



MORE THAN FRIENDS:
BRAD

MARIE ROCHELLE

More Than Friends:
Brad

A novel of erotic romance by

Marie Rochelle

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Dedication:

This final book is for all of my fans who fell in love with
the Drace brothers ... especially Brad and Alicia.

Enjoy,
Marie

Prologue

I can't believe the words coming out of my boss's mouth. Alicia Hart listened in utter shock to the next assignment that her boss Tiffany Henry was handing down to her. It took all of her willpower to sit up straight and not fall out of the expensive chair. There was no way in *hell* that she could do it. Why did Tiffany think that she could or would? Ever since her old boss left for a better job and Tiffany found out she knew the family she had been pushing her to become a part of this story. Well, she would just turn it down and that was that.

Another reporter could volunteer to take it and do a better job than her. Yes, she wanted to move up through the ranks of the news station, but this wasn't the next story she wanted to be a part of in any way, shape or form.

"Tiffany, are you sure about this?" Alicia asked as she laid her pen back down on the notepad on her lap.

"Alicia, you will be the perfect reporter for this assignment. They have turned the news station down countless times, but since you're friends with one of the brothers I know you could get them to agree this interview without a problem." Tiffany grinned at her like she had it all planned out in her head and nothing would go wrong.

Tiffany wasn't aware of her true relationship with the aloof Drace Brothers. She hadn't even spoken to Brad in a while and if Lee had anything to do with it she wouldn't for the rest of her life. The oldest and most outspoken of the elite Drace Brothers hated, and she meant, hated her!

"Didn't you tell me that you want to start doing something like the Barbara Walters' specials? Well, this is your first big step there," Tiffany encouraged. "If you do a good job with this, I see bigger and better things in your future."

"Brad Drace and his brothers are very private men. Most of them are already married and don't want eyes prying into their personal lives," Alicia pointed out, trying to get off this topic as quickly as possible. Tiffany didn't understand that she really didn't have any pull with the family.

She could already see Lee giving her that unblinking stare of his. He wouldn't need to give her an answer after that because his look spoke volumes. No...she wasn't going to allow herself to be put into that position by Tiffany or anyone else.

"I really don't think any of them will agree to this behind the scenes type of thing anyway. I'll be thrilled to do another spot on television and report something else going on in the news. Wasn't there a recent drug raid that I can cover instead?" Alicia wasn't that fond of doing drug dealers pieces, but it would get her away from the Drace Brothers story.

Tiffany glared at her as she tapped her French manicured nails on her desk. Great...she knew her boss only did that when she thinking of a way to get what she wanted and didn't care who she had to bully to get it done.

Alicia was trying her best not to agree to this. For the past four and a half years, she had worked very hard making Brad understand that they couldn't be more than friends. Yet, if she accepted this new project it would put her around him all of the time and she wouldn't be able to handle it.

Brad really thought that she didn't care about him, but that wasn't the real reason that she pushed him away all of the time. So, it was for the best if he kept thinking that she wasn't interested in him. It would work out better for the both of them in the end.

"Alicia, I'm not going to let you back out of this. You don't seem to understand that my boss wants this interview done and I'm not about to lose my job because of you. Now, you can be the one that does it or I can give it to one of the new girls working here. It's up to you, but it will be done."

"I'm still not sure about this," Alicia said, worried. She knew Tiffany wouldn't hire a good person to take over the project. As much as she didn't want to be involved with this, she did know the Drace brothers and their wives better than anyone else at the station.

"I was trying to do a good thing here. Everyone here knows that you're close to Brad because he used to give you tennis lessons. He might be more open to granting you an interview and then you could get something from him other people couldn't.

"Do you know that most people here in Houston don't know much about Lee, Richard, Zack or Brad? All of them are very influential men and the public wants to know what makes them tick and how their wives were lucky enough to get them to the altar."

Pushing up her glasses with her index finger, Alicia thought over what Tiffany was telling her. She hated it, but she had to agree that her boss did have a point.

The Drace brothers had moved to Texas years ago. It seemed like all of the brothers had made their fortunes overnight, except Brad who worked for Lee part-time about twenty hours a week and then gave tennis lessons for the rest of the time.

Were the handsome brothers hiding a rag to riches story that the community would love to hear about? This could really be the big break she had been dreaming about and it would give her a chance to be around Brad. She did truly love the moments she had spent with him during her tennis lessons. With this assignment, she would be doing her job and spending quality time with the attractive Brad.

Alicia wasn't going to allow someone else to be around Brad when she could do it herself while working on a kick ass job assignment. "We haven't spoken to each other for a couple of weeks, but I'll call Brad and try to run the idea past him. However, I can't promise that he'll agree to do anything. I know that he'll talk it over with his brothers first before he gives me any kind of answer."

"Excellent," Tiffany said as she stood up from behind her desk. "I'm late for my lunch date, but I'll talk to you later on in the week to see where things are with this. I know that you aren't going to disappoint me

Alicia stood up from her seat and pressed the notepad against her chest. She wasn't going to hold out for a lot of hope that Brad would agree to this. He was probably still mad at her because she didn't attend Lee's engagement party with him several weeks back, but she truly had been working late on an assignment. Brad most likely thought it was another excuse she had used to get out of going on a first date with him...which wasn't the case at all.

Lee's engagement party was going to be her initial step at trying to see if she could become get involved in a relationship with Brad. Yes...she had been trying for God knows how long to find ways to avoid Brad. Or keep him out of her life because she was apprehensive about getting drawn in by him. Because he came from a pretty well-known family and she wasn't positive she could handle all of the notoriety that came along with dating a Drace Brother.

"Okay, how about we go out to lunch and we can discuss everything then?" Alicia suggested. "I'm free next Friday if you want to do it then since you're going out of town for a couple of days next week."

“I like that. I’ll mark it on my calendar and then leave myself a reminder on my Blackberry.” Tiffany headed for her office door. “Please...don’t take no for an answer. This will be an outstanding piece, if can get all of them to agree to do it.” Tiffany waved good-bye to her before opening her office door and walking out.

Standing alone inside of her boss’s office, Alicia wondered how she was going to pull off interviewing Brad about his successful family plus continued to pretend like she was uninterested in him when that was the furthest thing from the truth.

Chapter One

Sitting silently at the dining room table, Brad Drace wasn't really playing attention to the conversations going on around him. He had tried to think of several excuses to not attend the weekly Wednesday night dinner, but Lee wasn't about to let him bail out of it. His oldest brother told him that his ass better be sitting at the dinner table or else.

However, he wasn't in the mood to be here at all. Nevertheless, here he was with a plate full of food in front of him and a lonesome heart because of Alicia and her damn stubborn streak. She knew they belonged together, but she kept forcing things in between them.

Without a doubt, he loved his brothers and his sister-in laws more than anything in the world, but seeing how extremely happy all of them were constantly made him realize how lonely and empty his life truly was.

All of his brothers had found the women they love more anything in the world over the past couple of years while he still couldn't get Alicia to even go out on a real date with him.

Lee had advised him over and over to move on, but he couldn't think about not having Alicia in his life. He loved her. Hell, he was in love with her. She was the woman that he was meant to be with. As much as he valued his brother's opinion about other things in his life, this was one time that he wasn't going to listen to Lee.

He was going to prove to Alicia that he was the man for her and not to get sidetracked by other men who weren't worthy of her. If he didn't feel Alicia was in love with him too, he wouldn't be giving it his all to win over her heart. She loved him, but she was just too scared to admit it.

He had tried to be patient and understanding and do it her way, but that wasn't working so he was going to do it his way from now on. Alicia was done running the other way each and every time he tried to get closer to her.

Brad was tired of being the one on the outside looking into the lives of his brothers. This was his time to get Alicia and put a ring on her finger. If he didn't get her to admit that she was in love with him by Christmas Eve then he was going to move on. He would find someone else he could build a life with. It might not be a woman that he loved with his heart and

soul, but it would be somebody he could settle down with and start a family.

The sound of two familiar voices arguing drew his focus back to the conversation going on around him at the table. Brad couldn't keep the smile off his face as he glanced at the guilty pair. He loved how Cherise and Lee were so in love with each other, but neither one of them wanted to ever give up control about anything. Their fighting was what made them such an entertaining pair to be around and he wondered which one of them would give in first.

"I don't want to take a leave of absence from work just because I'm pregnant. The babies won't be here for another two months. I'm more than capable of going to work and doing my catering job on the side," Cherise complained, placing her fork back down on her plate as she glared at Lee.

"No, I don't think it's a good idea at all. My wife shouldn't be working right now. It's not like you need the money. I've more than enough to take care of you and our children. Stay at home and relax," Lee tossed back. "It's where you should be anyways."

Brad watched as his sister-in-law leaned back in her seat and folded her hands on her round stomach. Oh, he knew that he was in for a good show now. Cherise only did that when she was digging her heels in for a good fight. Lee should have just kept his mouth shut and let Cherise have her way.

"First, I'm not going to even talk about the last part of your statement. Secondly, what you want isn't going to happen. I'm more than capable of doing my job and not sitting at home waiting for you barefoot and pregnant," Cherise said. "Don't you remember that I did have a life before you came into it Lee."

"You need to listen to me sweetheart," Lee said, lowering his voice like he was talking to a pouting child instead of his wife. "I'm only trying to do what is best for you and the babies. You're too upset right now to see what I'm telling you is right and what you want to do is wrong. I know that your hormones are driving you crazy and after you think about it you'll see that I know what is best for you."

Brad couldn't keep the grin off his face when the rest of his family stopped eating to start watching the action playing out around them. He wondered how long it would be before one of the other family members got involved.

"I agree with my sister," Traci chimed in. "I think she can work at least until the middle of next month before she goes on bed rest. Look at how well she has been doing so far."

"Zack, tell your wife to stay out of my conversation with my wife," Lee said, dipping his spoon into his banana pudding. "Traci has enough to deal with herself so she doesn't need to meddle in my affairs."

"Hey, I don't need Zack to tell me anything," Traci said before Zack could get a word in.

Brad pushed his half-eaten plate of food away because he would rather watch the entertainment going on around him instead of finishing up his dinner. He always hated driving way out to Lee's house for these weekly dinners, but in the end something exciting always happen to make the long trip worth it.

"Traci, I think that Lee has Cherise's best interests at heart. He's concerned about her like any good husband would be. She's having twins and he doesn't want her to overdo it," Zack said and then leaned over placing a kiss on his wife's cheek.

"What do you think Dawn?" Cherise asked as she looked at her sister-in-law across the table. "Do you think I need to stay at home with nothing to do, but to watch the next saga in Erica Kane's life?"

Great...Brad couldn't wait to hear what Dawn would tell Cherise. Dawn sometimes had a different way at looking at things which made her so much fun to be around.

Dawn wiped her mouth with a napkin and then placed it on her plate. "I can't really give you my opinion," she answered. "As soon as Richard found out I was pregnant, he banned me from D4 until I had the baby."

"I sure did," Richard admitted looking at Dawn, and Brad saw the love shining in his brother's eyes. "I would do it again too. You were already gorgeous before you got pregnant and you got even better looking the further you got along. I couldn't have the male customers drooling over you. You should be glad that I let you do that side job for Hamilton."

"Sweetheart, Hamilton doesn't want a married woman with a new baby," Dawn laughed patting Richard on the hand. "He's totally over the crush he had on me. God, it was such a long time ago."

"It wasn't that long ago," Richard corrected. "I had to control myself not to rip him apart when you left me to go and work for him. He only did it to get a rise out of me."

Jealousy ripped at Brad's heart as he watched the loving way his brothers interacted with their wives. He wanted Alicia sitting here next to

him talking about babies and the love they shared for each other. He was the only one with an empty seat next to him.

“Brad, you’re awful quiet tonight,” Lee said. “What’s going on with you? Please don’t tell me you’re thinking about that Hart woman. I told you that you need to let her go. I’ve a couple of single women at work that would love to date you. How about I throw a party and invite them over here. You’re bound to find one of them attractive enough to forget all about that snobby news reporter.”

Closing his eyes, Brad took a deep breath trying not to voice the first words that came instantly into his head. He loved Lee but sometimes he wished that his brother would keep his mouth shut. Alicia was the woman he wanted and if Lee didn’t like that, he didn’t give a damn.

“Lee, I wish you would stop trying to find another woman for me when you know I’m in love with Alicia. Can’t you just be glad you’re married to Cherise and about to become a father? Do you constantly have to throw my miserable life up my face?” Getting up from the table, Brad tossed his napkin down.

“I knew it would be a mistake to show up tonight. I’m tired of you treating me like I’m a kid instead of your thirty-two year old brother. I think I should leave before I say anymore and don’t count on seeing me for any weekly dinners for a while.”

Storming away from the table, Brad headed for the door and just as he was about to open it a hand touched his arm. Spinning around, he was about to snap at the person until he saw Cherise standing there. He was surprised that she could move that fast as pregnant as she was.

“Brad, come back to dinner,” she suggested as she removed her hand off his arm. “You know how Lee can get sometimes when he gets on a roll. He loves you. Just give him a chance to apologize.”

Bending down, Brad planted a kiss on Cherise’s cheek and then rubbed her belly before rising back up. Sometimes it was still hard for him to believe this was the same woman who was going to toss Traci out of her life, if she had married Zack. Cherise had changed so much and it was for the better. He was touched that she was concerned enough to come and get him, but he wasn’t going to stay any longer.

“No, I think it’s best if I go home. I wasn’t having that good of a time anyway.”

“Are you sure?” Cherise asked, softly. “You might miss another one of my famous fights with Lee. We still haven’t settled if I’m going to take an early maternity leave or not.”

At first, Brad hadn't been sure if Cherise would be a good fit with his family because she had been so feisty when he got introduced to her. Now, he didn't know how his family worked without her. Sure, Cherise fought with Lee but he could always see their love glowing beneath the surface.

Brad shook his head. "No, I think I'm going to leave. I had a long day at work and I wanted to relax in front of the television before I hit the bed," Brad lied, hoping Cherise wouldn't pick up on it.

Tilting her head to the side, Cherise studied him for a few seconds. "Don't you dare lie to me, Brad. I know you're leaving because of what Lee said about Alicia. You know that he can't help but to give his opinion about everything, right?" she asked. "He loves you so much and only wants to see you content like the rest of his brothers."

"Yeah, I know," Brad admitted. "But he can't determine who I need to find happiness with. If I want to be with Alicia then it's my business not his!"

Moving closer to him, Cherise replaced her hand on his arm. "Are you sure that she wants to be with you? I know that I tried to keep Lee away from me but that was because I had such deep feelings for him and we both knew it. I've met Alicia only once, but she seems to be hiding something very deep. Do you think you can break past all of her barriers?"

Brad laid his hand on top of his sister-in-law's and gave it a slight squeeze. "Yes, I know I can. All I need to do is spend more time with her. Cherise, I love Alicia and I'm not going to give up until I'm positive nothing will come of my feelings. Can you understand that?"

Smiling up at him, Cherise nodded her head. "I understand completely," she replied as she removed her hand from underneath his. "If you need any help from me let me know. I'm very good at setting up a romantic dinner for two and don't let Lee's big mouth get you down. I'll have long talk with him tonight."

Brad was touched that Cherise wanted to stand up for him. She was a wonderful woman and Lee got very lucky getting Cherise as his wife. She never allowed him to take control of everything and that is what his domineering brother needed: a woman who was his equal but would fight for him too if the situation called for it.

"You don't need to do that for me. I know how Lee is and I'm just going to blow off what he told me tonight," Brad said.

"Oh, I'm going to talk to him after everyone has left. He might not understand what he is doing is hurtful to you. So, I don't want you to think anymore about it. Go home and call Alicia."

Brad couldn't keep the shock off his face. How in the world did Cherise know that he was going to do that? He hadn't even admitted to himself yet that she was one of the reasons he was leaving the dinner early.

"How..."

"Brad, you're a Drace. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that you were going to call Alicia as soon as you walked out that door. Now, give me a hug."

Bending down, Brad gave Cherise a quick hug. "My brother really did well by coming to his senses and marrying you," he whispered in Cherise's ear making her giggle.

"Lee may not think that most of the time," she whispered back before he ended the embrace.

"You know that you have Lee wrapped around your finger and soon the babies will too." Brad hated that Lee was always trying to tell him what to do, but he was glad that Cherise finally gave his overbearing brother a chance.

"Okay...I need to go. Tell Lee that I'll talk to him later which means that I'll call him and not the other way around." Brad wondered if Lee had enough self-control not to leave a message on his cell phone before the night was over.

Laughing, Cherise spun around and headed back towards the dining room. "You know that I can tell your brother that, but if he listens is a totally different thing."

Brad knew that Cherise was telling him the truth, but she couldn't fault a guy for trying. Moving back to the front door, he took a last look back at the dining room and listened to the laughter going on before opening the door and going out.

Chapter Two

Glancing down at the cell phone in her hand, Alicia wondered how she was going to present her boss' idea to Brad. The last time the two of them had spoken to each other things hadn't gone over too well. She left like she usually did and Brad was upset she hadn't stayed to talk about their situation. So, she just couldn't call him up, ask for permission to interview his entire family and think that he would agree to ask them about it.

Brad had asked her out on a date to spend the weekend with his family on vacation, but she'd turned him down flat. There was no way she could spend that time with him seeing how content and loving his brothers were with their families when she was so miserable with her own life.

No!

She wasn't going to think about that. She loved her job, life and everything else that she had going on for her. Being in love wasn't in the cards for her right now, so she was going to focus on her career and ending up where she wanted to be in her ten year plan.

Sure, a new job and a bigger bank account wouldn't keep her warm in the middle of the night. Or listen when she had ideas about work when something good just popped into her head out of nowhere.

Most women needed a man at their side to make them feel worthwhile, but that wasn't her. She was strong, independent and self-sufficient. She didn't need anyone there to hold her hand or cuddle up with her on the couch to watch a late night movie.

She had gotten this far in life without help from anyone else and she would continue to do so and in the end all of her sacrifices would have been worth it.

How long are you going to keep lying to yourself, her mind taunted? You know that you want Brad in your life more than anything else in this world. Even landing a bigger office and position at the news station didn't compare to how much she wanted Brad in her life, but it wasn't going to occur. She had burnt too many bridges with him.

Alicia shook the crazy thought from her head. She couldn't let her mind go down that road. She had to focus on one thing at a time. The most

important item on her life's agenda now was her career and she wasn't about to change that for anyone. If love came to her so be it, but she wasn't going out looking for it.

Okay, she had to stop thinking about this nonsense and get down to business. Shaking off her nerves, Alicia went over in her mind what she wanted to tell Brad and then dialed his number. The phone rang a couple of times before he finally answered it.

"Hello?"

Alicia tried to calm down her racing heart at the warm, rich sound of Brad's voice. Just the tone of it sent her down a path of steamy nights rolling around in bed. Lord, it wasn't right that one man could make her entire body melt with one spoken word. She had to keep her wits about her.

"Brad, it's me, Alicia," she spoke up when she finally regained her voice well enough to speak.

"Sweetheart, I know. I saw your name on my Caller Id, but I thought I was seeing things at first. How are you doing?" his deep, rich, tempting voice asked.

Sweetheart... Alicia wouldn't admit it to Brad, but she liked when he called her that.

"I'm doing well." Alicia kicked off her shoes and relaxed on the couch. Taking to Brad always made her feel so comfortable and peaceful, she didn't know what it was about his tone but it did something to her.

"That's good. Why are you calling me? I thought you told me that you weren't going to talk to me anymore after our last conversation? What can I do for you?"

She heard the slight hesitancy in his words, but Alicia wasn't going to allow that to stop her. "I need to talk to you. I know it's late, but do you think that you can come by for a few minutes? It's really important."

There was a long pause and Alicia wondered if Brad was even going to answer her. Maybe he was remembering the last time they were together and it wasn't sitting well with him. She might have ruined her chances spending any time with him and that hurt her more than not being about to do the project Tiffany wanted.

"Yes, I can come over. When do you need to see me?" Brad asked.

Alicia clutched the phone to her ear and sent up a silent prayer that Brad hadn't blown her off. God, he was such an amazing man. He was going to make some woman a wonderful husband.

“Do you think that you can come over tonight? I know it’s very short notice, but it’s really important.” *Please let him say yes.*

“Tonight...” Brad said.

“Yes.”

“Okay, I think I can swing by there before I head home,” he replied and then ended the phone call before she could say another word.

Alicia looked at the phone in her hand with semi-shock. Did Brad mean that he was actually going to show up for her tonight because she had asked him? Would it be in the next hour or three hours from now? Well, it didn’t matter how long it took because she was going to wait up for him.

After he showed up and she confessed the reason she called him over to her house what would Brad tell her? He wasn’t the type of guy to tell her to shove the idea up her ass or anything. No, he was too much of a gentleman for that kind of comment. God...Brad agreeing to ask his brothers wasn’t the only hurdle that she had to jump over.

The other Drace brothers had to give the green light for it too, but Lee would be the hardest sell. He hated her with a passion sorely for the way she had treated Brad over the years. However, she couldn’t blame Lee for his low opinion of her. Brad had been open with his feelings and she constantly ran from them.

A sudden knock on the door drew Alicia’s away from her inner thoughts. Getting up off the couch, Alicia hurried over to the door and swung it open. She was glad that she was holding on to the door frame because if she hadn’t been she would have fallen over after looking at Brad.

Damn, was it right for one man to look this perfect without even trying?

Brad stood there, devilishly handsome and almost too much for words to even form in her head. His usually sun-blended hair was slowly getting back to its naturally dark brown color since he was spending less time giving tennis lesson and working indoors more.

The porch light glimmered over his attractive face highlighting the angles of his features. His lips were firm and sensual which only enhanced his compelling eyes and the hint of a shadow of a beard that touched his jaw. It look like he hadn’t bothered to shave this morning and the little rougher look was turning her on.

Years of playing tennis and being athletic had given Brad a beautifully proportioned body with rippling muscles that strained against

the white dress shirt he was wearing. Alicia couldn't believe how acutely conscious she was of Brad's tall physique. Slowly, Alicia dragged her gaze away from Brad's powerful body up to his face. "Wow...you got here fast," Alicia said, hoping that Brad hadn't noticed her drooling over him.

Brad smiled down at her making her heart skip that familiar beat. Damn it! He knew that she had been staring at him, but she wasn't about to admit it.

"I was only about a block from your house when you called me," Brad confessed. "I wanted to come over and see you since we haven't spoken to each other in a while."

How was it possible for Brad to be this handsome and sweet at the same time?

Alicia was so taken back that she didn't know what to say, so she did the only thing that she could. "Would you like to come in and tell me why you were a block from my house when you don't live anywhere near my neighborhood?"

Easing past her, Brad walked into her house making the large area suddenly seem a whole lot smaller.

"Well, are you going to answer my question?" she asked, closing the door behind her.

Sliding his hands into the pocket of his slacks, Brad spun back around to face her. "I was having the weekly dinner at Lee's and some things happened, so I decided to leave early to come and see you. You don't know how pleased I was that you called me."

God, how could she have forgotten about the notorious weekly dinner at Lee's mansion? Lee Drace was one of the bluntest men she'd ever had the displeasure to be around.

He wasn't fond... No, he hated her and never had a problem telling her what he thought. It was a wonder that Brad was still even friends with her at all.

"You don't have to stand there in the middle of the living room," Alicia told Brad as she walked past him. Taking a seat on the couch, she waved her hand toward a chair across from her. "Have a seat."

Instead of sitting in the chair she offered him, Brad decided to sit very close to her on the couch with an inch barely separating them. "Thanks, I would love to sit by you," Brad said, trailing his finger down the side of her arm.

The light touch was making it hard for her to concentrate and control the shiver that raced through her body every time Brad touched her. Most

women in town had a thing for the other Drace brothers and were devastated when they had gotten married and started families of their own. However, the man she was drawn to was sitting right next to her slowly driving her crazy.

"I don't recall telling you to sit next to me," Alicia teased as she leaned away from Brad instead of moving closer like she desired.

"Okay, I'll stop messing with you." There was a trace of laughter in his voice as he moved away from her so they were no longer thigh to thigh. "I'm going to be good. Tell me why you called me. Was it because you were lonely without me or were you craving one of my kisses?"

Nibbling at her bottom lip, Alicia pondered how to start off the conversation about what her boss Tiffany wanted her to do. She decided she might as well jump right into it.

"My boss called me into her office today and gave me a new assignment. I'm really excited about it. I mean if I do a good job this could lead to other things maybe bigger and better job opportunities."

"That's wonderful," Brad replied, smiling at her. "What's it about?"

"She wants me to do a special about some very influential men here in Houston."

Brad tilted his brow, looking at her uncertainly. "I don't think I'm following you. Why would you want me to come over to hear about you interviewing some men? Are you saying that you want to use me to make one of them jealous like you tried to do with Max?"

Alicia quickly shook her head. "No, it's not like that. I apologized for that. Max wasn't the man I thought he was. I'd have never asked you to do that for me. It was truly wrong and I'm sorry."

"I know how it is to be in love with someone who doesn't see you the same way. Now, let's forget about Max and you finish telling me about this wonderful new job assignment."

"I can't believe how understanding you are," Alicia said, surprised again by this unpredictable man. "Most men would have been so upset that they wouldn't have said another word to me."

Brad ran the tip of his fingers down the side of her face. "If you ever stop running from how you feel about me, maybe you will see that I'm not like most men."

Alicia opened her mouth and then snapped it shut, stunned by Brad's bluntness. It took her a second or two to regain her thoughts. "My boss wants me to do a story about you and your brothers," she blurted out."

Slowly, Brad's warm fingers dropped away from her skin and then he moved back from her before completely getting up. A chill suddenly filled the room that she wasn't prepared for and honestly didn't want.

"Are you telling me that you invited me over here so you could get a news breaking story about my family?" Brad demanded glaring at her.

His expression grew harder and resentful as his mouth dipped into an even deeper angry frown. "You already know how private my family is. We don't talk about our private lives unless we really have to."

Jumping up from the couch, Alicia tried to approach Brad, but he took a step back from her. She wouldn't admit to herself how much that slight movement hurt her feelings. However, she had to make Brad understand that if he didn't agree Tiffany was going to do it on her own with another news reporter.

"Brad, the title of the story is '*Why white men love and marry black women.*' It seems when a white man proclaims his attraction for a black woman not only sexually, but also romantically that it sometimes leads to a lot of controversy and sometimes even dangerous threats. So, the main focus of the piece will be why some influential white males are opening themselves to dating outside their races, despite any criticism that may come from it."

Alicia watched as some of the anger left Brad's handsome face, but it still didn't look like he was going to agree to her request. If he turned her down she wasn't sure what she would have to do to make him help her.

God...she wondered what Brad would think if he knew she wanted to do this assignment just to be able to spend more time around him.

Brad raked one hand through his dark hair giving it that tousled look that she loved so much. "I can't give you an answer about this until I talk to everyone else involved and if one person doesn't want it the answer will be no. I don't care what your boss wants. Our final answer will be it, so don't try to change my mind."

The need to argue was pushing at her, but Alicia knew when to leave something alone and see how the cards would play out. "Okay...that's fine. Go and talk things over with your family. I swear that I'll do an excellent piece about your brothers and their families."

Brad gave her one more look and then headed toward the front door. "Don't count on hearing a yes because I can already hear Lee now, but I'll ask for you." Opening the door, he went out and then suddenly came back to her getting close, looking down at her intensely.

His mouth was on hers before she would move one muscle and just as suddenly the surprise kiss ended. "Have a good night, beautiful," Brad whispered against her swollen lips before going out the door closing it softly behind him.

Pressing her fingers to her mouth, Alicia stared at the closed door wondering if Brad's family agreed to the story how she was going to handle working so closely with him and keep up a distant attitude.

Chapter Three

“Are you busy? I think we need to talk to each other about what happened last night at dinner.”

Brad debated if he should even acknowledge his brother or keep reading over the rental properties that Zack had given him a couple of weeks ago. He loved Lee, but he was tired of working with him. It was past time that he made his own mark with his own business.

He wasn't the kid brother that Lee, Richard or Zack needed to take care of anymore. It was about time he proved it to himself and his brothers.

“What do we have to talk about?” Brad questioned as he looked up from the papers on his desk. “You hate the woman I'm in love with. How can we ever get past that? It's like a pink elephant in the room.”

Coming into his office, Lee sat down in a chair. “I wouldn't say that I hate Alicia, but she doesn't treat you with any kind of respect. Why would you want to be around a woman like that?”

“How can you give me advice?” Brad demanded. “Didn't you have one hell of a time getting Cherise to admit how she felt about you? I don't ever remember telling you to give up on her.”

Lee glared at him before his laughter filled the room. “I guess I need to see and understand that you aren't my baby brother anymore, but it's going to be hard on me. I've taken care of you for so long that it's going to be a hard habit to break.”

For a moment, Brad was too stunned to say a word to his brother. Why was Lee giving up so easily? It wasn't like him at all. Lee usually dug his teeth in and didn't give up without a hard fight.

“Okay, what's up? Are you sick or something? I know you and you wouldn't have thrown in the towel this quickly and especially when it comes to Alicia.”

Leaning back in the leather seat, Lee laced his fingers across his stomach and watched him with the steady stare he'd hated ever since he was a little kid.

