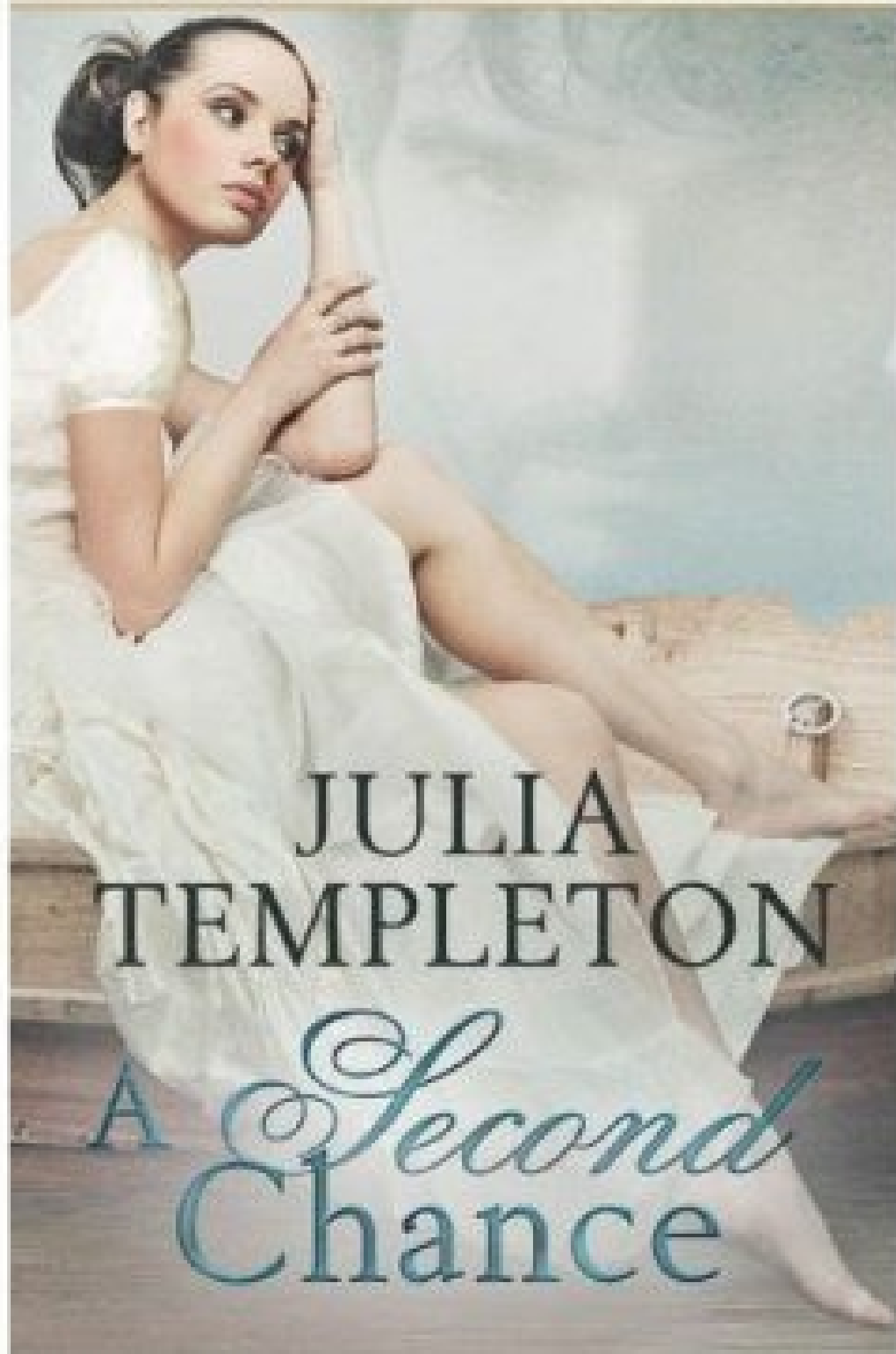


ELLORA'S CAVE VOYAGER



JULIA
TEMPLETON

A *Second*
Chance

A SECOND CHANCE

Julia Templeton

Chapter One

Present Day

Dante's Restaurant

Seattle, Washington

“That son of a bitch!”

Karen’s fingernails dug into Deanie’s hand, but she didn’t pull away. “Maybe it’s a business dinner.”

“With his twenty-four-year-old intern?” Karen’s eyes narrowed. “What the hell does she know about law?”

“It could be innocent. Just don’t draw any conclusions right now. When you get home tonight you can ask him about it.”

“Ask him? My husband is having dinner with his young intern, at a restaurant that he always goes to when he wants to impress a client. He told me he had a business meeting tonight. Does that look like a business meeting?”

Deanie glanced over at Karen’s husband. At the age of forty-seven, Greg Hamilton was at the top of his game, and one of three partners in Seattle’s most prestigious law firm. He was a good catch for any woman...especially a young intern who could make strides if she slept with the boss. That or it could backfire. “Maybe they’re discussing a case?”

At that moment Greg’s intern laughed aloud and reached out and touched Greg on the shoulder. Karen’s nails dug into Deanie’s hand again. “How can I compete with a twenty-four year old? I’m forty-five. Christ, I could be her mother.” She shook her head. “Staying late at the office, my ass. I’m going to kill him. I swear it! I’ll take everything, including the shirt off his back. Do you realize she was born the year we were married?”

Deanie nodded, resisting the urge to hug her best friend of over twenty years. She knew all too well the pain of infidelity.

“What are they doing now?” Karen asked, doing her best to hide behind the menu.

Ironically they had been out shopping all afternoon when they’d received Greg’s call that he was working late. They’d slipped into the Italian restaurant, and by chance found Karen’s husband and his intern.

Taking Karen’s lead, Deanie flipped open the menu and glanced at the couple. “They’re just talking.”

“Jesus, what did I do with my glasses? I can’t see a damn thing on the menu,” Karen said, unloading her purse contents on the table. “Does he look happy?”

Deanie glanced at the mess on the table and then at Karen. Her face now a pale white, her eyes glistening with unshed tears that she dabbed at with a wrinkled tissue. “It’s going to be all right. You’re going to be all right. Maybe we’re just reading too much into it.”

Karen, having dried her tears, slipped her glasses on and looked in her husband’s direction. “How could I have not seen this coming? I just figured he wanted to get in shape because of his high blood pressure. Little did I know it had nothing to do with his health, but rather his floozy intern.”

“I think we just grow too comfortable,” Deanie said before she could stop herself.

Karen looked like she’d been slapped. “What are you saying?”

“I’m not saying you’re guilty of growing too comfortable. I’m just speaking from experience. I did the same with Eric. I didn’t see it coming until it was too late. By the time I realized my marriage was in trouble, he had already fallen in love with someone else.”

“I’ll kill him,” Karen said, her voice deadly calm as she put the items back in her purse. “I gave that fucker twenty-four years of my life, four children, and what the hell do I get? Left for a woman who’s not even that pretty. Look at her. She’s as plain as a post and much too thin. No tits to speak of. The only thing she has going for her is her youth. Sure, I gained twenty—okay, thirty—pounds in the past five years, but at least I’m cute.”

“You are cute,” Deanie agreed, meaning it. Karen was adorable, her shoulder-length red hair, compliments of a Bellevue colorist, was perfect as usual, and she always wore the best clothes.

“Maybe you’re right. They could just be having a business dinner. No doubt discussing a case,” Karen said, biting her bottom lip. A second later a tear slid down her cheek. Feeling helpless, Deanie stood and held out her hand. “Come on, Karen. Let’s go. I’m not hungry, and we certainly don’t need a drink. Just go home and decide what you’re going to do.”

She nodded, looking more vulnerable than Deanie had ever seen her. “I need to blow my nose though. Let’s stop by the bathroom.”

Deanie glanced over her shoulder while she followed Karen. Greg didn’t notice their departure, thank goodness.

The blue-tiled bathroom had two stalls. “What do I do when he shows up at home tonight?”

Before she could respond the toilet flushed. Karen winced, and stepped into the empty stall. Applying lipstick, Deanie watched as a short woman, who stood not even five feet, stepped from the stall. Her hair was a frizzy puff of white, her cheeks baby pink and her skin extremely wrinkled. She looked ancient and fragile. She couldn’t weigh ninety

pounds.

“Hello, dear,” she said in a friendly voice. “How are you tonight?”

“Very well, thanks,” Deanie replied.

Karen snorted from the stall.

“Your friend doesn’t agree with you.” The old woman winked and proceeded to wash her hands.

“My husband is having dinner with his intern,” Karen blurted.

The old woman’s brows lifted. “Would this be business or pleasure?”

“It had better be business...or I’ll cut his balls off,” Karen said, appearing from behind the stall. Her eyes still glimmered with tears, but there was something there that hadn’t been before. Anger.

Deanie smiled. Now this was the Karen she knew and loved.

“Not all men cheat,” the old woman said, running her bony fingers through her sparse hair.

Karen applied lipstick and met the old woman’s stare in the mirror. “I’d like to meet just one man who believed in loving just one woman for the rest of their lives. What is so hard about it? True, we grow old, but we grow old together.”

“I think that’s part of the reason in and of itself,” Deanie said, running a brush through her dark blonde hair. “Men don’t want to admit they’re getting old. They want to know they still got it and what better to stroke their ego than a younger woman’s interest?”

The old woman turned. “What if a younger man showed interest in you? Would you consider being unfaithful?”

“Never,” Karen said matter-of-factly. “I love my husband.”

The old woman glanced at Deanie. “And what about you, my dear?”

Deanie laughed. “I’ve kind of sworn men off for a while. My husband left me for a younger woman.”

“Ah, I see,” the old woman said reassuringly. “You’re better off without him, dear.”

“Thanks.”

“Would you like to meet a man who is faithful...a man unlike your ex-husband?”

“Of course I would...one day,” Deanie said, heading for the bathroom door.

“Well, we had best get a move on. It was very nice meeting you.” Deanie was shocked when the old woman’s fingers wrapped around Deanie’s hand, stilling her from opening the door.

Her hand was ice cold, and even stranger—her eyes shone with an unearthly light

which sent a ripple down Deanie's spine.

"What if I told you there is a man outside that door who would give anything to have you? A man who has been as hurt as you, but dreams of the day for a second chance?"

Compelled, but spooked by the old gal's manner, Deanie replied, "Then I would say you are a miracle worker, because there is no man outside this door who wants to date me. I'm too old and too tired to take any man's crap. Been there, done that, my friend. Not going down that road again."

The old woman's laughter filled the room. "But what if your soul mate really was beyond that door? What would you give up?"

"Just about everything."

The old gal's lips quirked. "Even the life you have now?"

"Yes," Deanie and Karen said in unison.

Chapter Two

1808

London, England

"Reece, I am so sorry."

Reece's heart lurched at the expression on his father-in-law's face. The poor man was devastated, as well he should be. He knew what that look meant. And though he had steadied himself for this moment, a mixture of exhilaration and deep sadness welled within him, shocking him with its ferocity. "She's dead?"

"Yes."

His wife was dead.

Reece took a deep breath and released it. There was a God!

"Would you care to see her?"

Reece nodded at his father-in-law, a man he respected and loved like his own.

"Yes, I would like that."

He straightened his shoulders. He could do this. After all, it would be the last time that he would ever have to see her. Never again would he have to hear another rumor about her philandering ways. Never again would he have to make excuses to all those around him why his wife was not at his side.

Good riddance to you, Abigail Rochester, or Lady Pembroke, as she liked to be called. A mere merchant's daughter who had made her way into his heart. He had even called off his marriage to an earl's daughter to marry Abigail. His father had called him a fool, but he had been in love with Abigail and he had truly believed she was in love with him too.

He should have listened to his father. His marriage had been a sham from the first day.

Grabbing his cane, he stood and followed Robert to the second-story room, avoiding the oil painting of Abigail in the very flower of her youth. Entering his wife's quarters, the scent of roses was strong, nearly overwhelming. She had always loved roses, which in turn made him hate the flower all the more.

The curtain fluttered, bringing a warm breeze into the room. It stirred Abigail's hair, the pale blonde tresses framing her angelic face, now frozen in death. Even dead she was stunningly beautiful.

"I'll give you a moment," Robert said, shutting the door behind him.

Reece took the seat beside the bed, shocked to feel tears burn the back of his eyes. Memories of their years together raced through his thoughts. He had loved his wife once. Deeply. Passionately. He had been a young man of twenty years, and Abigail just shy of her seventeenth birthday when she had been introduced to him at the Earl of Cloverdale's ball. All night long men clamored for her attention and he had been stunned when she had singled him out and threw coquettish smiles his way. He had been shocked when he entered his carriage that night to find her hiding there, waiting for him. Before he could say a word, she had thrown herself into his arms and they had kissed feverishly. It had been his valet's quick thinking which had kept him from taking the girl right there.

She had exited the carriage, but the damage had been done. Abigail and her father arrived on Reece's porch the following morning.

Though Reece's father, the late Viscount of Pembroke had been distressed about the match, it was Reece who convinced him that he did care for his bride.

But things soured quickly.

Pushing away the horrible memories, Reece touched Abigail's jaw, his thumb brushing over her full lips. He had always loved her lips, her mouth and that coy smile.

Suddenly Abigail's eyes fluttered open and Reece's heart missed a beat.

The familiar clear blue eyes that stared back at him narrowed. "What's happened?" she asked, her voice a mere whisper above the pounding of his heart. "And who are you?"

"Did I hear her voice?" Robert said, busting through the door and rushing to his daughter's side. "Thank God! It is a miracle!" The older man took one of her hands within his own. "My precious darling, how are you feeling?"

Abigail furrowed her brows and looked from Robert to Reece and then back to Robert. "I'm okay."

"Okay?" Robert asked, brushing a tear away with the back of his hand.

"Yes, I'm fine," she said. "How are you?"

Robert brushed a tear away with the back of his hand. "I am extremely relieved. Absolutely elated, my dear."

Reece locked his knees. How could life be so cruel as to deal him such a heavy blow ...and just moments after experiencing immense elation?

Robert finally released Abigail. "Now don't you move, my dearest. Don't you let her move, Reece. I'll call for the doctor. Praise be to God!" he said, rushing for the door.

The door closed behind him and then it was just the two of them. "How are you feeling?" he asked, hoping his voice did not reflect the disappointment he felt.

Abigail's brow furrowed. "Who are you?"

Yes, the bitch was back. "I am your husband."

"Husband?" She sat up on her elbows, her gaze slowly shifting down his body and up again before she looked around the room. "Where am I? What is this place?"

Already weary of the cruel game, Reece shook his head and started for the door. He needed a stiff drink and a fresh horse because he was heading home...far away from this woman and her deceitful ways. Why had he even come? What a bloody fool he was.

"Where are you going?" she asked, coming to her feet.

With one hand on the doorknob he turned to face her and nearly choked on his breath. She stood a few feet from him and the cream-colored night rail did nothing to hide her attributes—particularly the rosy hint of her nipples through the thin silk. She had large breasts, a perfect handful. She always liked him to pinch her nipples hard and pull on them roughly. Abigail had always preferred sex a bit rough. "I am going home."

"But you said you were my husband? You don't live here?"

He closed his eyes and counted to ten. When he opened them, she was even closer. So close, he could feel the heat of her body. "No, Abigail. This is your house. Do you not remember when you kicked me out five years ago?"

"Kicked you out? But we're still married?"

He attempted to smile, but failed. "Yes, we're still married, but in name only."

Deanie stared at the man before her, then scanned the room once more. She had woken just moments ago to strange surroundings and now this gorgeous hunk of a man was saying he was her husband...but in name only.

It must be a dream, and a damned realistic one at that, because the dark-haired man with shoulder-length hair was dressed in nineteenth-century attire, complete with waistcoat, cravat and well-worn Hessians. He even walked with a cane and she guessed it wasn't for fashion, but necessity, since he had a slight limp. He even spoke with a pleasant British accent.

He looked like a hero straight out of a Jane Austen novel.

"You should return to bed," said the gorgeous man as he turned the doorknob.

Reaching forward, Deanie placed her hand over his, stilling the movement.

He jerked away as though her touch had burned him.

Not a good sign. Trying hard not to be offended, she took a step away from him and instantly he relaxed.

He despised her. She could see it in his beautiful forest green eyes as he stared at her as though she was crazy.

