

Romance

A Race For Love

By Jillian Dagg



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Chapter One

The house was secluded from the main road by a long driveway edged with thick rhododendron bushes and huge redwood trees. Tanya Steele pushed open the heavy front door and entered the dark oak paneled hallway. She found it depressing, even worse was that the owners, Mary and Donald Wicklow, had recently been killed in a train crash while traveling through Italy.

Not that Tanya really felt the loss. They'd just been two more in a long line of relatives who'd housed her through her twenty years. Their deaths were another crisis she would have to cope with. Still, she had been with the Wicklows for five years, and did feel some fondness for them. She even shed a few tears at the funeral this morning.

Now she was alone once more, as she'd been alone since the time her parents hadn't wanted to take their new baby out to Australia with them. Her mother's sister, not wanting to see their baby enter an orphanage, took pity on the child and had looked after her with a promise from her sister and brother-in-law that they'd come back for the baby when they had settled in their new life. But they never returned. Tanya's aunt died and she was transferred to another aunt and uncle. And after that, some cousins had put up with her for a year, but they had so many children of their own that one more was just too much. Finally, when she was fifteen, she'd come to live with the Wicklows who were distant cousins of her father's. They had been wealthy and had sent her to good

schools, then to Oxford University, where she'd been for a year now.

No one else from the funeral party had arrived back at the house yet. Tanya had gone on alone, choosing to leave early and walk rather than ride in the procession of black Bentleys that had wound its way to the cemetery.

She took off her hat, freeing her auburn hair to flow in uncontrolled waves on her shoulders. She unbuttoned the navy raincoat and walked up the wide staircase, wondering what would happen now. She'd finished her term at Oxford and had been packing to come home when she'd heard of the tragedy.

The Wicklows' daughter, Cheryle, had been waiting at the house yesterday morning when Tanya arrived. Cheryle was a model in London. She had taken only a few minutes to brief Tanya on the funeral proceedings before driving off in her little sports car for an appointment with a magazine. Cheryle had attended the funeral dressed in black, with high leather boots and a hat with a little veil. Tears had welled in her brown eyes; her lips had been set in a tragic pose. She should have been an actress, Tanya had thought, observing the dramatic droop of her shoulders. The Wicklows also had a son, but they never spoke of him. His father had wanted him to enter the family business but instead he had gone off to America at the age of nineteen. They had never reconciled. Which was sad, thought Tanya, entering her bedroom and throwing the wide brimmed black hat onto the bed. Now that they were dead, all the family bickering seemed pointless.

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She shed the raincoat and smoothed the skirt of the navy wool dress that she'd worn beneath it. She hoped that she'd looked subdued enough because she knew with her brilliant auburn hair, green eyes and striking features, she was often accused of looking showy. She threw her raincoat down on the bed. What a depressing room this was compared to the little bed-sitter she'd rented up in Oxford last term! The bedsitter had been brightly decorated by some students before her, and she'd only had to add a few cushions and posters to make it habitable. But this room! The mahogany furniture was heavy and the bed might as well be a four-poster it was so large. The walls were covered in wallpaper of brown flowers, the carpet was maroon with some type of a pattern running through in worn threads, and the curtains were a heavy maroon velvet. For all his wealth, Donald Wicklow had been very tight with his cash. The house had remained as it was in his father's day.

A door banged downstairs. Probably Cheryle and that man Jonathan. She'd introduced him as her fiancé.

Tanya walked to the window, a girl of medium height in slim fitting black suede boots and calf-length woolen dress. She'd pinned the V neck with a small silver brooch to make the style a little more demure for attending the funeral, because although basically thin, her body was well-developed and her creamy cleavage was often being misinterpreted by amorous boyfriends and lusting middle-aged men. Not that it disturbed her. She was quite uninterested in most of the men she met. Since she'd first started going out with boys, they'd fallen instantly in love with her rich silky hair and sensual

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good looks, hoping for a response from her strange green eyes. But she'd gained a reputation of being extremely cool and self-sufficient. Although there was always some brave man willing to attempt to break down her reserve, she'd never found anyone who could arouse her. Not that being cool was her nature, she was really a warm-hearted woman, but never having had anyone or anything to love, she'd become withdrawn when it came to giving an emotional response.

She looked out of the window and down on to the driveway. Yes, that was Jonathan's silver Aston Martin parked outside the house. Cheryle had obviously hit the jackpot with that one. When she'd introduced him, she'd mentioned something about him being a photographer. The butler, Harry Wales, and his wife Louise were also back, their car parked neatly behind the Aston Martin. Cheryle hadn't been too pleased that Tanya had chosen to walk home from the funeral, but Tanya had ignored her disapproval. Walking was her release when she was upset. She was about to turn away from the window when the sound of an engine attracted her attention. A red Ferrari came roaring up in front of the house, the engine throbbing as though angry at having to stop. The driver turned off the engine and got out. He was a tall man dressed in a black belted trenchcoat, black trousers and shoes, the darkness of the clothes emphasizing his golden head of hair. He closed the car door with a bang and walked slowly toward the steps to the house. Tanya noticed a pronounced limp as he forced his way up the steep steps. Even from the height where she was standing, she noticed a

spasm of pain cross his face and wondered how a man obviously very muscular and athletic had suffered such an injury.

The doorbell rang when the man finally made it to the top of the steps. Someone opened the front door. There was a screech of pleasure from Cheryle, a deep voice said something, and then the man must have been taken into the lounge. The door closed and all was quiet. Was he one of Cheryle's ex-boyfriends come to pay his respects?

Tanya left the window and struggled out of the suede boots now beginning to feel tight around her calves. She slipped out of her dress and panty hose and dressed in jeans and a blue shirt blouse. As she brushed the tangles out of her hair she hoped that lunch would be served soon because she was hungry. Then deciding to find out, she left her room and went downstairs. She met Louise in the hallway.

"Oh, there you are, Tanya," Louise said, her elderly face set in a permanent expression of sympathy for the family she had been with for thirty years. "I'm serving lunch by the fire in the lounge. Just some sandwiches. Miss Cheryle said that would be all right."

"Fine, thank you, Louise."

Tanya opened the door to the lounge and paused. The people in the room formed a little tableau as they turned to look at her. Cheryle had discarded her coat and was wearing a black dress splashed with colorful flowers which complimented her straight blond shoulder-length hair. Jonathan lounged on the couch by her side. He had loosened his tie and thrown his jacket across the back of a chair. His

dark eyes lit up with masculine appreciation when he saw Tanya enter. But it was the man sitting in a straight-backed dining-room chair who'd caught her glance. The man who'd arrived in the Ferrari. He'd taken off his raincoat and he wore a black high-necked sweater and well fitting black trousers. His hair was pure gold, straight and thick, brushed back covering his ears and resting on the back of his sweater. He held a coffee cup on one knee, his other leg stretched out straight in front of him. He turned to look at Tanya with cool gray eyes.

Cheryle stood up. "Come in, Tanya," she said and turned to the blond man. "Richard, this is Tanya. She's the cousin who has been living here with Mum and Dad for the last few years."

The blond man didn't stand up, but acknowledged Tanya with a nod of his head.

"Richard's my brother, Tanya," Cheryle went on, giving Tanya a rather exasperated glance which meant she didn't approve of her changing into jeans and a shirt. But Tanya didn't care. She turned to the man.

"How do you do," she said politely.

"It's a pleasure to meet you." Richard spoke with a North American accent.

"Why don't you sit down, Tanya?" Cheryle interrupted. "Louise will be serving us lunch shortly."

Tanya pulled up a straight-backed chair and sat down next to Richard. Cheryle's expression was haughty as always. She'd never got along with Cheryle. Already the woman was taking on the role of mistress of the house. Wouldn't it be a

joke on her if her brother inherited the house? But that would never happen. Cheryle had been the favored child. Besides, who'd want this house? Those heavy, green velvet drapes, that massive furniture, the faded worn maroon carpet! Tanya would be glad when she was back at school.

Cheryle sat down on the sofa and looked across at Tanya.

"We were just discussing the funeral," she told her.

"Richard couldn't get here this morning. He ... he had other commitments."

"I had to visit a doctor," Richard told Tanya.

"I see," Tanya said and then with curiosity, "why?"

"Tanya," Cheryle said.

"It's okay," Richard smiled halfheartedly, his thin firm lips in a straight line. "I was involved in a car crash and have trouble with my back."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Tanya said.

"Richard's a racing driver," Cheryle said. "Aren't you, Richard?"

Richard nodded, looking slightly bored with the whole affair.

Louise came in just then wheeling a tea trolley with plates of sandwiches piled on it and a coffeepot and cups.

"Thank you, Louise." Cheryle got up and settled the trolley between the four of them and the older woman left the room.

Tanya ate six sandwiches. She was ravenous as she had only had a slice of toast before the funeral that morning. She noticed that no one else was quite so greedy and hoped they hadn't noticed. When they'd finished and the coffee had been served, Cheryle stood up again.

Up and down like a nervous yo-yo! Her brother's presence seemed to be undermining her usual self-confidence. He dominated the room. In spite of his injury his muscles beneath the black clothes were firm and hard. The tilt of his head was alert to all that was going on around him.

Cheryle stood with her back to the fire. Tanya saw that there was a distinct family resemblance between the brother and sister. The hair was the same, except that Cheryle's had been lightened considerably artificially. They both had the same aristocratic bone structure that put Cheryle up high on the list of the best models in London.

"Tanya, I've been telling Richard about Dad's will," Cheryle said.

Tanya nodded.

"I get the house," Cheryle went on, "and Richard gets the value of the house in money plus what else is left split between us, which includes the price of the business that Dad just sold. There is five thousand pounds for you."

Tanya lowered her eyes. She hadn't expected anything, but she had been hoping. Five thousand pounds wasn't much. While it was certainly better than nothing it wouldn't finance the rest of her university education.

"That's fine," she said bravely.

"It means you'll have to find somewhere to live."

Tanya swallowed hard. She hadn't expected that. But then Cheryle wouldn't want her to live with her at the house. She wouldn't want to live with Cheryle anyway.

"Also, Tanya, I really can't see why I have to go on financing your tuition. It was something Mum and Dad were doing, but..." the woman shrugged.

"I wouldn't expect you to," Tanya told her, fighting tears. Maybe the funeral had affected her more than she'd thought.

"Have you any idea where you'll go?" Cheryle asked.

"I have friends," Tanya lied. She'd take her money, find a small apartment, then get a job. She sensed Richard looking at her and managed a watery smile.

"Are you sure you can manage?" he asked.

"Of course," she said huskily. "I'll make some plans." Then she stood up and left the room as quickly as she could.

She stared unseeingly out of the bedroom window. She was being thrown out once again. Well, it had happened before. She could cope with it, it was nothing new, even though it did come as a shock each time it happened. She should have known it was all too good to last. She'd only had one year at Oxford. Now it was over and she'd enjoyed it so much. It was the only time she'd been happy in her entire life. Where would she go now? She'd been taking history and had no specific training in anything. How could she possibly get a job? She'd hoped to eventually become a teacher, but that was out of the question without further education.

She went to the mirror and gazed at her reflection. She ran her fingers through her luxurious hair, piling it on top of her head with her hands. Maybe she could become a model like Cheryle. Only Cheryle was as thin as a rake and Tanya's body was softer with more curves. There was a knock on the door and she let her hair fall back to her shoulders.

When she opened the door it was the first time she'd seen Richard Wicklow standing up at close quarters. She was struck by his height and the broadness of his shoulders hugged by the wool of his black sweater. His legs were long and the tight cloth of his black trousers emphasized the hardness of his thighs.

"Yes?" Tanya inquired

"May I talk to you?"

"Of course." She opened the door wider to let him in.

As he closed the door and leaned against it, she realized that it had taken a lot of effort for him to get upstairs.

"I'd offer you a seat but the bed might be difficult," she said.

"It's fine," he told her, his gray eyes serious.

She swallowed hard. "Was it a bad crash?"

"Just about as bad as a crash can be."

"It was probably hair-raising?" She tried to smile even though there wasn't much to smile about.

"It was hair-raising," he said, his firm lips softening. He shifted his frame so that he leaned more of his weight against the door. "Tanya," he said, "I think you're getting a rough deal out of my parents' deaths."

Tanya shrugged, "It doesn't matter."

"I believe you were at University?"

She nodded, her eyes bright with unshed tears because this man was making her feel sorry for herself.

"I could try and persuade Cheryle to keep you there."

"She wouldn't," Tanya shook her head. "Besides, I don't want to live with Cheryle."

"Then is there anyone you can go to live with? Maybe a girl friend?"

"I have no special friends," she said. "I've been working so hard at school that there wasn't time, and here at the house, well..." she shrugged.

He nodded, "I know this house is hardly the most friendly place in the world."

"I'll sort myself out, don't you worry," she told him, more confident than she actually felt. "I've always been alone, it's nothing new."

"I know how you feel," he said, "I left home young, but I was a pretty tough guy, you're a lovely young woman."

She smiled through glittering tears. "You're being awfully kind, Mr. Wicklow. But I think I can manage."

"Okay. I don't want to push you, it's your life."

"Thank you."

"One more thing," he said, making a move to leave. "Would you be kind enough to take me out to the cemetery where my parents were buried?"

"Why of course," Tanya told him. "But what about Cheryle?"

"Cheryle and Jonathan are just leaving to go back to London. Besides, I'd rather you took me. I'll be staying here tonight."

"Fine. I'll just get a coat and shoes on."

"Good," he smiled, his eyes crinkling at the corners, "I'll see you downstairs."

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He went out of the door moving awkwardly and Tanya was filled with compassion for him. She hurriedly put on leather boots, and a navy suede jacket over her jeans and shirt.

He was waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs. She followed him out of the house, down the steep steps not wanting to embarrass him by offering help. But she cringed when she saw the pain flicker across his handsome features. He helped her into the Ferrari, then walked around and got into the driver's seat beside her. It was a left-hand drive. Tanya felt a little disoriented as she sat beside him.

He smiled. "You'd better fasten your seat belt," he told her as he fastened his own.

"Are we going around the racetrack?" she joked and he grinned.

"No, but this car's pretty powerful."

"I noticed when you came in," she told him. "It growled."

He started the engine. "Were you watching from your window?" he asked.

Tanya blushed. "I heard the car."

"I guess it's pretty loud," he said and drove down the driveway to the main road.

Tanya gave him instructions on how to get to the cemetery. When they arrived, he parked the car by the curb. They walked in through the gates and along the gravel path, Tanya keeping her pace slow so that Richard's handicap would be less noticeable. Finally they reached his parents' graves, the coffins now interred and covered by fresh earth.

He limped up to them. Tanya stood back feeling treacherously close to tears. What was wrong with her today?

Was she crying for herself or for this virile, handsome man who had obviously come perilously close to death?

He turned around to look at Tanya.

"What was the funeral like?" he asked, his voice husky.

"Like funerals," she told him wishing she'd taken more notice of the ceremony this morning.

He took a deep breath and touched her arm. "Let's go," he said. They moved back through the graves out onto the main path.

Back in the car, he didn't leave right away, but sat staring into the cemetery.

"I feel inadequate," Tanya said softly.

"Why?" He was surprised.

"Because of all that's happened."

"Don't worry. I was just feeling guilty for not caring as much as I should."

Tanya could understand that, so she wasn't shocked by his statement.

"Actually," he smiled at her, "it's me that should feel inadequate."

"No," she shook her head, "you're fine."

"I don't mean that I'm feeling sorry for myself," he told her, "I'm worried about what's going to happen to you?"

"I can look after myself. Really."

"I believe you can. But somehow I feel responsible for you. After all, you were in my parents' care."

"I know. But I'm nothing to you. Please."

He was looking at her as if seeing her for the first time. His eyes took in the shiny auburn hair, the strange greenness of

her eyes and the rise of her breasts beneath the taut blue material of her blouse.

"I suppose you wouldn't accept a gift of money?" Richard said.

"No," she shook her head vigorously. "I've got some. You don't owe me anything."

"It was just a thought," he passed off the offer.

"Anyhow, thank you for bringing me here. I'm grateful."

Then he started the Ferrari and drove back to the house.

Once inside, Richard went directly to the lounge. Tanya walked up to her room and took off her jacket and shoes. Then, propping herself up against the pillow of her bed, she picked up a paperback that she'd been reading the night before. When things weren't going quite right, she'd always been able to escape inside the pages of a book.

This book was an adventure story with a handsome hero who she unconsciously pictured as Richard. Strange that his parents hadn't wanted anything to do with him for so many years. You'd think with a son like that they'd have been proud. She wondered if they'd known he was a racing driver and had had a bad accident. She wondered, too, if he was in love like the hero in her book. Maybe his girl was waiting for him to come back.

She became so involved in the book that she forgot the time. When she thought to look, it was past seven. It must be dinnertime. She brushed her hair hurriedly, and ran downstairs almost colliding with Louise in the front hall.

"I was just coming to tell you that your dinner is ready," Louise said. "I'll bring it to you right away in the dining room."

"Richard's having his in his room," Louise told her as she set a plate of food in front of Tanya. "The poor boy's not that well yet."

"Yes, I know," Tanya said. "Did you know him when he lived here before?"

"Oh yes," Louise said, "Harry used to talk to him for hours about cars. Harry's a great racing fan."

"Then you knew he was a racing driver?"

"Oh, yes we did, but you couldn't mention the boy's name without his father going off the deep end."

"Did you know he'd been injured?" Tanya asked.

"Of course. We saw it on television. It happened in America. There was a lot of controversy about it, I remember."

"In what way?"

"Oh, safety regulations, that kind of thing. It's very sad. Poor boy. All he did was follow his heart's desire. After all it was his life."

"It is sad." Tanya looked down at her food. "You only live once, don't you?"

"Yes, dear," Louise patted her shoulder, "I know the circumstances. I'm very sorry."

Tanya looked up at her, "Are you going to stay on?" she asked.

"Miss Cheryle wants us to," Louise told her.

"That's good," said Tanya feeling sorry for herself again.

Louise patted the girl's shoulder once more. "I hope everything turns out all right for you," she said.

"I hope so too," said Tanya.

When she'd finished eating, Tanya went up to her room to read her book again. She wondered which room Richard was in. Was he sleeping already? Or was he brooding? Even though he was in complete control, he gave the impression that he was lonely.

Around ten o'clock she undressed and put on her thick wool dressing gown and went along to the bathroom. On the way back she met Richard climbing the last few stairs.

"Hello," she said, smiling, "have you been out?"

"I just felt like a breath of night air," he told her, returning her smile.

"I love night air," she said.

"So do I," he smiled again. "What have you been doing this evening?"

"I was reading," she told him. "I find it helps."

"An escape?"

She nodded, "I suppose so."

He was standing stiffly, one hand on the stair railing, the other in the pocket of his black trousers. She thought he looked tired; his eyes were red-rimmed.

"I suppose I should get to bed," she said.

"You must get your beauty sleep."

She touched her auburn hair self-consciously. "What room are you in?" she asked for something to say because she felt rather strange.

"The little one at the end of the hall. Why?" There was a glint in his gray eyes.

"Oh, I just wondered," she replied quickly.

"Then you're not planning on visiting me?" His eyes crinkled.

"Oh, no."

"I'm disappointed. I hoped that I was being offered more than a hot water bottle tonight."

She hadn't expected him to be the type of man to proposition her. Yet somehow his proposition didn't bother her like other men before him. She actually wouldn't mind...

He moved up to her and gently caressed her warm cheek before cupping her chin to tilt her face toward him. He bent his head. For a dizzy moment, she thought that he was going to kiss her and her lips involuntarily parted in expectation.

"I'm so tempted," he said. "But you've had a hard day. Why don't you run along to bed?" He put his hand on her shoulder and half turned her toward her bedroom.

Tanya could still feel Richard's eyes on her back as she walked to her room. Behind the closed door, she took a deep gulping breath. If he'd kissed her? Her mind somersaulted at the thought. If he'd kissed her, she would have responded.

Chapter Two

Richard wasn't there in the morning. Louise told Tanya that he'd gone to the hospital but he'd be back for lunch. Tanya stood staring out of the window eating the remains of her toast. She hated the isolation of sitting alone at the dining room table. At first, when she'd found out Richard had gone, she'd thought he'd left for good and it had disturbed her, but knowing he was coming back for lunch made her feel better. She felt restless this morning. The uncertainty of where she was going to live was worrying her more than she cared to admit.

After breakfast she put on her coat and boots and told Louise she was going for a walk. It was a dismal, cold day with no trace of sunshine. She walked up the winding pathway, kicking at an occasional clump of grass that grew up between the paving, wondering when she had to leave the house. She knew that Cheryle would like her to get out as soon as possible. She supposed she should travel to London on Monday and see about getting somewhere to live. She didn't really know any of the larger towns in Surrey well enough to go and make her home in one of them.

She wandered across one of the wide green lawns that led back to the house. She shivered. It was cold despite being late spring. Maybe she should go abroad and settle in a warmer climate than England.

Richard's car was parked outside the house when Tanya arrived back from her walk. She went inside and took off her

jacket. She was eager to see Richard again, but felt a little trepidation since their encounter on the landing the night before.

She straightened her shoulders and walked into the lounge. Richard was standing in front of the fire looking thoughtfully into the flames. He glanced up.

"Hi," he said, "how are you today?"

"Fine," she told him. "Have you had lunch yet?"

"I think Louise is fixing something." He shifted his weight from one leg to the other as if to settle himself comfortably. "Why don't you sit down?"

"No, I'll stand," she said and walked further into the room. "I've just been for a walk. It's cold out."

"England's rather dreary this time of year," he said.

"It's supposed to be almost summer," she smiled.

"Is it really?" He grinned, then asked, "Have you decided what you want to do yet?"

She shook her head, "No. Things have been going around in my mind, but nothing definite."

His eyes surveyed her, narrowing slightly while he took in her slim blue jeans, the yellow shirt blouse and the delicate gold chain that nestled against the whiteness of her throat.

"Tanya," he said, "I'm going to ask you something. It's an alternative to anything you might have thought up, and if you don't agree, you just have to say no, you won't hurt my feelings. I know you hardly know me, and I hardly know you, but you have been living in my parents' house for the past five years and I lived here for eighteen years of my life, too, so we do have something in common. I have a house in

Canada; actually a cottage. It's isolated, a place I need for my peace of mind. I live alone and could possibly manage to cope the way I am although I know it'll be difficult. You don't really have anything here in England to hold you. I suppose I could offer to pay for the rest of your education, but somehow I don't think you're the type to accept charity as you made clear yesterday."

Tanya stared at him. "You want me to come to Canada with you?" she asked, tentatively, not sure what he was telling her.

"Yes;" he said, and took a steadying breath. "Why don't you marry me?"

"Marry you?" Tanya looked at him aghast. "*Marry* you?"

"Why look so shocked? You're a beautiful woman."

"But we don't know each other, Richard."

"I did say you could say no if you didn't agree. Maybe you'd like to think about it. I need someone to care for me, my house, cook my meals and in return you could pursue your interests and you'd have a stable future."

As well I'd have you, she thought. "I'll have to think about it. Could I tell you in the morning?" She looked up at his chiseled features. He was smiling gravely, his gray eyes cool. He was certainly the most attractive man had ever met, but *marry*.

"The morning would be fine," he said softly.

The door opened and Louise stood there with the trolley.

"Your lunch," Louise smiled. "Are you eating with Mr. Wicklow?" she asked Tanya.

"Yes, she is," Richard said. "Just bring it in."

Louise wheeled in the trolley and put it next to the fire. "It's cold for being so late in the season," she said. She threw another log on the fire before she left the room.

Richard pulled up a chair and sat down. Tanya went to the sofa and poured the coffee and passed him a sandwich.

"Thank you," he said, smiling. "All the comforts of home."

