

# **Erica's Choice**

**by Pam**

## **Chapter One: A Place of Solace**

Erica sat in darkness at her penthouse, still reeling from her meeting with Adam Chandler. Now two people knew what she had done on the night of Michael Cambias' disappearance: Adam Chandler and David Hayward. Adam had assured her of his silence. In spite of their tortured history, she still trusted Adam and knew that her secret was safe with him. David had also assured her of his silence. Though David was inherently less trustworthy than Adam, he had thus far shown himself to be sincere. Besides, Erica had wisely insured David's loyalty by giving him an alibi for the night of Michael's disappearance. She told the police that they were together all night, making love. It was a lie, of course. But that lie would keep their secrets safe and keep David's lips sealed, for he too had a lot at stake if the truth were revealed. The lies and secrets were beginning to take their emotional toll on Erica. Most importantly, they were wrecking havoc on her already strained relationship with Jack. Initially, giving David an alibi and pretending to be his lover seemed clever. Now, Erica was beginning to doubt the wisdom of her decision. Jack was the unintended victim of her ruse. She wanted so badly to tell Jack the truth, to have him hold her and tell her that everything would be okay. But, she couldn't tell him the truth. To do so would make him an accessory. It would ruin him. She loved him far too much to watch him throw his life and career away, though she knew he'd do it for her in a heartbeat. She struggled to convince herself that she had done the right thing. But, her heart was still breaking. Erica tried not to think of Jack. But, every time she closed her eyes, he was there. She longed for his touch, his voice, his tender kisses. Earlier, at the hospital, he had turned down her offer to come to the penthouse to "talk". She was hurt by his rejection, but she understood it. He had told her that as long as the ruse with David continued, they'd have to remain "just friends". But, in the hours since she had seen him everything had changed. Adam's revelation had rocked her. She needed her friend.

"Erica Kane does not wallow", Erica told herself, as she ended her reverie and picked up the phone to call Jack's loft. She was relieved when Reggie answered the telephone.

"Hey, what's up, Erica!", Reggie was happy to hear from her.

"Hi Reggie", she smiled into the phone. The feeling was mutual.

"Hey, um Erica, J's not here, he's at the police station. Said he'd be home by seven".

"Oh, that's okay, Reggie. Actually, I'm glad you're there. I need a favor".

"What's up?", Reggie was intrigued.

"I want to come by and surprise Jack a little later, and I was hoping\_\_\_\_\_"

"\_\_say no more", Reggie broke in. "You were hoping that I'd get lost so you and J can get busy. I understand."

Erica laughed. Somehow he had Jack's ability to know when she was up to something. Erica continued, "So, is there a movie or something that you can go to. You know, something that will keep you away, I mean entertained, for a few hours".

"Hey, no prob. You can count on me. I'm your guy. You just show up".

"Thanks, Reggie". Erica hung up the phone, beaming. Though seven O'clock was just two hours away, it seemed an eternity.

## **Chapter Two: Jackson's Regret**

Jack arrived at his loft at 6:45pm. Reggie was dressed to go out.

"Going somewhere?", he asked Reggie.

"Hey J, I was thinking I'd go catch a movie and get some dinner. I'll see you later." Reggie started for the door.

"Hey, hey, hey. Just wait a minute.", Jack responded, blocking Reggie's exit. "I may be a little rusty on the rules of parenting, but aren't you supposed to ask my permission first?", Jack asked.

"Oh, J, you know, there's this real pretty girl and she needs me. So, you know, I have to be there for her. I know you understand. So, let's just skip the rules, and I'll see you later, okay?" Reggie hated lying to Jack. But, it was for a worthy cause. Besides, there was some truth in his statement. Erica **is** pretty, and she does need him.

Jack laughed. He had only adopted Reggie a few weeks ago. But, somehow it seemed that they had been in one another's lives from the very beginning. As much as he wanted to keep Reggie under his watchful eye, he knew that he needed his space. Obviously, Reggie wanted to help a damsel in distress. Jack understood that more than anyone.

"Okay, Reggie. But, please stay out of trouble. The Pine Valley P.D. has you on radar.", he joked. "Besides, it's a school night".

