

# Crystal Clear

## CHAPTER ONE

Erica stared at her reflection in the mirror as she finished getting ready for the Crystal Ball. This should have been a happy occasion - getting ready to celebrate the New Year. It would have been the first New Year's Eve that she and Jack had spent together as husband and wife if only everything hadn't gone horribly wrong. Now she was attending the ball with David, a desperate attempt to keep up the ruse she had started to prevent David from being arrested. She hadn't even wanted to attend the ball but David had insisted that they needed to keep up the appearance that they were lovers and she had finally reluctantly agreed.

As she looked in the mirror, her upswept hair and white gown couldn't help but remind her of the first Crystal Ball where she and Jack had had such a magical evening. They had danced and professed their love, and after, they had made love all night long and finally knew they were going to be together forever. Years had passed since that night and much had happened but they had finally found their way back to each other but somehow secrets and misunderstandings had come between them once again.

Erica knew that Jack would always be there for her and her daughters. He had supported Bianca through her rape and pregnancy and was now helping with Kendall's defense in the murder trial. She knew that he would be there for her too if she needed him. She was less sure, however, if he had forgiven her for keeping the truth from him about Greenlee or if they still had a chance for a life together. He had given her no real indication of how he felt about that and usually did his best to avoid talking about it. As the months had gone by, her hopes were slowly dwindling.

She was startled out of her reverie by the sudden flickering of the lights in the penthouse. As she came back to the present, there was a knock at the door. Since she was meeting David at the clinic, she had no idea who it could be. Everyone she knew was at the ball. She crossed the room and opened the door and the breath nearly left her body. Jackson was standing there, looking impossibly handsome in a black tux with a white scarf around his neck and holding a single red rose.

They stared at each other for a long moment. “You look beautiful,” he said, staring down at her. “Jack, what are you doing here?” she finally managed to ask.

“Isn’t that obvious?” he said as he came into the room. “I came to take you to the ball.”

“To the ball?” she repeated. She followed him back into the room. “I’m going to the ball with David.”

“No, you’re not,” Jack said calmly. “In fact, you’re not going anywhere with David Hayward ever again.”

## **CHAPTER TWO**

Erica stared at Jackson in astonishment. “Why on earth would you say that?” she asked. “There is no way that you and I can be seen together at the ball. I have to be there with David.”

“No, you don’t,” he replied. “There is no reason for you to continue this ruse with David anymore. Derek and Justin are convinced that Kendall is guilty. They have no real evidence against you or David. Even if they are still suspicious of what you and David did that night, there is no reason that you have to pretend that you and David are still together. You can simply say that you both realized it was a mistake and have moved on.”

Erica couldn’t believe what he was saying. She wanted so badly to believe that he was right, that she didn’t need to pretend to be with David anymore and that he actually wanted them to be together tonight. But as she felt her hopes rise that he actually meant it, she felt her fear and insecurity rise to the surface and overtake her.

“I see. So it’s that simple,” she said.

“Of course it is. I want us to be together tonight,” he said. “I miss you.” His voice deepened as he said this and he held out the rose to her.

Erica wanted to take the rose and rush into his arms where she knew she belonged but instead she heard herself say, “After all this time and everything that’s happened, you suddenly miss me?”

Jack narrowed his eyes, puzzled by her reaction.

“Honey, I just thought...” he began but she cut him off.

“Exactly, *you* thought!” she said. “That is so typical! You’ve decided that now is the time for me to stop seeing David so now I’m just supposed to, what, fall at your feet?”

Jack slowly lowered the arm that held the rose. She could see that he was getting angry but she plunged on ahead, months of hurt and anger tumbling out of her.

“You have given me absolutely no indication of what is going to happen with us and now you just waltz in here and expect me to go with you to the ball?” she demanded.

The lights flickered again and Erica glanced uneasily at the ceiling.

“Look,” Jack was losing his patience. “The only reason I’ve allowed this whole David thing to go on is because it gave you a much-needed alibi but now you don’t need to keep pretending.”

