

Goodbye to Mama

By Joannie Kay

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Chapter One

Trina pulled into the familiar driveway and parked her Ford Taurus behind her sister's BMW. She braced herself for the weekend ahead and got out of her car, grabbed her bag from the backseat, and made her way to the front door and let herself inside. "Lori, it's me!" she called out, not wanting to startle her younger sister. She heard footsteps and Lori was soon hugging her.

"I hated walking in here and knowing that Mama wouldn't be here," Lori said tearfully.

"I know. The house feels empty, doesn't it?"

"It does. Have you heard from Rob?" Lori asked.

"He said he would be here this afternoon. I hope he was able to get away without Jennifer planting her fat butt in the car, too. The last thing we need this weekend is her telling us what we should save or throw away."

"Rob agreed that this was a job for the three of us, no spouses. It is our Mama we are saying goodbye to, and our memories we are sorting through this weekend." Lori squared her shoulders. "If Jennifer shows up with Rob, we will simply send her back home and one of us will take Rob home on Monday."

"Hopefully she will respect our wishes," Trina answered. "Are we sleeping in our old room?" she asked Lori with a grin.

"Of course. And Rob can sleep in his old room." They both laughed. Their Mama gave Rob the smallest bedroom in the house when they were children because Rob was a boy and she didn't think boys needed as much room, which Rob always argued against; once Mama made up her mind that was that. The guest room was kept in pristine condition for guests, not for children, and that never changed over the years. Fortunately, they all lived close enough to come for holidays and visits without needing to spend the night.

"I am sure Rob will have his orders from Jennifer about what she wants, but I am not going to pay attention to that. We are going to find a fair way to take what each of us wants, and Jennifer can go hang for all I care," Trina commented. She was executor of Mama's estate, and Mama told her to make whatever decisions she felt right making. Mama trusted her to be fair, and she would be, but 'fair' did not include Jennifer's wishes... only Rob's, and of course, Lori, too.

"Oh, it will all work out, Trina. Mama knew that you would be fair." They heard another car door and then Rob came inside. He looked sad, but he gave them one of his special smiles.

"I was afraid I'd find you girls crying your hearts out," he admitted, swiping at his own eyes. "I miss Mama so much."

That was all it took for all three of them to start crying. After a lot of hugging, Trina said, "I vote we all have a stiff drink and then get started. We have a lot to accomplish this weekend."

"Sounds like a good idea," Rob agreed, and headed for the kitchen. Their Mama wasn't much of a drinker, and when she did drink, it was wine. Still, there was a bottle of good bourbon on the shelf, and Rob added a stiff shot to each glass, then added ice and filled the rest with cola. When they all had a glass in their hand, he held his up and said, "To Mama, may she rest in peace and be happy!"

"To Mama," the sisters echoed. They all clinked glasses and took a sip.

"Where do we start?" Lori asked, looking to Trina since she was the eldest and the one in charge.

"If it is all right with both of you, I suggest we start in the attic and work our way down. There isn't too much left in the attic. Mama's bedroom is packed full, however, and so are our bedrooms."

"Sounds like a good idea to me, Trina," Rob said. "I think the attic will be fairly simple, and a good place to start."

They took a box of trash bags with them, and a few boxes. "If anyone wants something, please speak up. Otherwise, we'll put it in a box to donate to charity unless it is junk."

"There is more up here than I thought there was!" Rob exclaimed as he climbed the ladder steps and reached up to pull on a string to light the bulb. "It's also stuffy. I don't think the fan is working, girls." His cell phone rang and he automatically reached for it and answered. "What is it, Jennifer?" he asked when he heard her voice. He listened and then said, "Tell Abby that she knows she is grounded this weekend, and I will not permit her to pick and choose when that grounding happens. She is not going to beg off, and I expect you to see to it she stays home." He listened again, and then stated firmly, "Jenn, if I come home Monday and learn that you permitted Abby to go out this weekend, I am going to give you reason to regret it. Am I making myself clear?" He listened and then said, "Yes, I am serious. And, Jenn, please don't call me again unless it is truly important. I promise I will stay in touch, but this weekend is for my sisters and I and we need this time to ourselves. I expect you to handle Abby and tell her 'no'. I'll see you on Monday. I love you; goodbye." He closed his phone and then said, "Sorry, girls. Jenn is testing me, and in some ways she is worse than the teens." He glanced down at them and noticed they were staring at him in shock. "What?" he asked.

"We've never heard you speak to Jennifer like that!" Lori commented. "It was surprising."

“It is surprising to her, too,” he said with a grin. “Now, back to this attic. It’s too hot for all of us to be up in here. How about I hand down the boxes, and we’ll sort through them in the hallway? Okay?”

“Sure,” Trina quickly agreed. She stood on the ladder and left Lori on the floor. Lori had a bad knee and she didn’t want her to risk falling. Rob handed down a box and Trina handed it down to Lori. The system seemed to work, except for one time when Rob said something was too heavy for them to try lifting. He brought it down the ladder and sat it on the floor and climbed up the steps once again. Trina was truly surprised there was so much stuff. “I thought Mama said she cleaned the attic after Daddy died!”

“She certainly didn’t throw away anything!” Lori said with a giggle. “Mama was a packrat!”

“She certainly was,” Rob’s muffled voice came from the attic. They worked for about fifteen minutes before Rob’s cell phone rang again. “Yes...?” he answered, and then listened for a while before breaking in to say, “Abigail, you are grounded and that is my final word on the subject. If you ask again to have this punishment lifted or changed, we will add another week to the grounding. Is that clear?” She must have threatened him with running away because Rob said, “Step one foot out of the house and I will prove to you that you aren’t too old for a good spanking, and the grounding will last until school is out for the year. Is that clear, Abigail? And, do *NOT* give your Mom a hard time this weekend. You might want to help her around the house for a change.” He chuckled when the phone clicked in his ear. “I guess she didn’t like that suggestion.”

“Rob, what is going on at your house?” Trina asked. “I’ve never heard you threaten the kids with a spanking before. And don’t you think that Abby is too old? Why, she is a senior and she’s eighteen!”

“She is still in high school and living under my roof. The problem is that her Mom wouldn’t allow me to discipline the kids when they were little and now I’m having to be really firm to take them in hand. Several months ago we found drugs in Abby’s room,” he said, his voice reflecting how upset he was over the fact. “Let me get the rest of these down, and then I’ll tell you the entire story.”

Lori looked at Trina, and her eyes were full of shock. Rob didn’t sound like himself at all! He quickly cleared the small attic of the rest of the items up there, and by the time he was finished, the hallway was full of boxes and trunks, and old furniture. “This is the last of it,” he said as he backed down the ladder with another heavy trunk. “I can’t imagine what Mama had in all these boxes and trunks.” He folded the steps and then pushed them up and closed the door to the attic.

“This stuff can wait,” Lori said, her voice full of concern. “I want to hear about what is happening with Abby!”

“Me, too,” Trina added. She loved her brother and his children, and she even loved Jennifer, she supposed.

Rob sat down on a box and said, “Like I said, several months ago we found drugs in Abby’s room. Jenn and I were planning to surprise her with a complete make-over of her bedroom... Painting the walls, new carpet... furniture. We arranged for her to go on a trip with some friends for the weekend, and once she left for school Friday morning, we started clearing her room. The drugs were hidden behind her desk in a large manilla envelope. Abby did that to make it look like something had fallen behind her desk, and that is what Jenn and I both thought, but then packets of stuff fell out and we looked at each other and asked each other if it was what we thought it was. We got on the Internet, and sure enough, it was marijuana. Jenn went out and bought drug testing kits and we picked up the kids from school that afternoon, and tested both of them. Abby didn’t pass, but Craig did. So, we canceled the room makeover, and Abby’s weekend away, and we’ve had Abby in counseling. We came to realize that a lot of Jenn’s behaviors were giving Abby to think she didn’t have to obey any rules, and that is when I decided I needed to take charge and be the head of my own household. I had a few long talks with Mama and she gave me some good advice, which I was smart enough to implement. It hasn’t been easy, and it’s probably been the hardest for Jennifer because she has had to rethink her attitude. Both the kids have been held accountable for their choices, and Abby, in particular, has been ordered to stay away from the kids who were encouraging her to do drugs. Abby is chafing a bit because she was permitted too much freedom before she was ready to handle it.”

“But, you certainly wouldn’t spank her?” Lori asked.

“If she sets foot outside the house without her mom this weekend, she will find out that I will do just that. I don’t want to resort to corporal punishment, but since she knows what the consequence will be it is up to her whether it happens or not.”

“What if Jennifer permits her to go and promises her that she can do her grounding next weekend?” Trina wanted to know.

“Then I’ll have two girls with sore butts,” Rob answered them with a confidence they had never seen him exhibit before, especially when it came to his spoiled brat of a wife. Rob abruptly changed the subject. “Now then, we need to start sorting this stuff. We’ve only got tonight, and tomorrow, and Sunday, and we all decided that we needed to just do it and get it over with so the house can be sold.”