"It's cool, J. I'll be back by 11".

"Whoa, 11:00? How's about 10?"

"Come on Jack. This girl's problems could take a long time to solve. How about 10:30?"

Jack laughed. "Okay, she sounds like someone I know. 10:30. Have fun". With that, Reggie headed for the door. With Reggie out for the evening, Jack thought that he'd finally get some much needed rest. He sat wearily on the sofa, sighing deeply. He thought about his earlier discussion with Erica. She wanted him. She had given him "the look". After all that they had been through, they still retained the unspoken bond of love and passion. He had asked for a raincheck. "Good move Jack" he scolded himself. In the moment, it had seemed the right thing to say. But now, faced with the honesty of hindsight, he knew that he had blown it. Truth was that he had wanted her just as much as she wanted him. Why hadn't he told her?

Jack couldn't stop replaying his earlier meeting with Erica. In his mind, he rewound that scene a thousand times. Each time, he changed the way the scene played out. In his replayed version, Erica would understand that he had a job to do, but that she was still the center of his world. In his new and improved version, they would end up in each other's arms. Jack decided to get some rest. He'd figure out a way to fix the mess that he had made with Erica. But, right now

he needed sleep. As he headed for his bedroom, there was a knock at his door. Too tired to deal with anyone else, he opened the door abruptly, intending to get rid of whoever it was immediately. His mood brightened when, to his pleasant surprise, it was Erica.

### **Chapter Three: A Second Chance**

Erica was dressed in a long leather coat that hugged her small curves and draped down to her slender calves. She wore her hair up, with delicate dark wisps of hair framing her face. She was beautiful. Jack could not believe how beautiful she was. She seemed to become more beautiful with the passage of time. They stood there in the doorway for what seemed an eternity, staring at each other, Erica awash in the sea of his deep blue eyes and Jackson entranced by the curve of her soft sweet lips.

"Well, are you going to let me in?" Erica asked with a wry smile. Jack's obvious pleasure at seeing her had not escaped her notice.

"Oh, um, yeah, sure, of course. Come on in sweetheart". Jack was flustered. "Is everything okay?"

"Everything's fine", she lied, as she walked into the room.

"Uh, huh. Sure. Well, what brings you here?" Jack didn't believe her for a moment. But, he knew there was no use in trying to force the issue.

"Well, you offered me a raincheck, and I'm here to collect". Remembering that he wanted her to feel loved and not rejected, Jack chose his words carefully.

"Uh, look, Erica, I'd like nothing more right now than to take you into my arms and keep you there all night long\_\_"

"But?!", Erica pressed gently, still smiling and moving closer to him.

"But, but, uh, but what?" Jack stammered confusedly, thrown off guard by her closeness.

"What's stopping you from taking me into your arms?" Erica persisted, sliding one hand up his arm and slowly caressing her way up to his shoulder, neck and face, her hand coming to a stop on his cheek.

"Uh, nothing I suppose, but\_\_"

"Shhhhh. No buts." Erica moved her hand from Jack's cheek and nestled it in his hair. She gently pulled his face down to hers until she could feel the warmth of his breath against her lips. She kissed him softly, tentatively, afraid to give in too soon to the full force of her longing.

Jack returned the kiss, enfolding her in his arms, parting her lips gently, inquiringly, with his tongue. The lovers kissed with increasing passion, losing themselves in the moment.

#### **Chapter Four: The Naked Truth**

They stood awash in their passion for each other, their kisses slowing but still loving. Jack pulled away from her embrace, holding her hands, he looked down at her lovely face. He hated what he was about to say. "Erica, we can't."

"But, Jack, why not?" Erica was taken aback. She wondered if she had misread the situation. Jack turned away from her, his thoughts racing. He was trying desperately to find the right words, to reconcile what his heart and body wanted with what he knew had to be said. He turned to face her again, his expression pained. Jack could see the hurt in her eyes. He spoke softly, his voice reassuring. He stroked her cheek gently and lovingly. "Erica, first I need you to know that I love you. I have loved you from the moment that we met and, I will love you until the day that I die. I cannot imagine a world without you in it. You inhabit every corner of my heart". Erica relaxed, visibly relieved by Jack's words. "Oh Jack, I love you too. So why\_\_?", she asked.