“Cherise told me that if I didn't stop pressuring you about Ms. Hart that I will drive a bigger wall between us. I don't want that to happen. I

might not act like it most of the time, but I do love you as much as I do Zack and Richard. I think I push them just as hard as I do you.”

“Don’t you understand that all of us are adults now? God, both Richard and Zack are fathers and you’re about to be one in a matter of months yourself. It’s past time you took a step back and enjoyed your life. Hell, you finally got Cherise to marry your ugly ass,” Brad teased.

“Yeah that’s true. When Traci told me I’d lost her and she was moving to Paris I almost lost my mind. I couldn’t let Simon have what I had been fighting for so long. I love Cherise so much and the babies are a wonderful bonus of our love for each other.

“So, I’m going to listen to her about Alicia. Honestly, I truly don’t know that much about Ms. Television Reporter. How about you set aside a time for all of us to do something together?

“It can’t be anything too stressful with Cherise being as far along as she is; however, I’m willingly to extend the olive branch for your girlfriend little brother.”

“Do you mean that despite the fact that Alicia isn’t my girlfriend yet?” Brad asked sliding forward in his seat. “Alicia wanted me to ask the family something, but she was afraid that you would shoot the idea down instantly.”

“What does she want?” Lee inquired in a low, composed voice which he knew usually meant trouble was on its way.

Brad knew it was now or never, so he jumped in feet first. “Alicia wants to interview us for a special her boss requested at the news station.”

“Hell...No!” Lee shouted as he jumped up. I’ve already told that Tiffany woman I don’t want the public meddling into our lives. Why does she care so much? If we were poor and married to black women, it wouldn’t be news worthy at all. Tell Ms. Hart and her hard-headed boss that the answer is still no.”

“You don’t speak for the rest of the family.”

Lee’s eyes darkened dangerously. “Yes, I do and I better not hear that you bothered Richard or Zack with this nonsense either. When are you going to grow up and stop fantasizing about this woman,” his brother tossed out before he got up from the chair and stormed out of his office.

Well, it seemed like the olive branch had broken before Alicia had a chance to even accept it from Lee, he thought.

Brad hated that Lee didn’t see the importance of this story, but he wasn’t going to let Lee’s piss ass attitude stop him. He was going to talk to

his other brothers after work and get their opinions. If Lee didn't want to participate then so be it.

Cherise moved around several times on the bed before she finally found a comfortable spot for a while. At least the babies had stopped kicking for the night and decided it was time for them to sleep. She wasn't sure if she was ready for two miniatures versions of Lee in a couple of months. Her husband was bad enough sometimes but to have two sons that would be exactly like their daddy, it definitely was going to keep her busy.

She was reaching for the romance book next to her on the bed when Lee came storming into the bedroom looking madder than a bull in a pen slamming the door behind him.

"I can't believe the nerve of my brother. I don't know how I made it all day at work without yelling at him again," Lee complained as he placed across the carpet in front of the bed.

"Bad day at work," Cherise asked, watching as Lee practically ripped the dark purple tie from around his neck. .

"I tried...I really did, but Brad just doesn't want to listen to anything I want to tell him. I'm older and wiser. He should be glad that I want to give him my opinion."

"Sweetheart, Brad might be the youngest but he's still an adult and a grown man. He has a right now not to want you all up in his business and mainly his love life. I've talked to Alicia before and she didn't come across that horrible to me. I think she's a little guarded with her emotions and that's it."

Lee stopped his crazy pacing and looked at her. "Alicia is bad for Brad. Baby, I love you, but you don't know what you're talking about. Look how long it took you to come to your senses about me?"

"I'm going to let that comment pass because you're upset about your day, but I'm warning you not to say it again." Cherise waved a finger in her husband's direction.

Coming over to her, Lee took a seat on the bed next to her. "Wait until I tell you what Alicia wants us to do and then you'll agree with me."

Cherise knew she wasn't going to be able to relax with a good book anymore, so she gave her undivided attention to her husband. Lee wouldn't be able to sleep tonight unless he got this problem off his chest and she didn't need him tossing and turning in the bed next to her.

“I’m listening.”

“Brad knows how I feel about the media and their interest in my family. I’ve done everything in my power to keep them out. I hate doing interviews unless I really need to and it’s for a good cause.”

“Sure I have money, power and fame, but I’ve no need to put it out there for the public to judge me about. So, why in the hell do I want Alicia in my personal life? It’s not hers or anyone else’s business why I married you.”

Cherise couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Lee was actually upset that Alicia wanted to tell the world how they fell in love with each other. Was there another reason that he didn’t want the story done?

“Could you please move so I can get off the bed?” Cherise touched Lee on the arm and waited while he got up. She noticed how he was watching her kind of strangely, but she didn’t care. Once she got off the bed, Cherise stood in front of her husband.

“Lee, I think a story about you and your brothers will be wonderful. I don’t understand why you’re so irate about this. Are you saying you don’t want the world to know that you fell in love with me?” she questioned.

Lee quickly pulled her into his arms and planted a kiss on her mouth. “Baby, I started planning our wedding the second day after I met you. Of course, I don’t mind telling the world I’m in love with my beautiful pregnant wife.”

Leaning back in her husband’s arms, Cherise stared up into his handsome face. “I’m glad you knew it because I hated you the first day I saw you and even more the second day.”

“Did you really hate me?” Lee whispered against her neck. “You weren’t the tiniest bit turned on by me?” Moving his hand between their bodies, he rubbed it over her belly. “Are you telling me that you didn’t know that I’d be the father of your children?”

She couldn’t resist teasing her overly confident husband...sometimes he was just too arrogant for his own good.

“No, honestly I had my eye on Simon. That’s why I ran off to Paris with him. There’s no telling what might of happened if you hadn’t come after me.”

Placing a finger under her chin, Lee lifted her chin until her eyes connected with his. “You never would have done anything with Simon because you were in love with me. Plus if he had laid a hand on you I would have tossed his ass off that balcony,” he growled.

“Why would you have done that?”

“Because I love you and I wouldn’t have let anything or anyone stand in my way of my feelings for you.”

“Why can’t you see that’s how Brad feels about Alicia?” Cherise asked Lee. “You can’t live his life for him. Do you truly think he would have asked you to do this interview if he thought Alicia would do a hatchet job on his family?”

His eyes clung to hers, analyzing her reaction. It was going to be hard for Lee to admit that he was wrong, but he would be man enough to do it.

“Do you know how much I hate it when you’re right?” Lee moved her finger off her face and then took a step back. “I can’t make Richard and Zack not do the interview.”

“Does that mean you’re agreeing to do it?”

“Yeah, if my other brothers say yes, then I won’t say no.”

Cherise stood on her tiptoes and gave him a quick kiss. “I’m proud of you and so are your boys.”

“I’m glad you’re proud because that means you’ll give me something I want,” Lee said, smiling at her.

Lord, she could only guess what her sexy husband wanted.

“What can I give you?”

“Right at this second I’ll settle for a kiss from my gorgeous wife and then I’ll pick something better later,” Lee told her with a certain look in his eyes.

“I bet I already know what it will be,” Cherise said as her husband lowered his head for a kiss.

“What’s your guess?”

“Crab puffs,” Cherise moaned “I think you love those darn things more than me.”

Lee’s face lit up right before he pulled her closer to him. “They do come a very close second,” he admitted and then kissed her.

Chapter Four

Why did it seem like her hours at work were getting longer instead of shorter, Alicia wondered as she dragged her weary body over to the small wine bar at the corner of the room and poured herself a glass of red wine.

Grabbing the glass, she moved over to the island in the kitchen and rested her back against the side. She had been sitting on her behind for the last sixteen hours and she wasn't in the mood to sit down at the moment.

God, when was Tiffany going to learn that everyone didn't have to jump through hoops when she called. No, she hadn't heard from Brad yet about doing the piece on his family, but that didn't mean he was going to turn her down.

If anything or anyone was holding him up, it had to be Lee. . He came across like it was his way or else. It was almost like he had never heard the word no in his whole entire life. No was something she heard a lot while she had been growing up as a kid. She wouldn't be able to handle that kind of strong personality.

At first, she didn't understand what woman in their right mind would want to be with Lee Drace until she met Cherise Roberts.

Cherise was the perfect match for Brad's brother. It was like they were almost cut from the same cloth, but Cherise was a tad bit better at filtering her comments and nicer than Lee was when it came to her.

Now, Brad was totally on a different scale when it came to his older brothers. He was so laid back. His carefree attitude always made her smile when he was giving her tennis lessons. Not to mention how his kisses almost made her forget her own name and where she was.

Why did she have to like a man who would never be a part of her life? Brad lived everyday and every moment to the fullest. He never allowed grass to grow under his feet.

However, she, on the other hand, was a totally different story. She liked some kind of structure in her life. Not so much that if something went wrong that it would flip her out, but enough that she knew why she was waking up every morning.

Alicia knew going in that a career as a TV reporter/anchor would take some sacrifice, but she wasn't aware of how much. A lot of her friends

thought she had the most glamorous job in the world, but they didn't know how wrong they were.

Her closest friends wouldn't believe it if she told them the truth. However, it wasn't like any other job in the world and she loved the excitement and thrill. She even loved the pressures the position brought every single day. How could someone not love doing something new every day and making a difference?

One of her biggest dreams while living in Treebanch, Alabama was to be able to leave the small television station there to something bigger and better. So, when her boss told her about the position opening up in the Houston area, she had jumped at the chance and was lucky enough to beat out seven other people for the position.

Her old job back home had been a wonderful experience for her. Working at a smaller news station she had done everything from shoot video on a scene, edit her own words, to report and produce an element in the same day.

The only thing she wasn't told to do was to use the teleprompter and she would have done that too because this was her dream.

Sure, only a little more than a ten percent of news anchors hit it big to hold a nightly news show, but who said that she couldn't be in that low percentage? Shit, if she'd stayed with her news job back home she would be making less than \$18,000 a year there.

Her Ivy League parents still weren't pleased that she didn't go to Harvard or Yale like they had. No, just the other day her father called to lecture her again about how everyone and their mama wanted to be television, but how there weren't that many available slots for them.

Alicia took another sip of her wine as she pulled the hair clip off. She quickly ran her fingers through her hair causing it to brush the back of her neck.

She wouldn't forget how her mother almost died when she cut off all of her long hair when she first moved to Texas. She had tried to make her mother understand how much quicker her hair was to do now since it was shorter.

Sometimes she wondered why her parents even had her because they'd spent more time doing their own thing instead of listening to what she'd wanted to with her life growing up.

Both her older brother Shelton and her sister Chloe moved away from home right after graduating from high school to pursue their dream jobs. She knew that they kept in contact with their parents.

But she didn't see any good reason to do anything more than a call or card for the holidays. She always got the feeling she had been the surprise baby her parents hadn't been prepared for but kept because they didn't believe in abortion or giving away a child.

Alicia made her way out of the kitchen and fell down on the couch. Picking up the remote, she turned on one of her favorite celebrity gossip shows. At least, there were some people out there in the world with more horrible lives that she had.

She couldn't believe how many celebrity break ups there were lately. Maybe her mother was right when she told her that money couldn't buy anyone happiness or was it that money was the root of all evil.

Hell, it didn't matter. Dolores Hart was constantly throwing quotes at her when she was living at home before she decided to take the leap and move for her career. So, it was hard for her to remember all of them. Finishing off the last of her wine, Alicia placed the glass on the table next to her and then pulled off her dark purple suit jacket. She was too tired to even think about making her way upstairs to her bedroom.

She had fallen asleep on the couch before, so it wasn't like this would be the first time. Alicia slid down on the cushions and closed her eyes hoping that sleep came to her quicker than it usually did.

"Thanks for coming over at such short notice," Brad said, staring at the two couples standing on his front porch.

"We know that you wouldn't have called us unless it's really important," Zack replied, walking past him with Traci carrying a sleeping Carter in her arms.

"Yeah, little brother, you sounded very upset on the phone," Richard chimed in as he followed the first couple inside with a car seat in his hand.

Brad smiled at Dawn before closing the door behind everyone. He hated to bring out his nephews this late, but he had to talk to them about Alicia, Lee and his thoughts about leaving the marketing business to start his own business.

"Let me apologize again. I didn't mean for any of you to bring out the boys this late. I just needed to see everyone." He waited for everyone to take a seat before he sat down in his favorite recliner. It was the one piece of furniture in the living room that he wouldn't be able to live without.

“Where’s Lee and Cherise?” Traci asked as she handed a still sleeping Carter over to Zack. “I’m surprised that they aren’t already here.”

“I’ve already talked to Lee about this, so I’m sure he has filled in Cherise about everything. That’s why I only invited all of you here.”

What if Richard and Zack reacted the same way as Lee? Was he assuming too much? He knew how much Richard and Zack adored their families and they might not want them in the public eye either. If they told him no then he would respect their wishes.

Yes, he was in love with Alicia and wanted to help her with this, but he wasn’t going to alienate his entire family for her. No matter what his feelings might be for the sexy reporter. He would always protect his family no matter the cost.

“Are you going to keep us in suspense or should we guess what is going on?” There was a faint glint of humor in Zack’s eyes. “If you didn’t want Lee to be here with us, it must be something that would set him off on one of his lectures.”

“Alicia wants to do a special about our family,” Brad said, watching how everyone looked at each other and then back at him. “She thinks the community and other people would love to know how three of the most eligible bachelors in Houston, Texas ended up getting married.”

“Don’t try to cover up for her. We all know the real topic of the story,” Richard snapped. “I can see why Lee wouldn’t want to be here tonight.”

“Richard, calm down,” Dawn told her husband touching him on the leg. “Let Brad finish. Honestly, I’m not upset about this. I love any kind of couple specials. It’s always so interesting learning how couples fell in love with each other; I would like to be a part of it.”

“I would too,” Traci jumped in. “I’ll be able to brag to all the women out there how my sexy husband wanted to know my name from first sight and I was wearing no make-up and sweaty gym clothes at the time.”

Brad liked how Traci’s beautiful face became more animated as she talked about the first time she saw Zack. His brother had dated a lot of women over the years, but he was very pleased that Traci was the woman he married in the end. Her sweet and outgoing personality was a perfect blend to Zack’s usually laid back image unless someone bothered him or his family and then his protective side came out in full force.

“What about you Zack?” Brad asked, knowing that he would get an honest answer. “Do you want to get interviewed by Alicia? I told her that I had to get everyone’s approval first.”

A shadow of annoyance crossed Zack's face as he laid Carter down on the couch next to him. Brad was surprised that neither child had woken up with all of the talking going on around them.

"Brad, I've turned down about eight interviews over the years because they wanted to know more about my personal life than my business life. The only reason I did the most eligible bachelor thing was because the money from the sales went to charity."

Great, Brad thought as he dropped his head. This was going worst than he thought it would. He loved the idea; however, all of his brothers hated it and their wives didn't.

"But since I've fallen in love with the most brilliant woman in the world, I'll be more than delighted to tell my story. Count me in," Zack answered, shocking the hell out of him.

Brad's head snapped up quickly and his shocked eyes locked with Zack's amused ones. "Are you serious about this? I was sure you would hate it as much as Lee."

One corner of Zack's mouth pulled up into a slight smile. "No, I'm not against it and I'm pretty sure that Lee will come around after Cherise has a talk with him. You know he tries to act tough with her, but she has him wrapped around her little finger."

"Stop making fun of Lee," Richard cut in laughing. "I think both of us suffer from the same thing. Well, I guess that I should agree too. I don't want to be left out in the cold and I need to show Hamilton and other men that Dawn is off limits forever."

"Haven't I told you that Hamilton is just a big flirt and you should ignore him," Dawn said, shaking her head. "He loves getting under your skin."

Jealously intermingled with hurt touched Brad's heart as he sat back and watched his older siblings talk to their wives. He'd always thought he would be the first brother to get married because it had been a dream of his for as long as he could remember. Now, he was the single brother playing with his nephews instead of his own kids.

Alicia was the woman he wanted to build a family with but either she was too scared to be with him for some reason or Lee was right and he had been wasting his time and energy longing for a woman he had no chance of winning over.

Could he love a woman who might not have any real interest in him, but only wanted what she could get out of him?

Finally...you're beginning to see that Lee was right. Alicia isn't any good for you. Stay away from her. You can do so much better.

Brad shoved the wayward thought from his mind. No! He wasn't ready to give up on Alicia yet. He was going to try one more time to break down the stubborn wall she held so close to her heart.

"Hey Brad! Are you listening?" Richard asked.

"I heard every word. Thanks so much for doing this. I'm pretty sure Lee won't give me the green light for him. It's hard for him to believe and understand that I'm not that little boy who used to be scared of the dark or wanted to follow behind my three big brothers. I'm a grown man and he should treat me accordingly."

"Lee is just an overbearing big brother. He fits into the mold perfectly," Traci said. "I grew up with a sister cut from the same cloth. That's why both of them are so perfectly matched for each other. Don't worry about him because after the twins are born Lee will forget all about you and Alicia."

"Listen to my beautiful wife here," Zack said. "She knows what she's talking about. I know that Richard even got a life when his son was born, so there is help for Lee."

Dawn's soft laughter drew Brad's attention over to her. Out of all of his sisters-in-law, he liked Dawn the best. She had been in love with Richard so long and had been through so much.

He almost thought that Richard was going to lose the love of his life when Dawn found out he was asked by Richard to follow her and he unearthed the huge secret she was keeping from him.

"I think our son really changed Richard. He was loving and understanding before, but it grew more after the baby. So, I would love to be a part of the interview."

"Wonderful," Brad smiled. "I can't thank all of you enough. I'll go ahead and tell Alicia whose all in and then I'll leave Lee's decision up to him."

"Well, we better go," Zack said, picking up Carter. "Our little man here wore himself out at his play date. We need to get him back home and into bed."

"Yeah, we should get going too. We have a little bit of a longer drive back home than these two," Richard pointed at Traci and Zack before picking up the car seat. "Let me know if Lee gives you any problems and I'll have a long talk with him."

Following behind his guests, Brad fought down a smile. Richard was always the one who stood up to Lee for him when he was a kid. Not that Zack was a good brother or they weren't close, but it just seemed like he was closer to Richard.

"Have a safe drive home," he told everyone as they secured their kids and then got into the car. Brad waved at his brothers as they pulled out of his driveway and drove off.

Instead of going back inside, Brad went over and took a seat on the swing set on his porch. He had so many good memories sitting out here with his parents as a little kid. It seemed like his mother always had a snack for him and his brothers to share on this porch every day after school.

After their parents had died, Lee had been old enough to be his and his brothers' legal guardian which helped them stay in their childhood home. Over the years, his brothers moved out leaving the house to him.

Just last year, Zack had asked him if he wanted to sell the huge house for him so he could get a smaller one or a condo closer to town, but he turned down the offer. Instead, he hired a contractor to update certain parts of the house because he wanted to stay here and raise his family.

A family he thought he would be having with Alicia, but now he might be wrong thinking she was the woman for him or would be the mother of his children.

Brad knew that Alicia loved her career, but she needed more than that in her life. Hell, he wanted her to have more than that and he wanted to be the man who gave it to her. All of his siblings took the woman he loved at face value, but he saw the deeper part of herself that she was trying to hide from him and everyone else...the loneliness, the need to have something or anything to grasp on to so she wouldn't get pulled under by the everyday routine of life.

If she would only open up to him more and let him in. He could show her that there was more to life than those sixteen hour days she couldn't get away from.

This interview special Alicia wanted to do with his brothers was going to be his last chance at winning that piece of her heart that she was terrified to let go of.

Alicia had been pushing him away for so many years, but if she did it this time after the story was over, his interest in her would be over too. The love he had for her might be a little harder to get rid of, but he would do it over time.

Alicia, this is it. Either you realize what you have in me or it will be gone forever.

Chapter Five

“Have you heard anything from Brad Drace yet?” her boss asked, stopping her by the water fountain near the elevators. “Today is the deadline. If you don’t hear from him, I’ll have to find another way to give the public what they want.”

Alicia hated the way Tiffany locked onto things like a hungry dog with a bone. If the Drace brothers didn’t want to give any interviews than that was their right and if she could understand it why couldn’t Tiffany?

“Brad will get back in touch with me. He’s a man of his word. So, please just give him a chance to do it.”

Tiffany crossed her arms under her breasts and tapped the toe of her four inch black high heel against the tile. “Are you sure you and that cute Brad aren’t more than just friends? You’re jumping to his defense pretty quickly. I’ve heard whispers around the office that he’s in love with you. Will that prevent you from doing this story?”

Alicia had felt a strange surge of affection toward Brad when Tiffany was talking about him and it frightened her. It was almost like the need to protect him.

“Brad and I’ve been friends for a while, so I just feel the need to protect him from stupid gossip.”

“So, you’re saying that Brad doesn’t want to make you the newest and latest addition to the Drace family,” Tiffany taunted. “I know a lot of women here who wouldn’t turn down a simple dinner invitation from him.”

The thought of Brad going out with another woman didn’t set well with her at all. Not that she was jealous, but he needed to date someone who saw him for the unbelievable man that he was and would appreciate everything he had to offer her.

“Well, that’s nice but I don’t have anything to do with it. Brad is only my friend. I’ve no say or opinion about his love life. Now, please excuse me, I need to get ready for tonight’s news.” Spinning away, Alicia headed for the small room she had at the very end of the hall.

She had to get herself under control before she went on the air. Tiffany had a way of pushing her buttons and her boss knew it; however,

she wasn't going to let her dragon of a boss get under her skin. Sometimes, she wished that Harvey had never gotten transferred to a better paying job in New York. Work had been so much more fun with him than Tiffany.

Walking into her office, Alicia kicked off her shoes and then closed the door behind her. She had arrived at work a little earlier, so she could relax for a minute or two before she was called to get ready to go on television.

Taking a seat in a chair by the window, Alicia stretched her tired legs out in front of her. Her feet were so worn out from having high heels so many hours during the week. She longed for the days she'd be able to toss on a pair of tennis shoes and flip flops.

Closing her eyes, Alicia rested her head against the back of the chair and hoped to get a quick catnap in before anyone came looking for her. She didn't know how long she had been in that position before she felt warm fingers sliding up the back of her leg and lifting her foot.

"What in the..." Alicia's eyes flew open at the same time she tried to jerk her foot back but the grip tightened.

"Whoa! Watch out," Brad laughed. "You almost made my voice go up another octave."

"What are you doing?" she asked, looking at Brad sitting on the small table in front of her with her left foot in his hand.

"I was going to give you a foot massage," he answered, rubbing his thumb over her heel. "I know the only time you take off those shoes is when your feet are bothering you."

Awareness shot through her body at the touch of Brad's calloused fingers and pooled right between her thighs. She wanted to squeeze her legs together to ease the ache, but she shoved it back down.

Instead, she struggled to focus on something else which was nearly impossible to do with Brad looking so tasty in a red polo shirt and a dark pair of slacks. He was beyond model perfect in her eyes.

"What are you doing here?" She made another move to get Brad's hand off her leg, but he only brushed it away.

"Baby, I came to see you," he replied as he pushed her skirt further up her thighs shocking her.

"Stop, you can't do that here. What if Tiffany unexpectedly walks through the door and sees you with your hand up my skirt? I don't need her complaining that I was making out with you at work. I know she lives to make my life hell."

“How about we give her something to really get pissed off about?” Suddenly, Brad lifted her out of the chair and placed her body over his hard thighs, so her drenched panties were directly touching his throbbing erection.

The new sensation felt so good that her eyes almost rolled in the back of her head. Alicia tried not to squirm. She really did, but it felt so good and she had fantasized about it for such a *long* time.

Sliding his hands under her skirt, Brad cupped her ass in the palm of his hands. “Are you glad to see me?” he whispered against her neck as his teeth nibbled at the sensitive skin there.

All Alicia could do was nod because she was totally lost in the craziness that Brad’s cock was creating inside her sex-starved body. She should stop him. Yeah...she really should push him away...but he was making her feel so *amazing*.

“I asked are you glad to see me,” Brad asked again in a low voice. “How can you continue to deny this connection between us? I know that I haven’t experienced it with another woman before. Let me in. Show me what’s broken inside of you so I can fit it.”

Alicia was so startled by Brad’s suggestion to offer any kind of comment. This wasn’t happening to her. She hadn’t finally found the man she had been waiting for all of her adult life.

No! She couldn’t fall in love with him. Not with the baggage from her past, Brad was too nice of a guy to have that kind of pressure on him. She was positive none of this was happening. It was a dream. She had to get out of it before it got any deeper.

Slowly, Alicia calmed herself down and closed her eyes. She was going to wake up and Brad wouldn’t be in the room. Closing her eyes, Alicia focused on relaxing her mind and body then she reopened her eyes and found the room empty. Brad wasn’t anywhere in sight.

I knew it was a dream, she thought to herself. Sadly, she wished that the dream had been real.

Standing up, Alicia stepped back into her shoes and fixed her clothes. It was almost time for her to sit in her co-anchor chair and she was being paid to be at the top of her game. Which meant she wasn’t about to let herself or her fans down.

Chapter Six

“Can I come in or are we still mad at each other?” Brad peeked into the study and found Lee grabbing several books off his bookshelf and tossing them into a large box by his left leg.

“Brad, you’re my brother. I’m not going to stay mad at you,” Lee said glancing at him. “Come on in. I know you’re here to talk about Alicia.”

“I had a meeting with the rest of the family last night and they’re all in, but I didn’t want to agree unless you were going to be a part of it.” He wasn’t going to disrespect his brother by going over his head. Lee had a right to turn him down again.

“Cherise told me that you would make one last ditch effort and I should listen to you, but there’s no need I already have my mind made up about the special.”

Leaning his shoulder against the bookshelf, Brad studied his brother noticing how Lee didn’t dress as conservatively as he used to in the past. Now, when he was home his clothing consisted of t-shirts and jeans. Cherise was just the woman Lee had needed in his life. They were truly the perfect couple.

Lee tossed one more book into the box before looking at him. “Tell your Alicia that all of the Drace brothers will participate in the little news story of hers. All I ask is that she interviews me first because with Cherise being so close to her due date, I don’t want this project to interfere with that.”

Brad wanted to ask what changed his very stubborn brother’s mind, but he already knew—*Cherise*. He wasn’t going to do anything to make Lee change his mind about his decision.

“Thanks Lee,” Brad said as he moved away and headed for the door, but he spun back around.

“Why are you cleaning out your books?” Lee loved those marketing books. Some of them had been around since he started his own business all of those years ago while he was still in college.

“I’m boxing up some of the older books to make room for baby photos. I’m about to have more important things to display than my old marketing books that I got years ago.”

“It’s about time you put your interest and time toward something else besides my personal life,” Brad exclaimed and then left the room to the sound of thick books being dropped into a box.

As Brad was about to leave Lee’s house so he could find Alicia and tell her the good news, Brad stopped by the kitchen door and looked at Cherise flipping through a cookbook. She had this glow about her now that she was pregnant and it looked good on her.

For the longest time, he never thought that Lee would end up with their feisty sister-in law because she put up such a battle back when Zack was dating Traci. Cherise was the female version of Lee and that was the main reason they always argued and Cherise pushed Lee away for so long.

However, after almost losing her to another man Lee came to his senses and took his ass overseas to get his woman back. He was willing to do that and more for Alicia, but he wasn’t going to be her stepping stool either. She needed to meet him halfway or they wouldn’t ever make that walk down the aisle. He stayed there a few more minutes watching how in high spirits Cherise was before he eased away from the kitchen door and left the house.

“Alicia, you had a wonderful broadcast tonight, but your deadline is almost up,” Tiffany told her as she walked out of her office and up to her in the hallway.

Did her boss have a life or was her life totally made by being up in her business all of the time? Alicia thought to herself.

God, couldn’t she get a moment’s break? Well, she would rather deal with Tiffany now than later. She guessed Brad wasn’t able to get through to his brothers because she hadn’t heard back from him.

Honestly, she wanted to be the one who did the exclusive interview with Brad’s family because she wouldn’t sensationalize their life story like another reporter at BBTv would to move up at the station.

Spinning around, Alicia faced Tiffany so she could finally get her boss off her back. “Tiffany, I told you.” She was going to finally tell this woman what she thought of her and it didn’t matter if she lost her job or not.

“Alicia, I was hoping that you’d still be here. I’m glad that I didn’t miss you.”

The sound of Brad's voice breaking into her conversation made Alicia looked over her shoulder at the man who was a permanent part of her nightly fantasies now. She couldn't take her eyes off his long strides as he headed in their direction. They showed that he was sure of himself and for some odd reason it was turning her on.

You just need to get laid, her mind taunted.

Taking a peek from the corner of her eye, Alicia noticed how Tiffany couldn't take her eyes off Brad either and it was pissing her off. Why in the hell was her boss drooling over Brad when he wasn't interested in her at all? He wasn't here to see Tiffany. He came to the station to see her.

"What are you doing here?" she asked as Brad walked right past Tiffany like she wasn't even in the same room as them and right up to her.

"I wanted to see you to tell you about my brothers' decision," Brad answered as he pushed her glasses up her nose with his index finger.

The feel of Brad's hands on her skin sent her blood pressure up another notch. Her attraction to this man standing all up in her personal space was getting harder to keep under control. Could Brad see in her eyes that she had been dreaming about licking French Vanilla ice cream off his bare chest?

