now just a few miles away. Pump 'em Up." He said the words with obvious pride and satisfaction.

Blondie shushed her daughter who was insistent on buying another cone to make up for her lost one. "I always knew you'd make something of yourself."

Oh please! Lil wanted to gag. She bet Blondie's saccharine smile curdled the milk she clutched against her abdomen. At least, it had that effect on her.

Trevor shrugged. "If you and your husband want to join, I can offer you a great discount, seeing as how we're old friends."

"That's so kind of you. I really have been meaning to join a health club. Not getting any younger you know." She proceeded to pat her perfectly flat abdomen. Lil felt her own swollen stomach and prayed that Blondie had more stretch marks since having her daughter than a zebra had stripes.

"Oh, and I'm no longer married. Been divorced for nearly five years now."

Oh, shit! Lil thought with consternation. Another blonde Amazon would be hanging around the gym. And this one was clearly in the market for husband number two. This whole ice cream idea was turning out to be a very bad idea.

Before Blondie ended up suggesting any type of get together between her and Trevor, Lil stepped into the foreground, planting herself at Trevor's side. She jabbed

Trevor's right arm that was slugged into the front pockets of his jeans, and gave a little cough.

"Oh," Blondie said with great defeat, eyeing Lil. "I suppose this is the little woman. Who would have thought that Trevor Scott would be tied down?" She flashed Lil the phoniest smile one could ever bestow upon another.

Trevor seemed to have a thing for snide women. Lil felt a spiny retort on her tongue but held it in.

"No!" Trevor blurted out, the one word sounding almost frantic. "This isn't my wife. This is—uh—Lillian Campbell. My adopted sister." He grinned again. "I've known her since she was born." He proceeded to wrap his arm around her neck, reminiscent of a wrestling move, and rubbed his knuckles back and forth over her mop of curls.

Lil wriggled free of his tight hold and resisted the sweet temptation to punch him in the gonads. Adopted sister! Here she was pregnant with his child and all she's introduced as is his adopted sister?

Gritting her teeth, not wanting to make a scene in front of the little girl, she managed to stand there and not let her humiliation show as Blondie literally beamed with relief.

"Well then." She smiled beguilingly up at Trevor, though he was only a few inches taller than her. "Amanda and I better be on our way. The name of your place is Pump 'em Up, did you say?"

"Yeah."

"I'll be seeing you again soon, I'm sure. I can't pass up such a kind offer." She headed back into the ice cream shop with her daughter in tow. "Ta-ta," she said over her shoulder, giving him a three-finger wave.

"Ta-ta," Trevor called after her then looked down at Lil. "Still want that ice cream?" His mood had done a complete turn around. Where before he was depressed and glum, now he was grinning and radiant. *What an ego*, Lil thought with more than a hint of anger. Now she was the one down in the dumps.

"No, I do not want any ice cream," she said slowly. "I want to go home. *Now*. And you can go to hell." With that she turned and started down the sidewalk in the direction of Trevor's Jeep.

She could have taken a cab, or even walked the distance back to her place, she had that much pent-up anger, but she preferred to subject Trevor to her fired-up ire for the trip back. He deserved it!

"Hey," he jogged a few steps to catch up with her. "What's wrong?" He looked genuinely perplexed. "Are you feeling sick?" He walked backward directly in front of her as they made their way down the street.

Lil stopped. "Yes, I am sick. I'm sick of running into blonde Amazons every time I turn a corner, and I'm particularly sick of being introduced as your adopted sister. I was totally humiliated back there." She lifted an arm and pointed in back of her. "And then you had the nerve to give me a noogie! Right in front of that woman!"

Trevor blinked a couple of times as if processing the information. "Look, I'm sorry, okay? I just don't know how I should introduce you. I couldn't very well say, this is Lillian Campbell, the woman I live with and my used-to-be lover whom I've impregnated in order for her to have the child she so badly desires." He grimaced as a few passersby shot him with a look of shock. "You see the effect it has on people?" He gestured to the old woman who was tossing him disapproving glances over her shoulder as she walked

on.

“Couldn’t you think of something a little nicer to say?”

He lifted his shoulders in a helpless gesture. “I can’t very well say you’re my girlfriend. People would think there was something serious between us.”

“Oh, heaven forbid. I’m only carrying your child, for shit’s sake,” she muttered, brushed past him and didn’t stop until she reached his Wrangler.

* * * *

“I said I was sorry, Lil,” Trevor repeated for the twentieth time as he stopped in front of her place to drop her off before he headed back to the gym.

“I heard you the first time,” she said curtly, keeping her gaze straight ahead.

“I’ve just been so damned confused and I don’t know exactly how to introduce you. Actually, this is the first time we’ve faced this type of situation since you went and got pregnant.”

“Since *I* went and got pregnant?” She cast him a dubious gaze. “I had help, buddy. Lots. Or have you forgotten your hand in this whole thing?”

Trevor hated seeing her like this. What could he do to patch up the situation? “It wasn’t my hand that got you pregnant, sweetheart,” he drawled, hoping to make her smile.

Lil pursed her lips, not amused. “Very funny.”

Trevor looked at the woman next to him who harbored so much anger and hurt at the moment, and he wanted so badly to lean over and kiss her. Kiss her senseless and carry her straight to bed.

Yes, he was definitely in love with Lil, and he felt bad for hurting her. Wanted her to know how truly special she was to him. Not an adopted sister or buddy. He took a deep breath. “Lil, I’m really sorry, and I want you to know that I...” *I love you*. “I...” But the words wouldn’t come to his lips.

“You what?” When he didn’t answer her, instead staring at her in dismay, she continued. “Couldn’t you at least say we’re living together, that you’re the father of my unborn child, anything that would make you appear less...” She didn’t finish the sentence, turning her head to look out of the passenger’s window.

“Less what?” He reached out and tucked a few stray curls behind her ear. Her chin jutted forward in anger. He loved that chin. Her eyes blazed with anger, with life. He loved those eyes. Loved everything about her.

He loved her so damn much it hurt, yet he couldn’t utter those three words. Why? Because he was still having great trouble in accepting it himself, and didn’t know if he was quite ready to let Lil in on his feelings. If ever.

Lil sighed. “Oh, forget it.” She climbed out of the Jeep, stalking to the house.

He knew she would hold a grudge, so he didn’t bother taking in the milk she’d left behind and trying to apologize—once again. She couldn’t stay mad forever. Could she?

“Women,” Trevor muttered, before driving off in the direction of his gym.

Chapter Thirteen

After making a stop at the library for some more parenting books and DVDs, Lil headed to the gym. She was still a little pissed at Trevor after what he'd pulled yesterday, yet she couldn't deny that he was indeed confused over their relationship.

So was she.