"Because, sometimes love isn't enough, Erica. I need to trust you."

"Oh, that again!" Erica exclaimed, turning away from him.

"Yes, that again", Jack whispered back, taking her arm gently and turning her to face him. "Erica, that whole situation with Greenlee, and now this thing you have with David, whatever the hell it is, it's more than I can take. We keep coming back to this issue Erica. We can't ignore it, and even a great night of lovemaking won't make it go away. You have been, shall we say, creative, with the truth for far too long, and people are being hurt."

"Jack, you've never had a problem with my creativity before." Erica smiled at him suggestively, hoping to change the subject.

"Stop that!" Jack was exasperated but not angry. He knew Erica well. He was not going to let her distract him.

"Oh, okay, then." Erica sighed in mock defeat, sitting down on the sofa.

"Okay!" Jack responded, relieved that she hadn't stormed out of the door. He sat next to her on the sofa.

"So where do we go from here?" Erica asked honestly.

"Well, you can start by taking off your coat and making yourself comfortable. We'll talk and take it from there. How's that for starters?"

Erica smiled knowingly. "Well, if you insist", she replied, standing to take off her coat. "And Jack, you are so right. We do have to deal with that annoying little trust issue. I want to make things right between us again", she continued earnestly as she unbuttoned her coat.

"Great! I'm so glad we're on the same page", Jack replied, rising from the sofa to take her coat.

Once her coat was unbuttoned, Erica shoved it off her naked shoulders, handing it to Jack with a smile. Jack stood before her, speechless, his brain unable to completely register what his eyes were seeing. She had worn nothing under her coat.

"What's the matter Jack?" She was grinning. It felt good to have the upper hand in a conversation.

### **Chapter Five: Afterglow**

Jack and Erica lay in each others arms as the sun rose. Both wore the same smile of contentment.

"You were truly inspired" Jack said softly, planting small kisses on her forehead.

Smiling, Erica looked up at Jack and replied, "You are all the inspiration I need". With that, they kissed again, each kiss building on the next, reigniting their passion from the night before.

\*\*\*\*\*

Two hours passed before either needed or wanted to speak again. This time, Erica broke the silence. "Do you still want to talk?"

"About what?" Jack asked jokingly. Before she could respond, he continued. "Erica, I don't regret last night in the least."

"Well, what about this morning?"

Jack detected a note of insecurity in Erica's question. He lifted her chin gently and, while looking directly into her eyes, he replied "I have no regrets. I have only love for you sweetheart." He continued cautiously. "But we still have issues to iron out. Remember, that whole 'truth' and 'honesty' thing?"

"Ah, yes, that" Erica replied, knowing that she wouldn't be able to skirt the issue much longer. "What if I go home, change into something a little less, uh, revealing and we can talk later at the penthouse?"

Jack laughed. "Nope. No deal. We talk here and now. I'll get you a shirt to put on." Jack got out of bed, slipped into a robe and grabbed an old shirt for Erica. Erica slipped into the shirt. She loved that it she could still smell his cologne on it. He watched her as she happily and lovingly wrapped her tiny body inside his warm shirt. "Come here", he whispered deeply. She responded without question. He wrapped her into his arms again and kissed her softly on the lips. "I love you so much." Then, as if catching himself, he pulled away, took her by the hand and led her into the kitchen. \*\*\*\*\*

Reggie was having breakfast in the kitchen, wearing his headphones, and bopping happily to his music. He saw Jack as he entered the room. Without missing the beat, he shouted above the music in his ears "Hey, wuzzup J?" Then he saw Erica, dressed only in Jack's shirt. He didn't even attempt to conceal his happiness. For this, he took off the headphones. "Whoa, hey Erica! Aw, man, so your little plan worked? That's great! So, J, when's the wedding. You know, I still remember my speech \_\_\_\_\_"

Jack cut him off. "Wait a minute, Reggie. Erica and I have a lot to work through. We still have a long road ahead before we can talk about a wedding. Besides, we've discussed your interference in my

personal life. Please, Reggie, I know you mean well, but you need to stay out of this."