“*You’ve* allowed it?” Erica said incredulously. “This is just too much, Jack. I’m going to the ball and I’m going with David as planned.” She turned and grabbed her purse and wrap and headed for the door.

“And who says I’m pretending anything?” She said over her shoulder.

Jack followed her to the door. “Don’t walk out on me when I’m trying to get things settled between us,” he said angrily but she was already in the foyer. He slammed the door behind them and followed her to the elevator, both of them oblivious to the men down the hall working on the electrical panel.

Erica impatiently pushed the button for the elevator. “There is nothing to settle, Jack. You’ve made it perfectly clear that you don’t want to marry me so let’s just leave it at that.” The elevator arrived and she walked in with Jack right behind her.

“I have made no such thing clear and you know it,” said Jackson. “Let’s just talk about this. I want us to talk about everything that’s happened. That’s

why I came here tonight, so we could spend time together and work things out.”

Erica pushed the button for the garage. She could feel herself weakening but she couldn't bring herself to give in. She was too afraid of what would happen if she started to believe that everything could be perfect between them again.

“Why, Jack?” she turned and suddenly he was very close. She took a deep breath and stepped back. “Why should we try to work things out now?” The elevator seemed very small all at once and being this close to him was making her heart beat faster.

“You know very well why,” he said huskily, staring down at her. She could smell his cologne and staring into his blue eyes was making her head spin. “No, I don't,” she finally managed to say. “I think you do,” he said and now he sounded amused. “Otherwise you wouldn't be so nervous.”

“I am not nervous,” she retorted and whirled away to break the spell. She walked over to the elevator panel and pushed the button again. “I just want to get out of here and away from you.”

The sudden grinding halt of the elevator threw them both off balance and he reached out to grab her by the arms as she was thrown against him. He was so close that when he spoke his breath stirred the tendrils of hair on her forehead. His gaze went from her hair, down across her face, and settled on her mouth. “Well,” he said softly. “It doesn't look like either one of us is going anywhere...at least not for a while.”

### **CHAPTER THREE**

The silence in the elevator was deafening as they stared at each other. With difficulty, Erica tore her gaze away from his. “Jack, the elevator has stopped.”

“I'm aware of that,” he murmured, still staring at her mouth. She stepped back and he let go of her arms.

“How can you be so casual about this?” she demanded. “Any minute this thing could send us hurtling to the ground!”

“Well, that would hardly be a testament to Chris Stamp’s architectural abilities, now would it?” he said with a laugh.

“Jack...”

“OK, OK, I’m sorry. Look, everything seems fine,” he said. “It has to be a power outage. The emergency lights are on. I don’t think we’re in any danger. I just think we’re stuck here for a while.”

The thought of being alone with him in the elevator was more than Erica could contemplate at that moment. She knew she had to start talking about something - anything.

“Did Bianca tell you she’s going to the ball with Lena?” she asked, searching desperately for something to say.

“Umm hmm.” He stepped closer to her again. Erica backed up until she was against the wall of the elevator and could go no further.

“She seemed really happy about that,” she continued, as he got closer.

“Umm hmm,” he said again, stopping in front of her. He reached out to place her wrap back on her shoulder and his hand lingered on her bare skin. She could feel her breath quicken at the look in his eyes.

“You’re barely answering me, Jack,” she said. “I thought you wanted to talk.”

“I don’t want to talk anymore,” he said huskily. Her head was spinning as his mouth slowly descended toward hers.

“Jack, I...”

“Erica, just...shut...up,” his last word was said into her mouth as his lips met hers. She was kissing him back before she could think. They kissed urgently, with all the pent-up passion of the past few months. He pressed her back against the elevator wall as her mouth opened for his tongue. Her wrap fell to the floor as his mouth left her lips and began a trail of kisses down her neck and lower. They were both breathing heavily now and totally lost in each other. She moaned in protest when he stopped and opened her

eyes to look at him. His breathing was ragged as he looked deeply into her eyes.