"Will I be happy with your answer?" Alicia asked when she was finally able to get her wandering thoughts together.

"I believe so," Brad replied as his fingers brushed a strand of hair off her cheek. "How about I tell you everything over dinner?"

All while Brad had been talking to her he hadn't stopped touching her body and it was making her even more aware of him. He looked over her seductively, patiently waiting for her answer and it suddenly hit Alicia that she didn't want to turn down Brad's dinner invitation like she always did in the past.

"I would love to have dinner with you."

"Alicia, can I have a minute of your time before you leave with him?" Tiffany's sharp voice cut in.

Her attention had been on Brad so much that Alicia had forgotten her crappy boss was still standing within hearing distance of her conversation with Brad. She could only imagine what Tiffany had to tell her.

Brad shook his head. "No, you go and get your stuff while I talk to Tiffany. There are a few things that I need to tell her about the interview she wants you to do and now is the perfect time for me to do it. When you come back, I'll be ready to take you out."

Nervousness set in as Brad moved away from her and escorted Tiffany over to the other side of the room near the exit sign. She was dying to know what Brad was saying to Tiffany, but she could tell from the sour look on her boss' face that it wasn't good or anything she might want to hear about.

Alicia took one last look at the two people to her left before making her way to her office with the thoughts of her date with Brad in the back of her mind.

Chapter Seven

“Tiffany didn’t look too pleased when we left the station. What did you tell her?” Alicia asked Brad as they sat outside on the patio of the restaurant.

They had just finished dinner and were waiting for the waiter to bring their check. She had suggested they have dinner at D4, but Brad declined. He informed her that he wanted to be able to have a good time without Richard looking over their shoulders throughout the meal.

She had wanted to talk about Brad’s conversation with her boss over dinner, but he shut it down and wouldn’t let her. Instead, he turned the conversation towards her. Asking her questions about her past relationships and family, but she avoided most of them by getting him to talk about his childhood. She liked the closeness she shared with his older brothers, it was something very special and she envied it a lot.

“I thought Tiffany needed to understand who was doing the story and if it wasn’t you then we wouldn’t agree to the story,” Brad said, shocking her.

Alicia was surprised that Brad would take time to even speak with Tiffany because most of the time everyone at work tried to avoid her unless they had to be around her since her attitude was so nasty.

“I bet she wasn’t too pleased with your discussion,” she laughed, wishing she could have heard Tiffany’s response.

“Honestly, I don’t care about what Tiffany thought. My only concern is for you. Did you have a good time tonight? I was surprised that you accepted my dinner invitation without the usual fight you put up. Could you not think of a good reason to turn me down this time?”

Brad was a hundred percent right. She couldn’t argue with him. She was constantly trying to find ways not to be alone with him, but tonight for some reason was different. She *wanted* to go out with him and spend some alone time together with the gorgeous and kind man in front of her.

He was a very intriguing man. Most of the women in Houston probably overlooked him because his brothers were so dramatic with their outgoing personalities that fit them, but Brad did possess a lot of wonderful qualities of his own.

She would call him an aphrodisiac to her senses and Brad wasn't even aware of it. Sometimes, he made her want to do things she shouldn't do like take a candlelight bubble bath while he washed her back. Or slow dancing naked together in front of a fireplace...naughty little things that she had never craved before.

"I did almost turn you down out of habit," she confessed. "But I changed my mind and said yes."

"Are you glad that you did?" Brad asked as his dark blue eyes roamed over her face.

Before she could give him an answer the waiter came back with their bill. Brad handed the young guy a credit card and he hurried away back towards the front of the restaurant.

"Yes, I am. It was a lot more fun eating with another person instead of sitting on my couch alone watching television and eating a turkey sandwich."

The cool night air brushed over her bare arms as the faint sounds of traffic echoed in the background behind them. Alicia couldn't get over how perfect the night had turned out when she finally decided to let herself relax and have fun with Brad.

Tonight with Brad was one of the best dates that she'd had in a very long time. It was nice to be out with a guy who didn't want to talk about himself or his accomplishments over dinner like the last guy she dated.

Max was a gorgeous man and was blessed with a brilliant mind, but when it came to carrying on a conversation that didn't involve work or him he fell short in that department because he only thought about himself.

"Did you have enough fun that you might want to do something with me tomorrow?" Brad inquired at the same time the waiter brought back Brad's credit card and his receipt. She waited until the waiter walked away again before giving Brad an answer.

"You still haven't told me who I'll get to interview first when it comes to your family." Alicia secretly hoped that it wouldn't be Lee because she didn't want to start off on a bad note with him.

"I know," Brad grinned, making his amazing eyes stand out even more. "So, I guess you have to go out with me again to find out the answer."

"I think that's called extortion," Alicia laughed. She hadn't felt this free and good in years that she almost forgot what it felt like.

Shaking his head, Brad stood up and came over to her chair but instead of pulling it out like she thought he would he bent down and whispered by her ear. "No, I think it's called a guy trying to get a second date with the woman he's falling for. So, what's your answer, Ms. Hart?"

Turning slightly, Alicia noticed an almost hopeful glint in Brad's eyes and she knew in that second she desired a second date with him too. She might actually have found one of the last good guys in the world...no, she knew that she had.

She was ready to do something with Brad that she hadn't done in a very long time. Give him an honest chance at getting to know her.

"Yes." Instead of going with her over-analytical mind, Alicia trusted her emotions.

A soft kiss was brushed along the back of her neck before the words "thank you," were whispered against her skin.

Alicia caught Brad's look as their eyes connected. She tried to hold his gaze as long as she could, but it was so intense that she had to glance away. What was he doing to her? She never acted this nervous on a date with a man before, not even with Max who she thought she had been in love with.

"Come on, sweetheart. Let's get you home," Brad said as he finished pulling out her chair. "I know you have to get up early tomorrow for the sunrise newscast. It's how I start my day."

She felt a warm glow flow through her. A part of her reveled in knowing that Brad got up early to watch her on the news and another part of her was a little scared at having someone care enough to do it.

Taking her by the hand, Brad linked their fingers together and led her off the patio back into the restaurant. As they walked through the other patrons, she noticed how the females took a double take at the handsome man next to her. However, she guessed that Brad was so used to getting stared at he didn't even acknowledge the stares.

Alicia thought about her night again while she and Brad waited outside for the valet to bring the car. Tonight truly turned out to be exceptional, it was almost like it wasn't real in some way. He had kept her on her toes with his wit and charm without being overly supercilious about it.

"What are you thinking about?" Brad asked.

"Actually, I was thinking about you," Alicia answered, rubbing her bare arms against the low temperature in the air.

“Oh, I like the sound of that.” Taking off his suit jacket, he placed it on her shoulders. “I’m assuming it was all good and nothing bad.”

Hugging the warmth of Brad’s jacket closer to her body, Alicia breathed in the wonderful smell of his cologne and then nibbled at her bottom lip. She wondered how much she should tell Brad about her thoughts. He wasn’t arrogant as Lee, but Brad did have a way about him that drew her to him more than other man she had ever known.

“Are you going to give me an answer?” He seemed to be enjoying her struggle to capture her composure and inability to find the right words.

“No, it wasn’t anything bad. I was just thinking about how glad I was that I didn’t turn you down. You aren’t a bad dinner companion after all.”

“Me too baby.” Brad seemed like he was going to tell her more but got interrupted by the valet coming back with their car.

“Here you go sir,” the boy said as he handed them the car keys.

“Thank you.” Brad took the keys and then gave the boy a tip.

Alicia never remembered a time that she had gone out with Max that he had been nice to anyone. He constantly found things to complain about instead of ignoring the small problems that came up. The guy looked at the twenty dollar tip in his hand twice before he smiled at her and Brad before running off to get another car.

“That was nice of you to give him such a huge tip,” Alicia said as Brad escorted her over to the black Lexus.

His eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Haven’t any of your other dates given a good tip before?”

“Not any that I can count,” she answered getting inside of the car and Brad closing the door. Alicia watched as Brad walked in front of the car and then got into the driver’s side.

“I better get you home before I try to think of a way to make you stay out longer with me.”

“I have to say that I wish I could, but I’ve an early meeting with Tiffany and then I’m off the rest of the day.”

Starting the car, Brad checked for oncoming traffic and then pulled out. They had been driving for a while in silence and Alicia didn’t mind. She liked how comfortable she felt around Brad when she wasn’t over thinking the situation.

“Did you have a hard time getting all of your brothers say yes?” she asked, dying to have an answer before the night was over.

Brad stole a glance at her as he stopped at a red light a couple of blocks from her house. “I thought it might turn out differently, but yes all

of my brothers agreed to it. So, all I need to know is when you want to get started” He, pulled away from the light. “However, we don’t need to go into all of it now. I want to enjoy the last few minutes of our date. No business will be talked about until tomorrow,” he said and then winked.

Chapter Eight

Resting her back against the seat, Alicia crossed her legs and noticed how Brad glanced at them when her skirt inched up her thighs. She swallowed down her smile. It did feel good knowing that Brad was so attracted to her.

“Tell me how it felt growing up in a family with such complex and overly protective older brothers?”

“Honestly, I’ve always looked up to all three of them, but I’m the closet to Richard. Anytime, I needed help or had a problem I went to him. He always found a way to calm me down and ease my fears.”

She was surprised to hear that Brad was closet to Richard. She would have thought it would have been Zack. “You couldn’t talk to Lee or Zack?”

“I could but not like with Richard,” Brad corrected. “He would always stop what he was doing to help me no matter what time of day it was. Richard is my brother, but I consider him like my best friend.”

“So, how do you consider your other brothers?”

“Lee is the one I go to when I need money advice. He’s brilliant at turning nothing into something when it comes to cash. I swear he can start off with ten dollars and by the end of the month it will be over two hundred dollars. He always had a way with numbers. I’m stunned that he hasn’t opened another marketing firm.”

“Now, Zack is without a doubt the business man. He can take a rundown building and turn it into a masterpiece. I’m always left speechless by his finished product. You should have seen D4 before the remodel that Dawn helped him with. It doesn’t even look like the same building.”

Alicia was glad that Brad was proud of all of his brothers’ achievements and wanted to tell her about them; however, she wanted to know about him. She only knew a few things like he loved playing, teaching tennis and plus every other Friday night that he loved going out for hot wings with some of his friends.

“Brad, I know that I haven’t shown interest before but why don’t you talk about yourself more? You really didn’t do it when you were giving me tennis lessons.”

Pulling up in front of her house, Brad cut off the engine. “There isn’t much to tell,” he confessed as he got out of the car. He came around, opened her door and helped her out. Closing the door, he held her hand a little tighter and escorted her to the front door.

For a while now, she’d fought actually going out on a real date with Brad because she didn’t want to get too close to him. Her main focus was moving to the top of her field as a reporter, but now she...hell, she wasn’t sure what was going on in her head.

“I think you’re wrong,” she said.

Brad touched her cheek with the back of his hand. “I’m wrong about a lot of things, but not that. Do you know that half the time I got invited anywhere it was because of my brothers? They are the three famous Drace brothers and I’m not. I understand and I’m not upset about it.”

“It’s only because they’re older,” Alicia corrected. She didn’t want Brad to think he wasn’t worthy because he was. “Don’t let it get you down. You have to know how unbelievable you are.”

Cupping her chin in his hand, Brad leaned closer to her until their mouths were almost touching. “I know something that you can do to cheer me up.”

Alicia had a hint of what it was, but she’d play along. “What can I do for you, Mr. Drace?”

“A good night kiss would be a perfect finish to the night.”

A warning voice whispered in her head that if she let Brad kiss her tonight that there would be no turning back, but she just pushed the fear to the back of her mind. God, it was only a kiss and it wasn’t like that Brad hadn’t kissed her before.

“I’d like that,” she answered a second before Brad nibbled at her bottom lip softly in a tantalizing way. The firmness of his mouth drew her body and mind into the kiss even more.

He pulled away slightly and glanced down into her eyes and then lightly licked her lips before kissing her again.

Alicia was trying to draw a thought into her mind; however, with the way he was kissing her fast and then slow, it was driving her need up the charts. Who knew that kissing could be so arousing? Standing on tiptoes, she wrapped her arms around Brad’s neck drawing him closer to her.

Sliding his hands down her back, Brad cupped her ass and lifted her up pressing her back against the front door. The thickness of his hard erection against her underwear made her purr in the very back of her throat.

“Do you know how much I want to pull out my cock and bury myself inside of you until neither one of us can think straight?” Brad whispered against her swollen lips.

Her breath caught in her throat as she felt her heart pounding in her chest when she saw the smoldering look in his beautiful eyes. “No, I didn’t know that.”

“I’m so fucking hard right now that my whole body is aching to be with you.”

Alicia didn’t know what to say right now. She was fighting with every fiber of her being not to beg Brad to take it to the next step. Damn it! How could she lose control like this and on her front porch with all her neighbors to see? From now on she would have to guard her own actions as well as his.

“Brad, please put me down.”

“I was afraid you might tell me that,” Brad confessed as he let go of her ass and lowered her back down to the ground.

She quickly fixed her clothing and pulled her skirt back down to a respectable level. Awkward silence filled the air as one of them tried to think of something to say. This was new territory for the both of them.

Brad was finally the one to take the huge leap. “I wish I could apologize for what happened, but I can’t. I love the taste of your mouth. It’s sweet, spicy and a temptation made to get a man in trouble. I’ve always considered a kiss the first sexual contact that will introduce me to a possibility of a lover. Haven’t you ever heard that you can tell a lot from how a person kisses?”

Of course she had heard that before but she hadn’t even given it much thought until now. The way Brad just kissed her proved that he knew his way around the bedroom.

“Before we go down a road that I shouldn’t tonight, I’m going to tell you goodnight.” Alicia turned away from Brad and unlocked her door. Going inside, she turned back around to look at a man who had given her such a wonderful night.

“I’ll see you tomorrow after work.”

“Sweetheart, I’ll be there,” Brad told her in a deep and sensual voice that sent a ripple of awareness through her. Turning on his heel, he strolled

away from her back to his car leaving her staring at his back and perfectly tight ass.

Chapter Nine

Instead of going home after his date with Alicia, Brad decided to drive around for a few hours until he ended up at his favorite place. Turning off his car, he stared out at the pond near the campsite where he usually spent most of his summers as a kid camping with his older brothers. It was the one place that he considered a second home because of the tranquility. Anytime he came here he always felt at ease like he didn't have a problem in the world and nothing could get him down no matter how big the issue might be.

He was still on a high after his dinner date with his woman. He wouldn't have been able to sit still at home and not call Alicia to wish her good night again and maybe hint if he could come over for a another kiss or two. Instead, he came here hoping the fresh air and quiet would give him time to think about his next step when it came to her.

Alicia's response to him tonight was fantastic. He had only wanted a small goodnight kiss. He never imagined something so sizzling hot bursting between them. Now that he had gotten her this far, he couldn't let Alicia crawl back into her shell.

A passionate and loving woman was dying to break through that stonewall Alicia had built around her for protection, but he was going to be the man who broke it down. He wasn't about to go another damn year without his woman in his home and bed. All of his brothers had fought hard to get their wives and so would he.

The love he carried around for Alicia only came around once in a lifetime and he wasn't about to lose it...not without a hell of a fight on his part.

Why couldn't Alicia see the intriguing and unusual relationship that they shared with each other? All she had to do was just accept their differences and appreciate what they could have with each other.

He would never forget the first time that he bonded with her. It was during their first tennis lesson. He had tossed a joke out at her and she laughed. Most people, even his brothers, usually groaned and walked away.

At that moment, he started thinking about what it would be like to date a smart, sexy and appealing woman like Alicia Hart. A woman who had a five year plan and didn't mind telling anyone that she had big dreams she wanted to accomplish in her life.

Sure, she had been in love with another man, but that wasn't a huge concern of his. All three of his brothers hadn't allowed any obstacle to stand in the way of them winning over their women, so he was going to do the same thing.

Didn't Alicia see the same spontaneity, spunk and adventure that he saw in her? Alicia's potential was something that could explode if she had more confidence in herself and her abilities.

All she had to do was crack open that wall a tiny bit and he would burst through it full force without hesitation. Together, the two of them could show the world how a hot chemistry between two intelligent adults grew into a loving and caring relationship.

Brad doubted that Alicia knew how much he admired her ability to be able to pull a person into her from her spot behind the desk on television. He found Alicia's unique wit compelling and her sharp mind captivating.

He had to respect that he might not be able to fully understand or control Alicia because she was her own woman, making her a mystery that he wanted to be around each and every day.

The more time that he was around her Brad was positive he could use some seductive foreplay to heighten her desire for him showing her every pleasure imaginable.

*Patience...*he just needed more patience and everything would turn out the way he wanted in the end.

After a long soak in the tub, Alicia relaxed in a chaise by her bedroom window with her hands wrapped around a hot cup of Chamomile tea. She knew she should be in bed, but her thoughts were still racing with images of her date with Brad.

He had shown her so much depth and complexity over their dinner. She never knew that Brad didn't think he was as accomplished as his brothers. Why would he believe that? He worked side by side with Lee at his marketing firm.

There was no way that Lee would give Brad a job if he didn't think he couldn't handle it and do it very well.

Against her will, Alicia's curiosity had been peaked by Brad's insights. She loved how Brad introduced her to new things like fun.

Honestly, at first she was overwhelmed by Brad's intensity and a little annoyed by the way he was picking at the security blanket around her heart. It had taken such a long time for her to build it up and he was ripping it to shreds faster than she could think of ways to rebuild it.

His interest in her was as plain as the nose on her face, but she could tell that he was upset by her lack of emotional response in the past to his advances. However, tonight a part of her took over and she had forgotten all about her promise to stay away from Brad.

When Brad kissed her tonight all she could think about was getting lost in the emotions, yanking him into her house and having her way with him. Which was very surprising since she tried to keep her feelings tightly under wraps at all times.

Since the first instant she had laid eyes on Brad there was an attraction hovering which had turned out to be very surprising, since she had only taken the tennis lessons to impress a man who had shown no interest in her.

Max was a fantasy that she shouldn't have gotten caught in. He was a self-centered asshole that felt every woman should fall under his polished charisma. Unfortunately, she had been one of those asinine females, but thankfully she came to her senses and got over him. The few times she had allowed herself to be around Brad showed her how a man was suppose to treat a woman that he cared about.

Sharing and being playful were things that made Brad so different from any other man she had ever known. He was the type of guy who would want to express feelings and thoughts a woman wasn't brave enough to share with him yet.

It wouldn't be nice to talk to someone who could listen to her hopes or what was going on in their relationship without making an instant judgment about who's right and who's wrong.

Taking a sip of her tea, Alicia wondered if Brad would be the type who would like to cuddle and talk after sex or the type to roll over and fall asleep right after he was finished.

There were so many things she wanted to find out about Brad, but was scared to do because of her bad track record with men. God, her past encounters with men should have sent her to a relationship therapist, but it hadn't yet.

How was it possible for such an intelligent and successful woman to have such horrible luck with the opposite sex? It was almost like someone had placed a curse on her without her even knowing it.

She desired the same thing every other woman did in the world. She wanted to feel that rush of emotion when she looked at her man—an intense, hot emotion like there was a speeding car behind you and you weren't sure that you would make it out of the way in time.

One of her best friends used to tell her not to worry because she would find the love of her life. She shouldn't settle for a guy just to get a ring on her finger. Instead hold out for the man who is the other half of herself and it would happen. Just date and go with the flow of things until it did.

Everything would come to her in the end if she'd calm down and be patience enough to work for it. Sometimes, she had a hard time expressing what was going on inside her when she was around Brad. Just his presence sent her heart into a tailspin and almost made her tongue-tied, however she was always able to control it but just barely.

Alicia took another sip of her tea and wrinkled her nose at the cold temperature. She placed the mug on the floor by the chair and stood up. Stretching her arms above her head, she tried to relax some of the stiff muscles in her lower back. Slowly, Alicia dropped her arms sliding them into the pockets of her robe.

Tonight being with Brad showed her what had drawn Traci, Dawn and Cherise to his brothers. Brad offered the intimacy and closeness women longed for when it came to the men in their lives. She was pretty sure that Brad wanted the same things too. Because he was a man didn't mean that he didn't.

Was she really ready to acknowledge she had been very reluctant in giving Brad a fair shot? Getting intimate with him would require her opening her heart and to take whatever might happen because of her decision. It was such a huge risk and one thing she wasn't was a risk taker. She wasn't fond of the unknown.

Would Brad try to change her after they got together? No, he didn't come across like a controlling guy. He had constantly accepted her no matter what was going on in her life. Okay, she would do it. Brad deserved for her to give him a real chance. Their relationship wasn't going to happen overnight because change took time, but she was willing to work at it and see where the chips would fall.

Chapter Ten

“God, what a morning,” Alicia screamed as she raced through her house searching for her car keys. She had been up most of the night thinking about Brad and her growing feelings for him. Now, she couldn’t figure out why her car keys weren’t in her purse. She always tossed them back into the side pocket after coming into the house.

Shit! I’m running late and I would kill for a cup of coffee.

Picking up her purse off the couch, Alicia dumped the contents out of it on the table and searched through it again for the missing keys and came up empty again. Damn it!

“Great! How in the hell can I get to work without my car keys?” Today was the first day she was going to start outlining the ground work for her Drace brothers’ story. What kind of first impression would she be giving off by showing up late?

She didn’t have time to stay at home looking for them. Alicia tossed all of her stuff back into her purse. She had to go. Maybe if she hurried up she would be able to catch the bus that was about two blocks from her house. It had been such a long time since she had ridden it, so she prayed that the schedule was still the same. But before she left she would take one last look in her bedroom and check there for the keys.

Alicia got off the couch and headed for her bedroom at the end of the hallway. What had she done to make her day start off so badly? She never imagined when she woke up this morning things would go so downhill. She was in the middle of the hallway when the doorbell rang, stopping her. Spinning back around, she hurried back to the front door and flung it open.

“What are you doing here?” Alicia asked eyeing the delicious man standing on the porch with a bag in his hand along with two cups of coffee in a cardboard holder.

“I came here to see you. Do you want to eat breakfast with me? I have donuts and coffee. I hope you have a little time before work.” Brad grinned at her as he waved the bag in front of her face. “You know that you want to invite me inside. I know how much you love coffee and donuts.”

Alicia couldn't deny the truth. She did adore coffee and donuts, so her diet was going to get tossed out of the window. She was dying to have something sweet and fattening this morning. She had to do something to fix the horrible way her day was starting off.

"Come on in. I need something good to move this dark cloud over my head." Moving to the side, Alicia waved Brad to come inside. She would just apologize for being late. Maybe after she got some food in her stomach, she would be able to think more clearly and spending time with Brad might help settle her nervous too.

"What's wrong?" Brad asked the second he came inside and she closed the door. "I know that you usually like to get to work early. So, I was on my way to see you at the station, but when I drove by your house I noticed your car was still in the driveway. I was surprised to see you were still here."

"You know my schedule," Alicia said, clearly surprised that Brad knew so much about her.

"Sweetheart, I care about you. I want to know about you. I'm hoping that you will let me in so I can learn even more." Brad placed the food down on the living room table. "Now, are you going to tell me why you're still here and very upset?"

"I lost my keys and I've been looking for them for over ten minutes. I called and told Tiffany that I was going to be late for our meeting about the ground work for the special. It's a good thing that I wasn't scheduled to be on television this morning."

"Why don't you take the food into the kitchen and let me call Tiffany to see if I can get her to cancel your meeting with her. I was going to take you by Lee's house, so you can talk to him. He doesn't have any clients until late today. "

She *loved* the idea and doubted that Tiffany would have any problems with it, but more than getting to interview Lee, she was actually excited about spending this morning with Brad. He was constantly surprising her with his knowledge of her and she *liked* it.

"Do you need me to give you Tiffany's number?" Alicia asked as she picked up their food.

"No, I got it from Lee. He still had a copy of it at his office. I'll be there in a minute."

Alicia looked at Brad one last time before she headed in the direction of the kitchen. Inside the kitchen, she placed everything on the table and grabbed one of the coffees. Wrapping her hand around the container,

Alicia took a sip of the warm liquid allowing it to ease some of the stress from her body.

How did Brad know this is what she had been missing this morning? She never talked about a lot of personal stuff when they were together, yet he seemed to know so much about her likes and dislikes.

Brad's kindness touched a part of her that she didn't know was there. Brad relied on his feelings and instincts more than any other man that she had ever known in her life. Her past boyfriends had been extremely private and secretive about everything going on with them. Which made it extremely hard to get to know them any deeper than what they decided to tell her about themselves.

Subconsciously, Alicia was beginning to think some of their qualities started to rub off on her and that was one of the reasons she avoided any deeper emotional attachments. It worked out for her better than the other option. The one thing she hated was to feel vulnerable.

She was absolutely fearful of being hurt or humiliated by a man who she would give her everything to.

"Gorgeous, what has you in such deep thought that you haven't touched the breakfast I bought for you?"

Glancing over her shoulder, Alicia watched as Brad shoved his cell phone back onto the pocket of his dark gray slacks. She never knew a man could look so good in a suit until Brad. He had the perfect body to fill it out.

"Oh, I was just thinking," she answered. "What took you so long on the phone with Tiffany?"

Damn, why had she said anything? Her comment made her come across as jealous and insecure neither a problem she suffered from.

"Did you miss me?" Brad asked as he sauntered up to her. Taking the cup out of her hand, he placed it on the countertop behind them and pulled her into his arms.

"I was only wondering what took you so long on the phone with my boss," Alicia replied as Brad removed her glasses placing them next to her coffee cup.

"Sure," he whispered as he ran his thumb over her bottom lip. "Did you think about our kiss after I left last night? It stayed on my mind all the way home and I replayed it over and over while I was alone in my big, empty bed."

Alicia noticed that Brad was watching her intently. She fought down the overwhelming need to push him away like she usually did. She was

going to be honest with him. Remembering the steamy kiss is what had kept her up half the night and was the reason she was so out of sorts this morning.

“Yes, I did. How could I forget it? I stayed up half the night replaying it over in my head.”

Moving closer to her, Brad pressed her body against the counter and the warmth from his muscular body eased into hers. She could feel the sexual magnetism that made him so self-confident.

“Did you fantasize about how unbelievable it would have felt if I had gotten to go any further?” he asked as his fingers traced the skin down the side of her neck.

“Yes.” She watched as Brad’s dark blue eyes darkened to a smoldering intensity at her confession.

“Confess your thoughts to me.” The words were spoken so low and sensually that it shot a ripple of awareness through her.

“I’ve nothing to confess. I was just having thoughts.” Alicia placed her hands against Brad’s chest and was shocked to feel how fast his heart was pounding. It was like he had just run a marathon.

“How about I go first?” he suggested.

“Hmmm...aren’t we going to be late for our appointment with Lee? I don’t want to get on his bad side worse than I already am.”

Removing her hands from his chest, Brad took a step back from her. She watched as the teasing light went out of his eyes and the hurt she felt turned her stomach. What in the hell happened?

“Sorry, I forgot how important your career is to you. So, we better hurry up. I wouldn’t want to be the reason Lee cancelled his interview time with you.” Turning away from her, Brad walked away without even making sure that she was behind him because he automatically assumed she would follow him.

“Brad, wait!” Alicia yelled running after him.

Spinning back around, Brad stopped and suddenly yanked her against his powerful body. Alicia gasped as her breasts pressed into his hard chest. “Alicia, I’m going to tell you something and this is the last time I will tell you this. I’m in love with you. I’ve been since I first laid eyes on you in that pink tennis outfit, but I will only take so much of you shoving me away.”

“Brad...”

Brad placed his finger over her mouth. “No, I don’t want to hear you say something that you might be able to take back. Whatever has you

scared to commit to me, I want to help you work through. However, I can't keep falling more in love with you if you know there isn't going to be a future between us. I'll give you to the end of this project about my family to make your decision."

Removing his finger off her mouth, Brad gave her a quick kiss and then left the room leaving her speechless.

Chapter Eleven

Sitting inside the empty office, Alicia wanted to be thinking about the questions she wanted to ask Lee, but all she could think about was Brad and what happened this morning in her kitchen.

He actually told her that he was falling in love with her. It was one way to think she might know something, but, it was totally different situation to hear Brad tell her the words with such a passion that it touched her and made her feel them.

God. How could she get anything done now with his confession running through her head? There had been so much going on at her house this morning that she thought she wouldn't ever make it here on time. At least with Brad's help they had found her car keys wedged between the sofa cushions.

While they were still at her house, she had tried numerous times to get Brad into a conversation, but he blocked her every attempt by bringing up a different topic. How was she ever going to be able to tell him she wanted to give it a try if he wouldn't listen?

He wanted to be with her and she was slowly changing her mind about things. She wanted to see how it was to be with a man who cared about her so deeply that he wasn't afraid to admit it to her.

The sound of the door opening and closing behind her made Alicia spin around in her seat and she found her best nemesis behind her. She swallowed hard as she found the most intimidating of the Drace brothers glaring at her. Lee really disliked her and he'd never minced his words about it.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, but since you were a few minutes late I decided to take care of some other things," Lee said as he moved away from the door and took a seat across from her.