“We’ll get it all done, Rob, but we wanted to know about what is going on at your house. We love you guys, you know!” Trina told him.

“We certainly do!” Lori nodded her head in agreement. “Why didn’t you call us? I’m an RN; I would have helped you.”

“It was something that Jenn and I had to handle, Lori. I had to step up and show my wife and kids that I could take care of them. Abby’s drug tests come back clean now, and we are satisfied that she is with a better crowd of kids.” He smiled at them. “My marriage is a lot stronger now, too.”

“That is wonderful, Rob,” Trina said in relief. She got to her feet and opened a box. Inside she found old shoes. “Oh my goodness! Remember these, Lori? We used to fight over this pair of sandals! Why on earth did Mama save them? They are so scuffed and worn, and so out of date!” She laughed, and then said, “I hope we have enough trash bags because I have a feeling that nearly everything here is going to be thrown away.”

“This box is full of our artwork,” Rob said, chuckling. “Look at this monkey riding a bicycle that I drew. Mama used to plaster our drawings on the fridge, remember?”

“Yes, and she hung the grandkids there, too. Mama always made us feel so special, like we were actual artists in the making.”

“Ahhhh! Look at this pair. There are holes in the sides where you wore them through, Rob!” Trina held up one shoe.

“I want those!” Rob cried out. “I can show them to the kids and tell them that this was how long I had to wait before I could buy new gym shoes.”

“They’re going in the trash, silly man,” Trina replied, shaking her head and dropping them into the large green bag.

“You’d deny me the right to torture my kids?” he asked in mock outrage.

“I’m doing you a favor and keeping you from smelling up your car and Jennifer’s clean house! They stink!”

“Oh, here we go with the foot odor jokes!”

“You always did have the stinkiest feet, brother. I remember Mama scolding you and sending you to shower before she’d allow you to sit in the family room and watch television with us,” Lori reminded them.

Trina joined in, mimicking their mother, “She would say, ‘Rob, you are going to be the death of us all! Go and wash those grimy, stinky feet before we all drop over dead from the fumes! Lordy, I need to open a window. Lori, go get the Lysol!’ It was hilarious! The faces she would make!”

“It was the socks she bought for me,” Rob insisted.

“It was your feet!” Trina said, laughing.

“Oh, lookeee here. Now, Trina, what is this?”

“Oh brother! Throw that away, Rob!”

“Awwww, it’s cute, Trina!”

“I can’t believe Mama kept it,” Rob commented.

“She probably didn’t realize what it was, or she would have had a fit!”

Trina’s face was red. “She said to draw something from nature, and I drew the dogs. I didn’t know what they were doing! I do remember that my teacher had trouble keeping a straight face when she saw it, and she quickly hid it on the bottom of the pile and didn’t choose it as one of the pictures to hang on the drawing board. She put it in my bag and sent it right home. Mama said, ‘How lovely! Doggies... Let’s hang them on the refrigerator and show Daddy when he comes home.’ Daddy looked at my drawing and laughed and said it was definitely a nature picture.”

“Mama didn’t know what the dogs were doing?” Rob asked with a grin.

“Well, I was only six, and I didn’t know what they were doing, and Mama knew I didn’t know anything about that, so it never crossed her mind. Besides, I’m not that good an artist!” Trina said with a laugh.

They worked together to go through each of the boxes, and they did find some treasures to share. Mama saved all of the Christmas ornaments they’d loved for years, and they divvied them up so that they all had a few treasures for their own trees. There was also a couple boxes of photo albums and they spent time going through some of them and remembering their Mama, who was, agreeably, a character. Another box contained Mama’s high school memories, and those they looked through with a lot of curiosity.

“She was so pretty,” Lori said emotionally. “You looked so much like her, Trina!”

“No, I was never this pretty,” Trina argued. “Mama was simply beautiful.”

“I happen to think that both of you look like Mama, and if we ask your husbands, they’ll say they think you are beautiful,” Rob said firmly. “It is so hard to imagine Mama so young. My Abigail is the same age Mama was in this picture, and Mama was already engaged to Daddy.”

“It was common back then, and Mama truly loved Daddy,” Lori told him. “Oh look, here is the picture that she gave to Daddy. ‘For my darling Henry with everlasting love.’ Isn’t that sweet?”

“I thought we would lose her when Daddy died,” Rob admitted. “She grieved so deeply, but she finally pulled herself together and she told me that she’d had a dream and Daddy

gave her a scolding and told her that she had children and grandchildren who needed her to be strong for them. She started eating and taking care of herself and we were blessed to have her for ten more years.”

“She almost always did whatever Daddy wanted her to do,” Lori recalled.

Trina smiled, wondering if she should share a memory...

Chapter Two

“What are you thinking, Trina?” Lori asked. “Come on, share. Why are you smiling that secret smile of yours? It’s the one you always wear when you know something we don’t!”

“Oh, don’t be silly!” Trina shook her head, but she was still smiling.

“Lori isn’t being silly, Trina. You are smiling, so what gives?” Rob asked.

“Okay... but I hope you aren’t shocked. What you said about Mama always doing what Daddy said... I remember one time when she didn’t. I had just turned five, so you were only a little over a year old, Rob, and you weren’t even thought of yet, Lori. Mama got really angry with Daddy when he told her she couldn’t go shopping for some new shoes she wanted to go with a new dress she made. Mama did her best to talk him into changing his mind, but he said ‘no’, and then he shook a finger at her. You know what I mean...” Trina demonstrated by shaking her finger in warning like their parent used to do.

“You do that so well!” Lori giggled. “Now tell what Mama did...”

“Daddy shook his finger and said, ‘Alice, you’d best mind me or I’ll use your hairbrush.’ I remember eating my cereal and thinking that Daddy was going to take Mama’s hairbrush and brush his hair, and that was so silly since his hair was really short. I had no idea he was threatening to spank her if she disobeyed him. Well, Mama was not happy. She stomped around after Daddy left for work, and then she said, ‘Trina, go and find your shoes. We are going shopping!’ I asked her if Daddy would get mad at us, and she laughed and said ‘no’. We went to a shoe store and Mama bought *four pairs* of shoes, and they were so pretty. They were expensive, too. All afternoon she kept putting on one pair and walking in them, then another pair, and she smiled and kept remarking that she was ‘going to show Henry he couldn’t boss her around’, and she ‘wasn’t a little girl and I can do as I please’. I didn’t understand, not at all, but Mama was all excited, and she kept changing her dress and trying on those shoes, and fixing fried chicken...”

“Daddy’s favorite,” Rob said with a nod and a laugh. She wasn’t as sure of herself as she kept saying she was.” He found a lot of amusement in that little fact.

“She baked a chocolate cake, too, because she knew that Daddy was going to blow.”

“Oh my, yes!” Lori exclaimed. “When Daddy said no to spending money on something, he meant ‘no’! He was never one to deny us something we truly needed, but if he thought we were being frivolous, he didn’t mind saying so, and Mama always backed him up, without fail.”

“Yes, she did,” Trina agreed. “Do either of you remember my prom...? Daddy gave me money to go shopping for my dress and shoes, and he said, ‘Not one penny more on this prom business, Trina.’” She imitated his deep voice, and the other two chuckled.

“Daddy always said ‘not one penny more on this whatever business’.” Lori giggled. Then Mama would add, “Your Daddy is right. That is more than enough and you must learn to spend wisely. Shop a bit before you buy.” She said that even when I was grown and married and pregnant and looking to buy a crib for Jeremy!”

“And when Jenn and I were going to buy our first home,” Rob added with a smile.

“She was telling me that when I was looking for a new refrigerator for her when her old one stopped running. I laughed and asked if she thought I still needed reminding of that. She looked at me and smiled her wonderful smile and said, ‘I am still your Mama, Trina, and that job never ends.’ Isn’t that sweet?” she asked the other two, her eyes misting with tears. It was enough to bring on a moment or two of tears for all of them. “God, I miss her so much!”

“So do we,” Lori added, passing a box of tissues she produced. “I knew we’d need them,” she explained when Rob looked at her in surprise.

“Smart girl,” he nodded, helping himself to a handful. “I knew this weekend would be hard. When you girls start crying, it just kills me,” he admitted.

“Rob, we all need to grieve,” Trina said softly. “I cried a lot when we lost Daddy... I loved him, but losing Mama is *so* hard. As long as she was alive, I felt protected in this world. Now, we are the adults, and the protectors of our children.”

“We were raised to be capable, Trina, especially you,” Rob told her. “You are fine, and if you need us, we will be there for you. So will RJ and so will your kids.”

She nodded and then blew her nose. “Let me finish telling you the story,” she said, determined to stop crying. “When Daddy came home that night he looked at Mama and asked what the occasion was that we were having fried chicken on a week night. Mama said she wanted to spoil him a bit. Daddy took a seat and then gave me a big hug and asked me what I did that day...”