She smiled in spite of her residue of anger. He really was a sweet guy, and fussed over her. She ate up every bit of it, too, though she knew his turn-around was for the baby's sake. To Trevor she was still Lil the Pill, a buddy. Hadn't yesterday proved that?

As she switched off the ignition and exited her car, a chilly, foggy wind seeped into her bones and the words to an old song ran through her mind: *Take me as I am or let me go*.

But when she walked through the glass doors and the warm interior of Trevor's place, the look he graced her with when he caught sight of her made her want to believe he would never want anyone except her.

"Hi there." He came from around the reception desk to plant a kiss on the top of her head. "Still mad at me?"

"No," she said softly, meaning it. She was just tired of the emotional ups and downs in their relationship.

"Good." He looked genuinely relieved. "Ready for a workout?" One dark brow rose over a heavy-lidded eye. Lil would have laughed at the innuendo if she hadn't been feeling so hormonally unbalanced and craved his sweet touch so much.

"Sure am." She forced a smile, reaching up to tap him on the nose. "I have to go change first, then I'll be right out."

"Okay." He frowned down at her. "Is everything all right?"

"Sure." She shrugged. "Why wouldn't it be?"

"You tell me." He kept his voice low so he wouldn't call attention to their conversation. Though it was nearly time to lock up, a few patrons still remained on various machines and she knew he wasn't keen on having everyone within hearing distance know his business.

"Just a little tired." She didn't lie. The bigger the baby got, the weaker she felt.

"You're sure you aren't still angry about yesterday?"

"Positive." Not wanting Trevor to think anything was wrong, she flashed a quick smile and started walking toward the ladies locker room.

Trevor obviously wasn't convinced. He followed suit, walking right inside the room clearly marked Women Only.

Grabbing hold of her slender shoulders, he pivoted her around, but she refused to look at him. "Don't lie to me, dammit," he growled, pressing her back up against the row of white metal lockers. "What's wrong, Lillian?"

Lil's head snapped up in surprise. Trevor never called her Lillian unless he was angry. "I'm fine," she said, taking in the hard twist of his mouth.

His gaze went from her face, to her stomach and back again. "Is it the baby?"

"The baby is fine. I went to the doctor's today and she said everything is going along quite normally." With the utmost concentration she stared at him, certain not to let any

emotion show.

"I should have gone with you."

"I'm fine. The baby is fine," she said again. Since the night when he had gotten stone-drunk, Trevor had gone with her to every doctor appointment, marveling at the way the tiny heartbeat of their infant sounded. He had even seen the little ghost-like arms and legs kicking when she'd had the ultrasound last time.

"If I had gone with you as usual, I would have found out first-hand if anything was really wrong or not. I guess I'll have to take your word for it, though my instincts tell me something isn't right." That perpetual frown was still on his face.

Lil tried to ignore the heat radiating from his body into hers. "Trevor, the baby is fine," she repeated, wanting to put him at ease.

"The baby." He gave a curt nod indicating he believed her to that point. "But what about you?"

"I'm fine."

"All right, if it isn't the baby, and it isn't me, and you're feeling so damned peachy, then what's wrong?"

Rick Sanchez poked his head through the door at that moment, clearing his throat to get their attention. When Lil and Trevor both turned to him, Trevor's hold on her still firm, Rick said, "I can see you're busy." He cast a meaningful glance at the two of them. "You want me to lock up so's you can carry on with whatever it is you started?" A broad grin flashed after the question.

"Yeah. Please," Trevor said, focusing his attention back on Lil. "Thanks, Rick."

"No *problema*. *Ay amor*," he said wistfully, leaving Trevor and Lil to continue staring at each other.

"Where were we?" Trevor asked, running the pad of his thumb back and forth over her collarbone. "Oh yeah, we were discussing your physical and mental well-being."

Lil laughed, commanding her leg bones not to crumble at his touch. "I'm fine. Really. But I sure don't feel like cooking tonight." She thought she'd change the subject. Trevor was always one who enjoyed his food, and she hoped to get his mind on his stomach and not her mental and physical well-being.

He looked thoughtful for a moment then smiled. "How about some greasy burgers and fries? That rabbit food we've been eating lately might be good for your health, but I need my weekly intake of high cholesterol or I'm no good."

A relieved laugh poured from her lips, happy that his senses were off on another track. "That stuff is loaded with artery-clogging fats, though I have to admit that I'd love a thick, juicy cheeseburger and drowning-in-ketchup fries."

He stuck a forefinger into his mouth then snapped. "I know, let's have a contest, first one who drops to the floor from a heart attack has to give the other CPR." He smiled again, the crinkles at the corners of his eyes stating his years though making him appear eternally youthful at the same time.

"Deal!" She ducked under his arm, going to the locker she used, extracting a towel and her workout clothes that Trevor brought from home for her each day. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have to change and begin my torture session." She shooed him away with a wave of her hand. When he simply stood there, hands on his lean hips, legs splayed in that male stance of superiority, Lil pursed her lips. "I'm not going anywhere, for goodness sakes!"

“You think you’re pretty smart, huh?”

“Whatever do you mean?” she asked innocently.

“I haven’t forgotten our previous line of conversation. But if you’d rather not discuss it, we won’t.” Her tense shoulders drooped with relief. “We won’t discuss it *here*. When we get back home, we will be doing a shitload of talking though,” he warned.

Lil tensed again and grimaced. “Great.” *So much for getting his mind on another track.*

“See you in five.” He held up a hand, indicating the time allocation with his fingers. “A second longer and I’m back,” he warned.

Lil shook her head slowly in defeat, looking heavenward. “Men. Can’t live with ‘em, can’t shoot ‘em.”

Trevor pointed at her gun-style, one brow high as he stopped by the closed door. “Don’t even *try* living without me, babe. You’d never survive.”

Lil feigned aggravation at his extreme arrogance, throwing the towel at him, although he would never know how incredibly true his words were. “Get out of here!”

He held up a hand, reminding her of the promised five minutes, and was gone.

Lil emerged from the dimly lit locker room into the workout area illuminated only by the one fluorescent ceiling light left on during the night. She looked to the right and saw Trevor pumping his heart out on the weight bench.

His buffed-up beefcake bod, Lil thought, amused. She watched in admiration as his neck muscles strained with every push, every muscle in his arms and chest rippling with the effort, sweat glistening off his exquisite body.

He’d been tall and gangly as a teenager. She now knew why keeping his body built-up was so important to him. He was afraid his father’s temper flowed through his veins. And, wanting to avoid any physical confrontations that may prove him correct, he used his sheer size and muscle to deter any would-be encounters.

As far back as she could remember she had never seen Trevor so much as hurt a fly. How could he think he possessed a single ounce of the rage his father had exhibited? As if he were a bad seed just waiting to be sown. Trevor Scott was truly the gentlest, if more than a tad egotistic, giant she’d ever met.