This is what it would be like to be his wife, Tanya thought. To sit opposite him and share his meals—and his bed. She almost choked on her sandwich. She wasn't experienced with boys. And Richard was no boy! She remembered her meeting in the hall with him the previous night.

"What's the problem?" he asked, reaching for another sandwich.

"Oh, nothing." Her eyes moved from his face, to the muscular column of his throat.

"Are you sizing me up as a husband? What's the verdict?" His voice sounded amused.

She looked down into her coffee cup. She really wasn't sure what to say.

"So you are considering the idea?"

"Of course. It's not every day that a woman receives a proposal."

"No, I suppose not," he said and put his coffee cup down on the tea trolley. "Maybe I should just let you go and live alone somewhere, but somehow I can't do that. I feel responsible."

"If I say no to your proposal; I will be alone," she told him.

"I know, but at least I've given you the chance."

"I told you before. You don't owe me anything."

His eyes held hers. "I'll only be giving you, security. If we are married and anything happens to me, then you will inherit what's mine."

"But surely..."

"No," he shook his head, "let's leave it for a while. Why don't we take a drive later in the afternoon? Then we can get to know each other better."

She stood up. "I'd like that." Get to know him better? She felt dizzy at the thought.

"I'll wait for you downstairs at around three," he said.

She nodded and left the lounge.

She ran upstairs and leaned breathlessly against the door. Walking to the window, she looked out at his Ferrari parked directly beneath the steps. She tried to imagine what marriage to him would really mean. If she married him, he would probably expect her to be his wife in every way. She buried her hot face in her hands. Here in the privacy of her bedroom, she could admit the idea was not exactly repugnant to her. She had always dreamed of wearing a white dress and marrying the man she loved in a church wedding, just as she had always dreamed of having loving, caring parents. It was too late to have parents now. But this man? Even if he didn't love her, it was better than the alternatives.

Also, the idea of traveling to Canada was attractive. She had no desire to stay in England. There was nothing for her here. She had no life here; nobody who cared. Yes, she rather liked the idea of living in another country. But to do so, she would have to marry Richard Wicklow! The idea scared her more than she cared to admit. She only knew that he felt

responsible for her because his parents had not provided a living for her. This was apparently his only motive in offering to share his home with her. Yet, why should he take this on? Why should he care what happened to her? He had a full life and must certainly have girl friends, maybe even a special one. Why did he want to tangle himself up with a woman about whom he knew nothing?

It was getting close to three. She tucked a white, silk shirt into her leather belt and gave her hair a quick brush. She paused for a moment in front of the mirror. Did Richard find her attractive? Other men had; she knew that. But Richard had never even kissed her. You could hardly count his casual dismissal of her the other night as an embrace. She sighed. He had made it quite obvious that all that he needed was help in the house, a housekeeper and cook, and possibly a nurse.

And yet what were her alternatives? A lonely, London flat? A menial job, waitress perhaps? Houseworker for strangers? She had no visible means of support and no skills. She could get them of course. But it would take time. And she had to admit to herself that Richard was the first man who had ever attracted her. She thought of his sapphire eyes appraising her, his head of burnished gold. Then she remembered his firm mouth, faintly twisted by pain, that she had almost hoped would brush hers the evening of their encounter in the hall.

If she married Richard, life would certainly not be dull! She shivered with anticipation. Perhaps he did find her attractive after all. But would he ever grow to love her? And if he did, would she respond? Well, there was no point in thinking about

that now, she told herself sternly. It would just muddy the waters. It was better to concentrate on practical matters, such as the satisfaction that she would derive from doing honest work and being genuinely needed. She would be caring for someone and would have a real home for the first time in her life. She might do well to remember that.

At three o'clock when she went down into the front hallway, Louise told her that Richard was already outside in the car. She ran down the steps. He reached over and opened the door for her and she slipped in beside him. She fastened the seat belt.

"Am I late?" she asked breathlessly.

"No," he said, "I just thought I'd get down here first."

"It embarrasses you, doesn't it?" she said, meaning his injury.

"It frustrates me," he corrected. He started the car. The engine roared as they drove off up the lane. Tanya sat back in the low seat.

"You didn't want to go to the funeral, did you?" she said.

He shook his head, "No, even though I got here on time."

"Did you really go to the doctor?"

"Yes, they won't let me out on my own for too long. But he told me I should be cutting down my visits very soon now."

"I'm glad," she said, really meaning it. "Is this your own car?"

He smiled, "Yes. It's my one big extravagance. I take it everywhere, regardless of cost."

This awed her. "On the plane?"

"I have a company that transports it. I loathe driving rented vehicles."

She touched the dash. She'd only ever driven small older cars, but didn't own a car herself. "Maybe you could teach me to drive it."

"Are you agreeing to come home with me then?" He glanced sideways at her.

"I haven't decided yet. You did say the morning."

"Of course." He turned back to concentrate on his driving. "Any particular place you'd like to go?" He smoothly took the car down a narrow winding road lined with trees.

"No," she told him. "Anywhere." She enjoyed being with him. No man had ever made her feel that. Of the few she'd been out with, she'd always wanted to get it over with fast, like a disagreeable visit to the dentist. She looked across at his hands on the wheel of the car and asked the first question that came into her head.

"Will you be able to race again?"

She saw his knuckles tense up and whiten.

"Yes."

"That's good."

He relaxed slightly, "I can drive okay, it's just that I get tension headaches under extreme concentration. It'll take time."

"I'm sorry."

"You shouldn't be," he said, "it's a risk I take each time I get behind the wheel. That this was a more serious crash than any before, was just my bad luck."

"But you miss racing?"

"Of course. Wouldn't you, if all you had to do was wake up each morning wondering if you could make it through the next eight hours without any pain?"

Tanya swallowed hard and stared out of the window at a bed of daffodils waving beneath the trees. She'd almost decided what she was going to do.

"If I came with you, would it help?" she asked huskily.

"Yes," he said with no hesitation.

"You don't know me," she said looking at him again. His golden hair was falling across his face, almost covering his right eye.

"My father's solicitor told me a few things," he said. "He filled me in on your life to date."

"Which is rather a mess," she said looking down at her hands.

"I think you've come through remarkably well."

She flushed at the compliment.

"You've had a rough time being chucked from one relative to another, which is rather typical of my family, I'm afraid."

It wasn't their fault. Your parents were good to me."

"Maybe they felt guilty," he said bitterly.

"Surely, they made some attempt to contact you?" she said.

"I wrote to them, but my father never answered the letters. You'd have thought I'd committed a deadly crime by not being pushed into a life of their choosing."

"I suppose you hurt him. The business was his whole life and the thought of his son not wanting to be in it was beyond his comprehension."

"Exactly."

"Why did you choose racing?" she asked.

He shrugged, "I always liked cars. I followed car racing ever since I was a kid and the racing drivers were my heroes."

She smiled, "That's like someone dreaming of being a film star?"

"I suppose so. I used to hang around the tracks doing amateur stuff until I met a guy who'd been racing across the States and Europe for years. It escalated from there."

"Racing scares me," she told him.

"It scares me too, but I couldn't do anything else."

"I couldn't imagine you doing anything else. You don't look like an accountant or a lawyer."

He laughed, "Over the last year I've sometimes wished I were." Then, sighing, he changed the subject abruptly. "Know any place where we can stop for tea?"

They found a café that did afternoon teas and went inside. Richard had to bend low for the tiny door and a low beam.

"I think the people back then must have been smaller," he told her as he straightened painfully, "certainly not cripples like me."

"You're not a cripple," she said, taking a seat opposite him at a little table. He sat down and stretched his left leg out in front of him.

"Why don't you order a typical English tea?" he suggested. "It's one of the few things I've missed."

She picked up the menu. "We'll have cucumber sandwiches and a big plate of cakes," she said, "and of course a pot of tea."

"Sounds delightful," he said smiling.

Tanya ordered from the waitress because Richard insisted, and then sat back in her chair. She hadn't been out to tea since a boy had taken her one autumn day last year when she'd been at Oxford, she told Richard.

"Do you have many boyfriends?" he asked.

"No. I've never found anyone I've wanted."

"Do they ever want you?" he sounded amused.

"I suppose so," she shrugged.

"Don't you know?" His eyes sparkled mischievously.

"No," she told him, coloring slightly.

"You're a strange girl."

"Why? Just because I don't let every Tom, Dick and Harry maul me? Why should I if I don't care for them?"

"I agree," he nodded.

"And what about you? Have you lots of girls?"

"I've had lots of girls," he said shortly.

"Anyone special?" she asked.

"Not anymore. A man loses his appeal when he's disabled."

"But you're not." She wanted to wipe that bitter expression from his face. "It's only temporary."

"Maybe," He said.

"I thought you said you could race again," she persisted.

He leaned his elbows on the table.

"I think that's called hope. You know all about that, Tanya." His gray glance held hers.

When they left the café, the sun was shining. Richard's hair glinted in the sun. Like the daffodils, Tanya thought.

"I feel much better," he said. "You've helped me immensely. I was dreading coming home and seeing Cheryle again, and then there was that monstrous house."

"I don't like it either," Tanya told him. "It gives me the creeps."

"Then are you glad to have to leave it?" he said.

"In a way, although I was at college most of the time."

"Do you mind not going back to college?" he asked.

She shrugged, "Not really. It was a nice experience though."

"I'm sorry," he said.

"It's not your fault," she told him and grasped his hand impulsively. "You've done all you could."

He still held her hand, his fingers large and warm surrounding hers. "I could do more if you came home with me."

"You said, tomorrow," she reminded him.

"I know I did." He released her hand, his expression surprisingly bleak.

They continued toward the car. Tanya was thinking about her alternatives. Stuck in London in a lonely flat. No job, no marketable skills. The vague possibility that she might meet a man and fall in love. She could not even imagine such a man, especially with the virile presence of Richard beside her. It was more than anything else that she had ever had in her life. She reached over and touched his leather-clad arm.

"I think I'll come home with you," she said softly.

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"Are you quite sure?" His eyes probed hers.
She nodded.

"Have you considered it carefully? Thought about what you might be giving up?"

"There's nothing to give up," she said flatly.

His fingers reached up and stroked her hair, then moved around to cup her face. He leaned and kissed her softly on the lips. "I won't let you down. I promise you."

Chapter Three

They drove back to the house in silence. What had she done, Tanya wondered. She'd just told this man that she would marry him. To go with him to a strange country. To live with him. He might have to be her only companion, her only friend for years. He was older, with a successful career. She was young, still a little unsure of her way in the world. What could they possibly have in common?

She touched her fingers to her lips where his soft kiss still lingered. What would it be like to be held in his arms? To wind her own arms around his neck, to touch the golden hair, the firm tanned flesh. A lump of panic formed in her throat. What had she been thinking of when she'd agreed to marry him?

His profile was unsmiling, proud. Was it pity she felt for him, or some strange animal attraction? There was certainly something, but she didn't know what. She was too inexperienced to even begin to analyze her reactions.

"Regretting your decision already?" Richard asked, a wry twist to his handsome mouth.

"No," she reassured him. "I'll marry you."

Louise and Harry were pleased to hear about the wedding. When Cheryle came down from London for an evening visit, she also thought it was a good idea.

"There's a bit of an age difference," she told them, "but I suppose you can work it out. It's not as though either of you have anything to lose. Actually, I'll feel better knowing that Richard is being looked after."

Richard's glance was skeptical, but held a cool amusement. "Cheryle, I didn't know you cared...." he said.

As the girl shrugged her elegantly thin shoulders, Tanya wondered if she'd been mistaken about Richard's sister. Maybe some of the icy coolness was a controlled facade. She remembered how Donald Wicklow had sometimes turned himself off at will. Then in the days that followed, she discovered that Richard had a similar trait. He was cool, courteous and completely in control during their time together, even on the rare occasions when she caught his expression slip and cloud with pain as he moved awkwardly or rose too quickly. A mask would soon slide across his gray eyes.

Not that Tanya had time to dwell on her problems. There was a lot to do. Even Cheryle seemed pleased about the wedding. She made arrangements to have the ceremony at a registry office, and invited all her friends from around Surrey and in London. She even arranged a small luncheon reception.

"Remember we have to catch an afternoon flight," Richard said, but let her have her way. "We'll have to grin and bear it," he told Tanya with a wink. "Are you sure you haven't got any friends you'd like to invite?"

"No," she told him. "What about you?"

"No," he said. "I don't know anyone here anymore."

Richard and Tanya made a trip up to London to Canada House to obtain her immigration. Although Richard had already contacted them, Tanya was petrified that they

wouldn't accept her, but Richard seemed to know the ropes and bypassed a lot of the red tape.

After a long morning of grueling interviews they shared lunch at a London restaurant. Tanya glanced around at the deep faded velvet decor and sniffed the mustiness, mingled with the delicious aroma of roast beef. She had a sudden attack of nostalgia for her English girlhood.

"You're not going to miss the old place, are you?" Richard asked as if he'd read her mind.

She glanced up with a start. "Probably, sometimes," she told him. "Did you ever?"

"Of course, but there will be trips back. I'm not poor."

"I know." She played with her meal, not really hungry. Richard was also eating sparingly, and she wondered how he was feeling. Surely all this hurrying about and excitement couldn't be good for him.

When they arrived home he went straight to his room, and when he didn't arrive down to breakfast the next morning, Tanya was worried. She asked Louise about him when she met the woman carrying a tray from his room.

"Look, he didn't eat a thing," Louise complained, indicating the untouched tray. "He's not well, that boy. You're going to have your hands full, I can tell you. And he's not easy either. A difficult patient that's what he is."

Tanya found her lips twitching despite her anxiety over Richard. "What did he do?" she asked.

"Just doesn't want anyone bothering him, he said. 'I'll sweat it out,' those were his words." Louise looked a little put out.

"He's proud, Louise." Tanya soothed the woman. "He doesn't like to think that he's a bother or putting upon anyone."

"Well, I just hope you understand him." Louise went off still in a slight huff.

Tanya went to Richard's room and silently opened the door. It was a small room with a large single bed, and Tanya knew that it had been Richard's room when he was a young boy. There were some magazines, a newspaper and a paperback novel strewn around the floor. His clothes were thrown over a straight-backed chair. And Richard? He was just a lump beneath the heavy quilt and numerous blankets that one needed to keep warm in the vast house. He was obviously sleeping soundly. Tanya closed the door. She didn't want to wake him up. She wouldn't know what to say to him if she did, and she certainly didn't want to get any of the gruff treatment that Louise felt she had received.

At lunch, Cheryle, who was staying at the house until the wedding, suggested that it would be a good opportunity to go out and buy Tanya a wedding dress and trousseau.

Richard had given her a generous check and although she hadn't really wanted to take it, there was no choice if she was going to be an acceptable bride, especially as Cheryle had invited so many guests.

Cheryle saw her sigh. "You have to look your best. I can help you choose something pretty. Richard might only be my brother, but I can see he has charms. You'll have to make an effort to hang on to him."

Tanya didn't like Cheryle's tone, but in her heart of hearts she agreed with her. She sat silently while Cheryle gave her firm orders as to how she should dress. Tanya couldn't dispute her. Cheryle always looked beautifully turned out, even when she was only wearing jeans. Beside her, Tanya felt awkward and dowdy.

They went out in Cheryle's sports car. Tanya, who thought they'd be going to the local town, was surprised when they kept driving toward London, ending up on Kings Road.

"I don't really think the clothes here are my style," Tanya protested, eyeing some of the wilder outfits of the people who strolled along the street.

"Oh, there's everything here," Cheryle said. "You can buy a dress for three hundred pounds that will last you for years, or a dress that's just in style this week. Come on."

Tanya had never been on such a shopping spree. She usually shopped carefully, buying only good quality, practical clothing, counting her pennies. Now Cheryle insisted on more frivolous purchases: dresses whose color and soft fabrics complimented her hair and skin, tiny scraps of underwear that made her blush to think of Richard's gray eyes seeing her wearing them. There were also night clothes in sheer flimsy materials, slacks, blouses and sweaters. Tanya was feminine enough to be excited and pleased with the purchases.

"These clothes will last me for years," she said breathlessly as they stopped in a café for tea and cakes, surrounded by packages and exhausted.

"You're an attractive woman," Cheryle conceded. "You should dress to it."

When they arrived home, Richard was sitting in the living room, reading a book.

"Have a good time?" he asked, smiling at them both.

"I spent all your money," Tanya told him.

"So I notice," he grinned looking at the array of packages. "That's good. Have fun."

"We have some lovely things," Cheryle told him. Tanya had found out that Cheryle was in her element shopping for clothes. It was obviously her favorite occupation.

Richard joined the two women for dinner, but Tanya noticed that he looked terribly pale with dark smudges beneath his eyes. He excused himself immediately afterward.

Did Cheryle think it strange that he made no intimate contact with his bride to be, or was the girl shrewd enough to guess that they'd come to an agreement of convenience? Tanya suspected the latter, but was glad that she tactfully refrained from saying anything. Probably Cheryle saw it as an easy way of being relieved of a lot of responsibility.

As the day of the wedding and their trip to Canada drew closer, Tanya found herself extremely restless. She couldn't even seem to concentrate on reading a book. She packed all her new clothes, plus any of her old ones that were still good. Cheryle said she'd send anything Tanya didn't want to a local rummage sale. After Tanya had packed, she re-packed, more because she needed something to keep her active, than out of necessity. Was Richard really going to see her in all these bits of filmy underwear and negligees?

She didn't have much time alone with Richard until the evening before the wedding. Cheryle and Jonathan had gone out to visit some friends. Louise and Harry were in their quarters. After dinner, Tanya followed Richard into the living room where there was a blazing fire.

Richard sat down on his usual uncomfortable chair, and Tanya perched on the edge of an armchair. She swung one leg restlessly while the other foot kicked at the rug on the floor.

"Nervous?" Richard asked suddenly, making her jump.

"Not really."

His mouth curved in amusement. "You're as jumpy as a cat these last few days. Has Cheryle been overpowering?"

"A little," she admitted. "I think she's pushing me on my way."

"Probably glad to get rid of us both so tidily," he agreed. "She has something of my mother's acting ability, and all of my father's ruthlessness."

"I also think she likes big social events where she can invite her friends and act like a queen."

Richard laughed harshly, "The social event of the year. Beauty and the Beast. Marriage between a cripple and a beautiful young woman. Who's much too good for him, I might add."

"Richard." Tanya was down her knees beside him. "You mustn't talk like that."

"How do you expect me to talk?" he asked. "Do you really think that this is going to be fun for you?"

"I am not looking for fun," she told him sincerely. "And you will get better. *You will.*"

Cheryle helped Tanya dress for her wedding. They had chosen a short dress of a shimmering white silk with a scooped neckline and three-quarter sleeves. A tight bodice emphasized Tanya's full breasts, while the flowing skirt gently outlined her shapely hips. Tanya put on her silver-tinted pantyhose and sat on the bed to buckle her fragile sandals. She stood for Cheryle to place her hair on her shoulders and to make the final adjustments on the small net veil. Cheryle handed her the bouquet of yellow roses and stood back to admire the effect.

"Do you think it's too much?" Tanya asked anxiously.

"What do you mean?"

"It's only a small wedding. Perhaps I should have worn something more simple."

"You're marrying my brother, Tanya," Cheryle said firmly in her haughty tones. "Not some boy off the streets."

Jonathan drove up in a hired silver Rolls Royce to take her to the registry office. White satin ribbons formed a vee from the hood ornament across the front of the car, giving it a festive look that Tanya didn't feel. Then she chided herself as she met Jonathan's dark admiring eyes in the rear-view mirror.

"Quite beautiful, love," he said as he drove along sedately. "Are you sure you know what you're getting into?"

"Of course," Tanya said, swallowing hard against all her personal indecision. She was in an adult world now, away from colleges, schools, and foster parents. She was going to

become a wife, and maybe even a mother sometime. That thought gave her another jolt.

Jonathan went on. "Richard's injuries are serious, I believe. I hope for your sake that he's all in one piece."

"What do you mean?" The words came out in a jerk, as her fingers nervously touched the expensive leather upholstery beside her.

Jonathan's dark eyes looked cynical. "Well, I wouldn't want to see anything as gorgeous as you go to waste," he drawled.

"I'm not quite sure what you're getting at," Tanya said. She could feel herself blush and forced herself to meet Jonathan's mocking gaze in the mirror.

"What I'm Saying is that maybe he's only half a man."

Tanya trembled with anger. "Let me assure you," she said, with as much firmness as she could muster, "he's all man."

Jonathan grinned. "Well, good for you, love, and good for him that he hasn't wasted his three weeks in England. I guess he's pretty Smart though, being a Wicklow. Knows when there's a good thing going."

"Richard's not like that," Tanya told him. "Now will you please stop?"

"Sorry." For once, Jonathan sounded genuinely contrite. "I shouldn't have said anything, but, you know, you wonder about these things."

Tanya sat back in her seat, trying to control herself. "Perhaps you had best stop wondering and worry about your own love life," she suggested sharply.

"Richard's a lucky man," was the surprising response. Jonathan's voice was unexpectedly warm and Tanya felt herself swallow against the involuntary tears.

Tanya would have preferred to be married in a church rather than in a dowdy south London registry office. She and Richard had stood behind a battered table to be married by a neat little man with glasses in a shiny black suit. On the old table someone had placed a large vase of spring flowers with a white satin ribbon tied around the base. Tanya kept her eyes fastened on it throughout most of the ceremony to avoid turning around to glare at Cheryle's sophisticated London friends, shifting and wriggling on their scraping chairs. She had vaguely heard them chattering and laughing when she had first entered the room, but now they were silent as she and Richard said their vows.

Her hands trembled and perspired as she clutched the yellow roses. From the corner of her eye she had caught a glimpse of Richard, dressed in a gray suit, his body hard and muscular beneath the immaculate fit. Certainly, his appearance belied Jonathan's sly insinuations. His patent virility went through her like a shock. A ray of sunlight from the dusty window lit his hair to frame a golden aureole around his stern face. Tanya's heart contracted. TO LOVE, TO HONOR, and TO CHERISH. What would these words mean to him?

Richard bent down to slip the plain gold wedding band on her finger, his lean fingers warm on hers. He smiled gently as he eased the ring over her sticky, perspiring flesh. Now it was

firmly on, binding her to this gray-eyed stranger leaning down to kiss her.

Hand in hand, amid laughter and confetti, Richard and Tanya walked to the silver Rolls Royce. When they were finally settled behind Jonathan in the back seat, Tanya noticed that Richard's lips were compressed and that beads of perspiration glistened on the smooth skin of his forehead. She slid her hand to cover his, clenched on his knee. Almost imperceptibly, she could feel his fingers slowly begin to relax.

Cheryle had outdone herself in planning the reception. The restaurant was in an old Tudor house. The wedding reception itself was held in a back room that had been decorated with large silver goblets of bright flowers. Silver streamers floated from the ceiling. A three piece orchestra played current hits and several couples had already started to dance. At the other end of the room a long buffet table was crowded with delicacies, including even a wedding cake with a miniature bride and groom on top. Even if Cheryle wanted to get rid of them as quickly as possible, Tanya thought wryly, she was giving them a glorious send-off.

Richard was quite the hero. He circulated among the guests, chatting easily, answering all questions, even those about his accident, good-naturedly.

Finally, they had to leave to catch the plane. Tanya laughingly refused yet one more offer to dance, and they said their goodbyes, leaving the guests to what appeared to be an increasingly lively party.

They coralled a reluctant Jonathan to drive them to Heathrow. He stored their luggage into the trunk as they both went upstairs to change.

Richard escorted Tanya to her bedroom door. "Did you have a good time?" he asked her, surveying her flushed appearance. "I thought it went surprisingly well."

"I enjoyed it," she admitted.

"I'm sorry I couldn't ask you to dance," he said a bit more stiffly.