Rob started laughing in anticipation.

“Oh, you *didn’t* tell on Mama!” Lori asked, her eyes big.

“Oh, yes, I told on her, but I didn’t realize that I was to keep her pretty new shoes a secret. I didn’t know why she was wearing an old pair instead of the new ones, but Daddy looked at them first, and then he looked at Mama and asked if she really bought four pairs of shoes. Mama’s face turned pink, but she nodded, and then said, ‘I was upset because you said I couldn’t have a new pair, so I went shopping and bought four pair!’

I'm sorry I spent all that money.' Daddy just looked at her and said they would discuss the matter later. I still didn't have a clue that Mama was in trouble, so I ran to their bedroom and got the shoes to show Daddy. The receipt was in the box I brought out to the living room, and he about choked. I still remember how he looked at Mama, and she hurried out to the kitchen, telling him she would take up dinner. It was so quiet at the table, and I kept talking. Mama gave me a bath while Daddy played with you, Rob. Once I was in my pj's, Mama bathed you, and then she tucked you in your crib. Daddy carried me to my room, and read a couple of books to me, and then told me to go right to sleep. I didn't want to go to sleep, like most five year olds. I waited what I thought was a really long time, and decided I had to go and find Mama and get a drink of water, and another hug. I couldn't find Mama... or Daddy. They weren't in the living room, even though the television was on. They weren't in the kitchen getting some wonderful snack like they did sometimes. So, I went looking in the bedroom, and I heard a smacking sound. I knocked on the door and called out for Mama. The smacking stopped, and Daddy came to the door, and he got me a drink of water and put me back to bed. I asked him what the smacking noise was and he clapped his hands. I giggled; he left me in my room, and went back to his bedroom. I know that because I waited a minute or two and then followed him. That smacking sound started again, and I heard Mama telling him to stop. He asked her if she was sorry she spent so much money on shoes after she was told no. She agreed that she was, but Daddy kept right on scolding, and the smacking noise continued. I finally realized that Daddy was actually spanking Mama, and I got all upset, thinking that it was my fault. I started crying, and then wailing because I couldn't bear for Mama to get a spanking. The door opened and Daddy picked me up and asked what was wrong. I begged him to stop spanking Mama and told him I was sorry. I remember him hugging me and telling me that I didn't do anything wrong, but all I could think of was that I'd tattled, and Mama and Daddy both said that tattling was a bad thing to do because I was constantly tattling on Rob, even though he was a baby. I would try to play with something, and since he was a baby, just walking on his own, he would come along and mess everything up... and I would scream for Mama or Daddy, if he was home from work, and then tattle. Of course, they were older and realized that Rob was a baby and not trying to be mean to me, but as a child I didn't understand." She laughed a bit, and then said to Rob, "You really were a pest, little brother."

He managed to keep a perfectly straight face as he said, "I sincerely apologize for knocking over your toys when I was a little one, dear sister." He spoiled it all by bursting into laughter, and his sisters joined him.

Lori asked, "Did I upset you like Rob did?" The look in her blue eyes was full of hopeful mischief.

"I was almost eleven by the time you were born, Lori. You upset Rob by getting into his things. I thought you were the most precious baby in the world, and I helped take care of you. Even if I was doing something and you came in and messed things up, I would have laughed and held you and squeezed you. You were *my* baby!" Trina explained.

“Until we were both older and we shared a bedroom and I kept getting into your makeup and other girly things. You were so mad at me then!” Lori recalled.

“And Mama tried to explain how I used to get into her things when I was your age.”

“So what happened when Daddy found you outside the bedroom door,” Rob wanted Trina to continue the story about their Mama. “Did he stop spanking Mama?”

“He called to Mama to put on a robe and come to my room.” She said she would be right there, and Daddy carried me to bed and tucked me in. “Your Mama is just fine,” he kept telling me, but I didn’t believe it for one second. I was really shook up. Mama’s aren’t supposed to get into trouble!”

“Oh, I am so sure they were both mortified!” Lori said, her eyes wide.

“How do you explain something like that to a little child?” Rob agreed with her.

“Mama came in and she hugged me and said that sometimes adults do things they shouldn’t, and that is what she did when she bought all those shoes after Daddy said not to. She said that Daddy loved her a lot and he was right to scold her and insist she take the shoes back to the store the next day. I remember her kissing my cheek and smiling the way Mama smiled with all her love and her telling me how much she loved me, and explaining that it wasn’t my fault she got into trouble. I didn’t drive us to the store and I didn’t try on all those shoes and I didn’t buy them. I told her I tattled on her and Daddy was spanking her because of me. She shook her head ‘no’ and insisted it wasn’t tattling to answer Daddy’s question about my day. All I did was tell him what we did because he asked, and that wasn’t tattling. She kept reassuring me, telling me that Daddy loved her and wasn’t being mean. I finally felt asleep, and by morning everything was normal. Mama only took back three pairs of shoes, though, and when I asked her about the fourth pair, she smiled real big and said Daddy changed his mind and said she could keep them.”

“Mama always did know how to wind Daddy around her little finger.” Rob grinned.

“Do you suppose that Daddy spanked Mama often?”

“I never witnessed another scene like that one,” Trina answered. “Did either of you?”

“I did once,” Lori confessed, her cheeks pink. “It was Rob’s first year at college, so I must have been around thirteen. It was one of those rainy Saturdays, and I noticed that Mama was awful quiet and so was Daddy. He was in his workshop, cleaning it, and Mama was sewing.”

“On a Saturday...?” Trina asked in surprise.

“That is weird. They normally spent Saturday doing things together, or with us...!” Rob added.

“Yes, it was a Saturday. Daddy came upstairs and asked me if I wanted to go over to Beth’s for a while, and told me to call and see if she was home, and he offered to drive me since it was storming and raining. I gathered a couple of new magazines I’d bought with my allowance, and was all excited at the idea of an afternoon at Beth’s. Daddy sent me on out to get into the car, and he came out a couple of minutes later. He dropped me off, and Beth and I got into a huge fight less than five minutes after I got there. I told her I was going home, and I put on my raincoat and started walking. I let myself in the house with my key, and ran right upstairs, not about to explain to Mama or Daddy that Beth and I were secretly in love with the same boy...” she admitted with a laugh.

“Who was it?” Rob asked curiously.

“You were too young to be in love!” Trina scolded, ever the older sister.

“Well, that didn’t stop us from having crushes on boys, dear sister.” Lori giggled. “It was a silly fight, and we were best friends again by Monday.”

“Good. But, who was the boy?” Rob persisted.

“As if I would tell you that! You’d find some way to embarrass me for something that happened nearly thirty years ago!!!”

“Would I do something like that?” Rob tried to appear innocent, but both his sisters knew him too well for it to work. He laughed when they both said ‘yes’. Then he said, “Tell us about Mama...”

“Okay. As I said, I didn’t want to have to explain to them, so I went upstairs. Their door was open just a crack, and I heard Mama telling Daddy she was sorry. He said she was going to be even sorrier and told her to come to him. I confess, at that age I was a brat... so, I peeked into the room and saw that Mama had her skirt pulled up and her panties down, and she laid over the edge of the bed, telling Daddy that she didn’t think he was being fair. He said that wasn’t for her to decide, and then I saw he had a hairbrush in his hand! I was shocked to realize that Mama was going to get a spanking, especially at *her* age! Daddy didn’t hesitate. He started paddling her, and Mama kept asking him to stop, but he gave her a doozy of a spanking, and she was crying by the time he was done. I never did find out why he spanked her, but you both know Mama. She wouldn’t have let him spank her if she wasn’t feeling guilty about something. When he was done, he dropped the hairbrush on the floor, and then he lie down beside her and hugged her and kept telling her he loved her. Mama stopped crying and kissed him and thanked him for spanking her! Well, that was confusing... and when they kissed again I knew I needed to get out of there and fast. I went to my room, and spent a good long time thinking about what happened and decided it was best not to tell either of you what I saw because you might tell Mama and Daddy I was spying on them... and I sure didn’t want Daddy to spank me! Mama was shocked when she realized I was in my room and she asked me how long I’d been home. I told her that I got there right after Daddy took me, and I saw

the door to their room was closed and I figured they were taking a nap so I went to my room and started reading, and I fell asleep. Mama seemed relieved, and then she asked if I wanted to bake some brownies. The rest of the day was normal, but I did notice that Mama insisted we call and order a pizza for delivery for supper that night, and we ate in the living room so she could sit in her soft rocking chair to eat. Daddy smiled at her, and she smiled at him. I figured if she wasn't mad at him for spanking her, then I sure wasn't going to say anything. You know, I never thought she was abused in any way. I could see that Daddy loved her more than anything."

"Yes, he did." Trina nodded in agreement.