She slowly made her way to the area he occupied, knowing it was at the opposite end of the blue padded warm-up mats, but craving some time with him.

*

As a male lion senses his mate’s presence, Trevor stopped his intense workout. For the past odd months this had been his way to detour his mind from the shambles Lil had him in. Resting the barbell on the supports to each side of his head, he sat upright, avoiding the heavy metal bar. A gusty breath of wonderment seeped from his lungs as he took in Lil’s appearance.

She usually came in much earlier than she had this evening and he never got more than a few brief seconds to say hello, much less examine her with the scrutiny he displayed now. She wore gray pants that looked much as his now sweaty T-shirt, and the stretchy material hugged every curve of her shapely calves and thighs. A bright blue maternity tank top covered her upper body, draping softly over her full breasts and rounded abdomen. A headband matching her shirt in color graced her halo of curls.

And he wanted her.

Wanted so badly to make love to her. But what was he going to say? For what

seemed like an eternity he had resisted Lil's tempting presence, each night sleeping fitfully on his makeshift bed on the couch. More than once he'd taken cold showers and three mile jogs in the middle of the night in futile attempts to curb his raging libido. Jerking off hadn't helped either. And he'd done so much of that lately he'd lost count. The only thing he had acquired from all acts was prune-like skin, an aching knee, and both his wrist and dick were sore.

But he couldn't very well come out and ask if he could take her to bed tonight. And he couldn't very well go on pretending he didn't want to make love to her. So how could he make his desires known without making a total ass out of himself or appearing like a randy teenager?

Scooting backward on the bench, the chrome plated bar against his back, he made room for Lil, patting the empty space before him. "Have a seat." Without hesitation she straddled the bench as he did, their knees touching. "Hey there," he murmured, his eyelids dropping to half-mast.

"Hey, yourself." A little smile curved her lips.

"Feeling better?"

"Much, thank you."

"I do apologize about yesterday."

Lil gave a slow shrug. "Let's forget about it. How does that sound?"

He smiled. "Sounds good." He reached out, running a callused palm over her smooth cheek. "I really miss being with you."

"We're together now," she said.

Subtlety was never one of his strong points, Trevor thought with dismay. "I meant in a *closer* way." He trailed his hand down to her right thigh, giving it a firm squeeze.

She smiled wryly. "If we were any closer I'd be on top of you."

Trevor choked on his own breath, his face turning bright pink from the neck up. Grabbing her hands, he looked into her eyes and said, "Lil, I'm horny as hell. I need you so badly. Do you think we could..." Trevor shut his mouth and averted his gaze when she looked at him in what he assumed to be shock.

Hell, he thought with some bitterness, it wasn't his fault he had the sex drive of a man half his age whenever she was near. How did she think he'd had the stamina to get her pregnant so quickly? And here she was looking at him as if he was a raping pirate ready to throw her to the ground, tear her clothes off and ravish every inch of her delectable body right here and now.

The way he felt at the moment that sounded pretty damn appealing.

"But ... I thought our lovemaking had been strictly a business deal?" she said after several heartbeats of silence.

"Yeah, I know," he muttered, focusing on something across the room. "Just forget I said anything." He made a move to stand, but Lil reached out to touch his thigh, freezing him to the spot, his gaze shooting to hers.

"I most certainly won't forget what you said, Trevor Emery Scott. Are you saying you'd like to make love with me?" Her voice was warm honey. "That maybe we should ... rethink our all-business arrangement?"

"I ... uh..." He swallowed hard, his Adam's apple sliding upward before plopping back down. "Yeah?" he said in a hoarse whisper. He stared at her, awaiting her reaction.

Without a word she stood, telling Trevor to lie flat on the bench.

“Right here? Right now?” He looked around, expecting somebody to jump out from the shadows. Of course they were alone. The place was empty, doors locked and the blinds were pulled.

“Right here. Right now,” she reaffirmed.

“Shouldn’t I at least shower first? I probably smell like a dead horse.” He tried to control the heavy pounding of his heart.

Lil gave a slow shake of her head. “I want you exactly the way you are.” She inhaled a deep breath. “I love the scent of your hot, slick body. The smell of you after a workout turns me on,” she revealed. “I’ve missed being with you, too. I want you.”

Trevor moaned deeply, sliding down onto his back, hands gripping the bar overhead, every muscle in his body waiting expectantly as his sweet Lil assumed the dominant role.

Lil climbed onto Trevor’s thighs, running her hands down his taut biceps, over his chest, abdomen, and lower still. Over the fleece of his sweat-shorts she caressed him, bringing sounds of ecstasy from his very soul.

As if drunk on passion, unaware of his actions for a moment, Trevor found them back in the same position a moment later, though both naked. Trevor’s eyes were now mere lust-induced slits, but he saw everything: The heightened color in her cheeks, her full breasts and equally full stomach that were all his doing.

Lil rained kisses over his entire body. His forehead, the bump on his nose, his lips, his underarms, his nipples, down to the soles of his feet and back again, resting her mouth over his swollen dick.

With long, slow strokes, bringing a soft moan from him every time, she licked his shaft up and down. Every muscle in Trevor’s body tensed and his thoughts faded away until only sensation was left. Lil licked his balls, taking one, then the other in her mouth, swirling her tongue over them and tugging softly. He always did like his balls played with. “That’s it, baby. Suck me again,” he said on a husky whisper as tension gathered at the base of his dick.

He looked down, watching as she cupped his balls with one hand, massaging them just the way he liked. While holding his shaft with the other, she stuck her tongue in his slit then nibbled on the head of his cock. Trevor swallowed hard. This woman knew his every weakness, his every sweet spot, and it drove him insane with further want. As he watched her head move up and down, pleasing him more than any other woman had, she looked up at him. The passion he saw in those eyes punched him right in the heart. Trevor stopped breathing for a second.

“Lil, I...” He wanted to tell her he loved her. That he needed her and wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. But soon no words could be found in his vacant mind as she continued her sweet torture and he grew so hard he was certain he would break in two. Lil straddled his thighs once more, feet firmly planted on the carpeted floor as she began a rhythm that suited them both, riding his thighs like a pair of horses.

Trevor’s hands left the chrome bar of the barbell, wandering up her thighs, digging into the flesh of her hips, guiding her along. Her head was thrown back, beads of perspiration rolling down from her neck, slithering between her breasts. Trevor wanted to lick the trail away.

“Oh, sweet Heaven above,” he groaned. “I don’t know which turns me on more; the feeling of being inside of you, or watching you make love to me.”

“It *is* good,” she whispered, laying her palms on his slick chest. “It *always* is.” She

continued to ride him.