Man, but he was gorgeous! His amazing full lips pursed as though he had to fight to keep from telling her to fuck off. And his hair was luscious. Sexy and a bit ruffled. Those rich dark locks looked like silk. Probably felt like silk too, she thought, wishing she could run her fingers through it.

“Since you are once again the picture of health, I shall be returning to my estate.”

“Don’t go! I need you here. I need to understand what’s going on.”

His green eyes narrowed even more. “What is there to understand, Abigail? You fell from a carriage and hurt yourself. I was summoned here because your father thought you were dying. As that is not the case, I shall leave London posthaste. There is no reason for me to stay here now.”

Why was he calling her Abigail and what was this bit about a carriage? She looked around the opulent room with a huge four-poster bed, plush furnishings and ridiculously tall ceilings. She was definitely dreaming about another time and place, because there wasn’t a place in Seattle like this. And she would know. She’d been selling real estate in the greater Seattle area for twenty years.

“I don’t want you to leave,” she said, shocked at how much she meant it. If this was a dream, she wanted to play it out. After all, she was in an elegant bedroom that looked like something out of a dream. The one thing she would change is this guy’s attitude toward her. She’d been told she could flirt with the best of them and now she poured on the charm. She took the step that separated them and rested a hand on his shoulder. “Stay with me.”

The muscles beneath her hand clenched. He didn’t push her away, but the way he watched her said he’d like to do just that. “Abigail, I do not think it is wise for you to be up. Your father would be most upset, especially since only a moment ago you were pronounced dead and—”

Her heart jolted. “Dead?”

“Yes, you were pronounced dead not a quarter of an hour ago. Your father is calling on a doctor. Once he has given you word that you can be out of bed, then you can do so. Until then, I must insist you return to bed.”

Yes, this was something straight out of a Jane Austen novel.

“You mentioned my father.” Yes, she was definitely dreaming. Her father had died ten years ago from a heart attack.

Her husband shook his head and made an exasperated sound. “Yes, your father. The

very man who sent me an urgent letter telling me to come to London because you were dying. He will take care of you now that you are out of danger, which means I shall take my leave. I wish you well, Abigail.”

“You don’t like me very much, do you?” Deanie couldn’t help but ask the question, as she dropped her hand to her side. So much for her flirting skills. The man clearly hated her and it would take more than a coy smile to win him over. “What’s your name?”

He frowned. “Reece, and I am going to get your father.”

“You hate me. I see it in your eyes.” Deanie looked into those long-lashed dark green eyes. He smelled delicious. Of sandalwood and a masculine scent that made her lightheaded. She wanted to bury her nose in his wide chest, run her fingernails over his broad shoulders.

A nerve twitched in his jaw, but he said nothing.

“Did you hurt your leg?”

“You of all people know what happened.”

“No, I don’t know. What happened?”

“I was injured in a duel.”

Her lips quirked. “A duel?” Very odd, this dream. Regency clothing, a huge bedroom with furnishings straight out of an antique store...and now a duel.

“And you lost?”

“No, I killed him.”

“Then how come you’re not in jail?”

“Because it was a duel and I won.”

“Why were you in a duel?”

“Because I challenged your honor. It was rumored you were having an affair with the man and I did not believe him. In fact, I demanded satisfaction and the man agreed...in front of four hundred and twenty-seven guests at the Sutherlands’ annual ball. Little did I know you were actually guilty. Ironically, I was the only one who didn’t know of your infidelity.”

No wonder he hated her. She could relate. She had been so furious when she discovered Eric’s betrayal. It had been devastating and she had been horrified to learn that some of her closest friends had known about the affair. But four hundred and twenty-seven people knowing before she did would be not only embarrassing, but humiliating.

He took a step toward her, his fingers wrapping around her wrist. “Come, you need your rest, Abigail. I think the fall from the carriage might have caused damage to your head, for you are having difficulty remembering.”

“You mentioned a carriage before—”

“Indeed, the carriage you were riding in and fell out of.”

“You mean a car?”

“Car?” Exasperation laced the word. “What the devil is a car?”

She opened her mouth to respond when she caught her, or rather a young woman’s, reflection in the mirror. A girl who stood next to Reece. But where the hell was Deanie then?

She tilted her head, and the young woman did the same.

Deanie pulled away from Reece and approached the gold-framed cheval mirror. To her shock it was the young woman’s reflection, and not Deanie’s.

“What the hell?” Deanie said, staring at the young woman with large sky blue eyes and porcelain skin who could not be a day over twenty-five. Her features were small, perfect for her oval face, and her hair was a voluminous cloud of pale blonde that fell to her slender waist in thick waves. Large, full breasts pressed against the silky material of the ankle-length slip that couldn’t hide the long, slender legs beneath.

Deanie put her hand to her face and the woman mirrored her movements. “No way,” she said with a gasp, stunned that the woman in the mirror said those words.

Her heart pounded hard against her breastbone. If the woman wasn’t her, then why did she move whenever Deanie moved? Deanie winked, and the reflection winked back. “Oh my God! No way!”

“What is it?” Reece asked, his eyes wide with alarm.

Deanie waved and watched in silent horror as the blonde waved back at her. “It’s impossible. It’s time to wake up.” She pinched herself hard and winced when she felt the pain.

At that same moment a scream shattered the quiet and the sound of running footsteps followed.

“What the devil?” Reece exclaimed a moment before the door flew open and the older man, who she assumed was her father, appeared.

“What are you doing out of bed?” the older man asked, frowning at Reece before ushering Deanie back to bed.

“Who just screamed?” Reece asked.

Her father shook his head. “A servant has lost her mind, I am afraid. She says her name is Karen.”

Deanie’s heart missed a beat. “Karen?”

He nodded. “Indeed. She has been saying the name over and over again and staring into the mirror as though she sees a ghost. Thank goodness the doctor is on his way. He might have to give her a draught to help her sleep. Perhaps she is fevered.”

“She is not the only one acting strange,” Reece said, opening the door.

“Where is the woman who says her name is Karen?” Deanie asked, tossing back the blankets “her father” had just laid over her.

The men tried to stop her, but she flew past them and down an enormous staircase.

Chapter Three

Any other time Deanie might have appreciated the opulence around her, but now her mind was racing. What the hell was going on? Hopefully the woman downstairs was her Karen. It had to be.

But how could this be real?

The last thing she remembered had been the restaurant and the bathroom...and the strange old woman. What had she said about finding her soul mate? There had been something very odd about the woman. Something unsettling even about her touch. The coolness of her fingers, the strange light in her eyes when she’d asked Deanie if she would give up everything to find her soul mate.

Deanie had told her she would give just about everything—but hadn’t meant her life as she’d known it. Had she known she’d be transported to another time, she would have not been so enthusiastic.

Hearing the men directly behind her, Deanie quickened her pace. She raced down the massive staircase and onto the ground floor landing where a small crowd had gathered.

There in the center stood a tall, slender woman of about twenty. She stared into a large mirror between twin marble columns. Tears streaked the woman’s face and she shook her head adamantly. “That’s not me,” she said over and over again. “I swear to you, I don’t recognize the person in that mirror. I’m Karen Hamilton and I’m forty-five years old. I live in Seattle, Washington and I have four kids. This is insane. Why doesn’t anybody believe me?”

As Deanie approached, the small group stepped away from the girl dressed in a long black dress with a white apron. “Karen,” Deanie said firmly, and the woman turned, her brown eyes wide with fear.

“Yes?” she said, taking a step closer to Deanie.

Deanie’s stomach tightened, realizing everyone watched them intently, particularly Reece. They had to be very careful. In this day and age, women could be put away for anything...and a stressed-out, raging woman saying she was from a different time would really have issues.

Swinging from Newgate Prison for one.

With what she hoped reflected a reassuring smile, Deanie watched the girl’s eyes widen with hope. “Oh my God. Deanie? Tell me that’s you.”

Deanie smiled tightly and turned to Reece. “Could you excuse us for just a moment?”

Not waiting for an answer, Deanie took Karen by the hand and pulled her into the nearest room. Safely on the other side of the door, Deanie shut it firmly behind her and turned to her friend. "Karen?"

"Oh my God, it is you!" Karen wailed, throwing her arms around Deanie. "Thank God you're here. I thought I'd slipped into the twilight zone. What the hell happened? How could this be? We're like twenty."

Deanie lifted her finger to her lips. "We have to be careful," she whispered. "They think we're nuts and that's not a good thing. I'm not sure what they did to women who were loopy in their time, but I have to think whatever it is, it wouldn't be good for us."

Karen winced. "Sorry, I didn't think about that. I was just so damned panicked. I would have had a complete meltdown if you hadn't surfaced. I still can't wrap my brain around it. I mean, one minute we're at a Seattle restaurant, the next we're in a freakin' London townhouse."

"London? Really?"

Karen nodded. "Trust me. I've already been outside. Hyde Park is just across the street."

That certainly explained the clothing and talk of duels.

"How did this happen?" Karen asked, taking her hair out of the bun. "Damn pins were poking into my scalp."

"Remember that strange old woman in the restaurant bathroom? The one who asked us about soul mates?"

Karen nodded. "Yeah."

"She asked me a question. What I would give up if my soul mate was on the other side of the door. I said everything, and then she asked if I'd give up the life we have now."

"And we both said yes at the same time. Oh shit, Deanie. What in the hell did we get ourselves into?"

Deanie ran a hand down her face. The enormity of their situation was sobering. "There's got to be a way back."

Karen frowned. "Do we look for this strange short woman? What are the chances of finding her in London?"

"Slim to none probably, but what do we have to lose?"

"Everything," Karen said matter-of-factly.

"We'll find a way out. She got us here and I'm sure she'll put us right back."

A knock sounded at the door. "Abigail, are you all right?"

"Who's that?" Karen asked.

“My husband.”

“Husband?” Karen’s eyes widened. “You don’t mean that gorgeous hunk with the long hair?”

Deanie couldn’t help but smile. “That would be the one.”

“Bitch! Given my luck, I’m probably married to a troll.”

“Or not married at all.”

“True.”

“I’ll be right out,” Deanie called, lowering her voice. “Okay, we need to focus. This is what I know so far. I’m married to Reece. Our marriage is in name only—or so he said just a few minutes ago.”

“He actually said those words.”

Deanie nodded. “Yeah, the guy hates me. You can see it in his eyes. And did you notice the limp? Apparently he was in a duel with one of my lovers.”

“A duel?” Karen shivered. “How chivalrous.”

“Reece was challenging his wife’s honor. Somehow I get the feeling Abigail wasn’t one for monogamy, though I can’t understand it given how gorgeous he is.”

“Some women just don’t know what they have,” Karen said, wrapping a lock of her suddenly long dark hair with a finger.

“I get the distinct impression he’s not happy that I woke up after I had been pronounced dead.”

Karen’s lips quirked. “Is he your soul mate?”

“What?”

“When you woke up who was the first person you saw?”

“Reece.”

“Do you think this guy could be your soul mate?” Karen asked, excitement in her tone.

Deanie hadn’t thought about that possibility. What if he was her soul mate? “I don’t know. He hates me, so if he is my soul mate, I have a lot of convincing to do.”

“Just think of the possibilities, Deanie,” Karen said, clasping her hands together.

Someone knocked again. “Abigail dear, are you all right?” This time it was Abigail’s father.

“Yes, I’m fine.”

“Abigail,” Karen snorted. “That just doesn’t fit you.”

“And what’s your name?”

Karen's smile disappeared. "Bertha."

Deanie lifted a brow. "Yes, I'm fine, Father. I'll be just a moment."

Karen frowned. "Father?"

"Yeah, I have a father and a husband."

"Wow, that's intense."

"Yeah, well, it will take some getting used to. Anyway, let's try to talk a bit more refined. That way we won't be so obvious."

Karen smoothed a stray hair behind her ear. "I'll try." She took a deep breath and smiled at her reflection. "You know...this is exactly what I needed. A break from my everyday life. Something to show me how much I should appreciate all I have."

"You're right, and I will work on the formal speech. They already think you are crazy, so you have to be especially careful. We have to play our parts while we find a way out of this time and back to ours."

"I'm a servant. Hell, I have a maid at home. How am I supposed to pull this off?"

"Look at it as an adventure. Plus, I'll ask for you to be with me at all times."

Karen turned from her reflection. "What if we're really stuck here forever? I have kids and a husband."

"I have kids too, Karen." Deanie looked into the dark eyes of the pretty girl before her. The real Karen was short, only a little over five foot, but the girl before her was at least five-foot-eight and about the same age as Deanie's daughter. Deanie tried to hide the smile that came to her lips. "Holy shit, Karen. We're young...and beautiful."

Karen's lips curved. "Be careful what you wish for, huh? Maybe my husband would like me now."

As Karen's smile dimmed Deanie hugged her. "Everything is going to be fine. We'll find a way back to our own time. For whatever reason we were put here. Perhaps it's a test."

"One hell of a test, Deanie." Karen snorted. "I'm actually taller than you. And skinnier too."

"I'd be very careful if I were you," Deanie said, lifting her chin. "After all, I'm pretty sure I'm your employer, which means I can make your life a living hell."

A knock sounded again—this time more forceful. A second later Deanie's husband walked in. Her heart skipped a beat. Karen was busy checking him out, and not being very subtle about it either. In fact, poor Reece blushed to the roots of his hair, no doubt unaccustomed to being gawked at. Deanie coughed, but it took Karen a full minute to realize that cough had been for her.

She quickly looked at Deanie and when Reece turned his head, mouthed the words, "Oh my God. He's gorgeous!" She even slipped in a long glance at the prominent bulge in

his snug-fitting pants. When she glanced at Deanie, she grinned slyly while lifting her fingers about a foot apart. “Huge cock!” she mouthed, only to be caught by Reece, who looked from Karen to Deanie again, his cheeks scarlet.

Poor guy.

Pride filled Deanie. If this man was her husband, then she had every right to be intimate with him. True, their relationship was obviously on shaky ground, but she was more than a little motivated to set things right.

And quickly.

As she stared at him, a warmth flooded her, traveling throughout her, down to her stomach, and even lower...to a place that hadn't seen action in a very long time.

Would she be having sex with this guy while she was in Regency England? she wondered, her clit twitching at the very idea. It had been over two years since she'd had sex and honestly she hadn't missed it. It wasn't like her ex had been a giving lover to begin with and foreplay hadn't been part of his vocabulary. Only his gratification had been important.

Though Eric had been a nice-looking man, he was no Reece. What would it feel like to have this man touch her? To feel those long-fingered hands on her body? To feel those full lips against her own? To feel his ripped body moving over hers, thrusting against her—that big cock of his filling every inch of her.

A throbbing began between her legs, making her moist. Yes, it had been too long. And Reece would be a wonderful, skilled lover. She would run her fingers through those silky dark tresses, over those broad shoulders and along his spine, to the firm globes of his tight ass. She'd graze her fingers over those high, tight cheeks, while urging him to fuck her harder and faster.

Oh yes, she'd like to take this young stud to bed...right about now.

It was Karen's time to clear her throat and when their gazes met, they shared a secret smile.

Maybe Karen was right. Perhaps this time-travel thing might be just what she needed.

Chapter Four

Though Reece and Robert both suggested Abigail return to bed after the doctor's exam, she ignored them both and emerged in the dining room dressed in a rather plain blue satin gown and no jewelry. Even more, her light hair was unbound, and flowed around her like a veil.

She had never looked so lovely and to Reece's dismay his heart rate accelerated. How could he be so attracted to her after all she had done to him?

He should have left immediately. He should have left and not listened to Robert's pleas to stay, at least for the night. Reece had agreed, but he was going to leave at first light. He'd leave and never look back. Forget about Abigail and enjoy his life.

Robert sat to his daughter's right and he absolutely beamed, pleased beyond words that Abigail had escaped her brush with death.

Abigail smiled widely and to his dismay, the hair on his arms stood on end. What the hell was the matter with him? This woman had taken everything from him, including his dignity and pride. Why then was he remembering the Abigail of old all the sudden? Once she had been a sweet young girl with a smile that could light up a room. An innocent girl, who had changed the moment she had become a woman. She had learned quickly that beauty meant power and she had power over so many men. They all had wanted her and didn't care she had no blue blood to speak of.

She smiled at him and he quickly looked away. That was how she used to look at him ...a long time ago. When she had been the innocent Abigail.

