

Blast from the Past

By Mel and Joy

A short story tells of someone from Jack's past intervening in his "happy" life. Will this mystery woman hurt Jack and Erica's friendship or help them explore new possibilities? Read and find out!

Chapter 1

Pine Valley Inn Dining Room

"Mmmm.... this veal is delicious" Jack mumbled with his mouth full of food

"Jack, it isn't polite to talk with your mouth full, especially in public" Erica hissed sharply.

"I'm not a child Erica, you don't have to talk to me like one" Jack shot back still chewing

"Ssshhh..... you'll make a scene."

"I'm not the one making a scene, you are" Jack swallowed his food.

"Oh please, you're sitting over there showing chewed meat to the entire dining room and you say I'm causing a scene" Erica's voice rose slightly.

"Geez, can't we just have one quiet dinner together" Bianca interrupted as she drew their attention to the people staring from close tables. "We try to have one small lunch together and you two have to turn it into a warzone.

"Well it was your idea to come here Bianca" Erica said defensively

"And my bad luck to be eating here at the same time" Jack sighed

"Well Jack if you want us to leave" Erica started to rise.

"No, no... wait, look, let's just all calm down and act like we're having a normal family gathering shall we" Jack backed off slightly.

"Yeah, just a simple gathering between a famous celebrity, her ex-lover who also happened to be her brother in law, and her lesbian daughter who is the niece of the same ex-lover." Bianca said

sarcastically.

"OK, so this isn't a normal family, but we're all we have and we need to stick together" Jack gave Bianca a sharp look..

"Jack's right Bianca, your uncle and I are about the only family you have left" Erica chimed in

"Well there's Barbara and Molly and....." Bianca's voice trailed.... "OK, I apologize, I was out of line with that last jab" she hung her head.

"Out of line perhaps but not off the mark" Jack chuckled to lighten the mood. "We are a pretty odd combination when you think about it."

The mood lightened again and they were no longer drawing attention from the other diners when their peaceful chatter was interrupted.

"JACKSON MONTGOMERY, IS THAT REALLY YOU?!" A shrill voice rang out across the dining room. Every eye turned to look at the woman who had just entered. She was fashionably dressed with shoulder length blonde hair and a wide grin on her face, wildly waving over in the direction of Jack's table.

"Jack, who is that" Erica whispered as she turned to face Jack. To her surprise he was as white as a sheet. He barely managed to rise as the woman approached the table and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Oh it's so good to see you again" she squealed rocking back and forth with her arms around his neck practically choking him in her excitement.

Erica and Bianca exchanged amused glances at the display yet remained silent..

"Scarlett, how nice to see you again." Jack managed to croak out while unwrapping himself from her embrace.

"Oh I never thought I'd see you again, this is just fate!" she gushed, "Look I'd love to sit down and meet your friends but let me run powder my nose real quick after that plane ride and I'll be right back, don't move a muscle sugar" she cooed as she dashed off to the ladies room.

"Old friend?" Bianca snickered

"Look, you two can tease me later ok, but I've only got a few seconds before she gets back and I've got to ask a favor." Jack said speaking rapidly and looking over his shoulder.

"Well ask away Jack, worse we can do is say no" Erica laughed amused at his discomfort. "Erica, I'm being serious, look yes this is an old girlfriend, and no I can't say anymore right now, but this would be a huge favor" Jack gulped before continuing. "Erica I need you to pretend that we are seriously involved for the brief time she's in town, you know, act territorial and all that, just until she leaves"

"Well Jack that's kinda silly, why don't you just tell her you aren't interested in her"

"No Erica, you don't understand...." Jack panicked as he saw Scarlett emerge from the ladies room. "If our friendship ever meant anything to you...." he pleaded under his breath breaking off as Scarlett approached the table once again.

Chapter 2

"Whew, what a flight" Scarlett sighed, "Now let's find out who our dining companions are" she boldly reached across the table to shake Bianca's hand. "Scarlett Hughes, Advertising Executive extraordinaire and just lovable in general to everyone I meet." She gushed.

"Bianca Montgomery, nice to meet you" Bianca remained polite despite the overwhelming urge to roll her eyes.

"You must be related to Jackson, surely you're not his daughter are you?" Scarlett's eyes widened slightly and the look of happiness faded minutely.

"No, I'm his niece" Bianca clarified.

"Oh that's wonderful" Scarlett perked back up and turned her attention to Erica. "Well you heard my introduction already, and the legendary Erica Kane needs no introduction" she said while reaching out her hand. "It's a privilege to meet you Ms. Kane".

"Pleased to meet you as well Ms. Hughes" Erica said cordially

though getting annoyed at the constant gush of words flowing from this woman's mouth. The constant perky attitude was really starting to grate on her nerves.

"I hope I didn't interrupt a business meeting or anything?"

"Oh no, we were just having a simple lunch." Jack replied, hoping that Erica would decide to go along with his earlier plea.

"Still unmarried I hope?" Scarlett said bluntly, seductively turning her full attention on Jack and effectively excluding Erica and Bianca off from the conversation.

Jack laughed nervously unsure of how to reply. "Well....."

"Yes he is" Erica interjected. Jack was starting to contemplate methods of escape when Erica continued. "I still haven't managed to get him to propose."

Jack's sigh of relief was almost audible as Scarlett straightened up to re-evaluate the trio. "So you two are....." she raised an eyebrow critically. "Involved, yes." Jack finished almost gleefully.

"I see" The disappointment was evident as there was a brief pause while she recomposed herself. "We'll still have to get together to discuss old times though. I'll be in room 712, and perhaps we can get together later?"

"You're staying in town for awhile?" Jack asked innocently

"Oh yes, I should be around for a week at least, possibly more" she grinned, I'm here negotiating an advertising campaign for IncredibleDreams.com, how about tonight, you could come up to my room and we can.... visit" she smiled, her meaning not lost on any of them.

"Well I would but I've promised Erica a night on the town" Jack sounded sincerely apologetic

"Couldn't you change your plans considering I'm in town?"

"No, he can't" Erica interrupted. "Tonight isn't just a regular date it's an anniversary"

"Anniversary of...." Scarlett seemed dubious.

"Why don't you tell her Jack darling" Erica said sweetly, trying to pass the buck since she didn't have a clue as to what to say next.

"Oh sure, well it's the 10th anniversary of when we first declared our neverending love for one another" Jack grinned convincingly.

"Ten years? that's quite a lengthy relationship I must say." A definite tone of suspicion had entered Scarlett's voice.

"Well the path hasn't always been a smooth one" Jack hastily added.

"Right, we hit some rough spots but now we're back together and happy as can be" Erica beamed while reaching over to hold Jack's hand.

"Right, together forever" Jack said lifting Erica's hand to plant a quick kiss on it. Erica couldn't refrain from an honest blush at the feel of his lips brushing against her hand.

"I hate to leave but Mr. Lavery just arrived and we have an appointment so I must excuse myself. I'll definitely be seeing you later" Scarlett broke the moment as she rose to leave, a frosty air apparent which was a startling change to the way she had entered.

"Whew, am I glad that's over?" Jack sighed, "Let's get out of here and I'll fill you in on some details about my old friend"

Chapter 3

"So is she like psycho or something" Bianca asked as soon as they entered her Mother's house.

"She seemed a little creepy there at the end, this isn't a fatal attraction type thing is it?" Erica sounded worried.

"No no, she's not psycho, just a little emotionally high strung when it comes to love" Jack smiled reassuringly.

"OK, well tell us how it all began than, and why it is you felt that you needed to use me as a shield instead of being your usual straightforward self" Erica said as she and Bianca sat back on the sofa and gazed expectantly at Jack.

Jack took a deep breath as he began to tell the story of himself and Scarlett.

"It began back while I was in high school." He paused for a moment and sighed.

"Wow, that's a long time ago." Bianca's jaw dropped.

"Look, it wasn't during the dark ages or anything," Jack retorted, "but yes it was several years ago."

"Anyway I wasn't the most popular kid in school, to tell the truth I was still a bit gangly and well not very popular with the ladies, if I had it I'd show you a yearbook picture"

"I don't believe it Jack, you're gorgeous and always have been, I bet all the ladies found you irresistible" Erica argued.

Jack blushed at her outright compliment and couldn't help but feel a small pang of joy that she still found him attractive.

"At 17 and a Junior in High School, I hadn't quite finished up the growth spurt, I had gotten tall but was pretty thin which got me teased a lot about being a beanpole, etc. I certainly wasn't captain of the football team or even into the sports teams at all. Anyway Scarlett was one of the more popular girls and I used to think she was the most gorgeous girl I'd ever seen." Jack paused a moment staring dreamily into the space of the past.

"And..." Bianca prompted.

"I asked her to a school banquet and to my surprise she accepted. We had a pleasant time together and soon became inseparable."

"I bet she discovered the strong caring person beneath that awkward teen. You've always had a heart of gold" Erica complimented again causing Jack to blush.

"By the end of our senior year my popularity had really increased. I don't know whether it was because of her or that my body had started catching up. But I was starting to catch some admiring looks from other women on campus. We both went on to the same college and our relationship continued. I lived in the dorm however due to finances while she had an off-campus apartment. We even talked about marriage."

"Sounds like the perfect high school romance, what happened?"

Bianca was curious

"Well when I saw all those pretty young co-eds who were giving me warm glances I kinda decided that I'd like to play the field a bit so I told her I thought we should see other people and not be so exclusive" Jack blushed again at this admission.

"So basically you dropped her so you could play the field. That was a little cold wasn't it." Erica scolded mildly.

"Well I didn't think I should marry the first person I seriously dated, plus though I really liked her that special spark was never there." Jack tried to defend himself.