“You can’t tell me that anything has changed between us,” he said, “that *this* has changed between us.” He bent to kiss her again. She was ready to tell him everything, how she felt, about the ruse with David, everything. “Jack,” she said against his lips.

The elevator suddenly lurched into action again, taking them both by surprise. They stared at each other as the elevator began a quick descent. Erica was suddenly unsure of what she wanted to say as Jack slowly released her.

The elevator doors opened on the ground floor. Jack picked up her wrap and handed it to her. She slowly reached out to take it from him.

At that moment, the door to the building opened and David rushed in.

“Erica, what’s going on?” David asked as he walked over to the elevator. “You were supposed to meet me over half an hour ago. I was getting worried.”

“She’s fine.” Jack answered for her. “Just a little electrical trouble.”

“We should get going then,” David said. “Maybe you should find your own date, Jack, instead of trying to steal mine,” he continued with a smirk.

“If you still have a date,” said Jack, not taking his eyes off of Erica.

“Why on earth wouldn’t I?” laughed David. “Let’s go Erica.”

Erica hesitated for a second, looking at Jack. His face revealed nothing and she felt her uncertainty return. Her original plan to go to the ball with David was still unappealing but suddenly seemed less complicated than staying with Jack.

“Of course,” she heard herself say to David. “I don’t want to miss the ball.” She walked over to David and took his arm and couldn’t bring herself to look at Jack as she walked out of the building.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

Erica looked around the ballroom at Wildwind but she couldn't concentrate on the holiday decorations or the beautifully dressed dancers. As she tried to focus on what people were saying, all she could think of was Jackson and when he would arrive. If he would arrive. She had barely spoken to David on the ride there and now just the sound of his voice in her ear was enough to make her want to scream.

She had chatted with Bianca and Lena and Kendall and Aidan and had even managed to be civil to Greenlee. She had wanted to talk to Reggie but hadn't been able to locate him.

"Erica, what is it?" asked David. "You haven't listened to a word I've said since we left the penthouse. What exactly happened between you and Jack?"

"What?" she replied, finally coming to at the mention of Jack's name. At that moment, she finally spied Reggie out on the terrace with Jamie and a few other young people. "Excuse me, David, I have to go speak to Reggie," she said and headed out to the terrace.

Reggie was doing his own dance to music coming from his headphones. Erica found herself smiling for the first time that evening as she watched him. As he turned and saw her, he took off the headphones and came over to her.

"Hey, Erica, you finally got here," he said exuberantly. "Man, this music is so bad I'm glad I brought my own. Where's J?" he looked over her shoulder expectantly. Catching sight of David, he immediately looked disappointed. "Jack said he was taking you to the ball. What are you doing with Dr. Hayseed?"

"It's a long story, Reggie. I just wanted to see how you were doing," said Erica.

"I'd be doing a lot better if you and Jack would just stop all of this and get back together," said Reggie.

"It's not that simple, Reggie. I wish it were," Erica said wistfully. She was silently berating herself for her reaction when Jack had shown up at the

penthouse. He had said everything that she wanted to hear, so why had she reacted the way she had? And then, in the elevator. She shivered at the memory of Jack's mouth and tongue and his hands on her body. If only David hadn't shown up, she had been ready to tell him everything but then she had panicked and left with David of all people.

"I'll talk to you soon, Reggie," she said and turned to go back inside. She stopped when she saw that Jack had arrived in her absence. He was talking with Tad and she suddenly couldn't breathe just looking at him. God, she loved him so much, more than she had ever loved any other man. If only they could go back to where they were before the wedding.

He looked up suddenly and their eyes met across the room. Everyone else in the room disappeared and it was just the two of them. She felt a surge of confidence that everything could be all right again. She could make him understand about Greenlee and about David. She started walking across the room toward him when David caught up with her and grabbed her arm.