Reggie considered Jack's words for a minute then grinned at Erica. "So, mom, what can we get you for breakfast?". Erica smiled back at Reggie but Jack was not amused. "Isn't it time for school?"

"Alright, alright. But, you two behave yourselves while I'm gone" Reggie replied as he headed out the door for school. Erica was smiling broadly as Reggie left the loft. Jack turned to her and apologized on his behalf.

"It's perfectly alright", she replied. "I understand Reggie. We really are a lot alike. He just wants a family and he'll move heaven and earth to get one. I can relate to that."

Jack saw the truth in the analogy. On one level he had understood why Erica kept the truth about Greenlee from him. Reggie's situation made things clearer for him. But, he still needed to confront Erica about her creative truth telling. "What did Reggie mean when he said that 'your little plan worked'?" Jack asked.

"I asked Reggie to make himself scarce because I had a surprise for you" she reported honestly. "I hope you are not angry with me about that?"

"No. No, not at all" Jack replied, blushing slightly over the memory of Erica's surprise. Then, looking at his watch, he noticed the time. "Look, maybe we will need to take a raincheck on our little talk\_\_"

"Don't you mean an encore?" Erica teased.

"No, I mean a raincheck. And, I mean a talk, a real talk", Jack replied seriously. "Right now I need to get down to the courthouse. Lena is being arraigned today. They think she killed Cambias"

"What! Lena? How? Does Bianca know? Why didn't you tell me this!?" Erica sounded angry.

"First of all, you didn't leave much time for talking last night and secondly, I didn't think you'd particularly care what happened to Lena", Jack replied, trying to maintain his composure.

"Of course I care what happens to Lena. Bianca still loves her. I have

made my peace with her. Jack, how could you even suggest that I wouldn't care. Do you think I'm heartless?"

"Look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way. Listen, I'll tell you whatever you want to know when we talk later."

"Whatever I want to know? Does that include whatever happened or didn't happen in the evidence room?" Erica asked pointedly. Jack wanted desperately to change the subject. But, he was unable to resist the one issue that plagued him. "Only if you are ready to tell me what you and David did on the night that Cambias disappeared".

With that, Erica's good mood quickly disintegrated. "So, the only **truth** that you are interested in is mine? Isn't trust a two way street, counselor?"

"Erica, I can't tell you anything more about the evidence room. I don't want to involve you any further in this whole investigation."

"Well, for that same reason, I can't tell you about what David and I were doing that night" Erica responded angrily. "Why is it that when I want to protect you from the truth, I'm perceived as being dishonest. But, when you claim to be protecting me, it's considered virtuous and noble? How arrogant!"

Jack wisely ignored the question, persisting in his attempt to get Erica to open up about her involvement in Michael's disappearance and murder. "Erica, don't you see, I need you to trust me. I need you to know that whatever your secret is, I will keep it. I can only protect you if you tell me the truth. Let me worry about the fallout. Just tell me, please. Trust me enough to do that, please Erica." Jack was clearly desperate to help the woman he loved. But, Erica was still seething. She ignored his plea.

"Jack, you haven't answered my question. You want me to trust you. You want me to tell you everything, to lay it all on the line. But, you won't do that for me? How can we 'work through our issues' if you won't trust me? Jack, if you don't want to marry me, just have the courage to say it!" As she spoke the words, she pulled her coat back on and headed for the door.

"What? This has nothing to do with\_\_\_ Erica, wait, please\_!" Jack tried to calm her, to get her to stay so he could explain things further.

But, Erica was not listening. She hurried out of the loft, almost knocking over a bewildered Tad Martin, who had come to see Jack. "Hurricane Erica, I presume", Tad yelled after Erica as she breezed out of sight. He peeked into Jack's loft, afraid of the state in which he might find his old friend.