Trevor reached up, cupping her breasts. No more did they fit in his palms as they grew larger each day with future nourishment for their infant. His roughened fingers pinched her soft, dusky pink nipples until they became hard pebbles.

Lil cried out, grinding against him again and again as she reached orgasm.

“Oh, baby,” Trevor rasped. “You’re so damned sexy.” Watching her come like that had his libido at an all-time high and his orgasm hit only a microsecond later. He bucked, holding her tight as he shot his load inside her womb.

Letting out a shuddering sigh, his entire body tensed one last time then melted onto bench beneath them. Lil rested her head on Trevor’s damp chest, and he wrapped his arms around her in a tight embrace. Their hearts beat a harried pace that soon slowed with every breath.

Trevor felt Lil’s hard, round stomach pressing against his own and wondered if they were squashing the baby. Just as he was about to say something, he felt a sensation like a small kick against his own stomach. His heart stopped between beats. He grew still, concentrating on the tiny rapping.

“Is—is that our baby moving?” he asked in a hushed tone.

Lil laughed, sitting upright. “Yes.” She smiled warmly, looking down at him. “Here.” She took one of his big hands, placing his palm over her stomach. “This is the general area of the baby’s foot.”

The baby kicked again, bringing a gasp from Trevor, his gaze riveted to the movement going on inside of Lil. “There it is again!” The miracle of it all overwhelmed him. His eyes drifted to Lil’s which were just as emotion-filled as his own.

They stayed there like that; gazes locked, Trevor’s hand on her belly, an awed smile on his face as he felt the common bond they shared entwine them tighter.

I love you, Trevor silently whispered, craving a day when he would be able to say the words aloud. “Let’s go home,” Trevor finally said aloud.

“Yes,” Lil whispered. “Let’s go home.”

* * * *

When they got back to Lil’s place, Trevor took her hand, leading her down the hallway and to the bathroom where they shared in a hot, languorous shower.

Emerging some time later, and after dressing, they’d wandered to the kitchen. This new closeness between them was too fresh, too new, and Lil didn’t know what rules this once again adopted facet of their relationship would entail.

For now they were content to remain silent as they consumed the beef stew she had left cooking all day in the crock-pot.

When the meal was over and dishes washed, they sat at the small kitchen table sipping tea. Lil knew there were things that needed to be said, but was afraid to break the magic carpet of sensuality and happiness they had been riding on for the past few hours.

“I hate tea,” Trevor commented, interrupting the silence, staring down into his mug.

“I know,” Lil said, looking at him over the rim of her own rainbow-colored cup.

Trevor frowned. “Then why do you always insist on tea instead of coffee?”

She smiled sheepishly. “Because I know it bugs you.” The small smile turned into a wide grin.

He laughed. “Still a little bit of pesky tomboy left in you, after all?”

Lil tried to keep her carefree smile in place though the comparison hurt. "Oh, and I suppose you're perfect?" she asked, trying to keep the cynicism from showing in her voice.

Palms resting flat on the table in front of him, Trevor took a slow breath through his nose, his jaw hard. "I never said I was. You of all people should know that." His tone was quiet. Too quiet. She had hit a sore spot in him. "Maybe I should leave." He rose from his chair, avoiding any potential confrontation, as was his habit.

When he turned his back to her, when he would have started heading for the door, Lil stopped him with her words. "What are we, Trevor?" The bewilderment in her voice had him pivoting back around to face her. "Are we friends or are we lovers?"

He was silent for a moment. "Can't we be both?"

"I'd like to think so." She looked down into her cup as if hoping to find answers in the bits of tea leaves resting at the bottom. When she gave up trying to divine the future she said, "It doesn't seem to be working though. Things are fine when we're making love, but when the rush of excitement is over..." She looked straight at him, her words came out quick and pleading. "Tell me that nothing has changed between us. Tell me that we can be friends *and* lovers. Tell me that maybe we could even have more."

It was the first time either of them had voiced any wishes of pursuing their relationship past the level of confidants and lovers. Hearing the words, as vague as they were, caused Trevor to shut down. She could see it. "Maybe this wasn't such a good idea, Pill." He ran a shaky hand through his hair, backing up until he was flat against the front door, ready to bolt if the subject should get any more oppressive.

Lil was on her feet, stalking toward the uneasy Titan straight ahead. This man had her hormones, her head, her life, in a constant state of turmoil for the past six months, and she'd be *damned* if he was escaping now. All of the confusion she had kept a lid on was being shaken up like a bottle of champagne until the pressure was too much and she blew her cork.

"Don't ever again refer to me as Pill!" She stood before him, hands planted on her hips as she glared up at him. "How often do I refer to you as Scarecrow?" She lifted an incriminating brow as she repeated the nickname Trevor had acquired as a gangly kid.

"Never," was his even answer.

"Then why is it that whenever you can't handle our intimacy you start treating me as if I was ten years old?" Her sharp tone demanded an answer.

"It's easier that way, okay?"

"Why?" Lil stood before him, unmoving.

His hand was on the doorknob, knuckles white against his golden skin, as he fought the urge to flee. "I'm confused, that's why," he said in a much more placid voice. "I don't know what I want. I want you as a friend. But I also want you as a lover. The two don't mix, can't you see? There's a void in between each one that has to be filled."

She shook her head, not comprehending what he was getting at. "You had no trouble in the beginning when you were trying to get me pregnant," she pointed out.

"Yes," he said harshly. "I know that." He scowled down at her. "You deserve more than a man who comes from lousy parents. After watching what I did as a kid, what the hell do I know about keeping a relationship alive?" He shook his head as if to erase the memories. "Before ... when I was trying to get you pregnant ... that was different."

"How so?" Lil calmed herself as she saw Trevor battle with the invisible forces

inside his mind. Arms folded under her breasts, she stood patiently before him, waiting for an answer.

"I felt differently back then. It was easy to pretend. To carry on our friendship as well as carrying on as lovers." His gaze rested on her belly. "Now I have a very real reminder of what my life is. More precisely, what it isn't. What it could never be."

"Trevor." She blinked hard, trying to free her mind of the perplexing cobwebs Trevor's words were spinning. "I don't understand. Is it me, is it you, or is it something else?"

"Don't you see? Every moment you spend with me, you're taking your life, our child's life, into your hands. I could snap at any moment. Sometimes I feel it." He held a fist to his chest. "I can feel the anger simmering inside of me. Most people are smart enough to leave me alone when I'm in a rotten-ass mood, but you, you never back down an inch. I can't intimidate you."

He grabbed her by the arms. "Don't you understand? As fucked up as my head is, the inherited genes that make up my mental state, what if I..."

"Let me go," Lil said calmly, taking control of the situation. She'd never heard such fierce words out of Trevor before. Never had she seen his face set in such harsh lines.