"A spanking isn't abuse, girls," Rob quietly commented. "I see it as a firm expression of love. Of course, I believe it has to be consensual. I wouldn't spank Jenn if she hadn't agreed to a lifestyle that included spanking as a consequence, but once that consent is given, I am the one in charge."

Chapter Three

“And she is okay with this?” Trina asked, surprised as could be.

“She is,” Rob replied. “Now, of course, she puts up a fuss in the moment and does her best to talk me out of it. That is pretty normal behavior. A spanking hurts, and she doesn’t like it when it is happening. But, it works, and afterwards she tells me that she feels loved and secure in our marriage. Haven’t either of you experienced that?” His sisters both turned red, and Trina insisted they needed to get busy or she wasn’t going to order a pizza for supper and would instead call a local restaurant and order liver and onions for them! They laughed, but Rob decided to poke a bit more and get stories out of them both before the weekend was over. After all, he was their brother and it was his duty to tease them into confessing all.

It took a while, but soon they were finished with the boxes and items from the attic. The throw away pile was large, but all three of them had found treasures, and Trina was so thankful that there hadn’t been any arguments over any one item so far. The Christmas ornaments were fairly distributed, and they all agreed on donating some items to charity. Mama did have a lot of items that were just plain junk, but they’d expected that since they knew their Mama was frugal and she seldom disposed of anything. Every one of them had accepted items from her and brought them home, only to quietly dispose of the damaged goods later.

Trina ordered their pizza and they sat at the kitchen table and devoured it, along with the cola she ordered to go along with the treat. The weekend called for comfort food, and they all agreed that pizza was number one on the list.

“Where to next, girls?”

“Our bedrooms. Rob, I am sure that almost everything in your old room belongs to you. Lori and I will sort out our stuff. My guess is that we might find some things that could be donated, but if none of us has claimed stuff in all these years, then it probably needs pitching. Do any of you need/want any of the furniture? Or do we sell it?”

“We don’t need it, Trina. Our house is full, and it will be a while before Abby has her own apartment,” Rob answered decisively.

“I’m not sure yet,” Lori answered thoughtfully. “I won’t say that I won’t see something that I would like to take home.”

“Fair enough,” Trina agreed. “If any of us sees anything we want, speak up. Maybe Rob will have something in his room that one of your boys would want, Lori, and we might have something that Abby would like to have...?”

“That’s true,” Rob agreed. “Why don’t we make a section in the hall of furniture that is still usable. Another of ‘things’ that are usable, and a pitch pile. Then we can all go through the piles together. That way I won’t throw away something that Lori would like for her sons, and I might see something that my kids would like.”

“Sounds like a great idea, Rob. I can see why you just got that promotion,” Trina told him, sincerely proud of her brother. He was very successful.”

“Thank you, Trina,” Rob answered. “Jenn is planning a family thing to celebrate, but she is still trying to get with the two of you to work out a date you think everyone in your families can come. We’re going to put steaks on the grill.”

Lori giggled. “That sounds like Jennifer.”

Trina laughed, too. “Yep. She is planning a celebration for you, and you get to do the cooking, brother!”

“Hey, the steaks were my idea!” he admitted. “You know I love to grill... and get all the compliments on my steaks!” he insisted, puffing out his chest.

“We’ll be there, little brother, and I will bring that fruit salad you love so much,” Trina offered.

“And I’ll do baked beans, if that is okay with Jennifer...? I don’t want to insult her.”

“She would love to have your baked beans, Lori, and so would I. I love your fruit salad, too, Trina. Thank you both. Jenn will be pleased,” he stated again. “And, I really did suggest the steaks. She was going to make something stuffy, but I thought outdoors would be more fun for the kids and for us.”

“We were just teasing, Rob. We love your steaks, and it sounds like a great idea.”

“I agree with Lori,” Trina said with a nod of her head. “Now let’s see if we can at least get these two bedrooms done before bedtime, but remember, unless you want to sleep on the floor, don’t take the beds apart!”

“I can sleep on a mattress on the floor,” Lori said, “but the two of you are too old for that!”

“Old?” Rob exclaimed. “You are the one with a bad knee, little brat.”

“That is right. I can do just fine, but it would take Rob and I both to get you up in the morning,” Trina informed her baby sister.

“I knew you’d both react to that!” Lori said smugly. “You are both so easy!”

“Mama should have locked you in a closet and tossed away the key!” Rob announced, but his blue eyes were twinkling and they all knew he didn’t mean a word he was saying.

“I think Trina and I can get our room done before you get finished,” Lori taunted him. “Ours is twice as big as yours, and I know we have more stuff packed in there.”

“You’re on!” Rob yelled, and he disappeared inside his old bedroom and the two women heard a crash.

“Are you okay in there?” Trina called out in concern.

“Yeah! Mama stored more stuff in here and I didn’t know it. I opened the closet and it all fell out!”

Trina peeked inside and saw her brother standing there, hands on his hips, frowning. “Girls, look at this,” he bossed. “Some of this stuff is brand new, and she must have ordered it from those infomercials on television.”

“Oh my! Do you remember how indignant Daddy was that Sunday we all came for dinner and Mama had that new blender she was experimenting with? She ordered it from tv, and Daddy said that he thought it a crime that normally intelligent women would be suckered into buying something they could get in a local store and know it would work right. Mama told him that they had to keep up with new trends and ideas. But, that darn blender never did work the way it was supposed to, and Daddy finally tossed it away and bought her a good one at the store.”

“Mama loved ordering things on tv and getting packages.”

“She must have done a lot of it,” Rob grumbled, “and it’s all right here in my closet!”

“Well, have fun sorting!” Lori sang out, and then she followed Trina to their room, only to discover their closet was jam packed with unopened boxes, too.

“Oh my goodness, Trina. I had no idea she was shopping like this!”

“Me either. How long has it been since you came up here for any reason?”

“Only to get something Mama wanted from her bedroom, or to help her clean the guest room before someone came to pay her a visit. Oh gosh, I hope she didn’t fill it with stuff, too!” They took off to check the guest room and were relieved to find it was in the same pristine condition Mama always kept it in.

“What are you two doing in here?” Rob asked from behind them. He’d heard them running down the hallway, and wanted to see what they were up to.

“Making sure that Mama didn’t stuff this closet and room full of unopened stuff she bought on tv like she did our rooms,” Lori explained. “Thank goodness she didn’t!”

“She must have been terribly lonely once Daddy died,” Trina commented. “She didn’t sleep well, and I’ll bet she bought a lot of this stuff while she was up during the night, and then she hid it from us so we wouldn’t know she wasn’t being frugal.”

“Poor Mama. Jenn and I were so busy with the little ones, and I was trying to work hard and earn a living. I should have been here more for her.”

“Don’t start that, Rob. You were here for her as much as we were. And we *ALL* did our very best. I never called her but that she would tell me she’d just seen you or Lori, and that you came and fixed her leaky faucet. Mama never once complained about not seeing any one of us.”

“I am sure it was the nights that were very long for her. I know how I would be if I lost my Zach. I would be lost. There is something very comforting in waking up and knowing the person you love most is on the other side of the bed.”

“You’re right, Lori. None of us could have taken Daddy’s place,” Rob agreed. “Still, I wish we could have spared her that loneliness.”

“We all do, Rob,” Trina comforted him as best she could. “Well, let’s bring all those boxes in here and put them on the bed. We’ll see what we have, and then try to sell some of it online, or have a garage sale. That might be the best way to get rid of stuff with the least amount of work.”

They worked quickly, and were shocked to see how all the boxes piled up on the king sized bed. Once they had all of the new items on the bed, they proceeded to dispose of what they considered the junk in their former bedrooms. Rob had a large pile for Lori to go through, and she did find some things she thought her boys might like, and Trina had a couple of things that she kept out for Abby. Lori had taken much more of her stuff when she moved out than the other two had. When only the empty furniture was left, they talked quietly and decided that donating all of it to a couple of different charities was what their Mama would want them to do. It wasn’t as if any of them needed the furniture, and they didn’t really think they could sell it to anyone for more than a few dollars. Giving it to those in need was something their Mama would approve of for sure. She made it a point to help others, donating her time and money to organizations that provided care for children, and for the Food Pantry, which was her favorite.

“Do you remember what Mama always said?” Lori asked. “She said that it is hard for anyone to think of finding a job if they are hungry, and she said that even a good man would resort to stealing to feed his hungry children if he couldn’t find help. I think that any money we raise for those things in the guest room should go to the food pantry in Mama’s name.”

"I like that idea, Lori," Rob nodded his agreement.

Trina smiled. "Mama would be so proud and happy. She hid those items from us because she didn't want us to scold her for wasting her money, but this way the money won't go to waste. We'll put up a sign and tell everyone that the proceeds will go to the Food Pantry, and hopefully people will pay more... and maybe even donate to the cause."

"That would be great, Trina. None of us is hurting for money, and it is nice we are in a position we can do this."

"Hopefully we'll find a lot of other things we can sell, too."