### **Chapter Six: A Word to the Wise**

Tad had come to talk to Jack about the threat of organized crime in Pine Valley. He told Jack that the "accident" that almost claimed the life of Greenlee and Carlos was, in fact, a well organized and orchestrated assassination attempt. He wanted Jack to be aware of the situation, which needed to be handled delicately in order to avert disaster. After they talked, Tad cautiously broached the topic of Erica. At first Jack hadn't wanted to talk about her. But, now he seemed calmer and more willing to open up. He explained why they had fought. They discussed her ruse with David Hayward. Tad shared Jack's concern that perhaps Erica was in over her head. In Erica's defense, Tad agreed that Erica needed to feel that she could trust him too. "Well, I can't say that I blame her.", Tad had said. "You want to protect her. I get that. But, don't you see that she wants to protect you too? The problem is that you are both too damned stubborn to be the first person to give in. Jack, you need to put an end to this. You can't let this situation with Hayward continue. You know that creep will exploit this situation without a shred of guilt. And, by the time Erica catches on, it'll be too late for her. More importantly, it'll be too late for the two of you." Jack knew that Tad was right. "So, now that you've identified the problem, tell me, what is the solution?" Jack asked the question rhetorically. But he was surprised that his friend had an answer. "You really can't see the forest for the trees, can you? Here, let me do a little deforestation for you. You want to protect Erica. She wants to protect you. You love her. She loves you. You want David Hayward out of the picture. It's simple. Marry her."

Jack responded to Tad's suggestion with laughter. But, Tad was not laughing. "Jack, Erica already has an alibi for the night of Cambias' disappearance. There is no need for her to continue this insane ruse with Hayward. If anyone asks, she can tell them that she had a foolish fling, that she discovered that Hayward is the biggest jerk in all of Pine Valley and she has seen the light. Trust me on this, no one who knows Hayward will question any of that."

Jack considered his friend's words. "Look, Jack, don't rule it out before you think about it, okay?" Jack nodded, escorting Tad to the door. He would give it some consideration, but he made no promises.

### **Chapter Seven: Hurricane Erica**

Erica arrived at her penthouse, still fuming over her argument with Jack. Her relationship with Jack had been a roller coaster ride. The peaks had been glorious\_long nights of lovemaking, romantic dinners by candle light, fireworks on Bastille Day, two soul mates united for all eternity. But, the valleys had been horrific\_\_brutal verbal combat that left both of them emotionally scarred, weary and painfully distant. They loved each other with such intensity that they had been able to weather almost every storm. They had survived a plane crash, several affairs, the death of Erica's mother and of Jack's brother. Each time they faced a challenge, they faced it together and emerged stronger and more in love. Through the red hot fire of her rage, however, Erica could not see her way out of the valley this time.

Erica showered and changed. She tried to focus her attention on something other than Jack. In spite of herself, she could not stop thinking about him. Her reverie was disrupted by a knock at the door. Certain that Jack had come to apologize, Erica opened the door with a smile.

"Oh, David, it's you", she said, attempting to mask her disappointment.

"Hi Erica. I hope I'm not interrupting." David replied, noting her demeanor. "I came to find out what happened with Adam."

"Come in, David. We have a lot to discuss."

David and Erica spent the next several minutes discussing her meeting with Adam. She also informed him that Lena was going to be charged with Michael's murder.

"We have got to help her" Erica said. "We have information that will exonerate her. We have to go to the police. We can't let her take the blame for this, David. Bianca would never forgive me if I let that happen. We've got to do something."

"But Erica", David reasoned, "we can't help Lena without destroying

our alibi."

"Then I'll admit to my part in this mess. I'll keep you out of it."

"No, Erica, you know that won't work. We have already admitted to being at Cambias' condo together. If we destroy the alibi, we are both going down." David was growing increasingly uneasy over Erica's determination to clear Lena. "I have an idea that will allow you to clear Lena and potentially keep both you and I out of prison."

"What, what is it David. I'll do anything."

David hesitated briefly, then asked "Will you marry me?"