Trevor let her go so quickly she stumbled backward, steadying herself as she grabbed handfuls of his shirt then fell forward against the hard length of his body.

Arms stiffly at his sides, Trevor looked down at her with so many emotions running across his face that Lil couldn't begin to decipher even one of them. "You see what I mean? You'll have bruises tomorrow." He kneaded the sensitive flesh of her shoulders. Looking at her left shoulder he spoke, "I've tried to keep it a secret for so long. Brian always said it would come to this. That it would eat me alive, unless..."

Lil still leaned against him as he massaged her shoulders. "Unless what, Trevor?"

He looked at her. "Unless I had somebody to share it with."

"I could be that someone," she offered without hesitation. "Don't you realize what's happening?" she said when he didn't answer her. "It's so simple." A smile tipped the sides of her lips as it all came into view for her also. "While it's true you need to face your past, it isn't the slightest bit conceivable that you possess your father's same brand of hostility..."

"You sure as hell can't deny what just happened here?" He set her away from him so they stood a foot apart. "Nobody could be that blind."

Lil wrapped her arms around herself, holding on to her elbows. "No, I'm not denying it, but I seriously doubt anger was the cause."

His brows bent, all ten fingers thrusting through his hair. "If it wasn't anger, it sure as hell felt like it to me."

She shook her head and gave a small laugh as if he was too dense to comprehend the simplicity of it all. "You're confused. This whole situation with the baby has turned out so much more different than we had anticipated in the beginning. You thought you'd get me pregnant and that would be the end of our intimacy, and back to friends we'd go. That's what I'd thought, too. But when I actually became pregnant and we stopped making love, we had to face so many things. The fact that we had made a baby, the fact that the baby would be changing both of our lives, the fact that we had enjoyed our intimacy and then cut that new-found closeness off as abruptly as it had started."

She heard a breath escape him as he slumped back against the door. "Yes, that's

exactly how I've been feeling."

"Me, too."

"Ah, Lil," he whispered, pushing away from the door, and standing directly in front of her, framing her face with his palms. "We do understand each other, don't we?" She nodded, her heart beating heavily against Trevor's chest. "Why haven't we been brave enough to talk before this?"

"Because we're treading into alien territory?" she suggested. "Because we had been so used to just being friends, never allowing ourselves to think of each other as anything more than we were both caught off-guard?"

"Yes." He ran a thumb over her bottom lip, trailing it down to her chin and back again, his gaze following the slow path. "I think those are a few of the reasons."

"Why don't I make a pot of coffee and we can talk over the other reasons." Her arms went around his trim waist, traveling down to his equally lean hips, circling around to caress his denim-covered butt.

"Coffee for me this time instead of tea?" He laughed. The first true, hearty laugh she'd heard from him in quite some time.

Lil took him by the hand, leading him to the small kitchen with a wide smile on her face. *Trevor was back.* She then heaved an inward sigh. *But for how long?*

* * * *

Lil did something she rarely succumbed to and decided to take the day off from work. Last night she and Trevor had stayed up until the wee hours of the morning making love, discussing his family, her family, good times, bad times, the past, present and future.

Still no words of everlasting love and commitment had been spoken, but Trevor made it clear that he intended to be in their child's life until his dying day. He just hadn't indicated how close he wanted to be with their child—or her, for that matter.

As she prepared dinner, awaiting Trevor's arrival home, she knew tonight was to be the night. She had to tell Trevor she loved him, and face his reaction once it was out in the open.

She had called him earlier, asking if he could have Rick lock up tonight so he could come home earlier than his usual nine or ten o'clock. At first he had been worried, thinking something was wrong with either her or the baby. After ten minutes of assuring him of their good health, he had calmed down, becoming curious, even anticipatory when she said she had something special planned for the evening.

He was due home any moment. She glanced at the clock on the microwave that confirmed the hour. Her stomach felt jittery. Nerves.

Just as she removed the steaks from the broiler, Trevor walked through the front door. When his heavy footsteps faltered before stopping completely, she knew he realized something was up.

"Wow. What's all this for?" He looked on in amazement as she plopped a king-sized steak and an equally huge baked potato onto his plate. Butter, sour cream and chives waited at the table, along with two tapered candles she had lit moments earlier.

Lil shrugged, carrying the dish that weighed a couple of pounds and set it down. She avoided answering the question by saying, "I didn't even make a veggie," knowing his aversion to them. Trevor's theory was, anything that was good for you had to taste awful.

"I must be in Heaven," he declared, resuming his easy strides that put him in the kitchen and at Lil's side.

"Well, live it up now, because I don't think they eat steaks in Heaven." She turned her head, noting the soft, sleepy-eyed look on his face. This man was her heaven.

"I wasn't referring to the food," he glanced at the plate, "although it does look tempting. Actually," he slid his arms around her growing waist, "I was referring to the angel I'm now holding in my arms."

"Oh, you." She twisted around so she faced him, sliding her arms around his neck.

Inclining his head, Trevor sealed his mouth over hers, sharing in a kiss that had her lipstick removed by the time they came up for air.

Lil smiled. "Here, let me wipe your face. I'm afraid *you* have my lipstick on now."

Trevor brushed her hands away, smiling. "Leave it."

"Suit yourself." She shrugged, wriggling free from his embrace, knowing he would have them heading straight for the bedroom if she didn't make a quick escape. She fully intended to tell him after dinner that she loved him, and nothing was going to get in her way. Not even his luscious body and drugging kisses. "Let's eat before it gets cold."

"Can't I have dessert first?" he pleaded, giving her his best wounded-puppy expression. "Certain parts of my body are hungrier than my stomach." He grabbed her again, rubbing his pelvis against her backside. Lil sucked in a breath. It almost worked, but not quite.

"You can have all the dessert you want ... *after* we have dinner." She gestured toward his empty chair with an upturned palm, and took her own.

Trevor sat down with a mighty *harrumph*. Lil could see he was trying very hard to keep the child-like pout on his face at not having gotten his own way for once.

Evidently the sight of the food got his stomach juices flowing because he picked up his knife and fork and started digging into the inch-thick sirloin. After several hearty bites, he took a chug of beer and grinned. "Guess I was hungrier than I thought."

"Looks that way." She smiled in return, both silent for the next fifteen minutes until Trevor had devoured every scrap of food within sight. Lil did love a man with a big appetite—at the table and in the bedroom. Trevor topped the list on both counts.

When the table had been cleared and both candles were melted down to distorted nubs, they sat there staring at each other over their coffee cups. Lil knew why she was tense, but had no idea why Trevor looked so stiff and subdued all of a sudden.

"Is something wrong?" she asked, setting her cup down, hands wrapped around the warm ceramic, hoping the heat would penetrate through to her suddenly cold insides.