What had happened to his wife? Who was this woman who had taken over her body? This vixen who laughed, smiled and begged him not to leave. The woman who wore her hair down and dressed plainly? What would he have given to hear those words to stay so many years ago?

He had hungered for them and now that he no longer cared what she felt or said, he was furious.

"So Reece, how long have we been married?" she asked, before picking up a fork and taking a bite of roast duck.

He was surprised she even ate the duck since she had always detested the taste, or so she had said on several occasions. But instead of complaining about it, as the old Abigail was surely to do, she seemed to savor the light fare. Even more, she was using the wrong fork.

Abigail had been educated at one of England's most sought-after schools of deportment. She would have never dreamed of using the wrong silverware, even in this informal setting.

Not at all the Abigail of old.

Recalling that she had asked him a question, he cleared his throat and replied, "We have been married for seven years now."

Her brows rose to her hairline. "Seven? How old were we?"

"You were nearly seven and ten, and I was twenty."

Her lips curved, exposing small, white teeth. He had always loved her mouth, the full lips and the deep dimples. Sadly, he had forgotten what it felt like to be the object of her kind regard. It had been so very long, after all...and it felt wonderful.

The smile slowly faded as she watched him. "I hurt you, didn't I? Badly." She set her fork down and leaned forward, waiting for his reply.

Robert stopped eating and set his fork down. He looked ready to bolt.

Reece's throat felt so tight, he could barely swallow. How easy it would be to tell her the sordid truth about their marriage, but he refrained. Unable to speak the words, he instead nodded, letting her draw her own conclusion.

Though he wanted desperately to believe Abigail had changed and that she was actually regretful of the way she had treated him in the past, he also knew how very clever and cunning she was. Perhaps she was using him because of the latest scandal and her ex-lover's brutal treatment of her. Perhaps she needed to take refuge and who better to champion her than her husband? The same husband who had championed her before, only to end up crippled and made a laughingstock of when he learned the horrible truth of his wife's infidelity.

Never again.

"Some people just don't understand what they have, do they?" She smoothed her gloveless hands over the lace tablecloth. Just as he loved her mouth, he also loved her hands. The small, slender fingers. The dainty and fragileness of them. And her touch. Dear God did he miss her touch.

Reece drained the glass of Madeira.

"I believe I shall retire to the study for a while," Robert said, already standing.

Abigail didn't stop him, nor did Reece. He waited until Robert had left the room and a servant finished refilling his glass before he responded. "No, sometimes people don't understand what they have." It had been so long since they had been a married couple in every sense of the word. He had hoped to have many children with her, but for whatever reason, they had been unable to conceive. Always he had worried she would have a child out of wedlock, but thankfully it had never happened.

That was one humiliation he would have difficulty accepting.

She reached across the table and took his hand in her own. Her thumb brushed over his in a soothing gesture. His first instinct was to pull away, to protect himself against her. After all, he had survived her rejection once and he could survive it again, but God help him, he did not want to be torn down again. Not twice in one lifetime.

He ripped his hand away, very nearly upending the now refilled glass of Madeira at his elbow. He drank it down in one swallow, feeling her gaze on him all the while.

The usual disdain was not there, but something else. Something he had not felt from her since he'd been shot in the leg and she'd recoiled from his touch, telling him he was nothing better than a murdering cripple. She had sobbed for her dead lover, and then in the next breath told him she would never allow him to touch her again.

But the look now was not at all unpleasant. It was...desire. His wife wanted him. He resisted the urge to rub his eyes and look again to see if he had only imagined it. True, he might be a broken man, but he knew desire when he saw it.

Warmth flooded his veins, swooping low into his belly, and lower to his cock which throbbed hard against the rough material of his pants. He had taken a lover, an older

widow who lived within miles of his manor in northern Wales. The place he had withdrawn to that day so many years ago when Abigail had looked at his leg and shuddered. Carolyn had been a gracious and giving lover, who demanded very little of Reece. Their relationship was based simply on mutual satisfaction. Neither had time in their lives for love. "I shouldn't be here," he said, standing. "I need to leave."

She came to her feet. "Reece, don't be silly. It's dark out and I don't want you to go. I don't. Stay with me. Please. Stay with me."

He ran a trembling hand down his face. "Who are you?" he said, the words coming out harsher than intended. "And what have you done with my wife?"

"I am your wife," she said, rounding the table. A moment later her warm hand slipped around his. "I want to be your wife again, Reece. Will you let me show you how good it can be between us?"

Her scent enveloped him, drawing him in, making his heart and mind war with the other. She took another step, her arms wrapping about him, her hands splaying against his shoulders, her breasts smashed against his chest. "I don't know what she did to you. I mean what I did to you."

His hands were still at his sides. How he yearned to hold her as tightly as she held him. Though he refused to touch her, to his surprise, she did not let go. Instead, her hands moved up and down his back in a soothing gesture...and his body responded. She had to feel the hard ridge of his cock pressed firmly against her stomach and she didn't move away.

"I should leave." He said the words again, but they held no affirmation this time. Could it be that he wanted to stay? Even after all she had done to him? All the lies. All the deceit. The cruelty.

"Reece, stay with me," she said quickly, her breath hot against his chest. "I don't want you to leave. Stay with me."

He looked down into her clear blue eyes framed by dark lashes. Good God, she seemed sincere. "Don't do this, Abigail. You don't mean it."

"I do mean it."

"It's only because he's no longer in your life."

She frowned. "He? Who are you talking about?"

He put her at arm's length. "For the love of God, don't pretend you don't know who I'm talking about. Your lover. Lord Hammerstein. The man who threw you out of his moving carriage."

Her face paled, draining of color. "Oh my God."

"I cannot do this."

"I'm not that woman anymore, Reece."

“Isn’t it enough that all of London knows what happened? I have abided by your wishes to stay away from you all these years. I came only because your father requested it.”

“Reece, please believe me when I say that I’ve changed. Let me prove to you I’m a different woman than the one you remember.”

Sweet Jesus how he wanted to believe her. How many nights had he dreamed of such a declaration? Of having his beautiful wife tell him she wanted him to be with her? Instead that dream had always ended up in a nightmare, with that horrible night of her telling him he was half a man and that she would never allow him in her bed ever again. “I can’t,” he said, and for his own sanity, he turned on his heel and left.

Chapter Five

Deanie stared out at the gray, dreary day. Though the weather was absolutely atrocious, a few brave people were out and about. It had been raining for three straight days, and now the wind kicked up. A miserable day...which matched her mood perfectly. The house had grown quiet, aside from the footsteps of servants scurrying from room to room, cleaning.

Reece had left two days before, but it felt more like a week.

She would never forget the look in his eyes when she had asked him to stay. The pain in those green depths would haunt her for the rest of her life. Abigail had hurt him badly. She knew all about the rejection of infidelity. The number it did on one’s self-esteem. When Eric had left her for his mistress, she felt like she’d die from the pain. She’d spent two weeks in bed. Her heart had felt like it had been ripped from her chest. “Maybe we should go to him.”

Karen, with feather duster in hand, stood back surveying her handiwork. For someone who had employed a full-time maid at her five thousand square foot home in a wealthy Seattle suburb, her friend had taken to her new job as servant with zeal. Perhaps it was the new youthful body, or the absence of grown children and a philandering husband that had sparked her exuberance. Whatever the case, she seemed to be thriving in her new surroundings. “He lives in Wales, I understand.”

“Wales?” Deanie glanced at her reflection in the mirror. It was still startling to see the statuesque blonde in the mirror versus the middle-aged Deanie she was used to. And though she could not find a single flaw on her new face and body, strangely enough she actually missed the Deanie of old...at least a little bit. Not the wrinkles, crow’s-feet and stretch marks, but the familiar face. The familiar smile. This woman she looked at now was a stranger, and the more she learned about Abigail, the more she disliked her.

No wonder Reece had run for the hills. Who could blame the guy, especially after all the things she had done to him.

“Yes, Northern Wales, I believe,” Karen said, kicking off her shoes and sitting down in a nearby chair. “In a place called Snowdonia. Very picturesque, I hear. Kind of like our

Seattle.”

It hurt to think of Seattle and the life they’d left behind. Of the kids who were no doubt going crazy trying to figure out what happened to their mothers. The movie *Thelma and Louise* came to mind. “What else have you heard about Abigail and Reece?”

“Do you really want to know?”

Seeing the strange expression on Karen’s face should have warned her how grim the news would be. “Of course I want to know. Tell me everything.”

“You were a horrible wife, to be sure. Rotten to the core. I hear you were called the Ice Princess.” She snorted. “Imagine that. Sweet, kind Deanie, successful realtor, soccer mom and lifelong friend...an ice princess.”

“Apparently the ice princess label fit, especially since Reece told me my current lover threw me from the carriage.”

“What a way to call it off. Sounds like she deserved it.”

“Can you imagine leaving a man who looks like Reece? Why would you want to stray?”

“And his cock is huge,” Karen said with a sheepish grin.

“Sure looks like it.”

“I hope you get to sleep with him before we leave this place.”

“Trust me, I will.”

“Do you think we’ll ever find that strange lady, Deanie? I’m getting kind of worried. What if this is it for both of us? I’ve been trying to summon her for the past two days and nothing. Maybe a séance is in order?”

The thought of living the rest of their days out in Regency England was more than a little disconcerting. “There’s a way back,” she said with more confidence than she felt. “And we can do a séance, but I would really like to resolve some things with Reece first. The guy deserves to have some happiness in his life, and there’s a reason the strange old lady sent me here saying my soul mate was on the other side of the door. He must be my soul mate.”

Karen snorted. “Sounds like a chick flick in the making. That’s fine. We can travel to Wales, but after you bury the hatchet with your stud-muffin hubby, it’s time to focus on getting back to our real lives. I can’t spend too many more days tied up in a corset like this.”

“Me either.” She clapped her hands together. “Let’s get packed then. By the way, what does one pack for a stint in the country?”

“Let me!” Karen all but pushed her out of the way as she opened up the wardrobe and pulled out gown after gown. “We’ll make you so gorgeous Reece won’t be able to keep his hands off you. At least one of us deserves to get laid, though I do think Reece’s valet

has a thing for me.”

“Really? What makes you say that?”

“He followed me around the first night we were here. He told me how lovely I looked, and while I was eating with the other servants, I kept looking up to find him staring at me.”

“Is he cute?”

“He’s young. Maybe mid-twenties.”

“He’ll be in Wales, too.”

“Why do you think I’m so gung ho on the idea?”

Deanie laughed. “I think it might be a bit harder for me than for you. I’ve got my work cut out for me. Reece really hates me. In fact, he might throw me off his property.”

“No he won’t. He’ll fall in love with you all over again.”

“You think he loved her?”

Karen stopped in mid-motion, and nodded. “Yeah, I do. I’ve watched him watch you. There’s chemistry there. The boy is just a bit shell-shocked. One can’t blame him, given what he’s been through. You need to bring a smile to his face again.”

“Well, I’m determined to show him I’m a different woman—literally. If he doesn’t respond, then it wasn’t meant to be.”

“What if this is your second chance?”

Deanie hadn’t stopped to think it all through. What if she did fall in love with Reece? The strange old woman had said something about soul mates, so what if she knew something Deanie didn’t, and what if she did fall head over heels in love with her husband?

* * * * *

Reece woke from a dead sleep. Damn it! Why couldn’t he get Abigail out of his thoughts? He could not even escape her in his dreams. Last night she had visited him there, wrapping her arms around him, pressing her cheek against his chest...much as she had done the day he had left London.

The devious wench! He had awoken with a rock-hard erection and only his hand could ease the tension. He had brought himself to climax and came with a growl, furious that she had interrupted his life again.

She had an ulterior motive. Abigail always did. And though he wanted to believe she was a changed woman, their history together told him he would be a fool to allow her back in his life.

What if?

Those two simple words had been racing through his thoughts since leaving London.

What if she really was a different woman? What if she truly was sorry for all the pain she had caused him? What if she really did want to make their marriage work? What if he could forgive her?

But could he forgive her?

And even more, did he believe her? The woman who had called him a murdering cripple. The woman who had been called the ice princess from her peers. A title she wholeheartedly deserved.

He rang the bell on his bedside table and a moment later Gerard emerged. "Yes, my lord?"

"Have my horse brought around. I am in need of a ride."

"You might change your mind, my lord. Apparently a carriage has just arrived. I was on my way up to wake you when I heard your summons."

Reece sat up straight. "Who is it?"

Gerard quirked his lips. "Your wife, my lord."

His heart skipped a beat. "My wife? Are you certain?"

"Yes, my lord. She is riding in a carriage bearing your crest. Shall I tell her you are away on business?"

"What the devil do you think she is doing here?"

"If I were to hazard a guess, my lord, I would say she is hoping to win you back. Why else would she come to this 'godforsaken land'? I believe those were her exact words when last she visited some five years ago?"

Gerard always spoke bluntly, as they were close friends, but never about Abigail until now. He might have guessed that Reece was surprised because he shifted his gaze to the window. "I will tell her whatever you wish, but we had best decide. She is stepping out of the carriage as we speak."

Reece was out of bed and staring out the window a second later, not bothering with a robe. His breath formed fog against the cold window and he leaned forward, resting his forehead against the cool glass. Down below, his wife emerged from the gold-encrusted carriage with his family coat of arms emblazoned on the side. The one thing Abigail had never been was discreet. No, she always enjoyed making a grand entrance...and now was no exception.

His stomach tightened at the sight of her pale hair. Just as she had worn her hair down on their last meeting, she did so again. She pulled the navy cloak tighter about her and turned when her servant stepped out. They embraced, both smiling, and then she looked up. The breath lodged in his throat and he could not step away to save his life. Two things became painfully obvious to him in that moment, one, his wife was happy to arrive and two, he stood before the window without a stitch of clothing...and the window was low.

Neither his wife nor her brazen servant looked away either.

Gaining his wits, Reece finally stepped away from the window and looked to Gerard, who was trying to keep from cracking a smile. “Shall I draw your bath, my lord?”

“Indeed,” he replied, going to his wardrobe and taking out a crisp white shirt and navy breeches. The waistcoat was navy as well—Abigail’s favorite color, with streaks of silver running throughout. That was not the reason he chose the attire, he told himself. Nor was his heart pounding because he was excited by his wife’s unexpected arrival.

No, he was just merely intrigued that she had taken the time to travel the rural roads of Snowdonia to visit him, in a home she said was as ugly and cold as he.

* * * * *

Deanie paced the floor in Reece’s study. The large room with gorgeous mahogany furnishings screamed elegance and masculinity. Much like the man who stood before her. His still damp hair curled at the collar of his frilly, yet masculine shirt. She really did love the romantic touch of the cravat as well. Thank goodness he hadn’t opted for the Brutus haircut so popular in the Regency Era, nor did he have prominent sideburns either.

He didn’t bother with a coat, but wore a waistcoat, which hung nicely on his athletic frame. The navy pants clung to his impressive thighs, and likewise to the equally impressive bulge below his waistband. Her nipples pebbled against her bodice at the image of him standing naked at the window upon her arrival. That image was forever burned into her brain. He was gorgeous, and perfectly formed.

Like then, her body responded as her gaze wandered over him. He really was a sexy man. The type of man who could go all night. The blood in her veins warmed as she stared. He wasn’t at all happy to see her and the Deanie of old would have left immediately. Sure, he had managed a tight smile for her benefit, but that smile said anything but welcome and more of what the hell are you doing here?

But she wasn’t going to leave. No, she was going to play this whole soul mate scenario to the max. She wanted Reece and she would have him by the end of this day ...if all went according to plan.

She and Karen had spent the long, bumpy carriage ride scheming a seduction that would make the most saintly of men throw caution to the wind.

How had Abigail been able to deny herself this gorgeous man?

What a bloody fool.

Well, Abigail’s mistake was Deanie’s gain, and she would not leave Regency England before she sampled this hunky English lord.

Reece stopped in front of her and leaned back on the desk, his long fingers curling around the mahogany edge. “So how long will you be staying on?”

His gaze drifted from the floor between them, before locking with hers. It seemed he had a hard time holding her gaze for any length of time. Not surprising since Abigail had

ruined his self-confidence.

“How long will you be here?” she asked, noticing how the nerve in his jaw twitched.

He frowned. “Indefinitely.”

“Then I shall be here indefinitely.”

“What?”

“I will be here as long as you are here.”

He swallowed hard. “Why?”