"Well did you find that special spark with the other girls?" Asked Bianca

"Well no, actually I've only found that spark once in my life" Jack admitted almost nervously, which caused Erica's ears to immediately perk.

"Oh really Jackson, and who would that special someone be, anyone I know?" she said in more than a suggestive tone.

"Well that doesn't matter at this moment does it?" Jack gulped and chuckled a little nervously, not wanting to bare his soul and his feelings at this time to Erica who had correctly assumed that she was that one special person he had found.

"Scarlett didn't take the news very well. She had already planned our wedding and subscribed to Bride's Magazine as I found out later. I really didn't realize how into this relationship she was. So yes things got a little messy, I got even more nervous about the depth of commitment she expected and so I decided to break things off completely."

"Typical guy being afraid of commitment" Erica muttered.

"I don't recall him being afraid of commitment with you Mom, how many times did he propose again?" Bianca teased making her mother turn slightly red.

"She does have a point doesn't she" Jack gloated for a moment before continuing. "She worked hard to win me back, insinuating

herself into my life at every turn, ruining my relationships with others by telling them lies about me. Finally I got tired of it all and went to her apartment to confront her and tell her to back off. She wasn't home but I used the key she had given me awhile back to go in and wait for her. I couldn't believe her apartment, she had pictures of us together all over the place.

"You know this is beginning to sound psycho to me" Bianca interrupted.

"Look, I told you she's not psycho, just easily blinded by love and has a hard time dealing with closure" Jack defended Scarlett.

"She came home and was embarrassed that I had seen all the pictures, she begged and pleaded for me to come back to her, telling me how much she loved me and that she couldn't live without me, and so on and so forth, and well I caved in and got back together with her" Jack admitted almost sheepishly.

"Geez, some women think their whole lives have to revolve around a man." Bianca groaned..... "No references to you intended Mom" she hastily amended as she saw Erica's eyebrows raise in one of those "You'd better not be talking about me" tone.

"So how did you get out of it again?" Erica asked, feeling the need to get the topic moving again.

"Well I decided to leave school, I wasn't enjoying the college scene that much anyway, especially with my reputation being smeared all over campus in her attempts to keep any other women from wanting to date me so I told her that I was going to join the army and had to leave."

"And she let you go that easily?" Bianca said incredulously.

"Well she let me go after I had promised to write every day and that we would be married as soon as I returned from the service"

"And she never heard from you again right?" Erica finished for him.

"Well..... yeah." Jack hung his head.

"And now you want me to help you because you are trying to keep her from wanting to rekindle the old flame since she never knew that

you're leaving college was to get away from her, right?"

"I know it sounds silly Erica but she is so persistent, she has always managed to walk over me and I figured with another strong woman in the picture who can't be misled by her false tales, and won't back down then she would have no choice but to give me up."

"This was so long ago Uncle Jack, what makes you think she's still interested in you that way?"

"That is a good point Jack, she may be all over that now and just want to catch up as friends"

"Maybe, but I'm not sure" Jack remained unconvinced. "I mean look at how she was at lunch, she was very warm and friendly until she got the impression that we were a couple."

"Well that is true? The tone did change pretty quickly." Erica agreed.

"How about we just play this thing by ear and if she's changed then I'll let you off the hook Erica, but if not then it will only be a week that you have to pretend that we are together, you can do that can't you?" Jack entreated once again.

"OK, Jack, I still think it's silly but I'll help you out while she's around" Erica conceded, "I guess that means I have a date this evening then?"

"Uh yeah, I'll pick you up around 7." Jack said, "Want to join us Bianca?"

"No I need to work on a school project with Laura, plus I can't see it appearing to be a very romantic date if you are dragging me along. You two have fun and bring me some takeout OK?" Bianca said as she picked up her backpack and headed out the door for Laura's.

"OK, so I'll see you around seven." Jack said to Erica as he rose to leave

"See you then, oh but where are we going? And are you thinking casual or black tie?"

"How about SOS and casual dress?" Jack replied after thinking for a moment.

"Sounds great! And Jack..... you owe me one" Erica winked with a smile on her face as Jack made his way to the door.

"And don't think that I will ever doubt you won't let me forget it either" Jack laughed as he left to start making plans for the evening.

Chapter 4

7:00 PM Erica's house

Erica was ready and sitting in the living room when Jack arrived promptly. She inhaled sharply at how handsome he was in his black slacks and turtleneck with a gray suit jacket.

"Well we won't clash will we?" Jack grinned as he appraised her outfit of a simple yet flattering black dress that clung perfectly to her curves, with appreciative eyes. "Aside from people asking us where the funeral is probably not." Erica laughed as she took his extended arm as he guided her out the door and to the car.

SOS

"Coast looks clear to me." Jack said scanning the room after they had been seated. Since there was no sign of the amorous Scarlett the two were able to keep the appearance fairly simple, though they were both aware of a few wondering eyes on them and the speculations rippling through the customers in SOS.

"Well I think we've done enough, especially considering she didn't come" Jack said while holding Erica on the dance floor.

"Yes, dinner was fantastic, and we've danced a few dances, obviously she isn't tracking you down to check your story" Erica agreed as the dance was ending.

Out of the corner of his eye Jack suddenly saw a harried Scarlett burst into the room and start anxiously scanning the crowd. Without warning he grabbed Erica and spun her around into a kiss just as Scarlett noticed their presence. Erica gasped in surprise as his lips claimed hers but quickly recovered as she wrapped her arms around his neck and threaded her fingers into his hair. At the feel of her fingernails lightly scratching the back of his neck Jack increased the intensity of the kiss enjoying the sweet familiar taste that was uniquely Erica. There's no telling how long the kiss would have gone

on if not for Scarlett's interruption. The first thing they noticed when they broke apart was that they had the attention of pretty much everyone in the room at such a kiss on the dance floor.

"AHEM!" Scarlett cleared her throat loudly for the second time causing the couple to reluctantly turn and look at the spectacle before them. Scarlett was wearing a dress so revealing it was barely legal and a large white magnolia hair clip.

"Oh, uh Scarlett, how nice to see you again." Jack said, chest still heaving from the intensity of the kiss he and Erica had just shared.

"Yes, well I've been to every club and restaurant in town looking for you, I was about to give up."

Erica raised her eyebrows at Scarlett's admission but remained silent. Partly because she wasn't sure what to say, and also because she wasn't sure she could find her voice after that amazing kiss.

"Well you found me, what did you want?" Jack asked, trying to be polite though he was not enjoying the feeling of being hunted down. He slipped his hand to Erica's back and led her to their table with Scarlett following close behind.

"I thought we could rehash old times now that your "date" is over." She said hopefully as they reached the table.

"What makes you think the date is over?" Erica finally found her voice.

"Well you've obviously finished eating, so what's left to prevent us from conversation?" Scarlett chirped.

"We are through eating but the evenings activities are not yet over, I was just getting ready to escort Erica home." Jack said trying to shake Scarlett off

"That's what taxi's are for. Now c'mon Jack darling I'm only going to be in town for a few days surely you can let her catch another ride so we can spend a little time together" Scarlett pleaded.

"Let me say this again." Jack's voice deepened and he pulled Erica possessively into a close embrace. "The evenings activities are not over, now goodnight Scarlett and I'll get in touch with you tomorrow

regarding a lunch or something, goodnight" he said firmly as he led Erica out the door and to the car.

"I daresay her intentions are definitely more than just discussing the good old days" Jack groaned.

"She certainly is relentless isn't she" Erica sighed as they climbed into the car.

"Not only that she's following us" Jack said incredulously looking into the rearview mirror.

Chapter 5

"What, are you sure?" Erica sounded alarmed.

"Yup, can't miss that huge white flower perched on her head. I gave it to her as a birthday present."

"What do we do now, just let her follow us?"

"For now, we can call for help if she appears dangerous but she's probably just spying on us."

"Spying, why, just to see when you leave?" Erica was trying to understand this woman's mind.

"I told you, she's very persistent, probably seeing if I leave so she can follow me back to my apartment, and have a little alone time to try and work her feminine wiles on me." Jack shook his head as he drove, still glancing in the rearview mirror occasionally.

Scarlett followed them all the way to Erica's parking her car on the street, though they could see the white hair bow bobbing through the bushes as they drove slowly up the drive.

"What do we do now Jack?"

"Pardon me for sounding intrusive but would you mind if I crashed on the sofa tonight?"

"No not at all, but do you think she'll really camp out all night?"

"I don't know, but I'd rather be safe than sorry and having her show up on my doorstep."

"OK, well come on in then" Erica smiled as Jack got out and walked around to open her door. As they reached the porch he pulled her to the swing and leaned in as if to nuzzle her neck.

"Thought we might see about scaring her off with a little make out session on the swing if you don't mind" he whispered into her ear while planting small kisses on her neck.

Erica couldn't believe what Jack was suggesting. Not that she minded in the least, the hardest part would be not to appear overly eager. "Sure, I guess I can go along with that" she whispered back, trying to sound reluctant, although her heart was racing so fast, she knew Jack wouldn't be fooled.

Jack could barely contain the feeling of elation he felt at her agreement, almost forgetting Scarlett's presence in the bushes.

He moaned audibly when Erica lightly kissed his neck, almost forgetting that this display was phony. The added sensations of her nearness and her fingers on his scalp almost caused him to forget the reason for this display as he turned his head so their lips would meet. The kiss was even more than the kiss at SOS as they became even less inhibited without the surrounding crowd. Jack was enjoying the kiss fully when to his surprise he felt Erica's tongue probing at his lips. A small voice in the back of his mind warned him this was going to far but that was voice was quickly silenced as he couldn't resist the temptation and relaxed his jaw. Erica on the other hand could not believe what she just did. Here she was in what was supposed to be pretending and she had just taken over and initiated a very deep kiss. Tongues dueled and clashed as Jack laid back on the swing pulling Erica down with him.