"Kind of." He traced the floral pattern of the coffee cup with an index finger, looking at his fidgeting hand. "What about you?" He was trying to change the subject and she knew it. "What's on your mind?"

"You go first."

"Okay. Since neither one of us is going to give in." He placed his palms flat on the table and got to his feet. Going over to the counter, he opened a drawer, extracting a tablet and two pencils. "Here." He stood at her side again, handing her the tablet after tearing a sheet of paper off for himself, and handed her a pencil. "We'll write down what each has to say then exchange notes and read what the other has written. Sound fair?"

Lil nodded slightly. "All right." She was nervous. Her hand shook. What if his was bad news? What if he was going to tell her he was moving out again?

With trembling hands she wrote down the three words that had been emblazoned across her heart for at least the past six months, longer if she really thought about it. When she looked up from her yellow scrap of paper, she saw that Trevor had already finished and was waiting patiently for her to do so also.

“Ready to switch?” he asked, looking just as tense as she knew she must look to him.

She nodded once again, reaching across the small table to hand him her note while taking his. Their fingers touched, held for a moment, as did their gaze, then released as they swapped notes.

Trevor was the first to read Lil’s message. With slightly unsteady hands, he unfolded the small rectangle, taking in the three simple words Lil had written.

Lil studied the man across from her, the note in her hand still unread. Trevor’s expression was undecipherable. Her blood turned to frozen slush.

“Aren’t you going to read your note?” he prompted when she didn’t look at it, staring at him with a faraway look.

“Oh! Sure.” She blinked several times, swallowing hard.

Unfolding the pale-yellow slip of paper, expecting the worst, she read: *I love you, Lillian Ethyl Campbell*. Slowly, she lifted her gaze to meet Trevor’s and saw smoldering desire.

“So? What’s your opinion?” His voice slid out raw and husky while his lids were at half-mast. “I love you, Lillian.” He rose from his chair, holding a hand out to her. Lil stood, placing her hand in his. “And you love me.” He drew her into his arms.

“I’m speechless. Why? How? I mean, when did you first realize this?” She looked up at the man towering above her.

“I suppose I’ve loved you ever since I saw you in your cradle twenty-nine years ago.” His smile was warm and just a bit fragile as they both trod into foreign territory. “I probably knew for certain when I kissed you on your twenty-first birthday. That’s why it scared the hell out of me. But I wouldn’t admit it to myself until that night when you fell asleep against me after watching the movie. When I put you to bed, it just seemed natural that I should be in that bed with you—always.” He toyed with a curl at the side of her head. “How about you?”

Her hands caressed the cloth-covered muscles of his back and shoulders. “I suppose I’ve loved you ever since you beat up Tommy Monroe for splitting my lip. And that kiss, it was a turning point for me also. I knew for certain I loved you then, but never thought you’d feel the same for me so I tried to pretend it never happened. But when we first made love, I knew I’d never love another man as I love you, and I was willing to do anything to keep you.” She bit on her bottom lip in regret. “That’s why I didn’t tell you I was pregnant when I found out that second week. I didn’t want our time together to end.”

Trevor cupped her head with one big palm, pressing her against the hard wall of his chest. “What fools we were.” His voice was a deep rumble in her ear. “Wasting all of these precious years when we could have been together.”

“We’ll make up for it, I’m sure.”

“I’m sure we will.” He added concreteness to her statement. Placing his palms on each of her cheeks, he raised her face to him, bending to kiss each freckle across her nose, then running his tongue over the scar on her upper lip. “Why don’t we start making up for lost time?” He breathed the words against her mouth.

He took her by the hand, leading her to the bedroom. Once inside, he didn’t waste

any time as he covered her from forehead to neck with a series of hot, wet kisses that had Lil melting and sizzling like a marshmallow over a campfire.

He raised his head, eyes barely slits. "I love you." Slowly, he took off her pink maternity T-shirt, lifting it over her head and casting it to the floor. Tenderly, he removed her lacy bra. "Very feminine," he murmured, tossing it aside. Gently, he removed her stretch pants and underwear, exposing her sex. He moaned deeply. "Turn around." It was a soft order.

Lil did so and was face-to-face with her reflection in the full-length mirror attached to the bedroom door. She turned her head away from the sight, feeling uncommonly plain and more than a little embarrassed. Trevor grabbed her chin, forcing her head back around.

"Look at these full, luscious breasts." He cupped them in the palms of his hands, gently pinching the responsive tips. Lil moaned deeply, her lids fluttering shut at the ecstasy of his touches. "Look at these hips and thighs, those beautiful legs and perfect feet." He rested his hands on her hips watching the two people in the mirror. "Look at this." He cupped her abdomen with his large hands. "Our baby is in here. Growing every day. Made with our love, our lust. Look here." He slid one hand between her thighs, his middle finger sliding inside her. "Feel how hot and ready you are for me, Lil. Put all of this together and you get the most feminine, sexy, enticing woman God ever created, not a ten-year-old kid with scraped knees and a ratty baseball cap."

Lil gasped as desire lanced its way through her body. She reached up in back of her to grasp Trevor's shoulders for support. She crumpled against him, Trevor's arm going around her waist while the other continued to work its magic on her. He parted her pussy lips with his index and ring finger, watching as he rubbed her clit. "You've shown me just how much we deserve each other." He bit the side of her neck. "How we were made for each other. How well our bodies fit together. How our personalities complement each other." He smiled. "Brains and brawn."

He slid rhythmic circles over her nub. Lil's breathing picked up speed, her legs were about as useless as rubber bands, though Trevor had a firm hold on her. In the next breath he brought her to climax, her body convulsing with the pleasure rippling through her.

"I love making you come," he whispered in her ear. "I love watching you come."

Trevor lifted her off the floor, placing her on the bed. Lil laughed, glorying in his words and his lovemaking. "I love it when you make me come."

"Turn over," Trevor softly commanded.

Lil did so, getting on her hands and knees as Trevor positioned himself in back of her. She felt the head of his dick at the entrance to her pussy and moaned in delight when he slid inside and she felt his balls against her ass. Turning her head, she watched the look of total abandon and ecstasy on his face as he pumped in and out. His movements were slow at first, but soon he was driving into her, his fingers buried in the soft flesh of her hips. Lil pressed her face into the pillow, her ass high in the air for his taking. How she loved bringing out the wild side of this man, *her* man.

Trevor bent over her, cupping her breasts as he continued to surge and retreat. His breath was hot in her ear and he whispered words that had her lust on a high flame. She felt him slide one hand down and between her legs, rubbing her clit while he fucked her.

"You're gonna come again, aren't you?"

"Yes!" Lil met every one of his thrusts, reveling in the urgent passion they shared.