“Because I want to be with you,” she blurted, taking a step closer to him. She noticed his fingers tightened on the desk’s edge, turning white at the knuckles.

“What game do you play, Abigail?” The words were little more than a whisper. “I have no time for this.”

She smoothed out her skirts and cleared her throat. “It’s no game, Reece. I want you. It’s that simple. I want to be with you and I’m not leaving until I have you.”

The vulnerability returned to his eyes and once again he dropped his gaze.

She took another step, and then another, boldly stepping between his thighs, trapping him. She’d never done anything like this before, but then again she hadn’t been this excited in a very long time. Amazing what a hot guy and a second chance could do for a woman’s courage. “Do you want me to stay, Reece?”

The poor guy trembled. When he didn’t respond, she took comfort in the fact that he hadn’t downright refused her. There was some hope, at least.

Her hands slipped to his sides and she felt his muscles clench. She could also feel his heart pound unsteadily and hear the quickening of his breath. “Abigail, you don’t want this. You know you don’t.”

She lifted her chin and kissed his neck. His pulse leapt and her heart skittered when his hands moved to her hips. For an instant she thought he might push her away. She held her breath, waiting.

But he didn’t move at all. She kissed his throat again, making a path up toward his ear. Growing more daring she nipped at the lobe there, sucking it lightly, and he groaned. It was a low, guttural sound that pleased her in ways she had forgotten. The feeling of power she had so savored the few times she had taken control in the bedroom when she’d been married.

The power of love...and being loved in return.

To her surprise tears burned her eyes, but they served to strengthen her resolve. She had denied herself for far too long, believing herself past her prime and undesirable. Well, she no longer felt undesirable. She had the man who was supposed to be her soul mate touching her and it felt incredible. She felt revitalized as she kissed his strong jaw and then finally his mouth.

His lips were soft, warm, and unresponsive. Determined, she tried again, kissing softly, her hands moving to his chest, splaying there, feeling his nipples harden against her palms.

He did want her. She knew it. Even if his mind was telling him differently.

And the body didn't lie.

She sensed the change in him a second later when his fingers tightened at her hips. Her heart rejoiced when he started kissing her back, his mouth opening, his velvety soft tongue playing with hers.

Eric had never liked to kiss. Just a peck here or there, and they rarely Frenched, but apparently Reece did.

Suddenly his hands were framing her face. Without breaking the kiss he turned and lifted her so her bottom rested on the edge of his desk. She felt the solid length of his long, thick cock pressed against her stomach.

Elation and excitement rippled through her. *Yes, he wanted her!*

With her heart pounding loudly in her ears, she started to unbutton his waistcoat and shirt, desperate to feel his skin against her fingertips. He helped her, shrugging out of it, all without breaking the passionate kiss. And, man, could he kiss.

She moaned with pleasure as she touched his bare chest and ran her hands over his back, over his ass. He had the body of an athlete, a man prone to hard work and not at all soft. Michelangelo's *David* came to mind and she smiled inwardly.

Feeling bold, she squeezed his butt cheeks. He made a wonderful noise that had her smiling against his lips and to her elation he smiled too.

"I want you, Reece," she whispered, and he pulled away, looking down at her, his smile fading as quickly as it had come. His chest rose and fell, as though he fought to catch breath. He watched her intently, not even blinking in those heart-stopping seconds. Then she saw the wariness return. "I want you," she said again, her gaze dropping from his, to the expanse of his chest. "You have a beautiful body, Reece." Her gaze dipped even lower, to where his erection strained his breeches. "Every single inch, perfection."

She could see the war raging within him. The uncertainty. The fear. Slowly she pulled his head down to her, kissing him, wanting the wariness to leave once and for all.

"Trust me, Reece," she whispered. "Please trust me."

He leaned forward, making her arch back, and with a swipe of his hand cleared the polished desktop of everything. Something crashed to the floor, but he seemed not to care or take notice.

Instead, his hands moved up her ankles, circling there, before splaying over her calves drawing her gown up, above her knees, and further still. Feeling the cool air on her privates, she nearly came up off the desk, but took a deep breath and relaxed. The hair on

her body stood on end as his long fingers made their way up her thighs, coming dangerously close to her heated flesh which pulsed for him.

She glanced down between them to see the outline of his cock straining the material of his pants. The large head brushed the waistband, poking above it. Boldly she outlined his cock with her fingers, palming it through the material. He made a wonderful guttural sound. Her channel throbbed, her clit ultra-sensitive. "You're so big. So hard."

The pulse at his throat jumped and then his hand was there, at her molten core, touching her softly at first, parting her, slipping a long finger within her slick center.

She sighed, her legs falling open, wider. He slipped another finger in and she cried out as she came hard against his hand.

His lips came down on hers and she kissed him back, their tongues parrying with the other.

Reece's heart pounded loud in his ears. She was so hot, her inner walls drenched, his fingers coated with her juices. Her essence surrounded him, drawing him in. Though his mind told him to leave now and never look back, his body told him differently. He wanted this. Even more—given the last few days, he needed this.

Plus, he was seconds from release, his cock painfully hard. Though he worried about someone walking in on them, he couldn't pull away to save his life.

Especially when she whispered, "Fuck me, Reece," against his lips.

He wouldn't come before he entered her though. No, he would make her burn for him first and put his own need on hold.

He leaned over Abigail and kissed a path from her neck, over her breasts and to her flat stomach.

She actually trembled, as though this was the first time they'd ever made love. Ironically, it did feel like the first time. It had been so long, after all.

Her musky scent taunted him again the closer he came to her dripping sex. He kissed her navel, his tongue stroking her there, before he moved lower to the pale curls that covered her woman's mound.

Instinctively she lifted her hips. He tasted her and she made a sound of such feminine bliss, he could not help but smile.

Deanie's breath caught in her throat as Reece's tongue danced over her clit time and time again. Eric had never been into oral and the handful of times he had attempted it, the experience had been less than gratifying. However, Reece made up for all those failed attempts. Good Lord, the man knew how to pleasure a woman.

As she edged up on her second orgasm in as many minutes, his hands cupped her bottom and pulled her closer, as his tongue grew bolder. He flicked his tongue over her slit before suckling on her clit. She came, her fingers digging into his scalp as she sighed his name.

He looked up at her, his eyes dark and full of desire. She knew that look, even before he stood and unbuttoned his pants.

His cock sprang from the nest of dark hair, huge and purple, a drop of pre-cum on his slit. He shocked her by edging her back onto the desk and mounting her. He guided his rod to her center, the head disappearing a second later, stretching her.

Sweat beaded his brow as he thrust into her moist center.

She gasped, never having been filled so completely. “Do you like that?” he asked, thrusting hard.

Damn right she did. It had been far too long and no vibrator in the world could make up for the real thing. “Yes,” she replied, as she ran her hands over his naked back, feeling the muscles there, before cupping his high, firm ass. She spread her thighs wider and tucked her hips, wanting every single inch of his huge cock stuffing her.

His balls slapped against her ass with each thrust. He bent down and kissed the swell of her breasts. A second later he pulled the bodice down enough to take a sensitive nipple into his mouth, sucking harder. She rocked against him, desperate for every last inch, but he held his hips steady, not moving.

She circled her hips, rotating, anything to feel that delicious cock thrusting in and out of her. He used his teeth with restraint—just enough to give that precious combination of pleasure-pain she loved.

He was glorious. His long hair stuck to the side of his neck, sweat dripping from his chest, onto her. She looked down as his long rod disappeared in her again. He thrust harder, pushing her along the desk, to where she had to hold on to the edge to keep from falling off.

Her insides churned as she climbed closer toward release. Her ankles locked at his back as he pounded into her again and again.

Her nails bit into the skin of his back and as her pussy clenched around his cock, she cried out her release, saying his name over and over again as she shot to the stars and fell slowly back to earth.

He cried out a second later and withdrew, hot semen pouring onto her belly, coating her before he fell on her, fighting to catch his breath.

She heard a door open and close and she gasped, horrified someone had walked in on them.

Then Reece started to laugh and she smiled. She had rarely seen that smile and it took him from handsome to downright breathtaking. The man was absolutely gorgeous when he smiled, and when he laughed, the rich baritone filling the room, she knew it would be near impossible to leave him now. Plus, the sex had been mind-blowing.

What if? Her conscience taunted her, reminding her time in this century with this man could be temporary. She could disappear in the next few minutes and never see Reece

again. That, or maybe she would never be able to go home again. Whatever the case, at least now she knew how great it could be to make love to another man, and for the first time in a very long time, she felt desirable.

Chapter Six

What in the world was she up to now?

Reece stared out the window, looking down at his wife as she strolled around the gardens. How lovely she looked in the yellow day dress, her hair piled on her head in an untidy bun as she bent to cut yet another blossom to add to the already full basket.

It seemed another of his wife's new hobbies involved gardening. Indeed, she had already spent two hours there, walking amongst the blossoms, stopping to cut a flower here or there and handing them to her servant who was never far from her side.

And now the pair laughed at something Abigail said. His wife's face lit up, her deep dimples making her even more beautiful. She had shocked him with her passion yesterday in his study. It had been amazing and he had the best orgasm of his life. In truth, he would have taken her again, but after being walked in on, he had instead walked her to her bedchamber and ordered a bath.

She had taken the bath and then lain down for a nap. She had slept straight through dinner and when he had checked on her later, he did not have the heart to rouse her. Rather, he had stood there for a long while just staring at her. How beautiful she had been, her cheeks a rosy-pink, her still damp hair draped across the white pillow. How tempted he had been to slip into her bed, but he did not feel that comfortable with her yet.

But he hoped that day would come.

Even now, he wanted her with a desperation that terrified him, yet excited him...and even gave him hope that they could have the kind of relationship he had always dreamed of.

Could it be possible after all that had passed between them? Could they have a happy marriage? Could Abigail have enough love in her heart to become the woman he always wanted her to be?

As though sensing him, she looked up at him and waved.

His heart leapt like a boy's.

Reece nearly took a step away, embarrassed to be caught staring, but instead he lifted his hand and waved back. She motioned for him to come down and he glanced at his desk and the work there.

He had so much to do, but then again, how often did his wife summon him?

When he glanced at Abigail again, she was still watching him and even summoned him yet again.

He ran a hand through his hair and was shocked that he trembled. Was it from fear or

trepidation?

Needing no further urging he headed for the stairs, stopping to grab his cane.

He wished he had no need of the blasted device that made him feel years older than he was. Indeed, some men used it for fashion alone, which he found ridiculous. What he would give not to have to use it at all.

Once again he was reminded of Abigail's horror when he'd arrived home from the duel with her lover. He stopped. What was he doing falling in love with a woman who had unmanned him so?

Why was he willing to put himself in the same situation again?

All because she had fucked him?

The blood coursed through his veins, thick and hot with a desire that kept him walking toward the veranda and to the back garden.

Perhaps he could use her as she used him? No, it wasn't in his nature.

He stepped out the back door and to his surprise she flew into his arms.

Her laughter enveloped him, as did the warmth of her soft body, and all his fear dissipated. Her full breasts pressed against his chest, her arms enfolding him. She lifted her chin, her lips curving into a seductive smile. "I hoped you would come down and play."

He lifted a brow. "Play? What do you have in mind?"

She wiggled her brows in a suggestive manner. "Since you did not wake me last night, I thought we should make up for what I missed."

"I wanted to wake you, but you looked so peaceful."

Her brows furrowed. "You watched me?"

He could feel his cheeks burn. "I could not help myself."

"I wish you would have woken me," she said with a saucy smile that heated his blood.

Her words pleased him immensely. "Perhaps I shall remedy that tonight."

"Mmmm. I certainly hope so." She kissed his cheek, and then took his hand. "Come, let us go for a walk."

Her fingers slid around his, urging him down the gravel pathway and onto the lush lawns. One of the many things which had drawn him to Wales was the beautiful greenery. His lands encompassed not only a forest of ancient oaks but a clear, clean river and even a pond.

His heart accelerated as she took the bun from her hair and let the glorious tresses fall about her shoulders. "You're a wonderful lover, Reece."

Though her bold statement shocked him, he was equally pleased. “Thank you. As are you.”

She laughed gaily and ran ahead of him, her hands out to her sides as she twirled around.

“What are you doing?” he asked, enjoying the sight of Abigail in play. He had never seen her like this. So playful. So warm.

“I’m dancing. Will you dance with me, Reece?” Before he could respond, she came up to him. She tossed his cane aside, took his hands in hers and then they danced.

“You’re a wonderful dancer, though it’s no surprise. Have you heard the rumor that if someone can dance well, then they must be good in bed?”

He frowned. “Where have you heard such a thing?”

She shrugged. “Just a rumor, I suppose.”

“Then there’s little wonder that you dance so well.”

She grinned. “And I can say the same for you. When you make love to me, I feel like my bones are melting. In fact, I don’t think I’ll ever get enough of you.”

Her words slid over him like warm honey. Not only had she said the words, but she looked like she meant it, because he could plainly see the desire in her eyes. The heat. “Is that why you lure me away from the manor?”

“You know me too well.” She stopped in mid-sentence, her gaze shifting to something behind him. “Wow, now that’s amazing!”

She dropped his hand and in the next moment she was rushing toward the river, and the bridge he had built there just two summers before. Though he could hardly call the bridge a work of art, he had designed it after a bridge he had seen in Venice when he’d been just a boy.

“You built this?” she asked, stepping onto the bridge, walking to the center, where she leaned against the balustrade and looked down into the water rushing beneath.

“Yes, I did.”

“You are not only talented in the bedroom, but outside of it as well.”

She talked so strangely, not to mention bluntly, and he liked it. Liked that she said exactly how she felt. Though some would consider such bluntness scandalous, he found it exciting. He stepped behind her, his hands wrapping around her slender waist. “I made it with you in mind.”

“I’m glad,” she whispered, glancing over her shoulder to look at him. “You are so amazing, you know that?”

The words were sincere, as was the smile that curved her full lips. His cock hardened against her buttocks, and he was glad to feel no corset beneath her gown. In fact, he soon found she had no drawers on either. “You are naked beneath your gown, Abigail,” he

said, kissing the back of her neck. “Did you do so on purpose?”

She laughed wickedly. “I told you earlier than I stopped by your room this morning, hoping you were there. When you weren’t, I figured I’d find you. Call me optimistic.”

“So you planned on luring me away from the manor and any prying eyes. And here I thought I would do away with anything that would hamper our intimacy. You’re a wicked woman, Abigail.”

Smiling, she turned and unbuttoned his pants, and had her hands inside his drawers before he could blink. “Yes, I am wicked. But only around you.”

“Why is that?”

She nipped at his bottom lip before sucking on it. Releasing it, she smiled against his lips and kissed him softly.

His eyes darkened, and his smile faded. Lifting her skirts, he ran his fingers over her wet slit, parting her, and slipping a finger inside her hot, slick sheath.

She gasped, and then let out a low-throated moan as he slipped another finger in.

With his free hand, he cupped her breast, playing with the nipple through the soft material, pulling it into a tight bud.

He applied gentle pressure on her clit with his thumb.

She groaned.

“Do you like that?” he asked, brushing his thumb over the sensitive nub again and again.

“Yes,” she groaned, stroking his cock.

He thrust inside her dripping wet sheath, moaning at the exquisite heat that surrounded his cock. She came immediately, her channel gripping him tightly, pulsing, drawing him in deeper.

He couldn’t wait any longer, and followed her, pulling her against him as he thrust against her a final time.

They stood like that for a few moments, before he righted her clothes and straightened his own. She turned and kissed him passionately. “That was wonderful,” she said with a satisfied smile. “What do you say we go for a swim?”

“I’d love to, but we have company arriving soon.”

“Who?” she asked, clearly disappointed.

“My brother.”

“How long is he staying?”

“Hopefully just long enough to take care of business.”

“Business?”

“Yes, he is my partner in a venture over in America. We own several large farms. Tobacco crops in Virginia and West Virginia. He travels there a few times out of the year to make sure everything is running smoothly.”

“Have I ever been to America?” she asked.

“No, you don’t like ships.”

“I don’t?”

“No, you don’t, but perhaps that has changed.”

“Perhaps. Does he want you to go with him on this latest trip?”

“I think he’d like me to, but it all depends.”

“On what?”

“You.”

She frowned, and his heart fell to his toes. “Are you asking me if you can go?”

He shrugged. “Not exactly. Rather, I’m asking you if you want me to go.”