"That's all right, Richard," Tanya said. Her eyes were still brilliant from excitement and the unaccustomed champagne. "We will have plenty of other chances—"

Richard's expression softened. She could feel the gentle curve of his lips as they brushed hers.

"Now, get along with you and dress. We don't have much time," he said gruffly.

She had turned to enter her bedroom when she felt his arm on her shoulder, turning her around again to him. "Tanya," he said, "I wanted to tell you. You looked lovely today. I am a lucky man."

Before she could form an answer, he had pushed her into her room and firmly closed the door behind her.

Her green pantsuit was lying out on the bed with a matching green silk blouse. She slipped out of her wedding gown, rolling it up so that it fitted into the slot she'd left in her smaller suitcase. Then she dressed, and combed out her hair. Cheryle had put rather a lot of makeup on her face. She scrubbed some of it off, and made herself look more natural.

It might be all right for all those theatrical types, she thought, thinking of the wedding guests, but not for me.

Holding the small suitcase and her handbag, she glanced around the room for the last time. She wouldn't be sorry to see the back of this house, that was for sure.

Richard was already downstairs waiting when she got there. Jonathan swung her suitcase from her with a grin and a wink.

"You're a honey," he whispered, and Tanya couldn't stop herself from smiling at his open flirting. She could feel Richard scowling beside her, but was determined to ignore it. "I'm ready," she told him brightly.

He opened the car door, and she slid along the seat. He came in beside her. He'd changed out of the gray suit into denim pants, a blue high-necked sweater and a leather jacket, looking just as imposing in the casual clothes.

"Is there something wrong?" she asked when he didn't speak for a while. Jonathan was still outside the car, putting away the last of their bags.

"Should there be?" he asked curtly.

She shook her brilliant head. What had she done now? Before she'd changed he'd been so gentle ... almost ... loving. Now he looked as though he hated her.

As they traveled around the western outskirts of London, Tanya kept her eyes riveted to the scenery. Not that Staines was the most picturesque part of England, but even the sight of an English Mini could bring her close to tears right now. Maybe she'd never see England again. Richard had said she could visit, but one never knew what life held in store. She

certainly didn't know, she thought as she glanced at her husband's hard knee.

Living with him would mean that she'd glimpse the inner core of his being. On the outside he was polite, courteous, too proud to admit defeat. But on the inside, he might be bitter, even twisted because of the accident that had cruelly taken his way of life. Or maybe he wouldn't reveal anything to her. Maybe he'd continue the way he was, cool, contained, with no release for the torment she knew he must feel at times. She remembered he'd mentioned that his house was isolated. Had she driven herself into a trap? She stared around at the buildings and streams of cars as they entered the busy airport. Did she have time now to escape before it was too late? Then Richard's hand touched hers where it lay in her lap, tense and hot.

"We're there," he said, not quite as grim now. "Are you ready?"

Ready? Would she ever be really ready, she asked herself as she walked into the terminal at Heathrow with Richard and Jonathan.

Jonathan shook Richard's hand. "All the best," he told him, and then glanced at Tanya. "I have to kiss the bride," he said, and before she could stop him, he'd claimed her lips with a brief kiss. "Best of luck, love," he smiled. He looked endearingly English, his accent so familiar that Tanya felt a strong pull to run after him when he turned and left them together.

Richard's fingers clamped down on her shoulder. "You're with me, remember," he told her.

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Glancing up into the cool gray eyes, she knew he would never allow her to forget it.

Chapter Four

As the Air Canada jet took off, Tanya looked out of the window, and took her last glimpse of the green fields and red brick buildings of England. Again, tears pricked behind her eyes, despite the thrill of being in a plane for the first time. She glanced at the man by her side, but he sat staring directly ahead. She wondered if the takeoff caused him any pain. He hadn't been in a very good mood since they'd said goodbye to Jonathan. She wondered if he'd been jealous of Jonathan's attentions to her, and then thought better of it. How could he be jealous when he didn't care?

She rubbed her stomach beneath the green material of her silk blouse and wished it would cease churning. She didn't feel like a wife, especially not to the silent stranger beside her.

He moved restlessly at her side. He unfastened his seat belt.

"Okay?" he asked, noticing her pale face.

"Fine." She searched for some reassurance in his cool glance.

She was still holding on to her stomach.

"Do you feel sick?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, just nervous. I've never flown before."

"It's fun," he said. "Just relax."

The attendant was smiling over them and Richard returned the smile. She was a sophisticated-looking woman with a

shiny cap of brown hair. More his type than I am, thought Tanya.

"We'll have a couple of ginger ales," Richard said and she poured the drinks into plastic glasses full of ice and handed them over.

Tanya would have expected Richard to have something alcoholic and said so.

"I can't drink," he told her, "too many other things entering my system."

She nodded. There was so much she had to learn about her new husband.

He rattled his glass around in his hand.

"Cheers, Mrs. Wicklow," he said before he took a sip.

"Cheers." Tanya raised her own glass. *Mrs. Wicklow!*

After the attendants had collected the empty glasses, the meal was served. Tanya looked down at her piece of chicken and vegetables, wondering how she was ever going to eat it. But she managed, and even enjoyed the fruit dessert. Richard's appetite was good, however, and he finished off what she couldn't get through.

"How much longer?" she asked, after the trays had been cleared away and she could stretch out her legs again.

He looked at his watch, "Another five hours. Why don't you try and sleep for a while? I'm going to."

She nodded and sat back in her seat. She tried to relax by closing her eyes, but she remained still and tense. Then the Captain mentioned something about flying over Labrador. She looked down and saw the faint outline of brown land and white icebergs surfacing through ocean. Excitement gripped

her as she listened carefully to what the man was telling them. Then she was watching the St. Lawrence River wind its way through Quebec.

"We're nearly there," she told Richard. He woke up and stretched his cramped limbs.

"Are we really?" he grinned, and leaned over her to look out of the window, his hand warm on her shoulder. He seemed happy to be returning home.

"Did you ever mind giving up England?" Tanya asked watching the vast country spread beneath her.

"Not really. Will you mind?" His breath fanned her hair against her neck.

"I don't think so." She reached out blindly and took hold of his hand, squeezing it tightly. Tears streamed down her cheeks, but he didn't seem to notice.

* * * *

The terminal at Toronto Airport was crowded, mostly with charter flights, but they got through quite easily.

"Where's the car?" she asked, as they stood waiting for their luggage to come through. Richard had sent the Ferrari ahead of them a few days so that it would be waiting on their arrival.

"It should be here," he told her.

She fiddled with the strap of her leather handbag, feeling crumpled and travel-worn in her green pantsuit. Richard looked as cool as he had before the flight. Tanya noticed several women openly admiring him. *He's mine*, she thought. The idea made her feel weak at the knees.

Finally their luggage came. Richard got someone to take it upstairs to where the car was parked. She looked at him questioningly, wondering how the Ferrari could have possibly got there so quickly.

"They're used to me," he told her, putting some of the luggage in the trunk, and some in the small storage space behind the two front seats. "Let's get out of this place."

He took her to a hotel not far from the airport terminal.

"My place is a long way up north," he explained. "I couldn't have made it today, besides I have to visit my doctor tomorrow before I go."

"I see," she said, feeling guilty because she'd forgotten for a minute how ill he was.

They left the elevator and found the room he'd reserved. He inserted the key in the lock and, putting his hand against her back, pushed her into a luxurious suite.

Tanya looked around in astonishment. "It's huge. Like a flat."

He smiled, "Much more comfortable than a cramped room. And, don't forget, this is a honeymoon of sorts."

She glanced down at her finger and twisted the gold band around. He moved around restlessly. They were both relieved by a tap on the door.

"Probably the bags." He answered the knock and tipped the man who brought their luggage in to the room.

When the man had gone, Tanya went to the window and looked out, pulling aside the heavy white drapes. Outside she could see the airport, silver planes with maple leaves on their tails, and somewhere a Union Jack stood out on a British

Airways jumbo jet. Traffic was steady on a network of freeways. The grassy landscaping between the concrete jungle was brown with only the slightest tinge of green.

"It's not the best view," Richard said taking off his jacket and throwing it over one of the sofas, "but there's a good restaurant in this hotel and the beds are comfortable. If you want a shower, just go ahead, you can be first."

She turned around to face him, realizing that she'd now have to share everything with this man. "I think I will," she said. "I feel a bit worn out."

"Of course. You can have whichever room you want."

So he didn't want her body, just her presence. The thought that there might be no physical involvement should have pleased her, but she felt a stab of pain. She picked up her small overnight bag and, choosing the room with the view of the airport she entered and closed the door.

She stayed in the shower a long time enjoying the feel of the water cascading upon her body. She washed her hair, shampooing it vigorously to clean the travel dirt out of it. Then she went back to the bedroom and opened her bag and took out a silky floor-length robe. Her clothes were in the larger suitcases in the lounge. Clutching the robe around her, she went to the door. Richard was standing staring out of the window. He started when he sensed her presence.

"Finished?"

"I need some clean clothes," she told him shyly, indicating the suitcases on the floor.

He limped over to pick up her two cases and took them into her bedroom, placing them down on the white bedspread.

"Are you sure you should carry those?" she asked, worried.

"Why don't you leave that to me?" he said curtly, but she noticed that he put a hand to his back as he straightened.

"It hurts, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it hurts," he told her, and left her room closing the door behind him.

She shrugged, wondering at the tumult of emotions that she'd experienced since she'd first met Richard. It was like being on a roller coaster, but she couldn't see herself stopping it and getting off. He wasn't even acting like a husband, more like an affectionate brother. Would he come to her tonight? She looked at the shiny gold band once again. She had burned all her bridges now.

She dressed in a brown silk dress splashed with golden flowers. With it she wore brown suede high-heeled shoes, another of the purchases she'd made with Cheryle in London. She was brushing her hair when she heard the shower running and Richard moving around in the bathroom. *My husband*, she thought and took a deep, steadying breath, thinking of him so close, water cascading over his muscular body. All she had to do was walk into the bathroom from her side.

What would he say? How would he react? Her blood raced. *Calm down*, she told herself. *He married you because he felt responsible for you*, and, she could not help adding, *because he needs you to take care of him*. She did not dare think of

the expression she had caught in his eyes. Affection? No, he barely knew her, even though they'd been living in the same house this past while. It was probably just male lust that he'd feel for any woman. She had seen the same look on the boy who had taken her to tea. But now, somehow it was different. Very different. It was not a college boy's flirtation. This virile, experienced man was her husband.

The water stopped running. She heard Richard get out of the shower and leave the bathroom. For a second, Tanya met her green eyes in the mirror, then, squaring her shoulders, she walked out into the lounge. Richard's jacket was flung across the sofa. She picked it up and straightened it, running her hand idly over the smooth leather.

Then the door opened and he came out. Her heart skipped a beat. He had changed into a well-fitted dark suit, and combed back his hair.

"You look lovely," he commented, his eyes appraising. "We should really have some champagne to celebrate."

"It's fine," she said breathlessly, not quite knowing what to say.

He looked concerned. "This isn't much fun for you, is it?"

"Oh, Richard. It's a whole new adventure for me. I've never been out of England before. How can you say it's not fun?"

"No regrets?"

"Oh, no."

He smiled, "Okay, I'll take your word for it. Sit and relax for a few minutes while I make a phone call." He walked over to the phone and picked it up, absently straightening the

coiled cord as he waited for the hotel operator to answer. Then he asked for the number and waited.

"John, it's Richard. I'm back. Not too bad. Why don't you come over and have a drink with me after dinner, I've got a surprise."

"You'll like John," he said, on their way down to dinner.

She hoped she would. After all he was a friend of her husband's. And a wife would want to get to know his friends, wouldn't she?

They ate a quiet dinner. Richard insisted she have a glass of wine with her meal even though he couldn't drink since the accident. Tanya was surprised to find how hungry she was and ate a huge meal and even stretched to a piece of coconut cream pie for dessert.

"I'm going to get fat," she said, sitting back.

"I don't think you ever will," he smiled, his gray eyes appreciatively lingering on her. She lowered her gaze.

"When you left for England a few weeks ago, I suppose you never dreamed that you'd come back with a wife?" she asked.

"Never."

"You asked me if I had any regrets, but what about you?"

He reached across the table, his fingers straying lightly across her left hand until they moved against the shiny new wedding ring. "No, I've no regrets."

When they'd finished their coffee, they went into the cocktail lounge where they where to meet John. They sat at a table not far from the door. At her request Richard ordered a

creme de menthe and a club soda for himself. Shortly after, a dark haired man joined them.

"Richard. It's good to see you, you look good." John looked down at Tanya, a questioning look in his dark eyes. He had very black hair and sideburns. Tanya thought that he seemed a few years older than Richard.

"John Laughton, this is my wife Tanya." Richard introduced her.

"Wife?" John looked dumbfounded.

"We met in England," Richard said briefly. "Why don't you sit down and join us instead of just standing there gawking?"

"Well, you must admit this is quite a surprise!" John laughed. "For this, I need a double scotch." He pulled up a chair and sat down. Tanya winced to see Richard maneuvering himself so awkwardly back into his chair.

"Well, Richard really picked himself a beauty! You are probably just what he needs! I've had him living with me for the past few months, and he's not exactly the easiest person to live with."

"Lies," Richard said coolly.

"It's debatable," John said, smiling at Tanya. "Do you speak, or just look lovely?"

"Of course," Tanya smiled.

"And with an English accent too. Don't be shy with me, I've known Richard since he first came here eleven years ago, and though I admit he's impossible, we've been good friends ever since. He has some good points—"

"You're making me blush with all your compliments," said Richard.

"When did you get married?" John asked Tanya.

"This morning," she told him, glancing at Richard.

"You mean I'm butting in on your wedding night?"

"It's okay," Richard said.

"It wouldn't be okay with me if I had a delicious woman like this for my wife, but then maybe..." he shrugged at a loss for words.

"Maybe you'd better shut up," Richard told him good-naturedly.

"Maybe I'd better." John drained half his drink. "Tell me how you're feeling?" he asked Richard.

"Not bad," Richard said. "Time changes don't help, but I'm managing."

"He's been pretty sick," John told Tanya, "you have quite a handful."

"I know," Tanya said.

"She'll look after me," Richard told his friend.

"I'm sure she will," John smiled, "I'm sure she will."

They went on to talk about politics and England. John mentioned something about racing although he didn't pursue the subject.

"I'm going to go," he told them a little later in the evening, "this is your honeymoon night after all."

Tanya didn't want him to go because she knew that once she was alone with Richard again she wouldn't know what to say to him. It was as though he were a complete stranger.

Richard stood up and so did Tanya.

They all walked to the door of the cocktail lounge.

After saying good-night to John, Tanya and Richard went up to their suite. Once inside, Richard shed his jacket and tie and turned on the television. He then settled himself on the sofa.

"What did you think of John?" he asked.

"He's nice," Tanya sat down beside him.

"You'll probably see a lot of him. He's a special friend."

"Did you race with him?" she asked.

"We were sponsored on the same team before the accident."

"Does he still race?"

"Not so much this season."

He changed the television channel to a movie.

Tanya sat quietly beside him, forcing interest in the screen. It was close to midnight when the movie finally ended. Richard stood up, stretched and reached out a hand for Tanya. She clasped his warm fingers. He looked strained. Tanya wondered if the pain was bothering him. She felt he would be too proud to tell her if she asked. He had gone out of his way to give her a pleasant evening and she was sure he did not want to talk about his own problems.

Richard looked down at her small hand lying in his larger one, and drew her toward him. She could hear the movement of his heart through the thin cotton of his shirt. She felt his mouth moving against her hair. He lifted her hair from her neck and placed warm lips against her smooth skin.

She trembled so violently that she would have fallen, had it not been for his supporting arm. Tentatively, she put her

arms around his waist, her fingers shyly caressing the warmth of his back.

His lips moved across her cheek and burned against her trembling mouth as his hands wandered down her back to rest on her spine. Newfound desires and emotions touched, disturbed and frightened her. Instinctively, she put her hands against his chest and pulled away, her breasts rising and falling rapidly beneath the thin silk of her dress.

"Richard," she said raggedly, wanting to give herself to him, but not sure of what was involved. If it meant producing the sensations to her body that she'd just experienced, she wasn't sure that she would be able to handle them.

He pulled her close to him again and stroked her hair, "I didn't realize you'd be so inexperienced," he said huskily.

"I'm sorry," she said. Maybe if they loved each other, things would be better, then it wouldn't be such a purely physical thing.

He held her away from him, his eyes dark and softened by lovemaking. "You'd better get to bed, we have to get up early in the morning. I have to see the doctor and then there's quite a long drive."

She nodded and he let her go.

"Good-night," she said.

"Good-night, sleep well," he whispered.

"Tanya?" She turned around, her hand on the door handle. "When you feel you need me, that'll be soon enough," he said. "Now get to bed."

When she was in the room, she walked to the window and looked out at the flickering lights and cars moving along the

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freeway. Her heart was still hammering in her chest and her legs felt weak and shaky. *She did need him.*

She unzipped her dress and stepped out of it. She put on a pale green silk nightgown that she had bought in London. She sighed as she remembered the excitement she had felt wondering if Richard would like her in it. He was still walking about in the other room. Should she go and find out? Her mouth felt dry. No. Better not to push it. They were both tired. Turning off the light, she crawled into bed and drew the covers up to her neck. The sheets felt cool against her hot body.

For some time she could not get to sleep. Tossing restlessly, she relived her frustrating evening. Why had she pushed Richard away so firmly? She remembered his gray eyes darkened by passion, the feel of his hard body against hers. Eventually she drifted off into fitful slumber.

Much later, she was awakened by Richard flicking off the light next door. Reading the luminous dial of her little wristwatch, she could see that it was after three o'clock.

Chapter Five

Tanya woke in the morning feeling as if she were suffering a hangover. She showered, hoping it would revive her, but still felt the dull pounding around her temples. She dressed in brown slacks and a cream shirt, tying her hair back with a printed silk scarf.

Richard was sitting on the sofa reading a newspaper. He looked up and smiled at her. "Hi, did you have a good sleep?"

"Fine," she lied, then blushed. Sometimes she had the feeling that he could see right through her.

"Ready for breakfast?" he said.

The thought of food was nauseating but she nodded in agreement and they went downstairs. She managed a glass of orange juice, a slice of toast and a cup of black coffee and felt better. *What a wedding night*, she thought. This morning should have been one of the happiest times of their lives. Did Richard care? She stole a glance at him, Apparently not. He was enjoying his breakfast and talked to her cheerily.

They drove into Toronto. Richard went to the doctor, leaving her to wander through the shops on Yonge Street. She forgot her headache for a few moments in the excitement of being in a new place. She watched the larger North American cars cruising down the street, and the taxicabs that she'd previously seen only in movies.

She walked back to Richard's doctor. The woman at the reception desk smiled at her. "I'm waiting for Richard Wicklow," Tanya said.

"He's in with the doctor now. Why don't you take a seat?"

Tanya sat down on one of the vinyl chairs and, picking up a magazine, flicked through it unseeingly. She couldn't get it out of her mind that she'd made such a mess of her wedding night. Richard had wanted to make it a normal marriage and she hadn't been able to respond. She looked at the receptionist out of the corner of her eye. She was a little older than herself, blond and self-assured. Tanya's eyes flew to the gold band on her left hand.

"How long have you been married?" she burst out suddenly. She had to know.

The woman looked startled. "Just a year. Why?"

"I just wondered."

"How long have you been married'?" the woman now asked Tanya.

"A day," Tanya told her shyly.

"To Richard?"

Tanya nodded.

"Lucky you," the receptionist smiled, "he's cute."

At that moment the door to the doctor's office opened and Richard came out with a tall dark haired man in a white lab coat. "Come and meet Doctor McLaughlin."

"How do you do," Doctor McLaughlin smiled. He glanced at Richard, "I suppose I should offer congratulations."

"Thank you," said Tanya. Richard moved around beside her and held her arm.

The doctor seemed to be assessing her. Was he wondering if she could cope with the situation?

"He's been very ill," the doctor was speaking to Tanya now, "but he's much better. I'm glad he has someone with him, since he insists on going up north to bury himself. At least, in an emergency, there will be someone to look after him!"

Tanya nodded, wondering what kind of emergency could arise. Richard seemed to be able to cope with his injuries unless there was something he hadn't told her.

"Come on, Tony, you'll scare her," Richard told the doctor.

"You'll scare her more if something should happen and she is not forewarned." He turned to Tanya. "Richard is not really supposed to drive. I have a feeling you won't be able to stop him from doing so, but I'm glad he's not alone," he patted Tanya's shoulder, "and especially glad he has someone as pretty as you."

"Richard smiled, "Well, we'd better go," he said, "I'll be down in two weeks."

"You'd better be," Doctor McLaughlin told him good-naturedly. "Be happy." He went back into his office.

"I've put you down for a week from next Thursday," the receptionist told Richard.

"Fine." Richard's hand slid down Tanya's arm and he took hold of her fingers, "Let's go."

Richard took her for lunch. She didn't eat much of it and Richard commented as they left the restaurant.

"I hope you feel up to the long trip home," he said.

She looked up at him and noticed the lines of strain around his eyes. Was it his disability? Or was it due to nothing happening the night before? Did he regret marrying her?

"I feel fine," she said.

"You don't look fine." He opened the car door for her. "You look tired."

"Possibly it's jet lag," she told him.

"Possibly." He started the car. They drove through the city traffic.

"I suppose you're glad to be home?" she said.

"Why? Are you homesick already?"

"I'm not homesick," she told him, "I've got nothing in England to be homesick for."

"Then what is it?"

"I didn't sleep."

"I suppose that was my fault."

"Why should it be your fault?" She looked at him.

"I think I aroused your suppressed desires last night."

"They're not suppressed."

"Okay. But they seem to be. Either that, or it's your English reserve."

"Probably it is my English reserve and the fact I really don't know you very well."

"That's rapidly changing. Now just relax."

The scenery flicked past as they drove. Farms and undulating fields; tinges of green spotting the dead, brown remains of winter.

Some time later she asked, "Is it much farther?"

"Another forty miles or so. I told you it's quite isolated. We'll be each other's company."

She nodded, and looked out of the window into the bright sunshine.

"Will it soon be spring?" she asked, remembering England and the daffodils.

"This is spring, then it'll be summer and you won't be able to breathe."

"Does it get that hot?"

"Yes," he said, "but we're lucky to have a lake on our doorstep."

He'd said "we" as though he already thought of them as a couple. She was somehow glad of that.

"Your doctor was nice," she said putting a hand on her neck to ease the tension.

"He's pulled me through. Don't listen to his tales about me not being able to drive, he's just being over-cautious."

"He is a doctor though, Richard."

"I've got to live. Six months ago I was paralyzed in a hospital bed and thought I was dying. Today I feel comparatively healthy."

"I understand."

"I hope so." He sighed. "Tanya, you don't have to talk to me. I'm perfectly happy driving in silence and you look washed out. Why don't you try to sleep for a while?"

"Maybe I will." She dutifully closed her eyes, but she could shut out neither the roar of the engine nor her awareness of Richard's presence.

Richard's house stood up on a plateau of rock. It was built of cedar in a simple, modern style. Tanya somehow had known that it would be totally different from the ancient home that he'd lived in as a child in England. He parked the car on a

flat piece of land at the bottom of a staircase hewn out of the rock, and sat back in his seat.

"Well what do you think?"

"It looks gorgeous," Tanya said, really enthusiastic, "I can't wait to get inside."

"Then help me up the steps." Richard got out of the car and moved toward the bottom step. Tanya put his arm around her shoulders and he leaned on her as they made their way slowly up the steep steps. At the top, Richard let go of her. Breathing heavily, he wiped perspiration from his face with the back of his hand.