"Hey, we're supposed to look like a happy couple, remember? A happy couple should be dancing," David said as he led her out to the dance floor. Jack was still talking to Tad but now he wasn't looking at her. She started to dance with David but couldn't bring herself to pay attention to anything he said.

"Mom, I hope you don't mind, but I really want to dance with David," Bianca's voice came from behind her. Erica turned to see Bianca standing with Jack.

"Why don't we switch?" Before Erica could say a word, Bianca had taken off with David, leaving Jack and Erica staring at each other.

Jack held out his hand to her and she took it. He put his hand around her waist and she placed her hand on his shoulder as he pulled her close. They had danced together so many times over the years and this time was no different. They fit together perfectly as they moved in time with the music.

Erica felt herself relax for the first time in a long while. She was in Jack's arms where she belonged and she could almost believe they were at the first ball together, where none of the current barriers between them existed.

"What are you thinking?" Jack asked her softly, gazing at her intently.

She decided to be honest. "I was thinking that if I closed my eyes, I could imagine that we were dancing together at the first ball," she said.

"Then I think you should keep your eyes closed," he said and pulled her closer. She tentatively laid her cheek against his chest and let out a sigh of contentment. Their fingers were entwined and he lifted her hand to his lips.

In her dreamlike state, she became aware of a commotion near the door. She opened her eyes to see Derek and Justin talking with Edmund. Jack stepped away from her and headed toward the door. Erica followed with a feeling of dread.

"What the hell is going on here, Derek?" Jack asked angrily.

"I don't see why I would have to answer that, Jack," said Derek. "It's not like you're the district attorney anymore."

"I'm well aware of that," Jack retorted. "But I'm sure Edmund has told you that this is a private party - and on New Year's Eve at that."

"The law never takes a holiday, Jack," said Justin with a grin. "We're just here to hand out a few subpoenas in the Cambias case. It seemed like a good place to catch everyone at once."

"Subpoenas? For who, exactly?" questioned Jack. By now the music had stopped and several people had gathered around Erica, Jack and Edmund.

"Well, let's see," said Derek, pulling a stack of papers out of his pocket. "I've got quite a few here but for starters, how about Dr. David Hayward?" he turned and handed one of the papers to David who took it with a resigned look.

"And a matching one for his lovely partner in crime, Ms. Erica Kane," Derek held out the white paper to Erica and she took it with a nervous look in Jack's direction.

"Erica and David have already been questioned," Jack said in a deceptively measured tone. "I don't see the need for them to be subpoenaed."

"I'm sure you don't Jack," Derek said. "And I'm sure you'll like this one even

less.” He held out a subpoena in Jack’s direction. “You’d better get used to being on the other side of the law, Jack, because this one is for you.”

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

“For me?” Jack took the subpoena from Derek and pulled his glasses out of his shirt pocket to read it. “This is ludicrous and you know it.”

“I can assure you everything is in order, Jack,” said Derek. “There’s a few additional things the state would like to ask you - about the evidence room and your whereabouts on the night Michael Cambias was killed.”

Erica’s feeling of dread was rapidly turning to fear. She had expected that she and David might be subpoenaed, but Jack? It was bad enough that he had been suspended as district attorney but the thought of him being questioned about his whereabouts that night filled her with unease. She cursed the circumstances that had led to her giving David an alibi since now she couldn’t say that Jack had been with her. Even as she thought it, though, she knew that Jack would never let her do it.

David was trying to get her attention and she finally turned to him. He took her arm and led her to the terrace. She looked back in Jack’s direction but he was engrossed in conversation with Derek and Justin.

“Look, as long as we stick to our story we’ll be fine,” David said.

“I know,” said Erica. “But it will be committing perjury to say on the witness stand that we spent the night together.”

“The alternative is that they’ll try to pin Michael’s murder on one of us,” David pointed out. “By saying that either you or I returned to his condo after we put the drug in his scotch. Is that what you want?”

“No, of course not. Maybe they won’t ask us about anything except what we did at Michael’s condo,” Erica said hopefully.