Her lips curved in a coy smile. “Well, then that’s an easy enough answer. No, I don’t want you to go, so I suppose the decision is made.” Taking him by the hand, she smiled. “Let’s go for a swim before we head back to meet your brother.”

Reece took great pleasure in watching his wife disrobe. She seemed more modest than he recalled, taking great pains to hide certain parts of her body, which was perfection. Ironically, he liked the vulnerable Abigail over the too confident Abigail of old. “You’re beautiful, Abigail.”

She smiled, dropped the gown and stepped out of it. “Thank you, Reece. So are you, and by the way, it’s your turn to undress.”

He took off his shirt, then did the same with his pants and drawers. She made no attempt to hide her interest and stared boldly at his cock. “You are so gorgeous,” she said, her gaze sliding over him slowly. “Amazing. I already want you again.”

Taking the steps that separated them, he lifted her in his arms and walked into the water.

The water was cold, but he didn’t care. He had the woman he desired more than anything in his arms, in this paradise, and he wanted only to feel every sensation. Hot, cold, it didn’t matter. He hadn’t felt this alive in years.

She kissed his neck, his jaw, his nose, his eyelids—one, then the other. Her breath smelled of mint and her feminine scent enfolded him, enveloping him. Her mouth covered his, her tongue sliding over the seam of his lips, coaxing him open.

They kissed like that for a full five minutes and he loved every single minute. The intimacy, the intensity of being one. Of being in love.

And Lord help him, but he was falling in love with his wife all over again. How could

this have happened so fast after so much had transpired over the years? He forgot about everything when she wrapped her legs about his waist and locked them behind his back.

He took a step farther into the water, past their waists. The cool water lapped at his balls, his cock, but he didn't care.

Her arms wrapped tightly about his shoulders. He could feel her heart pounding hard against his own. "You make me crazy with desire," she whispered against his lips. "I feel like I can't get enough of you."

"Likewise."

"I love everything about you. Do you know that?"

His heart missed a beat at her declaration. Had he heard her correctly? She loved him? To his shock he felt tears burn the backs of his eyes. Though he yearned to tell her he felt likewise, he could not form the words. Not now. It was too early.

She slid down his body. "Take a step backward."

"What?"

"You heard me. Step back."

He did as she asked.

"One more step," she said, pushing him back, a playful smile on her lips.

A moment later, she slid to her knees and took his cock into her mouth. His breath left him in a rush, as she took him deep inside her mouth, sucking him, licking him, while playing with his sac.

The water lapped at her full breasts, hiding them from his view. Her fingers curled around his hips, pulling him closer.

Her fingers wandered from his balls, to his thighs, then up and over his ass, before returning to the sensitive skin of his scrotum. She came close to the puckered hole no one had dared touch and slid a finger in.

His first instinct was to push her back, away, but she looked up at him. There was trust in her eyes and he relaxed, closing his eyes and allowing himself just to feel.

Heart pounding in his ears he enjoyed the multiple sensations, and soon his balls lifted. "I'll come if you don't stop, Abigail."

She pulled away, her lips curving into a smile as she stood.

He lifted her in his arms, took a few steps and lay her down on the soft grass.

She opened to him, her body covered with droplets, her flesh covered with goose bumps.

He entered her, taking her hard, fast and with an urgency that surprised him. He'd never been so hard, so in need.

“Yes, that’s it,” she cried out, meeting each thrust.

There was a crack of a twig nearby and he knew it was possible someone had followed them here, and watched them, but he didn’t care. He couldn’t stop if he wanted to.

Plus, she didn’t want him to. Her cries filled the afternoon air, and as her channel gripped him tightly, he came with a roar.

Chapter Seven

Reece’s brother was a few years younger than him, but one would never know they shared blood, for they looked nothing alike. Where Reece was tall, dark and olive-skinned, his brother had blond hair and was just a few inches taller than Deanie herself.

That’s not to say he wasn’t good-looking, because he was...but not in the same way Reece was attractive.

No one could compare to Reece though. Her husband was a stud. In and out of the bedroom.

Dang, she’d never been bedded so soundly in her life, and even now, as she stared across the dinner table at him, she could hardly wait until tonight. She wouldn’t fall asleep on him again tonight. No, she would take a bath and head straight to his room, where they would have sex all night long.

The man was a fabulous lover. She could get used to this.

“You are looking the very picture of health, Abigail,” Chester said, with a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. Great. Another guy that hated her.

“Thank you, Chester,” she replied before taking a sip of wine.

A moment later she felt a bump against her calf. She frowned, because Reece sat at the very end of the table and it would be awkward at best for him to play footsie with her. Which meant it had to be Chester.

She abruptly moved her foot out of the way. Locking her feet beneath the rung of her chair, she took another sip of wine and glanced up to find Chester watching her with a strange expression. The guy seriously gave her the creeps.

Then a sickening thought came to her. Was it possible that Abigail and Chester had been lovers? From what Deanie knew about Abigail, the possibility was certainly there, but how low...

Dear Lord, did the woman have no shame—messaging around with her husband’s brother?

Feeling nauseous, she glanced at Reece. He watched his brother closely, which led her to believe her instincts were right. Great, and after she’d made such progress. She’d had the best day of her life and she didn’t want anything ruining that.

Chester sat up straighter in his chair. “I heard you took quite a tumble.”

“Yes, I did, but as you can see...I’m fine. The country air has helped a lot, isn’t that right, Reece?” she said with a smile.

Reece smiled and took a sip of his Madeira. “Indeed.”

Chester’s smile evaporated and he reached for his glass and drained it.

Small talk continued, and Deanie made an extra effort not to look at Chester, or draw suspicion in any way. She didn’t want him misinterpreting her friendliness.

“I’m surprised you came to Wales, Abigail. Didn’t you always say you detested the Welsh?” Chester asked, an annoying smirk on his lips.

Reece’s brows furrowed. The flippant statement had hit a nerve. “Perhaps my wife has had a change of heart, Chester.”

Unable to stand the cocky grin on Chester’s face, Deanie reached across the table and took Reece’s hand in hers. “I have had a change of heart. I love Wales. I think it’s the most beautiful place in the world.”

Reece grinned, and her heart skipped a beat.

She glanced at Chester to see he no longer smirked. “Indeed.”

“Plus, my home is wherever Reece is.”

Chester gave a sinister laugh. “I am astounded by the change in you, Abigail. I hardly recognize you.”

It was all she could do not to toss the remainder of her wine in his face. She really did hate the man. “I’ll take that as a compliment, Chester.” Knowing she’d better leave before she said something she couldn’t take back, Deanie stood. “Well, I suppose you have a lot to talk about so I’ll head for our bedchamber. Good night, Chester.” She managed a tight smile for him, and then turned to Reece and kissed his cheek. “I will wait up for you, my love.”

“I’ll see you soon,” Reece said with a boyish grin.

“I can scarcely wait.” She ran her hand through his hair before walking to the door.

She could feel both men’s stares on her the entire way out of the dining room. Once on the other side of the door she stopped and released the breath she’d unconsciously been holding.

Karen appeared out of nowhere. “Deanie, come here.”

“What?”

Karen pulled her into a dark parlor, the only light a solitary candle burning on a sideboard. “Gerard made a move on me.”

“The valet? You’re kidding? Oh my God, what happened?”

Karen bit her bottom lip. “I was mopping in the east wing when I looked up and there he was, watching me. I asked him what he was doing and he says, ‘I’m looking at you.’”

You should have heard the way he said it, Deanie. I could tell what he wanted, and for a minute, I wanted it too. I stood up and he pulled me into his arms.”

“That’s great!”

“He kissed me then, and I swear to God, my knees went weak. I clung to him, and started kissing him back. I can’t tell you how great it felt.”

“What else happened?”

Karen pursed her lips. “He said he wanted to meet me tonight in the garden, out by the gazebo...right now!”

“What are you waiting for?”

“I don’t know,” Karen said, running a hand down her face. “I don’t think I can do this. I mean...I’m still married.”

“Well, not technically...”

“No, Deanie. I am married. I may be in another person’s body, but I’m still Karen Hamilton, mother of four and wife of Greg.”

“You make it sound like an obituary.”

“The strange thing is a part of me really wants to do it. To see what Greg feels when he’s with someone else.”

Deanie hugged Karen tightly. “Follow your heart, Karen. If it’s not right, then don’t do it. But like you said before—maybe this is exactly what you need. Perhaps you need to test the waters out for yourself. After all, it’s only fair.”

“Should I meet him then?”

“I think you owe it to yourself to meet him. You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to. If he’s moving too fast, then tell him as much. In fact, if you want I’ll keep an eye on the gazebo while you’re with him. We’ll just come up with a signal if you need bailing out.”

Karen mulled it over and nodded. “All right, let’s do it.”

* * * * *

An hour later Deanie settled back into the bath. The warm water felt wonderful and the lavender oil was doing its job, easing her aching muscles and relaxing her.

Her body ached in places she forgot about. A delicious ache the warm water helped ease.

She smiled to herself, remembering the reunion between Karen and Gerard. The tall valet wasn’t necessarily good-looking, but he had a beautiful body and a charming personality. It was obvious Karen was smitten. The two had kissed, quite passionately, and Karen had clung to his broad shoulders like a lifeline. Deanie doubted Greg had ever kissed her that way before. Hell, Eric had never kissed Deanie that way before. The men

of this century definitely had a leg up on the men of her time.

Thankfully, after a ten-minute kiss- and hug-fest the two parted ways. Deanie had met up with Karen, who was flying high. Though she said she had felt some guilt, she also felt sexy for the first time in a long, long while.

Yes, this is definitely what they both needed, and she was grateful to the little old lady who had made it all possible.

Problem was, where was the little old lady, and where and when would she finally emerge?

Putting that thought aside, Deanie slipped farther into the tub. Tonight she would make love to Reece again. She smiled, remembering this afternoon when they had made love on the bridge and then later on the river's edge. It felt so wonderful to be uninhibited. To feel so free and not worry about anything or anyone else.

The door creaked open and closed just as quickly. Her heart missed a beat upon seeing Reece, who stood with his back to the door. His lips curved into a smile.

"You've come to bed already? I thought you'd be entertaining your brother?"

"And miss the sight of my wife taking a bath? How could I pass that up?"

She noted the way his gaze slipped from hers to her breasts which were just above the water. "You're staring."

"Forgive me," he said, not looking sorry at all as he pushed away from the door. "I couldn't help myself."

He took off his boots, then his shirt followed by his pants and drawers.

Exhilaration raced along her spine as he approached. His semi-hard cock grew longer and thicker by the second.

She squeezed her thighs together.

"May I join you?"

"Of course."

He stepped in and settled behind her. Instantly the water poured over the rim of the tub, onto the wooden floor. "The servants will be angry with us for making such a mess."

"I'll wipe it up later. They'll never know."

She rested her head against his shoulder. "Are you and your brother close?"

He stiffened. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm just curious. It didn't seem like you had that much to talk about."

"It has always been that way between us. If we were not related, we would not be friends."

"Meaning he's difficult?"

“Not necessarily. He’s ambitious, but lacks the drive and determination required to be successful. Also, he always envied me being the first-born. That’s not so uncommon, given the older son is bestowed with the titles and riches. But I’ve been fair. I’ve included him in many of our ventures, making sure he felt a part of it and was monetarily provided for.”

Even Deanie and her sister had a fierce sibling rivalry, so she understood. “No offense, but I hope he leaves soon. Didn’t you say he was going to America?”

“Yes, he leaves for Virginia within the week. He wants me to go with him.”

She sat up, the swift movement making more water spill over the tub’s edge. “You said you wouldn’t go.”

He frowned. “I did?”

“Yes, you did. I don’t want you to go. It’s too soon.” She clamped her lips together. What right did she have in telling him what to do? She had turned his life completely upside down in the space of a week, and she would have to leave, back to her own time.

What if he returned from his trip to find her gone? He would never know that a strange little woman from the twenty-first century was the reason behind her disappearance, not to mention time-travel. No matter how badly she yearned to say the words, she couldn’t. Their relationship was just too new, and he didn’t completely trust her as it was.

“I can send my solicitor in my stead.”

“Good!”

He grinned. Lord, how she loved that smile. The single dimple on the right side of his face and the way the skin crinkled at his eyes. He would be one of those men who just got better-looking with age.

“Let’s not speak of it any longer,” he said, easing her back down against him.

They lay in silence, enjoying the warmth, the cuddling. She and Eric had bathed together a few times and showers even more so, all of which ended in a quickie that was usually unsatisfying for her. She needed a little more help revving up than she used to.

As though reading her thoughts, Reece’s fingers brushed along her stomach, down over her mound, inserting a long finger into her.

She moaned, smiling when he caressed her left breast with his other hand, pulling lightly on her nipple.

His erection grew harder, pressing against the curve of her ass.

He lifted her slightly, telling her to go up on her knees.

Excited, she braced her arms on either side of the tub, while he went on his knees behind her. His cock head brushed her back entrance and she held her breath. Surely he wasn’t going to attempt anal... She had never attempted it, even all the years she’d been

married to Eric.

Nope, thankfully a second later his huge cock slid into her, filling her to the womb.

The water sloshed around her thighs as he thrust slowly.

She glanced up and saw their reflection in the cheval mirror. Her cheeks were pink, stray hairs had come loose from her bun and clung to her body.

He reached around and brushed her clit over and over again. She cried out and arched her back, her fingers curling around the tub's edge as the multiple sensations brought her closer to orgasm.

She reached between his thighs, stroking his sac, urging him to completion, wanting to come together.

His strokes increased and his fingers dug into her hips. The slapping sound of skin against skin resonated in the chamber, along with the sound of water spilling over the tub's edge. He groaned as her channel tightened around his cock, squeezing him hard, pulling his seed from him.

He fell back into the tub, bringing her with him.

His breaths came heavily, as did hers.

Still trembling, she glanced back at him and smiled. "See, I couldn't bear to be without you even for a day. I've had you three times today and already I want you again."

She could tell by his relieved expression her declaration pleased him. He pulled her against him, kissing her hard. "I'll tell Chester tomorrow that I won't be going with him."

"Do you mean it?"

He nodded. "I promise."

Chapter Eight

Chester woke at dawn, exhausted from a night of tossing and turning. He had been unable to sleep worth a damn after listening to his brother and his whore wife fuck all night long.

Did the woman have no shame? Her cries had rung throughout the entire west wing. And not once, but a total of four times within two hours.

No doubt Abigail's fall from grace had been the best thing to happen to his brother in a long time. Why else would he have allowed her to follow him to this godforsaken place, and after she spent the better part of a decade humiliating him?

Did Reece not know he was the laughingstock of London?

A tiger did not change its stripes.

He tried to convince himself that what he was feeling had nothing to do with jealousy, but he couldn't. He had fucked Abigail three days after her marriage to his brother, right in his brother's own bed.

Abigail, who had acted the perfect wife, had met up with Chester at every given opportunity. They had rutted on nearly every piece of furniture in the London townhouse and even in Reece's carriage during an opera intermission.

It had been a vast relief when she had not turned up pregnant shortly thereafter. Apparently she had miscarried the baby, but Chester had wondered if her visits to a discreet doctor hadn't taken care of that little problem.

When he had arrived in Wales, he'd been pleasantly surprised to hear Abigail was in residence, and he expected it wouldn't be hard to entice her back into his bed. However, it seemed she was the faithful wife all of the sudden, which meant it might be a touch more difficult to woo her...

Especially if her cries and moans from last night were any indication.

Suddenly the woman of his thoughts materialized before him at the foot of the steps. She looked amazing in a conservative green gown that flattered her slender body. Her hair had also been styled in a loose chignon. As though sensing his stare, she looked up. The smile she bestowed did not quite touch her eyes.

"How are you this fine morning, Abigail?"

"Fine, and you?" Even her tone was cool.

"Wonderful, though some cries did keep me up."

She at least had the grace to blush. "Sorry to hear that."

She didn't sound sorry in the least.

His gaze slid from hers to the bodice of her gown. She had fabulous breasts. Rosy-pink nipples, he recalled, and perfectly formed. Just thinking of those lovely breasts made his cock hard. "Would you like to go for a ride with me this morning?"

"No, thank you."

He frowned. "You would deny your brother-in-law a short ride about the grounds?"

"I don't ride."

"Do you not? That's not what I've heard."