They broke apart gasping for air as they looked deeply into each others eyes each seeing the desire that lay within. Their lips met again even more intensely the second time as their hearts raced.

They broke apart abruptly as they realized someone was walking onto the porch by the clicking of shoes. Expecting Scarlett they were both surprised to see Bianca standing there with a bemused expression on her face. They both sat up suddenly and almost guiltily at what had been happening.

"Well I guess you two had a good evening" she said in a dry tone as she turned and entered the house. Erica and Jack took a moment to compose themselves and wipe off the smeared lipstick before following her in.

"Bianca, we can explain" Erica began

"No need to explain, I'm old enough to see what was going on" Bianca said almost laughing as she started to climb the stairs.

"Wait, Bianca. Let me tell you the facts before you go off with the wrong idea". Jack halted her ascension.

Bianca stopped to let Jack continue. "Really honey, it was nothing. What you walked in on was simply us making a scene for Scarlett, she was in the bushes"

"Yeah right" Bianca laughed, "you expect me to believe that you had your tongues down each others throats solely for the benefit of the ex-girlfriend in the bushes, I didn't see her" She sounded skeptical.

"Honest honey it meant nothing" Jack reiterated still trying to convince her. Not noticing Erica's expression fall at his statement. "Go look out of an upstairs window if you don't believe me and you'll probably be able to see her in the bushes" Jack encouraged.

"I must have misread him, I thought the spark was still there but obviously he didn't feel a thing" Erica thought mournfully for a second and then quickly masked her emotions all of this was unnoticed by Jack and Bianca.

"Ok, I'll go look, but I still think there's a lot more to this" Bianca agreed reluctantly and went to look as Jack turned to face Erica.

"Well Jack I apologize if I got to carried away out there, I just wanted so badly to convince that Scarlett person that you were no longer available" Erica said before Jack had a chance to speak.

"Gee I thought I felt the spark again but I must have been wrong, I'm glad she said that before I said something I'd regret" Jack thought. "Yeah, well we gave her a real show didn't we." Jack said weakly as they saw Bianca coming back down the stairs.

Oh my goodness, I can't believe it, you guys were right!" Bianca was

incredulous. "She is sitting in the bushes staring up into the windows. Does this woman have no shame?"

"Geez as if she still needs to be convinced after that display" Jack groaned.

"Yeah for real, I thought you two were really going at it very convincingly." Bianca snickered.

"Well I guess I'll be crashing here tonight after all right?" Jack ignored her comment and went to plop down on the sofa and started to remove his shoes.

"I'm sorry I jumped to the wrong conclusion guys." Bianca apologized. "Anyway I'm going to bed now so I'll see ya in the morning. Going to be here for breakfast right Uncle Jack?"

"Sure thing, night kiddo." Jack smiled at his niece as she went to her room.

Chapter 6

"Well goodnight Erica." Jack reclined on the sofa expecting Erica to leave as well.

"Wait Jack, I was just thinking about this Scarlett thing." Erica said with a scheming tone to her voice.

"I fail to see what else we can do about that tonight." Jack said unsure of where this was going.

"I was thinking that perhaps we should put on one more small display to show her what a lost cause pursuing you is before we call it a night" Erica grinned with a gleam in her eye.

"Oh yeah, well what exactly do you propose" Jack raised his eyebrow quizzically.

"A little show in front of the window of the bedroom perhaps, that is if you're game"

"That's a little risky isn't it, I mean you and I in the bedroom, alone...." Jack's voice trailed off.

"Oh Jack, we're two mature adults I'm sure we'll be able to behave

ourselves" Erica began ascending the staircase. Jack gulped and followed though he still was not fully convinced of the wisdom of this plan.

They went into Erica's room without turning on the light and peered out the window. Sure enough Scarlett was still huddled in the bushes staring repeatedly at the different windows waiting for a light to come on.

"Her persistence is almost frightening isn't it? This might be a good idea after all Erica" Jack sighed in exasperation at Scarlett's behavior.

"I still say she's psycho, but ready for the show to begin Jack." Erica shivered slightly despite the lightness in her tone.

"Sure, so what's the game plan here." Jack whispered back in a hushed tone. The dark room almost seeming spooky.

"Well I figured we could turn the lights on dim so she'll focus on this window, then go kiss and stuff in front of the window where she will be sure to see us and then after a moment move and turn off the light and she'll assume we've gone to bed." Erica laid out her plan.

Sounds simple enough, what is this "and stuff" though" Jack tried to better pin down the plan.

"We'll just play it by ear... ready?" Erica walked over to the door to turn on the light.

"Ready as I'll ever be" Jack walked over behind her and mentally braced himself for another "*pretend love scene*".

Erica switched the lights on dim and turned to face Jack as they slowly walked to the window. Their profiles clearly visible through the sheer lace curtains. They kissed softly keeping themselves in check since they had already realized on the porch how easy it was to get carried away. Jack almost lost his balance though when Erica slid her hands up to slip his jacket off his shoulders and began pulling his shirt up, he realized she was doing it as part of the act but it still made him feel almost weak with desire. He moved back to help her pull the turtleneck over his head and then took her in his arms again, wishing even for a moment that this was real and that he wasn't going to have to take a cold shower later.

Erica had been doing fine with keeping her reactions in check until she had been pulled back into an embrace with a now shirtless Jack. The feel of his smooth skin beneath her cheek brought back so many memories that she almost forgot the reality of their current "friendship only" agreement as she melted into another mind-numbing kiss. It was the feel of his fingers pulling down the zipper to her dress that brought her back to reality as she forced herself to put up her hand and push him away . leaving them both gasping for air.

"Jack, what's going on here?" She gazed steadily into his eyes.

Jack was speechless for a moment as he tried to clear his head and think. "I'm sorry, I got carried away, I shouldn't"

"No, Jack, wait. I wasn't trying to blame you" she interrupted, "Here lets move away from the window before we destroy the plan" she took his hand and led him away from the window and over to the bed where they sat down putting a good 2 feet of space between them.

"Believe me Jack, you were not forcing yourself on me, we were just getting much to carried away."

"Yeah, I know" he sighed, "I guess we shouldn't have tried this considering our history and the number of times we've given in to temptation".

"Yeah, poor planning on our part wasn't it?" Erica agreed and the room was silent for a few moments.

"I wish I could say I was terribly upset" Jack chuckled breaking the silence.

"I know, it was a nice little trip down memory lane wasn't it..... but why do we keep losing control Jack, is it hormones or...." Erica broke off

"Now's a perfect time to tell her how deeply I still feel about her... but what if she doesn't feel the same way.." Jack was momentarily frozen about replying

"He's got that deer in the headlights look, oh no I've embarrassed him, he's probably panicking thinking I still love him." Erica's mind was racing.

"We've always had unbelievable chemistry, so I guess it only natural that this would happen when we get this close regardless of our actual feelings" Erica quickly said to let Jack off the hook.

"Yeah, just the old hormones cranking up again" Jack maintained a smile of agreement though his heart sank as he tried to forget his feelings and that she obviously did not return them.

Once again there was almost an awkward silence.....

tap-tap a small knock on the door interrupted the silence.

"That must be Bianca, we barely explained the porch, forget trying to explain this. Oh and shoot, the window. Why don't you close the blinds and then hide in the bathroom, ummmm no the closet" Erica said as she hastily pulled on a robe as Jack closed the blinds and headed for the closet. As soon as he was in Erica went to open the door to Bianca.

"Honey, what are you doing up so late?" Erica tried sounding sleepy.

"I wanted to talk with you about you and Uncle Jack"

"Can't it wait until tomorrow honey" Erica said trying to discourage Bianca. Not that she wouldn't love to find out Bianca's feelings on the matter, she just did not want to do so with Jack less than 10 feet away.

"Please Mom." Bianca put on her most pleading expression

"OK" Erica relented as they went to sit down on the bed, Erica suddenly became flustered as she noticed Jack's shirt and jacket still on the floor where they had dropped and she desperately hoped that Bianca would not notice.

"Mom I just wanted to say something about your relationship with Uncle Jack and then I'll leave, but hear me out first OK?" Bianca started talking quickly trying to get it all out before Erica interrupted

"What "relationship", remember honey I told you it was just an act for that old girlfriend, there's..."

"Mom, I know what I saw, and there was a lot more going on there than just an act" Bianca rose her voice. Jack of course by this time

had his ear firmly against the closet door listening to every word.

"How do you know honey, you're so young, when you're older you'll understand but now you'll just have to take my word for it, there is nothing going on between your Uncle Jack and I"

"Mom, I'm not that young!" Bianca wailed "I saw the way you were looking at him, and I saw him looking at you the same way, I know love when I see it!"

"Honey I don't know what you think you saw but...."

"Wait Mom, one thing OK -- I want you to look directly into my eyes and tell me the truth about how you feel about Uncle Jack" Bianca's voice took on a very serious tone as she turned to look straight into Erica's eyes. Erica dropped her gaze for a moment unsure of how to proceed. "Just tell me the truth Mom and then I'll leave" Bianca gently pressed on. You could hear a pin drop as everyone including Jack was holding their breath"

"I don't want to lie to her, but I can't tell her the truth, especially with Jack here. I'll make an idiot out of myself. Plus if I told her how much I still cared for him what if she got upset again because of Travis" Erica pondered her options carefully and with a sinking heart prepared to lie to her daughter, feeling horrible already but deciding it was for the best.

"Mom" Bianca prompted again. Erica rose to meet her eyes and put on her best poker face.

"OK Bianca, I consider Jack a wonderful and dear friend. But the romance is over honey. There hasn't been anything between us for a long time and there never will again. We just don't have that love anymore. We're just friends honey, that's all. I don't love him anymore like I did many years ago." Erica emphasized those last words to make a point to Bianca, though she felt even more guilty knowing she was lying to the nearby Jack as well.