“Maybe,” David sounded doubtful. He looked behind her and suddenly leaned in and kissed her. Erica pulled away after a stunned moment.

“David.”

“Derek and Justin are watching us,” David said. Erica turned and looked back into the ballroom. She couldn’t see Derek or Justin or Jack anymore for that matter.

“Look, David, about this whole thing. I’ve been giving it a lot of thought and I really think it’s time for it to end,” Erica said.

“Now, Erica? When we’ve just been subpoenaed? I hardly think this is the best time,” David replied.

“Maybe not,” said Erica. “I’m not going to change my mind about our alibi. I owe you that much for helping me. I just can’t keep pretending that we’re together.”

“I see. Obviously this has something to do with you and Jack earlier,” David said with an edge to his voice. “Too bad if he doesn’t like it. What about the way he left you at the altar?”

“David, I’m not discussing that with you. Jack and I have a lot of things to work out,” Erica said. “And I’m determined to work them out.”

“I can’t believe it,” said David. “I really thought you had more sense than that.” Something about the way he was talking was suddenly making Erica uneasy.

“David, you weren’t actually thinking that you and I...” her voice trailed off. “You know I love Jackson.”

“I know that’s what you say, Erica,” David replied. “But you and I...”

“Are friends, David, nothing more,” Erica finished for him. “It took years for me to admit it but I belong with Jackson. I always have. Even when I was committed to other people, I realize now that a part of me was always with Jack.”

“I know that you miss Anna,” she continued. “But don’t confuse that with anything between us. You’ll find someone to love again, David, and right now I need to find Jack.”

David gave her a rueful smile as she turned to go back inside. "I hope you won't regret it, Erica," he said.

"I won't," Erica replied. "I know exactly what I have to do now."

She went back into the ballroom, her eyes searching for Jack but she couldn't see him anywhere. She finally approached Tad.

"Tad, have you seen Jack?" she asked. "I can't find him anywhere."

"He was looking for you," Tad replied. "I thought he went out to the terrace."

"Uncle Jack left, Mom," Bianca said, overhearing and coming up to them. "He didn't say anything. He looked upset all of a sudden and just walked out the door."

## **CHAPTER SIX**

Erica glanced at the hands on the clock for what seemed like the hundredth time. She had left the ball soon after talking to Tad and Bianca and returned to the penthouse. She had tried calling Jack, both at the loft and on his cell phone but there was no answer. She had briefly considered going to the loft but had lost her nerve. Instead she had taken off her gown and changed into an ivory silk nightgown and robe, released her hair down around her shoulders and began to pace the floor trying to make sense of the night's events.

She was startled by the knock on the door. "Please don't let it be David," she thought as she went to open it. When she saw Jack standing there, her heart leapt. He was still wearing his tux but the tie and scarf were gone. He looked tired and his hair was tousled. She longed to reach up and run her fingers through it.

"Jack, I'm so glad you're here," she exclaimed. "Why did you just leave like that?"

"It seemed like the best thing to do at the time," he replied as he came into the room.

She shut the door and followed him over to the couch. "I wanted to talk to you about the subpoenas," she said.

"Yeah, I wanted to talk to you too but you were preoccupied with something else - or should I say someone else," said Jack in a tightly controlled voice.

Erica was puzzled. "What are you talking about? David? Of course I had to talk to him about the subpoenas."

"Well, I guess you had to kiss him when you were talking about the subpoenas too," Jack said. "I saw that, Erica. There was no audience to pretend for. At least not one that you were aware of anyway."

"I certainly did not kiss David," Erica replied indignantly, "He kissed me - supposedly because he saw Derek, but knowing David, it looks like it was because he saw you."

"Look, Erica, it doesn't matter," Jack said wearily. "If you really wanted to be with David tonight, you should have just told me."

"But I don't," Erica protested. "You were right when you said it was time to end the whole charade and I told David that tonight."

"So this whole thing from the moment I showed up here earlier until now has just been what - a big misunderstanding?" asked Jack.