"It is starting to get late, and I think we all need some down time before we go to bed," Trina spoke up. "I brought a bottle of wine to share."

"I have some crackers and cheese and some fruit. Let's eat," Lori said, heading for the steps."

"You didn't tell me to bring food!" Rob complained. "But, I know you girls, and I brought something, too."

"What?" Lori asked curiously.

"Just wait a minute and I'll get it..." he scolded.

"Ohhhhhhh!" Lori exclaimed when she saw what he went out to his car to retrieve. "Ohhhhhh! This is going to be fantastic!"

"Rob, you are a wonderful little brother," Trina told him as she poured wine into three glasses. "Hurry up and get that box open!"

"You girls and your chocolate," he teased them, opening the huge box of chocolates he'd bought especially for them. The box was large, but by the time they left Sunday evening, it would be empty. He offered the first piece to Lori and then Trina got a pick. He then helped himself, and they all savored the wonderful taste of chocolate.

"This is so good!" Lori declared. Trina nodded in agreement, and Rob just shook his head. Nothing but chocolate would have made the same impression on these two.

After a good night's sleep, Trina fixed breakfast for everyone while Lori made coffee. Rob set the table, and he made sure to call Jenn and make sure that things were going smoothly at home. Both Lori and Trina had checked in with their spouses, and learned that everyone was handling being on their own just fine. Breakfast was good, and they made short work of doing the dishes.

“Do you remember how we used to hate doing the dishes and Mama would get so upset with us and tell us that ‘dishes are a fact of life, so get used to it’?” Trina mimicked their Mama to perfection.

“I remember that the two of you moved out within months of each other... You got married, Trina, and Rob went off to college, and I was the only one here to do the dishes! I used to look forward to when you came home for dinners on the weekends so I would get a break!”

The good-natured fussing lasted as they restored the kitchen to rights. “Let’s tackle Mama’s bedroom next,” Trina suggested. “We’ll donate her clothing since none of it will fit us, but it’s hard to tell what else we will find in there.

A few minutes later they were in her bedroom and Rob whispered, “I feel like we are snooping and about to get caught. We were never allowed in here without express invitation and permission.”

“I know!” Trina agreed. “I am half expecting to get yelled at.”

One by one they emptied Mama’s drawers, finding some pretty sexy lingerie in one drawer. “These are pretty,” Lori exclaimed in delight, holding up a gown.

“Do you want it?” Trina asked.

“No! I couldn’t imagine wearing this, knowing that Mama probably wore it for Daddy! It would feel so wrong!”

Rob couldn’t help snickering, and he noticed that Trina was trying not to laugh, too. He waited until another box was full and he carried it downstairs. By the time he came back up the steps his sisters were engrossed in reading a small book. “What are you looking at?” he asked.

“We found an entire drawer full of diaries, Rob!” Trina exclaimed. “They are dated, and Mama started them just before she met Daddy!”

“Are you going to read them all?” he asked, a bit surprised.

“Oh yes!” Lori answered. “I want to read each and every one.”

“Okay, but I vote that we get some work done first, girls. The diaries have been here all along and they aren’t going anywhere. We need to finish clearing drawers and then Mama’s closet this morning.”

“Rob is right,” Trina reluctantly agreed. “Let’s put these in a box and we’ll start reading tonight after dinner.” They soon had all of the diaries packed in a box, and instructed Rob

to make sure he put it where it could easily be found. The rest of the drawers took little time, but the closet kept them busy until lunchtime.

“How on earth could Mama pack so much stuff into one little closet?” Trina exclaimed as they headed downstairs to make sandwiches. “I swear, I thought she got rid of Daddy’s stuff ages ago. His coin collection is valuable.”

“It is worth a pretty penny, and if I knew she had it in that closet I would have been worried sick.” Rob was frowning. “It has sat in this empty house since Mama died, too. Not to mention her jewelry. I thought she gave it to you girls!”

“I thought it was all in the safe deposit box at the bank,” Lori said.

“I did, too. I’ve been waiting for permission to go through all of that,” Trina told them both. “I had no idea any of those things were here. Do either of you want the coin collection? Or would your kids?”

“It is much too valuable to give to the kids, Trina!”

“Yeah. I don’t want it. What about you, Trina. You are the one who spent the most time with Daddy working on his collection.”

“I only did that to be with him, Rob. I don’t want the coins. My vote is that we have it appraised and then sell it, either as an entire collection, or by coins, whichever will bring the most. We can either put the money into the estate and split it up, or we can add it to the Food Pantry fund.”

“Let’s talk about this later,” Rob suggested. “Right now I’m too hungry to think about anything.”

“I am with you, brother. What are you fixing for us to eat?” Lori teased him.

“I’ll drive through the golden arches if you two girls would like a Big Mac, fries, and a milk shake,” he offered.

“That sounds so much better than the tuna/pasta salad that I brought along for lunch today,” Trina said, clearly tempted by her brother’s offer. “What about it, Lori?”

“It sounds so heavenly... Let’s indulge just this one time.”

“I’m on my way, unless you two girls want to come along and play in the playroom...?” he teased the two of them.

“I think we can resist, but if you promise to climb up in there and slide down the slides, I’ll come along just to watch,” Trina promised, giggling.

“Oh, don’t dare him, Trina! He would do it just to embarrass us, and he’d get stuck up in there, and we’d have to call 911 to get him out!” Lori predicted, alarm in her blue eyes.

Rob laughed even harder as he picked up his keys and cell phone and headed for the door. “You two better stay busy while I’m slaving away over lunch!” he called out.

Chapter Four

“He doesn’t change!” Lori commented, shaking her head. “Tease, tease, and then tease some more.”

“He is so much like Daddy was, though. He is a good Dad, you know,” Trina said seriously. “I certainly hope his two kids realize how fortunate they are to have him.”

“I’m proud of the way he decided to handle Abby’s problem. He didn’t just pretend it didn’t exist. He faced it head on and did what needed to be done to save Abby.”

“I would have done anything to help him, but he didn’t ask it of me,” Lori said, hurt that Rob didn’t come to her.

“I know, honey,” Trina said, and then smiled wickedly as she suggested, “Want to look at that first diary while Rob is gone?”

“I sure do,” Lori quickly agreed.

They’d just picked it up when Trina’s cell phone rang. She took it out of her pocket and looked at the Caller ID. “It’s Rob,” she told Lori. “Yes...?”

“Don’t you two get into those diaries until I get back... or else!” he growled into the phone, and then hung up, laughing when she made a sound of pure exasperation into his ear.

“He’s not going to tell us what we can and can’t do!” Trina declared, her temper asserting itself.

“You sound just like Mama!”

“I should hope to tell you so!” Trina said, and then picked up the diary and opened it. The first several entries were fairly typical of a young girl looking forward to life.

Rob came back and they settled at the kitchen table to eat. “How far did you get?”

“What do you mean?” Trina asked.

“Mama’s diary... How much of it did you read?” he asked knowingly.

“Just some girly stuff that she wrote before she met Daddy,” Lori told him.

“Good, I’m not interested in that stuff. I live with it in my own home right now,” he said with a grin. “Abby is hoping to meet Prince Charming.”

“She needs to go to college first,” Lori stated with conviction.

“I agree,” Trina added. “If you need for us to talk to her, we will. A woman needs an education.”

“Jennifer and I both keep telling her that, and Abby says that she can meet Prince Charming and go to school at the same time. She seems to remember a certain Aunt of hers getting married during her first year of college...” He looked directly at his younger sister.

“But there was never any question of my finishing school,” Lori said, blushing. “I just fell in love with Zack and I knew he was the right man. I still feel the same way about him, and I worked hard to get through school. If anything, I set a good example.”

“You did, but I would rather Abby wait to get involved with a man and marriage until after she graduates.”

“What does she think she wants to do at this point?” Trina asked.

“She is entering pre-med, but she could very well change her mind. Right now there are too many things that capture her interest.”

“She has plenty of time to decide.”

“That is what Mama told her,” Rob said with a smile.

“This was soooo good,” Lori announced, slurping the last of her chocolate milk shake. “I might live now.”

“Me, too, although I probably just gained ten pounds off of this meal,” Trina added.

“You could use another ten pounds, Trina,” Lori stated bluntly.

“No I couldn’t!” Trina argued.

“You both could. Stop worrying about your weight. Mama wasn’t heavy, and neither was Daddy. You’re both doing fine.” Rob hated it when they talked about their weight.

Trina got up and took their trash and stuffed it into the bag. “See, Lori, I am doing the dishes for you!”

“Thanks, Trina!” Lori then looked at Rob and said, “Thanks for cooking, Rob.”

“You’re both very welcome,” he replied with a grin. “What is next, girls?”

“Reading the diaries for an hour or so?” Lori suggested.

“We’d better go back upstairs and do some cleaning and sort out the closets in the hallway, and the bathroom. It’s going to take a while, I’m sure,” Trina told them. “We’ll need to unfold each and every towel, wash cloth, and all of the sheets and blankets to see if they are worth saving.”