"I just think I'm getting there and then it starts to backfire on me," he said, his lips tightening. He felt in his pockets for a set of keys and inserted one of them in the lock. She held on to him as they entered the house.

A fireplace built of gray stone stretched toward the ceiling. The furniture was low, upholstered in black leather and corduroy. Light colored rugs covered the floors while the drapes across the picture window were cream to match a pile of cushions tossed casually in front of the fireplace.

Tanya let out a gasp of pleasure. "It's beautiful."

"It's your home," he said, looking pleased.

"Thank you." She wound the leather strap of her bag around her fingers.

"Do you want to see the rest?"

She nodded and he took her to the kitchen. It was also finished in cedar, the appliances larger than anything she'd ever seen in England. There was a cedar breakfast nook by a window overlooking a shimmering blue lake.

"There are three bedrooms," he said, "each one has its own bathroom. One's up the top of those stairs," he pointed to a staircase that looked more like a huge stepladder. "I used to use it, but I won't attempt to now. We'll use the two downstairs. You can choose which one you want." He took her through into the bedrooms, both large, with fitted cedar closets and the same natural wood furniture as in the living room. There were more rugs on the wooden floor and patchwork quilts over low Swedish-style beds.

Thinking about their earlier conversation. "Aren't we sharing a room?"

"Maybe later when I'm recovered. I have bad nights."

"Okay." Whether it was the truth, probably was, or an excuse, she didn't really mind having a reprieve. "Can I have the room overlooking the lake?"

"Of course," he smiled, and took her into another smaller room. Here was a desk with a typewriter and a shelf for books. The window looked out onto a forest of green pines.

"This is the room I use as a workroom. I write for car magazines."

"It's perfect."

"Then you like the house?" He sounded almost anxious.

"I love it," she told him.

"Do you think you'll be happy here?" There was still that uncertain note in his voice. Or had she imagined it?" Was she only projecting her own anxiety?

"*Happy?*" she said. Happiness was an elusive word that she'd never really associated with herself.

"Contented?" he corrected himself.

"I think so."

He came to stand beside her and lifted a shining strand of auburn hair. "Would you mind very much if I kissed you?"

She lifted her face to meet his lips. It was a long and gentle kiss. She felt slightly dreamy when he moved away.

"Let's see what we can do about getting the luggage in here and getting supper," he suggested matter-of-factly. She felt strangely deflated. After that kiss had she expected more?

Between them, they managed to get the luggage up into the house. Richard drove to the store to get supplies while Tanya unpacked some of her things. He came back with two bags full of groceries. She ran down the steps to greet him and help carry them upstairs. He leaned heavily on her. He was a big man and it took all her strength to support him.

It was dark outside by the time they had eaten. Richard built a log fire in the fireplace and settled down in front of it. Tanya curled up beside him.

"It's lovely here," she told him.

"Wait till the winter and the wind's howling outside and the snow piles high up at the door."

"I'll go out and build snowmen," she smiled, "I can't wait."

"If I'm not better then, you'll be doing all the shoveling," he warned her. "I'd wait till it happens before you become enthusiastic about it."

"Richard," she asked, "what did Doctor McLaughlin mean when he said that something could happen to you?"

Richard stared into the bright flames of the fire. "I wouldn't let it worry you."

"I think I should know though, don't you?" She tried to make out his expression, but his face was in the shadow.

He continued staring at the fire. "I told you I get bad headaches. Well, sometimes they're so severe that I pass out; that's all. That's why he didn't want me to come up here alone."

He looked at her, "I'm over the worst. I'm not going to die on you."

"I never even thought of you dying."

He picked up a book, "Well I have." He opened the book and started to read it. Tanya could see the conversation was closed.

At about ten o'clock Tanya was trying hard to keep her eyes open. She lay curled in the corner of one of the sofas. The heat from the fire had suffused her cheeks with heat and she felt pleasantly warm.

At first, Richard's comments about dying had bothered her, but since he'd obviously come to grips with the situation, she must too. She yawned sleepily.

"Why don't you go to bed?" Richard told her, looking up from his book.

"Maybe I should."

"I think so." He went back to his reading. She roused herself and made it to the door of the bedroom.

"Good-night, Tanya. Get some sleep tonight eh?" His gray eyes met hers casually.

So he had decided not to make love to her tonight. Was it a relief or a disappointment? She didn't know herself. Better not to examine it right now.

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"Good-night, Richard," she said, as she slipped into her room, "and thanks for everything—"

"You're welcome." She had closed the door so sharply that the tone of his voice was muffled. Irony? Concern? Did it matter?

Chapter Six

The next morning Tanya got up early. Dressed in jeans and a warm sweater, she ran down the rocky steps toward the lake. The water lapped gently against the dock. She saw a glazed whiteness of ice out near the center of the lake and shivered. A cool breeze rustled the pine trees and slid through her hair. She took a deep breath of the clear, crystal air and hugged her arm around herself. She felt good. She'd slept well and there was a bubbling insistence inside her this morning to explore her new surroundings. She was sorry that Richard couldn't run down to the lake edge with her.

He was up when she returned to the house. Dressed in jeans and a navy sweater, he was cooking bacon and eggs.

"Morning," she said, admiring the glint of his hair in the bright, morning sun.

"Good morning. Did you have a good sleep?"

"Wonderful, thanks. It must be the air. It's gorgeous here."

"I'm glad you like it. It's my paradise."

"Oh I can see why. Don't you want me to do the cooking?"

He grinned. "No, you just sit down and be waited on for a few days, then I'll hand the kitchen over to you."

"Thanks," she said and perched on one of the stools by the breakfast nook. How many women had he said that to? Had they shared his bed. she wondered....

"Do you ever get lonely living alone?" she asked, before she could stop herself.

"No." He turned the bacon over, "Do you think you'll get lonely up here?"

"I've always been alone," she said.

"I suppose you have," he agreed.

"Besides we have each other."

He put the bacon on a plate and broke eggs into the frying pan, "I suppose we do." He raised his eyebrow at her as he put the plate of bacon on the counter. "There are knives and forks in that drawer beside you."

She got out the cutlery and he handed her a plate with an egg on it. He told her to add as much bacon as she wanted, while he made the toast.

"It's good to be home," he said after he'd eaten and she was finishing off a slice of toast and marmalade. He leaned on his elbows. "If you find me rather exasperating at times, it's because I'm used to being a bachelor."

"Didn't you ever bring any women here?" she asked boldly.

His expression hardened slightly. "Of course," he said, and reached for her hand across the breakfast counter. "Look. There was a girl, but it's over now. She didn't care for a sick boyfriend. A hospital bed was not what she had in mind."

"You mean she left you when you were ill?"

He nodded. "Don't look so shocked. People can't always take human frailty."

"But that's terrible."

"You think she should have stayed around and looked after me?"

"Of course. If she loved you..."

He shrugged. "Love comes in different strengths."

"Did you love her?"

"I suppose I must have," he said, "when she first left, I thought I'd go crazy."

Tanya touched his arm and he covered her hand with his own. "Gonna take your old man down to the lake this morning?" he asked.

Richard leaned on Tanya as they walked down the rocky incline. When they reached the bottom, Tanya's heart was pumping so fast she thought she was going to be the one to pass out.

They sat together on a flat rock by the water's edge. Tanya put her head down slightly to regain her breath. When she looked up, Richard gave her a wry glance.

She smiled shakily. "You're heavy."

"Sorry," he shook his head. "They wanted to get me on crutches but I refused. Maybe I should have taken them."

"They wouldn't do you much good out here." Tanya glanced around at the rocky landscape.

"True."

"Do you know how much longer it'll take?" She indicated his leg which was stretched out in front of him.

"If I get a lot of rest and exercise regularly, it shouldn't be too long." He gazed out across the lake. "There's more chance for the rest out here. I had an apartment in New York before the accident. It was more convenient, but nowhere like this. I'm away a lot, but between racing seasons this is a place to escape to. At least it was." His light tone covered the seriousness. He stood up awkwardly as though the idea of his

disability needed motion to distill it. "Race you to the top," he said to Tanya.

Inside the house, she said, "You sit down. I'm going to make lunch."

Resignedly, he picked up his book. "Okay, let's see what you can do," he grinned, "and if your coffee's good, I'll keep you around."

After lunch, Richard got a headache but wouldn't let her touch him or administer any help. He went into his room and closed the door.

Tanya walked around the house by herself. Design drawings and photographs of racing cars adorned the walls of the living room. Model cars in all sizes stood on the shelves. Tanya checked Richard's bookshelves. Most of the books were about racing. Some were biographies of other racing drivers. She picked one out. Maybe it would help her understand her husband.

She ate a lonely supper of salad and cheese wondering if she should have asked Richard if he wanted anything. Then, late in the evening when she was sitting in semidarkness, reading, he came out of his room dressed in a white terry robe, his hair disheveled.

"Are you feeling better?" she asked, jumping up and dropping the book. She tried to conceal her embarrassment at seeing him so undressed with his robe gaping open displaying his broad chest with its mass of golden hair. It was something she would have to get used to....

"A bit," he told her. His eyes slid over her rumpled jeans and tight cotton shirt. "Why are you sitting so quiet in the dark? We have a TV and a stereo, you know."

"I didn't want to disturb you." Why was he staring at her like that?

"You're very thoughtful."

"I've been reading one of your books." She decided to change the subject.

"You can do what you like here," he said. "It's your home."

"I know, but..."

He smiled slightly, "But it's strange?"

"I'll get used to it."

He took a couple of steps toward her and took her in his arms. "Oh Tanya," he murmured, stroking back her hair from her forehead, "any other woman would be storming around complaining because I'd left her alone all day, but not you, you just sit here in the dark so you won't disturb me."

The warmth of his arms around her was comforting and she put up her hands to his chest and touched his skin, and the curly blond hairs she had noticed.

"You're so lovely," he whispered, his lips against her neck. She felt her breath soar from her body.

Unbuttoning her blouse, he moved his hand to gently caress her breast. She'd never been touched so intimately and involuntarily gasped.

"Are you hungry?" she asked crazily, the first thing she could think of to say.

"You don't know how much," he said hoarsely and drew her back into his arms.

She pulled away from him. "I mean *food*."

"Food," he nodded. "Yeah, I could do with some food I suppose."

"I'll make you a sandwich."

"That'd be fine." His eyes were cool now. She broke away and hurried into the kitchen.

There wasn't much she could do for a moment, her heart was pounding so madly. She took a deep breath and forced herself to calm down. Surely a man's touch didn't always cause this tension. But this wasn't just any man. This was Richard.

Later, when she came out with a plate of sandwiches and a pot of coffee, he was sitting on the sofa watching television.

She sat down beside him and he accepted the sandwich she offered him. He turned back to the television.

She picked up her own coffee and sipped it. It wasn't going to be easy living with him. If only they were in love and she could be a real wife to him! He was still wearing the terry bathrobe and his long legs were stretched out in front of him. She could see a jagged scar running up beneath the golden hairs on his left thigh. She touched his arm. "I'm sorry."

"What for?" he asked gruffly.

"You know."

"I understand. But I did think that you would want to make love with me."

"Maybe if we were in love," she said, putting her coffee cup on the tray.

"Well we're not, are we?" He was eyeing her narrowly.

She shook her head. Why should she admit her vulnerability when he made his position quite plain? He had made a business arrangement. Well, she would keep it that way. He'd never mentioned love. Then why should she?

"You knew what you were getting into, Tanya. I'll make it as easy as possible for you, but damned if I'm going to go without a woman for months on end just to satisfy your lofty expectations. I know I'm not exactly in the best of health, but I think I'm still attractive enough. I didn't lose my virility in the accident." He raised an eyebrow at her.

She blushed, her lowered eyes unconsciously slipping to the ugly scar on his leg.

He shifted impatiently. "I suppose I should apologize, but I've never met such a reluctant female before. It's a new experience." He smiled ruefully. "It's not the greatest for my ego, particularly at this stage in my life."

Or mine either, she thought. The idea of another woman opening her mouth to his kisses, being caressed by his lean, sensitive fingers, was more painful than she cared to admit even to herself. "I'm really sorry," she repeated shakily. Tears stung the back of her eyes. *All she wanted was love. She realized that now. If he told her that he loved her, she'd be his.*

Richard's eyes softened. Reaching out, he ruffled her hair. "You know your problem?" he said. "You're an old-fashioned romantic. It's hard to believe they exist nowadays, especially for an old cynic like me."

"Maybe," she said. She picked up the tray and hurried out to the kitchen before he could see that she was almost crying.

"Tanya?" Richard had followed her.

She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, concentrating on unloading the tray of dishes.

"Don't cry," he said. "I won't push you. Promise."

He left her alone and she washed the dishes and put them away in the cedar cupboards. Would the kitchen ever feel like her own?

She went through to the living room, but Richard was too absorbed in the television to even hear her low good-night as she passed by.

She lay awake for hours listening to the rustle of the trees in the wind. What a failure her life had been! She had never had the chance to be a real daughter, and now she couldn't make the man she'd married a real wife. She sighed and settled herself down farther under the covers. Well, if he wanted her to grow up, she was trying to, but the growing pains were more painful than she had anticipated.

The next day she got to the kitchen before Richard and cooked breakfast. If she couldn't share his bed, then at least she could cook his meals for him. When he came out of his room, he looked deathly pale.

"Are you ill?" she asked anxiously.

He sat down at the breakfast nook. "No." He began to eat the food she set before him. Suddenly he pushed the plate away and took a deep breath. "I think the traveling was too much for me."

"Can I do anything?"

"There's nothing you or anyone can do," he flung at her. He got up and turned on his heel. Through misty eyes, she

watched him limp angrily away. He opened the door, walked out, and slammed it shut behind him.

When she moved over to the window, she caught a glimpse of him standing by the lake, his hands thrust in his pockets. How had John Laughton dealt with Richard's moods? But then it was different for him. Even unsophisticated as she was, she guessed that part of their tension was sexual. Richard was a normal man; of course, he wanted a normal marital relationship. He had hinted as much. She had hoped to fulfill her obligations. Why was it that she shrank from him when she found him so attractive? If only he had revealed more of his feelings for her! She somehow felt that she was being treated as some sort of an object, a convenience, a commodity, and it hurt. Was she being over-sensitive? Had it all been a terrible mistake? She thought of England and the dreary fate she had once envisaged there. No! Anything was better than that, even life with this difficult and dangerously attractive, enigmatic man.

The door opened and Richard walked in. "Now it's my turn to say I'm sorry. I think I'm expecting way too much from you."

"It's fine," she told him.

He smiled, shaking his head. "Even if I had a knife in your back and was turning it, you'd say you were fine." He came to where she was standing in the kitchen. "We're going to have to call a truce. We can't live from day to day with this tension, although I'm not going to promise not to touch you because you're very desirable. Don't blush," he said, as he saw the color suffuse her cheeks.

Tanya turned toward the sink and ran the tap for the dishes, wishing that she were more worldly and more of a match for him.

"Tanya," he swung her around, his right hand gripping her shoulder, "Are you listening to me?"

She nodded, tears straining at her eyes again.

"I don't want any more conflict. Do you hear that? I don't want any more tension. I came up here to relax and recuperate. I like your companionship. You're a sweet, lovable person. Let's behave like sensible adults and develop a relationship that will bring us both satisfaction. Do you hear?"

His gray eyes held hers as if in a challenge and she nodded.

"Then you'll just take things as they come?" he said. "You won't try and want more before it's time?"

"What about you?" she asked.

"I want you," he told her, "I wouldn't have married you if I didn't, but I'll wait until we're both really ready."

"Thank you," she said as calmly as possible but inside her heart soared. At least he wanted her. Eventually they might fall in love.

He smiled. "Now," he said, "I don't want to see any more tears in those lovely green eyes of yours; there have been far too many the last few days."

The remainder of the day was spent in comparative harmony. Richard was a charming, platonic companion and Tanya responded to his charm, though once in a while she caught herself wondering again how such an attractive man could have tied himself into a loveless relationship.

In the evening, they listened to music. Richard taught her how to play cribbage and she beat him three times although she wasn't sure if he'd let her win or if she had some skill in the game. Then he made hot chocolate and they sat on the glassed-in veranda and drank it while watching the sun disappear over the lake, tipping the pine trees with a pink glow.

"It's gorgeous," Tanya said, cupping her hot chocolate as she strained to see more from the window.

"Are you going to stay then?"

Tanya couldn't see Richard's expression in the half light. "I made an agreement to marry you."

"I know, but I wouldn't ever want to hold you against your will."

"You're not."

"That's good," he yawned and stood up, putting down his cup. "I think I'll turn in now."

Tanya drank the last of her chocolate and also stood up.

He took the cup from her hands and put it down on the table with his. For a moment she thought that he was going to try to make love to her and she backed away from him.

"I was just going to say good-night. Come here." He put out his hand and she took it, curling her fingers around his. Leaning over, he kissed her gently on the lips. "Good-night," he said, touching her cheek with his fingers.

She placed her hand over his against her cheek. "Good-night, Richard," she whispered.

Chapter Seven

Tanya drew herself out of the water and sat on the edge of the dock. She pulled a towel around her shoulders and covered her brief bikini. Although she'd felt warm at the beginning of her swim, she was now shivering. The water had been icy cold. She was sure that if Richard had been here, he would have warned her against swimming, despite the warmth of the sun.

But Richard wasn't here. He was in Toronto, visiting his doctor. She had needed the exercise of the swim. The freedom she'd felt in the depths of the icy water had added a lightness to her spirit. She'd kicked and splashed as though dispersing the tensions of the past weeks.

Richard didn't love her. She was sure of that. He'd shown no affection other than a friendly comradeship that would eventually drive her mad. Granted he still suffered pain, but he had improved immensely. He was now well able to climb without any help. Despite his declaration that he wanted her, he'd managed to keep himself detached, not touching her unless absolutely necessary, and not encouraging her to touch him. Strangely enough, lately she'd felt an overwhelming desire to smooth his hair or wind her arms around his neck, and even press herself against his body. In the past, such feelings had been alien to her. She hoped that they meant she could enter into a normal marriage situation. If Richard wanted her, that was. She sighed and stretched her limbs to greet the warmth of the sunshine.

The unmistakable sound of the Ferrari made her look toward the house. Richard got out of the car. When he saw her sitting on the dock, he came to join her. If she was grateful for anything, it was that he moved with so much more ease now.

"Hey," he smiled, "been for a swim or trying to get up the nerve?"

"I actually went in," she told him returning the rare smile. She stood up and went to the flat rock where he stood. "How was it?"

"The doctor? I'm getting better."

"I'm so glad."

Richard touched the damp towel that hung from her shoulders.

"Sure you won't catch cold?" he said.

"I'm strong," she told him. "You don't mind?"

"That you swam?"

She nodded.

"Of course not." His eyes slipped to her hair that was beginning to curl around her face as it dried. His gaze lingered on to her lips.

She moistened them with the tip of her tongue before taking a nervous step backward to try to avoid his gaze. The towel slipped to the ground. As she bent to pick it up. Richard stopped her.

"Don't," he shook his head. "You're beautiful without it."

Tanya touched the low bikini top with nervous fingers. She wanted to run upstairs to the house and change into more clothing, but something was keeping her rooted to the spot.

"I knew you were lovely," Richard said thickly, "but I never expected anything like this."

Tanya gave a little moan just before his mouth covered hers. This was what she'd been wanting this past while. To be held in his arms, against the strength of his lean male body. To feel his mouth devouring her own.

Her hands moved up to clasp around his neck. She ran her fingers through his hair as his mouth lowered to the hollow of her throat.

"Oh," she whispered as he unfastened the bikini top and let it fall between them.

She arched her body to meet the desire in his. There was an ache deep inside her that needed to be fulfilled. She had no doubt that Richard was as aroused as she was herself.

Neither of them heard the sound of a car; nor footsteps on the pathway.

"Good heavens, forgive me," a man's voice said, "I forgot that you were newlyweds."

Richard was holding Tanya's trembling body against his chest, shielding her nakedness from view.

He took a deep breath. "Anyone ever tell you that you always arrive at the wrong time, John?"

"I don't think I need to be told," John remarked, "I've got perfectly good eyes. Do you want me to leave?"

"No," Richard shook his head, "just give us a couple of minutes."

John retreated up the steps to the house. Richard looked down into Tanya's face.

"Well, at least you look more like a wife." he told her softly. "How do you feel?"

"More like a wife," she said. She disentangled herself from his grasp and picked up the bikini top and towel. She wrapped the towel around her sarong style.

"If you don't want that to happen too often, you shouldn't wear that thing." He flipped the black bikini top that she held in her hand.

"I wanted it to happen," she told him truthfully.

"Well at least we've achieved something," he said, "we both want each other. Unfortunately," he glanced toward the house, "we have to entertain John for the next few hours, and knowing John, he won't leave all that early."

They walked up to the house. John was waiting for them in the living room, discreetly gazing from the side window. He turned when they came in.

"I'm truly sorry," he said.

"Not to worry," Richard told him. "Tanya, why don't you go and change. I'll get John a drink. I presume you want to stay to dinner?" He looked at his friend.

"Well it is a long drive," John said.

"Of course he must stay, Richard," Tanya asserted her wifely duty, "I won't be a minute."

She escaped to her bedroom. She wasn't sure if she was glad or regretful that John had interrupted them. She just knew that the feelings she'd experienced with Richard had shown her a side of herself she hadn't known—a warm passionate nature.

Her hands were still unsteady as she changed from the bikini into blue slacks and a matching blouse.

John and Richard were talking when she walked through the living area to the kitchen. There was a casserole in the oven that John could share.

Tanya thoroughly enjoyed John's company at dinner. For the first time in weeks Richard laughed spontaneously. John was good for him. He made him relax. There were no tensions between them, just an easy friendship with no complications.

But to her Richard became a stranger. A man who'd led a full life and was now easing himself back to that way of life. Was Tanya just a diversion on the way up? In the biography she was reading, life for the racing driver was hectic. Wife and children seemed to take second place to racing.

"The food's delicious," John interrupted her thoughts, "Richard's lucky. A beautiful woman and a good cook."

Tanya smiled. She liked John. He had none of the enigmatic personality traits that made Richard inexplicable to her.

"Do you think he's getting better?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. He's improved one hundred percent. You're doing wonders for him."

"He helps himself." Tanya glanced at Richard who was taking the banter good-naturedly.

"Where there's a will, eh?" John grinned. "We'll have him back on the track in no time at this rate."

Tanya's pulse beat uneasily. She felt faint as though she'd received a bad shock. Surely Richard wouldn't even think of racing again after that accident!

Richard didn't comment. He pushed aside his plate and looked from his best friend to his wife. "How about some coffee?" he said to Tanya.

Richard started a fire while Tanya prepared the coffee. When she put it on the table, John was standing with his back to the fire, hands in the back pockets of his jeans.

"I'll arrange some practice sessions for you," he was saying to Richard. "You can slip back in easily."

"Sure," Richard agreed, "I've had the doctor's permission to drive again. He told me to play it by ear."

"I think you should," John said sitting down in the armchair and helping himself to a cup of coffee. "If you cut out too long, you might never get back. We've got cars, there's no problem there." He glanced at Tanya. "I'm trying to persuade him to get in some practicing," he told her. "What do you think?"

"Of course he should," she said automatically. She watched the flames in the fire lick out at the logs. Richard's profile was set in relief by the firelight. Proud and determined. Sometimes gentle and absolutely charming. His lips had the power to move her beyond any of her expectations. His hands ... She glanced at his hands resting on his thighs. Long sensitive hands that had caressed her and that had steered a car at death-defying speed. He obviously had a mind that could block out fear, that could make him perform to the utmost capacity. Except one day—the day he'd lost control of the car he had been driving. Tanya felt cold despite the warmth radiating from the blazing fire.