And she came again.

Trevor let out a broken groan, pressing his hips against her butt. Lil reached between her legs, gently squeezing his balls as he pumped into her again and again with each wave of his climax.

Letting out a pent-up breath, Trevor collapsed to his side. Lil pulled the covers up, and lay beside him. He took a deep breath and let it out. Looking at her, he brushed back a damp curl from her forehead. "You grow more and more beautiful every day, you know that? Wrapped in that rumpled sheet, naked, your stomach full and round." He swallowed hard. "You're so beautiful I ache."

She didn't know what to say as emotion nearly choked her. "I—thank you."

He slid an arm around her plump waist, nuzzling her hair. "Marry me, Lil."

Lil studied his face and frowned. "Trevor, you're probably feeling this way because you're simply caught up in the moment, excited over the baby and our regained intimacy." How could Mr. Foot-loose-and-fancy-free ever be satisfied with one woman? Not to mention a family life that would most likely seem monotonous and boring within the first few weeks of being a husband and father.

"That's what you honestly think?" He sounded hurt, though resigned.

"It's hard to believe that we can do a complete turn-around overnight," she said into the darkness that enveloped them. "I love you, it's true. But there are still things we have to work out."

"Things that can't be worked out while we're married?" He adjusted the sheet to cover them both, then laid her in the bend of his arm. "I've never been in love before, Lil. Not like this, anyway." His tone suddenly became solid, almost hard. "I'm going to have you as my wife, Lillian. Our child *will* carry my name."

Lil splayed a hand over the smooth skin of Trevor's chest. "Stay with me here," she said. "In my house. My bed. Let's take it one day at a time. See how things go. And perhaps..." She let her words trail off as her fingers grazed one of Trevor's nipples, making him gasp.

Trevor moaned deep in his throat, grabbing hold of Lil's wrist to stop the sweet torture she was causing him. "Perhaps you'll consent to being my wife?" His question demanded an answer.

"Perhaps," she murmured.

"Fair enough."

Chapter Fourteen

Days and nights blended one into another. Lil was in her ninth month, the baby was due any day now and Trevor was beginning to get antsy. Lil still hadn't consented to marrying him, though he was sure to ask her at least twice a day, upon awakening and just before falling asleep.

As far as he was concerned they were already living as husband and wife. He worked at the gym, came home to a hot dinner and an even hotter woman, waking up with her in his arms each and every morning. And he could honestly say he had never been happier in all of his life. If only Lil would agree to be his wife. He knew it was just a piece of paper and a little band of gold, but it was the principle of the thing. Lil was his and he was hers, in their hearts and in their lives. Still, he wanted them to belong to each other in law as well.

He sat in his cluttered office at the gym going over some facts and figures. Pump 'em Up was doing quite well and he was still thinking about buying the empty space across town and having Rick run it. The bank assured him the loan would be no problem. All they were waiting for was the go-ahead from him and they would start in on the paperwork. Trevor had no doubt it would attract new members. It would also add to his monetary take-in. He, Lil, and the baby would have a comfortable life.

Then what was holding him up? He tapped a pencil on the doodled-on paper before him, deep in thought.

A second gym was a big step. True, in this fitness-conscious age, and the fact that he offered not only the best equipment in the city, but also one-on-one training sessions and consultations, he had practically been making profits since the day he opened his doors. In fact, his staff had grown from just him and Rick to include another trainer, Pete Marsalla, and a high-school girl, Clara, to handle the phones and reception desk.

Chewing on the pencil now, leaving behind several imprints of his teeth into the soft, yellow-painted wood, his thoughts were interrupted as Rick burst into the office, his face ashen, eyes wide.

The pencil dropped from Trevor's mouth as he shot to his feet. "What is it?" he demanded, trying to still the wild tattoo of his heart.

"It's Lil."

Trevor rounded the desk, stomach in his throat. "What about her?"

"She's here." Rick held onto the doorknob for support as his legs looked like they were about to buckle. "She said she tried to call but the line was busy. She doesn't want to go to the hospital alone. She's in labor, man!"

The floor beneath Trevor began to rock and sway. This was it. Their baby was going to be an actuality instead of a squirming lump in Lil's stomach. The product of their love would in hours be taking up the empty crib in the small spare room Lil had used before as storage space.

Briefly he wondered if they had gotten all they would need for the tiny arrival. Yes. In fact, Lil had said the kid would be spoiled rotten as he'd gone out over the past months and gotten at least one of everything any baby—boy or girl—could ever need. They had wanted to keep the sex of the baby a surprise until the very end.

"Well, this is it, isn't it?" Trevor felt his feet turn to clay. He was scared shitless and had every right to be. Come tomorrow, he would be a father. But would he be a husband?

"Good luck, *amigo*. You're gonna need it." Rick patted Trevor on the back as he brushed past him, striding out into the workout area.

Trevor entered the large room, seeing a throng of people to the front of the building. He knew Lil must be at the center of it.

"I'm fine." He heard a familiar voice tinged heavily with impatience. "Just get Trevor."

Shouldering his way through the small crowd he found her, looking mad as hell and ready to burst, Lil was there within the circle of both familiar and strange faces.

"I'm here, baby," he soothed.

"Will you tell these people to leave me alone, I'm having a *baby*, not a heart attack!" Her face was flushed and he saw her wince, as she must have just weathered a small but fierce contraction.

"You heard the lady." Trevor took her into his arms, lifting her off her feet. "Go back to your workouts." He nodded his head at several patrons who stood nearby. "Employees, man your posts." He shot Clara with an angry look, knowing she was probably on the phone talking to one of her admirers when Lil had been trying to get through to him. In his lust-induced haze this morning he'd left his cell at home.

The young woman cast her gaze to the carpet and turned away from him, hurrying to the reception desk, her face a bright scarlet.

When Trevor had Lil settled as comfortably as possible in the front seat of his Wrangler, he climbed behind the wheel, trying to insert the keys into the ignition three times before he got it right. "Hey, if I'd had this problem nine months ago, you wouldn't be in this condition now," he said wryly, pulling out of the driveway and maneuvering the Jeep onto the street.

Lil, with beads of perspiration on her upper lip and a shadow of pain on her face, laughed. "The way I feel right now, I wish you had been impotent and with a body full of lethargic sperm." She grimaced, riding out another contraction.

Trevor reached over to take her hand. "Does it hurt bad?"

She nodded. "Imagine breaking your leg in ten different places and not having the luxury of pain-killers."

Trevor winced. "Ouch."

"Definitely, ouch." She inhaled a sharp breath before saying, "Not as bad as it will when the contractions come one on top of another, I'm sure."

"Oh, babe." If it were possible, he would take her pain from her, or at least share in it. But he couldn't. All he could do was lend her his moral support. "I love you." He directed his attention to the pale woman at his side.