“Sounds like an afternoon of fun and games!” Rob remarked, and then followed them up the steps once more. One of the closets was full of towels, and they kept some to use that night, but went through all the rest. Some went into a bag to use as cleaning rags. Most were in good enough shape to donate to the abuse shelter. Another closet was packed with sheets. Those were placed in a box for donation as well. They also found boxes of photos, and other things that none of them could bear to part with. Rob carried them downstairs for them to go through later in the relative comfort of the living room. The bathroom was fairly simple. Most everything in there was their Mama’s personal items, and the half used bottles all went into the trash.

“I think we’re done up here,” Trina said in satisfaction. “The only thing remaining up here is the furniture, and we’ll wait until tomorrow to strip the beds. Let’s go downstairs and take a break.”

“A break is okay, Trina, but just a break. We have a lot to finish off yet, and we promised to get it all done this weekend.” Rob was using his serious, take-charge voice again.

“Brother, dear, we all need a break. I am so thirsty I can’t swallow.” Trina marched off and headed down the steps as fast as she could go.

“Temper, temper!” Rob teased her once again.

“I’m going to show you temper, you little pest!” Trina resorted to the name she called him when he was a child.

Lori giggled when Rob simply stuck out his tongue and gave Trina a raspberry! Trina shot her a dirty look, but then she suddenly started laughing. “Wouldn’t Mama love this!” she managed to say through her laughter. “Fighting like children!”

“I didn’t mean to make you mad, Trina,” Rob pulled her close and gave her a hug before putting a brotherly kiss on her forehead.

“I know you didn’t, Rob. I think this is just getting to me. Getting rid of Mama’s things; getting the house ready to sell. I just miss her so much.” The tears started again, and Rob held her, and then Lori when she started crying, too. Of course, their grief touched his, and he felt tears slide down his cheeks, too. It took a few minutes for all of them to pull themselves together, and then they followed Trina to the kitchen where she poured ice cold water for all of them. They took the glasses with them, walking through the

downstairs, walking from room to room, discussing and tagging items as they went. It was a daunting job, and there were only a few items that more than one of them wanted, but all issues were amicably worked out. Mama had told Trina that specific items went to certain people, and she'd written it all out in a list and gave it to her daughter long before Trina thought she would need it, but in reality, it was only a few months earlier.

It was only four o'clock when Trina firmly called a halt. "I'm too tired to do any more today. I feel like we've been on an emotional roller coaster all day, and I need to sit down, have a glass of wine, and relax."

"I agree," Rob shocked her by saying. "It's time to simply sit down and enjoy an evening together. We can read some of the diary entries if you girls want to, but my back wants a break from all the lifting and carrying."

"Oh, poor you! We haven't been very fair, have we?" Lori was instantly worried about her brother. "I have some ibuprofen in my purse, and a nice hot shower might help your strained muscles."

"I'm okay, Lori. I just want a drink and a seat on a nice soft sofa," he told her with a grin.

"Sit down and I'll bring you something," she offered, and Rob didn't argue. "Trina, you sit down, too. You must be tired."

"I'll get the diary," Trina said, and she went and got the first couple off the pile. She couldn't wait to read them, but she waited for her sister before starting to read. She didn't want to disappoint her if she read something special, and Lori already said how she was looking forward to learning about how her Mama felt when she met the man she was to love and marry. Once Lori returned with a tray of ice water, and a pitcher of more, she sat down and waited for Trina to start reading. Rob pretended to snooze until Mama met Daddy, and then he as caught up in their story as his sisters.

Things went well until the first time Mama butted up against one of Daddy's pet peeves, being late. Daddy warned her that she had to be ready at a certain time to go to his work Christmas party, and she promised she would be ready on time. Well, she wasn't, and Daddy was furious with her and since her parents were already at a Christmas party, he turned her over his knee and gave her a sound spanking, and then he went on to the party... alone. They read how devastated Mama was that evening when she didn't get to go to the grown-up party, and how upset she was at being spanked like a naughty child.

"Poor Mama!" Lori felt terrible for her, but quickly learned her brother and sister felt differently. "I can't believe the two of you think Daddy was right! It was terrible of him to disappoint her like that!"

"She was acting like a child, Lori," Trina said. "You know as well as I do that she was purposely showing Daddy that he couldn't tell her what to do. She wanted him to wait on

her, and that was just wrong when she knew he was hoping she would make a good impression on his employer. It might be all right for a higher up in the company to walk in the door late, but not the newest employee. You know that Daddy explained all of that to her.”

“Daddy hated being late to things of that sort.”

“I remember when RJ and I were dating; RJ was late for the third time in a row and Daddy met him at the door and said that if he couldn’t show up on time then he wasn’t treating me as I deserved to be treated and he didn’t need to come back. RJ called the next day and apologized and promised he wouldn’t be late again, and he never was. Daddy thought it was disrespectful to me. I am sure he felt the same when Mama wasn’t ready on time.”

“I still feel sorry for Mama. You know that Grandmother was the one who taught her to be late and to keep a gentleman caller waiting... Mama was very young at the time,” Lori insisted.

“She was old enough to know that Daddy didn’t appreciate waiting for her,” Rob argued. “Read on, Trina. What happened next?”

Trina read:

December 13, 1952

Henry didn’t come by today. I feel he owes me an apology, and even if he does come, I am not going to forgive him right away!

December 14, 1952

Another day without Henry! He must be very angry with me, but I am angry with him, too! He treated me like a child, and my bottom is still tender when I sit on a wooden seat. I wonder what he is doing? Apparently not thinking a bit about me...

December 15, 1952

I did not feel like going to work today. My heart hurt, and I knew that the others would ask about the party. I simply didn’t know what I could say that wouldn’t sound childish. I managed to stay busy most of the morning in the file room, and then Mr. Grayson gave me dictation for another hour. It was nearly time for lunch and I looked up to see Henry standing beside my desk. “Are you free for lunch, Alice?” he asked, and before I remembered that I was angry with him, I was agreeing to go. He sent me to get my coat, and we went to Benny’s for burgers and fries. Henry did not apologize for spanking me, and he told me not to expect one. He scolded me again, and told me how disappointed he was to go to the party alone. He told me that promptness is very important to him, and if we were going to continue seeing each other, I would need to learn to be on time. I told

him I would try, and he said I should try real hard because he would probably spank me harder and longer if I kept him waiting again. I didn't know whether to be angry or just accept it as Henry's way of blustering. He walked me back to my desk, said goodbye and then kissed me on the cheek in front of everyone who was looking our way! I found that exciting.

"That sounds like Daddy. Firm and loving at the same time," Lori commented. "I'm so relieved they got back together."

"You already knew they got back together, Lori, or none of us would be sitting here," Rob teased her.

"Oh, you know what I mean! I hated seeing her so unhappy."

"I am beginning to think there was an entire side to our folks that we knew nothing about," he said.

"I think we are seeing them as Alice and Henry right now, and not as Mama and Daddy," Trina said softly. "Do either of you keep a journal like Mama's?" she asked. "I do, and I never once thought about the day my children would discover them and want to read them."

"Will you destroy them?" Lori asked.

"No. I think that it will be good for them to know how I felt as a young girl and a woman newly in love."

"Are you getting tired of reading aloud yet, Trina?" Rob asked. "I'll spell you whenever you want."

"I'm fine," she answered, and then looked at the diary before saying, "The next few entries are all about work and some woman named Clara who was retiring, and everyone in the office speculating on who will get her job. Here we go, back to Mama and Daddy."

December 20, 1952

Henry told me that he loves me! I am excited and so happy. He wants us to get married next summer! I know that Mama will be happy, but I don't know about Papa. He doesn't like Henry very much for some reason. I will need to tell him when he is in just the right mood.

December 21, 1952

Henry decided to speak to Papa about us before I could prepare him! Papa told Henry that I am too young to get married. I feel like crying! Papa refused to discuss the

situation with me tonight and sent me up here like a troublesome child! Henry said that Papa will soon come around, but I am not so sure I believe that.

December 24, 1952

Christmas with Henry's family was very different from Christmas at home. His parents are so formal, and they expect us to have a very formal wedding. Mama has always said the bride is the one who plans the wedding, so I fear that Henry's parents will be very disappointed. Of course, I will take Henry's wishes into account, but there is no way our guest list will include the five hundred close friends and acquaintances that his Mother feels should be invited. I also think that giving money as a Christmas gift is rather cold. I remarked on this to Henry, and he smiled and said he expected our family's Christmas will be just as foreign to him as his was to me.

December 25, 1952

Merry Christmas!! What a wonderful day! Henry was here early, and Papa made him feel welcome. Dorothy was home with Bill and baby Judy. There were lots of presents, and I do think Mama was disappointed that Henry didn't give me an engagement ring. I know he loves me and he wants to marry me, and I know he is waiting for Papa to accept him a bit more. He is showing Papa respect. I think Papa likes that a lot. What a wonderful, magical day. Oh, I guess I should share that Henry gave me a new coat. He said that mine wasn't warm enough to suit him. Mama loved the coat, and so did I. I gave Henry a new sweater. I guess we both wanted to keep the other warm.