Alicia knew that she hadn't been late, but she wasn't going to argue with him. It wouldn't do any good anyway. Lee would still think he was right and she was wrong.

"Thank you for agreeing to meet with me," she said, sitting up straighter in the chair as Lee's gaze never left her face.

“Why are you leading my brother around in a circle? You have to know that he’s in love with you, but you constantly stomp on his feelings. Care to tell me why?” he asked smoothly, with no expression on his face.

Alicia’s body froze after Lee’s unexpected attack on her. She wasn’t prepared for the harsh words. As she slowly gathered her thoughts so she wouldn’t tell Lee, the arrogant ass, where to go, she was keenly aware of his scrutiny. It was like she had to pass some sort of a test she wasn’t aware she had to take.

“Lee, I’m here to get background info on you before I start the angle for my story. I’m not interested in talking about my relationship with Brad. However, if I was, I seriously doubt that it would be with you.”

“Why, because you know that I’d see through your lies?”

“I think it would be best if I...”

“Lee, will you stop attacking Alicia with all of those questions,” Cherise snapped as she came into the room through another door. “I was concerned when you told Brad you wanted to do this at home instead of work.”

Alicia noticed how Lee’s face went from distrust to love in a flash at the sound of his wife’s voice. Getting out of the chair, Lee rushed over to his very pregnant wife like Alicia wasn’t even still in the room with them.

“I thought you were going to take a nap. You know that you need all the rest you can get. It was doctor’s orders that you spend a couple of hours in bed every day,” Lee complained, kissing his wife on her cheek.

Cherise glanced around Lee and looked at her. “I was until I realized that Alicia was here and might need my protection and from the sound of your voice, I can tell that I was right.” Cherise patted Lee on his arm and moved away from him.

“Hello, Alicia,” Cherise said with a genuine smile on her gorgeous face as she walked towards her wearing a very expensive looking white maternity outfit. “It’s good to see you. Please forgive my husband for his lack of manners. How about we get something to drink and go out of the patio? I think I want to get interviewed first.”

Alicia glanced back at the Lee who glaring at her, then at Cherise who was grinning from ear to ear. “Are you sure about this?”

“Don’t let my husband’s mean look scare you. He isn’t going to fight with me. We can stop by the kitchen before heading outside to my flower garden that I started when I found out I was pregnant.”

“Cherise, I really think you should let me finish talking to Alicia. You need your rest.”

“Lee, I’m capable of talking to Alicia for a while. Besides aren’t you suppose to be meeting with Richard and Zack in ten minutes?”

“I won’t leave you here with her,” Lee said, looking in Alicia’s direction. “I don’t want her to upset you this close to your due date.”

“I’m not a she-devil. I wouldn’t think about hurting a pregnant woman.” Alicia couldn’t believe that Lee truly had such a low opinion of her.

“How do I know that?” Lee hollered back. “You keep hurting my brother every time you blow him off.”

What in the hell was wrong with Lee? How dare he keep tossing his unwanted and bias opinion at her? He knew nothing about her, but he voiced his belittling insults like he did. Well, he wasn’t going to get anymore free shots at her today. If he was in a bad mood for some reason, she wasn’t going to let him take it out on her.

“Cherise, thank you for your kind offer. However, I think I’m going to pass. I’ve better things to do with my day than to get insulted by Lee. I’ll come back another day when your husband is in a better mood.”

Walking past Cherise, Alicia went back over to her chair and gathered up her belongings. As she turned to leave she found Lee standing directly behind her.

“Ms. Hart, I’m shocked that you’re leaving in such a hurry. I thought you would be able to handle anything since you’re a reporter.”

Lord...didn't this guy know how to give it a rest.

“Lee, stop being so mean to Alicia. You know that Brad is going to hit the roof when he finds out about this,” Cherise said, jumping into the conversation.

“If Brad learns about Lee being a jerk, it won’t be from me.” Alicia gave Lee a hard glare before she brushed past him and left the room slamming the door behind her.

On the way back home all Alicia could think about was how she’d allowed Lee to push her buttons once again. How was she going to handle interviewing him if he already had his mind made up about her because of Brad? Why should she tell him that she was starting to see Brad in a totally different light now? She looked forward to seeing him and missed him when she didn’t.

Lee knew zero about her feelings for his baby brother. He didn't know how she was ready to give Brad a chance and push some of her fears about falling in love with him to the back of her mind. She was going to prove him and everyone else wrong.

Chapter Twelve

Standing next to the answering machine, Brad pressed the play button again to make sure he wasn't hearing things. After the way he had left Alicia at her house before her meeting with Lee, he never thought this would be waiting for him when he got home from a long day at work.

"Brad, hi! I was wondering if you aren't working late if you would like to come over for dinner. I usually eat around six o'clock if you decide to come over, bye, Alicia."

Pressing his shoulder against the kitchen door frame, Brad couldn't keep the huge grin off his face. This was the first time Alicia had ever asked him out on a date. Maybe she was starting to see the light when it came to him and that they might be able to have something really good if she only opened up her heart a tiny bit.

Why couldn't Alicia look in the mirror and see herself in the same way that he saw her: as a delightful and entertaining hot woman that could be so much more if she only got over some of her insecurities.

Sure, Alicia possessed the confidence needed to be a brilliant reporter, but she was also incredibly clever and talented outside of her profession. She had found a way of talking him into asking his family into doing this new story about them. Even the media-hating Lee had jumped on board at the very last minute for him.

Didn't Alicia understand that she would always be dying to learn new things because her mind was constantly on the lookout to explore new activities or thoughts? She tried to pretend that she was an unappealing woman who lived for her work, but he felt the inner passion Alicia fought so hard to keep a secret from everyone.

Brad knew deep down in his gut that a married life with Alicia would never be predictable. His woman had an insatiable thirst for learning new things and digging out situations most people wouldn't even think twice about.

The more he was around Alicia the more she amazed him. She was changing a little and he wasn't too proud to take some of the credit for it. Something inside of Alicia was wounded and it called to him to fix it.

Most of his family was trying to be supportive of his pursuit of Alicia, but he could see some of them even doubted if Alicia truly cared about him. He never thought of Alicia as unfeeling or detached. Rather he saw her as a woman who spent more of her life with tunnel vision towards her career and not on love.

Now with him confessing his love for her every time he got the chance, Alicia wasn't sure how to act because none of it fell into her well-laid plans for her life. Challenging would be the word he would use to describe his woman. Alicia fought and pushed him away at every turn because his love was something new and hit her out of the blue.

A small part of her could be afraid of commitment and that was understandable after the way Max had treated her. Nevertheless, it was time for Alicia to leave Max in the past and for her to see what was right in front of her face...*him* and his love for her.

Well, tonight would be another step in that direction, Alicia had invited him over for dinner and he wasn't about to miss out on this golden opportunity to spend the evening with her. Picking up the cordless phone off the stand, Brad punched in Alicia's number and waited.

"Hello," she answered in her soft voice which he considered the sexiest thing he had ever heard.

"Hi, baby. I got your message. Of course, I would love to have dinner with you. Do I need to bring anything?"

"I don't have anything for dessert."

"You mean you aren't going to be dessert? I already know how sweet you taste. I could make a meal out of you." Brad's flirty comment was met by silence. He hoped that he hadn't ruined his small progress he had made by voicing his inner thoughts.

"You never know what might happen after you show up, but bring something sweet just in case," Alicia flirted back shocking the hell out him and then she hung up.

A second hadn't passed before Brad hung up the phone and then raced up the stairs to get ready for his date. He would think about what to bring for dessert while he was in the shower.

Alicia's dinner invitation was a surprise to him but before the night was over he would make sure that he impressed Alicia with something she wouldn't forget for a while.

Taking the last piece of cubed chicken out of the skillet, Alicia worked on the rest of the ingredients for the Chicken and Coconut meal she was working on for dinner tonight with Brad.

After her horrible interview experience with Lee, she had actually thought about spending the night alone to think about it, but in the end she changed her mind. Why should she allow Lee to bother her? It wasn't like his views were going to change any time soon.

She wasn't trying to impress him and the only Drace brother's opinion who mattered was Brad. He *knew* her. He found ways to get deeper into her mind and she liked that the most about him. He wasn't scared away by her defenses.

Picking up the cut bell peppers and scallions, she tossed them into the skillet and stirred them around. After about a minute, she tossed in the other items and mixed them in as well loving how the smells of Thai Red Curry paste and ground cumin filled the kitchen.

Alicia left the food cooking on the stove to grab a bag of cauliflower florets along with matchstick carrots out of the refrigerator. She quickly opened them and added everything including the chicken back to the hot pan before pouring in the coconut milk she had measured out earlier. Turning the heat down, Alicia added a lid to the food so it could simmer.

Chicken with Coconut curry was one of her favorite meals because on one of the rare occasions that her parents would take her and her siblings to her grandmother's house for a visit, this was the one meal that they would cook together while her siblings would be outside playing.

Over the years, she had gotten pretty good at whipping up a satisfying meal, but anytime she experienced a bad day, she would always fix this one for dinner and it made everything better in her eyes.

She only hoped that Brad like it. Inviting Brad to dinner was a huge step out of her comfort zone, but she had dialed his number and left the message. Brad was good for her. He knew how to make her smile without even trying. More and more she was getting used to the idea of him being a part of her life.

Chapter Thirteen

The sound of the doorbell ringing made her glance over at the clock on the microwave. Damn, Brad was thirty minutes early. Leave it to him. Taking off her apron, Alicia tossed it on the island and then smoothed her hands over the dress she kept buried in the back of her closet for a special occasion.

As she made her way to the front door, Alicia blew out a deep breath and shoved the anxiety from her body. How was it possible that being in front of a camera for millions of people never had her heart pounding as fast as it was at this moment? Was opening the door for Brad really this nerve racking?

“Stop it. You can do this,” Alicia mumbled to herself before she opened the door.

A soft gasp escaped her as her eyes landed on Brad. He stood there, stunningly handsome in a dark blue shirt that could almost be mistaken for black. The rich outlines of his shoulders strained against the fabric making her wish she could see him without it. The top two buttons were open revealing a tantalizing glimpse of a muscular chest covered with crisp light brown hair.

She even liked how his usually clean shaven face had a shadow of a beard that gave him an even manlier aura. “Wow, you look nice,” Alicia complimented when she finally stopped staring long enough to speak.

“Baby, you look damn hot!” Brad eyed the strapless black dress she was wearing especially for him, not that he knew that. “I’m glad you invited me over for dinner because I wouldn’t let you leave the house wearing that killer dress.”

“Oh, really.” Alicia moved to the side, waving Brad inside and closing the door behind them. “What’s in the box?” she asked, pointing to the medium sized box in his hands.

“I’ll tell you in a minute.” Brad set the box on the table and came back to her. “But I want to do something with you first.”

“What do you want?” Like she had to ask because she already knew the answer, but she did anyway just in case she was wrong.

Yanking her into his arms, Brad covered her mouth with his slipping his tongue inside. He moved his mouth over hers devouring its softness. His tongue sent shivers of aching desire racing through her. Alicia wrapped her arms around Brad's shoulders allowing herself to really get lost in the moment. She was shocked at her own eager response to Brad's firm lips.

Slowly, he pulled his mouth away to nibble at her earlobe. "Do you know how good you taste? I could make a meal out of that perfect mouth of yours."

Alicia's fingers played with the hair at the back of Brad's nape as she breathed in his cologne. "You taste pretty good yourself, Mr. Drace," she teased before stepping back. "But if I don't check on the food in the kitchen we won't have anything to eat."

Brad tapped her on the ass as she moved past him. "God, what smells so good?" he asked following her into the kitchen carrying the box.

"I'm treating you to my specialty," Alicia answered taking the lid off the skillet, she watched as the steam escaped. "It's chicken with coconut curry." She tested a piece of the chicken with her fork before replacing the lid, turning off the burner and setting the pan to the side of the stove.

"Are you going to tell me what's in the box?" She was dying to see what Brad brought with him.

"How about you come and take a look for yourself?" Placing the dessert box on the table, Brad waved at it and then took a step to the side.

Walking over to the dessert, Alicia took a peek at Brad who winked at her. She flipped it open and found a perfectly made chess pie inside. God, she couldn't remember the last time she had a deliciously sweet slice of chess pie. Her grandmother used to make them every Christmas when she was a little girl and her grandmother passed away ten years ago.

Brad didn't have a clue what wonderful memories had rushed back to her causing her to blink back sudden tears. She had loved her grandmother so much and it killed her when she had passed away from pancreatic cancer when she was only seventy-six years old. Alicia truly believed a part of her died that day too.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Brad asked, touching her on the shoulder. "Why are you crying over chess pie?"

Closing the box, Alicia glanced up at Brad and the concern on his face touched her. Damn, Brad's good guy image seemed like the real thing. Alicia brushed a tear away from her eye with the back of her hand.

“Oh, seeing the pie brought back some good childhood memories of my grandmother. She was an outstanding woman and despite being gone for close to ten years, I still miss her like it was yesterday.”

Grabbing her by the arm, Brad pulled her against his chest allowing her body to soak in his warmth. “I know how you feel. I was young when my parents died and I’m an adult now, but the loss hasn’t gotten any easier on me either. I was very close to my mom and dad. It killed a part of me when they died so suddenly.”

Blinking away the last of her tears, Alicia gently pushed Brad away from her. She didn’t want this dinner to turn into a night of sorrows. She wanted to have fun tonight because she was trying to give this thing a chance between them.

“Okay, enough tears already. How about you sit down and I’ll bring the food over to you?”

“Do you need any help?” Brad asked, brushing his thumb over her cheek.

“No, I can get it. Just sit down and relax.” She removed Brad’s hand from her face and went back over to the stove. She needed a few minutes to herself to get her emotions back under control. She wasn’t expecting tonight to take the sudden turn that it had.

Alicia felt Brad’s eyes linger on her back for a minute before he took a seat at her kitchen table where a bottle of red wine was already there waiting for them. While she dished up their food in two large red bowls, Alicia slowly cleared her mind and got herself back under control.

The kiss she’d shared earlier with Brad eased back into her thoughts. Brad could set her body on fire like no other man in her past. He knew how to make love with his mouth and keep her wanting more and more from him. If he hadn’t been the one to pull away, she wasn’t sure where the two of them might have ended up tonight.

Okay, calm down and stop drooling over your dinner date. It isn’t like you haven’t been around Brad before alone.

Alicia quickly got herself together before she embarrassed herself. She picked up the bowls of food and carried them over to the table. She noticed how Brad’s eyes started at her legs and slowly inched their way up her body and lingered on her breasts before connecting with her eyes.

The hot intensity in them almost made her drop the food on the floor. She felt she’d better sit down soon before she fell down.

“Here you go,” Alicia said, placing one of these bowls in front of Brad before taking a seat.

“Thank you. I hope you don’t mind I poured you something to drink,” he said, pointing toward the wine glass.

“No, I don’t. Go ahead and take a bite. Let me know what you think,” she told Brad before taking a bite of her food.

They had been eating for about five minute before Brad finally commented. “This is really delicious. I think I found someone who is right up there with Cherise. Don’t let her taste this or she might try to get the recipe from you,” he teased.

Alicia was honored by the comment because Cherise was a professional caterer which meant she knew her way around a kitchen. “Thank you. It’s a family recipe. I love cooking it when I have the time.” She left out the part about how it usually cheered her up after a bad day.

“How did your first interview go with Lee today?” Brad tossed the question out at her as she was about to reach for her glass of wine.

Placing the glass back down on the table, she tried to think of a way to get out of answering the question. She wasn’t about to tell Brad the truth and how Lee told her what he truly thought of her...*again*.

“Hmmm...I wasn’t able to really start it today. Some stuff came up and I had to leave early. I need to reschedule with him later on in the week,” she lied.

“Why don’t you just tell me the truth?” Brad asked as he placed his spoon next to his bowl. “Lee was mean to you as usual and you practically ran from the house after he was finished with his derogatory remarks.”

“Who told you that?” She gasped. Alicia knew Lee wasn’t about to admit to his behavior so who told Brad about what really happened?

“Cherise called me right after it happened. She thought you might not tell me and she was right. Why didn’t you?” The anger rang out in Brad’s usually calm and collected voice.

Alicia could sense the barely controlled anger that was coiled in Brad’s body. That was why she didn’t call and tell him about Lee. She couldn’t allow a wedge to form between big brother and little brother because of her. Lee had a right to his opinion and as a reporter she knew and understood that.

“What Lee told me wasn’t anything that I hadn’t already heard before. He was right. I wasn’t giving you a chance in the past like I should have. How can I be upset about the truth?”

Brad’s posture relaxed a little like her answer had helped ease some of his anger, but not all of it.

“Lee doesn’t know anything about you or our relationship. I don’t give him advice about his marriage to Cherise. So, he should give me the same courtesy.”

Alicia seriously doubted that Lee needed any advice when it came to his marriage. He looked at Cherise with such devotion that she was positive Lee would do anything his wife asked him to as long as it was within reason.

“Enough about your brother,” she said. “How about we go to the living room and listen to some music unless you’re ready to call it a night?”

“I’ll never pass up an opportunity to have you in my arms,” Brad said, getting up from the table. “Do you need help with the dishes?”

“Just leave them there. I can get them later.”

Walking over to her, Brad kissed the back of her neck and then pulled out her chair. “Come on, baby. I’m dying to get you in my arms.”

Standing up, Alicia’s senses were spun by the scent of Brad’s raw sensuality and the image his words evoked in her head. She wanted to be in his arms too. More and more she was beginning to like how he was shattering the hard shell that she had built so carefully around her heart.

Chapter Fourteen

Toni Braxton's smoky voice filled the room as Brad pulled Alicia closer as they swayed to the music. Tonight was turning out so much better than he thought it would. Alicia had opened up to him some allowing him a glimpse into her past.

She never really talked about her family much. All that he knew was that she was the younger out of three siblings and her brother and sister moved away from home right after graduation.

Alicia's ability to start opening up toward him was wonderful, and he knew that her sharing her emotions with him was essential. It was going to be the first key he needed to crack open the door to her heart.

He was able to see how his romance with Alicia wasn't going to take off like a rocket the way Zack's did with Traci, However, his relationship wouldn't have the secrets or lies that almost ruined everything between Richard and his wife Dawn.

No, his connection with Alicia was different and he didn't care because it was his life and not theirs. After years of working towards something; it was beginning to happen for them. Alicia was a different woman with different needs....which by the way he planned to address every way that he could over time.

Burying his nose below Alicia's earlobe he breathed in the sexy scent of lavender or maybe jasmine there. The fragrance was like her signature. Even after spending hours on the tennis court with him, it was constantly present on her skin. It was so much a part of her personality.

"You smell so good. I could stay like this for the rest of the night," Brad whispered against Alicia's skin.

"I could too. I have to admit I'm having a good time."

*Good time...*that's all Alicia was having with him? Well, he would have to do something to bump up her adjectives about their date. He didn't like his dating skills being called only good.

Tilting her head up, he ran his thumb over her glossy lips. He had been fighting the urge to kiss her again since dinner. The aching need hadn't stopped and neither had his growing erection. As close as they were dancing, he was surprised Alicia hadn't felt its presence.

“Brad, what’s wrong?” Alicia asked, concerned.

He didn’t answer her, but captured her lips in a hot kiss before she had time to react or get it in her silly mind to drive him away. He was ready for the worst, but shockingly Alicia kissed him back with an equal amount of passion. Her mouth sucked at his tongue the moment he slipped it into her mouth.

Brad grabbed Alicia’s ass lifting her up, so she could wrap her legs around his waist. Without breaking their kiss, he carried her across the room and laid her down on the plush dark brown couch.

“You feel so fucking good beneath me,” he moaned by the corner of Alicia’s swollen lips. He was dying for a look at her breasts. Their brown full perfection had been tempting him since Alicia greeted him at the door wearing this short temptress dress. It was made to send a man’s blood pressure up to the next level.

Did Alicia really expect him to keep his hands to himself with her looking so good?

“Do I really?” Alicia asked as she ran her hand down the front of his shirt.

The feel of her soft hands on his body sent blood rushing to his hard cock. Shit, maybe this make out session wasn’t such a good idea after all. He wanted to show Alicia how much he cared about her and seducing her into bed on their first date wouldn’t do that. He wanted to be different than her previous boyfriends.

Dropping his head against her forehead, Brad took a deep breath and blew it out trying to refocus his thoughts away from making love to the sexy and desirable woman in his arms.

“Alicia, I should leave.” The words were spoken in agony, but Brad knew it was the right thing to do. “I don’t want to rush you into anything tonight.”

Brad took one last whiff of Alicia’s perfume before rolling off her body. Damn, he loved the desire he saw lurking in her eyes. It gave him hope that everything he was going through wasn’t for nothing. If Alicia responded to him like this, there was hope for them to have a real future together.

“Why are you leaving?” Alicia asked looking like a woman who was begging her man to make love to her.

Shit! Why wasn’t he doing what both of them wanted? No. He wasn’t going to win her body over with sex. He wanted her heart in love with him

as well. Yes, she was attracted to him, but he desired more than that. He deserved to have everything that his brothers had with their wives.

Standing up, Brad ran his fingers through his hair calling himself a million kinds of stupid. Instead of leaving her, he should be back there kissing her senseless, but he knew that Alicia had been crushed by Max and he didn't want to push her. He was madly in love with her and pushing her towards a rushed relationship isn't what he wanted to do...not with Alicia.

"I'm leaving because you aren't ready for us to make love yet. I won't force you into something that will ruin your memory of tonight."

Grabbing Alicia by the hand, he pulled her up and against his body. "Don't get me wrong. I want to strip this beautiful body of yours naked and make love to you until I'm the only thought imprinted in that smart brain of yours, but I'm going to hold off for a little while longer."

Before Alicia could utter a sound, he recaptured her mouth for a quick hot kiss and then stepped back. Turning on his heel, Brad opened the front door. "Lock this as soon as I leave." He went out closing it behind him leaving a stunned and sexual frustrated Alicia staring at a closed door.

Chapter Fifteen

“Do you think I was crazy for leaving Alicia last night? Instead of being here with you, I could be waking up in her soft arms.” Brad shoved a piece of fluffy pancake into his mouth as he watched Richard across the kitchen table.

“Is that why you wanted me to invite you over to my house for breakfast? I thought you wanted to spend time with your favorite brother.” Richard took a sip of his black coffee and watched his brother over the mug.

“Stop busting my balls and answer my questions.”

Chuckling, Richard placed his coffee cup back down on the table. “Zack and Lee would tell you that you were dumb for leaving last night. I think you did exactly the right thing. There’s something about Alicia that reminds me of Dawn.”

“Really, I thought Alicia was more of a Cherise with her commitment issues. I lost count of how many times Cherise pushed Lee away from her.”

“I can see where you get that idea from, but that tough exterior is an act. She really has a tender heart like Dawn. You’re doing the right thing by winning over her emotions first. Any man can make a woman’s body want him, but only the man who’s meant to be with her can truly capture her heart.”

Brad was shocked by Richard’s advice. He didn’t know that his brother was this deep or insightful. “I can’t believe you know so much about women now after the way you treated Dawn.” The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them and he instantly regretted his jibe.

“You’re right,” Richard agreed not taking offense to his nasty comment. “I was a real bastard to her. I shouldn’t have ever treated her the way I did. Thank God she loved me enough to forgive me and marry me.”

Brad couldn’t hold back his astonishment. He was momentarily taken back by his brother’s honesty. Richard had never opened up like this to him before.

“What if Dawn had wanted to be with Hamilton instead of you? Would you have let her go?”

“Fuck no!” Richard snapped. “Dawn might have been upset with me, even a little disappointed, but never enough to ever consider Hamilton as a love interest. I would have kidnapped her and locked her away at our family’s cabin until she got over it. Dawn is my wife now and forever. I truly would be lost without her and our son.”

Finally, someone who understood what he was going through. “See, Alicia is that for me, but she’s having a hard time opening up. How much longer should I wait before I move on to someone else that I might be able to have a future with?” Brad hated the thought of spending the rest of his life without Alicia.

“You will never be happy with another woman if Alicia is the love of your life. Fight for her with everything that you have in you and from what you just told me about last night. Alicia isn’t fighting you the way she used to in the past.”

The memory of making out with Alicia had kept him up most of the night and well into the morning. “No, she isn’t putting up blocks against me anymore. I think I’m moving towards something good with her.”

“Great...now enough about Alicia,” Richard said. “I want to discuss your life. Are you still thinking about leaving Lee’s business and starting up your own?”

He hadn’t let go of the idea of being his own boss, but starting up a new venture was hard especially since he still wasn’t too sure what he wanted do. “I haven’t decided yet,” Brad admitted, honestly. “Sometimes, I get a little envious that you, Zack and even Lee have jobs that the three of you love.”

“Don’t be jealous. We always knew what we wanted to do since college. You, on the other hand, loved being outside more than you ever cared about being inside a building,” Richard told him. “Just make sure this time you decide on a career that you love to do every day.”

Stretching his legs out underneath the table, Brad ran the palm of his hand along the back of his neck trying to relieve some of the knots. Richard made it sound so easy, but it wasn’t. He just couldn’t do anything with his life. He had to pick a good career, so he could be on an equal playing field with Alicia. She was younger than him and was already working at a job she loved and moving in the right direction with her life.

“It’s not as easy as you’re making it out to be. I’m thirty-two years old. I should already have a well-established career and I don’t. How can I ask Alicia to spend the rest of her life with me when I won’t be able to take care of her?”

“Alicia doesn’t seem like the type of woman who will want you to take care of her. All you need to do is love her and that will always be enough.”

“Are you sure?” Brad asked more than a little worried.

“Well, it’s enough for my stunning wife,” Richard laughed, trying to ease some of the tension in the room. “How about you take a peek at your nephew before you leave?”

His brother got up from the table and pushed the chair back in then headed for the door. “I think Dawn should be done bathing him by now. I told her I would stay home from work today, so she could spend the day with Traci and Cherise.”

“Do you love being a father?” Brad asked.

Turning back around, Richard gave him a smile so huge that it spread from ear to ear. “Sterling is the most beautiful gift that Dawn could ever give me. The love I have for my little boy knows no bounds. You’ll see when you have your own.” Richard spun back around and went out the door towards the nursery at the end of the hall.

Brad stood alone in the kitchen for a few minutes wondering would he ever be a husband and a father. He knew one thing. He wasn’t going to let Alicia leave him without a damn good fight on her hands. She was his perfect woman and he wanted her in his life forever.

Whistling to himself, he walked out of the kitchen and followed behind his brother thinking of another way that he could win over another piece of Alicia’s heart.

Chapter Sixteen

Standing in front of the window in her small office, Alicia glanced down at the crowd of people walking below but she really didn't see them. Her mind was on something else, the same thing that had been keeping her up most of the night...*Brad*.

After the way the two of them had made out on the couch, she was positive he would ask to spend the night in her bed, but he surprised her. Instead of picking her up and carrying her the short distance to the bedroom Brad gave her a long, slow kiss and then left leaving her in a state of arousal that she had never experienced before.

Brad's attention to her last night made her feel so cherished and understood. She might have been upset when he first left, but Brad was trying to prove to her that he wanted to create a meaningful and intense connection with her that wasn't spent getting sweaty between the sheets.

Now, the idea of spending the night in Brad's bed wasn't horrible at all. Truly, the more she gave it thought the more she dreamt about it happening every night she was home alone in her empty bed.

Alicia hadn't been the same since Brad started showering her with his unwavering attention. Somehow, he had gotten into her psyche and she was having a very hard time pushing him out this time.

Leaving the window, Alicia walked over to her desk and touched the flowers sitting there. When she had arrived here this morning a dozen red roses had been waiting for her at the security desk with the guard. How Brad found someone to deliver flowers that early in the morning she would never know. Reaching for the card, she flipped it open and read the note again.

Last night was wonderful; I hope that we have many more in our future,

Love,

Brad

Alicia wasn't about to ignore the little skip of her heart. She placed the card back and took a sniff of the roses again. Oh yeah! Brad was

paying her the right amount of attention with the way he was trying to get to know her.

“I didn’t know that you got paid to stand around and smell the roses. Wait until I tell our brother. You will never hear the last of it,” a female voice teased behind her.

Spinning around, Alicia screamed before running over and giving her big sister a hug. “Chloe, what are you doing here? I thought you were going overseas to give a lecture,” Alicia said as she took a step back from her sister who could have been a stand-in for Venus Williams.

“The seminar got cancelled,” Chloe said. “So, instead of going back home I decided to come and see my favorite little sister.”

“I’m your only sister.”

“That is true,” Chloe agreed as she moved around her and headed over to the roses and read the card. “Is this the tennis instructor you used to tell me about? Are you finally giving this guy a chance?”

Going across the room, Alicia took the card from her sister and shoved it back into the flowers. “I don’t need any advice from you and the last time I checked there wasn’t a ring on your finger.”

Chloe laughed at her outburst like she constantly did when they were children. “I’m single by choice,” her sister defended crossing her arms over her chest. “You’re single out of fear. You need to let the past go and move on. What happened back when you were younger wasn’t your fault. How many times do I need to tell you that before you believe me?”

Alicia wasn’t going to do this with her sister. Chloe should leave the past dead and buried. “I’m done talking about this.”