"I love you, too," she gasped. "I'm trying to remember the breathing techniques I learned in Lamaze class, but evidently pain produces amnesia." She smiled, though it looked forced.

"Marry me," Trevor insisted, looking at the road ahead. "There's always a priest running around hospitals. We'll have him perform a quickie ceremony before the baby's born. After you've recovered, we'll have the real thing. A chapel, *off-white* lace dress." He flashed a teasing smile. "Flowers, the works. Say yes, Lil."

Her only answer was the adamant shake of her head.

“Dammit!” He slapped the steering wheel in frustration. “No child of mine is going to be a bastard and no woman of mine is going to give birth out of wedlock.” He stabbed her with a fiery glance.

“Since when did you become so damned old-fashioned?” She puffed and panted. “Shit! Are babies worth all of this gut-searing torment?”

Trevor ignored her last question and answered the first. “Since I fell in love with you,” he returned. “Since when did you start cussing?”

“Since I fell in love with you,” was her equally tart answer.

Trevor pursed his lips and changed the subject. “I know this isn’t the time nor place, but I’m thinking of adding on another Pump ‘em Up...”

“Do it!” She hissed, interrupting him. “I always told you it was a good idea.” It was crazy to talk business while she was in labor, but thankfully it kept her mind detoured for a few seconds at a time.

Trevor nodded. One problem was solved. “Will you help me out?” He drove along, thinking the damned hospital never seemed farther away than it did right now.

“Sure. Get my leotard, some music, and a few out of shape women. I’ll start right now.”

He laughed, amused. Still, he had the answers he had been seeking.

“After the baby’s born I want to draw up new papers making you an equal partner in the gym.” Trevor turned into the hospital parking lot, heading for the sign that read Maternity Entrance.

Lil only nodded, her face pale, lips thin and a pinched look on her face.

* * * *

Sixteen hours later Lil was still in labor and Trevor was going out of his mind. He looked at the woman on the slim hospital bed. She was, as Rick had stated so eloquently, the bitch from hell. He felt he was in the movie *The Exorcist* as he watched the sweet woman he loved transform into a swearing, sweating, howling beast.

The doctor offered to knock her out, but she wanted to be awake when the baby arrived. The way Trevor felt at the moment, *he* wouldn’t mind being knocked out for a few hours. At least until this was all over.

He stopped pacing to stand by her side. “God’s trying to tell you something. He won’t let that baby be born until we’re married.”

“Go to hell!” she screamed as the contraction reached a white-hot crest of pain.

Nurses bustled about the room, checking her vitals every five minutes or so. They assured him she was doing fine and that no woman had ever been in labor for the rest of her life, and that she would be herself again as soon as the baby arrived.

Trevor had to see it to believe it.

“Marry me,” he pleaded again. Her contractions came one after another with barely enough time in between for her to catch her breath. The baby would be here soon. “I’ll do anything you want. Name it and it’s yours.” He took her hand in his. “Just please say you’ll be my wife.”

She turned to look at him. An unholy fire burned in her eyes, curls lay plastered to her head, and the front of the sexless hospital gown was drenched with sweat. Trevor thought she never looked more beautiful than she did now. And he told her so.

“You’re insane.”

“Maybe.” He shrugged. “Is that a yes?”

“Yesss,” she hissed between gritted teeth. “I’ll marry you.”

Trevor was speechless. “Yes?” he repeated in disbelief.

“Are you deaf?” she snapped. “I said yes! Now get that goddamned priest before I change my mind.” Another wave of pain rolled over her.

He kissed her firmly on the lips. “Is there a priest around here?” he asked the grandmotherly-looking nurse who had been witness to the unfolding soap opera.

She smiled knowingly. “Father O’Malley is on his way up from the downstairs chapel now.”

Trevor gathered the old woman up in a bear hug, his excitement evident. “Thank you!”

The nurse squealed before he put her down. “You’re quite welcome,” she said, laughing breathlessly, replacing a few of the pins that had come loose from her bun.

Patting his pockets, Trevor located the small box he had carried with him for two months now, praying for such an occasion as this. Extracting it from the back pocket of his jeans, he opened the velvet lid, taking out the small, perfect wedding band and its larger mate, just as Father O’Malley walked into the room.

“I hear that somebody’s in need of a speedy ceremony.” The thin, graying man with just a touch of an Irish accent stopped at the side of Lil’s bed, Bible in hand and a smile on his face.

Epilogue

Seven years later

Lil and Trevor sat side by side on one of the wooden slab benches in the neighborhood park. Lil shaded her eyes from the glaring sun as she kept her gaze on the small figure coming up to bat.

Trevor's attention was also focused on their child. This was Alex's first Little League game and they wouldn't have missed it for the world.

The years up until now had been, not surprisingly, peaceful, although they'd had their share of ups and downs as most married couples do. Trevor's nightmares had ceased years ago as he had come to grips with his abusive past, knowing in his heart that he was in no way like his father.

Lil had quit her job at the department store soon after Alex was born, accepting Trevor's offer of becoming partners in Pump 'em Up. They had opened two other gyms since then.

Not only was she the workout instructor at the main site, but she also ran training classes specifically designed for all aspects of motherhood. From the stages of early pregnancy, postpartum and on, she helped women keep and regain their strength, stamina and self-esteem, while letting off stress and tension from the rigors of everyday family life. Needless to say, her classes were a success.

Lil adjusted herself so she lay against Trevor's shoulder. He slid one arm around her in a natural protective gesture, his other hand roaming to her tight, round abdomen as he caressed their second child, who was due next month.

Trevor planted a light kiss atop Lil's head, breathing in her feminine scent, breathing out a sigh of contentment. Yes, the Fates had indeed been kind to him after all. He pulled Lil closer, looking on as Alex swung the bat, the ball flying over the foul line.

"I love you, Pill," he bent to whisper in his wife's ear, excitement pouring into his lower body at the thought of how he planned to make love to her this very evening. In all these years he hadn't grown bored with Lil and doubted he would ever.

Lil slapped his chest playfully, looking up at him. "I love you, too." For a moment they were lost in each other until the noise of the crowd brought them out of their silent reverie.

When they looked toward the baseball diamond, they rose to their feet and shouted with pride and glee, embracing each other tightly as a grand-slam home run was hit by their daughter Alexandria who had obviously followed ... in her mother's footsteps.

The End

About the Author:

A lover of romance and strong characterization, Kelly believes that any story worth reading should have a hero/heroine that the reader can fall in love with. She is currently

living her dream, writing sizzling tales of suspense with paranormal elements, as well as contemporary and humorous romance. All of her books contain highly sensual love scenes and sexual tension that will make your heart race!

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