John put down his empty coffee cup and stood up.

"I must be going," he said. "Thank you for the dinner. I'm glad you're both doing well."

"Thanks for dropping by." Richard got up awkwardly as he often did when the day drew to a close and his limbs stiffened.

"I hope it wasn't too much of an inconvenience?" John's eyes twinkled as he glanced at Tanya.

"Not at all," she assured him, "you're welcome anytime."

Richard saw John out to his car. Tanya stacked the dishes into the sink and turned off the kitchen light. She'd wash them in the morning. Or Richard would. He often got up early and tidied the house. Richard came back into the house.

"Thanks," he said.

"For what?" She tipped her head to one side.

"For bearing with us this evening. Racing drivers can become extreme bores to people with no interest in the subject."

"I wasn't bored," she shook her head. Actually she'd closed her ears to the subject as much as possible. If Richard raced again, she knew that she'd lose him to the world he loved. Not that she really had him, she thought.

Richard put his fingers to his temples. "Too much excitement," he smiled ruefully. "I think I'll get to bed."

She watched him walk into his room and close the door. She felt acutely disappointed. She'd expected him to make love to her again. She wanted to be a wife in more than name. Didn't he want it too?

Chapter Eight

The sun shone brilliantly, sending trickles of light across the lake. Tanya prepared breakfast, pausing occasionally to wipe perspiration from her brow. The previous day had been warm, but this morning was positively hot. She wasn't exactly in the best of moods either. She'd spent a disturbed night, full of restless dreams. What really didn't help was John's interruption yesterday afternoon, and then Richard taking off for bed as soon as his friend had left. Even so, she managed a slight smile as Richard came out of his room.

After pouring himself a cup of coffee, he sat down at the breakfast nook.

"It's warm," he said, looking as if the heat were taking its toll. He wore denim shorts, and perspiration beaded down his naked chest. "I have a canoe in the boathouse. Why don't we drag it out and go up the lake?"

Tanya placed his breakfast in front of him and sat beside him to eat her toast.

"Sounds good," she said. "Otherwise this heat will kill me."

"If the mosquitoes don't get you first," he teased.

Tanya scratched at her bare arm. "They had a good meal yesterday."

His fingers reached out and touched the red blotches that marked her tanned skin. The touch was like a caress and Tanya felt little shivers move up and down her spine.

"Don't scratch them too much," he said. "They'll get infected." He took his hand away and continued eating his breakfast.

Tanya prepared a light lunch while Richard went down to the dock.

When she went down to join him, he had the canoe moored by a rope tied to an iron ring fastened on the dock. It was cooler by the water's edge and Tanya enjoyed the feel of the breeze lifting her hair.

Richard took her hand to help her into the canoe. There was a fishing rod and tackle box in the bottom.

"Fishing?" Tanya asked.

"Well," he shrugged. "We'll play around at it, but John and I have sometimes caught enough to keep us going for two weeks straight."

She sat down and held on to the sides, feeling the canoe sway slightly as it took his weight. Then he was paddling into the lake.

They kept close to the shore. Tanya watched the lean strength of Richard's body as he steered the canoe with deft movements, paddling on one side only. Then he would turn the paddle at the end of each stroke to keep the canoe straight. She trailed her fingers through the cool water. It was heaven to be away from the heat of the land.

"There's a little island further round the point. It's always a good place for fish," Richard told her. "We'll go there, okay?"

It didn't take long to get to the island, which turned out to be a cluster of moss-covered rocks and spiky pine trees.

There was a small sandy beach that looked just right for swimming.

Despite the heat, the water was colder than it had been the day before when Tanya had swum off the dock. She contented herself with wading in the edge. Richard sat on a rock, his fishing line over the side.

Tired of paddling around in the water, Tanya lay back on the beach to sun herself. Her eyes closed as she caught up on sleep from the night before.

She awoke some time later to the smell of burning wood. Richard had built a small fire on the beach and was cooking something.

"Did you catch a fish?" she asked, getting up to move closer to him.

"Two," he smiled. "Not bad for the first time out in three years."

Tanya wrinkled her nose, "They smell good."

Richard had filleted the small bass he had caught. They ate the fish, plus the rolls and cheese and cans of pop she'd packed for lunch.

Replete from the meal, Richard leaned against a rock as the fire burned its way down to ashes. Tanya thought that it felt a little cooler. She pulled her cotton T-shirt over her bikini top and shorts.

Richard glanced at her through narrowed eyes. "Come here," she said softly.

She went to him, letting him put his arm around her shoulders. His fingers slid beneath the neckline of her top, tracing a sensitive line across the top of her breast.

Tanya caught her breath. She'd been waiting since yesterday for the continuation of his lovemaking. She moved closer to him.

His mouth came down hard and demanding, parting her lips. She pressed herself against his hard chest delighting in the feel of his flesh against hers and wound her arms around his neck. She could feel the sharp intake of his breath and the strong, rhythmic pounding of his heart against her own. Never had she felt more of a woman, and she exulted in the knowledge that this proud and independent man wanted her as much as she wanted him. His mouth moved down her throat to her shoulders, and then to the hollow between her breasts.

A crack of thunder surprised them both. Richard lifted his head to gaze with passion-glazed eyes at a streak of lightning that flashed through the sky. Slowly, he eased himself away, momentarily oblivious of the large, splashy drops of rain that fell on his shoulders. There was a low, ominous rumble of approaching distant thunder.

"Damn," Richard said despairingly.

Tanya, looking up from under her lashes at his flushed face, could not restrain a giggle.

"Hey," he said, glancing down at her. "What's so funny?"

"Yesterday, and now today," she explained. "I guess the powers that be just don't want us to get together."

Richard smiled wryly, tracing her jawline with his finger. "If it weren't for the fact that these electrical storms by the lake can be dangerous, I'd say to the devil with the powers that be—" He glanced around at the menacing black clouds and

the white caps on the swelling gray lake. The rain was settling down to a heavy downpour drenching them both. "Come," he commanded, helping Tanya to her feet. "We'll have to get some shelter and wait this one out. It would be asking for trouble to go on the lake now."

Together they turned the canoe upside down and propped it against the rocks. They crawled in under it and remained crouched in its shelter. Lightning was flashing all around them, punctuated by the grumble and roar of thunder. The rain was now coming down with a driving force and the wind swept branches and twigs off the trees causing them to fall all around them. The temperature had dropped considerably and Tanya could not stop shivering.

About twenty minutes later the rain abated, and Richard peered out from under the canoe. It doesn't look too bad now," he commented. "Why don't we paddle like the devil and try to make it home between cloudbursts? I can't bear to see you shake like that. You will catch your death of cold."

Tanya followed Richard out from under the canoe. She thought the lake looked far too rough to navigate but she did not want to contradict Richard. After all, he knew the waters far better than she did and she hated the idea of being a coward.

They righted the canoe, pushed it into the water and set off. They were still surrounded by black clouds, but the squalls seemed to be moving away from them. Tanya hoped that they made it home before it poured again. Then before they were able to get around the point, they were suddenly in blinding rain, the wind whipping the lake into waves that

bounced the small canoe around mercilessly. Rain, fanned into sharp pellets by the strong wind, tore into their flesh.

Tanya took hold of the other paddle Richard pushed toward her. They both paddled furiously. After a while, she noticed that Richard's face was pale beneath his tan, and that he had drawn his mouth in a thin line.

"Richard?" she shouted at him through the noise of the storm. The thunder and lightning seemed to be overhead now.

"I'm okay," he snapped gritting his teeth against what Tanya knew must be a spasm of pain. She'd seen it all too often.

Then she watched aghast as he slumped forward. The paddle dropped from his hand into the lake and was whipped away by the waves and wind.

"Richard!" she yelled, but there was nothing she could do.

Her arms arched as she tried to keep the little craft upright in the icy water. Sobs threatened at her throat, but she couldn't give way now. She needed all the strength she could muster to get them home safely.

Richard seemed to be breathing steadily, but he was ghostly pale, his eyes closed. Had he fainted from the pain? She didn't dare look now.

She paddled frantically in the bow of the canoe and maneuvered two complete circles before she could right herself. She hadn't had much training in boats. A Sunday afternoon on the River Thames at Oxford didn't compare to this. But at least she knew how to row and paddle. A helpful boyfriend had taught her that much.

Waves splashed over the side of the canoe and started to fill the bottom. Tanya glanced apprehensively at Richard's still form. Gingerly, she picked her way to the stern, balancing precariously in the fragile craft shifting in the choppy water. She made Richard as comfortable as she could, then moved to the stern to paddle both sides, keeping the shoreline as her bearing.

Finally she rounded a bend in the lake and saw the outlines of the house high up on the bluff. Hugging the shore, she made for their dock.

Richard seemed to be coming to. He opened his eyes and shook his head. "Sorry," he muttered, glancing down at the water sloshing around him.

"Don't move," she told him breathlessly. "We're nearly there." But she wasn't at all sure that they were going to make it. Her arms ached in their sockets and the muscles in her back had tightened with exhaustion. Everything she wore was soaked.

They neared the shore. The dock was now only a few hundred yards away. Richard had managed to sit up and was running his hands through his wet hair. Little rivulets ran down his face and onto his chest.

Then at last the iron ring on the dock was in reach. Tanya grabbed for it and missed. The canoe rocked wildly in the wind. She reached for the ring again, this time managing to hold on. She dragged them against the dock. Then after tying the rope securely around the ring, she leaned down to help Richard out.

"You'll have to help me," she muttered kneeling beside him. "Please."

He was able to get to his feet when they were on the dock. She could hear him grit his teeth with the pain as he took her arm to lean on her.

Tanya didn't know how long it took them to get up the rocky incline. She just knew sheer relief when they were inside the warmth and dryness of the house.

She managed to get Richard into a hot bath. "Do you want something for the pain?" she asked, as she checked the medicine cabinet.

"Nothing," he said, easing himself down into the warm water.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure," he said harshly. Then sighed. "It's just a dull backache now. I'll survive." He tried to smile, the color coming back into his lean cheeks. "I'm sorry. Look you'd better get into a bath yourself."

"I will." She moved toward the door.

"Thanks, Tanya," he said. "I guess I owe you my life."

"It was nothing," she told him feeling close to tears. She was probably suffering from shock herself, but she didn't want to be the one to crack up.

After a quick hot bath she put on her robe and went through to the kitchen to prepare some hot chocolate.

When she took Richard's in to him, he had found his way to the bed and lay propped up on pillows with a sheet covering his body.

She handed him the chocolate.

"How are you feeling?" she asked, shy now that the emergency was over.

"Better," he raised an eyebrow. "I thought this was all over."

"I guess you overdid it,"

"I guess so." He finished his chocolate and she saw his hand shake as he put the cup on the table.

He swore bitterly and stared at his hand. "Yesterday John was talking about getting me back into a car...."

"It'll be okay," Tanya soothed, touching the back of his hand.

"It won't be okay," he tore his hand from her. "I can't even paddle a rotten canoe. How can I get into a racing car?"

"In time," Tanya said softly.

He glared at her, his eyes dark and angry. "Have you any idea what it takes?"

She couldn't think of an answer to that one, so she nodded wordlessly. Then, she leaned over to kiss him on the lips but she felt no answering response.

"I think I'll go to bed," she told him. "If you need anything—"

Averting her face, she left the room quickly. She did not want him to see the pity that she was afraid showed. She knew that it would hurt his pride too much. Noiselessly she closed the door behind her and hurried to her room. She was in no mood for a harsh rejection.

* * * *

Tanya rolled over in her bed and buried her head in the pillow. It was dark in the room. She'd been sleeping soundly and it was so silent outside that she couldn't imagine what had woken her so abruptly.

A noise? Tanya sat up in bed suddenly, straining her ears in the darkness, wondering what it was. Her heart pounded loudly in her chest. Maybe it was a wild animal. She'd heard rumors of bears and wolves in Canada. Could there be something outside?

She got out of bed and looked out the window. But she couldn't see anything but the black shapes of trees and rocks.

It came again, sounding like a mangled scream. She grabbed her silk robe, slipping it on as she hurried toward the direction of the strange cry. It came from Richard's room. Now what was wrong? Her heartbeat quickened. Even though Richard appeared to have more or less regained his physical well-being, he had been low in spirits. He had been moody and short with Tanya. At this point she despaired of their relationship ever evolving into anything more intimate. The lovemaking that they had shared that day on the island now seemed like a distant dream. She wondered if they could ever have a real marriage. Richard, she decided, had either forgotten about it, or had just been momentarily attracted. She sighed as she opened Richard's door. He would probably be furious at the invasion of his privacy but she couldn't leave him alone making those terrible, bestial groans.

He was sitting up in bed, his knees drawn sharply under his chin. Perspiration ran down his face and drenched his neck

and chest. With shaking hands, he pushed back his hair to look at Tanya through glazed eyes.

"Richard! What is it?"

"Could you get me some water?"

"Of course."

She handed him the water and he drank it in one gulp. She sat down on the edge of the bed, taking the empty glass from him, and putting it on the bedside table.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

"I don't know." He was trembling violently. "There are some little white pills in my top drawer. Could you get me a couple?"

"Of course."

She got him the pills and more water.

"I heard you scream." She put her hand on the warm damp flesh of his arm.

He rested his elbows on his knees and pushed at the hair that kept falling across his face. "It was just a nightmare," he told her, and he smiled rather shakily. "This was one of the things the doctor was cautioning you about that day."

She stroked the hair back from his damp forehead, "Can I get you anything else?"

"No, it's okay."

He leaned back against the pillows and his eyes closed sleepily. Tanya gently pulled the sheet over him.

Although he seemed to be resting peacefully, she didn't want to leave him. It could happen again. Next time she might not hear him!

Quietly, she took off her robe and slipped into bed beside him. This way if anything happened, she'd be close by. She snuggled down beneath the covers leaving some space between them. Even so the warmth of his body penetrated her own. A shudder of desire and longing eased through her. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all! She rolled on her side and closed her eyes. Richard moved restlessly against her. His arm encircled her waist. Tanya turned over and made herself comfortable against the hard length of his body. She'd get up early in the morning. He'd never know that she'd stolen these moments of ecstasy.

Butterfly kisses flickered against the soft skin of her cheek. Warm lips burned a pathway down her throat toward the cleavage of her breasts. Tanya moved restlessly in her sleep and opened her eyes. Richard was leaning over her.

"Morning," he whispered.

"Morning." Tanya suddenly remembered where she was and why. "How are you feeling?"

"Much better thanks to you," he said.

She touched his forehead with trembling fingers. "You feel much cooler."

"Maybe on the outside," he murmured.

She tried to move from beneath him, but his arms had her pinned against the pillow. His nakedness and the warm male smell of him, were sending tremors of passion through her. She took a deep steadying breath.

"I should get up," she told him. "I didn't mean to stay this long."

"I'm glad you stayed." His eyes were warm with desire. He leaned forward and opened her mouth with his lips, moving over her so that his entire weight was pressing her down into the bed. Pushing aside the thin nightgown, he caressed her breasts. She thrust her body toward his. Her hands found their way to his shoulders and lightly moved down the hard contours of his back. His lips left hers for a moment to touch her ear. "You're lovely," she heard him whisper, before her world shattered to a glorious kaleidoscope.

Sunshine shimmered through the curtains and Tanya turned over sleepily wondering where she was. Then she saw Richard's gold-blond head on the pillow next to hers and smiled. With tentative fingers, she reached out and touched his hair. He rolled over and looked at her, his gray eyes soft.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"What for?"

"For waking you up."

"I've been awake for a long time," he told her, "watching you." He reached out and wound one of her auburn curls around his finger. "You don't regret making love with me?" he asked.

"No," she told him, stretching luxuriously beneath the sheets.

He smiled and reached out for her, bringing her closer to him. His lips explored her neck and throat before moving to the creamy whiteness of her breasts as his hands strayed intimately and possessively over her. She felt desire flame through her again. As her body met his, an awareness filled

her. For the first time in her life, she felt like a woman. His woman....

Tanya lay lethargically in bed while Richard took a shower. He came back into the room with a towel around his waist.

"Aren't you ever going to get up?" he asked.

"In a minute," she told him, not moving.

"Lazy." He began to dress.

"Do you feel you're getting better?" she asked, watching his easy movements as he stepped into his jeans.

"Not after last night," he raised an eyebrow.

"It was only a dream."

"A recurring nightmare." He shook his head and pulled on his shirt.

"Do you still take all those awful looking pills you have in the bathroom?"

"Shake me and see if I rattle," he smiled. "Seriously though, no. The ones I took last night were for emergency pain."

He tucked his shirt into his pants and buckled the leather belt. He walked over to the bed. Placing a hand on either side of her, he leaned down and kissed her nose. "If you don't get out of that bed, I'll make love to you again," he said his voice husky.

"Then what?" she teased, stroking his rough chin with her fingers.

"We'll spend the rest of the day in bed."

"And—"

He kissed her firmly on the lips and straightened. "Get up. I'll make breakfast. I'm hungry." He grinned, "I'll give you five minutes.

"Slave driver," she called after his retreating form as he left the bedroom.

They ate a late breakfast in companionable silence. It was a warm day and the lake looked inviting. Tanya wanted to swim.

"Do you think you could swim?" she asked Richard. She was aware that he did therapeutic exercises, and swimming was supposed to be good for muscle toning. Not that his hard muscles needed much toning, as she'd experienced this morning in bed. The thought made her blush and she glanced away from his probing look.

"That sounds like a good idea," he told her.

She stood up. "Then I'll get changed."

"Oh, no," Richard shook his head, amused glimmering in his eyes, "no one can see us out here."

"Oh, but—"

"But what?" He was teasing her.

"John could arrive again."

"What if he does? He'll disappear and wait like he did before. John's discreet."

"Maybe, but—"

Richard got up and pulled her into his arms. His hands wandered boldly over her curves. Then he picked her up so that she was held against his firm chest muscles.

"You shouldn't, Richard. You'll hurt yourself."

But her protests went unheeded as he carried her down to the edge of the lake. He dropped her onto the wooden boards on the dock. Then he got undressed.

"Last one in—" he shouted and splashed over the edge of the dock.

Tanya stripped off her shorts and top and followed him into the water. Richard in this playful, charming mood was too hard to resist.

They swam for a while, splashing and laughing. While Richard took off to the center of the lake with a powerful crawl, Tanya floated on her back. She squinted her eyes against the bright sun and blue sky, a bubble of contentment stirring insistently through her.

She laughed in surprise as Richard came up from the water to grab hold of her. His hands caressed her naked body, arousing her as he'd done earlier this morning.

She put her arms around his neck and drew his mouth to meet her own.

"My beautiful wife," he murmured, before his lips claimed hers.

Afterward they sunbathed on a flat rock. Tanya insisted on putting on her bikini.

"What if a boat comes by," she argued against Richard's amusement.

"They'd need binoculars," he told her, but he obliged by dressing in brief denim shorts. "Not that this leaves much to the imagination." His hand wandered boldly down her bare back. "Like me to rub some suntan lotion on you?"

"Please." She couldn't get enough of Richard's touch. Making love with him was sheer heaven. It left her in no doubt of how much she loved him. If only he'd tell her that he loved her.

His hands moved rhythmically down her back and over her thighs. "Turn over," he said. He squeezed a drop of the silky lotion onto her stomach. He rubbed it in with his fingers. His hands grew more caressing as he reached the curves of her breasts. He gently released the catch of her bikini top. "You're so beautiful," he said huskily. His breathing was ragged when at last his mouth found hers.

Tanya had no defenses against her newfound love.

After the glorious sensuous experience of sun and water, their first day of love together, Tanya was disappointed when it rained almost every day. Not that she was unhappy. Richard had moved into her bedroom because she wanted the lake view in the morning. Her nights with him were sheer delight.

Richard was working in his study and Tanya decided to go for a walk. She looked in on him before she left the house.

"Where are you going?" he asked, looking up from his desk, where he was sitting writing.

"Just down to the lake. I won't be long."

"Okay," he glanced at her thoughtfully. "Do you feel like a change?"

"A change?" She looked at him, thinking how much better she knew the expressions on his face now.

"I have to visit the doctor tomorrow. Do you want to come along?"

"I don't mind staying here," she said. She usually stayed behind.

"I know you don't mind, but I was thinking it might be nice if you came."

She felt a flurry of excitement flow through her at the expression in his eyes.

"Do you want me to?" she asked, her green eyes bright.

"I wouldn't be asking if I didn't."

"Then I'll come."

"Good." He smiled and turned back to his work. "Have a good walk."

Tanya closed the door quietly behind her. The rain had eased to a sticky drizzle. She walked down to the lake and stood on the rock where they'd sunbathed. She dug her hands into the pockets of her waterproof jacket. Did Richard love her? She sighed. Maybe it was too much to ask that he love her as well as desire her. At least they were heading into a normal marriage.

She hiked off across the rocks, turning back when she began to feel wet. Richard was waiting for her on the dock.

"Crazy girl," he said, "you'll catch pneumonia."

"So will you," she told him. His hair was plastered to his head. He wasn't even wearing a jacket. Just jeans and a shirt.

"It'll give us an excuse to spend weeks in bed together," he grinned and opened his arms to her.

Both were unaware of the slashing rain as their lips met.

Chapter Nine

The following morning was sunny, promising a hot day. Tanya got up while Richard was still in bed and prepared breakfast. They were in the car on the highway just after ten.

"It's going to be hot," Tanya said, noticing the haze through the pine trees.

"You'll miss having a swim," Richard said.

"I'll have it tonight instead."

"I'll join you."

Tanya glanced at him. With his chiseled features and blond hair, longer and streaked by the sun, he looked so handsome that her breath caught in her throat.

"I've got such a handsome husband," she told him.

He smiled, "I haven't got such a bad wife either."

"Then we're both lucky. What do you think the doctor's going to tell you?"

"Probably that things are okay now."

He'll be glad to get rid of you." She rummaged in her canvas bag and found a pair of square-framed sunglasses. She put them on her nose. Then she reached into the glove compartment and got out Richard's steel-rimmed ones. She perched them on his face.

"There, now you look like a real racing driver."

"Tanya," he said, sounding serious. "Would you care if I started racing again?"

She glanced down at her hands. At the plain gold band that bound her to this man. "I guess it doesn't matter whether I care or not, does it?"

"There's a lot of traveling," he told her. "The house would be used more as a retreat than a permanent home."

"I wouldn't mind that," she lied. It had all been so perfect!

"What would you mind?"

"The fear," she said, her heart pounding as it had that evening with John at the thought of Richard racing. Next time he might not be so lucky.

"I could die in this car, on this highway," he told her.

"Don't say that, Richard."

"You have to face reality, Tanya."

But the reality was that she loved him. So much, that she couldn't think coherently at the thought of anything happening to him. Life would never be worth living again without him.

Toronto was hot and humid. Richard left her to shop while he went to the doctor. He told her he'd meet her at a restaurant for lunch. She walked the streets, finally entering a department store. It was air-conditioned and cool. She looked at the clothes on the racks, but nothing seemed pretty enough. Since she had married Richard she had become more fastidious about her clothes. Nothing ever seemed to come up to the expectation of how she wanted to look for him. She glanced at her watch. If she didn't hurry, she would be late for their lunch date.

She arrived a little ahead of him and found a table in the corner. She watched as he came in and moved toward her,

tall, tanned and blond, threading his way through the dark restaurant. *How much better he looks than when I first met him*, she thought with satisfaction. *He walks almost without a limp, and his eyes have lost that remote, haunted look.*

He smiled, as he sat down opposite her. "How's it going?"

"Fine," she told him.

He called the waiter and ordered two beers.

"Richard?" she said, knowing he wasn't supposed to drink alcohol.

"I'm back on beer," he told her, "nothing stronger though."

She smiled, "And what else?"