January 1, 1953

Henry took me to a New Year's Eve party, and this time I made sure I was ready well ahead of time just in case Henry came early! I did not want another spanking; in fact, I do not wish another spanking as long as I live. I told Henry that, and he said that he wouldn't spank me again... as long as I behaved as I should. I guess that leaves it all up to me, doesn't it?

"Mama is so cute, even then."

Chapter Five

“She was being practical, Rob.”

“Yes, but she knew who was responsible for getting her into trouble, don’t you think?”

“I just cannot believe that Mama had to worry about such things,” Trina told them. “I mean, she always seemed so confident and in control, but she really did want to please Daddy, even then, and do you both recall how she always catered to him... making sure she fixed him a chocolate cake even on our birthdays and we would pick something we liked? Daddy had to be treated special.”

“She loved him, and I think it was that simple, Trina. If Mama didn’t love him she wouldn’t have gone out of her way to make each day special for Daddy.”

“Do you do that for Jennifer, Rob?”

“I didn’t for a long time,” he confessed, “but I learned that she needed to feel my love in tangible ways, too. She is doing the same for me. She knows I like those flavored creamers for my coffee, and she’s been buying them for me. Just little things, like making fried chicken once in a while instead of always doing the skinless, boneless breasts on the indoor grill. It might sound simple, but those little things do make a difference. We’re happy.”

“That is so good to hear, Rob.” Lori smiled at him. “Mama wanted you to be happy, and she worried at times that you weren’t.”

“Yes, she told me as much. I think she was pleased when she saw Jenn and I turn things around. Now, what about you two? We’ve talked entirely too much about me and my family this weekend and the two of you have been mum on the state of your unions.”

“Well, I do have some news,” Lori admitted, her cheeks pink.

She hesitated so long before speaking that Trina and Rob both said, “Well?”

“I am pregnant,” she said, then looked at each of them to gauge their reactions.

“Okay, brat. That was funny. Now, what is really going on?” Rob asked.

“I’m due in December,” Lori continued, her smile fading a bit.

“Lori, are you serious?” Trina asked, shocked.

“Yes, and believe me, I know how old I am. Zack was in shock when I told him. We thought the boys were it, but what we took for early menopause clearly wasn’t.”

“Have you been to the doctor, honey?” Rob asked, his expression one of concern.

“Oh, yes. As soon as I suspected it was possible. She has done every test, and so far, so good. I didn’t want to tell anyone right away because I was afraid, and then we lost Mama... I was so afraid I’d lose this baby, and once the shock wore off, I realized how much I wanted to have her.”

“It’s a girl? You know already?” Trina asked, surprised.

“Yes, it is a girl. I want to name her for Mama,” Lori admitted.

“And you let me fix you a drink, and pour you wine!” Trina scolded.

“I dumped them when you weren’t looking,” Lori confessed, smiling in pure mischief.

“Good! Oh, Lori, what a surprise this is!”

“Will you both be there?” she asked. “I’m scared. And I don’t want Zack and the boys to go through this alone.”

“You bet we’ll be there, honey,” Rob promised. “How is Zack handling this?”

“He’s amazing,” Lori answered with a happy smile. “He’s a wonderful father, and he’s delighted we’re having a little girl. He said he’s going to have to touch up his gray or people will think she is his granddaughter instead of his daughter!”

“He’d better be supportive or I would give him what for!” Trina promised indignantly.

“The thing that has been worrying me so much lately is about Mama and me,” Lori told them. “This little darling,” she said as she patted her tummy, “is an oops baby, and I am positive that I was an oops, too. I just want to know if Mama was upset at the prospect of having me.”

“Lori, that is simply not true,” Trina stated matter-of-factly. “Mama simply glowed with excitement and love.”

“Are you sure?” Lori tearfully asked.

“Oh, *hell* yes, I’m sure. I’ll prove it.” Trina jumped up and went to the box of journals until she found the right one. She looked through until she found what she wanted. Now listen here...

Today I learned that Henry and I are going to be blessed with another child. Henry was so happy, and so am I. I couldn't wait to tell Trina, and she asked a million questions that I wasn't sure how to answer, so I simply told the truth. I made sure to keep it very simple, but I feel lying about such things is wrong. Trina promised she would help with the baby, even if it should be another boy. I had to laugh. I would not mind a boy; our little Rob is so special, but I would also love another baby girl. I am sure Mama is going to tell me I am too old to have another child, but then, as long as Henry and I are pleased I cannot see what it should matter to anyone else.

"Now, does that sound like she was upset to have a little oops baby? In fact, I'm not so sure you were an oops, Lori. And, even if your little girl is an oops, it doesn't mean she won't be loved. Why, you and Zack are already in love with her, and so am I!" Trina declared.

"It's all hormones, Lori," Rob said calmly, finding the box of tissues and handing them to her before he sat beside her to wrap his arm around her and give her a big hug. "We'll be there for you all the way, honey. This family could use another baby."

"There will be two new babies in time for Christmas," Trina confided.

"Trina, if you tell me that you are pregnant, I am going to faint!" Rob promised.

Lori giggled. Trina just smiled and said, "I am to be a grandma."

"Mikey and Claire?" Lori asked in surprise.

"No. It's Jeff. He and his girlfriend are expecting, and both of them are planning to drop out of college. Jeff found a construction job, and Liz is going back to her old profession, medical transcribing, so that they can make a living. Jeff said he is trying to talk Liz into getting married, but she doesn't want to force him into anything he doesn't want."

"What do you think they should do?" Rob knew his sister well, and he knew she was upset as could be. Jeff had plans to be a lawyer, and dropping out of school in his second year wasn't the way to make that happen.

"If they are truly in love, they should get married. If not, then he is still going to be a father and he needs to be there for his child. I just don't want this child to disappear from our lives if the parents don't make it. RJ and I want to be grandparents to this baby, and it will be difficult at best if they don't marry. Mama would be sitting here shaking her head."

"She believed in marriage before babies, that is for sure," Rob agreed. He looked at his watch and said, "I think we all need to check in with our families and then find some dinner. No alcohol or junk food for you, young lady," he bossed, pointing his finger at his younger sister. "We are going to take care of you now. And no more chocolate, either." Rob frowned at her.

“It was just a piece of candy, and I won’t indulge again,” Lori promised.

“It better not, or I’ll tell Zack you need a spanking.”

“Don’t do that! I’ve convinced him that a pregnant lady shouldn’t be spanked!” she said with a giggle.

“Zack spansk you?” Trina asked, shocked as could be.

“I’m not perfect, Trina, and Zack deals with things in his own way. I was shocked to realize that Daddy did the same to Mama! And when Rob said the same, I was amazed. I thought I was the only one, and I didn’t want you guys to know my secret. What about you, Trina? Does RJ ever spank you?”

“I’m not going to talk about it!” she replied, turning red.

“That means he does,” Rob told Lori with a grin. “I’m betting it has to do with that hotheaded temper of hers, too.”

“Ohhhhhh, you!” Trina whispered, irate. “It’s none of your business.”

“And I’m guessing from the way she’s acting that she is in a bit of trouble right now. My guess is that she is interfering in Jeff’s life after being told by RJ to butt out, and if he finds out he is going to set her fanny on fire. How’s that for guessing, Trina?” Rob asked with a little brother’s instincts to get right to the heart of the matter.

“Well, RJ is certainly not doing one thing to help Jeff resolve this situation, so I had a talk with Liz. I know that RJ didn’t want me to, but he isn’t always right, you know.”

“From the way you are squirming, my guess is that RJ already knows about this and he’s already told you what to expect when you get home tomorrow, right?”

“Damn it, Rob! You are such a pain in the butt sometimes!”

“It’s nice to know I haven’t lost my touch,” he stated, then ducked when she threw a pillow at his head. “Now, watch that temper, Trina. I’ll have to call RJ and have him add ‘throwing things’ to the list.”

“You just butt out!” she ordered.

“I am starting to get hungry. What can we have tonight? Chinese?” Lori suggested.

“Sounds great to me. Trina...?”

“Yes, of course. Rob, you call,” she bossed. She needed a moment or two to get herself under control. RJ was going to do exactly what Rob predicted, and Trina was not looking forward to a spanking at her age. It had been three years at least since she’d had a discipline spanking, and she was a bit shocked that RJ was going to do something of that sort. After they ate dinner, she was going to suggest they continue with the diaries so that Rob wouldn’t press for any more answers. Hearing about Mama was safer than talking about them... Unless Rob wanted to talk about spanking Jennifer. Now *that* would be all right with her, and probably with Lori, too.

“What are you smiling about?” Lori whispered since Rob was on the phone ordering all sorts of tempting dishes.