“You shouldn’t let what happened with Brian and Nick keep you from falling in love with Brad. Alicia, they didn’t die because of you. How can you believe that they did?”

Enough already...she was done discussing this subject. She had just got through being on television for nine hours straight. She was ready to go home and take a couple of hours break before she was due back tonight for a late broadcast.

In addition to her sister’s unwanted advice, Tiffany was hounding her to get a rough tape about the Drace brothers special to her, but her boss didn’t understand that she had to work around their schedule.

“Chloe, I’m thrilled you’re in town. How about we have an early dinner and I can bug you about your lack of love life so you will leave mine alone.” Grabbing her purse off her desk, Alicia made her way

towards the door and as she was about to open it the door was flung open and Brad walked through carrying a small box.

“Hey beautiful, are you ready to spend some time with me?” he asked and then stopped in his tracks when he spotted Chloe standing behind her. “Oh, I’m sorry I didn’t know that you had someone in here with you.”

“No problems,” Chloe answered before she could. “I’m Alicia’s sister Chloe. I just popped into town on a surprise visit. We were going to have dinner together, but my sister can go out with you instead.”

Alicia wanted to spend time with Brad, but she didn’t want to miss dinner with her sister either since she wasn’t sure how long Chloe was going to be in town.

“Chloe, I’m sure Brad wouldn’t mind me going out with him tomorrow night,” Alicia said, looking over at Brad who was still standing near the door.

“I apologize, I should introduce myself. I’m Brad Drace, Alicia’s boyfriend,” Brad said, shocking the hell out of her as he came further into the room and shook her sister’s hand. “How about I treat the two of you to dinner? I would love to hear more about Alicia when she was a little girl.”

When had she and Brad discussed that he was her boyfriend? What was going on here? She was thrown by his words, but she liked how it sounded, a lot.

Chloe’s gaze swung back and forth between her and Brad like she was debating on taking Brad up on his offer. God, Chloe would tell Brad all of her secrets. She didn’t want her sister to come, but she wasn’t about to tell her that she couldn’t.

“Thank you for your offer. It was very nice of you but I’m going to head back to the hotel. Have fun at dinner. Alicia and I can have breakfast tomorrow. I need to talk to my sister about something anyway.”

Coming over to her, Chloe hugged her and whispered in her ear. “Brad is gorgeous. Don’t fight him. Just have fun and let the chips fall where they may.” Chloe ended their hug, waved at Brad and then walked out the door closing it behind her leaving her alone with the good smelling hunk behind her.

“Chloe seems very nice. Are you sure you don’t want to have dinner with your sister?” Brad asked. “I don’t mind taking a rain check.”

If Chloe had wanted to have dinner with her there was nothing Brad could have done to stop it. “I think my sister would rather I go out to eat with my boyfriend.” The last part of the sentence was spoken as Alicia faced Brad who just stared at her.

“Did I do something wrong?” he asked, innocently.

“When did we officially become a couple I thought we were working towards that stage?”

Brad moved closer until he left her no room at all. She swallowed her and squared her shoulders. She wasn’t going to let Brad intimidate her.

“Sweetheart, you have been my girlfriend even when you thought you were in love with that idiot Max. Now, you have to get on the same page as me and realize it.”

“What if I don’t want to consider you as my boyfriend?” she taunted. “Maybe I’ll always consider you as a friend and nothing else.”

A faint light twinkled in the depths of his blue eyes as Brad watched her and then he smiled. All of her defenses melted away when he did that and brought her into his world.

“I’ll let you keep thinking we’re only friends for a while longer and then I’ll have to show you.”

“Show me...what?”

“That we are more than friends.” Brad said the words with the certainty of a man who had a plan and wasn’t about to wipe it from his mind. “We better get going or we’ll be late for our dinner reservations.”

“Do you want to tell me where we are going?” Alicia asked, deciding to drop the topic of Brad being her boyfriend for now. It wasn’t like the idea was such a bad one.

“No, it’s a surprise.” Brad lowered his voice, being purposefully mysterious.

“Thank you for the roses,” Alicia said. “They’re beautiful.”

“You’re welcome, but I don’t think there is anything in the world more beautiful than you are. Let’s hit the road. I don’t want us to be late.” Grabbing her hand, Brad escorted her to the door making her wonder why he was being so secretive about their plans for tonight.

Chapter Seventeen

"I can't believe you brought me here," Alicia hissed glancing at the closed front door. "You know that I'm not welcomed at his house. How about we grab something and eat it at my place before I head back to work? I want to spend some extra alone time with you anyway."

"No!" Brad snapped. "You are going to get over your fears of my family dinner starting tonight. There's nothing to be afraid of and it's about time you see that for yourself."

Taking her by the hand, Brad opened the front door and dragged her in behind him. The instant Alicia hit the living room, the scent of a home cooked meal filled her senses while the sound of family laughter touched her ears.

"Come, let's go and surprise everyone. They weren't expecting me to bring a date." Brad took her in the direction of the formal dining room before she could tell him no, so she just walked next to him.

Oh, Alicia bet that Brad's family would be in for a hell of a surprise when they saw her walking into dinner with Brad. She was going to gain more shock than Sidney Poitier did in *Guess Who's Coming Dinner*. She only prayed that things went better than she hoped.

"Sorry we're late everyone, I had to stop so I could bring someone with me," Brad said, interrupting the flow of conversation going on at the table.

Several pairs of eyes flew in their direction as all of Brad's family members stopped talking to look at them. Alicia felt like an animal on display in the zoo. It was really weird. Alicia stood next to Brad as Lee glared at her from his seat at the head of the table. She didn't have to guess what he was thinking, she already *knew*.

"Brad, you bought Alicia. It's about time," Traci said, grinning at them. "Take a seat you two and grab something to eat. As usual my sister fixed enough food to feed an army of guests and she knows that it's usually just us having dinner."

Alicia would rather have stayed in the doorway, but Brad gave her a small shove forcing her to walk and take a seat at the table.

“Hi, Traci and everyone else,” Alicia said. She wondered if everyone noticed her knees knocking together. She was so nervous, but she had to get over it. Brad loved spending time with his family and she wanted to enjoy this time with him. It would give her more of an insight into who he was and what made him the incredible man that he was.

“I didn’t think I would ever see you again after the way Lee treated you today,” Cherise said.

Cherise wasn’t too far off, Alicia thought.

She wasn’t in the mood to go round three with Lee again today. She crossed her fingers everything went smoothly for Brad’s sake. He thought so highly of all of his brothers and she wouldn’t want to do anything to change that.

“Like I said earlier, Lee has a right to his opinion, but that doesn’t mean that his aversion for me will keep me away from Brad. I like how I feel when I’m around Brad. He’s a wonderful man.”

“Nicely said,” Richard exclaimed. “You keep doing what you want. Lee just loves to hear himself talk. Ignore him and he’ll stop.”

Alicia couldn’t help but smile at Richard. Richard was right. Brad was a good guy, probably the last truly good guy she might meet in her life. She should have realized that before now, but she was going to do her best to make up for lost time and her stupidity.

“Thank you. I’ll remember that.”

“Okay, enough about warning Alicia about Lee,” Dawn chimed in. “We all know how controlling he can be, but we all love him anyway. Now, get some food on those empty plates before my husband goes for seconds. You know how much he loves Cherise’s cooking.”

Laughing, Alicia watched as Brad grabbed a bowl of mashed potatoes, placed some of his plate and passed it on to her. For the next couple of minutes they filled their plates with beef, green beans, macaroni and cheese, and bread.

“How are the interviews coming along?” Traci asked. “I’m excited about my turn coming up tomorrow. I have so much to tell about Zack.”

“Don’t you dare tell all of our secrets,” Zack joked, smiling at his wife.

She loved how all of the couples teased and flirted around with each other. She longed one day to be able to do that with Brad. She saw herself there, but just not quite yet.

“Alicia was going to interview me first, but I insulted her and she left,” Lee stated making everyone at the table look at him. “I apologize for

being so harsh. I should've kept my opinions to myself. I hope you can schedule another time to interview me and Cherise."

Shock was the only word that Alicia could use to describe how she felt about Lee's apology. She wasn't expecting it. It was almost too good to be true.

"Apology accepted," she said because she didn't know what else to do. "How about I call you after I'm finished with Traci's interview tomorrow? If you're free I can come by your office?"

"I'll be in meetings until at least one o'clock, but I'll be free afterwards," Lee told her.

She could tell that he was trying his best to be cordial and if she guessed right it seemed that Cherise had a long talk with her husband. Lee had taken a 180 degree turn about her and that could be the only reason why.

"Okay, I'll be at your office at two o'clock," Alicia said.

Alicia glanced down as Brad grabbed her hand on the table then looked back up at him. He winked at her and she couldn't help but to smile back. Maybe this dinner wouldn't turn out as bad as she thought it would. She was still a little nervous of Lee and wasn't quite sure what to think about his apology, but if he was willing to give an olive branch than she would take it for Brad.

"I guess now is as good as time as any to tell everyone our secret," Brad said loud enough for everyone to hear.

Secret... what secret was Brad talking about? She didn't have a clue.

"What are you talking about?" Zack asked, staring at them.

"Are you pregnant?" Lee tossed out. "Is that why you brought Alicia to dinner, so you could break the news in front of everyone?"

"No, I'm not pregnant," Alicia answered quickly. Shit! Lee would be the one who asked that question.

"Alicia and I are now officially a couple," Brad said, smiling at her. "It took her long enough to let me in. I'm hoping things will only get better from here."

Looking at Brad, Alicia knew that she would always remember this moment because this was when she first started falling in love with Brad Drace. He was willing to announce to his entire family that they were a couple when she wasn't even sure about it herself. How could a woman not fall in love with a man like that?

“What do you think about Brad bringing Alicia to dinner tonight?” Zack asked Traci as he walked around their bedroom and got ready for bed. “I was very surprised to see her, but I didn’t say anything because I could see how pleased Brad was to have her there.”

“I thought it was about time. I love Brad to death and I want to see him with a wife and children. I hope Alicia realizes what a wonderful guy she has in your brother.”

Taking off his shirt, Zack tossed it into the hamper near the bedroom door for the cleaners pick up tomorrow. “You think Alicia is the woman for my baby brother?” Zack asked.

“Sweetheart, it doesn’t matter what either one of us thinks, but yes I do think Alicia is the one for Brad. Brad is a protector and Alicia looks like she needs taking care of for some odd reason.”

“I don’t care what Alicia needs. I’m concerned about my brother.”

“Zack, you have to realize that Brad isn’t a little boy anymore. He’s an adult and doesn’t need you holding his hand. I honestly believe that Alicia has feelings for him. Did you see how she looked at him after his announcement? Without a doubt, that was the look of a woman falling hard for a man.”

Zack finished getting undressed and pulled a pair of pajamas out of the top drawer of the dresser. He yanked them on and then joined Traci on the bed.

“Lee wouldn’t agree with you,” Zack said as he tugged Traci against his bare chest.

“Honey, I love Lee but he needs to stay out of it. Would you have dumped me if he had told you too? We were having a lot of problems before we finally made up and got married.”

“Hell...no! I wouldn’t have given you up for anything in the world.” Zack told her.

“Brad feels the same way. He’s in love with Alicia and I truly believe they have a future together.”

Flipping them over, Zack pressed her back against the bed. “You know what? I’m tired of talking about Brad and Alicia. I’d rather be doing something else a whole lot more fun,” Zack whispered by his wife’s mouth.

“Like what?”

“Working on baby number two. Carter is almost three years old, so it will be a perfect time for us to start getting busy on a daughter How about it Mrs. Drace?”

Traci grinned at her husband as she wrapped her arms around his neck. “I think that I might be persuaded to make a new addition to our family,” she answered right before her sexy husband kissed her.

Chapter Eighteen

"I really should be mad at you," Alicia scolded, walking into her house with Brad behind her. She was still a little taken back by how well everything turned out at dinner tonight.

"You should but you aren't," Brad said, closing the front door and then locking it behind them. "I think tonight turned out pretty damn good with Lee. He actually apologized for his behavior towards you and even acted like he might try to give you a chance. Plus, Tiffany called and told you that you didn't have to come in after all of the late night news. How can your night be any better?"

"I know and I'm thrilled about it," Alicia admitted. "I also agree that Lee's gesture did take me back a little. I'm not sure how long it will last, so I'll take it while I can get it."

Brad looked at her intently, then strode across the room until he was standing right in front of her. "Do you know how gorgeous you look tonight in this pink dress? I had the hardest time participating at dinner because all I was thinking about was what you were wearing underneath."

Alicia shivered at Brad's confession. How could he do that? Talk about something not that important one minute and then in the next second be turning her on with his words. Well, she could play this game too.

"How about I show you?"

His dark blue eyes flashed a gentle but firm warning before Brad's hand reached out wrapping around her upper arms. "Alicia, don't play with me. I'm trying to be a gentleman and not rush into dragging you off to bed, but if you keep offering me gifts like you just did, I won't be responsible for my actions."

Alicia paused wondering if she was ready to make love with Brad and the answer was *yes!* She had been thinking about it ever since he left her alone in the living room. She was tired of unfulfilled fantasies. She was slowly going crazy to have the real thing...*Brad.*

"I'm not playing or teasing you. I want you, Brad." Her breath caught in her lungs as Brad's hand skimmed down her sides coming around to cup her ass.

“Damn baby. You have to be one hundred percent sure because once I make you mine I won’t ever give you up.”

Alicia wanted to be mad at Brad for being so dominating, but she couldn’t. Hearing how he wanted to take control was a turn on and she wanted to see how well he could do it.

Moving her head to the side, Brad slowly nibbled at her earlobe before sucking it into his warm, wet mouth.

“What are you doing?” she moaned, softly.

He leaned back, looking deeply into her eyes and as much as she wanted to she couldn’t pull her eyes away from his.

“Showing you who you belong to,” Brad told her.

Chapter Nineteen

This is what he had been waiting years for. He watched as all of his brothers fell in love and got married. Now was his chance to get his dream and he wasn't about to blow it.

"Do you want me to show you who you belong to?" Brad asked as he jerked Alicia's hips against his. He watched her big brown eyes grow wider as his already hard erection grew thicker and longer against her stomach.

"Brad."

He cupped her face in the palm of his hand and slid his fingers through her hair. "Yes *Brad*."

Brad loved how his name sounded coming off her soft lips. He didn't give Alicia a chance to answer him instead he fitted his mouth against hers swallowing her soft moans. Sweeping the inside of her mouth with his tongue, Brad tasted a hint of the red wine that Alicia had with her food at dinner. He savored the perfection of her.

All the tastes that made Alicia such a huge part of his soul were strong and pulling at his heart strings. This was the woman he was meant to be with, the woman who was created for him and only him—*his wife*.

Alicia didn't move as he learned the texture of her mouth. Sure, he had kissed Alicia before but to him everything was like the first time. It was like he was constantly imprinting the taste of her into him.

She whimpered and if it was possible his cock got even harder. Brad dragged his mouth away, fighting the need to undress her and make love to Alicia right where they stood. He had to give her one last chance to change her mind. He would give her that and if she didn't turn him down, he was going to make love to her until Alicia finally realized that she was his.

"Baby, this is your last chance to tell me no. I've been waiting for this for so long, but I will stop now if you need me."

Alicia's eyes roamed over his face with a spark of some indefinable emotion in them. From the look, Brad was concerned what her answer might be. Had he just ruined his chances at finally getting the opportunity to make love to Alicia by being a gentleman?

“I want you, Brad. I want you so bad that I have been dreaming about it at work,” Alicia confessed, sliding her hands through his hair.

With Alicia’s confession, his heart skipped a beat and then kicked into overdrive. He had been in a state of semi-arousal all during dinner at Lee’s house, but he couldn’t act on it because there were too many people around, but now that they were alone he couldn’t wait until he undressed her and got a look at her body laid out on her bed.

He wondered if she knew how badly his body ached for her. How at work he couldn’t think about clients or listen to Lee during his meetings. All his thoughts were consumed with her and how much he wanted her in his bed but most importantly his life.

“Sweetheart, you’re going to get me and so much more,” Brad promised as he lifted her up into his arms. “Where’s your bedroom?” This would be the last time he would have to ask that question because he planned on spending most nights there with Alicia.

“It’s upstairs. The first door on the right,” Alicia told him wrapping her arms around his neck.

Brad planted a soft kiss on Alicia’s smooth full lips as he hurried up the steps to her bedroom. He walked through the door and laid her down on the bedspread. He was too lost in being with Alicia to even care about the color or the design of it. Later on after he had gotten his fill then he would pay more attention to his surroundings.

“Damn, you’re so hot,” he murmured as the moonlight came through the open window and shone down on Alicia giving her body a perfect glow only for him.

Seconds later, his fingers untied the slash from around Alicia’s waist and he moved the silky fabric away from her body. His breath hitched in the back of his throat as his eyes landed on the leopard bra and panties that stood out perfectly against her creamy brown skin that reminded him of melted chocolate. The kind of chocolate most people used for chocolate covered strawberries.

Reaching out he palmed one of her breasts in his hand, leaned down and then stroked his tongue over the raised nipple before drawing it along with the bra into his mouth.

“God, that feels so good. Please don’t stop,” Alicia begged as she held his head to her breasts.

Brad worked at the breast in his mouth a few more minutes and then released it. Alicia cried out.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he promised as his fingers worked at the front snaps on her bra. “I just want this gone, so I can taste you better.”

Once the bra was undone, Brad got off the bed pulling Alicia with him. “Take off the rest of your clothing,” he demanded, taking a step back. “I’ve had too many sleepless nights dreaming about your naked body or waking up with my cock so hard that I thought I would go out of my mind. Now that I have you here I’m not missing the thrill of watching you get completely nude.”

“I don’t know,” Alicia whispered, staring up at him.

Brad liked that Alicia was nervous about stripping for him. It meant that she hadn’t done it that often with Max. He wanted to do everything with Alicia that Max had never done before.

“Come on...baby. You can do it. Show me this beautiful body that you’re offering me tonight”...*and for the rest of our lives.*

Brad didn’t voice the last of his thoughts, but kept them to himself. He wasn’t sure if Alicia was ready to hear the words that he knew were true.

Chapter Twenty

Brad growled when Alicia slowly slipped the dress from her shoulders and it fell to her feet into a silky pool. His cock jerked when the bra followed and then she pushed the barely there underwear down her hips and over her legs until the sexy material stopped at her feet and Alicia kicked them away.

Standing back up, Alicia tried to cover up her breasts with her hands, but he brushed them away.

“Don’t do that. I want to look at you. I *need* to see you.”

He’d wanted this moment for such long that he wasn’t about to rush it away. He had seen his share of naked women and up until now he thought all of them had perfect bodies, but he had been wrong. Alicia’s body was the most desirable and perfect one he had ever laid eyes on.

Brad ran his hands over her curvy little body, tight ass and firm thighs. He liked that Alicia was built like a woman and not a girl. Bending his head, he licked her mouth because it had been too long since he had tasted her.

Slowly, he raked his tongue along her full top lip, nibbled at it and then sucked it into his mouth. Alicia’s brushed her breasts against his chest as low purring sounds came from the back of her throat.

Masculine ego kicked in that he was the man causing this reaction in her.

“Alicia, I know that I’ve said this before, but I love kissing you. You taste so good. I could make a meal out of your mouth,” he whispered huskily against her moist swollen lips.

The urge to toss Alicia back on the bed and thrust into her grew even more when she licked her lips and her eyes grew even darker with passion.

Shit! He loved this woman and he was about to prove it to her, but there was one thing wrong. As much as he was getting pleasure from learning Alicia’s body, he didn’t want to be the only one doing the touching.

He wanted--no craved-- to feel her small hands on his body. So, he finally voiced what his mind had been thinking.

“Undress me.”

Chapter Twenty-One

Alicia blinked at him like she was clearing her head from a deep fog. Her eyebrows shot up to her hairline like she couldn't quite believe what he just asked her.

"You want me to undress you?" she asked, touching his chest.

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Baby, I haven't ever been more sure of anything in my life." He was tired of talking and wanted more action.

Standing on her tiptoes, Alicia eased her hands under his suit jacket and then slipped it off his shoulders. He didn't even pay attention to it hitting the floor. All he could think about was how good it felt to *finally* have Alicia's hands on his body.

Alicia nibbled her bottom lip as she slowly slipped the buttons out of his shirt. His dick thumped when the shirt was open and her soft hands were pressed against his warm chest.

"Oh God, you feel so good," Alicia whispered as she ran her hands across his chest. Her fingers made their way over to his nipples and she played with them for a few minutes before leaning closer and licking them with her moist tongue.

The control Brad was desperately trying to hold on to snapped at that moment and he knew that he wouldn't be able to get it back. Not after feeling how fucking amazing Alicia's tongue was on his body.

"Enough!" he growled. Picking her up, he tossed Alicia back on the bed and stripped out of his remaining clothing in record time.

He wanted to make his first time with Alicia something to remember for both of them, but his patience was gone. He had to get inside of his woman before he lost his mind.

"I've wanted this and you for such a long time that it seemed like an eternity," he admitted, his voice filled with need.

Brad lowered his body back on the bed covering Alicia's smoother one. He swallowed down a moan as he felt his naked body touch hers.

Her bare firm breasts pressed so perfectly into his chest and Brad recalled how he would watch them bounce so nicely under her tight tennis

outfit while he was giving her lessons. After countless weeks and months of dreaming about what Alicia would taste like, how her sexy curvy body might fit against his...it was happening.

Alicia subconsciously rubbed her breasts against Brad's smooth hard chest. Her body was on fire and she was trying to find a way to ease the ache. Why had she been so blind by a man who wasn't for her when the perfect man had been in front of her all along?

She sucked in a breath when Brad's knee slipped between her thighs. Seconds later, one of his long calloused fingers worked its way into her body.

"Oh God," she cried out in pleasure as Brad hot warm tongue licked at her neck and another finger worked its way into her wetness.

"That's right, baby, scream for me," Brad encouraged against her neck. "Tell me how much you're enjoying this."

"I'm loving this. You're making me wild," Alicia whimpered as her body twisted around on the cool sheets that were trying to stick to her damp skin.

"Impatient?" Brad taunted as he slowly slipped his fingers out of Alicia's tight body. She had been driving him crazy for so long, so it was only fair that he had a little fun with his woman.

"Yes...please stop teasing me."

Oh, he planned on teasing her a little longer. Not much because his control was about to snap, but he had to show Alicia who was in control.

Moving his mouth away from Alicia's neck, Brad placed it over her nipple sucking it into his mouth. Alicia's body jerked up so quickly off the bed that she almost knocked him off of her, so he placed his hand against her hip to hold her into place and he continued to love her smooth delectable body. He licked at the valley between her breasts before covering Alicia's squirming body with his

Brad wanted Alicia to such a point that he thought he was going to lose his mind from it. Easing his hands to her thighs, he spread them apart even further so the tip of his cock could brush against her.

He watched as Alicia's eyes grew even darker as pleasure slowly took over her body.

Her eyebrows rose as he slipped an inch of his erection inside of her. He silently prayed that she wouldn't stop him and tell him to put on a

condom. He wanted to have her with nothing between them at all because the heat of her was driving him crazy.

As he was about to work at making his ultimate dream come true, Alicia's hand slammed against his shoulder stopping him.

"Condoms."

Shit! He had forgotten all about those damn things. It had been such a long time since he'd needed them that a whole box sat unopened in his medicine cabinet at home.

No. This couldn't be happening to him. He would make Alicia understand that she could make love to him without protection because he was disease free and he'd definitely take care of her if she got pregnant.

"Baby, I'm safe," Brad said, taking Alicia's soft hand off his chest placing it back on the bed.

Doubt clouded her dark captivating eyes. "How can I be so sure?"

"I haven't thought about being with another woman since I learned your name," he answered, honestly. He only had the need to be with one woman and that woman was Alicia. How could he ever think about sleeping with second best when he wanted perfection sleeping next to him in bed? "Do you trust me?"

There was a slight pause before Alicia answered. "Yes, but what if I get pregnant?"

The thought of Alicia being pregnant with his child kicked his masculine ego into over drive. He wouldn't care at all if tonight made Alicia pregnant. Hell, the more he thought about it, the more he wanted to make it come true.

"Alicia, if you got pregnant it would make me the happiest man in the world," Brad admitted. "Can I continue?" He waited as his heart pounded in the middle of his chest.

She held his gaze for a fraction of a second before she slowly nodded her head giving him her complete trust.

Mine. The word suddenly appeared in his mind and it never meant more to him than at this moment.

Sliding his hands through her hair, Brad lowered his mouth recapturing Alicia's soft lips with his as he thrust in. Her body flinched as his cock entered her for the first time.

Brad stopped moving as the reality hit him. He couldn't believe it. Alicia was a virgin. She hadn't slept with Max. Alicia was truly his woman. She had saved this special gift for him.

Her nails cut into his shoulders as her body got used to having him buried deep inside of it. "Oh," she moaned as he pushed it a little deeper. "It hurts."

"Shhh...it will be okay, sweetheart." Brad whispered, softly. He didn't want to move too fast with Alicia..

He held steady within her, struggling for control not to pound into her because her warm, wetness was gripping him like a glove. She shuddered as her body tightened even more around his throbbing cock.

Leaning up on his elbows, Brad moved his hand out of her hair and pushed a silky black strand away from her creamy brown skin. He loved the color contrast between the whiteness of his skin and the perfect brown of hers.

Brad searched Alicia's face for any signs of discomfort or lingering pain, but the only thing he saw there was desire and wonder. The look called to him making him want to stroke it and feed its need.

"Are you okay?" *Please let her be ready for me to continue.*

"No," she answered.

He frowned. "What's wrong?"

"I want you to stop talking and make love to me. Don't you want the same thing or am I wrong?"

Brad spread Alicia's thighs further apart and pressed his chest against her. He could see the desire lurking in her sexy bedroom eyes.

"I'm a hungry man. Are you sure you're ready for me?"

Alicia nodded slowly.

Sliding out of her, Brad pushed back into her gently loving how her wetness slid over his cock. He felt like beating his chest and screaming at the top of his lungs like he was Tarzan because he was finally claiming Alicia as his.

His cock was so hard and it was getting even harder the more time he spent inside of Alicia. She was his addiction and he wasn't looking for a cure. He loved how she made him feel.

If he slammed into her the way he wanted, he would hurt her and the last thing he wanted to do was hurt Alicia. She meant the world to him. Every thrust and moan that came from her captured a piece of his heart making him fall more in love with her.

Brad could tell that she was close to coming from the way her breathing changed and how her hands gripped his hips. He pulled her closer to his body as he could and sped up his thrusts until she screamed

her release bucking and crying against him, but he still wanted more. He had to hear her soft voice screaming his name.

“Who am I?” Brad demanded as he continued to thrust into her welcoming heat.

“Brad,” Alicia cried out as her nails scratched his back.

Getting totally lost in the sheer pleasure of being with Alicia instead of it being a dream, Brad captured both of Alicia’s wrists in one hand and yanked them above her head. With his other hand, he wrapped her left leg higher on his waist and continued with his thrusts.

Right before his release took over Brad looked down into Alicia’s beautiful face with her eyes closed, top teeth nibbling at her bottom lip and he knew that he’d never be able to let her go. His cries echoed through her bedroom as his orgasm raked through his body.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Alicia relaxed against Brad beneath the covers as his fingers played with the skin above her navel. She couldn't believe that she'd finally made love to Brad and it had turned out to be the best night of her life. She was so glad that she hadn't given into Max any of that time he had tried to get her into bed just for sex.

Brad was on a totally different level than Max. Brad was loving, giving and understanding. He knew how to rise above any situation to see it with objectivity. It showed her there wasn't a selfish bone in his handsome body. He was the kind of man that wanted to help a person to empower himself and transform into a better person.

"Sweetheart, what are you thinking about? You're so quiet. Are you regretting what happened between us tonight? Was I too rough with you?"

She heard the concern in Brad's deep voice and it touched her. It was just like him to be worried about her well-being instead of his.

"No, I was thinking about how perfect tonight turned out to be," she answered honestly. "I never thought I could be with a man so completely."

Turning her body on the bed, Alicia faced Brad running the tips of her fingers over his lips. She smiled when he nibbled at her. "I want to thank you for not giving up on me all of those times I pushed you away because I didn't know any better."

Brad grabbed her wandering hand and laid it against his chest and heart. Alicia felt the steady beat and its movements relaxed her. "I wasn't about to give up on you or let you go because I welcomed the challenge of a good mystery."

Alicia smiled at Brad's description of her. "So, you considered me a mystery?" Alicia asked, grinning at the man she was in love with.

"Yes, the best kind."

"What kind is that, Mr. Drace?"

"The kind of mystery a reader isn't able to guess the ending after reading only the first five chapters. You kept me working to know about you," Brad said. "I like that quality about you."

"I'm glad that you did," Alicia replied and then yawned. She couldn't believe how tired she was.

Rolling over on his back, Brad pressed her head against his chest. “Why don’t you go to sleep? I can tell you’re struggling to stay awake.”

“No, I want to talk to you some more. There are some things I want to tell you.” Alicia didn’t want to go to sleep without telling Brad that she was in love with him.

“Darling, whatever it is can wait until you wake up. Now do as I ask and go to sleep. Nothing is going to change while you’re asleep for a few hours.”