"Well, no, not really," Erica sighed. "It was just me being me, I guess. I don't know why I overreacted when you got here. I do want us to talk - to work things out. I want that more than anything." She looked at him pleadingly.

He was staring at her intently. "OK," he agreed. "You first." He sat down on the couch.

Erica paced nervously in front of him, praying that she could find the strength to say what she wanted to say. "First of all, there's absolutely nothing going on between me and David - but I think you already know that," she said.

"Let's just say it's good to hear, never the less," he replied.

“And Greenlee,” she took a deep breath. “I was wrong not to tell you - but you know that too. I just hope you can understand the reasons why I did what I did.”

“I’ve always understood why you did it, Erica,” said Jack. “You know I know you better than anyone. You felt threatened. You thought that knowing that Greenlee was my daughter would somehow interfere with my feelings for you and our life together.”

“Yes, I did,” admitted Erica. “And it certainly didn’t help that Mary and Greenlee aren’t exactly the two most trustworthy people in the world.”

“The whole point is that we have to be honest with each other, Erica,” Jack said. “I do understand why you did it but I can’t believe that after all we have been through that we still haven’t learned that.”

“You mean I haven’t learned it,” said Erica ruefully.

Jack reached up and grabbed her hand, pulling her down beside him on the couch. “I mean both of us. I’ve made some mistakes too.” He didn’t release her hand but instead gently caressed the back of her hand with his thumb before looking up at her again. “So, I guess the question is, where do we go from here?”

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

Erica didn’t know how to answer. Jack looked at the engagement ring on her finger. “Not once since the day we were supposed to be married have I seen you without this ring,” he said. “Suppose you tell me why.”

“Because I didn’t want to give up on the dream, Jack,” Erica answered, “Our dream. The one where we lived happily ever after and nothing could ever touch us again. I was so sure that it could still happen. Then when Bianca was raped, the pregnancy, Michael’s murder - everything just got so complicated. I was so sure that we could work things out and then, well I just made things worse with David -“

Jack reached out with his other hand and placed it over her lips. “Enough about David,” he said. “He’s not important.” The feel of his fingers against her lips was pure heaven and when he slowly traced his finger along her

bottom lip, her mouth parted. Their eyes met, both darkened with longing and desire. She was never sure who moved first but suddenly she was in his arms and his mouth was on hers. They kissed passionately, taking their fill of each other after the months of being apart. Her mouth opened for his tongue as the kiss intensified.

“God, I’ve missed you,” he said, pulling her onto his lap. Her fingers feverishly unbuttoned his shirt as she kissed her way down his chest. He groaned and pulled her robe from her shoulders, reciprocating with small kisses down her neck to her shoulders.

Somehow they were on the floor and the remainder of their clothes discarded. Their hands and lips found familiar places as if they had never been apart. He lifted his head to look at her naked body bathed in the warm glow of the fireplace. “I love you,” he told her hoarsely.

“I love you too,” she said breathlessly. Their lips met as they joined together, their bodies in perfect symmetry. The months apart only fueled their desire, bringing them to new heights. They reached the pinnacle together and lay spent in each other’s arms, their breathing slowly returning to normal.

Erica vaguely heard the clock sound 12 times and lifted her head off his chest to look at him. “Happy New Year,” she said teasingly. “Well, it’s certainly off to a good start,” he laughed, reaching up to kiss her.

“Oh, Jack,” she sighed. “I promise I’m not going to let anything come between us again. I promise to be honest with you - always - even if I’m scared.”

“That means the world to me,” he said. “I know how hard it is for you to do that. And I promise you that we will get through whatever is ahead together.”

Erica sighed and put her head back on his chest. “Together,” she repeated. “Forever, Jack. The way it was always supposed to be.”

“Forever,” he agreed. “I love you, Erica Kane.”

“I love you, Jackson Montgomery,” she closed her eyes, knowing that she

was where she was meant to be for the rest of her life.