“I was picturing Jennifer over Rob’s knee getting her fat behind smacked red,” Trina admitted gleefully. Lori giggled in response, and from the look Rob leveled on them, Trina was afraid he overheard what she said.

“I’m sorry,” she said as soon as he ended the call. “I was being rude.”

“What do you have against Jenn?” Rob asked quietly, all traces of his usual personality gone. He was angry with her, and it showed.

“I never thought she respected you or loved you, Rob. She seemed lazy and willing to have you do everything for the kids.”

“Do you know why that is, girls?” he asked. “Jenn was afraid you’d fault her for doing things her way and not the ‘family’ way. She sees both of you as being perfect and herself as a failure... no matter how hard she tries.”

“That is ridiculous!” Lori said, shocked. “What we found wrong was the way she treated you!”

“She always sits on her butt, letting you help out in the kitchen, or with the kids. She avoids being with us.” Trina was telling the truth.

“Now, isn’t this a trip...? I never believed Jenn was right, and I never thought that the two of you looked down on her. And, to know that you both want the same thing! I’m going to ask you both to give Jenn a chance. Girls, she does love me, and she isn’t a bit lazy... just afraid of you two.”

“I never once suspected that, Rob. I’m sorry,” Trina said, and she meant the words. “I will apologize to Jennifer, and let her know that I wouldn’t have found fault with her for that. I just couldn’t see the love.”

“It’s there, honey. Jenn is my life.”

“We’ll make it right, Rob,” Lori promised. “It makes me feel lower than the lowest to realize that we were making things so difficult for you and for her.”

“Now that the problem is recognized, we can make it work. Jenn will be happy, too.” He pointed at the diary and said, “Read on, Trina. It will be a while before dinner arrives.”

“I found this one,” she said. “It’s when Mama bought all the shoes, and I’m anxious to see how Mama’s version compared to mine.”

May 10, 1956

I set a very bad example for Trina today. Rob is too little to notice, but I am sure our little girl is very confused. She heard Henry tell me ‘no’ to buying new shoes to go with my new dress. I tried to explain to him that none of my shoes go well with the dress, but he is a man and just doesn’t understand. Instead of accepting the ‘no’ and trying to talk him into changing his mind, I permitted my darn temper to get the best of me. I not only took the children to the shoe store with me, I bought four, yes FOUR pairs of new shoes, and all of them were quite expensive. I used money that we put back for our vacation, and that was foolish as could be. But, my temper was in control, and it wasn’t until I got home and started figuring on Henry’s reaction that I began to question my judgment. I was so nervous! I changed clothes several times, trying to pick an outfit that would show off my assets and make him happy he’d married me and not someone else. However, I am afraid I looked exactly like a spoiled woman trying to manipulate my husband. Trina even asked me at the store if her Daddy would be mad since he told me ‘no’, and I brushed it off. Who will be to blame when Trina ignores a ‘no’ from her Daddy? It will be my fault because my example was poor. Henry came home, smelled the chicken, which is too expensive for a weeknight, and he knew that I’d done something wrong. I didn’t want to tell him until after he’d eaten, and hope that the fried chicken, creamed corn, and the chocolate cake would put him in a forgiving frame of mind. I heard him ask Trina what she’d done today, and with a child’s innocence, she told him the truth... all of it... including the four pairs of shoes I bought in defiance. Henry was angry, but he did not show it in front of the children, and for that I am grateful. He enjoyed his dinner, played and read to the children, and helped put them to bed. Then he sent me to our room with an order to stand in the corner and think about why he might be upset with me.

The doorbell rang and Rob hurried to answer the door. Trina tried to make him let her pay since he picked up McDonald’s earlier, and Lori was of the same mind, but Rob got all firm and said he was the man and he was doing the paying. “We are equal in this house, little brother!” Trina told him.

“Yes, we are,” Lori chimed in.

Rob looked at them both and grinned. “I’m bigger.” The delivery boy just grinned and winked at Rob when he paid. Rob added a tip, and then whispered loudly, “They are so going to kill me when you leave.” The young man laughed openly, and then told them to enjoy their meal. “Let’s eat, girls. I am truly famished. I got a lot of different things, so

I hope you like something. It didn't occur to me that I should have asked before I made the call."

Trina ran and got plates and napkins and forks and large spoons to serve them. Lori fixed ice water for them, and they filled their plates and enjoyed the simple meal. "This is so good," Lori said with her mouth full. "You like all the same stuff I do, Rob."

"Lori, you are pregnant. If we don't feed you, we are risking our lives. I ordered extra. Eat alllll you want," Rob teased.

Trina shook her head at his antics, but Lori simply giggled and she ate her fill, as did she and Rob. "This was such a good idea," she admitted. "RJ doesn't eat Chinese food and I don't get to enjoy it very often."

Rob cleared everything away, and he even insisted on doing the few dishes they had. When he returned, he said, "Read on...."

Trina was ready and just waiting on him. "Okay, Daddy sent Mama to the corner...."

I had no choice but to do as Henry said. I was in the wrong and I knew it. Henry didn't keep me waiting long. He said, "I cannot believe you ignored my wishes and you went out and bought four pairs of shoes, Alice. We cannot afford that extravagance right now." I started crying. I was ashamed of myself. To my surprise, Henry took me in his arms and hugged me. "It isn't the end of the world, honey. You can return them, right?" I told him that I would do so first thing tomorrow morning, and I will. I then shamefully confessed to teaching our daughter to be disrespectful. Henry promised me that my guilt and shame would soon be gone. He took me to the bed, where he sat down and then turned me over his knee and started spanking. It hurt. Henry is a very strong man, and he was justified in punishing me for my disobedience and for showing him such disrespect in front of our children. I cried out, asking him to stop, but knowing he wouldn't for a good long while. But, he did stop, but it was only to pull up my dress and slip, and to take down my panties, baring me for an even harder spanking. I couldn't help crying, and when my bottom felt like it was on fire, I asked him to please stop. He didn't... until we heard Trina calling out for us. Henry sent me straight back to the corner with orders to think about what he promised he would do if I bought shoes after he said not to! Well, I was too horrified worrying over what Trina heard outside our door to worry about what he said the day before. I did stand in the corner, and when he came back I asked about Trina. Henry chuckled and said she was stalling about going to sleep, as usual, and he got her a drink of water and tucked her in. She asked him about the noise she heard, and laughed when he clapped his hands together. I was relieved that Henry handled it so well, and I told him so. He then asked if I recalled what he promised me, and I had to confess I didn't. When he told me that he'd promised to spank me with my hairbrush, I felt insulted. I asked if he said that when he was shaking his finger at me, and he nodded that it was. I made it clear that it angered me when he did that. He raised his eyebrow in displeasure and then gave me a hard smack on my burning bottom and told me to bring him my hairbrush. I tried to talk him out of it, until Henry told me I

was only making the spanking worse by arguing with him. I got my brush and handed it to him, and then asked, 'How many?' His reply was unsettling. 'As many as I see fit to give you, disobedient little wife.' Oh my, the hairbrush really hurt and I was soon begging him to stop. That is when little Trina started crying right outside our door! I knew she'd heard us, and I wanted to go to her, but Henry said he would handle it. He told me to take off my clothes and put on my nightgown because I was going straight to bed after he finished spanking me. I heard Henry in the hallway, trying to calm Trina, but he wasn't having much success. Then he called for me to put on my robe and come to her room. Of course I went. She is my baby. Trina thought it was her fault that Henry was spanking me! I wanted to sink through the floor. I gave her a hug and told her that it was my fault. I'd done something I knew was wrong, and Daddy loved me too much to permit me to behave badly and to set a bad example for her and baby Rob. It took some time, but she finally went to sleep. Henry apologized to me for not making sure that Trina was sound asleep before he punished me, and he promised he would make sure we had complete privacy from then on. I thanked him, but then he told me to pull up my robe and gown, and he took up the hairbrush again and gave me to understand that I would not buy something we couldn't afford ever again. I promised, and I will keep that promise. I do not ever want another spanking with my hairbrush. I needed comforting after such a lengthy and sound spanking, and I went to great lengths to show Henry that he was still my love and that I am so sorry for my behavior. Henry fell asleep quickly afterwards, but not until he told me that I could keep the pair of shoes that looked so nice with my new dress. He said that it was rare for me to ask for something, and he felt he should have known it was important to me. I personally believe he felt guilty that Trina overheard him spanking me and he wanted to make it up to me, and this was his way. Now I must tiptoe back to bed and go to sleep... On my tummy, of course.

Trina read a few more incidents that none of them had a clue about at the time, but made sense now.

"We lost Mama so fast that none of us had the opportunity to tell her goodbye," Rob said what they all knew. "I am thankful for this time with you girls in order to say goodbye to Mama. It's given me a sense of peace with her sudden death."

Both Trina and Lori nodded in understanding. They all looked at each other and said in unison, "Goodbye, Mama. We love you."

The End