"A few headache pills and a mild tranquilizer but only if I feel I need them. Tony says I'm in pretty good shape physically. I might go and get some practicing in. See how it goes."

"Then you really are going to race again?"

His eyes held none of the warmth that she'd grown used to. "What did you expect?"

She met his cool glance. "I don't know," she said, shaking her head.

"It's my job," he told her. "Like going to the office every day."

Only you could get killed, she added silently.

After lunch Richard took her up to the top of the CN Tower. She was able to see most of the city, despite it being a hazy day. The excitement of the sight-seeing trip diminished his words at the lunch table. They wandered through the narrow streets of the Yorkville shopping area, hand in hand, the peace of their relationship a tangible thing now.

"You know," Richard said as they came out of a little art gallery arm in arm, "I feel like a different man from the one who came home with you last spring. And it's largely due to you."

Tanya felt a rush of pleasure and smiled up at him. She was needed. He depended on her. Even if he were not madly in love with her, he had acknowledged his gratitude. At this moment, it was enough.

He pulled her down some steps into a little restaurant. "Come on, let's have some supper before we get on our way."

They'd finished their dinner and were about to leave when a female voice came floating through the air. "Dickie, I haven't seen you for ages."

Tanya looked up to see a tall willowy woman in wide black trousers and a skimpy black top. Her glossy brown hair fell to her shoulders in a shining pageboy.

"Dianna." Richard stood up.

"You're walking, Dick?" the woman said glancing curiously down at his lean muscular legs.

"Of course," he said, his voice cool, "did you ever think I wouldn't?"

Dianna smiled sweetly, "No, I knew you'd come through on top. You always do." She looked at Tanya.

"This is my wife, Tanya. Tanya, this is Dianna Watson."

"Wife?" Dianna raised a skeptical eyebrow, then smiled affectedly at Tanya, "How do you do?"

Tanya nodded to Dianna, acknowledging the introduction coolly, though her emotions were in turmoil. Was Dianna the woman who had caused Richard so much pain? Or was she

another of his old flames? She knew that she was bound to run into one of them someday, but she wished it had not been this particular one.

"How did you ever manage to snare Richard?" Dianna asked. Her tone was openly incredulous. Mocking blue eyes flicked over Tanya and then moved away as though she were hardly worth a moment's attention.

"Tanya and I met in England when I went home for my parents' funeral," Richard said stiffly.

"I'm so sorry, darling, I didn't know about your parents."

"I wouldn't expect you to," Richard told her.

"And I suppose in that time of weakness you fell in love?" Dianna probed.

Tanya held her breath.

"We got married."

Tanya hoped that the tears forming behind her eyes did not show in her face. Well, at least he hadn't lied. He had always been honest. She supposed that this was one of the qualities that she had always admired in this fierce, proud man. But she could not help feeling that he had let her down. He had exposed her to this cruel woman.

Dianna's smile was creamy. *She has found out what she wanted!* "We should celebrate, Dickie. I know a great little place—it's new..."

"Tanya and I have to get home," Richard said tersely.

"You do?" The tone was insulting. As if Richard couldn't possibly want to go home with such an insignificant little nobody!

"You forget, I've been ill, Dianna. Now, if you don't mind."

He rose and Tanya took the cue to rise with him. She gathered her purse.

"Are you still up north?" Dianna persisted, laying a tanned, brown hand on his arm.

He shook it off. "We are." He held Tanya's hand, his fingers warm and secure.

"Bye for now," Dianna gracefully acknowledged defeat, adding, however, "I'll look you up—"

"Do that."

Richard and Tanya hurried out to the street. They walked in silence to where he had parked the car.

Richard drove expertly and rapidly along the narrow street crowded with motor traffic and pedestrians. He appeared to be totally concentrating on his driving. Only when he reached the highway and had slowed to a more relaxed pace, did Tanya feel that she could ask the question that had been tormenting her.

"Is Dianna the girl you loved?" She wondered if she should be using the past tense. It had been impossible to tell from Richard's behavior. He had seemed to be in a hurry to get rid of Dianna, but on the other hand he had not expressed any special affection for Tanya.

"Yes." He finally answered her question.

"I see."

"No, you don't see," he shouted, aggressively passing a car, "you don't see anything at all."

"I understand." Of course she did. He loved Dianna. She might as well face the fact.

"You're always so damned serene and understanding!" he said angrily, refusing to look at her.

"But—" She wanted to contradict him.

"I don't want to talk now, Tanya! I don't want to hear any more of your platitudes and your sweetness-and-light philosophy—"

Blinking back tears, Tanya stared out of the window. The bottom had gone out of her world. But that did not change her feelings for him. She realized that she loved him more than anyone she had ever loved in her whole life. For the first time she'd felt needed—and yes, cherished, she thought sadly, remembering his lips on her throat, and his soft, gray eyes as they had watched her wake that first morning when they had been together.

But there was no use dwelling on that now. She had fulfilled his needs, that was all. Why was it that people had discarded her all her life like an old toy? Dianna was beautiful, sophisticated. She could see how Richard might love her. And probably still did. He had said himself how he had nearly gone crazy when she had left him. He had used Tanya when he had been ill, but now that he was his old virile self, he would push Tanya off and go back to Dianna's more experienced charms. Dianna obviously still wanted him. At least now he was whole. She had made it perfectly plain.

What would Tanya do if Richard left her? How would she survive? Now that she had met Richard, she had lost all desire to be on her own. All that she wanted was to be with him. The thought was like a cry. It was so loud in her that she was afraid that Richard might hear it. She glanced at him

anxiously. But he was hunched over the wheel, his eyes sternly focused on the road, his jawline taut, seemingly without a thought of the forlorn figure by his side.

Soon they were home. Richard parked the car and bounded up the steps to turn on the house lights before Tanya had even moved from her seat. She could remember how she had first helped him up the steps. Sometimes, she'd had to hold him at the top landing while he caught his breath. An unbidden picture flashed into her mind. Richard, sitting white-faced on a rock by the lake, while she raced breathlessly up to the house to fetch his pills. But that was all over. He was well. For that alone, she would be grateful. She got out of the car and walked slowly up the steps into the house.

Richard was leaning by the mantel, idly twirling his leather jacket by one finger.

"I'm going to call John and try out some driving tomorrow," he announced, his eyes dark on her.

"That's fine," she told him.

"Do you want to come with me?"

"Do you want me to?"

"I think you should. Then you'll see what I do for a living."

"Then I'll come." She had to face up to it sometime; it might as well be now.

He swung his jacket over his shoulder. "We'll have to leave early."

"I'll be ready," she promised.

Then she went into the bedroom. Grabbing her robe, she went into the bathroom to take a shower. When she came out, Richard was sitting in bed reading a book.

She got in beside him, avoiding any contact with his body.

"I'm sorry," he said as she snuggled down under the sheet, and turned her back.

"What for?" Her voice was muffled. She hoped he couldn't hear the tears in it.

"For saying what I did in the car."

He leaned over to kiss the back of her neck, gently lifting her long hair. Then he took her shoulders and turned her toward him. Unwittingly, as though in a dream, she wound her arms around him. His mouth descended to meet her parted lips. What matter the agony she had felt? She was with him now.... In a very few minutes she had even forgotten the existence of Dianna Watson.

The sun was bright in a hazy sky when they left the next day. Richard appeared tense; Tanya remained quiet. She did not want to provoke another outburst like yesterday's.

When they arrived at the track, they met John Laughton. Richard told her to wait with John.

"It'll take awhile to change," he told her, "we have to wear all our equipment these days. The sponsors have too much tied up in us."

"What equipment?" Tanya asked.

"Flameproof underwear, gloves and socks. "That kind of thing."

"Just to practice?" Tanya asked surprised

"That's when most accidents happen. Anyhow, see you in a while."

Richard left them and John glanced at her anxious face. "Don't worry," he said, "it's just a precaution. It doesn't mean he's going to crash again. A crash as bad as he had only happens once in a while. I've been driving longer than Richard and I've only managed a broken leg and a fractured skull."

"That's all?" Tanya smiled shakily.

"Minor scrapes," he shrugged. "Come on, let's sit in the sun and relax."

They sat and talked and Tanya relaxed slightly. Two mechanics were preparing the car that Richard was to use. John informed her that the factory team had provided two cars for John and Richard to use in preparation for their starting a new season.

But when Richard came toward them in white overalls, Tanya felt a cold shiver of apprehension as she watched him. His eyes were completely cold and emotionless. He was all business as he glanced at John. "Ready?" he said in clipped tones.

The two men walked over to the car. Tanya hung back, reluctant to involve herself. Richard checked the car. Then he pulled on the protective hood and put his crash helmet over the top. He climbed into the car and adjusted the safety belts. John leaned down to say something and Richard roared off to the track.

John came back to Tanya, his hands in the back pockets of his white jeans.

"He's good," he said. "It'll be great to see him back."

"Did he ever win?" she asked in a small voice.

"You don't know much about this business, do you! Of course he did. Actually he was on a winning streak when he crashed. It was too bad."

"Too bad that he almost died! Tanya found it incredible that anyone would want to return to something that had almost caused his death. She watched John checking the lap times for several minutes, but the high-pitched roar of the engine began to irritate her. Excusing herself from John, she walked out to the Ferrari. She leaned against it, the sun warm on her bare arms. She could still hear the roar of Richard's engine, now mercifully muffled. A little yellow car drew up beside her and a fashionably dressed young woman hopped out.

"Hi," the young woman said to no one in particular. She removed her large, round sunglasses and focused more closely on Tanya. "Any action around here?" It was Dianna Watson.

"Richard's practicing," said Tanya reluctantly.

There was a pause. Dianna fluffed her hair.

"So you're Tanya," she said indifferently. It was more a statement than a question.

"We met last night," Tanya reminded her.

"I remember." Dianna's smile did not reach her eyes. "Is this Dick's first time since the accident?"

Tanya nodded. She wished Dianna would go away and leave her alone. She couldn't leave herself without appearing rude. Besides, it might appear cowardly and she wanted to

prove, at least to herself, that she could hold her own with this unpleasant female.

"It's exciting, eh?" Again, Dianna was probing a nerve.

"I'm not sure. It scares me." The words were out before she could check them. Why did she have to spill out all to this irritating woman? Why couldn't she have kept her mouth shut?

Dianna looked pleased. "It's his life, honey," she said smugly. "If you're his wife, you'll have to put up with it. He's already had about the worst crash he could have and he's lived through it. About the only thing worse than that is to be crippled for life—or to die."

"Please," Tanya said.

"I'm only telling it like it is. You have to be hard, honey, if you marry a racing driver. And believe me, baby, I'm not kidding. Take it from one who knows. I may not have been married to one, but it was the next best thing." She smiled meaningfully at Tanya, now shaking inwardly with rage.

Dianna opened her handbag and took out a pack of cigarettes. "Have one? It will steady your nerves."

Tanya shook her head as she tried to collect her wits for a suitable comeback, or at least to stop this hateful woman from developing the conversation any further.

Dianna continued to needle Tanya. "Did you know Dick for a long time before you married him?" she asked curiously.

"I lived with his parents for five years," Tanya replied. She hoped that Dianna would think it had been a long-term romance. That would give her pause.

Dianna was visibly startled. "Then you already knew that he was a racing driver?"

Tanya nodded.

Dianna was disconcerted. Tanya could almost see her wondering how well she and Richard had known each other over the years. But Dianna was not through yet. "Did Dickie ever tell you about us?" she shot back.

"Yes," said Tanya quietly. "And I think you were cruel to leave him when he needed you most."

"So you do speak your mind sometimes, don't you?"
Dianna was considerably taken aback.

"When it concerns Richard, yes. And now if you'll excuse me, I think I will go and see how my husband is doing."

Dianna put out her cigarette. "I think I'll join you, if you don't mind."

The two women walked toward the racetrack.

"You also have to remember," Dianna said. "This is how he makes his living. It's money in the bank."

Tanya nodded. "I know that."

John was leaning against the fence, a stopwatch in his hand, waiting for Richard's car to appear. Another man stood beside him with a clipboard and a pen.

"Hi Dianna," both men said.

"Hi. How is he doing?"

"Fine," John said and looked at Tanya. "This is Jeff Denver; Jeff, Tanya, Dick's wife."

"Hi," the man glanced at her shyly and turned back to his clipboard.

"Well, what do you think?" John asked Tanya.

"What's there to think?"

"In a few months you'll be down here cheering with the rest of us," John told her.

Tanya forced a smile, "I hope so."

She moved away from John, Jeff and Dianna. She didn't like Dianna one bit. How could Richard have loved such a woman?

Richard's car completed a lap and John and Jeff let out exclamations of delight.

Dianna jumped up and down in excitement. "He's good," she said to John.

"Not bad for first time back," John looked pleased. "That was good time."

"He'll always be the best," Dianna said.

Tanya let out a sigh. Dianna obviously knew a lot about racing. That could be why Richard was attracted to her.

"Do you know Dick Wicklow?" A voice asked from behind her. She turned in surprise.

"He's my husband," she told a dark-haired young man. The man was dressed in white racing overalls the same as Richard's.

"I didn't know he was married," the man said, "Then you know all about his accident?"

"Yes," Tanya nodded.

"It was too bad. Just at the high point of his career too. It looks like he might get back?"

"It seems that way. Do you race?" Tanya asked.

"I've just started," the man smiled pleasantly. "My wife doesn't take too kindly to it."

"Does she come and watch?"

"Are you kidding!" he shook his head. "Mind you, I'm only a beginner. Nothing compared to your husband."

My husband. The thought depressed her. The past week she'd got to know him as intimately as was possible. Out there, driving that highly technical piece of machinery; he was a complete stranger.

When Richard drove his car into the pits, he was immediately surrounded by people. Dianna drifted up and he put his arm around her waist and kissed her cheek. Tanya hung back. He obviously didn't need her with friends like that.

She went back to wait with John.

"Well, he did it," John said.

"Did what?" She knew she must sound stupid.

"Got back into a car. It's an achievement."

"I suppose so," she sighed.

When Richard was ready to leave, he walked out to the parking lot with Dianna. Feeling like a proverbial fifth wheel, Tanya tagged behind with John. Richard hadn't spoken to her, and had only given her the briefest of nods.

"Oh, Dick, it's been ages since I had a ride in your car," Dianna said, hanging on to his arm.

Richard smiled at her and looked at Tanya. "Would you mind if I gave Dianna a ride? We're just going to John's for lunch."

Tanya shook her head, "Of course not." She knew that Dianna had her own car and didn't need a ride.

"John'll take care of you," Richard said, patting her shoulder as if she were a little girl who could be pawned off on a friendly uncle.

John put his arm around Tanya's shoulder. "Come on," he said, "we'll see what my Porsche can do. You don't want to ride in his junk heap anyhow." He steered Tanya toward his blue car.

"You look sort of down at the mouth. You can't be worried about Dianna—are you?"

Tanya smiled tremulously, "I think Richard's still in love with her."

John smiled at her, "He married you, didn't he?"

"Yes," she admitted. Did John know anything about the circumstances of her marriage, she wondered. She guessed not by his next words.

"You shouldn't give it a second thought. It's easy to see he's found true love."

"Thanks," she told him. "Do you have a girl friend?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "Heather's staying with her parents in Scotland for a couple of months."

"What does she think of you racing?"

"She doesn't like it, but we've come to a compromise."

"I suppose it takes time," Tanya said.

"It'll grow on you. Richard's life is racing. The accident changed him and made him bitter. You've helped immensely. I didn't expect him back so soon."

"He didn't think he'd go back," Tanya told him.

"Oh, I did. Racing's in the blood. Don't worry. Everything's going to be fine."

John stopped the car on the street behind Richard's and they got out and went into the apartment house.

Richard and Dianna were waiting in the foyer. They all took the elevator to John's apartment.

Richard and Dianna sat down close together on the couch. John put on some music, and announced he'd get some lunch. Tanya went into the kitchen with him.

"I'll help," she said.

"Don't you think you should be chaperoning?" John said. "Dianna has that look in her eye."

"Richard's big enough to look after himself," Tanya told him, but her eyes were swimming with tears. Richard had hardly acknowledged her since they entered the apartment.

She helped John get out rolls, cheese and pickles. She had the tray ready when John kicked open the door for her.

He tried to close it before she saw what her anxious heart had known all day—Richard and Dianna close together on the sofa.

Trembling, she retreated to the kitchen to busy herself heating water for the coffee. By the time she followed John into the living room with it, Richard was standing by the window. Dianna was perched on a pile of cushions on the floor, smoothing her hair.

"Dick and I have been talking about a party," Dianna told John and Tanya. "I'll have it at my place. A sort of welcome back for Dick."

"Fine," John said. He glanced at Tanya but all she could do was try and smile at him. If she wanted Richard, she would have to have his friends and his life. That was obvious.

Around four o'clock Richard stood up. "We should get going. By the way John, I think we're going to have to rent an apartment in town so that I can get to the track more often."

"You can stay here anytime," John said. "You're both welcome!"

"Thanks." Richard looked down at Dianna who hadn't moved from the cushions all afternoon. "I'll see you, Dianna."

"At the party. Saturday. Don't forget."

"We'll look forward to it," Richard said.

John saw them to the door. "Give me a call," he told Richard. He grinned at Tanya, "I'll be seeing you."

"I suppose you won't want to come with me again?" Richard said when they were on the freeway driving north.

"If you want me to, I will," she said and looked out of the window.

"Admit it," he said, "you don't want me to race again, do you? You didn't really want me to get well. You enjoyed mothering me."

"That's not true," Tanya looked at him.

"Of course it's true. I got well because I have to race and I don't want anyone stopping me."

"Nothing I say would stop you," she told him quietly, tears stinging her eyes, wondering if his contact with Dianna had brought on this outburst. Dianna had a fearless personality. She would encourage him to race, Tanya was sure of that.

He put his foot down on the accelerator and the powerful car shot forward. Tanya sat back, watching him drive. She knew that he was in full control of the car. The speed was nothing compared with what he drove on the racing circuit.

There was a hard ruthless expression on his face as he pushed the vehicle to its full capacity. It was a side of him that Tanya hadn't really experienced before, and it scared her more than the speed they were traveling. He was in full control of his senses again. Reckless and fearless. He needed no softhearted wife to divert his concentration.

Tanya went for a swim immediately when they reached home. She had no desire to share the house with Richard in his present mood. It was dark by the time she returned, wrapped in a terry robe. Richard was sitting on the sofa. He was flicking restlessly through a magazine.

"So you decided to come back?" he said, looking up at her, his gray eyes fathomless in the half light.

"It got cool," she told him.

"If it hadn't, would you have stayed there all night?"

"Maybe." Tears threatened, but she held back. This was no time to weaken.

He put the magazine aside and stood up. "Oh, for Pete's sake," he told her impatiently, go and slip into something dry. You look half frozen."

If he could be so cool, then so could she. She went into the bedroom and closed the door. She would never let him see how much he had hurt her.

Chapter Ten

Tanya got up before Richard. She was putting on the coffee when he came out.

"I want to apologize," he said, digging his thumbs in the low belt of his jeans.

She turned to him, anxiously wondering what kind of mood he was in today. But he was calm, his eyes warm in the morning sunlight.

"I thought it might be nice if we went for a hike. We could take a picnic?"

If this was a peace offering, then she'd take it.

"Okay," she agreed.

Richard carried the knapsack on his back as they made their way along the pathway between the cool mossy rocks. Tanya felt the tensions of the past two days begin to recede.

Richard looked relaxed. As though he'd forgotten about racing and the return of Dianna Watson for a while.

They found a cool grassy spot beneath the shade of a huge pine tree to eat lunch.

Richard ate a sandwich, washed it down with a swig of beer, and made himself more comfortable against the trunk of the tree.

Tanya lay on her stomach on the mossy ground, The sound of the lake splashed up against the rocks in front of her.

"Penny for them," Richard teased. He tickled her nose with a blade of grass.

"I was just thinking how pleasant it is here," she sat up and stretched her tanned limbs.

"Unfortunately we can't be on vacation forever," he said. "Bills to pay."

"I know." He meant that he'd be working again. That meant racing. She'd just have to think of what he did as a job.

"I'm sorry about yesterday," he sighed. "But I have to get back, It's like swimming again after almost drowning. You just have to plunge straight in."

"I understand."

"I'm glad." He smiled at her. "Then you're ready to meet the gang. Don't forget the party on Saturday night."

"I've nothing to wear." Tanya had no desire to even see Dianna again, let alone go to her party. But if she did have to go she wanted to look great. You have lots of pretty things: But if you want, we can go and get you something. I'll go to the track while you shop."

"Maybe I will," Tanya agreed. She would get something smooth and sophisticated. She would show Dianna that she could hang on to her man.

"We'll go in Saturday morning. We can change at John's," Richard told her. "How does that sound?"

"Fine." She looked out over the blue lake, the sunshine, the calm. It was almost as though this was the lull before the storm.

"Richard..." She turned to him and he took her into his arms to kiss her. His hands pushed her T-shirt aside to cup her breasts. His lips moved to her throat and down on to the

warm inviting curve below. Tanya touched his bare chest. Her palms moved against his flat stomach muscles.

"Love me—" she whispered with desperation and a feeling that it might be the last time.

Tanya tried to ignore the feeling of doom that hung over her Saturday morning when Richard dropped her off downtown.

"I'll pick you up right here at six o'clock. Okay?"

"Okay," she told him and got out of the car.

She was disappointed that he made no move to kiss her good-bye.

She stood and watched him maneuver the car through the traffic. Then with a sigh she turned around.

"Some car," a young boy said. He'd been standing watching Richard drop her off. "You his girl?"

"No," Tanya said, "just his wife."

She walked in the direction of the stores. She'd made up her mind what kind of dress she wanted for Dianna's party this evening. She just hoped that she could find it.

The dress was green silk. It cost much more money than she'd ever paid for any article of clothing in her life. But it was sophisticated.

"Sure it's not too old for you dear?" the store assistant said, standing back to look at the way Tanya's slim curves filled the soft material.

"No," Tanya shook her head. The bodice was cut into a low vee so that it exposed her tanned cleavage. There were no sleeves and the skirt was straight cut, slit halfway up her thigh.

"The color is beautiful with your skin and eyes," the saleslady told her.

"I'll take it," Tanya said.

Luckily she was able to find a pair of highheeled sandals in the same shade of green. Then she went along to the beauty salon.

"I want it up. Sophisticated," she told the man.

"It's such beautiful hair. You should wear it flowing." The hairdresser let it fall over his fingers.

"Please put it up," she told him.

Richard picked her up in the designated spot. He sniffed the air. "You smell like a perfume counter. Actually you look great." His eyes admired her smoothly piled hair, with its tiny curls framing her cheeks.

He rummaged in the glove compartment as they waited for a red light. "I hope this matches the dress."

He handed her a velvet jewelry case.

Tanya opened it with trembling fingers. Other than her wedding ring, Richard had never given her a gift. It was an emerald pendant on a delicate gold chain.

"How did you guess?" She was so pleased.

"That you'd buy green?"

She nodded.

"I just thought you'd do anything to play up those green eyes."

"Thank you," she said softly.

"You can thank me more profusely later," he told her.

"I will," she promised.

John wasn't home when they arrived at his apartment, but Richard had a key.

"John has given us permission to use the place as our own," he told her, dumping her parcels on the bed. "The party's at eight. We'll go for dinner first."

He took off his jacket, "I think I'll take a shower."

Tanya stood in the doorway. "How was your practice?"

"Fine. John's going to go around with me tomorrow. You must come and watch."

Okay," she nodded.

He went into the bathroom and turned on the shower. Tanya unpacked the green dress and shoes and put them out on the bed. Was this John's room? No, it was too bare.

Probably the guest room.

Richard came out of the bathroom with a white towel around his waist.