Alicia opened her mouth to argue and then she shut up. Brad was right, she was tired and her love for him wasn’t going to change if she took a quick nap.

“Okay, I’ll go to sleep,” she said, snuggling closer. “You better still be here when I wake up.”

“I wouldn’t think about being anywhere else,” Brad answered, kissing her on the forehead before her eyes drifted closed.

Brad’s eyes wandered over the woman sleeping so peacefully next to him in the king size bed. He didn’t want to move around too much and wake Alicia up. She had to be the most beautiful woman that he had ever encountered in his life.

Her thick black hair stopped a few inches above her shoulders now and he liked her new haircut. It added a hint of sexiness to her, something that he found very tempting

It fit in perfectly with her cute nose and black eyebrows that were arched over a pair of brown eyes that could seduce him into doing anything when she looked at him.

When he was growing up he never thought about the woman that he would fall in love with, but he knew Alicia was his soul mate. The woman he would raise beautiful and healthy babies with. He didn’t care that Alicia was African American. All he cared about was that he could never love another woman but her and hopefully after tonight she felt the same way about him.

Unlike his brothers who dated a huge amount of women before they fell in love and settled down, he was very careful to only get intimate with a few ‘well-chosen’ women. He wasn’t a virgin and hadn’t been one since he was a junior in high school, but he had no need to have endless women clinging to him for attention.

For years, he had to get past what the women truly wanted from him? Was it the notoriety that his name and money brought? What could they give him besides an attractive arm piece and maybe a quick hot night in their bed?

Most of them never passed his test of wanting to spend time alone instead of going out to a fancy restaurant every night. He wasn't that kind of guy. Sure, he didn't mind spending time alone with his female companion, but he wanted more than that.

Alicia, despite all of her protests, showed him that she could be trusted, thoughtful about his feelings when she wasn't running scared and could give him space even when he didn't want it half the time.

Truthfully, he never had a chance to even think about falling in love with another woman after the strong sexual vibe between him and Alicia. She'd captured his attention and held it in the palm of her tiny hand ever since.

The emotional connection created a powerful intriguing stimulation that made him realize how he had found something very rare and special in Alicia. She made him so hungry to find out what made her tick. Alicia gave him the unique impression that something about her personality could enrich his life ultimately making it better and he was right.

Alicia was giving him enough courage to tell Lee that he was quitting the firm to open up his own tennis school. He loved tennis. It was a part of him like breathing. He might even call it a passion and he wanted to pass his love on to other people and children. He knew his brothers might be stunned and try to talk him out of it, but they wouldn't. His mind was made up and he was very pleased with his decision.

Brad saw and heard how Alicia loved talking about the complexity of her job and he wanted to have the same completeness when it came to his job. He doubted that Alicia even knew he saw or paid attention to these things when it came to her but he was intrigued by everything that was Alicia.

Complexity was another quality which had drawn him to the sleeping woman next to him. She seldom told him that things were fine. She had a fire in her eyes that came out at all the right times. He would be turned off by Alicia if he couldn't thrive in a good old-fashion argument with her.

No matter what, passion was a huge part of Alicia's personality. She let him in on what she aspired to be, but without coming off as needy for it. It was almost like she was allowing him to recite her dream with her.

Smiling down at Alicia, he touched the beauty mole on her cheek with his thumb. Love tugged at his heart because he was always going to remember this tender moment that he shared with her.

It would be something special that he kept with him even after the both of them had been married for years. Alicia was his one true love and nothing was going to stop him from spending the rest of his life with her.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The feel of soft lips kissing his face woke Brad up early the next morning. Opening his eyes, he found Alicia sitting on the side of his bed wearing a pair of jeans, a green t-shirt and her adorable glasses perched on top of her cute nose.

How did she get out of bed and get dressed without waking him? Was he really that tired?

“What are you doing up so early?” he asked, pulling her soft body on top of his. “I thought we could make love one more time before I left this morning.”

Alicia kissed him on the mouth and then rolled off his body to sit back on the edge of the bed. “I can’t. As much as I would love to I’ve plans this morning. My sister will be here shortly with breakfast and then I’m off to Zack and Traci’s to start the ground work on their interviews.”

Brad tried not to be disappointed, but he was. “I had plans for us today too, baby.”

Taking her hand, Brad slid it underneath the cover and wrapped it around his cock. “He wanted a little love this morning. Can’t you play for at least twenty minutes? I hate to make it so quick, but I can if we don’t have that much time.”

Alicia gave him a slight squeeze and then brushed her thumb over the tip. Brad could sense Alicia was weakening. He only had to work his magic a little more.

“Please baby. Do you want me to be like this all day? I will be because all I’ll be thinking about is how I missed out on making love to you this morning.”

“Thirty minutes,” Alicia agreed as she let go of his erection.

Flipping Alicia back on the bed, Brad quickly took off her shirt and worked on the button of her jeans as he lowered his head for a kiss. “No more than forty-five minutes,” Brad swore right before he kissed Alicia.

Forty minutes later, Alicia was pulling her t-shirt down over her jeans as she hurried towards the bedroom door before Brad grabbed her and yanked her against his naked chest.

"Tell Chloe I said hi," he whispered against her mouth as the doorbell rang followed by a loud knock at the front door.

"Get in the shower and then put your clothes back on that gorgeous body of yours," Alicia said, shoving Brad away from her and rushing out of the room.

"I'm coming," she yelled as she raced towards the stairs.

She rushed down them and brushed her hair down and straightened her clothes. Alicia took a deep calming breath and then opened the door smiling at her sister who was frowning at her holding a large brown paper sack in her hand.

"What were you doing?" Chloe came inside the house, her eyes raking over Alicia from head to toe. "I was outside for almost five minutes."

"Oh, I was upstairs. I didn't hear the doorbell at first," Alicia answered quickly slamming the door closed.

Chloe gave her another searching look before heading into the kitchen and placing the bag on the island. "Well, I'm glad you finally came because I was worried about the food getting cold on us." Her sister removed a white container of food out of the bag along with a drink. It smelled delicious. "Go sit at the table while I get mine."

Alicia took the food from her sister, moved over to the table and took a seat. She took a sip of her drink which turned out to be orange juice. Minutes later, Chloe joined her and flipped open her container.

Alicia opened hers and her eyes grew wide at the sausage, eggs, two biscuits and four strips of bacon piled there in front of her. God, she hoped that Chloe didn't think she would be able to eat all of this food.

"Why in the world did you get me so much to eat?" she complained as she waved her hand over the mound of breakfast food. She was usually a coffee girl for breakfast with a donut tossed in on a rare occasion.

"Oh, it's not that much and you'll burn it off with the way you move around," Chloe said before eating a fork full of scrambled eggs.

"You might be able to work it off that easily, but I won't." Alicia looked at her tall, model thin sister. Chloe had the perfect body that never seemed to gain an ounce of fat on it.

Shaking her head, she picked up a biscuit, tore it open and placed a sausage on it then took a bite. She tried not to moan at how good the food

tasted. This was the main reason she stayed away from breakfast food, it was her one weakness. Grabbing her orange juice, she took a sip and then placed it back on the table.

“Are you going to tell me the real reason you came for a visit?” Alicia knew her sister and Chloe never did anything without a damn good reason behind it.

“I missed my kid sister and wanted to catch up with her.” Chloe took a bite of her biscuit, followed by a bite of bacon.

Alicia ate some more of her food while she stared at Chloe. No, her sister wasn’t being completely truthful with her. There was something up and she would get down to the bottom of it.

“Don’t believe you. Try again.”

Chloe picked up her orange juice and took a long sip. “How about you tell me about you and that handsome boyfriend of yours? How serious is it? Did you have fun with him at dinner last night?”

Alicia was thinking for an answer to pacify her sister when Chloe’s eyes got round as saucers as she glanced over her shoulder. Before she could turn around a soft kiss was placed on the back of her neck.

“Good morning, gorgeous,” Brad whispered against her skin. “Sorry, I took so long in the shower. I wish you’d been there.”

She felt her face grow warm as Chloe took another sip of her orange juice, but didn’t say a word. God, she was going to get it after Brad left. Why did he have to do this to her?

“Hmmm...I was wondering if you were still here,” Alicia answered as she got up from her chair and faced Brad. She swallowed down a moan at how good he looked with his dark hair still damp and his suit jacket folded over his arm. He could have been a model on any runway.

“You know I wouldn’t leave without telling you goodbye,” he said, reaching around her grabbing a piece of bacon and biting down on it. “God, this is so good.”

Alicia grabbed the container off the table, closed it up and gave it to Brad. “Here you can have the rest. I won’t eat anymore of it.” She had to get Brad out of here before Chloe teased him or worse, her.

“Are you sure?” Brad asked taking the food from her. “I don’t want you missing out on the most important meal of the day because of me.”

“No, I’m sure. I’ll be okay.”

“Thank you, baby,” he said then kissed her again making her body melt against his.

The sound of her sister clearing her throat broke them apart. Alicia's eyes caught Chloe's and her sister had a huge smile on her face that spread from ear to ear.

"Brad, I better tell you good morning now before my sister kisses all of the breath from your body," Chloe teased.

"Good morning, Chloe," Brad replied, wrapping his arm around Alicia's waist. "I might be the guilty party instead of your sister. I can't help it, but I love kissing her. It happens when you're in love with someone."

Alicia could tell that Brad's answer pleased her sister by the way she leaned back in the kitchen chair and tilted her head to the side. Chloe could be a ball buster when she wanted to, but she sensed that for some reason Chloe liked Brad.

"Alicia, why don't you walk your boyfriend to the door," she suggested. "I'll stay here and we can talk some more when you get back."

She quickly grabbed Brad's hand and tugged him from the room before Chloe said another word to embarrass her. Anyway, she did want some more alone time with Brad before he had to leave because she wasn't sure when they would meet up later today.

At the front door, Alicia smiled up at Brad and she couldn't help the wonderful memories that came rushing back from last night. "I really loved last night. It was wonderful."

Brad glanced back at the kitchen before yanking her against him with his free hand. "I would rather be upstairs making love to you instead of heading back to my house, but thank you for this morning. I think I might actually be able to make it through my day without going crazy for you."

Why did Brad have to seduce her with his words and her sister was right in the other room?

"I'm going to miss you too, but we can meet up later after I finish with the interviews." Alicia kissed Brad and tried to move back, but he pulled her closer and reclaimed her mouth for a deeper kiss.

"I really don't want to leave you," Brad complained against her mouth.

"I know, I feel the same way, but think about the fun we'll have when we meet up later today," Alicia pointed out.

Stepping back, Brad stared down at her with his gorgeous blue eyes. "You're right. I need to stop at home and change out of this suit anyway before I head to work. In addition, I need to talk to Lee about a few things too."

Alicia heard the concern in Brad's voice. What was going on that she didn't know about? "Do you want to talk? I can ask my sister to leave."

Brad shook his head. "No, let me talk to Lee first and then I'll fill you in." Brad gave her another quick kiss and walked around her then opened the front door. Looking over his shoulder, Brad winked at her before closing the door behind him. "Goodbye, gorgeous. I'll see you later on."

"Are you still trying to deny that you're in love with that handsome man?" Chloe questioned behind her.

Rolling her eyes, Alicia faced her big sister who she loved dearly but wished she would stay out of her personal life. She knew what she was doing and didn't need any help from anyone else.

"I'm not going to discuss Brad with you. So, are you ready to tell me why you're here? I know that it isn't just to catch up with each other."

"Mom and Dad have been asking about you. Aren't you ever going home for a visit? They really do miss seeing you."

Alicia didn't forget how her parents acted the last time she went to see them. She had enough of the complaining about her career choice and their indifference towards her.

"Sorry, I can't. I've a big story I'm working on. I don't have any extra time to take off to visit them." Alicia left the living room and brushed past her sister to go back into the kitchen.

Walking around the kitchen, Alicia cleaned up the remainder of breakfast on the table tossing it into the trashcan. She wasn't getting into this with her sister. Her mind was made up and she wasn't about to change it.

Chapter Twenty-Four

“Thanks so much for seeing me,” Alicia said as she took a seat on the couch across from Traci.

“You’re welcome. It’s my day off from the hospital so it’s a perfect chance. Plus, Zack has taken Carter out to buy Halloween candy and a costume. He’s about to turn three soon so he’s really getting into the holiday.”

Alicia thought about the first time she saw Traci and it had been at a Halloween party. She was out on the dance floor with Brad. She remembered the jealousy that consumed her and how surprised she had been by it. Because back then she was positive that she was heads over heels in love with Max. How could she have been so dumb and blind?

If she had seen the light way back then she could have been happily married to Brad with a couple of kids and another one of the way. Well, it wasn’t too late to start making her dream come true now. They were moving in the right direction.

“Are you thinking about the first time we met?” Traci asked, shocking her.

“Yeah, I was. How did you know? I never knew you ever saw me that night.”

“Oh, I remember the hard look you gave me,” Traci laughed. “I thought you were dating Brad until Zack told me the two of you were only friends.”

Idiot wasn’t the word she would use to describe herself. Alicia realized her mistake now and was going to do everything to fix it.

“I wish I had been with Brad back at the party because the guy I was trying to make jealous turned out to be an asshole.”

Traci nodded her head in agreement. “I know how that is. I dated a lot of them before I found Zack. I couldn’t be happier.”

Alicia couldn’t have gotten a better opening for her interview..

“What did you think about Zack when you first met him? Was it love at first sight?”

“No, I would say that I was attracted to Zack but I had so much going on. So, I wasn’t looking for a relationship at the time he was trying to ask me out on a date.”

Alicia wrote down a few notes on the pad that she had pulled out of her purse. She wanted to get a lot of the back story before she set up a day to record the complete interview. This was the family of the man she was in love with and she wanted to do a good job for him.

“However, Zack was looking for a relationship and he didn’t give up until he got you,” Alicia said.

Traci smiled at her and it lit up her pretty face. “My husband was very persistent back then and I was turned on by how he never took no for an answer.”

Alicia had heard a little about Traci and Zack’s relationship from the other people, but was enjoying hearing Traci tell her about it.

“Was it hard to fall in love with Zack? Or did it just seem to happen? When did you know that he was the one for you?”

A dreamy look came over Traci’s face as she thought about Zack, and Alicia wondered if she got that look when someone brought up Brad. She felt so much love for him inside, but could everyone else around her see it?

“Falling in love with Zack was the best thing that I ever did in my life. We went through a lot of ups and downs yet in the end everything worked out. I can’t tell you precise time I fell in love with Zack because I think he did so many little things to make it happen.”

Alicia quickly wrote down more information. All of this was going to be a wonderful addition.

Hearing the loving way that Traci spoke about Zack made her see what was in store for her with Brad, Alicia was beginning to see being in love with a Drace brother was a fantastic thing.

“How do you think Zack has changed with getting married and becoming a father?”

“Zack is a superb father with Carter. I mean he used to be such a horrible workaholic when we first got married. Sure, he was home around eight or nine at night, but he brought work home with him. Now, since Carter is getting older he comes home earlier and spends the weekends doing father and son stuff.

“I think having a family has made him see that working long hours isn’t the most important thing in his life anymore. I’ve the most perfect family and I won’t change it for anything in the world.”

Alicia's hand flew across the paper as she wrote down the important parts of the story. She couldn't believe the excellent info she was getting. She only hoped that everyone else would be as open as Traci had been with her.

"Thank you for being so honest with me," she said, shutting up her notepad. "I think all of this information will work perfectly for the special. I know the public is going to love getting to know more about this family."

"How are things going with you and Brad?" Traci asked leaning back in her seat. "I think the two of you make such a cute couple. I've never seen Brad happier than when he is with you."

Chapter Twenty-Five

There would have been a time that she might have found a way to deny her feelings towards Brad, but that was all in the past. Alicia wanted to tell everyone how she felt about him now.

“I’m completely blissful with Brad. We are getting along so well with each other.”

“Good,” Traci smiled. “I’m glad to hear that Brad is such an amazing guy. We all want him to be happy.”

Alicia understood what Traci was telling her. She didn’t want Brad hurt by her or anyone else. She loved Traci cared so much about her Brad and it had to do more than with him being her brother-in-law. She was beginning to see what a close-knit family was like and the love they shared with each other.

“You’re right. Brad deserves some happiness and I’m hoping I’m the woman to make it happen,” Alicia admitted.

Traci’s eyes lit up as she leaned forward in her chair. “Does that mean you and Brad are finally a real couple now? I know what Brad told us at dinner, but a part of me thought that was him and his wishful thinking.”

“Yes, we are dating and in love. Brad really surprised me bringing me to Lee’s house for the weekly Wednesday night dinner. I wasn’t sure how things would go, but I was pleased how well the night turned out.”

“I bet Brad was too. He wouldn’t admit to it, but Lee’s opinion does mean a lot him,” Traci confessed.

“I got that too. I don’t want to be the reason Brad loses his connection with his brother.” Alicia could sense that Brad was looking for approval from Lee when it came to a lot of things in his life.

“Don’t worry about it,” Traci said, waving her hand in her direction. “I don’t think Brad will lose his brotherly bond with Lee. Honestly, Lee wasn’t on my side that much at first but I won him over and his growing attraction for my sister helped in my favor too.”

“Lee is so tough and hard, but when Cherise comes in the room I can see this change come over him immediately which is so surprising.” Alicia would have a hard time believing it if she hadn’t witnessed it with her own eyes.

Traci nodded in agreement. "Lee is such a softie when it comes to my sister anytime she's around. They may fight, but it comes from so much love. I think it's only going to get a hundred times worse after the boys are born."

Alicia knew that Brad was excited about the twins. He couldn't wait until he was an uncle again. Could it come from him wanting to be a father so badly? Is that the reason he didn't want them to use a condom when they had made love?

"When are the babies due?" she asked.

"Cherise went to the doctor yesterday and he told her the second week in December. Lee is buying baby presents and items every day like crazy. If he keeps this up there won't be any more room in the nursery. Zack and Richard are laughing at him. They love how nervous their tough as nails brother is acting now."

Sitting there with Traci, Alicia realized how much she wanted to be a part of this family. Everyone seemed to care about each other no matter if they had a disagreement; in the end they always came together.

"I get that too. My sister Chloe is a lot like Lee. She doesn't think I'm an adult, so she's constantly trying to guide me in the right direction."

"I guess that I didn't have anything to be worried about," a male voice interrupted. "Should I let the two of you continue to talk or is Alicia ready to interview me now?"

Twisting around in her chair, Alicia locked eyes with Zack standing behind her holding his son's hand. And if she remembered correctly his name was Carter.

"Hi, baby," Traci said, getting up from her seat. "Alicia and I were just talking. The first part of the interview went excellent. I had a good time with her."

Alicia was surprised by Traci's compliment. She'd liked the time spent with Traci too. Today was truly turning out to be better than she thought it would when she left the house this morning after the argument with her sister.

"Mommy, I got my Halloween outfit." Carter grinned holding up a bag in his tiny hand as he ran past her up to Traci. "Daddy let me pick it out."

"What did you get?" Traci asked as she picked up her son.

"A pirate. I got an eyeball patch too. Do you want to see it?"

"How about we go upstairs and you can show me while Daddy talks to Ms. Alicia?" Traci suggested.

Carter glanced away from Traci over to her and then Zack before looking back at his mother. "Okay. I'll show you. Can I try it on too, please?" Carter asked in the cutest child voice Alicia had ever heard.

"Alright, you can try it on and then I'll fix you some lunch." Traci headed for the door. She stopped in front of Zack and gave him a kiss. "Alicia, have fun with Zack and don't believe him when he tells you that I chased after him." She left the room without looking back.

"Are you ready?" Zack asked her.

If she wasn't ready to interview him, she would have to pretend because Zack made her a little nervous with the way he stared at her like he could see what she was thinking. Lee was her biggest nemesis, but she sensed that Zack might be a close second.

Chapter Twenty-Six

“Can I talk to you about something?” Brad asked Lee walking into his office. Everyone else was out to lunch, so he thought this would be the best time to bring his career change up to his brother when there were less people here to witness his murder.

“Have a seat. I’m glad you caught me now because I was about to leave. I’m meeting Cherise for lunch and then we’re heading to her doctor’s appointment.”

Taking a seat, Brad crossed his left leg over his right one and got as comfortable as he could. Lee seemed like he was in a good mood, but all of that would change once he got done talking.

“How is Cherise doing? I haven’t talked to her lately. I’ve been so busy with Alicia and other stuff in my life.”

Lee shut off his computer and then leaned back in his chair. “She’s doing wonderful. She’s getting more excited about the babies now that she’s closer to delivery. The doctor told us they should be born around Christmas or they could come a little earlier because Cherise is carrying multiples. So, we are going to have a very special Christmas this year no matter what and I can’t wait.”

“Have you and Cherise decided on names yet?”

“No, we’re still debating, but I know the names we choose will be perfect. Okay, that’s enough about me. How are things going with Alicia?”

Brad was surprised that Lee cared enough to even inquire about his relationship with Alicia since everyone knew he wasn’t her biggest supporter.

“You really want to know?” he questioned a little more than skeptical about his brother’s motives.

“I’ll admit I haven’t been sold on Alicia being the right woman for you, but after noticing how she looked at you during dinner, I’ve changed my opinion a little. She might actually fit into our crazy family after all.”

Brad wasn’t going to believe the sudden change came all from Lee. He had to get a little push in the right direction and he knew where it had come from.

“Cherise had another talk with you, didn’t she?”

Lee raked his fingers through his thick hair. “Yes, she did after everyone one had left dinner. She told me that I wasn’t being fair towards you and it was your life to live, not mine. Whatever mistakes you might make were yours and not mine.”

“Alicia won’t turn out to be a mistake. We love each other,” Brad replied.

He knew that Alicia hadn’t spoken the words, but her actions told him all that he needed to know. “How about we move this conversation to the real reason I came in here to see you.”

Lee sat up straighter in his chair and folded his hands on his desk. “I’m getting a bad feeling I might not like what you’re going to tell me.”

“I hope you’ll support me with my new decision instead of giving me a lecture.” Brad knew how Lee was about not wasting his MBA, but being at the marketing firm wasn’t a passion for him like it was for his brother. He didn’t get up early morning excited about coming into work.

“I’m quitting the marketing firm, so I can open up my own business.”

Lee dropped his head and sighed loudly. “I don’t even have to guess what it will even be—tennis. Are you sure that you want to do this?”

“Lee had you ever noticed that the only thing I was ever excited about was tennis? I couldn’t wait until I left this job, so I could go and coach people. I gave that up so I could work here full time.”

“I thought you stopped coaching because of Alicia.” Lee frowned. “I wasn’t aware it was because of me and my attitude towards how much time you spent doing it.”

Lee’s opinion mattered a whole lot to him. He had always looked up to Lee ever since he was a little kid and that hadn’t changed over the years. Yeah, Richard was the brother he could go to for advice, but Lee’s judgment was the one that mattered the most.

“You kept hounding me about getting a real job, so I did and I honestly tried to love it here, but I don’t.”

Lee looked at him like the light finally went off in his head. “Brad, I’m glad you think so highly of my opinion, but don’t live your life by it. If you want to open a school or business about tennis then do it. I’ll be glad to help you with marketing it“

Brad didn’t know what to say about the change in Lee. He was sure that Lee would be reading him the riot act, but he was being pretty open-minded about everything.

“You aren’t pissed at me? You spent a lot of money sending me to college for that degree and I’m not really using it now.”

“It’s just a degree, but you should do something you’re passionate about and if that’s tennis then go for it. I’ll give you my full support.”

Getting up from his seat, Lee came around his desk. “You’re my little brother and I’ll always be in your corner no matter what, but it’s past time I stop seeing you as seven years old and realize you’re a thirty-two year old adult.”

Brad stood up and gave Lee a quick hug then stepped back. “Thank you,” he said.

“Not a problem,” Lee grinned. “Now, I better go. I know my gorgeous wife is probably already at the restaurant waiting for me.”

“How about I walk out with you?” Brad suggested following Lee out the door. “Alicia is at Zack’s and I want to surprise her before she heads to work.”

“Do you really think Alicia is the one?” Lee asked over his shoulder.

“There isn’t a doubt in my mind that Alicia will be my wife and the mother of my children sooner than she thinks,” Brad answered without a doubt in his voice.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

“Thank you so much for the interview Zack,” Alicia said as they walked to the entrance way of his house. “It was wonderful to hear how you and Traci fell in love. I’ll be getting back in touch with you about a time I can bring a camera crew over to tape the last part of the interview with you and Traci.”

“That’s fine,” Zack smiled. “I enjoyed talking to you more than I thought I would. Do you need me to walk you to your car?”

“No, I can make it there by myself,” Alicia said as Zack opened the front door for her. She went out and waved goodbye. As she walked down the steps, she heard the door close but she was more focused on the person leaning against the driver’s door of her car.

God, she was so thrilled to see Brad. It was like that she hadn’t seen him a few hours earlier. “How did you know I was leaving?” Alicia asked before kissing him.

“I know everything about you. I could sense you were about to leave, so I came over here to see you.”

Alicia laughed then poked Brad in the ribs. “Tell me the truth.”

“Fine,” he sighed. “I was hoping that I could come over here and drag you away before you had to go to work. I just got lucky you were leaving.”

Disappointment filled Alicia. She wouldn’t be able to spend time with Brad before she was due at work. She had to be there earlier today because she was doing two broadcasts tonight.

“Sweetheart, I can’t,” Alicia said. “Tiffany scheduled me for a double broadcast, but how about we do something afterwards? I should be home around seven o’clock. I really want to spend some time with you tonight.”

Brad pulled her against his chest wrapping his arms around her lower back. “How about we catch a late movie and then grab something to eat?”

She liked how her man’s mind worked. Brad was constantly coming up with some way for them to be together with her crazy schedule.

“I like that,” Alicia smiled. “What are you going to do while I’m at work?” She was already missing Brad and she hadn’t even left yet.

“I’m going to see if Zack can help me with the new business idea that I have. I’m pretty excited about it.”

Alicia saw the excitement shining in Brad’s beautiful blue eyes and she couldn’t wait until he told her more about it. In the past, she lived for her job. Now that Brad was in her life she was beginning to see that there was more to life in the world than working sixteen hour days.

“Can I get one more kiss before I head to work? I need something to tie me over until I see you later on tonight.”

Brad moved his hands off her waist and up to her face tilting it back. Staring into her eyes, he whispered. “I love you,” right before his warm mouth captured hers in a soft kiss that made her body melt against his.

Alicia moaned as Brad ground his erection against her stomach. She was about to suggest to Brad that she could call in sick to work when the sound of something unexpected jerked the two of them apart.

“Uncle Brad, did you come to see me?”

Brad looked away from her and down at his nephew. Carter was barefoot wearing a transformers t-shirt and a pair of dark blue jeans with a little hole in the knee looking too cute for words. He even had a half-eaten cookie in his left hand to polish of the adorableness.

“Carter, what are you doing out here?” Brad asked as he moved away from her and picked up his nephew.

“I saw you outside and I wanted talk to you,” Carter answered.

“Do your parents know you’re out here?”

Carter shook his head causing his sandy brown curls to bounce. Alicia thought she had never seen a more beautiful child, but Brad was right Carter shouldn’t have come outside by himself.

“Brad, I’ll let you take Carter back in so I can get to work.” She saw how upset Brad was with his nephew and she was trying to make sure that Brad didn’t make it worse. She could tell how much Carter loved his Uncle Brad and only wanted to see him.

Carter looked back and forth between her and Brad. “Are you mad?”

“Yes, I’m mad, Carter,” Brad answered, hugging his nephew. “You could have run in the street and gotten hurt. Don’t ever open the door and run outside again by yourself, okay?”

“Okay,” Carter answered and then took a bite of his cookie.

“I better take him back in the house before Traci and my brother panic. I’ll see you tonight?” Brad gave her another quick kiss before walking away.

Alicia stood by her car watching Brad until he went inside Zack's house. If she'd ever doubted Brad was the man for her he'd just proven he was. He would be the perfect husband and father. Yeah, she was ready for a commitment and the only man she wanted to take that plunge with was Brad.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Walking hand in hand through the park with Brad, Alicia glanced up at the stars shining in the dark sky. She noticed that she wasn't the only person spending a romantic night in the park as other couples in love walked past them holding hands too or pushing baby strollers.

"You're awful quiet. What are you thinking about? Did you not like the movie or was it the Thai food?" Brad asked.

"No, I loved everything," Alicia said, truthfully, I had a wonderful time. I was thinking about something else."

"Care to tell me what it was about?" Brad inquired, smiling down at her.

Alicia stopped walking and Brad paused next to her. She couldn't believe how hard her heart was beating. She never thought that she would get to this point in her life, but here she was.

"I was thinking about how much I love you and how glad I am to have you in my life."

Staring up at Brad, Alicia watched as several emotions registered on his handsome face from shock, joy, disbelief and finally total happiness. She didn't have time to tell anything else before he planted a hard kiss on her surprised mouth.

"Baby, I've waited forever for you to tell me that. I love you too, but you already know that."

"I know that you do," she whispered against Brad's lips. "I think that's what finally made me admit how I truly felt about you."

Recapturing her mouth, Brad kissed her again slipping his tongue between her lips. His hot warm tongue lapped at the inside of her mouth making her knees almost buckle.