She quirked her lips. "I'm not the woman you think I am. I've changed, and I have no interest in you."

She did not break eye contact and he felt his cheeks blaze. No woman had denied him. "Oh, and what kind of woman are you now?"

"A happily married woman."

He took the step that separated them and lifted her chin with a finger. "You can never be happily married, Abigail. You are what you are."

She slapped his hand away. "Which is?"

“The kind of woman who likes to be fucked in every room of her husband’s house ...with her husband’s brother. Do you forget how good we are together? Remember how you used to have to bite my shoulder because the pleasure had been so great? Those were your own words, Abigail.”

“And I told you I’m not that woman anymore. Leave me alone, Chester.”

“How easy it is for you to forget what transpired between us. What if Reece found out?”

Deanie stared at Reece’s brother. She hated the man, but even more—she hated Abigail. The woman truly was a horrible person and she didn’t deserve Reece as a husband. What kind of woman slept with her husband’s brother? How could she live with herself after all the betrayal? “You’re a horrible brother.”

“You’re a horrible wife.”

“I’m remedying that as we speak.”

“You have him fooled, don’t you? The only reason you are here is because Lord Hammerstein tossed you from a carriage and you have nowhere else to go.”

“I’m here because I love Reece.”

“You don’t know what love is.”

Deanie lifted her chin. “I do know what love is, and the love I feel for your brother is intensely real. You might not buy it, but I don’t care. I love him.”

“You are incapable of love. Though I do give you credit for being a lover with great skill, Abigail. All the men in London speak of your multiple talents. In truth, you could put the best courtesans out of business.”

She could feel her cheeks burn. She’d love to strangle him. What an egotistical prick. “This discussion is over.”

“It’s only just begun.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be leaving for Virginia?”

“My ship doesn’t sail until week’s end.”

“Then I suggest you stay out of my way until that time. That, or better yet—find an inn somewhere.”

He grabbed her wrist again, this time forcefully. He squeezed, and she tried to pull away, but he held firm. “Let go of me right now, Chester. If you don’t, I’ll scream.”

“Go ahead. I’ll just tell him you encouraged me.”

“You’re an asshole, you know that?”

“I love it when you talk like that. It makes me hard.” He brought her hand to his cock that was indeed rock-hard.

She brought her knee up and connected with his balls.

He doubled over, clutching his groin. Deanie smiled to herself. The asshole deserved it and more.

“Am I interrupting something?”

Deanie jumped, hearing Reece’s voice. Chester released his groin and shook his head. “No.”

She looked at Reece, who glanced at her, then to his brother and back to her. Taking his hand in hers she smiled reassuringly. “No, you weren’t interrupting anything at all. I was just telling your brother that I do not wish to go for a ride with him. I am not feeling all that well.”

“Indeed, you look quite flushed,” Reece said, his voice dangerously low.

Deanie could tell that he had heard their conversation. There was warmth in his eyes, but also wariness. *Damn Chester!* Just when she felt like she was making progress.

“You are leaving today,” Reece said, and it wasn’t a question.

Chester cleared his throat. “I was staying on for a few days. My ship does not sail until the end of the week.”

“I think it wise you leave now. There is an inn adjacent to the port. I will pay for your room...and all your expenses.”

Chester’s eyes narrowed. “You would kick your own brother out? Why, I’ve done nothing!”

Deanie’s heart pounded hard against her chest. She wanted to leave the two alone, but she didn’t dare walk away.

“Please go.”

Chester clenched his jaw tight. “You trust her, that cheating whore, over your own flesh and blood?”

Reece landed a right to his brother’s face. The snapping of bone could be heard and blood flowed from his nose. “Get out of my house right now and never return.”

Chester swung, but missed completely and ended up on the marble floor.

Gerard appeared, and stepped in between the brothers.

Reece trembled. “A carriage has been called and I will bring out your bag momentarily. I would ask you to leave now.”

Wiping the blood from his face with the back of his hand, he said, “Very well then. I shall take my leave.”

“I am sending my solicitor with you to Virginia to make sure my interest is secured.”

“You don’t trust me?”

Reece smiled tightly. "No."

Yes, Reece had definitely heard their previous conversation.

Reece couldn't believe what he had just heard. His brother and his wife had been lovers. He felt like he'd been hit in the stomach. How long had their affair lasted?

What had shocked him more than his brother's devastating declaration about where they had made love was the simple fact that Abigail seemed completely unaware of their past relationship. Though he had sincerely doubted she had lost her memory, he was almost certain now that Abigail told the truth. She didn't remember the past.

But what if she regained her memory one day? Would she once again resort to her old ways?

God help him if she did.

Perhaps he should have sent her packing that first day.

But he hadn't, and instead she had worked her way back into his life. And he had not the power to refuse her.

The Abigail of the past week had been the woman of his dreams. Loving him unconditionally. She was a generous lover, she enjoyed giving him pleasure in return. For the first time in what seemed forever, he had been able to envision a life with her. A long life, full of love and children.

Lots of children.

Now he had two choices. He could either accept the fact that he had been given a second chance with his wife, or he could tell her to leave. To head to London and never come back.

"Reece..."

"Chester, leave now."

"She is a whore."

His fist connected with his brother's jaw again before he could stop himself. Chester stumbled back, catching himself just shy of his head hitting the stair's edge.

He licked the blood from his lip. "Everyone in London is laughing at you! Do you not realize what a fool you've made of yourself?"

He had considered that possibility, but he had quit caring what anyone thought of him long ago. "I will say this only once. Leave, and never come back."

"Blood is thicker than water."

Disgusted, Reece shook his head. "You aren't blood to me."

"You forgive her, but you do not forgive me? She is the one who approached me. She saw you and that is why she acted affronted."

His insides twisted. What if he spoke the truth? What if this was all a game, a ruse to get his money? What if she was only using him?

“Leave,” he said, the words barely above a whisper. “Leave before I have you thrown out.”

“You will regret this day.”

* * * * *

Deanie sat at the vanity looking at the face of a stranger.

Who was this evil woman who had broken such a beautiful man? A woman who would have an affair with her husband’s brother.

Poor Reece. He deserved so much better.

They had so much in common. She knew what it felt like to be used and discarded. She knew the rejection and the self-doubt that came with infidelity.

Despite the fact that Chester had left, Reece had stayed in his office all day.

For the first time since her arrival in this century, she actually missed her old life.

And here she thought living the life of a twenty-four year old would be so fabulous. Though she wanted Reece, she wanted nothing to do with Abigail, a shallow woman who had isolated everyone around her.

A soft knock sounded at the door. It opened, and Karen appeared. “Are you okay?”

Deanie nodded, shocked at the tears that burned her eyes. “I can’t believe what a wicked woman Abigail was. It seems like every time I turn around, she’s done something else.”

“The creepy brother left.”

“Good. Do you know Abigail slept with Chester?”

“Well, that would explain the tension.”

“He cornered me downstairs,” Deanie said, brushing her fingers through her hair. “He said he wanted to take up where we’d left off. Said that we’d had sex after I married, on every piece of furniture at the London townhouse. Even in Reece’s bed. The more I get to know Abigail, the more I hate her.”

“She’s a wicked woman.”

Deanie nodded. “I want to go home, Karen.”

Her eyes lit up. “Thank God! I was getting worried. I honestly thought I’d be spending the rest of my life in Regency England. Granted, it’s been a nice break from the reality of a stay-at-home mom, but I want my life back. Short, fat body and all.”

“What about Gerard? What’s happened with him?”

She smiled coyly. “Well, he’s just asked me to picnic with him tomorrow.”

“And will you?”

She shrugged. “A part of me wants to...almost desperately, but another part feels extreme guilt at the very thought.”

“Follow your heart, Karen. Do what you want before we head back.”

“Maybe we should try to locate that strange woman who brought us here.”

Deanie nodded. “I think that’s a good idea. I haven’t been fair to you at all, Karen. I haven’t even considered what you’ve been going through. I’ve been having such a great time with Reece.”

“Stop it. I’ve enjoyed this as much as you.” She snickered. “Well, not quite as much as you, but the break away has given me time to think about my life...and all that I have been doing wrong.”

“You’re a good wife and mother, Karen.”

She nodded. “Thanks. I’ve learned a lot though. I realize I haven’t been the best wife I could be. I’ve put everything on hold because of the kids and I haven’t made my marriage the priority. I’ve watched Ethel and Bernie, two of the servants here who are married. They work twelve hours a day, but they always make time to eat together—just the two of them by themselves. She said they take one day out of the month and go to the river to have a picnic, or take a long walk. I can’t remember the last time Greg and I had time to ourselves.”

“When we return to our own time, you can make up for all the things that are lacking.”

“I hope it’s not too late, Deanie.”

“It’s never too late. Not when you love someone for so long. Now let’s see if we can find the strange woman.”

Karen smiled. “Sounds good to me.”

Chapter Nine

Reece drank the last of the Madeira.

The bottle had been full an hour ago, and now as he came unsteadily to his feet, he considered passing out on the couch versus finding his bedchamber.

He hadn’t spoken to Abigail since Chester’s departure. Though he had heard her say she loved him, he still was reminded of their past.

Would he ever let himself forget? Could he let go of the past once and for all, and start fresh? Or had too much passed between them? Would she wake up one day and be the Abigail of old? He shuddered at the mere thought.

His mother had always encouraged him to forgive, saying it was a necessary part of living. Sure, it would be easy to stay in Wales, far away from London and the

gossipmongers, spending the rest of their days in love and harmony. But would that be enough? One day Abigail would grow bored of such a life and then she would want to return to London, a town he no longer felt welcome in.

If she left him, he would never again be the same.

A knock sounded at the door, startling him. He didn't want to talk to anyone, not even Gerard. Perhaps it was Abigail?

"Come in!"

A second later Gerard walked in. He called himself a fool for being disappointed.
"Yes?"

"My lord, I know it is not my place to speak of idle gossip, but I thought you might be interested in some news."

"Pertaining to?"

"Your wife."

His heart skipped a beat. "What news?"

"Others heard her speaking to the maid Bertha, who now calls herself Karen. They spoke of leaving, my lord. The maid said it was time to return and your wife agreed."

He felt like he'd had the wind knocked out of him. "Return to where?"

Gerard shrugged. "I do not know, my lord. No, wait, they said something about returning to their own time."

"Own time? Are you sure you heard her correctly?"

"Indeed, my lord. Granted, her speech has changed since the accident..."

"Yes, it has."

Pain sliced through Reece. Did Abigail plan to flee with Chester? Could she not bear the thought of him leaving without her? And here he had believed she wanted him to stay because she could not bear to be parted.

But what in the world was the "time" reference about? She wanted to go back in time ...as though she had traveled through time.

"Oh and there's something else, my lord. Bertha kept calling your wife Deanie."

"Deanie?"

Gerard nodded.

"So she believes she is this Deanie...but what of her maid? The maid was not even in the carriage."

"This is where it gets very strange, my lord. I have known Bertha for years and she is not at all herself of late. It all came about the same time your wife started behaving differently." He took a deep breath and slowly released it. "Do you recall when Bertha

made a commotion downstairs? We all ran down there, including your wife, to find the maid looking in a mirror saying she was Karen.”

“Yes, and something about being from Washington?” His stomach clenched into a tight knot. “Oh, and they also speak of an old woman who brought them here.”

Reece set the crystal bottle down with a loud thud. “Do you believe this is a joke my wife has set up at my expense, Gerard? After all, Abigail’s cruelty knows no bounds.”

The servant’s jaw tightened. “I do not know for certain, my lord, but I do know this—you love your wife as she is now and that is not a crime.”

“But what if it is a joke? I should have never let my guard down.”

“She has turned into the woman you have always wished her to be. The evil woman is gone, and in her place become someone who seeks your love. Forgive me for my bluntness, my lord. I have no right—”

“No, you are a true friend and I value your opinion. I’ll go speak to her now.”

As Reece made his way to his bedchamber he tried to piece together the things Gerard had told him. Why would Bertha be calling Abigail by another name and what did she mean about the old woman returning and taking them to their own time?

He ran a trembling hand down his face. He thought Abigail had lost her memory from the accident but as Gerard said, Bertha, who was not involved in the accident had been behaving strangely since Abigail’s accident and there was the other matter about Bertha calling Abigail Deanie. Could it be they were indeed two different women? Women who had been living in a different time and place?

Standing before the bedchamber he heard Abigail’s soft humming and stopped. It was the time for answers and he would not leave until he was satisfied. He walked right in.

“Reece,” Abigail exclaimed, looking happy to see him.

He wanted to be angry with her, but he could not summon the emotion. Bertha was there too, and she nodded at him. “I’ll see you later,” she said to Abigail and left the room, shutting the door behind her.

Abigail wore a sheer pale blue night rail and nothing else. The tips of her nipples were outlined in the material and shadow fell in the space between her thighs. His body responded to the sight. She was breathtaking.

“I didn’t think you were going to come to me tonight,” she said with a wide smile that made his heart pound.

“Oh, and why is that?”

“You’ve been drinking.”

“Yes.”

She laughed. “It wasn’t a question, but rather an observation.”

"I missed your laugh," he blurted. "I have not heard it for so long. I forgot how delightful it is."

"I'm glad it pleases you," she said, taking a step toward him.

He pulled his gaze back to hers, the questions in his mind spinning. "Do you love my brother?" he asked, before he could stop himself.

She cocked her head. "No. Reece, I don't love Chester, and I don't want anyone but you."

"Then why are you leaving me?"

She looked shocked. "Because I have something I need to do."

At least she didn't lie. "What must you do?"

"Decide where I belong."

"Do you not belong here with me?"

She shrugged. "It's much more complicated than that."

Her answer angered him and brought about the insecurity that perhaps Abigail had made a fool of him yet again. The myriad questions now forgotten, he picked her up and strode toward the bed in long strides, tossing her onto the silk covers.

She went up on her elbows, but he pushed her back down, flat against the mattress. "What are you doing?" she asked, her throat convulsing as she swallowed hard. He secured her arms above her head with one hand.

Her movements enticed him and he rubbed against her, his cock rock-hard against her belly.

She smiled then, and her thighs fell open. Apparently she wasn't going to fight him, and God help him, he couldn't be angry with her. He kissed her, then moved down to her breasts, kissing one, then the other. She writhed beneath him, helpless to move. He released her hands and she clung to him, her fingernails grazing his shoulders.

He licked her nipples, sucked them through the silk and was pleased to hear her low-throated moan. With his other hand he pulled up her night rail and touched her woman's flesh to find her wet and hot. He rained kisses down her body, over her stomach, her navel, and then lower to the pale curls that covered her mound.

She smelled musky and he licked her slit, smiling when her hips arched.

Deanie held on to the headboard as he licked her over and over again, paying special attention to her sensitive clit. He lifted it with the tip of his tongue, rolling it with expert skill.

She climbed higher and higher with each flick and cried out as she came, her sheath pulsing.

He unbuttoned his pants and slid into her heat, groaning as her honeyed walls

enveloped him. Part of him wanted to make it fast and give her little pleasure. He wanted to hurt her as she had hurt him. He thought of her with his brother, but the image evaporated as he remembered all the times they'd made love the past few days, and how wonderful he had felt each and every time. Alive again for the first time in what seemed like forever. He wanted to brand her the same way she had branded herself into his brain.

He thrust harder, slamming into her, the headboard banging against the wall with each stroke.

She cried out, her teeth sinking into his neck as her sheath throbbed around him.

Coated with her juices, he slid out of her and flipped her over. She arched her back, and he slapped her perfect heart-shaped ass. She cried out as he slid his cock over her slit.

She wiggled beneath him, lifting her ass higher.

He flicked her clit with his finger, over and over again. She rocked against him, arching her back, moaning. "Fuck me, Reece. Make me come again."

He entered her, sliding once again into her heat. She sighed and he thrust slowly, wanting her to feel every hard inch of him.

Deanie groaned with pleasure. He filled her completely, stuffed to her womb. His slow thrusts made her want to scream out. He picked up the tempo until he was slamming into her.

Reece's balls lifted and as Abigail's sheath tightened around him a second time, he came with a grunt of male satisfaction.

They lay entangled in the sheets, wonderfully sated, yet Reece's misgivings continued.

Abigail sighed with contentment while resting her head on his shoulder. "You are an amazing lover, do you know that?"

Her words pleased him and alleviated some of his fear. But was desire and sexual gratification enough to sustain a marriage? "As are you."