"This was my room when I stayed with John," he said as though he'd been reading her thoughts. "Maybe we should stay here tonight."

"Fine with me," Tanya said, knowing that they would be home late from the party. If Richard wanted to practice again tomorrow, then they might as well stay.

Tanya went into the bathroom. She took off her slacks and blouse and got into a cool bath. She didn't want to wreck her new hairstyle by showering.

There was a terry wrap hanging on the hook on the back of the door. It was obviously a woman's because it fitted Tanya perfectly. If this had been Richard's room, was it Dianna's?

She picked up her clothes and went out into the bedroom. Richard was dressing. He buckled his belt. Then he came up behind her. His lips brushed her bare neck.

"You haven't thanked me for the pendant yet," he said. "I see that it's an exact match for the dress."

"Who does this belong to?" she indicated the wrap she was wearing.

"John," he murmured, putting his arms around her.

"It's a woman's."

"Heather, then." He parted the robe and his hands curved the contours of her breasts.

"Not Dianna?"

"I've never been here with Dianna," he said.

"But you have been with Dianna?"

"If you mean what I think you mean, yes, I have been with Dianna."

"I see." Tanya backed away from him, holding the robe around her.

"But not here and that's not her robe. It probably belongs to Heather or even John's sister."

"Sister!" Tanya laughed.

"Well he does have a sister and she does stay here occasionally."

"I suppose."

"Be quiet!" He pulled her close again. "Thank me for that pendant before I go crazy." His mouth covered hers in a hard kiss before it eased into gentleness. Tanya couldn't resist him. She wound her arms around his neck, her fingers thrilling to the texture of his hair.

He lifted her in his arms and dropped her onto the bed. He came down beside her and claimed her lips once more, his hands molding her body in a slow caressing motion. His breathing was as ragged and uneven as her own as they came together and made love more roughly than usual, but with so much pleasure Tanya was exhausted afterwards.

She knew they fell asleep because the next thing she heard was John's voice calling, "Anyone home?"

Richard mumbled, "That's John."

"Come on, I know you're home. Your car's outside."

Richard propped himself up on his elbow. "We're just getting changed," he shouted. "'Won't be long."

"Fine," John answered.

Richard glanced at Tanya who was pulling on the terry wrap to cover herself. "I'm glad he didn't come home earlier."

"Me too," she told him, wondering if John would realize what they had done. Surely it would show that she was bursting with love.

He kissed her, got up and finished dressing. Then went out to see John.

Tanya roused herself from the bed. She put on the green dress and sandals. The pendant Richard had given her nestled between her breasts and glimmered brightly when hit by a ray of light. She touched it gently. It must have cost quite a bit. The chain was gold. She put on a light eye makeup that flattered her tan. Then she tidied her hair.

She felt pleased with her appearance when she stepped out of the bedroom to where the two men were having a drink.

"Wow." John stood up. "You look absolutely great!"

Richard also stood up. He didn't speak, but let her walk toward him. He reached out and fingered the emerald so that the back of his hand brushed her breast.

His eyes raked over her, noting her cheeks still flushed from his lovemaking. Her eyes were a deep lustrous green.

"Beautiful," he said softly.

Tanya swallowed hard. Her appearance had affected him in some way. It had brought an emotion to the surface, even if it wasn't love.

"Well do you think we should go?" John brought them back to reality.

"I guess we should." Richard smiled ruefully.

They took separate cars and met at a restaurant. Tanya felt quite pleased with herself as she was seated between Richard and John. Both men were dressed in dark suits and both looked handsome. Not that Richard could be outdone, she thought. With his gold hair and tan sparkling against the white of his shirt, he was easily the best looking man in the restaurant. Many of the women seated nearby were giving him covetous looks.

Even if he won't be mine forever, he's mine right at this moment, she thought. *I'll make the most of it.*

The meal lasted a long time. Tanya ate iced melon, followed by baked salmon. She turned down the dessert and just accepted coffee. John ordered a bottle of champagne.

"To welcome Richard back into the land of the living," he said, holding up his glass of the bubbling liquid. "Let's hope he wins them all."

Tanya raised her glass to John's. As she heard the tiny clink, she felt her heart constrict.

When they drove up in front of Dianna's house, Tanya was surprised that Dianna lived in such a large place. She'd expected a bachelor apartment. She said as much to Richard.

"Dianna's man was a very successful driver. He died when his car flipped in an accident. Also she runs a very successful boutique," Richard explained.

So all Dianna's men were racing drivers. Had Dianna felt the same way as Tanya at one time? Tanya thought not. Dianna enjoyed the thrill of racing as much as the drivers. If one died then it was just the luck of the game. She moved on to the next.

A maid led them into a large room where a party was in full swing. Dianna came through the crowds.

"Dickie, I'm so glad you've arrived." She hung on to his arm. "There are so many people here just dying to see you again. Mind if I take him away for a while?" she asked Tanya.

Tanya shook her head. What could she say?

John was by her side. "She gets her claws in early," he said.

"I'm afraid so," Tanya smiled halfheartedly.

"Well then, let me get a drink. What do you want?"

"Maybe some wine."

"Wine coming up." John went off to get it. Tanya glanced around. Richard and Dianna were in the middle of a crowd of smartly dressed people. Richard glanced down at Dianna with laughter in his gray eyes. Dianna was dressed in a red silk dress that left nothing to the imagination.

John arrived with Tanya's glass of wine, and handed it to her. He sipped his own drink.

"I must say you look beautiful this evening," he told her. "When you walked out of that room—well," he shrugged.

Tanya forced a smile. "You're good for me."

"If I didn't have Heather, I think you'd be very good for me too," he said seriously.

"Oh, John," she tried to dismiss his comment.

"I mean it, Tanya."

"You're just lonely."

"I might be at that," he said, "but it still doesn't take away from the fact that you're a very lovely woman and if I had to choose between you and Dianna, I know who it would be."

"John." She shook her head and smiled at him.

"Still," he shrugged. "Richard's going through a pretty hard time right now. He was probably scared when he got into that car this week."

"Richard scared?" Tanya was incredulous.

"Of course. After an accident like he had? It takes courage. Richard may have nerves of steel but he's still human."

"How bad was it, John?" she asked.

"Luckily he wasn't burned, but he broke just about everything there was to break. The worst part was the spine injury. Amazingly he's recovered. I must say at times I thought it was good-bye either to Richard himself or his racing."

Tanya glanced across to where Richard was chatting with a man. He was standing easily with no trace of discomfort. He looked tanned and healthy, as though he'd never been ill.

"Loving you gave him something to live for." John intercepted her glance. "I'm glad to see him so well again."

"You're a good friend, John," Tanya said, as Richard approached them.

"What are you doing with my wife?" Richard asked good-naturedly.

John turned toward him. "Making sure she has a drink and telling her that I've fallen in love with her."

Richard's expression changed and his lips thinned, "Oh you are, are you?"

"She's most desirable," John said. "Anyhow I must circulate. See you both later."

Richard's hand caught at Tanya's elbow almost making her drop the glass of wine.

"John's getting very friendly with you?"

"He's just joking. I like him very much."

"Has he told you about Heather?"

"Yes he has." She jerked away from his grasp. Was he jealous? Surely not!

"Did he tell you he's going to stop racing because of her?"

"No." She glanced up at him. His expression was hard.

"That's her one stipulation on marriage."

"He said they'd compromised," Tanya said.

"Compromised! Given up his life more like it."

"If they love each other though, Richard?"

"If she loved him, she'd want his happiness."

She couldn't answer him. She'd only argue. She took a sip of the wine and moved around with him for a while, meeting people.

After a while, she only wanted to escape the party. The crowd was stifling her. And Richard? She didn't know where Richard was. He'd disappeared while she'd been talking to an Englishman who was over in Canada on holiday. She couldn't even see Dianna's red dress through the mass of people.

She wandered out into the hallway and up the stairs to the room that had been designated as the women's powder room. She checked her makeup in the mirror, smoothed her hair and went outside to the landing. The room downstairs was loud with music, talk and laughter. She really didn't want to face it.

Then she heard voices. They were coming from one of the rooms along the hall. One was unmistakably Richard's. She walked up to the door that was slightly ajar.

Dianna was saying, "That night we met in the restaurant. I knew—" Dianna sighed. "I never should have left you, Dick. Please believe me."

"I went crazy, Dianna," Richard said. Then there was silence.

Tanya didn't want to glance inside. She was scared of what she might see. Although she had a pretty good idea. Her imagination had the couple entwined in one another's arms.

Somehow she managed to get down the stairs and back into the party. Her legs felt as though they wouldn't support her much longer and she leaned against the wall. Noone seemed to be noticing her discomfort, however, engrossed as they were in having fun. They probably thought she'd had too much to drink.

"Tanya?" It was John and he sounded worried, "Are you feeling okay?"

"Fine," she told him.

"I'll get you something. Hang on."

He came back with a glass of brandy. "Here, have some of this."

The liquid burned fire down her throat, but it brought life back to her body.

"Thanks," she smiled weakly, "I just felt a little faint."

"Too many people. Would you like to go outside for a while where it's cool?"

"Please." She let John take hold of her hand as they walked out into the garden.

It was a big house and the garden matched it for size. It was a maze of rosebushes and flowers. Their scent drifted toward them in the summer air.

Tanya took a deep breath of the fresh air.

"Better?" John asked.

She smiled shakily. Her world had smashed. For all that had happened to her in her life, she'd never felt this bad.

"Are you going to tell me what happened?"

"I don't think so—"

"It sometimes helps," John prodded.

Maybe it would. She said quite calmly, "Richard and Dianna were upstairs in one of the bedrooms."

"Oh, no." John put his arms around her. He held her close against his chest. "It's just a phase," he soothed. "It'll pass, believe me. Don't take it seriously."

"How I wish it was that easy," she murmured, close to tears from John's comfort

"It's Dianna's game," he said, "believe me."

"But Richard's playing it," she choked.

"He's crazy." John looked down at her, his arms tightening. Then with a sigh he released her. "Let's go back inside."

They went back into the house. The party was still in full swing. It would probably go on to the early hours of the morning. There was still no sign of Richard and Dianna. Were they making love? Tanya touched the emerald pendant between her breasts. She tugged at it, but it only hurt the back of her neck. It wouldn't break. Richard had bought her off with it, as though giving a child a toy to keep it happy.

She danced with John, giving an impression of enjoying herself. She wasn't going to let Dianna, Richard, or any of his friends see that she was upset. They'd just finished a dance when Richard came to find her.

"Care to dance?" Richard asked, his features tense. It was as though he were performing a disagreeable duty.

She hesitated, but John pushed her forward. "Go on," he whispered.

Richard put his arms around her and held her close. Her cheek rested against the crisp white shirt. She could hear the steady beat of his heart. Her fingers screwed up into a fist within his. She wanted to pound him! She wanted to cry! But when he released her, she was calm.

"Shall we leave?" he said, and she nodded agreement.

Tanya rested her head against the back of her seat in the car.

"Enjoy yourself?" Richard asked.

"It was fine," she told him.

"But not your scene?"

"I didn't know anyone."

"You knew John."

"John was just being kind because you left me alone." She glanced out of the window at the passing neon lights of the city.

"There were a lot of friends there I hadn't seen for a long time. I'm sorry if it seemed as though I ignored you."

"I understand."

"I doubt it," he muttered.

John was already home when they arrived at his apartment. He bid them good-night and went to his room. Tanya followed Richard into the room they'd used earlier.

Richard undressed, went to the bathroom and got into bed. He lay down on his side not looking at Tanya as she took off the green dress. She had no night clothes as she hadn't expected to stay away a night. She left on her underwear. After using the bathroom, she slipped into bed beside Richard. She turned away from him.

She was still wide awake when she heard his even breathing in sleep. Gone were the nightmares. The time when he'd needed her. Instead, she had her own nightmare. An image of Richard and Dianna making love.

Richard was up and dressed when Tanya woke the next morning. She could hear him talking to John. She took a shower and dressed in her slacks and blouse from the day before. She stuffed the green dress in its box. It hadn't done

her much good spending all that money! Inconsistent with her thoughts at the party, she slipped the emerald pendant around her neck. At least she had something of Richard. Something that Dianna Watson didn't have.

It had rained heavily in the night leaving the surrounding countryside of the racetrack fresh and green. John and Richard went to get ready while Tanya leaned on the fence. Her eyes scanned the crowd that was gathering. She watched other drivers, mechanics, and all assortment of attractive girls.

Richard and John came out. There seemed to be a lot to discuss about the cars. Finally the two men each climbed into a vehicle, strapped in and roared off to the track.

Tanya watched them start. Jeff, the man she'd met the other day, accompanied by another man, was using a stopwatch.

As the cars completed their first lap, she wasn't quite sure who was who. Well at least Dianna Watson wasn't here today. She could stand and watch the driving alone with her own fear. Not that Richard cared one way or the other that she was fearful for him. He'd hardly spoken to her this morning. Even John had been tense today. His strained attempts to keep a conversation flowing at breakfast had eventually ended in silence.

She felt she could get used to the silent tension before Richard raced. She realized that it took a great amount of control. What she couldn't get used to, was the fact that last night at the party, he'd been in a bedroom with another woman.

The sound of screeching tires out on the track, made Tanya's heart almost stop beating. Jeff Denver began to run toward the sound.

One of the cars was spinning sideways, hurling dust and debris around. It hit the guard railing, bounced off and then turned full circle in the center of the track. The other car stopped further up and John got out. She could tell the two men apart by their height even though she couldn't tell the difference in dress.

It was Richard's car. He was still inside. She began to run. Her throat constricted. It was very hot and humid. Perspiration soaked her clothing.

Richard got out and moved swiftly away from the car as she arrived.

"Richard!" She went to him, but he pushed her away as he took off his helmet and protective mask. Perspiration streaked his face and hair.

"Get away," he said. "Don't you know that thing could catch fire?"

John joined them and ripped off his own helmet.

"Tanya, go back," he told her gently. "It's okay."

"I thought maybe—" She stood in front of the two men, her breath uneven. Fear and hurt made her eyes luminous.

"Just get off!" Richard dismissed her. "I'll need a tow," he yelled at one of the men who was standing around. Then he began to walk toward the pits while John went back to his car.

Tanya followed Richard, not daring to talk to him. She noticed his limp was quite prominent as it hadn't been for some time. She followed him into the building.

"Richard?" she inquired tentatively.

He turned around.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," he said. "Now do as I say and go and wait for me."

The heat and humidity emphasized the odor of oil and gasoline. People were staring at her, but she didn't care. All she cared about was Richard. She continued to follow him.

He began to strip off his clothes.

"Richard?"

"I told you to get lost." His eyes were icy.

"You almost crashed. What do you expect me to do?"

"I didn't almost crash. I spun. That's all. Now leave, Tanya, please. I'll see you outside."

"It's too much for you. You aren't ready for it yet. I don't care what the doctor says."

"I'm the one who decides what I'm ready for."

"But I'm your wife."

He stared at her; his face pale, his lips thin.

"Yes, that was something I avoided before," he told her.

Her world crashed around her at his words. "Do you think you've made a mistake?" she asked with more calm than she'd credit herself with.

"Maybe I have."

She turned abruptly and ran out through the maintenance area. She slipped on an oil patch, but managed to right herself before she hit the ground.

John was working on the other car when she ran out. He anxiously scanned her taut features.

"Okay?" he asked.

But she didn't answer. She ran out to the parking lot. Mistake! He'd admitted that he'd made a mistake by marrying her. He'd never loved her. He had just been playing with her, using her for his amusement while he had no racing schedule to occupy his time.

Her legs trembled violently as she got into the car. She leaned back against the seat. She bit her lip against the tears. She wasn't going to cry.

She fumbled with the catch of the emerald and stuffed it into the pocket of her slacks. What did it matter that she had expensive jewelry when Dianna Watson had his love? His love was so much more important.

She didn't know how long she sat in the car, but when Richard got in beside her it seemed as though it had been hours.

"Aren't you hot and stuffy?" he said, winding down the window. He leaned across and wound down her window. His arm brushed her breast and she cowered back.

"What's wrong?"

"Do you have to ask?" she said stiffly.

"If you mean my behavior just now, I'm not apologizing. You have to learn not to get hysterical at the least little thing. You could get injured running around on the track like that."

Richard fingered the steering wheel. "I appreciate your concern, but it's not necessary."

"It was once," she told him.

He glanced at her, his eyes cool, not really focusing. "We made a bargain," he said, "I'd get you out of a sticky patch. You'd help me out of mine. I think we've done that for each other."

"What happens now?" She was close to tears from the coldness of his words.

"We go on as we are. We seem to have hit on a reasonably satisfying relationship." He started the car. "Okay?"

"Okay." She clenched her fists in her lap. She wasn't going to break down.

They drove up north in silence. Richard drove without the speed he usually added to his expertise. Tanya suspected he was tired, but he wouldn't admit it. Especially not to her.

She was glad to reach home. There was a peace surrounding the house and the lake that wasn't to be found in the city. She went for a long exhausting walk along the lakeshore. When she got back, she went to bed. She slipped beneath the sheets and stared up at the ceiling. Richard wandered restlessly around the house. He came to stand by the open bedroom door.

"You lost something." He threw something at her. It fell against the pillow. Tanya propped herself up and touched it. It was the emerald pendant.

"I must have dropped it," Tanya shrugged.

"Isn't the clasp working properly?"

"Yes it is. I took it off."

"I found it outside by the car," he said. "I'd appreciate you looking after the things I give you."

"Why? So that I can show people what a wonderful husband you are?"

His features went taut.

"Did you give Dianna Watson gifts? Is that why she thinks she still has claim to you?"

"What do you mean?" His eyes were an icy gray.

Her lips trembled, "I saw you with Dianna."

He frowned, "I don't get you?"

"Upstairs at Dianna's. You were in a bedroom with her."

Red suffused beneath his tan. He swallowed hard, but remained calm. "What do you want me to do about it?"

She shrugged, "What do you want to do?"

"I could explain."

She shook her head, "Why bother? We don't love each other so I suppose it doesn't really matter."

"I suppose not," he said dully.

She held out the pendant. "You can take this," she said. "Why not give it to Dianna?"

He held out his hand, and she slipped the cool pendant on to the warmth of his palm.

"I'd rather you didn't share the bed with me tonight Richard. I don't like other women's cast-off's."

He glanced at the jewelry he was holding. "I'll sleep upstairs," he said.

"Good-night then," she moved down into the bed. Her calm was deserting her. She was going to cry if he didn't leave.

A Race For Love
by Jillian Dagg

"Good-night. But this is yours." He placed the emerald pendant on her dresser before he left the room.

Chapter Eleven

Tanya was awake when she heard Richard get up. She listened to the slam of the front door and the roar of the Ferrari departing. Turning her head into the pillow, she cried noiselessly until she could cry no more. Exhausted, she fell asleep. It was almost midday by the time she finally got up.

She washed and put on jeans and an old T-shirt, then forced down a cup of coffee. She had work to do. She might as well do it. It would keep her mind off Richard. And who knew when he'd be back? She didn't even know where he was, but she could guess.

She dragged out the ironing board and set it up. There were Richard's shirts to be ironed. A few days ago she might have taken pleasure in doing them for him, but not today. She wanted more from Richard than being his maid. But from force of habit, she hung the shirts neatly on their hangers and climbed up the stairs to put them in the closet. She tried not to notice the unmade, rumpled bed, the indentation on the pillow where he had laid his blond head. A mistake he'd told her. *He'd seen Dianna Watson again and realized that he'd made a mistake.* She made the bed and then started at the sound of a rap at the front door. No one usually called on them here except John. She went down the steps and opened the door. It was Dianna Watson. Well, at least she wasn't with Richard. Tanya's spirits lifted a fraction at the thought.

"Hi," Dianna said, walking boldly into the house. "Dick around?"

"No he's not." Tanya's clothes felt untidy in contrast to Dianna's smart white pantsuit.

"Oh, well." Dianna took off her sunglasses. She glanced around the room, "I just thought you might like some female company. Life could get boring stuck away up here."

"Not really," Tanya said.

"Well," the woman shrugged her slim shoulders. "Aren't you going to offer me a drink? I'd like a nice glass of white wine after traveling all that way."

"I'm afraid we're out of wine. We only have beer or soft drinks."

"Oh, in that case, beer will do."

Tanya went into the kitchen and ungraciously emptied a can of beer into a glass.

"Thanks." Dianna took the overflowing glass. Aren't you joining me?"

"No. It's too early for me to drink. I've got coffee."

"I might as well sit down then." Dianna walked over to the sofa and perched on the edge. She slipped her shoulder bag onto the floor beside her feet. "I hear there was a bit of excitement out at the track yesterday? Richard almost crashed?"

"He spun," Tanya told her. "Nothing serious."

"But you were scared. I hear you were quite upset. Went chasing after him or something?"

"Do you have spies there?" Tanya asked.

Dianna smiled. "Actually I do." Then she came straight to the point. "I don't think you're right for Richard. He needs

someone strong, someone who can support his work, who doesn't crumble at the least little thing."

Tanya grew angry, "I don't think it's any of your business."

"Of course it's my business. Richard and I—well, we once had a good relationship."

"Had? Isn't that the key word?" Tanya glanced at Dianna. She sounded cool, but underneath she wanted to lash out at the woman.

"Dick doesn't love you."

"He does," Tanya said with more conviction than she felt. "We have a very good relationship." And they did if Dianna didn't keep interfering.

"I'd suggest," Dianna put down her glass, "that you reconsider your marriage. Let Dick go free. He obviously had a moment of weakness during his illness, but he doesn't need a nurse now."

"I was never his nurse."

"Maybe not, but he still loves me."

"Has he told you he still loves you?" Tanya asked. She felt close to tears, but she wasn't going to lose control in the presence of this spiteful woman. If she'd learned one thing in the past few days, it was to hide her emotions.

"He doesn't need to. It's unspoken," Dianna said.

"I don't believe you."

"It's true. Dick needs me. He always has. The one time I let him down, he had that accident. I've never forgiven myself."

Tanya stared at Dianna. Her heart was pounding. Was she hearing right? Had Dianna been the cause of Richard's accident?

"What happened?" she couldn't help asking."

"We had a fight before he left for the States. He wanted me to go with him. I couldn't—!"

"But if you loved him you would have gone. You would have stayed with him afterwards."

"What do you know of love?"

"A lot more than you," Tanya said. "Now would you please leave my house."

"Your house?" Dianna raised an eyebrow. "You really do think you've got him, don't you?" Nevertheless Dianna got up. She picked up her purse and slid it onto her shoulder.

Tanya followed her out to her sports car.

"Well, thanks for the beer," Dianna said. "I'll tell Dick I've seen you. I'll be seeing him tonight."

She got into her car. "Next time," she said, "get yourself a man whom you can hang on to."

As Dianna drove off, Tanya couldn't even think of an answer for her.

It was late afternoon. The air felt heavy and the lake was black and boiling. Lightning crackled ominously through the air. Tanya fastened all the windows and huddled in the corner of the sofa, hoping for the sound of Richard's Ferrari. Thunder roared all around her and rain pounded on the roof. At midnight Tanya gave up. She crawled into bed, lonely and scared, pulling the covers over her head to somewhat muffle

the bursts of thunder. Was Richard still with Dianna? Was he holding her close amid the ragings of the storm?

A few hours later she was wakened by the sound of the key being turned in the lock. She put on her side light and looked at the clock. Half-past two. She recognized Richard's footsteps in the living room and out in the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator and then walked back into the living room.

She got out of bed and slipped on her robe, tying the belt as she went to the bedroom door.

"You're home?"

He was standing with his back to the fireplace with a glass of beer in his hand. "Seems that way." His eyes looked disgusted by her disheveled appearance, her tangled auburn hair and tear-stained face.

"Did you have a good day?" she asked.