In the closet Jack's shoulders sagged and he was almost blinking back tears at the sting in Erica's sharp words. *"I really thought I saw that look in her eyes, I can't believe I thought I might still have a chance..... but she wouldn't lie to Bianca like that....."* He bit his lip as Erica's words kept resounding through his head.

Bianca studied her Mother carefully looking for traces of a lie, but saw none.

"OK Mom, I'll believe you, so let me just say what I came in here to say and then I'll leave"

Erica nodded and looked intently at Bianca praying that she wouldn't be put on the spot and have to lie again.

"When I saw you and Uncle Jack on the porch I honestly thought you two had realized you still loved each other. Regardless of what you say Mom I think I still see a lot of sparks between you two. But I'm not going to push you into each others arms if you are so adamant about not being in love with him anymore. I just want you to know that if you do feel those old familiar feelings again. And if you and Uncle Jack do decide to get back together than I won't stand in your way."

Erica's head snapped up when she heard this and Jack also was doing a double take in the dark closet. "Wh... what.." she stammered.

"What happened with you, Daddy, and Uncle Jack was a long time ago Mom. I used to be resentful then because I hated you and Daddy getting divorced. But now I see a lot more than just an ugly divorce. I see how supportive Uncle Jack is, to both of us. How he can reach you like no other man I've ever seen, even Daddy." Bianca's voice started to crumble so she paused a moment. "What you both did to Daddy was wrong..... but it was also a long time ago and some things you just have to move past. He moved on with Barbara. And now he's gone.... . If not for you and Uncle Jack I don't know how I would have made it these past few months. But you've stood by me Mom, even though we've had our rough times, and Uncle Jack has been wonderful, like a second father to me. I see now how well you two work together and I want you both to be happy. And if that happiness is found in being together then go for it and I'll cheer you on all they way. But if you find someone else..... I'll try to understand. Though please don't go back to David, I can't support that." Bianca stopped feeling as if she had said to much.

Both Erica and Jack had tears glistening in their eyes after hearing Bianca's heartfelt speech. "Oh honey" was all Erica could say as she held out her arms for a warm Mother/Daughter hug. "Well it's getting

late, I guess I should go so we can both get our beauty sleep huh?" Bianca laughed as she hastily started returning to less emotional territory

"Goodnight Baby, I love you" Erica whispered as Bianca exited.

After a moment had passed and she heard Bianca's door close she went to open the closet door.

"Wow, is that some kid or what?" he said as exited the closet and walked over to pick up his clothes off the floor and pulled them back on.

"Yeah, she's something isn't she" Erica agreed. Once again the silence was awkward but this time neither of them tried to break it as they were both still grappling with what they had just heard.

"Well goodnight, we'll talk over breakfast OK" Jack said grabbing Erica and planting a quick kiss on her forehead as he left the room.

"Goodnight" Erica said though he was already gone as she changed into a nightgown, turned the lights down and crawled into bed. Staring at the ceiling deep in thought.

Meanwhile

Jack had removed his jacket and shoes and laid down on the sofa lost in thought. One thought primarily repeating itself in his mind *"She doesn't love me, I'm only a friend.... I've got to come to terms with that and stifle these feelings I still have for her before any more pain is caused to any of us..... but how?"* As he drifted to sleep.

Meanwhile

"I still don't buy this story" Bianca was grinning to herself as she lay in bed remembering the looks of love she had seen on their faces. *"But if this is how they want to play it then I won't stop them, they can't avoid this forever"* she sighed as she drifted to sleep as well.

Chapter 7

While Jack and Bianca had drifted off to sleep fairly quickly Erica had lain awake for hours thinking. Thinking about her feelings for Jack, and what Bianca had said. She had finally fallen into a restless sleep

filled with dreams. She woke up feeling refreshed and slowly stretched as she turned to look at the clock. When she realized it was already 10 am and Bianca had wanted them all to have breakfast together she leapt from the bed and hastily started getting ready to go downstairs. At 10:30 she started down the stairs in a robe with her hair still damp from the shower.

"Anyone here?" she called out

"Well good morning sleepy head" Jack's voice boomed as he appeared at the foot of the stairs.

Erica was conscious of his eyes on her as she finished her descent to meet him at the bottom of the stairs.

"So I guess I missed the family breakfast?"

"Yes, well Bianca and I had breakfast before she left for school. And we talked..." Jack emphasized.

"About?" Erica said nervously

"Yes, well basically the same thing she told you about last night, you know about us, and Travis, and well, you know" Jack was almost stammering.

"Oh you mean more how she thinks we should be together" Erica said calmly though her heart was pounding.

"Yes, that too. She spent a good 15 minutes trying to convince me that you and I are still in love."

"Oh really, so what did you tell her" Erica said calmly, though she felt as if the temperature in the room had risen 30 degrees since she had come down the stairs.

"Well I told her basically the same thing you did, you know that we were just friends and there were no lingering feelings between us"

"I see" Erica had turned to hide the look of disappointment on her face.

"That is true isn't it Erica" Jack said slowly, his senses were on alert at her reaction

"Oh no, he's asking me if there's still anything between us. I'm not going to make an idiot of myself and act like some lovesick puppy"
Erica put on a smile and turned back around. "Well of course that's the truth Jack, we'd know if there was something there right?"

"Oh yes, of course we would" Jack responded hastily *"Great, she probably thought I was coming on to her"*

Jack took a deep breath. "I thought about last night and well I think we definitely have to be more careful from here on out."

"Oh of course, I agree" Erica said quickly. The awkward silence rose again.

"So what are your plans for the day Jack?"

"Well in a couple hours I'm meeting Scarlett for lunch. What are your plans?"

"I'm not sure yet, I need to go over to the office."

"Well if you wouldn't mind could you keep your schedule somewhat open in case I need you to help run interference again?"

"Sure Jack, no problem, as far as I'm concerned I'm all yours for the rest of the week" Erica smiled demurely

"Oh really? Well that's certainly nice to know" Jack said flirting back as he headed for the door.

Valley Inn Dining Room

Jack was not surprised that Scarlett was already there waiting when he arrived for their lunch meeting 10 minutes early.

"Jack, how wonderful to see you" she rose to hug him as he approached. "That woman isn't with you is she?" Scarlett said scanning the room behind him.

"No, Erica is not with me" Jack sighed assuring her as they went to the table. She had purposely picked a small table for two in a corner to try for some privacy.

"Good, I finally have you alone" She grinned widely as she leaned towards Jack across the table.

Jack not so subtly picked up a menu and leaned backwards. "Let's order shall we."

After ordering Jack knew it was time to face the music as he faced Scarlett. "I guess I owe you an explanation and apology for what happened..."

"No you don't" she interrupted much to his surprise

"I know what happened. You left and the service kept you too busy to write, and then by the time you had finished you probably couldn't find me because I had moved. I'm the one who should be sorry for moving and not leaving a way for you to contact me" Scarlett said apologetically.

"She has convinced herself this is all her fault, I can't believe it." Jack thought. "OK here's my chance to tell her what really happened."

"But now we've found each other again and our love can overcome!" She said in a happy sing-song voice before Jack had time to say anything.

"But Scarlett, I need to tell you....." Jack once again attempted to tell the truth.

"Oh I know you THINK you love that Erica woman, but trust me she's all wrong for you"

"Scarlett....."

"Now that we are together nothing can keep us apart again" she continued talking right over him as she had always done.

Fed up, Jack could not stand being interrupted again "Look Scarlett, I have loved Erica ever since we met and nothing -- I repeat NOTHING can change that. We were meant to be together and nothing can break us apart this time!" In his frustration he didn't realize he had said it loud enough to echo over the filled dining room and he noticed many interested looks pointed in their direction. "*Oh no, did I say it that loudly*" he blushed.

Scarlett was taken aback for a moment. "Well I'm sure she's got you fooled into believing this but..."

"But nothing Scarlett, I love Erica Kane and nothing you can say is going to change that, now excuse me" Jack said getting up and walking out of the dining room. *"Wow, I finally said the truth about my feelings in the open, If only I had the nerve to say it to Erica"* he sighed as he got into his car.

"So he thinks Erica and he are together forever does he?" Scarlett said scheming. "We'll see about that" she picked up her purse and left.

Chapter 8

Enchantment

Erica had reread the same contract several times still not being able to focus on it as her mind kept drifting to Jack. "When did I fall so deeply in love with him again..... or did I ever stop" she pondered as she once again made an attempt to scan the paper.

She almost jumped out of her chair when the buzzer rang. "Miss Kane there is a Miss Hughes here to see you" Her secretary interrupted.

"Yes, well send her in" Erica was surprised at this development wondering what she could possibly be doing here. She puzzled as she composed herself for Scarlett's entrance.

"No need to rise or greet me" Scarlett said as she opened the door and charged straight to Erica's desk. "We need to talk and I think we're both adult enough here to forego the preliminaries and cut straight to the matter at hand."

Erica was taken aback at this approach but nodded anyway. "OK, what can I do for you."

"I know you're don't really love him, and I want him back because I love him more than you ever could." She said boldly.

Erica could not believe the gall of this woman and felt her anger rising. "Look here Miss Hughes I love Jackson Montgomery and I mean real love. We are in love to our souls. I am not going to give up the best thing that ever happened to me just because of some high school fling.

Scarlett could feel the icy chill in the room and knew this was not going to be easy. "Why Miss Kane, you actually sound like you mean that" She said back sardonically.

I do! Erica said boldly almost shivering as she realized herself after speaking it that she had truly meant it. "I DO LOVE JACK" She said again loudly, suddenly feeling the urge to shout it out her office window for all of Pine Valley to hear.