She looked up at him, her blue eyes warm with affection as she watched him. "You're the most beautiful man I've ever met in my life...both inside and out."

He couldn't hide his joy, or the smile that came to his lips. "Are you happy, Abigail?"

"I've never known such happiness," she said, giving him a kiss.

* * * * *

"What happened at the picnic?" Deanie asked, lounging in the bathtub while Karen took her time making the bed.

Karen turned with a sheepish smile. "Well, we drank wine and had cheese and the best bread I've ever tasted. I think Gerard was shocked with how much bread I wolfed down. I do love my bread," she said laughing. "It's so nice not to have to worry about gaining five pounds just looking at food. Gotta love the metabolism of a twenty year old."

"I'm not asking about the food. I want to know about what happened?"

"Well, we kissed again, and I must say the man can French like nobody's business."

Deanie sat up straighter. "Really?"

"Then he felt me up. Just the top, mind you." Karen walked over to the window and looked out. "I felt my heart pounding like crazy, and it was so strange because I felt like a teenager again. Remember that feeling the first time a boy touches you? Well, it was like that but even more intense...because I knew I shouldn't be doing it. And I kept remembering Greg and his intern."

"How far did you let it go then?"

Karen turned from the window. "I stopped him there, and I could tell by the bulge in his trousers that he wanted a lot more than I was willing to put out."

"How did he take it?"

"Not well at first, but then he said he understood. He helped me up off the blanket and we went back inside." She shrugged. "A part of me regrets not having tried more, but I kept seeing Greg's face. Even when I was kissing Gerard I pictured Greg, and I realized how much I love my husband. I don't want to be unfaithful, Deanie, and I couldn't live with the guilt if I had done more than that. I have to live with the fact I made out with someone other than my husband."

"I'm proud of you, Karen."

"Really? I thought you'd kick my ass."

Standing, Deanie grabbed the drying towel off the chair and dried herself. "Are you ready to go home?"

Karen's eyes lit up. "Yeah, I am."

"Okay, then we will leave today." Deanie refused to give in to the tears which burned her eyes. She didn't want to leave Reece, but she couldn't continue to stay here when her friend wanted to leave so badly. And she also missed her kids desperately.

She was damned if she stayed and damned if she went. Really, there was no winning and she knew that. Which meant, she would return to their own time, back to her humdrum twenty-first-century life as a realtor, and to her children who didn't visit as often as she'd like. If anything, this trip had shown her exactly how much she had to live for and that love was worth taking a chance.

Who knew? Maybe one day Reece would appear in her own time.

"What if we find the strange woman and ask if you can go back in time just to think about it? Maybe have a chat with your kids and then have the opportunity to come back if you wish to."

"Like a revolving door?"

She hadn't meant for the words to come out so sarcastic, but she couldn't help it. She

had fallen in love with Reece and she hated leaving him.

As though reading her mind, Karen said, "He loves you, you know."

"Who?"

Karen smiled. "You forget I know you better than you know yourself. The face may not be the same, but the expression is pure Deanie, and that expression says you're falling hard and fast for Reece."

Deanie couldn't help but grin. "I am. I love him, Karen. I honestly feel like I've been given a second chance. I could actually be happy with this man for the rest of my life. Even better, I can live longer than the old me, and in a sexy, younger body. How great is that? But despite that, I would have to make the choice between love and my kids...and my kids win hands down. I'm going home and that's where I'll stay. In my old body, in my lonely house. The memory will just have to sustain me."

"Oh Deanie, you'll never be alone. I'll be sure to visit every day. Plus, you never know. Maybe Reece will find his way to you."

Deanie pondered the question. "Do you mean reincarnation?"

Karen shrugged. "I believe in anything now. Who knows?"

She would have to hold on to that hope in the future.

But would Reece want her if he saw the real her? Granted, she wasn't that bad in her "real" body, but would a twenty-seven-year-old gorgeous man even want a middle-aged woman? "I'd like to think that he would love me either way, but any man wants the package to match the cover."

"You're beautiful, Deanie. You could put Abigail to shame."

Deanie snorted. "You're full of shit, but thanks for trying to make me feel better."

Karen turned back to the window. "Oh my God! Deanie, look who's in the garden!"

Deanie's heart pounded hard against her chest as she ran for the window. She looked out and saw the little old lady.

"She must have known that we were looking for her. Hurry, let's go down before she disappears."

"Shit, I need to get dressed!"

Karen moved with amazing speed, grabbing the first dress she could find and helping Deanie into it.

Throwing her damp hair into a sloppy bun, they rushed out of the room.

Deanie had never seen Karen run so fast in her life, pushing bewildered maids out of her way in her rush to get out to the old lady before she vanished.

Thankfully, when they rounded the corner of the house, the old gal was still there. She seemed even tinier now than their earlier meeting.

“Hello, dears. Have you had time to decide what to do?”

“We weren’t exactly given a choice,” Deanie said, but Karen elbowed her.

Karen nodded. “We’re ready to return.”

The old woman glanced past Karen to Deanie. “You as well?”

Deanie opened her mouth, then snapped it shut.

“You love him.” It wasn’t a question.

“I do.”

“What will you do?”

“I need to go home...to my kids.”

“And walk away from love?”

Deanie nodded. “I have no choice. I pick my kids over Reece.”

“Very admirable of you. But your children are grown and gone on with their lives. I’m not saying they don’t need their mother, but aren’t you allowed to be happy?”

Her throat tightened as the old woman stared, a knowing smile on her lips.

Deanie lifted her chin. “I am, but I’m happy with my children. I’ve survived for two years without a man and I can be happy without a man in my life.”

“You will give up all of this,” the old woman said, nodding at the manor.

Deanie glanced over her shoulder at the sprawling home where she had discovered how good love could be the second time around. She hated to walk away from Reece, but her obligations awaiting her in her own time had to come first. “I need to go home.”

“Very well then.” The old woman held out her hands, and Deanie and Karen each took one.

* * * * *

Deanie opened her eyes and immediately recognized the grandfather clock in the corner of her living room.

A mixture of relief and deep regret rushed through her.

She had returned to her own time. Her house in Seattle. The clock ticked loudly, but it was the only sound in the big, lonely Victorian home.

Glancing down, she recognized the familiar chest. Definitely the boobs of a forty year old and not the perky boobs of a twenty-four year old she had come to expect this past week.

No more Regency England, and no more Reece. She had a choice and she’d made it. And the old woman had given her what she’d wanted. A glimpse of what life could be like if she fell in love again.

Not that she expected Reece, or any man who looked like Reece, to knock on her door anytime soon.

Nope. Reece was a world away, literally. And she was back to the life she'd once lived, to the children who would be upset if she were to leave and the life that had possibilities now that she was divorced and her children were grown.

She was done feeling sorry for herself, and instead she wouldn't waste another moment.

A knock sounded at the door and her heart gave a jolt.

She would give just about anything to have Reece be on the other side of that door, she thought, pulling her ass out of the chair. Every muscle in her body ached. She glanced at her reflection in the mirror as she walked by and smiled at the familiar middle-aged woman staring back at her.

Yep, she was definitely the Deanie of old—literally.

She whipped open the door to find her twenty-two-year-old daughter standing with hands on hips. Behind her stood Deanie's twenty-year-old son.

"Thank God! Where the hell have you been?" Kristen asked, throwing her arms around Deanie's neck. The poor thing. Her eyes were bloodshot and the skin beneath her eyes puffy. Josh didn't look any better.

Deanie smiled, knowing this was the reason she had returned. Her kids. Life without them would be unbearable.

"You're going to break my back, hon."

"Sorry," Kristen said, letting go.

Josh hugged her next and she felt guilty knowing they must have been worried out of their minds.

"Where the hell have you been?" Kristen asked again, closing the door behind them. "We've been searching all over for you. When you didn't come home from your dinner with Karen last night—"

"Last night?"

"Yes, last night. You had dinner at Dante's—that Italian place over on Pike Street. I dropped by and the house was dark. Stopped by again this morning before I went to work, and called everywhere looking for you."

She had thought at least a week had passed. "Sorry, I ended up having one too many and stayed at a hotel close to the restaurant."

"What about Karen? Her husband kept calling me all night," Josh said, looking relieved...and a touch angry.

"Yes, she was with me. Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you guys. I honestly didn't."

“Well, next time call,” Josh said, sitting down on the couch.

There was a part of Deanie that wanted to tell her kids about her time-travel experience, but she knew how ridiculous it would sound, and then they would really wonder about her. No, it was best to keep it to herself and let them think she’d been lax in her motherly duties.

“Karen’s husband called the police, but they couldn’t make a report for twenty-four hours. Luckily she arrived on hour twenty-three.”

“Really?” Deanie said, wondering if Greg wasn’t the slightest bit hopeful Karen would come up missing. It certainly would make the need for divorce unnecessary and then he could live the rest of his days with his younger girlfriend.

“Yes, he was worried sick...just as we were. He’s been calling every hour on the hour.”

Now that shocked her. “Well, next time he calls you can tell him I’m fine.”

“We will,” Josh said, hugging her again.

Deanie smiled, knowing she had made the right decision in returning. Her kids might be grown, but they needed her. “Did you want to stay for dinner?”

Kristen glanced at the clock on the wall. “I can stay for a little while, but Daniel wants me home.”

“I’ve been missing and you can’t spare your old mom a few hours?”

Kristen bit her bottom lip. “You’re right. Sorry, Mom. You know how he gets. I’ll call him.”

Deanie nodded, realizing once and for all that her children had moved on and were well on their way to becoming adults. She just hadn’t been willing to let go...until now. Perhaps she would travel, take a trip to England and Wales. She smiled to herself. Yes, that’s exactly what she’d do. Maybe even visit Reece’s Snowdonia. Tears burned the backs of her eyes. She wondered what the manor house would look like now.

“I’ll stay the night, Mom.” Josh kicked his shoes off. “Maybe we can watch a movie or something?”

“I’d like that,” Deanie replied, hugging him, knowing one day he would make some lucky girl a wonderful husband...just as Reece had made her immensely happy in their short time together.

* * * * *

“My lord, would you like me to bring you a glass of wine?”

Reece glanced at Gerard and shook his head. “No, I’m fine.”

“How about something to eat then? You haven’t taken a meal for almost a week now and your clothes are beginning to fit a tad too loose”

He didn't care. Ever since Abigail had disappeared, he had been unable to eat, drink or sleep. She hadn't even bothered with her clothes. In fact, she had taken nothing but the gown she'd been wearing.

The only thing missing was Bertha, the maid.

Damn, why had Abigail left without even leaving a note?

He believed she had gone to London, even though rumors circulated that she had followed Chester to Virginia. A rumor that had Chester's wife on the next ship bound for Virginia.

Strangely, he didn't believe the rumor.

Rather, he believed Gerard. He should have confronted Abigail about the conversation the servants had overheard between her and Bertha. See what she had to say about the strange old woman who had brought them here, and what about Bertha calling Abigail Deanie? He'd let his anger over Chester get in the way and instead of getting to the heart of the matter, he had made love to her, afraid of losing her a second time.

And now he had lost her forever because he hadn't found out who she was or where she had come from.

Abigail was not the Abigail he had married, but another woman. She was this Deanie that Bertha had called her.

It wasn't plausible, but neither was someone changing so much. He had come to love everything about his new wife. Her smile, her quick wit, her coyness. She was nothing like the woman he remembered. Dear Lord, he should have just come out with it and asked her if she was indeed this Deanie from another time. Instead he had let his fear get in the way...and his lust.

Now she was gone and he had no idea where to look for her.

"No, my lord."

"Do you believe in time-travel, Gerard?"

His valet's lips quirked. "My lord?"

"Do you think it possible to travel through time and take over another body?" No doubt the poor man thought him insane.

But he knew in his heart that Abigail had not been the Abigail of old and she wouldn't hurt him. He knew that. She loved him, and now all the small little details had fallen into place, leading him to believe that time-travel was possible...which meant his wife, his Abigail—or Deanie rather—was out there. The problem was how could he get her back?

"I suppose it is possible."

This time the smirk had disappeared from Gerard's lips.

Reece cleared his throat. "And what of the possibility of people switching bodies?"

"I do think that is possible, because I know Bertha was not the same Bertha...and I know your wife was not at all the same person either."

"But how do we find them?"

Shifting on his feet, Gerard looked Reece in the eye. "I suppose we must find this little old woman."

"Why don't you ask all the servants if they have seen an old woman on the grounds of late and report back to me?"

Gerard nodded. "Right away, my lord. I shall return shortly."

Without another word he was gone.

Reece's stomach coiled in a tight knot. What if he couldn't find this old woman? Did it mean he would never find Abigail? He would have to return to the life he had known before Abigail had come rushing back into it. A life full of loneliness and regret.

He closed his eyes against the pain, trying without success to forget the smile which had lit up her beautiful face. The memory of their lovemaking, when she had given him more pleasure than he'd known possible.

She had not been Abigail.

She'd been someone else...this Deanie...and he desperately needed that woman. Walking to the window, he pulled the curtain back and looked down, remembering the day she had come storming back into his life. "Come back to me, Deanie. Come back to me."

His heart missed a beat as a woman stepped out from beneath the giant oak. An old woman—and she looked right at him.

He had never run so fast in his life. In fifteen seconds he had made it from his bedchamber, down the stairs, past startled servants and out the back door.

Thankfully the old woman was still standing by the oak tree. Oddly, though the woman was tiny, not even reaching to his chest, she was intimidating with her clear blue eyes and mass of puffy white hair. She looked positively ancient. "Who are you?" he asked, trying to catch his breath. "Do you know what happened to Abigail—or Deanie?"

She grinned widely. "So you realize that your wife is not the woman you married?"

"Yes, I realize that. Where is she?"

"Which one?"

"Deanie."

"I will answer your question in a moment, but first let me ask you something. If you were given a second chance at love...would you take it?"

"My lord, can I be of assistance?" Gerard asked from behind him.

He didn't dare blink for fear the woman would disappear, but replied, "I'm fine,

Gerard.”

“I shall be right here if you have need of me, my lord.”

“I had a second chance at love...and she left,” Reece said to the strange old woman.

“She left because she has someone back in her own time who needs her.”

His heart skipped a beat. “Back in her own time, and what time would that be exactly?”

“Far into the future.”

“How far?”

“Almost two hundred years.”

He thought he might be sick. He could not even comprehend what life would be like so far into the future. He wasn’t even sure if he wanted to know but he might have to find out if he wanted Deanie bad enough.

“And who did she return to?”

“Deanie has two children. A son and a daughter.”

Deanie was a mother? He had wanted children himself, so he was not dismayed by the information. “Is she well?”

The old woman grinned. “She is, but she wishes you could be together. She misses you desperately.”

The words pleased him immensely and he had to fight the impulse to hug the woman. “I want to be with her.”

“Two hundred years is a long way from here. Your life as you know it would be different. You would be giving up everything you have in this lifetime.” She nodded toward the manor. “Including your home, your titles and your wealth.”

“Yes,” he said, shocked how little those things meant to him.

“But what if she’s not the Abigail you remember? Not the beauty you are accustomed to, but a woman who is older and has two grown children?”

“I don’t care. I love the woman, and I know I’d love her...whatever she looked like.”

“Deanie and her friend were transported back in time, and given another chance. Now I ask you, do you want a second chance?”

“Yes,” he said the word, then stopped. “But what if I can’t find her?”

“Oh you’ll find her.”

He glanced over his shoulder, to the manor house. Aside from his brother, he had no family, which meant his brother would receive everything...except for this manor in Wales.

That would go to Gerard. He had changed his will to name his trusted valet as the owner of his estate a long time ago, along with a substantial income from his half of the American crops.

“What will become of the real Abigail?”

“She has met her fate, I’m afraid.”

And though Abigail had made his life a living hell, he still did not rejoice knowing she had met her end. He nodded.

“You will have the same body as you do now, so Deanie will know you the moment she sees you.”

“When do I go?”

“Now, if you are ready.”

He looked back over his shoulder at the manor, the grounds, the trusted servant watching with tears in his eyes. Reece approached Gerard and embraced him. “Take care of your home and the servants. I know you shall be a good master to them.”

“My lord, I can not accept.”

“You have no choice. It is already done.”

Gerard nodded and walked away, leaving Reece to face the old woman. “I am ready.”

She reached out a hand and he grabbed hold of it.