Wrapping his arms around her waist, he yanked her against his hard body; his erection throbbed against her stomach. Slowly, Brad moved his lips away from hers only leaving enough space for him to whisper.

"Sweetheart, I've to get you back to my house. I need to make love to you."

"I want you too," Alicia replied already thinking about how good it would feel to be naked in Brad's arms.

He planted one more kiss on her mouth before he moved back. Linking their fingers together, Brad walked them back to his car and all she could think about was getting back to his house.

As soon as the door closed to his house, Brad pressed Alicia's back against the door and continued where they had left off at the park. Slanting his mouth over hers, Brad slipped his tongue back into her mouth relearning the unique and amazing sweetness that made Alicia the woman he loved kissing anytime he got a chance.

"So, delicious," he moaned as he let go of Alicia's swollen lips and ran his tongue along the side of her jaw.

Alicia pushed at his shoulders until he moved back from her. What in the hell was going on?

"What's wrong?" he asked, brushing her bottom lip with his thumb. Did she want him to stop? Was she trying to take three steps back when their relationship was going forward so well?

"You're wearing too much clothing," she said, tugging his shirt out of his pants. "I want to feel your skin beneath my hands."

Chuckling, Brad brushed Alicia's hands away. "Let me do it." Brad kicked off his shoes and then stripped down until he was completely naked. He would wait until he got Alicia in his bedroom before he got her luscious body naked. He had thought about stripping her down to nothing in his room for too long not to make it a reality now.

All during their walk through the park he had been in a state of semi-arousal and now it was a full blown erection. He had never been this hard in his life and he couldn't wait much longer to get Alicia to his bed.

"What are you doing?" Alicia gasped as he swung her up into his arms. "I'm carrying you up to bed. If you have to ask, I must be doing something wrong."

"No. you're doing everything perfectly," Alicia told him wrapping her arms around his neck.

At that moment Brad knew that he wasn't ever going to be with another woman. Alicia was going to be his for the rest of their lives as he carried her up the staircase to his bedroom.

Dropping Alicia down on his bed, Brad stood there just looking at the vision she made in his bedroom. The richness of her chocolate skin stood out so beautifully against his white sheets. It was like his bed had been waiting for her all along.

“Do you know how beautiful you are?” Brad asked as he removed Alicia’s scandals and then dropped them on the floor.

“I’m okay,” she said, looking at him. “I’m not too ugly to be on television so I’m happy about that.”

He didn’t have time to wonder were Alicia got that ridiculous thought from, so he focused on stripping her naked instead and then he would prove how stunning she was on the inside and outside.

Sliding his hands up her smooth warm thighs, he worked at the button on her denim shorts and when they were undone he slipped them down her legs tossing them somewhere near him.

His eyes zoomed in on her black underwear with small hearts all over the fabric. They were pretty simple, but they were hot enough to drive him wild. He had to get them off of her so he could get to the best part...the part he had been thinking about exploring all night.

Spreading Alicia’s legs wider Brad pressed his nose against the fabric breathing in her sweet scent. Sticking out his tongue, he licked at the wetness there growling in the back of his throat. All of that was for him and no one else. He shut his eyes savoring this moment.

“Is this all for me? Is this mine?”

“Yes,” Alicia moaned. *“Please.”*

“Please...what?” Brad asked as he moved back and rolled the scrap of fabric down her legs and over her feet adding them to the pile of clothing already there.

“Just...God, just make me feel good,” Alicia pleaded with him.

“Oh, baby. I’m planning on doing more than that as soon as I get you totally naked,” Brad promised with some heat in his voice.

As much as he wanted to continue to explore every inch of Alicia’s body, the need to be buried deep inside of her took over and became the most important thought in his head.

It seemed that after the thought became a plan for him the rest of Alicia’s clothing seemed to just disappear off her lovely body until she was as naked as him and it was a wonderful sight.

Brad settled between Alicia’s legs and barely stopped himself from shouting when the head of his cock slipped inside of her. How was it

possible for Alicia to feel this good every time he was inside her? Had she put a spell on him that he didn't know about?

Moving his hips, he burrowed deeper until there wasn't an inch of him not wrapped up by her wonderful tightness. He started to move slowly trying to savor the moment of having Alicia naked, sweaty and looking stunningly beautiful in his bed.

"Brad," Alicia whispered, rubbing her hands down his back while wrapping her legs around his waist.

"What sweetheart?" he panted as sweat trickled off him onto her.

"Can you give me a little more?" she whispered.

More?

It took a minute to kick in what Alicia wanted from him. Taking her hands, Brad held them down at either side of her head as his thrusts continued to get harder and faster as he got lost in the sensation of being with Alicia.

He felt her body straining as it worked toward her orgasm. Brad held on to her hips and continued working in and out of her until the orgasm ripped through her. Alicia screamed her release and her voice echoed through his bedroom and seconds later Brad shouts filled the room.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

“Alicia, tell me more about yourself,” Brad whispered against the back of her neck as his fingers brushed against her belly.

“Isn’t that line a little late since we’re already in bed together?” Alicia laughed as she snuggled closer to the warmth of Brad’s body behind her.

“Humor me.”

“Let’s see. I’m the youngest of three children. You’ve met my sister Chloe. She’s single and has never been married.”

Alicia yelped when Brad pinched her side. “What was that for?” she snapped, glaring at him over her shoulder.

“I don’t want to hear about your sister. I said that I wanted to know about you...not anyone else.”

Alicia groaned. She hated talking about herself, but she would do it for Brad. The memory of how he took his time to be patient with her made her normal defenses fall away making her want to be more open and let him in to learn more about her.

She was silent for a second or two while she got her thoughts together.

“Brad, my childhood was totally different from yours. You had a close relationship with your parents, but I didn’t.”

Brad touched her shoulder making her face him. “Are you saying that your parents didn’t love you?”

“I was the surprise baby my mom wasn’t expecting. My brother was eleven and my sister was ten when I came along. So my parents had to rearrange their schedules to raise me for a little while. I wouldn’t say that my parents didn’t love me, but I did suffer from lack of attention and I don’t think they were really aware of it.”

“Did your parents ever do anything with you?” he asked, running his hand down her arm. “I’ve so many memories of doing family picnics with my parents or going camping with my dad.”

“Oh, my parents had the nanny do stuff with me. I was around the nanny so much that I started calling her ‘mama two’. She was with us from when I was about two years old until I was about eight,” Alicia said.

“Why did she leave you?”

Alicia shrugged her shoulder. "I was told that she wanted to move back to be near her family in Virginia, but I believe my mother got jealous of our closeness."

Brad pulled her closer to him until her breasts pressed against his solid chest. "Have things gotten any better with your parents over the years?"

"I usually send them a card on the holidays or sometimes they call me, but it's only to tell me that I need a career change," she sighed. "Don't misunderstand me, I love my parents because they are just who they are and aren't going to change."

"Your parents don't know what a wonderful and talented woman that you are. They are the unlucky ones and I hope they realize it before it's too late to fix things."

Alicia ran her finger across Brad's chest while she thought about what he told her. Was that the reason Chloe had shown up out of the blue? Did her parents really want to try to make a closer connection between them now after all of these years?

"Chloe came here for the same thing you're telling me about. She told me that our parents want to talk to me about our less than stellar relationship. They want me to come for a visit. I haven't been home for about seven years."

Tucking his finger underneath her chin, Brad made her look at him. "Are you going to see them? I can go with you if you want. I promise I won't let them hurt you."

"Brad, my parents were unfeeling but they wouldn't hurt me," Alicia corrected defending her parents. "Chloe told me that she would go with me before she left for her flight."

"Does that mean you're going back home?"

Alicia wasn't quite sure what she was going to do yet, but she didn't want to spend the rest of the night talking about her parents or her not so exciting childhood. She would rather be doing other things.

"How about we find something else to do instead of talking about my past?" Alicia asked. She pushed Brad on his back and lay on top of him.

"What do you have in mind?" Brad asked as his hands roamed down her back to cup her ass.

"I was hoping that the two of us could spend the rest of the night in bed getting all sweaty unless you would rather watch television or play a board game?"

Placing his hands on either side of her hips, Brad lifted her up until she was directly over his erection and he slowly entered her.

"I think I've given you my answer," he whispered right before he pulled her head down for a kiss.

"Wake up, sleepy head." The words were whispered against her ear.

Alicia slowly opened one eye and found Brad sitting on the side of the bed fully dressed looking too gorgeous in a dark gray suit with a black shirt underneath open at the collar.

"Why didn't you wake me up," she complained, brushing a piece of hair out of her eye. "I could have joined you in the shower."

Brad gave her a smile that sent her pulse racing. "Sweetheart, as tempting as that sounds I thought you needed your rest. You looked too cute to wake up. Don't you have a late broadcast that you have to anchor tonight?"

Lying on her back, Alicia stretched her arms above her head causing the sheet to slip a little, but not enough to expose her breasts. However, Brad pulled it all the way down until it was around her waist.

"You have the most beautiful breasts that I've ever seen," he said cupping her right breast in his hand and brushing his thumb over the nipple.

Moaning, Alicia arched her back pressing her breasts deeper into Brad's warm palm. "How about you stay here and show me how much you love them?" she suggested softly.

"Damn Alicia, I would love to do that. God, you don't know how much I want to call and cancel with Zack, but I can't. He's helping me with this new business venture I'm working on." Brad removed his hand and pulled the sheet back up.

"What are you working on?" Alicia asked, sitting up in the bed. "Tell me about it. I might be able to help you out with something."

Sliding his hand behind her neck, Brad slowly ran his tongue along her lip before slipping it into her mouth. This kiss was different from his usual hot and panties creaming ones. This time the kiss was achingly sweet and romantic. She was only blessed with it for a few minutes, but the tender memory of it would last her a lifetime.

"What was that for?" Alicia asked, surprised again by this unpredictable man.

The tenderness in Brad's expression amazed her as he moved away from her and stood up. "I was touched that you wanted to help me. That's all, sweetheart. I never thought you would offer to do something for me."

"Brad, I love you. I want to help you any way I can."

Alicia heard his quick intake of breath and was shocked when his eyes suddenly filled with a fierce sparkling. "Baby, I love when you tell me that. I love it so much that I'm fighting the urge to get undressed and rejoin you in that bed."

"But you won't," she pouted.

"No, I won't," he agreed. "Now why don't I wait for you while you shower and get dressed?"

Alicia got out of bed and wrapped the sheet around her body. Without her high heels on she only came to the middle of his chest. She straightened his tie and then ran her hands down the front of his shirt.

"No, you go ahead and leave. I can get dressed and then I'll call a cab to take me home."

Brad bent his head slightly forward kissing her by the side of her mouth. "No cab for my girlfriend. I'll leave the keys to the Lexus out on the kitchen table. You can drive that home. Just leave the keys in the car in your driveway and I'll have someone from work pick it up and bring it back here."

"If you give me your Lexus, what are you going to drive," Alicia asked, staring into Brad's blue eyes.

"I'll drive my Mustang. I haven't driven it in months and I need to take it out."

"I don't think..." Her words were cut off by Brad placing a finger over her mouth.

"Don't say a word, only nod. You're going to accept my offer right?" His eyes were humorous and tender as he looked at her.

Alicia thought about arguing because she wasn't used to men doing things for her, but instead she nodded her head like Brad instructed.

"Good girl." Brad removed his finger from her mouth. "I better go. Zack doesn't have much time to see me today. I'll be by your house later, so be home," he said, turning away from her before leaving the bedroom.

Chapter Thirty

“It was love at first sight when you saw me,” Richard insisted sitting next to his wife on the couch. “You looked at me like you couldn’t believe I was real.”

“No, I didn’t,” Dawn denied looking over at her husband.

Alicia had just finished up her interview with the cute couple in front of her and she was listening to them remember how the two of them first laid eyes on each other and of course they both had a different account of it.

“You couldn’t have seen how I looked at you because you never even knew I was alive for the longest time,” Dawn pointed out.

“Sweetheart, I noticed you the first time I saw you sitting outside my office waiting for your interview, but I was still into being single. So, I shoved the attraction away. That’s why I pushed you so hard. I realized my horrible mistake when you left. Thank God you came back to help with D4 or I wouldn’t have the unbelievable family that I do.”

“God, the two of you are like a fairy tale come true.” Alicia laughed making Richard smile at her. “I’ve never seen two people so in love with each other.”

“Hmmm...I think I might have to disagree with you on that. I believe you and Brad are the fairy tale couple. He never gave up on making you see how he felt about you. Brad is an amazing guy. He’s going to make you a wonderful husband.”

“We haven’t talked about marriage,” Alicia sputtered shocked that Dawn even brought up the topic. “We’re just now starting a serious relationship.”

Could she marry Brad if he asked her? Was Dawn even right? Did Brad have marriage plans in his head?

“I know my baby brother and he only wants one woman in his life as his wife and that is you,” Richard informed her.

Alicia opened her mouth to ask a question, but she got cut off by the sound of Sterling crying through the baby monitor.

“I better go,” she said, getting her stuff together. “Thanks for such a wonderful interview. I’ll contact you when I’m ready to film the last part.”

“Not a problem,” Richard said, standing up as Dawn left the room to check on their son. “Let me show you out.”

“No, I can show myself out. Go with Dawn to check on Sterling.”

Richard paused to look at her. “Are you sure?”

“Positive,” Alicia smiled and placed her purse on her shoulder.

“Thanks.” Richard hurried out of the room and down the hallway.

Walking out of the room, Alicia went towards the front door but stopped in the entrance way when Richard’s family photos caught her attention. She noticed how Lee looked like their father while Richard and Zack were a mixture of both parents, but Brad looked totally like their mother. He even had the same dark brown hair and ocean blue eyes.

Several more photos were hung on the wall showing all of the brothers at different ages and it saddened her that Brad’s parents were already gone when most of these were taken. Brad might have missed out on the love of his parents at a young age, but his brothers made up for it.

Alicia took one last glance at a picture of Brad that looked like it was taken at a family BBQ a couple of years ago. There was a huge smile on his face and the familiar tennis racquet in his hand.

God, she didn’t know how Brad sneaked his way into her heart, but she was so thrilled that he had. Alicia smiled and touched the picture before she quietly opened the door and left the house.

Kicking off her shoes, Alicia tossed her purse down on the table along with her keys. On the drive back home, she couldn’t get Brad out of her mind. Everything about him captivated her every sense. He stimulated her mind with his intelligence and imagination. She loved the way he never saw the bad in anything. It was like Brad never had a bad day.

He wasn’t the type to brag about his accomplishment which would aggravate her to no end. Instead, he talked about his MBA like it wasn’t anything important at all.

Just little things like that made her more curious about him. It was like the more she was around Brad all of these new unique twists popped out about him. She would’ve never thought Brad enjoyed walking through the park holding hands at night.

Or how much he loved kids, but after seeing him interact with Carter she saw what an outstanding father he would be. Right at this moment, she

was enjoying the anticipation and excitement about where their relationship was headed.

Was there something new for her to explore and love about Brad? He was definitely leaving her wanting more and more which was making her come back time after time.

Another thing she had grown to love about Brad was his ability to hold a conversation with her. She wasn't always the one to be asking the questions or trying to think of things to keep it going. Brad possessed a way of tossing in things that showed her what made him click.

She appreciated how he listened to her. Brad was an excellent sounding board. Not once when she was telling him about her childhood and her parents did he ask her what she did to cause them not to love her enough. Without a doubt, Brad had a huge heart and he wanted to share it with her.

He made her want a sense of adventure in her life. Everything around her was so well-balanced and thought out. However, when Brad was around he did things on a spur of the moment which she found so hot and sexy. Brad kept her mind and body moving and she loved him for it.

None of the things Brad wanted to do with her were overly complex, but they were different and fun.

Heading in the direction of her bedroom, Alicia pulled her light pink shirt over her head and was about to undo her bra so she could take a quick shower and relax before she headed into work later on, but the sound of the doorbell stopped her.

She hurried back to the front door with the shirt in her hand wondering who was at the door. It couldn't be Brad because he had a meeting with Zack until late into the afternoon.

Taking a look through the peephole a smile spread across her face even before she opened the door. "I thought you weren't going to be here until later on today."

"Where in the hell is your shirt?" Brad demanded as his eyes zoomed in on her white lacy bra. He came into her house slamming the door behind them.

"Don't I get a 'hi sweetheart', or anything?" Alicia asked ignoring Brad's childish outburst.

"Not until you tell me why you're answering the door in your underwear," he demanded again touching her bra.

“I thought it might be this incredibly handsome man that I might be able to seduce into my bed for an hour or two before I had to drag my body into work.”

Brad’s eyes dropped down to her breasts before they slowly made their way back up to her face. The heat in them almost made her take a step back.

“Damn baby, you would pick now to try to have some afternoon fun.”

“You don’t want to go back to bed with me,” Alicia pouted. “I don’t have to at the news station for hours and I finished up the interview with Richard and Dawn already.”

“Hours?” Long, tanned fingers played with the tops of her breasts while Brad’s other hand moved around to cup her ass. “It feels like days since I made love to you.”

“I know,” Alicia agreed as she grabbed Brad’s hand. “Let’s go.” She started to pull Brad toward her bedroom but halfway there he stopped her.

“Alicia, I can’t,” Brad sighed, letting go of her hand.

“Why not? I thought you would like spending the day or a few hours with me.”

“Baby, I would love it, but I thought you might like to see my surprise instead.” Reaching inside his pocket, Brad pulled out a key and dangled it in her face.

“What does this unlock?” Alicia asked, excited as her hand reached for the key.

“How about you put that shirt back on over those beautiful breasts and I’ll take you to it?”

She dropped her eyes down to the shirt in her hand and then looked back up at Brad. “I forgot I even had this in my hand.” Alicia put the shirt back on and pulled it down. “Okay, I’m dressed. Can we go and see your surprise now?”

“If you’re sure that you’re up for it.” Brad grinned at her.

“I’m up for anything you have in mind.” Alicia flirted back as she turned away from him, “and if it’s something really good. I might give you a surprise of my own.”

Chapter Thirty-One

Walking around the huge empty building, Alicia looked at the space in awe. It was absolutely stunning with its high ceilings and small offices throughout the area. What in the world was Brad going to do with this place? Was Lee opening up a new marketing firm and Brad was going to be over it, but he had mentioned that he wasn't interested in doing that sort of job anymore.

"Brad, this place is beautiful. Why are we here? Is Lee opening up a new business or is it going to be another restaurant for Richard?" The location of the place was only two blocks for the news station where she worked.

"No, it's mine," he answered, watching her closely.

"Yours?"

"Yes, I'm leaving Lee's business and I'm going to open up my own."

Screaming, Alicia rushed up to Brad and hugged him. "Baby, I'm so thrilled for you. I know whatever you think of will be something amazing. You're a very intelligent man and you'll be able to make this place outstanding. Do you need my help with anything?"

Brad massaged her back through her shirt as he pressed her closer to him. She breathed in the wonderful scent of his cologne getting lost just being in his arms.

"Thank you," he said above her head.

"What are you thanking me for?" she asked, leaning back in Brad's arms. "I haven't done anything special."

"You're being supportive of me without even knowing what my dream is."

"I've no doubt that whatever it is it will be perfect for you and you will kick ass at it."

Alicia knew that Brad would work with everything in him to make this new career move of his a success and she would be there every step of the way. He might be older than her but she would show him that she could support him like a woman his own age.

"I hope that I'm doing the right thing. I'm leaving a steady job at Drace Marketing and jumping head first into the unknown."

“Brad, if you aren’t getting the best or most out of your life working with your brother then it is time to move on. What does Lee think about your decision to leave?”

Moving away from her, Brad leaned back against the counter in the room. “Honestly, Lee took it better than I thought he would. I think he wanted to say more, but he didn’t and I appreciate that.”

Alicia went up to Brad and stood between his spread legs. The scent of his cologne stirred her senses making her want to strip him out the expensive suit he was wearing, but she wouldn’t. Instead, she would rather Brad tell her more about his new job.

“So, tell me what you’re planning to do with this amazing building?” she asked moving away from Brad and walking to the other side of the room taking it in. She couldn’t get over how amazing this building was.

Brad came over to her and wrapped his arms around her waist. “I’m thinking about turning it into something involving tennis, but I’m not quite sure yet. I have to think about it some more. I know an idea will come to me.

Slowly, Brad brushed his lips across the back of her neck while his fingers massaged her stomach through her shirt. “Do you remember earlier when you wanted to have a little fun at your house?” he asked, pulling the shirt she was wearing up her body.

“Of course I do because you turned me down,” she complained. “You made me not want to be the seducer anymore.”

“Please don’t tell me that.” Stepping back, Brad pulled the shirt over her head tossing it in front of them.

“What are you doing?” Alicia moaned when Brad’s fingers started playing her nipples.

“Haven’t you heard the old saying, when a guy moves into a new building that his sexy girlfriend has to help him bless every room by having unbelievable sex?” Spinning her around, Brad captured her mouth with his as he lowered them down to the floor.

Alicia tore her mouth away from Brad’s. What in the hell was she doing? She couldn’t be having sex during the middle of the day in an empty building. What if someone saw them?

“No, we can’t do this,” she said as Brad slipped his hand underneath the black skirt she was wearing.

“Why not?” he asked hotly as one of his long fingers eased inside of her panties.

“Someone might see us through the—” her words were cut off by the sound of her panties being ripped off her followed by her skirt being shoved up past her waist. She was so turned on that she couldn’t think straight.

“No one can see us,” Brad said as he eased between her thighs. “Zack installed some kind of glass that you can see out but they can’t see inside. There is nothing to worry about. No one is going to see this beautiful body but me.”

She heard the rasp of Brad’s zipper. The sound seemed to echo off the walls inside the semi-empty building. “Sweetheart, do you want me. Tell me that you’re dying to have me deep inside of you as far as I can go.”

Alicia knew that she should be upset that Brad wanted to take her on the floor in a new building that he acquired from his brother. She should demand that he get off her and take her back home this instead. But all she could think about was how much she wanted Brad insides of her so fully that she wouldn’t about to think about anything else but him.

“Yes, I want you.”

Chapter Thirty-Two

Brad slammed into her the instant the words left her mouth and Alicia screamed as pleasure like she had never known before took over her body.

“Are you okay?” Brad asked concerned as his body pressed against hers. “Did I hurt you?”

Alicia looked into Brad’s eyes. She saw the desire there, but it was mingled with a little fear. “No, I’m fine. You didn’t hurt me.”

Grabbing the front of his shirt with her hands, she pulled Brad down to her for a kiss to show him that she was just fine. Brad nibbled at her bottom lip as his hips slowly started working like he was still trying to make sure that he wasn’t hurting her. After a while his slow shallow thrusts turned into something faster and harder as he spread her legs wider giving him more room to work.

There was something highly erotic about Brad being nearly fully dressed while she lay half-naked underneath him. Moving his hands up her body, Brad moved her hair to the side and worked his mouth over her skin until his lips were against the side of her neck.

He bit down gently drawing a low moan from her and then he drew the bruised skin into his mouth and sucked so hard that she was positive that it would leave a mark.

“Brad...” she cried out as her body tried to keep up with his thrusts and not orgasm, but it was too late. Her orgasm ripped through her entire body.

Brad caught her cries with his mouth as he continued to pump furiously into her until he threw his head back and howled his release as his seed shot deep into her.

“What is that?” Tiffany asked pointing at her beck as she stopped next to Alicia in the make-up chair later that night.

Shit! Alicia was hoping that the make-up artist would have the hickey Brad gave her completely covered up by now. She had to be on television

in less than forty minutes and she didn't have time to deal with Tiffany. She had to keep her thoughts focused.

"It's nothing that Karen won't be able to fix when she's finished. It will be like it doesn't exist at all."

Tiffany's eyebrows drew together in an angry frown. The way her boss always tensed her jaw when she was angry, Alicia was surprised that Tiffany hadn't ruined her perfect teeth.

"You better hope so," she snapped. "I can't have the station's favorite and most watched anchor going on air looking like she's been doing something she shouldn't have before work."

How dare she! What she did before work was none of her boss's damn business!

Alicia opened her mouth to say something, but she snapped it shut instead. Tiffany wanted to get a rise out of her tonight for some reason, but she wasn't going to fall for it. Brad had her on cloud nine after their little rendezvous in his empty office building and she didn't want to mess with that.

"Tiffany don't worry. Everything will be fine and no one will know I have a hickey. Will you still be around after my broadcast is over?" Alicia asked.

"No, I'll be leaving in about ten minutes. Why?"

"I want to go over with you what I have for the Drace brother's special," Alicia said, wondering when Tiffany might want to do it. She hoped that it wasn't this weekend because she wanted to run an idea she had past Brad.

"We can talk about it first thing Monday morning," Tiffany said as she turned away and left.

Alicia couldn't believe how cocky Tiffany seemed as she sauntered from the room like she had gotten something over on her, but she didn't realize that everything had turned out the way she wanted.

On the drive to work an idea had hit her, a way to help Brad with his business plan. She only hoped that everything would turn out as well as she hoped it would.

Brad wanted his dream to come true and she would do everything humanly possible to make it happen for him. Tomorrow would be her first step in that direction and she hoped it was the right movement.

Chapter Thirty-Three

“Mr. Graf, I want to thank you so much for meeting me on such short notice. I know you’re a very busy man,” Alicia said, looking at the attractive dark haired man seated in front of her. He reminded her, a lot, of Rob Lowe, but his eyes were a dark rich brown instead of blue.

“Alicia, it was my pleasure,” Ivan smiled. “I was very impressed with the interview you did on me a few years ago. I was happy to get your phone call. Can I hope this is about a romantic interest instead of business one?”

What a flirt. It was a good thing her heart belonged to Brad or this man might have been able to seduce her.

“I’m sorry. I’ve an amazing boyfriend and an outstanding relationship. He’s the reason I’m here.”

“Lucky man,” Ivan replied disappointment clear in his voice. “What can I help you with?”

This might be her only chance to get one of the top ranked former tennis players in the world to go into business with Brad, so she didn’t want to blow it.

“I heard that you’re looking to expand your business with another partner and I was hoping you would consider my boyfriend. He used to be my tennis coach and he knows the business better than anyone I know.”

Ivan stared at her for a moment or two before he finally answered. “How did you find out about this?” he questioned, clearly shocked. “I haven’t mentioned my plans to that many individuals.”

“I can’t give away my secrets and any reporter worth her grain of salt wouldn’t.”

“I don’t know if I can be much help to your boyfriend. I’m looking for someone to help me teach the game and help certain players reach the US Open. The person will be under a lot of pressure, so I can’t give that kind of responsibility to someone who taught you tennis in their spare time. In addition, he would have to be able to handle the business side too,” Ivan said. “So, I’m sorry I have to tell you no again.”

Ivan got up to leave, but Alicia jumped up from her seat and stood in front of him blocking his path while she pulled something out of her purse.

“Please just take a look at Brad in action. He’s an amazing player and he’d be an excellent asset to your team. He’s even opening his own business a couple of blocks from here that will focus primarily on tennis.”

Alicia pressed the DVD against Ivan’s hard chest. “If you take a look I promise you won’t be sorry. Brad gave it to me to help improve my game. I taped one of his business cards inside just in case.”

Ivan touched the DVD pressed against his chest and she moved her hand. “Alicia, you must care about this man a lot to go out on a limb like this for him.”

“I love him and would do anything to help him achieve his dream.”

“Okay, I’ll take a look at this on my flight back home,” Ivan finally agreed.

“Thank you.” Standing on her tiptoes, Alicia gave Ivan a sisterly kiss on the cheek. “You’re a good friend.”

“I hope that you don’t think my friendship with you will make me say yes to your boyfriend.”

“I know it won’t,” Alicia said. “Brad’s kick ass talent is what will make you agree to go into business with him. Now, do you think you can walk me back to my car? I’m going to be later for another meeting.”

“I love walking a beautiful woman to her car and especially if it’s you.” Placing his hand in the middle of her back, Ivan escorted her back towards the front of the restaurant.

Alicia was so caught up with happiness that her plan might work out for Brad, she didn’t notice the two men at the table by the far window in the restaurant. Or how they were watching her and the friendly way she was acting towards Ivan.

Chapter Thirty-Four

“Don’t tell Brad about what you saw at the restaurant,” Dawn told her husband that same night as she helped him close up D4. “You and Zack don’t know why Alicia was there with that man plus a kiss on the cheek isn’t the prologue for sex. Hell, I don’t even consider it anything romantic at all.”

Richard shoved the night’s money and checks into the money bag next to him. “You aren’t going to talk me out of this,” he told her. “We both agreed that Brad had a right to know and you’re wrong.”

“A kiss on the cheek with a guy can lead to something more in a man’s head. I’m beginning to think that Lee might have seen the truth when the rest of us were blinded to the fact. I won’t let her hurt my brother.”

“Alicia isn’t a bad girl. I truly believe she’s in love with Brad and isn’t cheating on him. Don’t tell him about this lunch today. You could be making something out of nothing.”

“Brad is the closet to me and if he finds out about this from anyone else, he will be so pissed that I knew and didn’t tell him.”

Dawn crossed her arms over her breasts and shook her head. “I’m getting a bad feeling about this. Please stay out of it. You might be reading more into it than there is.”