"Time to pull out the stops" Scarlett thought as she plotted her next move. "Look I know I broke his heart and he hasn't been able to get over that but...."

"You broke his heart?!" Erica was incredulous. "You have got some warped perception of reality you know that. He was the one who left you!"

"Oh really, is that what he told you" Scarlett replied coolly. "Let me set the record straight." She began to tell her version of the story.

"It all began during high school. He asked me out to a banquet, and of course I said yes. He was so dashing and charming any girl would have gone with him, but he picked ME!"

Erica rose her eyebrows but said nothing as Scarlett continued.

"We dated heavily for the rest of high school and then on prom night... I'll never forget it, underneath the stars he gave the most eloquent proposal, and of course I accepted" Scarlett sniffed.as if overcome with memories.

"We went on to college together and got an apartment as we started planning for our wedding. The problem came when my father found out we were engaged."

"Wait, now back up, you're telling me that you were engaged for several months without telling your father" Erica felt like she had caught Scarlett in a lie.

"It was somewhat of a secret engagement you see, since we were so young and all" Scarlett said calmly though Erica thought she saw a bead of sweat appear.

"Being a proper southern gentleman he was appalled that I had

become engaged without bringing Jack home to meet the family. And then when he met Jack well, he had such high expectations that Jackson just didn't have a chance and so he told me he would take away my trust fund if I married a young man with so little ambition and drive. You see Jack was very easygoing and mellow during college and most people didn't think he'd succeed very far. Well I couldn't give up millions of dollars so I told Jack that we would have to break off our engagement until I turned 25 and could collect the trust fund. He was so broken-hearted, he even cried while begging me to reconsider but I couldn't possibly lose all that money. I still regret that decision" Scarlett actually had a tear in her eye.

"I can't believe she expects me to believe this, she's definitely got more than one screw loose" Erica could not believe what she was hearing.

My father wasn't satisfied with my claims to have broken things off and he forced me to move back home. I told Jack I would write him every day and we would be married on my 25th birthday. That's when I left. The poor guy was so brokenhearted. Then he must have moved because all my letters came back undeliverable and that was when we lost track. So don't you understand now?"

"Understand what" Erica said confused as to what the question was.

"Haven't you been listening" Scarlett was exasperated. "Understand that we still belong together, that finding each other after all this time is fate. That our love cannot be overcome" she practically wailed.

"Look, I'll tell you what I understand, you've obviously obsessed over Jackson ever since high school. Yes he is a wonderful person and a true rarity among men. BUT he has moved on and you can't accept that. You need to get over it, move on and get a life. There are many more men out there, but Jackson Montgomery is mine" Erica said sharply her words stinging Scarlett.

"Well, I never!" Scarlett jumped up, almost looking like she was going to strike Erica. But perhaps realizing this was someone who could give as good as she got turned around and stalked out of the door.

"Miss Kane, Opal Cortlandt on line #2" The secretary buzzed her again.

"Opal, hi there, how..."

"What do you mean cut to the chase...."

"What's going on with Jack?..... Opal who have you been talking to?"

"He shouted it out over the dining room..... everyone heard..."

"I see Opal, look I'll tell you about it later....."

"Yes I heard you, he still loves me.... right... bye Opal"

Erica was shocked at this latest development. What in the world is Opal talking about, I'll have to ask Jack about this later. A small charade is one thing but broadcasting it to PV is another, I can't have the whole town think I've rejected him again. I'll be committed.

Chapter 9

Erica walked down the path of the park until she reached the bench where she had asked Jack to meet her. Standing a few feet off, she watched him, leaning back in the seat with his eyes closed. *Gosh, he is so handsome. I love how his hair catches the sunlight,* Erica thought, as she continued walking.

Clearing her throat softly, Erica stood beside the bench, waiting for Jack to notice her. Jack shifted his head down, then opened his eyes. *Well, well what do we have here? Yes, those are definitely her legs, Jack thought as his eyes slowly headed up her body. Oh, and without a doubt, those are her hips. Gosh, I would love to wrap my arms around that waist right now. Those lips, yep, I'm in heaven!*

"Jack, thank you for meeting me here," Erica said, after his eyes had met hers and she sat beside him.

"No problem. With all you are doing for me, the least I can do is meet you at a park. I assume this has to do with Scarlett. So what did she do now?" Jack asked, staring into those beautiful brown eyes of hers.

"Well, actually Scarlett came by my office this afternoon. She informed me of why you two broke up. Her story was the exact opposite of yours. It was so obvious she was lying, but that is not why I asked you here. I dealt with her just fine." Erica fidgeted

nervously with her purse, avoiding Jack's glance.

"Then why did you ask me here, Erica?" Jack knew it was bold, but he ran his finger under her chin and lifted her face to meet his glaze.

"Well, Opal called me this afternoon. So did Edmund and Tad. I didn't understand their calls at first, but finally called back Opal to get the full story." Erica thought to herself, *is it true, Jack? Tell me if it's true. I know you said you loved me, but was it just for show?*

"What did Edmund and Tad call you about?" Jack was almost afraid to ask. He knew the brush off would be coming. *Opal has probably told her about my outburst, and well, now Erica is going to try and "let me down easy." God, I hate this. I can't help it that I accidentally yelled the TRUTH!*

"They congratulated me. I didn't get it, but then Opal called and told me that Tad, Edmund, and her were all at the Pine Valley Inn for lunch today. And well, she told me what you said Jack." Erica was trying to work up the nerve to ask him if it were true.

"Scarlett and I were talking, and well, you know how she is. She wouldn't back off, and before I knew it, I was yelling that where everyone could hear."

"Jack, tell me what you yelled. Opal told me, but I want to hear it from you." *Yeah, that's a good way to see if he really means it. You will be able to tell by his voice. Come on, Jack, tell me you love me. Tell me, please tell me.*

Jack lowered his face, looking down at his shoes. "Well, I was telling Scarlett, that I have always loved you, and look I am sorry Erica. I know that this was only suppose to be for Scarlett's benefit and now the whole town knows. I am sorry."

"Yes, the whole town does know, Jack, but sometimes people have a hard time dealing with certain emotions," Erica said, as Jack's mind wandered, *Here's the big kiss off. She is going to say that I am having a hard time dealing with the emotions of being this close to her. I need to beat her to it. That's it, I'll say it before she does. But...what if?*

Jack interrupted, "Erica, since Scarlett came to town, I know I have

been "using" you to brush her off. I mean we have been awfully close in trying to convince her, of course."

"Yes, of course, trying to convince Scarlett. I mean, it is certainly understandable why someone might have a hard time dealing with the emotion of it all, especially considering our past."

"Yes, our past," Jack said solemnly. "With all that we have been through together, it would be hard for someone not to feel that old, um, familiarity."

Erica didn't know what to say. Familiarity, familiarity just kept playing over and over in her mind. *Last night was more than just familiar, Jack. Last night was, oh, so wonderful. Your touch, your kiss. I haven't felt so alive, so real, since the last time we were together. But it was just "familiar" to you.*

"I'm sorry that my past with Scarlett has affected your life so much, Erica. But we did have fun last night at SOS, right?" Jack's eyes danced with the thought of the porch swing.

"Yes, I had a very nice time. It has been a while since I have been out on the dance floor," Erica stated, as she thought of that kiss.

"Back to the issue at hand though, Erica. I hope I didn't embarrass you too much with my outburst at lunch. I can promise you that I will try and be a little more discrete. What exactly did Opal say?"

"She told me that you were having lunch with another woman and asked me if I knew. I said, yes, that she was an old friend of yours. Then she said that your conversation started getting heated and before she knew it you were raising your voice, claiming your love for me."

"Well, I was claiming..." Jack looked up and over Erica's shoulder, he spotted Scarlett headed their way. She was a good 20 feet off.

"Erica, this isn't exactly the time or place I was going to do this, but..." Jack knelt down beside the bench. Taking Erica's hands in his, Jack pulled a box out of his pocket. "Erica, this whole mess with Scarlett has just made me realize that I should have done this long ago. Erica, I have loved you for such a long time now. I realize that we should be together. So, I guess what I am trying to say is. I need

you in my life for the rest of my life. You are the only woman I want. Please do me the honor of being my wife." Jack opened the box, and Erica gasped as she saw the ring he gave her when he first proposed. *"He really does love me. He really does want to marry me. Oh, he kept the ring. Oh, Jack!"* Erica thought, as she suddenly heard, "NOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

Scarlett came running up to the bench. "No, no, you can't. You just can't."

Chapter 10

"Can't what, Scarlett?" Jack said as he automatically slipped the ring on Erica's finger. Erica was just sitting there stunned as Jack rose to talk to Scarlett.

"You can't marry her, Jack! You just can't. She doesn't love you. She admitted it today in your office. She doesn't love you. She could never love you like I do," Scarlett squealed.

Hearing this caused Erica to rise. She placed herself between Jack and Scarlett, glaring into Scarlett's lying eyes.

"You are lying, and you know it, Scarlett Hughes. But I guess a woman, as hopeless as you, has to resort to such low and dirty tactics to try and steal a man. You know what I said in my office today. And you know what Jack said at lunch, so just accept it. Jackson has moved on and upward for that matter. He is no longer in some two-bit high school farce of a romance. He is in a real relationship with a real woman that loves him very much. So deal with it, Miss Scarlett Hughes, because trust me deary, even on your most cunning day, you could ever get Jack away from me. The reason why is that we have true love, something you wouldn't know if it bit you in the..."

Jack placed his hand over Erica's mouth and kissed the back of her head. "I think it is time for us to go, baby." Jack took Erica's hand in his and led her to his car, leaving Scarlett just standing there with her mouth hanging open.