"Very good." He opened the top buttons on his denim shirt.

"Did you get to the track?"

He nodded.

"That's good," she said. She looked toward the window. "It's stopped raining."

"For a while now."

"I'm kind of scared of storms."

His glance was disparaging. "Seems you're scared of most things."

"That's not true," She shouldn't have given him the chance to undermine her. She looked down at her bare toes, "Can I get you anything to eat?"

"I'm fine thanks," he said. "Why don't you get back to bed. You look beat."

"I'm okay," she told him."

"You don't look okay."

"It's been a hot, stormy day," she licked her lips nervously.

"Then why don't you go to bed and sleep? I'd kind of like to be alone now, Tanya."

Tanya went back into her room and closed the door, Kneeling on her bed, she looked out into the darkness. She could barely make out the shapes of the black rocks along the lake below the cedar forest. She knew she couldn't stay here if Richard treated her like this. He had made it painfully obvious that he no longer wanted her. She'd heard the contempt in his terse tones and seen the coldness of his eyes. Better to go before the situation got any worse and while she still had a shred of pride.

The next morning Richard came to the door of her room. "I was wondering if you would like to swim?" he asked.

She sat up in bed and shook her head, "You go on."

"It might make you feel better."

"I'm fine and I don't want to swim." She pushed her hands through her tangled hair. Her eyes were dull and listless from lack of sleep.

"I'll get you some tea," he said.

He returned a few minutes later and put the tray on her bedside table. "Here."

"I don't want it."

"What do you mean you don't want it?"

"Just what I said."

"Don't be awkward, Tanya."

"I just don't want anything from you."

"What have I done?"

"What have you done?" She looked at him incredulously.

"You've destroyed my life that's what you've done. You've got a housekeeper and a cook. You had a nurse when you were ill, and a woman when you needed one. But you don't need one anymore because the woman you love has just blinked her pretty blue eyes at you. You think I'm just some unsophisticated kid who you can chuck away now that the hard times are over. But I'm not!" She swallowed hard. "I've grown up quickly these last months. I'll be twenty one in a few weeks, and I feel as though I were forty."

"I'm sorry," he said, his eyes like washed gray stones. He tucked his thumbs in the leather belt of his jeans and seemed to be waiting for her to finish.

"You should be! I wish had never laid eyes on you!" she shouted. "*Dickie*," she screamed sarcastically, and threw herself down into the bed.

How long she stayed like that she didn't know. She must have fallen asleep. When she woke up, the anguish and crying were gone, to be replaced by a listless calm that scared her. She had never felt so empty before.

She dressed in her jeans and blue top. After fixing herself a cup of coffee, she wandered out to the screened veranda. Richard was sitting on a lounge reading a book.

"Nice day," she said leaning against the wire screen and looking out toward the lake. The storm had washed away the clouds. The air was fresh and sparkling

Richard deliberately marked the page of his book and put it down. "Great," he replied. "Are you feeling better now?"

"I'm fine," she lied. "How about you?"

"Good."

She caught him looking at her in a strange way. "Why are you staring at me like that?" she asked, eyeing him suspiciously.

"I was wondering."

"About what?"

"About us."

"Do you want a divorce?" she asked. It was probably the next logical step.

"Oh, Tanya." He stood up and walked to the opposite end of the veranda.

"Well, do you?"

"Of course not," he said roughly. "Look honey. I've just come to the time when I'm going to race again, that's all, and I don't want any arguments."

Was that all their argument had been about? She didn't think so. But she felt confused and her head ached. She was too tired to fight about anything. When Richard suggested a walk, she accepted out of lassitude. What difference did it make anyway? He started out ahead of her, stopping only occasionally to spin a stone in the water. There was no conversation between them. She was almost relieved when he told her he had work to do and had to go back to his study. "Don't bother about lunch," he told her, "I'll get my own when I feel like it. I have lots of catching up to do."

A Race For Love
by Jillian Dagg

Tanya spent a lonely afternoon. She tried to read a book, but the words blurred before her eyes. She prepared a cold chicken supper. Richard joined her. Sunset should have been a moment of sharing, but the silence between them was so tense that Tanya kept making excuses to go to the kitchen.

When Richard settled himself in front of the television, she crept to bed. She wondered if he would come to her. Later she heard his steps on the ladderlike stairs.

The next day dawned hot and sultry. Richard had left a note saying that he would not be back until evening. She threw it away. What difference did it make? She was trapped here anyway. She had no car. Not that she could drive the Ferrari. Richard had taken her out a few times and tried to teach her, but the car was powerful and temperamental and she had never learned to control it. *Like its owner*, she thought, wandering about the house listless and teary. What a mess she had made of her life! She saw no future at all.

She put on Richard's white terry robe and walked down the rocky steps, perspiration dripping from her body. When she got to the lake, she took off the robe and plunged off the dock. The cool water hit her naked flesh with the force of a slap. She gasped, but taking a deep breath, she stretched out across the water. Soon she was swimming strongly out toward the center. She turned on her back and looked up at the floating clouds. It had only been a few days ago, but it seemed an eternity, since she and Richard had swum out here together, side by side, she trying to match her irregular stroke to his even crawl. She swam back to the dock, hauled herself up, and reached for her robe. Wandering slowly up the

steep slope, she kicked aimlessly at the pebbles, oblivious of the pain to her bare feet.

As she approached the house, she could hear the phone ringing. She quickened her step and picked up the receiver with trembling hands.

"Hi," the voice was casual, "how're you doing?"

"Fine." Her tone was even. Why should he know the agony he was causing?

"Look. Will you be okay there alone tonight? I want to do some more driving tomorrow and I figure it'll be easier if I stay at John's."

"Great," she said, knowing if she tried to say more she'd give way.

"Make sure you lock everything up tight. Are you sure you don't mind?"

"No," she told him and hung up. She knew there would be no more tears tonight, only a searing pain as she thought of Richard making love to Dianna.

At ten she took a shower and lay naked beneath the sheets, trying to force herself to sleep, but it was no good. She put on her robe and sat huddled in a corner of the couch watching an old late movie without even bothering with the sound. She was still there when she woke up the next morning, feeling headachy and groggy. She got up and went to the window. It was pouring rain. There was no Ferrari outside.

She had to leave. There was no way she could spend another day and night alone here. She didn't even want to face Richard again. She dressed in jeans tucked into a pair of

rubber boots, put on a raincoat and trudged her way to the highway.

The road was muddy but the rain had eased slightly. She knew that Richard would probably come home today, and she didn't want to be here when he arrived. The fresh air had made her feel better by the time she reached the grocery store, where they picked up their mail. Tanya knew Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, the owners, well. They'd been friendly with Richard and seemed to think a lot of him.

"Terrible day to be out," Mrs. Thomas said as she got Tanya the mail. "How's your husband?"

"He's much better thank you," Tanya replied politely. "But I'm having family problems. I had a call from a relative in England who is sick. I was wondering if there's a bus that could take me to the airport? My husband's away for a few days and I've got no transportation."

"Have you booked a flight?" the woman asked.

"Yes," Tanya lied, "The bus already came through for today, but Harry and I are going into Toronto tonight to visit my sister; we could drop you off if you would like us to?"

"Would you really?" Tanya could hardly believe her luck.

"If you come up here at half-past six, we'll be leaving then."

"Oh thank you; you are kind." Tanya gave the woman a wide-eyed smile.

"You're welcome, dear."

The rain had stopped when she left the shop. It was getting hot again. Tanya took off the raincoat and carried it. She felt a little better. When she got back to England, she

could begin a new life as she should have done months ago. She wished that she had never met Richard. Before meeting him she'd been relatively contented. But no more. Who'd have thought that love could be so painful? She'd always imagined it to be something that generated happiness, not this aching void. Had Richard felt this way when Dianna had left him after his accident? He must not have cared for a while whether he lived or died.

When she got back to the house, she made herself some coffee and sat down at the breakfast nook to open their mail. There were a number of bills and a personal letter for Richard. Also, a letter addressed to them both from England. It was from Cheryle. She was marrying Jonathan and they were moving into the house together. She invited them to stay anytime they were in England and reiterated several times how happy she was. Tanya put the letter aside. She didn't really care if she saw Cheryle or the old house in England again, but she was glad someone was happy.

She phoned the airport and managed to get a booking to London for nine o'clock that evening. She hoped that Richard wouldn't come home before she left.

She packed a small bag and set it aside by the door, but she still had the entire afternoon to get through. She got out some of Richard's music and played an album she hadn't heard before. They were sad, haunting folk songs. She sat cross-legged on the floor and let the melody touch her heart realizing that she was giving in to self-indulgence. It would be the last time she sat in Richard's house.

A Race For Love
by Jillian Dagg

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were waiting in their big station wagon when she appeared outside the shop at half-past six.

She sat in the back seat listening to the couple's easy chatter wondering if it would ever have been like that between her and Richard. They let her off in front of the terminal with many good wishes for her trip and her relative's recovery. She felt guilty in the face of their open generosity.

The plane was delayed for an hour and Tanya sat in the terminal nervously watching the door, wondering if Richard had either phoned or arrived home. She had a horrible premonition that he'd know exactly where she would run to.

Then finally the flight was called and she was able to pass through security and walk to the plane. She took an inside seat. She couldn't bear to look down and see the same view that she'd shared with Richard with such anticipation those few short months ago.

There was no excitement in returning to England. After passing through customs and standing in the midst of the crush of people, she was overcome with loneliness. She knew no one and had nowhere to go. She tried not to think of the house by the lake. Even if Richard were not a loving husband, it had been her only home.

Chapter Twelve

Tanya closed the door behind her and entered the small dark hallway of the house where she, was staying. It was Saturday and she'd worked all day as a waitress in a restaurant on Kensington High Street. Not the kind of job for a woman expecting a baby, but the only work she could get, as she'd found out when she'd scoured the streets searching for employment. Not having office skills had been a considerable disadvantage. Even the manager at the restaurant had been dubious about taking on someone without any previous experience. Putting a weary hand on the old wooden banister, she had just started to climb the stairs, when her landlady, Mrs. Green, looked out of her sitting room. She had often invited Tanya in to watch television on weekends, and she now came out to ask her again. Her husband had died a few years ago and she seemed lonely. It was obvious that Tanya was lonely too.

"I'll just go and get changed," Tanya told her with a smile. "Won't be a minute."

"That's fine, love," Mrs. Green said and went back to the television. She always had it turned up twice as loud as necessary.

Tanya's room was a bed-sitter, modestly furnished with a narrow bed, a table and chair and a hot plate. Tanya had purchased a new bedspread and some colorful cushions, but although it helped a little, it would never be home. She had no initiative to do anything else. She changed into a

comfortable pair of jeans that she could open at the waist and fasten with a safety pin, as her waist had thickened. She put on a loose shirt blouse and went downstairs to join Mrs. Green.

Mrs. Green's sitting room was as dark and dull as the rest of the house. The curtains were brown and always pulled across the little bay window. The furniture was heavy and Victorian, much too large for the little room. But the rented color television set was modern, and it took Mrs. Green into a world of make-believe that she obviously needed.

Tanya sat down beside her on the couch.

"Have a hard day, love?"

Tanya nodded.

"Why don't you help yourself to a cup of tea?"

"Thank you." Tanya leaned over and poured herself a cup and stirred in milk. She'd eaten her dinner at the restaurant; it was part of her benefits of being a waitress. Not that she usually fancied much. She'd just managed to squeeze down a salad and a crusty roll and cheese. Since she'd left Richard there had been this painful ache at the pit of her stomach. Mrs. Green knew she was pregnant and Tanya had never lied about her name or her status. Maybe secretly she hoped that one day Richard might come looking for her and if she still had his name, she would be easier to trace.

Mrs. Green was watching a variety show and Tanya turned her attention to the frivolity because Mrs. Green liked to comment on all the performers and their clothes. Then when the news came on, Tanya wondered if she should go up to bed. She was almost asleep, nestled back on the soft couch,

when she heard the newsman say, "Today was a successful day in motor racing. At Silverstone this afternoon, driver Dick Wicklow made a comeback after almost two years off the racing scene. After trailing second for most of the race, Wicklow went on to overtake Swedish driver Nicolas Stoor near the end of the race and then remained in the lead to the finish. We'll have film of that win plus an interview with the driver himself immediately after the news."

Tanya twisted her wedding ring around on her finger, her breath coming unevenly. Richard was in England! She felt an intense physical desire to see him and have him hold her in his arms. It seemed an eternity while the news continued, showing pictures of bombs exploding, political leaders and then the Royal Family abroad, but at last an interviewer came on to the screen.

"Good evening," he said and smiled. "Tonight on Sports Spot we have an interview with Dick Wicklow, who made an amazing comeback at Silverstone this afternoon. You'll all remember that almost two years ago Dick suffered considerable and almost fatal injuries while racing in the Indianapolis 500. We'll show film of that crash now."

Tanya forced herself to watch the screen as the commentator noted that Richard's car was number eight. She tried unsuccessfully to recognize him as the camera panned the track. Suddenly the man was yelling incoherently into the microphone as number eight turned a full circle on the track before hitting the wall. The picture went into slow motion as, with stunned horror, Tanya watched Richard's car flip through

the air, then cartwheel in a spray of dust and pieces and slide toward the inside of the track.

Tanya leaped to her feet. On the screen she could dimly make out scurrying figures amid a cloud of billowing smoke. An ambulance wheeled onto the track. Two men jumped out of the rear, but the screen footage faded before she could see the stretcher or who was on it.

The interviewer came back on the screen, his expression grim. Luckily there was a happy ending," he said. "Dick survived that experience and now we'll see some film of this afternoon's win."

Tanya was still standing as they showed a car coming in first under the checkered flag. Then Richard, in his racing gear, jumped up onto a platform. Hair plastered to his forehead, he was grinning triumphantly beneath the sweat and grime. A blonde girl was hugging him on one side, John Laughton on the other. Then the film faded, and they were back in the studio. Richard's face came on, dear and familiar.

Trembling, Tanya sat down. She still loved him. She always would. Racing was his life and she would have to accept it. She loved him too much not to be with him. She wanted to wipe the silly smirk off the blonde's face. It was she, Tanya, who should have been up there on the platform, sharing his triumph, not some silly little fly-by-night girl friend. Or was the girl someone Richard really cared about? Since she had run away, had he found someone who had been more willing to share his racing life? She wrenched her attention back to the screen.

"At one time it must have seemed that you would never make it back on the track?" the interviewer asked Richard.

"I always knew I'd be back," Richard replied. "And I had two great people helping me. My friend, John Laughton, whom you all know as a champion driver in his own right, and my wife Tanya who stood by me when I'd almost lost faith."

"Is your wife here in England to share your victory?" the interviewer asked.

Richard looked directly into the camera. "Yes, she is."

Time was up. The interviewer thanked Richard for coming over to the studio. The credentials flowed over the screen, but Tanya could not see them through the blur of tears.

"Is something wrong, dear?" Mrs. Green asked solicitously. She put an arm around the girl's shaking shoulders.

"That's my husband," Tanya said between sobs.

"Your husband? But he's a famous man!"

"He can still be my husband. If you'll excuse me—"

She ran from the room and up the stairs, sinking down onto the hard little bed. Richard had mentioned her name on a national television program and declared publicly that she was his wife!

Would he be staying down in Surrey at Cheryle's? If not, surely Cheryle would know where he was. Her heart lurched. Maybe he would stay in London to celebrate his win with the blonde he'd been hugging? Well, she wouldn't think about that now. She would take a chance and go down to the old house. There was a wild hope that he needed her as much as she needed him. After all, he had spoken of her on television for all the world to hear. She would have to find out. And how

about her baby? *Their* baby. she corrected herself. She'd had such a lonely, desolate childhood herself, she didn't want her own child to have the same. If she had only known that she had been pregnant, she never would have left Canada. She would have owed it to her child to stay. Richard might have treated her in a shabby way, but he was responsible—and he was honest. He'd never once deceived her by pretending he felt any more for her than physical compatibility and a sense of responsibility.

She went downstairs and knocked on Mrs. Green's door. "I'm going out," she said. "If I don't come back, don't worry."

"Are you going to your husband?" Mrs. Green asked.

Tanya nodded, "Yes."

"Good luck, dear."

"I'll need it all."

"I want to go down to Surrey," she told the taxi driver before she climbed into the car.

"That's a long way, Miss," the man said.

"Please take me there," Tanya persisted in spite of his obvious reluctance of having to drive so far so late at night.

It seemed an interminable time before the old house came into view. When she saw the red Ferrari parked outside the front step behind Jonathan's Aston Martin, her heart seemed to leap up into her chest and she wondered if she should have come. With trembling fingers she paid the driver and ran up the steps.

"Tanya!" Louise looked astonished.

"Is Richard here?"

"Yes, he is. He just got back. Come in dear, you look quite done in. I'll get Miss Cheryle."

Tanya walked uncertainly into the hall. Now that she had finally arrived, her courage was failing. What if he had that woman here?

The lounge door opened and Cheryle came out and saw Tanya. "Hello," she said, "how are you?"

"I'm not bad," Tanya told her. "Is it possible for me to see Richard?"

"He's up in his room," Cheryle said. "He hasn't been home long, but he was very tired."

"Can I go up?"

"You're his wife," she said, "I can't see why not. He might be asleep though."

"I'll be very quiet," Tanya told her. "What room is he in?"

"The small one at the end of the hall."

Tanya smiled her thanks. But once outside Richard's room, she froze. It was several minutes before she gained courage to knock on the door.

"Come in." Then when she didn't answer, he asked, "Who is it?"

"It's me," she said at last in a small voice.

She heard the springs of the mattress twang and his footsteps, and then Richard was standing in front of her. He'd never looked so attractive. His tan was dark, his hair lightened by the sun. She thought she saw amusement lurking in the depths of his eyes as she stared at him. With an involuntary movement she reached up to touch him, and then thought better of it, and retracted the gesture.

"Hi," she said.

"Hi," he nodded. "Why don't you come in." He opened the door wider and she walked inside, her legs trembling uncontrollably. Then he closed the door.

The bed covers were rumpled. An open magazine lay across the bed. She looked up at him while he tied the belt of his navy terry robe more securely around his waist.

"Congratulations," she said, "I saw you on television."

"I was hoping you would."

"Do you mean that?" Her eyes held his.

His glance slid to her waist. "I don't lie, Tanya."

She sighed, "I know."

"You're a hard person to trace. Although I have to admit, I'd only just started looking in London. It was a stroke of luck I won that race."

"I'm sure you practiced hard," she said.

He looked modest, "Okay, I did," he told her.

"Why were you looking for me?" she asked.

He raised an eyebrow. "We are married, or had you forgotten?"

"No, but you didn't want me, you wanted Dianna. I thought I left you free."

"Dianna wants a hero. I'm just an ordinary guy who wants a Woman. All the time, not just when I'm winning." He was still curiously examining her body.

"But you wanted Dianna again?"

"I admit that," he said. "I admit that I wanted to feel what it felt like with her again. I even took her out, but I couldn't go through with it."

"She visited me," Tanya said.

"Where?" He looked surprised.

"At the house. She told me that she was responsible for your accident. That you were upset because she didn't attend the race with you."

"Granted she didn't come with me. But then she was often busy with the boutique and couldn't come. The accident was caused by an oil leak from another car. I skidded and couldn't recover," he shrugged.

She turned away from him and moved around, her fingers straying to the magazine on the bed. It was a car magazine and a picture of John Laughton caught her eye. She put it down.

"Next month I'll be in there," he said.

"And then one day you might be an obituary," she told him, turning to face him again.

"We'll all be an obituary one day."

"I know."

"Besides, I don't particularly want to crack myself up again, especially if I have a child."

She looked at him, startled. "How do you know?"

He smiled, "I can see by looking at you."

"That's why I came to you, Richard. I don't want my child to grow up as alone as I did."

"That's the only reason you came?" His gray eyes held hers and they were warm as she'd remembered them.

"I love you, Richard," she told him. "You might as well know, if you haven't guessed already. I don't care if you don't love me. I just want our child to have two parents. You can

have who you want, Dianna or that blonde who was with you on the television, I don't care as long as I'm still your wife."

In two strides he came to her. She felt his arms go around her and squeeze her close to him. His mouth moved against her hair. "Why did you leave?" he asked thickly. "Why in the world did you leave?"

"I thought you didn't need me," she said in a muffled voice against his shoulder.

"I've never needed anyone the way I need you. And as for not loving you, you're very mistaken. And Dianna, I don't give a hoot about her. And that blonde girl you're talking about is John's fiancée, Heather. They'll probably be married by the time we get back to Canada."

"I'm sorry," she said, gulping back tears of happiness.

"No, I'm sorry." His arms tightened around her. "I was the one that selfishly wanted you. When you pulled up that straight-backed chair and sat down beside me the day of the funeral and looked at me with those wide, green eyes, I knew that I wanted you more than anything I had ever wanted in my life before...."

"More than racing?" Tanya interjected slyly, snuggling closer to him.

"Much more than racing, you little witch. And now, if you will permit me to continue—" Richard's tone was mockingly rueful. "I knew that I could never have you without marriage, you were too innocent for that, so I callously took advantage of your unfortunate situation and married you."

"And did you regret it?" Tanya couldn't help herself. Her old insecurity had risen to plague her.

"Did you find me such a reluctant bridegroom?" his lips brushed her ear.

Tanya felt hot all over. "But," she persisted, "I thought you were marrying me to be kind—and because you needed someone to take care of you after your accident. That's all."

Richard pulled away a little and gave an incredulous laugh. "Is that what you really thought, darling? To think you lived with me all those months and never knew how I felt. I would have thought it had been plain. I love you. I love you. I have loved you since the first moment I saw you. When you left me, I thought I would go mad from worry about you. Why do you think I came over here? Just to be in the race? I wanted that too, of course, but my main reason was to find you and never let you go again." He lifted a lock of her auburn hair and raised it to his lips, then looked worriedly into her misted green eyes. "You look so pale, my darling, what have you been doing all these weeks?"

"Working as a waitress and living in a miserable bed-sitter. Believe me, Richard, I never would have left Canada if I had known that I was having our child. And if you hadn't come here," she shuddered, "I don't know what I would have done. Gone on welfare maybe—"

"I would have found you." Richard interrupted her with a kiss. At first his kiss was tender and gentle, but it did not remain so as his pent-up longing and desire overcame him. Tanya wound her arms around his neck and pressed herself against him as she had dreamed so often of doing over the long nights that they had been apart. Finally, he pulled his

mouth from hers, to whisper in her ear, "Say you love me again."

"I love you, Richard."

His arms tightened around her and she felt him tremble. "You know, all the time you were unsure about me, I was just as unsure about you. I thought you'd just come along for the security. When you didn't have an interest in me racing, I thought that you couldn't possibly love me if you didn't accept what I did for a living."

"I was just scared, Richard."

"I know. John put me straight. He was actually quite blunt." He smiled ruefully. "I should have made it easier for you, but I was nervous. I wasn't sure if I could get in that car again and race."

"But you did and I'm proud." Tanya reached up and stroked the hair away from his forehead. "Where've you been to get that tan?"

"We practiced down in Florida."

"Where there lots of girls?" she asked before she could stop herself.

"Tanya," he shot her a warning look. "I had to practice long, hard hours to get where I did in that race this afternoon. Please believe me once and for all, there has been no one since our marriage."

"I believe you," she said softly.

"Good," he muttered, claiming her mouth once more. "Are you staying here?"

"Do you want me to?"

"What do you think?" His eyes were dark with desire.

Tanya smiled in unabashed happiness. "What about Cheryle?" she sighed.

"What about Cheryle?" His hands moved beneath her sweater.

"Shouldn't we tell her that I'm staying?"

"Maybe later," he whispered, his lips on her throat. "Much later," he added huskily.

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