Richard gave her a quick kiss on the mouth. “I’m sorry. I can’t. I feel he needs to know and I’m going to tell him. Secrets can destroy a relationship and I won’t allow that to happen to Brad.”

Turning away from her, Richard went towards the back of the restaurant toward his office. Dawn watched her husband’s retreating back with worry. She didn’t know why Richard couldn’t think Alicia’s lunch with that man wasn’t romantic, but he couldn’t.

It just worried her to think what harm was about to come to Brad and Alicia’s life because her husband couldn’t wait to find out what the truth really was.

For a fleeting moment, she thought about finding Alicia and talking to her about this before Richard got hold of Brad, but she decided against it, feeling it was Alicia and Brad’s relationship...not hers. Besides, she really

doubted that Alicia was cheating on Brad. She saw how Alicia looked at her brother-in law and there was too much love in her eyes for her to be cheating on him.

Nibbling on her bottom lip, Dawn prayed that she had made the right decision by not getting involved.

Early the next morning, Brad stormed around Richard's office shaking his head. He never thought this would be the reason his brother called him over here on a Saturday. He was on his way to pick up Alicia so he could take her to the pond, but he decided to stop by here first and now he was pissed that he had.

"You're so fucking wrong," Brad snapped hotly rushing up to his brother's desk. "Alicia loves me and I'm crazy about her. She isn't cheating on me. I don't know what you thought you saw, but it wasn't that."

"Brad, I wish I was but Zack saw the same thing, Alicia handed the guy something and then kissed him."

"On the mouth," he snapped.

"No, it was on the cheek but anyone could see their connection. I knew I had to tell you," Richard said. "Dawn told me to stay out of it, but I felt you needed to know. I would want to know if you saw Dawn kissing another man."

Brad ran his fingers through his hair and the memory of the way Alicia used him to make Max jealous racked his brain. Did she do that to him again?

No, he wasn't going to think like that. Not now. Not after all of the things they had shared over the past several weeks. Alicia wasn't the same woman. She had changed and for the better. Richard was wrong about what he saw and he was going to prove it to his brother.

"Alicia isn't cheating on me. You're right about most things but you're wrong about this. You aren't any better than Lee. Don't worry about me anymore. I can take care of my life without you or anyone else giving me their unwanted advice."

Moving away from the desk, Brad rushed towards the closed office door. He opened it and was about to step out when Richard said.

"I'll be here all day if you want to come back and talk in a more rational manner."

“Don’t hold your breath,” Brad barked before walking out.

Chapter Thirty-Five

The second Alicia opened the front door she threw herself into his arms and kissed him on the mouth, but instead of returning the kiss as he usually did Brad pushed her away from him.

“We need to talk,” Brad said walking into the house past Alicia. He wasn’t going to be made a fool of a second time by her. Yes, he loved her but not enough to let her break his heart a second time.

“What’s wrong with you? Has something happened I need to know about?” Alicia asked, closing the door to join him in the middle of the living room.

Brad didn’t even know where to begin so he ran his fingers through his hair while he gathered his wild thoughts. This might end up turning out to be the worst day of his life after he got finished talking with Alicia.

“I had a talk with Richard about you an hour ago,” he said.

“You did,” Alicia said, touching him on the arm. “Is that what has you so upset? Do you need to talk about it?”

“Yeah, I do want to talk about it. That’s why I’m here with you.” Brad moved away from Alicia so he could think and not get distracted by her touch. “He told me that he saw something while he was out having lunch with Zack, but I told him that it couldn’t be true.”

Unconsciously Alicia’s brows furrowed as she stared at him with a perplexed look on her beautiful face. “Brad, I’m getting confused. What did Richard tell you that he saw that has you so upset and confused? Baby, tell me so I can help you.”

“Richard told me that he saw you there kissing another man.” The words were shouted in the room. “Is it true?”

Though Alicia didn’t answer him right away, her face spoke for her. Richard was right! Lee had been telling him the truth all along. Alicia wasn’t any good. She had been making a fool of him again and he allowed it.

“Brad, it isn’t want you think,” Alicia swore. “Richard misunderstood what the kiss on the cheek was about.”

“Are you trying to tell me that you weren’t kissing another man out in public when you’re supposedly my girlfriend?” Brad demanded, harshly.

“No...Yes,” Alicia sputtered.

“Which is it? Yes, you’re denying it. Or no, you weren’t kissing another man in public. What kind of game are you trying to pull? Do you think I’ll let you make a fool of me again like you did with Max?”

“Listen to me.” Alicia tried to touch him, but he brushed her hands away.

“No, I’m tired of your lies. I’m through with you. It’s over. I don’t need this anymore.”

He had made up his mind on the drive over here. If there was a small chance that what Richard had told him was true about Alicia, he was going to break up with her. He wasn’t going to let her use him. Hell, he was a good man not some love sick teenager boy in love with the popular girl.

“What are you talking about?” Alicia gasped. “How can you break up with me? You haven’t even given me a chance to tell you what really happened.”

“I’m not letting you tell me your side because it will just be more lies. I should’ve listened to Lee and never gotten involved with you. However, I thought maybe a part of you did care about me, but was too scared to admit it.

“I kept thinking I could help you break down that wall around your heart but I guess I didn’t accomplish what I wanted most.”

Alicia moved towards him again, but he stepped around her. “Brad, listen to me. I’m not that same woman who thought she was in love with Max. I have changed. Just let me tell you about my lunch date with—”

“No, I’m done with you. I hope you’re happy with this new man and don’t worry, I’ll tell Lee not to blow you off about the interview since he still has to redo his with Cherise. I’m a man of my word and I plan to keep it.”

Brad didn’t want to hear Alicia’s response. Instead, he walked across the living room and opened the front door slamming it behind him as he went out. He was halfway to his car when out of nowhere Alicia jumped in front of him.

“Brad, listen,” she pleaded. “You don’t know the whole story. Let me tell you about my lunch date and who it was with. You’re going to be impressed.”

“I’m not interested.” Taking her by the arm, he moved Alicia out of his way and continued on to his car. “Like I told you inside, it’s over.” He got inside his car and drove off without bothering to even look back at Alicia.

Later that night, Brad sat inside his dark living room wondering if he'd handled the situation with Alicia wrong. Did he take Richard's side too fast after Alicia sort of admitted that she had kissed another man?

Taking another sip of his drink, he stared outside into the darkness. It looked black and lonely like his heart.

Shit! All day he couldn't stop thinking about Alicia which had made him useless at both jobs. He had promised Lee two weeks' notice and he was fulfilling it.

It was hard for him to believe that Halloween was tonight. He was supposed to go out tonight with Zack, Traci and Carter, but he backed out at the last minute and passed out candy for a couple of hours at home.

He couldn't help thinking about how much more fun it would have been if Alicia had been here with him. He guessed today showed him that he shouldn't plan ahead for his future.

Brad couldn't stop his eyes from glancing down at the dark velvet ring box on the table. No one else knew that he had been planning to propose to Alicia on Christmas Eve. He'd had everything planned out down to every last detail, but now he would be spending the day with only his family instead of his fiancée.

Why did I let her deeper into my heart? Brad wondered as he finished off the last of his beer. He was done with her messing with him. Now if only his heart would listen. It might take some time, but he would get over Alicia Hart.

Chapter Thirty-Six

A month had passed since Brad dumped her and broke her heart more than she could have ever thought possible. She had tried numerous times to catch him at the office building he was turning into his new business, but the workers always told her that Brad wasn't there which was a lie since his car was parked out front.

However, true to his word Brad made Lee finish up his part of the interview with her and the camera crew was going to start taping the entire Drace family in two weeks which gave her time to get her voiceover parts done in time for Christmas Eve when the *Shades of Love* special was going to air.

It was hard for her to stay focused because she had been feeling horrible since Brad kicked her out of his life. She hadn't been able to sleep or keep anything down. Even Tiffany noticed and told her to take some of her vacation time.

At first, she had declined because work was the only thing she had going in her life. Working long hours again had given her something to do to replace the pain that losing Brad had caused.

How could Brad do this to her? He made her fall in love with him and she had given him everything she had only to have it all tossed back into her face. Is this pain the reason Nick and Brian had done what they did to themselves?

After her high school boyfriend Nick, and her college boyfriend Brian had both committed suicide after she had broken up with them, it tarnished her belief in love and made her terrified of getting involved too deeply with any man. It made her feel like if she ever loved a man he would get hurt and she was right. She'd confessed her feelings to Brad and he'd dropped her ass like a bad habit.

Never in her life had she expected to fall for someone like she had with Brad and now he was gone from her life because of something Richard mistook as her cheating on Brad.

After Brad had accused her of cheating on him, she had thought about going and confronting Richard...but why should she? She hadn't done a

damn thing wrong. Instead of running off to Brad, Richard should have come to her instead and asked about the scene in the restaurant.

God, she didn't want to tell anyone about what she had been doing for Brad just in case Ivan didn't get in contact with Brad. Ivan was one of the top male tennis players in the world and if Brad knew about Ivan, he would have been waiting for the tennis pros' phone call.

What if Ivan didn't call? Brad might have taken Ivan's dismissal personally and stopped pursuing his dream. No, she had to keep quiet and hope for the best.

Ivan was supposed to be Brad's foot into the door with the career he loved so much. She had only tried to help the man she was in love with, but it turned out horribly wrong.

Rubbing her hands across her eyes, Alicia thought about fixing herself something to eat, but in the end changed her mind. All she wanted to do was crash in bed and stay there for a couple of days.

Alicia was dumb. She knew that she had been burning the candles at both ends for the last week or so; this might be her body's way of telling her that she needed a break for a while and get away from here.

Tomorrow she would call Chloe and see if she could crash at her place for a day or two maybe a week at the latest. New York was a far cry from where she lived and it wasn't like anyone here would be missing her anyway.

Hopefully, Chloe wouldn't try to force her to try and see their parents because her answer would still be the same. She wasn't in any mood to hear her parents complain about her lack of personal life or meaningless job.

All she wanted to do was relax a little before the Christmas holiday hit. It was the busiest time of year at the station.

Christmas was usually her favorite holiday season but she wasn't too sure about this year. She might just pull the covers over her head and sleep through it on the days she wasn't scheduled to be at work. She never would have predicted that breaking up with Brad would be this hard on her.

God, what was she thinking? She never thought about truly telling Brad about how she honestly felt until he pulled it out of her with his love and understanding.

Alicia blinked back the tears that suddenly filled her eyes. Shit! She wasn't a crier and she hated that she was doing it now, but it seemed to be

happening a lot now. It was probably her body's response to the lack of sleep that she had been getting.

Okay, now she really was going to call her sister and see about coming for a visit. She couldn't keep feeling like this from lack of sleep and nerves.

Going over to the couch, Alicia sat down and picked up the cordless phone. She was going to call her sister, but she had to go something first and it would be the last time she would make this call.

Her fingers quickly dialed a number she knew by heart and probably would for a while. She waited for the message to come on and her heart skipped a beat at the sound of Brad's voice.

"This is Brad...you know what to do after the beep." A second later the beep buzzed in her ear.

"Brad, this is Alicia. I just wanted to let you know that I finally understand now that it's over between us. So, I won't be trying to contact you anymore. Bye."

Alicia pushed the end button as tears poured down her face. Well, she'd done it. She let Brad know that she was done with him. She was the type of woman who once she committed herself to something would not likely change her mind. Her life worked out better that away and it would be extremely hard for her to go back to her old way of living, but she could do it, because she had no other choice.

Taking a deep breath, Alicia brushed the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand and got herself together so she could talk to her sister. Chloe was very observant and would be able to tell right off the bat if something sounded off in her voice.

She dialed the number. The phone only rang once before Chloe picked up.

"Alicia, what's wrong?" her sister asked immediately.

"What? Nothing."

"Don't give me that. You have never called me after midnight before. So, I know there is something going on with you."

"Nothing's wrong." Alicia answered too quickly and she knew it.

"You know that I don't believe you right? So, you might as well tell me the truth or I won't stop asking until I get it out of you."

Alicia knew her sister and Chloe was right. She wouldn't take anything but the complete truth. So, she retold Chloe what had happened between her and Brad and the pain was just as bad as the first time.

“Do you want me to come there and give that idiot a piece of my mind? No, better yet, let me have a conversation with that stupid brother of his. How dare he spread lies about my baby sister,” Chloe shouted.

“Chloe, calm down,” Alicia said. “All I want to know is can I come and stay with you for a couple of days.”

“Of course you can. Now, I won’t be here because my job has booked me on several seminars, but use the key I gave you. The condo is yours for as long as you want. I’ll let the security guard know you’re coming. When are you booking your flight?”

“I was hoping to do it tomorrow and leave on a later flight the same day,” Alicia answered.

“I’ll be gone when you get here. My flight flies out today. Everything you need is here and don’t worry about anything. Everything will turn out better than you think it will. I need to go, but I’ll call you once you get to New York to make sure you arrived safely,” Chloe told her before hanging up.

Sometimes Chloe got on her nerves being so overprotective and bossy, but that was how her sister’s personality was and despite all of their fights over the years, she loved her sister and even her brother who she only saw maybe once every three years.

Well, she didn’t have time to sit there and waste. She had a lot of things to do before she left on her much needed trip.

Tossing the phone on the table, Alicia got off the couch but instead of going to her bedroom she made a detour to the kitchen. It seemed like since she decided to leave town for a while, she had gotten her appetite back and a turkey with bacon sandwich was sounding really good to right now.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

"I was hoping that inviting you to lunch would get you out of this bad mood you've been in lately."

"I'm doing fine. I don't know why you don't think I'm not," Brad said, looking at Richard across the table. Sure, most of his time was spent working on getting his business up and running. It wasn't going as well as he thought it would, but he was keeping hope that it would get better.

"Brad, if you really miss Alicia why don't you call her. Maybe you can work past this kiss and get back together."

Didn't his brother know that he had thought about going to see Alicia and trying to work things out between them but he couldn't? He wouldn't let Alicia get any deeper into his heart than she already was. It was hard for him not to drive past the news station to try to catch a glimpse of her.

God, he had even been trying to see her on the news, but she hadn't been there for a couple of days now. He didn't want to be but he was worried that something might be wrong with her. Alicia loved her job and hardly ever missed a day of work.

He kept replaying that message he had gotten from her in his head and wondered if she was trying to tell him something and he hadn't picked up on it. As much as he hated it, he was still madly in love with her.

"No, I broke up with Alicia because I didn't want to go down the same road I had with Max and her. I deserve to have all of her love and attention. If I can't have her completely then I don't want her at all."

Richard's eyes bore into his. "Brad, I know you and you're still in love with Alicia. Why don't you talk to her?"

"Excuse me. Aren't you Brad Drace," a male voice interrupted.

Looking up Brad saw a tall, dark haired man standing to his left but he couldn't believe who it was standing there next to him.

"Yes, I'm Brad Drace," he answered.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but I was just finishing a business meeting and saw you over here. I'm—."

"Ivan Graf," Brad finished, shocked that one of the most famous Men's US Open tennis players even knew who he was.

"I see you know who I am," Ivan smiled.

“Yes, who wouldn’t,” Brad answered. “How can I help you?”

“I had a meeting with your girlfriend Alicia Hart several weeks back. She was telling me about how you were opening up a business and your love for tennis. I meant to contact you a few weeks back, but I had to take care of some personal issues.”

“You’re the man that Alicia kissed?” Brad said, shocked.

“You mean that sisterly kiss on the cheek.” Ivan laughed. “There wasn’t anything romantic about it. I met her a while back when I did an interview at her news station and we became good friends and that’s it. You have nothing to worry about. Alicia is totally in love with you.

“Okay, I’m getting off the subject. I don’t have time today, but are you free tomorrow? I would like to go over a business proposition with you.”

“You want to have a meeting with me?” Brad couldn’t believe this was happening to him.

“Yes. Unless you’ve already found a partner for your business, I watched the DVD Alicia gave me and you’re a damn good tennis player. You could have gone pro.”

Ivan Graf was thinking about being his partner. Alicia did this for him. She hadn’t been cheating on him like Richard and Zack thought. She was actually thinking about him and helping him make his dream come true.

What in the hell had he done? Why in the world had he listened to Richard? He should have known that she would *never* cheat on him. He had to talk to Alicia and make her understand his stupid ass mistake. God, he had to get her back and before Christmas. He couldn’t start the New Year off with her.

“Mr. Drace.” Ivan’s voice drew him away from his inner thoughts. “Are you listening to me?”

“No, I haven’t decided on a partner yet,” Brad answered.

“Good.” Reaching into his suit jacket pocket, Ivan pulled out a business card. “Call my office and tell my assistant I want her to set up a business lunch for us tomorrow at the club.”

Brad took the expensive looking black card still in shock by what was happening to him. “I’ll do that.”

“Excellent, I’ll see you tomorrow.” Ivan told him and then nodded at Richard before walking away.

“Who was that guy?” Richard asked once Ivan was out of ear shot.

Brad turned the card over in his hands before sliding it into his shirt pocket. "Ivan Graf is a professional tennis coach who has played and taught tennis all over the world. He has played the professional circuit in Europe, The United States and even Australia.

"God, he has taught the game in county clubs all the way down to public parks. He owns and runs several tennis clinics and camps for all ages and ethnicities. I mean he's a legend and I have him interested in becoming a part of my business because of Alicia."

"Shit Brad! I'm sorry. I shouldn't have jumped to conclusions about Alicia and what I saw," Richard said. "Do you want me to go with you when you see her? I can plead your case and tell her it was all my fault."

"No. I don't want you to do a damn thing," Brad snapped loudly, not caring who heard him inside of the restaurant. "Haven't you already done enough by telling me Alicia was cheating on me? Why didn't you listen to Dawn? Do you know the things I said to Alicia because of you? Did you ever think about talking to Alicia before running to me about that stupid kiss?"

Brad fought down the urge to reach across the table and punch his brother in the face for meddling in his life without knowing all of the facts. If he was lucky enough to get Alicia back, he wasn't to jump to conclusion anymore after listening to something someone told him when it came to Alicia. He would go straight to her and find out all of the facts.

"No, I didn't," Richard sighed. "I can't tell you how sorry I am about all of this. Why don't you leave? I can pay for lunch. You need to see Alicia and work things out with her."

"I can't go and see her today." Brad sighed, looking down at the card in his hand. "I need to get my thoughts together first. You don't know what I told her. I can't appear on her doorstep and beg for her forgiveness. It just wouldn't work."

"Not after I took your stupid words as the gospel...*Fuck!* I should have listened to my heart instead of my overbearing older brother. I thought Lee would be the one who broke me and Alicia up and it turned out to be you."

"Brad, I'm sorry. I can't apologize anymore. Are you sure that you don't want to go and see Alicia?"

"I don't want to talk about this anymore right now," Brad said, standing up. "I need to let all of this sink in. I'm getting a chance of a lifetime to work with Ivan Graf. However, the woman that made it happen is out of my life because I wouldn't listen to her."

“Call Alicia and apologize for not listening to her side of the story. She loves you and will understand,” Richard encouraged again.

“No, I don’t think so. I need to go. I’ll talk to you later.” Brad left the table and hurried out of the restaurant. Despite what he told Richard, he was going to Alicia’s house and he wasn’t leaving until she took him back and forgave him for his stupidity.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Where in the hell was she? Brad knocked on Alicia's door for the fifth time, but she wasn't answering. He got a bad feeling that she wasn't even inside. Where was she?

Damn it! He should have come over here right after he listened to her message. She had sounded so lost and alone like she didn't have anyone in the world. So, who could she be with?

After hearing about her parents, he doubted that Alicia would go there. He had to find her because Christmas was a little less than two weeks away.

Brad was about to knock on Alicia's door again when his cell phone went off. Pulling it out his jeans, he flipped it open and answered it.

"Hello?"

"Where are you?" Zack asked him.

"I'm at Alicia's house," he answered.

"Well, you have to leave right now."

"Why? What's wrong?" Brad asked. "I really need to talk to Alicia."

"You need to come to the hospital. Cherise is in labor," Zack told him. "You can bring Alicia with you, but Lee is driving everyone up the wall."

Cherise was in labor! He was going to be an uncle again. Rushing down the steps, Brad hurried to his black Lexus and got in slamming the door behind him.

"I'm coming. I should be there in thirty minutes. Tell Lee to calm down and help Cherise," he said before disconnecting the call.

Before he drove off, Brad sat inside of his car and stared at Alicia's house. He couldn't get all of the good memories he shared in there with her out of his mind. He had been a complete asshole not to listen to her when she tried to explain the kiss to him.

If he had listened to her, Alicia would be sitting next to him going to see the arrival of the new additions to the Drace family, but he wasn't going to give up on getting her back and placing a ring on her finger by Christmas.

“I’m coming back and I’ll make Alicia listen to me,” Brad said to himself before driving off.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

The second Brad got off the elevators he saw the entire Drace family sitting in the waiting room. Carter got off Traci's lap and ran up to him.

"Uncle Brad, Auntie Cherise's babies are coming."

"I know," Brad said as he picked up Carter and walked back over to his family. He noticed a Christmas tree over to the left and was surprised that Carter wasn't over there bothering it.

"I saw Santa today," Carter told him patting him on the shoulder. "He gave me a candy cane."

"You did?" Brad sat down next to Traci and handed Carter back to her.

"Yeah, he was at the mall."

"How are you doing?" Traci asked as she put Carter back down so he could walk around. "Zack told me about what happened with Alicia and then Richard just filled us in on who the guy really was. Were you able to talk to her?"

Brad shook his head. "She wasn't at home and I don't have a clue where she went to either, but I'm not giving up on her. Hell, she's my woman and I'm going to get her back."

"Brad, I feel like shit for even saying anything," Richard chimed in.

"It's not your fault. Alicia tried to talk to me and I blew her off. It's my fault, but I'm going to fix it. So, how's Cherise?"

"She's doing okay, but Lee was the one I was worried about," Zack laughed. "He called me in a panic as he was helping Cherise into the car."

"How far along is she now?" Brad asked leaning back in the uncomfortable hospital chair.

"The last time I heard Cherise was about ready to deliver and Lee was getting ready to go into the delivery room," Traci told him.

For the next three hours, the Drace family members paced up and down the hallway waiting for the announcement of Lee and Cherise's two

bundles of joy. Forty-five minutes later, they saw Lee rushing out of the delivery room with a huge smile on his face.

“How did it go?” Traci asked rushing up to him. “When can we see Cherise and the babies?”

“Everything went perfectly,” Lee grinned. “Kade and Duncan are beautiful. Cherise is doing perfect. The nurses are getting them cleaned up and taking Cherise to a room. Give them a few minutes and then everyone can see my handsome sons and beautiful wife.”

Brad stood towards the back watching all of his brothers talking to their wives and he was thrilled for Lee and couldn’t wait until he got to see his new nephews, but he was a little envious that it wasn’t him standing there.

Lee got his wish for Christmas with the additions of his sons. He’d be damned if he wasn’t going to get his too. After he saw the babies and congratulated his brother along with Cherise he was going to put his Christmas wish into motion. Because the time was running out with Christmas fast approaching.

Chapter Forty

Christmas Eve

Walking around the kitchen, Alicia enjoyed a glass of eggnog as a batch of Christmas cookies baked in the oven. She had been home for about seven days since her trip to New York and she had to admit that she felt *so* much better.

All of the nervous energy and not being able to keep anything down had passed. She honestly felt like a new woman and she loved it a lot.

The first night she came back home she had gone into work to see about taping the last part of the Shades of Love special, but Tiffany had informed her that the Brad called the station and told them Cherise had the babies, so it would have to be postponed for a while.

Alicia couldn't be happier for Lee and Cherise. Without a doubt, those two little boys were going to get a lot of love. She didn't want to but she did wonder how Brad was doing. When she got home there had been several messages on her phone from him asking to see her, but she hadn't returned any of them.

She had to stay away from him and that's why she had made that phone call to him. Brad had jumped to all kinds of conclusions without listening to her. She couldn't be with a man like that; it didn't matter how much she still loved him.

The timer for the cookies buzzed and Alicia went over to stove and took them out. As she was setting the cookie tray on the counter the doorbell rang.

Who in the world was that? She wasn't expecting anyone. All she had planned was to drink eggnog, nibble on warm cookies and relax with by the fireplace. Who had decided to mess with her night?

The doorbell rang again causing Alicia to rush from the kitchen. "I'm coming," she yelled right before she opened the door.

Brad

Alicia's eyes widened from shock as her brown eyes connected with a pair of blue eyes that haunted her dreams practically every night.

"Brad," Alicia whispered. "What are you doing here?"

“Hi, Alicia.” His deep voice sent familiar shivers down her body. “Happy Christmas Eve.”

“What are you doing here?” she asked again.

Alicia was trying her best not to drool at the sight of Brad in his blue jeans, black shirt and leather jacket. He looked almost too good for words. What in the hell was he doing on her porch at eight o’clock at night on Christmas Eve?

“I bought you a present,” he said, holding up a medium box in his hand covered in Santa Claus wrapping paper.

“I don’t know,” she replied, glancing at the box and then back up at him. “I wasn’t expecting you. I think you should go.”

“Please Alicia. Just let me come in for a few minutes.”

Alicia glanced back into her warm, cozy house and then back at Brad. She didn’t know what would happen if she let him inside her home. He had already broken her heart, so why was he here with a present looking too sexy for her to think straight? Well...she might as well let him in to find out.

“Come in.” Alicia moved to the side, so Brad could walk in.

“Thank you,” Brad said as he strolled past her looking gorgeous as usual.

Once he was inside, she closed and locked the door behind them. “So, what can I help you with on this cold night?”

“Can I at least have a seat?” Brad laughed making his blue eyes sparkle. “Will you at least offer me a cookie because they smell delicious?”

“Go right ahead.” Alicia waved toward the couch and waited while Brad took a seat. She moved in the direction of the chair, but Brad’s voice stopped her.

“Will you sit next to me on the couch? It will make it a lot easier for me to give you your present.”

Great! How could she sit that close to him with him smelling so good? Stomping across the room, Alicia took a seat on the couch but she left enough room between them so they weren’t touching.

“Alicia, I love you,” Brad said staring at her with a tense longing in his eyes. “I was a total ass to you and we both know it. I didn’t even give you a chance to defend yourself against what Richard told me. I assumed you were the same woman who had used me to make Max jealous, but you aren’t.

“You’re loving, caring and beautiful. You went out of your way to get me a meeting with Ivan Graf, who by the way agreed yesterday to become my partner in *Perfect Match*, my new business.”

“Congratulations, Brad. I’m so happy for you. I knew how much you wanted to have your own business,” Alicia said. “I know you will do an outstanding job. Ivan is lucky to have you and that’s all I wanted was for you to get everything you wanted.”

“Well, I only have about twenty-five percent of what I want then,” Brad said as he handed the box to her.

“What is this?” Alicia noticed how heavy the box felt. What in the heck was inside it and should she even open it?

“It’s a present for you and me,” Brad whispered as he slid closer to her on the couch. “Open it.”

A present for both of them? Brad wasn’t making any sense.

“I don’t know. This might be something that I can’t accept since we’re no longer together.”

“Please open the box. I love you and I know you still love me. Just open it.”

Alicia stared into Brad’s face and it was like an open book. She saw the regret, hurt, sadness but most of all she still saw the love there that he felt for her. Her heart jumped in her chest at the thought she might be about to get back what she had with Brad.

Tearing open the box, Alicia stared at the bridal books on the inside and when she glanced back at Brad her hands flew to her mouth as she found him down on one knee with an open ring box in his hand with a diamond the size of a small island.

“Alicia, those books are for you to start planning our future. Baby, I’ve never been so lonely as I was those weeks you weren’t in my life. I kicked myself every day after I tossed you out of my life. I’m hoping you find it your heart to forgive me and overlook me being a jealous ass. I almost let the best thing in my life slip away.”

“Yes, I’ve Perfect Match now, but it won’t be anything if you aren’t there to share in the wealth with me. I love you more than I could ever have thought possible. The years I waited to get you as my girlfriend were worth it, but now I’m ready to take the ultimate leap and make you my wife. Alicia Hart, will you marry me?”

Tossing the box down on the couch, Alicia got down on the floor and wrapped her arms around Brad’s neck. “YES! I would love to become your wife.”

“Thank God!”

Brad took the ring out and dropped the box to the side with the magazines. He slid the ring on her finger and planted a long, slow kiss on her mouth. As he tried to lower her to the floor, she pushed at his shoulders.

“Wait,” she said moving away from him. “I’ve a present for you too.” Getting off the floor, she raced into the kitchen and came back a few seconds later with her hands behind her back.

“How can you have a present for me if you didn’t know I was coming?” Brad asked as he got up off the floor.

“Hey, do you want it or not?” Alicia grinned.

“Of course. Show it to me.”

Moving her hands from behind her back, Alicia handed the book to Brad. He glanced down at the book and then back at her several times without saying a word making her afraid that he was in shock.

“45,000 Plus Baby Names,” he whispered. “You’re pregnant?”

She nodded her head and Brad tossed down the book and yanked her to his body. “Sweetheart, I’m so happy. I promise now that I have you back that I’m never going to let you go.”

“I hope not since we are going to add another new addition to the Drace family next year,” Alicia said as Brad looked down at her with love shining bright in his gorgeous blue eyes.

The End