At Erica's House

The entire car ride back to Erica's was silent. Jack kept his eyes on

the road ahead, while Erica stared at the ring on her finger. When they pulled into the drive, Jack stiffly got out of the car, walked over to Erica's side, opened her door and held his hand out to her. As he helped her up, their eyes met for the first time since he started the proposal. Feeling uncomfortable, they both quickly looked away and started up to the front door.

Once in the house, Bianca came bounding down the stairs. "Did you tell her, Uncle Jack?"

"Tell who what?" Jack asked, looking at Bianca in a dazed and confused state. Erica's silence had him scared. He was so worried he had screwed up his only chance of turning that proposal into a real engagement by rushing it for Scarlett's sake.

"Did you tell Mom about your little confession at the Pine Valley Inn? I told you both that you still love each other, now there is proof."

Erica had seated herself on the couch. "Bianca, Jack doesn't love me. He said that to Scarlett in an attempt to get her to leave him alone. Jack doesn't love me." Erica's voice trailed off at the end, and she just stared down at her hand.

"Mom, I heard how he said it. I have seen the two of you, last night and for quite sometime now. You two look at each other with love in your eyes. There is no doubt that you love each other. I am sorry, but you both are wrong. The sooner one of you just admits your feelings, the better off we will all be." With that Bianca ran back up stairs.

Jack stood on one side of the living room, staring at Erica, while she sat on the other side, staring at her ring trying not to cry. Finally deciding that the silence was too much, Jack crossed to Erica, sitting beside her.

"Are you okay, honey?"

Refusing to look at him, "Sure, why wouldn't I be?" Erica asked, quickly rising and walking over to get a glass of water. "Do you want something to drink, Jack?"

"No, honey, I don't. I want you to come and sit with me. I want to talk about what has you so upset."

"I am not upset," Erica, turned and flashed Jack her "see I am fine" smile. Jack got up, slowly walking over to her, and said, "You are upset about what happened at the park, right?"

"I told you, I am not upset, Jackson. Did I do a good job telling Scarlett off?" Erica asked in a futile attempt of changing the subject.

"Yes, baby, you did a great job. Are you upset because of the ring, Erica?" Jack put his hands on her shoulders, forcing her to look at him.

"I just don't understand, why you used this ring for a pretend proposal, Jack? Why this ring? Why use a ring that has such meaning to me for your little show for Scarlett? You could have gotten a cubic zirconium ring. Why this ring?" Erica was now glaring him straight in the eye, with that twinge of fire in her eyes.

"I don't know. I'm sorry it upset you."

"Jack, this ring has so many memories. Were you trying to hurt me? How could you use this ring to try and get rid of that woman?" Erica questioned, before she ripped herself out of his reach and headed upstairs.

But it wasn't a pretend proposal. I used the ring because I know what that ring means to us both. I love you, Erica. Jack thought, as he stood there watching her flee from him.

Chapter 11

Jack waited for three hours for Erica to come back down. Bianca came and went. Then she left to go out with Leo and Laura for the night. Finally around nine, Jack decided Erica had to eat something. He went into the kitchen, pulled a couple of sandwiches, some fruit and veggies together. Taking a tray, he headed upstairs. He had finally pulled together exactly what he was going to say to her.

Erica realized how much she truly loved Jack when she felt the sting of his fake proposal. *How could he propose to me like that and not mean it? But he didn't mean it. It was all a show for her. Why, Jack, why don't you love me?* She cried and thought about it over and over again until she finally fell asleep.

Jack knocked softly on the door, but when no one answered, he

opened it. Erica was lying curled up on the bed with tissues all over the bed around her. She had changed into her robe and her hair was in a loose ponytail. She looks so peaceful and beautiful lying there, Jack thought. He set the tray on the nightstand, cleaned up all the tissues, then sat on the bed beside her, just watching her.

Jack was kneeling beside her in the park. He had just finished proposing to her, when she opened her mouth to say yes, all that came out was Scarlett's whinny voice. Erica was suddenly standing to the side of Jack, watching Scarlett kiss him and put on her ring.

"No," Erica yelled. "No, Jack, no! I love you, not her." Erica awoke with a start. She bolted upright, only to be sitting face to face with Jack.

"It's okay. I'm right here," Jack said calmly. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close to him. Erica was satisfied with laying her head against Jack's chest and sobbing.

"Ssshhh, it's okay. I'm right here. I am not going anywhere. Ssshhh," Jack whispered in her ear.

Pulling back slightly, Erica wiped her tears away. She looked into Jack's eyes, and then started to cry again. Jack pulled her back into his embrace.

"Baby, baby, ssshhh, why are you crying? That must have been some dream, baby. You woke up yelling and then started crying. Please, Erica, tell me what is wrong." Jack continued to speak very softly.

Sobbing, "You...You gave my ring to her. You...You proposed to her, not me."

"Oh, baby. Oh, Erica, I would never, ever give this ring to anyone but you," Jack said, as he took her hand. Gently kissing her ring finger, right above the ring. "Erica, this ring has belonged to you and only you, since before I met you. I swore to myself, I would never place a ring on a woman's finger unless I truly loved her with all of me. I can honestly say that I have only broken my vow once."

"Today?" Erica asked, pulling back, having calmed down. Jack left his hand resting on her hip.

"No, not today. The only time I ever placed a ring on a woman I didn't love with all of me was when I proposed to Laurel. You see, I never gave Scarlett a ring. Do you realize that means you are the only woman I have ever given a ring to that I meant it?"

Erica shook her head no, and then said, "What about today? You didn't mean it today." Erica pulled off the ring and placed it in Jack's hand. "I can't wear this ring, knowing you didn't mean that proposal. I only want to wear your ring, if it ever means anything to you again. I can't wear this ring, now. Not after today's show. I have too much pride, too much dignity for that," Erica was now staring Jack straight in the face. "I love you. I am sorry. I know you don't love me, but I do. Yesterday just affirmed what I have been feeling for so long now. Jack, I never stopped loving you."

"Erica, look into my eyes. Look very closely. Tell me, honestly what you see?" Jack's eyes were showing his feelings brightly. There was no way Jack could deny his love for her now.

"Oh, Jack! You do love me!" Erica exclaimed throwing her arms around his neck. "I have missed you so much. I never stopped loving you, Jack, never."

"Erica, I have something I need to ask," Jack's tone was serious. Erica pulled back, happy, but now worried.

"What Jack?"

"Will you please put our ring back on? I want you to be my wife. Regardless of this Scarlett mess, I have always wanted you to be my wife. Please know that my proposal this afternoon was real. I used this ring to show you how true and real my proposal was and is. Marry me, Erica Kane. Become Mrs. Jackson Montgomery." Jack watched her face, as he slid the ring on her finger.

"Yes, Jack, Yes! Oh, Jack, I love you!" Erica was sobbing, and Jack quickly silenced her cries with a soft, gentle kiss.

"Jack, I did think at first your proposal was real until I heard Scarlett, then..." Erica trailed off, as they lay in bed eating sandwiches.

"It was real, but I had bad timing. I am so sorry, sweetheart. I never wanted you to doubt my seriousness of wanting you to be mine."

Jack finished up his sandwich, and kissed her forehead.

"Oh, Jack, I love this so much! I know we should probably talk more, but could we just curl up in bed for tonight. I just want to feel your arms around me tonight," Erica said as she scooted down under the covers and Jack moved the now empty tray. Jack then slid down in the covers beside her, wrapping his arms around her.

"Yes, of course we can, but nothing more. Not yet anyway," Jack whispered in suggestion. "I want to get Scarlett out of our lives before we make love. I want you to have no doubt that I am with you because of us, not her."

"Jackson," Erica turned to face him. "I know you love me. I see it in your eyes, now that I am not trying to explain it away. I love you, but tonight is too soon. Besides, how could I explain it to Bianca? All I want tonight is to wake up in the morning with your arms around me."

Jack kissed her forehead lightly, and they drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 12

The sunlight streamed in the sheer curtains, lighting up the room. Jack was lying on the bed, watching Erica sleep. Watching the soft sunlight illuminate her face, Jack was overwhelmed by his love for his beloved. Leaning over, Jack softly brushed his lips across her cheek. This caused Erica to stir.

"Mmm, Jack," Erica moaned lightly. She stretched slightly and opened her eyes to look straight into his.

"Good morning, honey," Jack said with a softness that could only speak of love.

"Mmm, good morning, Jack." Erica wrapped her arms around his neck and brought his handsome face down for a kiss. Their lips met gently with a sweet tenderness. Erica ran her fingers along the nape of Jack's neck, as the kiss started to deepen. Jack's tongue slowly licked Erica's lips, as their first kiss of the morning became filled with greater desire. Their bodies responding to this deepening kiss started to wake up much faster.

Jack rolled onto his back, bringing Erica on top of him. Pulling back from their breath-taking kiss, Erica placed light, airy kisses all over

Jack's neck. Nuzzling her way over to his earlobe, she rasped, "I love you, Jackson."

"I love you, Erica," Jack proclaimed, as he switched positions with her. Now gently lying on Erica, Jack had her neck area exposed to him. Brushing the opening of her robe aside, Jack leaned in and started kissing her collarbone.

"Mmm, Jack," Erica moaned, as Jack reached her ear. Pulling back slightly, Jack ran his fingertips along her cheek. Lightly Jack kissed her forehead, then each cheek. As Jack was leaning in to capture Erica's mouth with his, there was a soft knock on the bedroom door.

"Mom, Uncle Jack," Bianca called softly. "Are you up?"

Jack whispered in Erica's ear, "We have got to do something about her timing." Then he slid off of Erica and straightened his shirt, while Erica pulled her robe back over her shoulders.

"Come in, Bianca," Erica said once they were settled.

Bianca walked in the door, not surprised by the couple in bed together. She sat down on the foot of the bed. "Mom, Uncle Jack, are you going to admit it now?"