Reece opened his eyes to find himself enshrouded in darkness.

So many sounds. All unfamiliar.

A crash sounded and he came instantly alert, opening his eyes.

He was in a room full of people and smoke filled the air. A woman walked by, wearing clothes scandalously small for her frame. Was it some kind of uniform? She must be a whore, for her legs were not at all covered and her top, a small strip of fabric covered the largest breasts he had ever seen. So large they didn’t seem real, and her nipples were prominent beneath the sparse material. Her shoes were odd as well, high heels with fabric that wrapped up her bare calves.

Her heavily made-up eyes narrowed as she glanced at him, her full lips curving into a smile. “I didn’t see you there, big boy. How about buying me a drink?” she said, her gaze sliding over him in a way that made him flinch. Dear God, she was certainly obvious as to her intentions. “You dressed up in one of those reenactments getups or something?”

He glanced around, and indeed, he was a bit overdressed. “Something like that,” he said.

“So, will you buy me a drink?”

If he had to hazard a guess, he’d say she’d already had a few of those drinks already.

When he didn't respond, she shook her head and moved on to a group of men sitting at another table.

On a far wall was a box, attached to the wall...and inside the box was a moving picture of tiny people, and he could even hear what they said, though he didn't understand it all. It reminded him of the theater, yet different. His heart accelerated. Everything around him was strange and unfamiliar. Is this what Abigail, or Deanie, had experienced in his time?

Anxious to leave the place, he stepped past a few people, all dressed strangely, and out the door to a strange road.

He was met with a gust of cold air and he welcomed it. Odd noises rang out all about him and he frowned seeing what looked like a carriage, but rather had wheels. A sign of TAXI was on one, and a man stepped out. "You need a ride, buddy?"

Reece glanced over his shoulder, half expecting someone else to respond. "Do you mean me?"

The man frowned. "Uh yeah. Do you need a ride or not?"

"I'm looking for Deanie."

"Is that a bar or something?"

"No, it's a woman."

The man shook his head and got back into the vehicle. A second later someone got in and the strange carriage left. In fact, there were a lot of carriages—but they weren't exactly carriages, for they went a good deal faster than any vehicle he had ever seen.

His mind spun as he took in the new world around him with a sinking feeling.

Dear God, what had he done?

"You okay?"

He turned to find a young woman watching him. She lifted a dark brow that contrasted greatly with her almost white hair. She brought a cigarette up to her mouth and inhaled. A second later a trail of smoke escaped her bright red lips.

"I'm looking for Deanie."

The girl frowned. "Deanie who?"

He could not believe he had not asked her surname. "I'm not sure."

The woman glanced at his clothing, but did not comment on it. One of the first things he would do is purchase new clothing to at least blend in. "Come on, I'll help you out," she said, dropping the cigarette and crushing it beneath her three-inch heel. "I have a friend that might be able to help you out. My father owns the local newspaper and I'm sure he can be of assistance."

Chapter Ten

“Deanie!”

Deanie sat up abruptly in bed. Damn! She’d been having an erotic dream about Reece. He’d come to her in the middle of the night, slipping beneath the sheets and taking her with all the ferocity she’d been feeling since her return to her own time. He had said he would stay with her forever.

If only it hadn’t been a dream.

“Deanie!” No, definitely not a dream. That was Karen screaming her name at the top of her lungs. Upon their return, Karen had flat-out asked Greg about his intern, telling him she had seen him at the restaurant. He denied any romance, and whether he had told the truth or not, she didn’t know...but the entire incident had definitely rekindled their marriage.

Deanie threw on a robe and opened the door to find a red-faced Karen “Thank God you’re home!”

“What is it?”

“You are not going to believe this!” she said, pulling a newspaper clipping from her purse.

Deanie glanced at the caption. “Mystery Man?”

“Trust me on this one. Read it.”

“Okay,” Deanie said, taking the paper and sitting down on the edge of her bed.

“Late Saturday night a man who goes by the name of Lord Pembroke—” Deanie’s stomach twisted in a tight knot.

“Keep reading!” Karen urged.

“The mystery man appeared at the Fairway Tavern, dressed in period clothing. A waitress said the man appeared from nowhere and seemed disoriented. When she asked who he was, the mystery man said he was Lord Pembroke, an English Viscount from England.” Deanie’s heart pounded against her chest. “Oh my God!”

“He’s come for you, Deanie.”

Hope rushed throughout Deanie, and she hugged Karen. “Oh my God! I can’t believe it!”

“Keep reading! There’s more.”

“Lord Pembroke, or Reece,” Deanie gasped, laying a hand against her heart, “says he has traveled through time to find his soul mate.”

Karen laughed. “He is your soul mate, Deanie, and he’s come for you.”

“I wonder why they didn’t take a picture of him?”

“Probably because he’s absolutely gorgeous, and a titled English lord is bound to draw attention...and plus he’s looking for his soul mate. I bet you a million bucks that

women are already calling the newspaper saying they're his soul mate."

"What do I do? I mean, how do I go about this?" The excitement she felt lessened as she caught her reflection in the mirror. "Oh shit."

"What?" Karen said, looking affronted.

"He's going to expect Abigail. Not a middle-aged woman. He'll probably run for the hills the minute he sees me."

Karen planted her hands on her hips. "What the hell's the matter with you? The man of your dreams has time-traveled to be with you, and don't forget what he's left behind. You're gorgeous, and damn hot for a forty year old."

"Thanks, Karen. Now how do I get in touch with him?"

Karen grinned. "He's staying in a hotel in downtown Seattle."

"Then we're off to downtown Seattle...after I take a shower and find something sexy and young to wear."

* * * * *

Reece walked the length of the hotel room. Though he'd only been in this time for four days, he was having a difficult time adjusting to this new world. He could have never imagined all the progress in technology in the space of not even two centuries. It was overwhelming, and at any other time he would have been fascinated with each and every new discovery, but now he had only one thing on his mind.

And that one thing was Deanie.

Why hadn't the old woman told him he would have to hunt for Deanie? He had hoped that he would appear in her home, just as she had appeared in Abigail's home. It certainly would have made things easier for him.

Instead, he sat in a hotel room, watching television and looking out over the bustling city below him. What an amazing city this Seattle was, with its clear lakes, and magnificent snow-covered mountains and the jaw-dropping Space Needle. His heart had been in his throat as he'd taken the elevator all the way to the top. Once he had gotten over his fear, he stood on the observation deck, five hundred and twenty feet above the city, wondering where his Deanie was. He could hardly wait to start his life with her.

If she ever appeared. And she would appear. The old woman had promised as much.

A knock sounded on the door. No doubt the tea he had ordered from room service. In his short time in this time and country, he had learned there was an enormous difference between American tea and English tea. The hotel staff probably detested him for sending it back a time or two.

He opened the door, and sure enough it was the waiter. "Here you are, sir."

Reece waited as the young man set the tray down on the table. Handing him a tip, Reece followed him to a door, only to find a woman standing there.

She was a beautiful woman, with shoulder-length dark blonde hair with pale streaks throughout. Blue eyes the color of the sky looked back at him, and even narrowed a little as she continued to watch him, watch her. She had a dainty nose, with a smattering of freckles along the bridge and cheeks, which made him guess that she might be a bit younger than originally thought. Her lips were full, and looked rosy and wet. He licked his lips unconsciously.

Could this be?

Slender and of average height, she wore blue pants that clung to long legs, and a shirt that molded nicely to small breasts. He could see the nipples pebble beneath the blue material. "Deanie?"

She nodded. "Yes, it's me."

Elation like he'd never known raced throughout him. "Come in," he said, pulling her in and shutting the door behind him. He stepped back and stared. Older, but absolutely beautiful from the top of her head to the soles of her feet.

"Reece, I can't believe it. You look exactly the same. I thought you might have switched bodies like I did."

"Are you disappointed?"

"Are you kidding? No, I'm amazed that you're standing here...in the twenty-first century."

"I missed you, Deanie."

She smoothed a hand over her stomach and he noticed she trembled. "I missed you too. I was shocked to hear you came here. You had so much in your time."

"The moment you left, my joy went with you."

"I'm glad you came, and I hope you're not too disappointed."

"Why would I be disappointed? Deanie, you're gorgeous."

She chewed her bottom lip. "You're being kind, thank you."

He pulled her into his arms and she clung to him. It felt so right to have her in his arms again. She fit so perfectly to him, as though she were made just for him. "I'll never let you go again. Not ever."

She grinned, exposing dimples.

His cock twitched. He could hardly wait to take her to bed.

"You're staring, and it's making me nervous."

"Am I?" He shook his head. "Sorry, I've been waiting for this moment since you left. I can't believe you're finally here and we're together."

"I'm glad you came."

“I am too.”

“I want you to know that I didn’t leave because of you. I left—”

“Because of your children.”

She smiled again, and his heart missed a beat. “Yes.”

“I can’t wait to meet your children,” he said, intensely happy. “Perhaps we can have children of our own.”

Deanie trembled from her head to her feet. She couldn’t believe the man she had fallen head over heels in love with had found his way back to her. And he wasn’t even disappointed with her looks. But now at the mention of kids, her stomach tightened. “I can’t have any more kids, Reece. I’m sorry. I understand if you don’t want to move forward...”

His brows furrowed. “Why?”

“I had an operation and I can’t have kids.” She waited for the rejection to come.

This could very well be the deal-breaker.

“No, Deanie—I mean why would that stop me from wanting to move forward?” Instead of being upset, he smiled reassuringly. “It doesn’t matter, Deanie. As long as I have you, that’s all I care about.”

“Honestly?”

He put hand to heart. “I swear it. I’d love to be a father to your children...if you’d let me.”

Here was the man she had thought she’d lost, standing before her, looking exactly as he had when she’d left him. Reece took her face between his palms and kissed her softly. His touch felt like heaven. Even more, it felt right.

“There’s an age difference. I mean you’re twenty-seven and I’m forty.”

He shrugged. “I don’t care, Deanie.”

She couldn’t help but to smile thinking of Eric’s face when she introduced Reece to him.

“How about we go to my house? Do you want to bring your things?”

He smiled. “I don’t have anything. Just the clothes on my back.”

“We’ll have to fix that then, won’t we?”

“Yes, we definitely will.”

Thirty-five minutes later they pulled up to her house. For someone who had only been in a car once, Reece took to it instantly, and thrilled at the fact they could travel such a distance in so short a time. She could hardly wait to teach him how to drive...as well as teach him so many things. The future had never been so bright.

Once or twice she had caught him staring as they drove and she felt the misgivings well within her. He had to be disappointed in her looks. Maybe she should have done botox at the least. Then maybe she wouldn't look like his mother—or his older sister.

Then again, if Demi Moore could pull off having a boy-toy, then why couldn't she? It's not like she'd let herself go or anything.

"Your home is beautiful."

She smiled, glad he liked it. Opening the front door, she flipped on the light. "It's not much, but it's home."

He settled on the couch and she took the seat next to him, feeling like a teenager on a first date. "So, tell me of your life."

"I was married for twenty years to my high school sweetheart."

"Did he die?"

"I wish," she said a touch too quickly. "No, he didn't die. He left me for another woman."

He frowned. "He's a bloody fool to have let you go."

She laughed. "I'm glad you think so."

"And these," she said, handing him a picture that had been on the end table, "are my children Josh and Kristen."

"She's beautiful and he's quite handsome. They both have your eyes."

"Thanks. Kristen's engaged, and I just found out she is due with my first grandbaby in March. Josh is in his second year of college."

"They don't live with you then?"

She shook her head. "No, I live by myself."

"In this big house?"

"It's not so big."

"And does your husband—"

"Ex-husband."

He grinned. "Ex-husband live nearby?"

"Unfortunately, yes he does. Just about five miles north."

"Do you speak still?"

"No, only when necessary."

"Have you been alone for a while?"

"Yes, over two years ago. I haven't dated since my divorce. I guess I wasn't ready."

He reached out and tucked a wayward curl behind her ear. "I'm glad you ended up taking a chance with me." His lips curved into a sexy smile, making her insides turn to jelly. "I want to spend the rest of my life with you, if you'll have me."

Was he kidding? "Are you serious?"

He nodded, and she could see that he meant it.

"I'll have you."

Laughing, he leaned in for a kiss and shocked her when he rolled to where she was flat on her back, and every hard inch of him pressed against her. She could feel his hard cock against her stomach and arched her hips.

He rocked against her, making her nipples tighten into little buds and her panties wet.

She hadn't locked the front door, nor had she pulled the drapes. "We should probably go upstairs to my bedroom. What if someone walks in...or even walks by? My kids never knock first."

He grinned mischievously. "You didn't worry when we were at my house in the study."

"That was different."

"How?"

"You have to remember that I'm a mother...and word might just get out that I've kidnapped a gorgeous younger man and was making mad passionate love on my couch right in front of everyone. I'd be the scandalous woman in town."

He laughed, the sound making her intensely happy. "I wouldn't want to ruin your reputation." Standing, he held out a hand and she took it.

She straightened her shirt, closed the curtains, locked the door and led him to her upstairs bedroom.

Her four-poster bed had been a gift to herself on her one-year divorce anniversary, and as they entered, Reece smiled.

"You approve?" she asked.

"Yes, I do." Lifting her in his arms he kissed her passionately, before laying her on the bed. Slowly he undressed her, unveiling each body part. She wanted to cross her arms over her stomach, afraid he would find her overly curvaceous body unappealing. She was toned, but she had stretch marks from her pregnancies and her boobs were not exactly where they'd been twenty years ago. But if he was disappointed, he sure didn't show it.

In fact, he put her fears to rest as he proceeded to kiss every inch of her body.

Her breath left her in a rush when he bent between her legs and touched her slit with his tongue. He stroked her slowly, flicking her clit with the very tip, rolling it over and over, meanwhile his long fingers slid inside her, first one, then two.

Delicious sensations wove through her, making her lightheaded, and by the time her second climax came, she was begging for him to make love to her.

He climbed up her body, kissing her with agonizing slowness, her belly, her navel, her chest, one breast, then the other, using his teeth loosely on her sensitive nipples and then nipping at her neck and jaw.

She lifted her hips, urging him to take her. His cock rose between them, hard, the head a deep purple.

He thrust.

She gasped as he settled deep within her. Her inner muscles clamped around him, adjusting to his thick, long length.

“You feel so good,” he said with a deep-throated moan, and began to thrust slowly. She felt each glorious inch of his huge cock sliding in and out of her.

She came within seconds, and almost immediately her body readied for another climax.

He slowed his thrusts though, stopping to kiss her, wanting to prolong the moment.

Her fingers wove through his soft hair and she smiled against his lips, so happy to have him here with her. She still could hardly believe he had left behind so much for her. The life of a rich English lord, just to be her boyfriend—and hopefully one day her husband.

Tears flowed and she couldn’t stop them, nor did she want to. This is what she had prayed for. For Reece to come and find her. Her, Deanie. Deanie with her middle-aged body. Deanie, the discarded wife and mother.

“I love you,” he whispered, and her heart leapt with joy.

“I love you, too,” she said, tears streaming down her face.

He reared back, his eyes searching hers. “Have I hurt you?”

She could see the worry in his face, and shook her head. “No. I’m crying because I’m so happy.”

Relief shone in his eyes and he smiled. “I’m happy too, my love.”

She kissed him and he began to move again, and this time he didn’t stop, thrusting in and out, his long strokes building to a steady tempo until her body reached for the stars yet again. They came together, a blending of bodies and satisfied moans.

Reece kissed her forehead. “Marry me tomorrow.”

“What?”

“Will you marry me tomorrow?”

Sheer happiness bubbled within her. “Yes, I will...but I think it might take a few days to get a marriage license.”

“That’s okay. I don’t care, but I want to marry you as soon as possible.”

“I want to marry you too, Reece.”

“Then it’s settled. You’ll be Lady Pembroke by week’s end.”

“Mmmm. I like the sound of that.” Deanie had never felt so sated, or so at peace as she fell asleep in her lover’s arms.

About the Author

Julia Templeton has written contemporary, historical and time-travel romances for magazines and book publishers and, most recently, Romantica™ for Ellora’s Cave Publishing. She also pens novels under the pseudonym Anastasia Black with writing partner and fellow Ellora’s Cave author Tracy Cooper-Posey. Aside from her passion for writing, Julia also enjoys reading, listening to music, collecting research books, traveling and spending time with family.

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