Jack laughed. Erica just held out her left hand and said, "Does it look like we have admitted it to you?"

"Oh, Mom. Wow, oh, wow! Really?" Bianca jumped up and hugged her mother's neck. Then ran to hug Jack. Once Bianca had calmed down, Jack spoke.

"Are you sure you are totally okay with this?"

"Of course I am," Bianca stated calmly, still admiring the ring. "But what about your psycho chick, Uncle Jack?"

"She's not psycho, just high-strung," Jack defended.

Erica looked him in the eye and said, "Jack, she is psycho. I am sorry, but she is psycho. She may not have been back in college, but she is now."

"Anyway, I am not going to debate that with either one of you. I think your mother and I need to discuss how to handle Scarlett. Although,

it shouldn't be much of an issue in a few more days."

Bianca stood up. "Well, I do have to get to school. I just wanted to tell you both goodbye."

"Yeah right, you just wanted to rub it in that we were wrong," Jack teased.

"Bye guys," Bianca said, ignoring his comment as she walked out the door.

Jack leaned over and kissed Erica's neck again. "Now, where were we?"

"Wait a minute, Jack." Erica pulled back quickly. Getting out of bed, "I think we need to get ready for the day and get to our respective places of employment."

"But, Erica..."

"I also think you need to decide how you are going to get that woman out of our lives." Erica said walking into her bathroom and shutting the door.

Later that day...

"Ms. Kane, Mr. Montgomery is here to see you," Val said as he showed Jack in.

"Val, Jack can show himself in from now on. No need for you to make such a formal introduction for the man I am going to marry. After all, all he has to do is walk into the room and that is introduction enough," Erica gushed, as she got up from behind her desk and walked over to Jack by the couches.

"Yes, Ms. Kane. No interruptions, unless your daughter, I assume."

"Correct. Thank you Val." Erica watched Val close the door, then turned to face Jack. "This is a nice surprise. Everything okay?" Erica asked, while motioning for them to sit.

"Of course, what could be wrong? You are going to marry me." Jack kissed her left hand softly. "Scarlett called my office 5 times before 10. I finally left. I decided I would get more work done after we just deal with her."

"Val has been intercepting her calls for me, telling her I am not in yet. Jack, are you going to tell her the truth?"

"Yes, I just want you there. I am tired of Scarlett attacking me when you aren't around. She doesn't come on to me as strong when you are around. But after yesterday, I am sure she will never mess with you again," Jack ran his fingertip along her cheek. "You really blasted her."

"Well, what can I say? I love you. I wasn't about to let her lie to you about me."

"I love you, Erica," Jack leaned in and pressed his lips softly to hers. As Erica entwined her fingers in Jack's hair, her office door burst open. Scarlett stormed in with Val hot on her heels.

"I told you they were in here," Scarlett claimed, as Jack and Erica quickly rose from the couch.

"Do you want me to call Security, Ms. Kane?" Val asked, standing by Erica's phone.

Jack spoke up, while Scarlett and Erica glared at one another.

"Scarlett, your timing is lousy. Val, security won't be necessary, but if you hear any raised voices, call immediately."

"Yes and Val, please alert them that we might have a dead advertising executive before long," Erica said coldly, never taking her gaze off Scarlett.

"Yes, Ms. Kane," Val said, as he quickly retreated, closing the door behind him.

Erica walked over to behind her desk. "Now, why did you burst into my office unannounced, Scarlett. It can't be for business."

Jack sat down in one of the chairs in front of Erica's desk, enjoying the exchange between the women. He loved watching Erica defend him. He would see that passion growing in her eyes and realize that he never wanted it to die. Jack would never try to change the petite fireball he loved so much.

"Actually, it is business. I am moving to Pine Valley. I am not going to let you win this easily, Ms. Kane. You may think you scare me, but

you don't. Jack will soon realize that you are not worth his time and that I am the woman he wants. I most certainly am not leaving town until he does."

"Ha, Scarlett! What is on my finger?" Erica held out her hand. "That is an engagement ring, something you never got. Now listen and listen well. You never got a ring because your relationship was nothing like his and mine is. We are serious about one another. We are going to be married. If you are the woman Jack wants, why was he in my bed last night? Why did I wake up with his arms around me and not you?"

Jack stood up, as he noticed Erica's temper was about to blow. Erica walked to the door of her office. As she held it open, she said, "Get out of my office. Get out before I have you arrested for trespassing."

Scarlett looked at Jack for help. Jack said, "I think you should go, Scarlett."

"Come with me, Jack. We need to talk alone, away from your possessive she-devil. Please, Jack come with me. Give me a chance to just talk. I promise I won't try anything else."

Erica continued standing by the door, not wanting to interfere. *"If he wants to go, I should let him go. He is a grown man,"* Erica thought.

Jack looked over at his lovely fiancée. "No, Scarlett, I am engaged to Erica. It would not be appropriate for me to go anywhere with you. I love her. Please understand that. I have moved on. I love Erica Kane. Please don't dwell on this."

Scarlett looked at Jack. "You still have that soft spot for me, Jack. I can see it in your eyes. You do still love me, at least a part of you. Jackson, I am not leaving until you realize that we still belong together."

Scarlett then sat down in the chair, still staring at him. Jack and Erica exchanged looks of exasperation.

Chapter 13

Erica shut the door back. Jack told her with his eyes that he wanted her to come stand beside him. Erica was stunned and didn't know what to do. She just stood beside him, until Jack reached out and put

his arm around her. Kissing the top of her head, Jack finally spoke.

"Ladies, I think I need to be honest with both of you. Why don't we sit on the couches and let me tell the truth." Jack suggested, leading Erica over to them. Sitting down together, Erica was not worried although she was unsure of what he may not have told her. Scarlett sat down across from them.

"Scarlett, I owe you an apology. When we were together in college, I was not the kind of man you wanted or needed. Although I am the kind of man you need now, I love Erica. When I left college to go into the army, I told you I would write you. I never did, I didn't even join the army. Scarlett, the truth is I was running from you. You wanted a commitment, and I was far from ready for that. I wanted to play the field."

"Erica, you were the first woman I ever wanted to settle down with. I have wanted to be your husband for 13 years now, but we never could get the timing right. We are together now, thanks to Scarlett. This has all made me realize the mistakes I made in my past. And for those that have affected both of you, I am truly sorry."

Scarlett finally looked up, meeting Jack's eyes. "But I love you, Jackson. I never stopped. I kept waiting for you to return. Then I decided I had to move on, but knew that someday you would return to me, and you have."

"No, Scarlett, I haven't. I have not returned to you. I have finally got things just right with Erica. I refuse to throw away my relationship with her for one that occurred a long time ago."

"Scarlett," Erica found her voice. "I know it hurts to lose Jack. I have lost him a few times myself, but you see Jack and I have always belonged together. We love each other deeper than either one of us has ever loved. Now that you know the truth about the end of your relationship with Jack, can't you allow Jack and I to be happy? I promise not to hurt him, to always treasure his love and never take it for granted."

"Erica, I still love him though. I don't know if I can stop."

"Scarlett, part of you may always love him, but you can't make him love you like you do right now. Trust me, I have tried with him. He

has to come to it on his own; or else all it would be is your coercing him into it. That is not real love and not the kind of love you deserve."

Val slowly walked in. "Sorry to interrupt, Ms. Kane, but Mr. Adam Chandler is waiting for you in the lobby."

"Oh, shoot, I forgot. The Enchantment Board Meeting. Val, tell him I will be with him momentarily." Erica went to her desk, gathered up the reports. "I'm sorry. I have to be there."

Jack stood up and walked her to the door. "Go, I think we will be okay now." Erica kissed Jack's cheek as she headed out the door.

Turning back to Scarlett, he noticed a drastic change from the weepy woman sitting there before Erica left to the seductress standing before him now.

"Now that she is gone you can stop pretending Jackson. I know this relationship has all been a farce. You and Erica haven't been together in ages." Scarlett sauntered up to Jack, draped one arm over his shoulder and said, "Enough with the games. I understand that I screwed up when we broke up, but haven't we paid enough?"

Scarlett pressed her lips to Jack's hard and with full passion. Not wasting any time she wrapped both her arms around his neck and kept kissing him. Erica, having left the budget report on her desk, walked back in. Waiting to see how long it is before Jack pulled back, Erica just stood there watching. Not long after Erica walked in Jack pulled back and pushed Scarlett away. As he did so, he said, "No, Scarlett," then turned to see Erica.

Chapter 14

An eerie silence fell upon the room as both Jack and Scarlett stared at Erica, nervously awaiting what she might say or do. Erica did look at either one of them as she walked straight to her desk and picked up her missing report. Erica opened the report as she turned around and walked back out, while reading her report and ignoring both Jack and Scarlett and the awkward situation she walked in on.

Jack's eyes never left her until the moment Erica shut the door behind her. Scarlett watched Erica for a bit, but as she saw that Erica wasn't going to say anything, she started focusing on what to do now

that she had assuredly broken the "happy" couple up.

Jack felt Scarlett's hand on his shoulder. He turned around furious and scared. "What the hell did you kiss me for Scarlett? Damn it, you know I am engaged."

"Engaged is not married, Jack. And married is not the priesthood. Erica looked really angry. I am sure she just didn't want to embarrass herself by admitting her defeat in front of me."

Jack's jaw was clenched tightly. "Scarlett, don't ever mention Erica's name again. You are not fit to even mention such an incredible woman's name. Not only that, but you could never defeat the likes of Erica Kane. Get out of my sight!" Jack suddenly left the office to try and find his bride-to-be, praying she would still be his.

Around 9 that night...

Jack had searched all of Enchantment with no avail. He went to Myrtle's and Opal's trying to find her. He checked the Pine Valley Inn, his apartment, SOS, BJ's, the park and finally gave up and went back to Erica's. Sitting on her couch for the past two hours had been complete torture. Jack tried to work, he tried to eat, but nothing worked. Finally the fear took over he became worried she had been in an accident. Having called Derek, who had no information on Erica, Jack was greatly relieved when the door finally opened. He was then disappointed when it was Bianca, who knew nothing of Erica's whereabouts.

Jack started pacing the floor at ten. It had been five hours since the debacle with Scarlett, and the look of terror hadn't left Jack's face since Erica shut that office door. She was eerily silent, he recalled. God, please bring her home to me. Just then the door opened and Erica walked in.

Jack ran to her, threw his arms around her, holding her tightly against him. "Oh, thank you God. Thank you. I was so scared."

Pulling back Jack looked deep into her eyes. Searching for the love that shone so brightly from those brown eyes before she walked in on Scarlett and him. Erica pulled back before he could get a good look. Walking to the couch to put her bag down, Erica was still eerily silent.

Turning to face him, she finally spoke, "I am worried you might be mad at me after you hear what I have done, so I would like for you to sit and not interrupt me until you hear me out."

Jack started to speak, as he headed to the couch. "Erica, I could not be mad at you. I need to explain..."

"Jack, please let me go first." Jack sat there silent, watching her every move for any hint he could get.

"I am sorry you couldn't find or reach me this evening. I had some business to attend to. What my business pertained to is what I worry you might be mad at me about. I went to see Ryan Lavery about IncredibleDreams.com. As you know, Enchantment is a very large sponsor, and I personally invested quite a lot in the IPO. I offered Ryan my top advertising executive from Enchantment, if he would fire Scarlett. I told him I would pay for it and everything, but that I wanted her out of town by sunset tomorrow. Ryan couldn't pass up the offer, so Scarlett will no longer have job in Pine Valley after tomorrow morning. Then Jack, I did the really horrible thing. I called every business owner within a 100 mile radius that could possible hire Scarlett, and convinced them not to for one reason or another."

Erica sat down on the couch facing Jack. Jack held his breath. Taking his hand in hers, she said, "I then paid Marian Chandler \$100,000 not to sell Scarlett any property in town and to keep her from having another realtor find her something. Jack, I know I was mischievous, but I can't have this woman here any longer. I want our lives back to normal."

Jack kissed her hand. "Is that all? Did you break into her room?"

"No, I decided what I did was bad enough, and you might really hate me if I did that."

"Erica, I could never hate you. What about this afternoon? What about what you walked in on? Do you hate me? You were so silent and then you left. I can't lose you because of someone like Scarlett, Erica. I love you and only you. I pulled away."

"This afternoon. Oh, that kiss. Jack, that doesn't worry me. I know you love me and," Erica looked into his eyes. "I love you too. I was silent because I wasn't going to give Scarlett the satisfaction of a

reaction. I trust you, Jackson. I always have and always will. The likes of Scarlett Hughes or any other woman from your past could never frighten me."

Erica leaned in and pressed her lips softly to his. Pulling back, where she could still feel his breath on her cheek, Erica said, "I love you. I also plan on kissing that ridiculous woman's lame attempt at a kiss away by morning."

The suggestion in her tone was enough to drive any man wild. Jack leaned in, starting at her cheek he kissed his way to her mouth. Possessively claiming him hers, Erica's tongue slipped into his mouth to tempt Jack further. Jack slowly started leaning back on the couch, pulling Erica on top of him.

Chapter 15

The constant pounding on the front door and ringing of the doorbell aroused Jack and Erica from sleep. Jack looked at the clock, seven in the morning. Erica quickly went to the window to see, whose car was parked out front.

"Your psycho is here, Jackson," Erica cooed as she slowly walked to the bathroom to fix her hair before heading down to answer the door. "She is probably here to kill me for sandbagging her in Pine Valley."

Jack got out of bed wearing his trusty blue pajama pants. "Erica, I can handle this. Why don't you just get a nice hot bath going for us? I'll be back to join you shortly."

Erica came out of the bathroom with her hair pinned up, wearing Jack's pajama top. "I can draw us a bath, after we deal with Scarlett together. There is no way I am going to let her rant to you for my doings."

Wrapping his arms around her waist, "Are you sure you want to go down there dressed like this?" Jack leaned down and kissed her exposed neck.

"Yes, it will emphasize my point. Time for Scarlett to stick her tail between her legs and run home, wherever that may be." Jack wrapped his arm around her waist and they headed down stairs.

As they neared the front door, they could hear Scarlett. "Jack, I know

she's in there. Open this door. I have a bone to pick with you, Ms. Erica Kane."

Erica started laughing. Jack moaned, sarcastically, "Great, this ought to be fun."

"Oh, it will be," Erica laughed again, as she opened the door. "Good Morning Miss Hughes, what can I do for you?" Erica was standing where the door was only partially open, but Scarlett could see Jack's bare chest and the state of Erica's clothing very well.

"You can call all your friends back and tell them you were wrong," Scarlett angrily said.

"Now why would I want to do that?" Erica bit back. "I want you out of Pine Valley before sunset or else I will have to start calling more friends." Erica smiled at Scarlett.

"You aren't that powerful." Scarlett tried to look past Erica to Jack, but Erica kept bringing Scarlett's focus back to her.

"Do you really want to test me, Miss Hughes? Do you really want to try my patience? You have flung yourself off Jackson every chance you have gotten since you swooped into town. Every time he has turned you down. We are engaged, and you still kissed him. Don't force me to ruin you completely."

Jack laid his hand on Erica's shoulder. Scarlett was finally able to make eye contact with Jack. His eyes had nothing but coldness toward her as she searched for any hope of a chance.

"Scarlett, I think you should go," was all that he said to her. "Come on, honey." Jack said, as Erica turned to him and he shut the door behind them.

Later that day...

Jack was sitting at the Pine Valley Inn waiting on Bianca and Erica to meet him for lunch after their shopping trip. He was reading the latest news on Alex and Anna Devane in the Pine Valley News, when he heard her voice.

"May I speak with you for a moment?"

Looking up, Jack saw Scarlett standing next to his table. He motioned for her to sit, as he put the paper away.

"How is it that you have so much coldness in your eyes when you look at me, Jackson? We were once so in love."

"That was a very long time ago, and to be completely honest, I was never in love as much as you were Scarlett. You were my first girlfriend, and I did love you, but..." Jack paused. He was determined to tell her the truth.

"But what, Jackson?"

"I never really joined the army Scarlett. I left school for two reasons: 1) I didn't like it then; 2) I had to get away from you. You were talking marriage, and I was waiting to play the field. I wasn't ready to settle down with you or anyone."

"You lied to me to get away from me. I pushed you away," Scarlett looked down at her hands as she started to cry.

"I am sorry, Scarlett, but you needed to know the truth. I love Erica. She is the only woman I was ever not afraid to settle down with. I know that she and I have what it takes to go the distance. Please be happy for me, and let us go on with our separate lives."

Scarlett looked up, seeing Erica standing behind Jack. "Okay," she said, as she quickly rose. Walking up to Erica, "You won. Treat him right and don't ever let him go."

"Erica," Jack quickly rose. "How long where you standing there?" He asked as he hugged her.

"Long enough to know we are spending the afternoon alone." Erica's hands ran along Jack's back and the flash in her eye could have seduced any man.

"Mmm, where's Bianca?"

"She met up with Laura at the mall. They wanted to do some shopping alone, so here I am with a suddenly clear afternoon schedule. Do you have any plans?"

Erica pulled back from Jack and went to sit. He quickly pulled out her

chair for her, then sat back down. Jack felt Erica's foot slid up his leg. "Nothing I can't cancel." Jack took her hand and kissed it softly.

Chapter 16

Lying in bed, Jack held Erica close to him, as she played with his arm hair. After a playfully seductive lunch, Jack couldn't take it anymore. He realized there was no way he would be able to resist taking her in his arms until they made it out to her house. Since his apartment was closer and less likely to have interruptions, Jack drove Erica to his place. A painfully slow elevator ride with Erica leaning back against him, her whole body pressed up against him, amid the crowded elevator. Jack unlocked his door and they stepped into the dark room. After shutting the door, Jack pressed Erica up against it, unable to resist any longer. Now, lying with her in his arms, Jack tried to remember how they actually made it to the bedroom and when they did. Replaying the entire scene over in his mind, Jack felt Erica leaned back against him more.

"Jack," Erica whispered softly.

"Yes, honey."

"I am so sorry for all that happened between us these past few years, keeping us apart so long. I am so sorry about that thing with Mike. I loved you and although I screwed up, I never stopped loving you, Jackson."

"Erica, why are you apologizing for any of that? It is all over. None of it matters. We are together." Jack leaned up and kissed her cheek. "And I am never letting you go again."

"Jack, make love to me again. It's been so long since we have been together. I've missed the other part of me. I've missed you. I've missed being with my soul mate."

Erica turned to face Jack. He ran his finger along her cheekbone, down her chin, past her collarbone. Jack's hand was caressing every inch of her body slowly. Erica's eyes locked with his, as she ran her fingertip lightly along his chest.

"I've missed you Erica. You have no idea how many nights I have woken up from a dream that you were here with me only to be

disappointed that it was a dream. But tonight when I wake up in the middle of the night, I am going to have your hair on the pillow beside my head. I will have you sleeping in my arms. I love you, Erica Kane."

"Oh, Jack," Erica moaned as his hand that had rested on her back pulled her even closer. Jack's lips captured hers in a breath-taking, tongue-dueling, never-ending kiss. Pulling her on top of him, Jack and Erica continued to kiss, as their bodies slowly melded into one. One body, One soul, One heart, and One love.

THE END