### **Chapter 8: Erica's Choice**

Erica and David arrived at the courthouse in time to make their appointment with the Justice of The Peace. It had taken some convincing, but Erica had reluctantly agreed to marry David in order to give them both immunity from testifying against each other should either be arrested or stand trial for Michael Cambias' murder. Erica had protested that she still loved Jack. But David had managed to convince her that marrying him was the right thing to do for Bianca and for themselves. Jack would understand that. "Erica", he had pleaded, "I don't exactly see Jackson knocking down the door to reconcile with you. Has he even forgiven you for keeping the truth about Greenlee from him?" When Erica didn't respond, David continued "I thought not. Erica, Jack has no intention of marrying you. If he did, he would have made that clear by now. I know you still love him. I know you don't love me. But, we still care for each other. We once had a great thing going. Who knows, maybe we can get some of that back. This is the right thing to do. You know it is." In spite of her mixed feelings, Erica consented to marrying David. In the hours since she said "yes" to his proposal, Jack had called her cell phone no less than five times. She ignored the calls. Talking to Jack would weaken her resolve. She would marry David Hayward. She would pull strings to get it done today. \*\*\*\*\*

While at the courthouse, Erica and David waited anxiously in the corridor. Erica was lost in thought when David spoke to her. "Erica, this IS the right thing to do. I promise you that. Jackson will understand."

"Jackson will understand what?" came a voice from the distance. "What will I understand?", Jack continued, clearly puzzled by seeing Erica and David at the courthouse.

Erica looked up at him, unable to answer. They held each other's gaze for a moment. Erica stood in silence. Jack, still confused, looked over at David who was by now grinning smugly. "Jack, you're just in time to congratulate me and my wife\_to\_be on our impending nuptials. Isn't that right sweetheart?" David turned to Erica, still smiling. Erica did not return his smile. At that precise moment, she wished that she were completely invisible.

It took a moment for Jack to notice that Erica had finally taken off his engagement ring. In the next moment, he realized that they were standing outside of the room where the Justice of the Peace presided. He looked at Erica. She could not look at him. The truth hit Jack like a ton of bricks. "Please tell me that you are not going to marry David Hayward!" Jack shouted.

Erica could hear the hurt in Jack's voice. She looked up at him slowly, afraid to speak the words. "Jack, I'm sorry\_"

"\_\_\_\_How could you!!" Jack interrupted.

"How could I?" Erica replied, her resolve returning. "You were the one who gave up on our relationship Jack, not me."

Jack was still in disbelief. "I need to talk to you Erica, NOW!!"

"Well, Jack maybe you can talk to her after our ceremony\_" David started. At that, Jack turned to David sharply, grabbing him by the collar and shouting at him to shut up.

Erica pulled the two men apart before they came to blows. "Jack, please. Okay, I'll talk to you now. But, I'm marrying David. You can't stop this."

"We'll see about that!" Jack retorted, still glaring at David.

\*\*\*\*

Jack led Erica to a quiet, empty courtroom to talk.

"Jack, I'm in no mood for a lecture." Erica started.

"Good, I'm in no condition to give one. I just have a couple of questions for you."

"Fire away counselor."

"Erica, do you love me?"

In spite of everything, that was the one question that Erica wasn't prepared to answer. She looked down at the floor and turned away from Jack's gaze.

"I want an answer, Erica. An honest answer." Jack continued, standing behind her and stroking her shoulders with unexpected gentleness. She did not pull away. When she turned to reply, she had tears in her eyes. Jack pulled her close, holding her gently while she sobbed a whispered "Yes".

Jack looked at Erica again and asked his second question. "Will you marry me?"

\*\*\*\*

The only thing more surprising than Jack's question was Erica's response. She had not taken the suggestion of marriage to Jack with the expected happiness. On the contrary, she seemed angered by the thought.

"Erica, I thought you wanted to get married" said a startled Jack.

"Well, yes I did. But, not under these circumstances, and certainly not as a preemptive strike to keep me from marrying David!"

"Is that what you think? You think I'm asking you to marry me to beat David Hayward to the punch?"

"Well, isn't that exactly what you are doing?"

"Let me ask you this, Erica\_\_\_"

"I'm afraid you have already asked your quota of questions, Jack" Erica responded sarcastically, while heading for the door.

"Have you bothered to check even one of the six voice mail messages that I left you. If you had, you'd know exactly where I stand." Jack's words halted her exit.

"What? What did you have to say?" Erica asked, turning to face him.

"Well, let's play the messages right now and see." Jack replied.

Erica listened to her voice mail messages. Jack was right. There were six messages from him, all within fifteen minutes of one another.

*Message One: Erica. It's Jack. I uh need to speak to you right away. Please call me as soon as you get this message.*

*Message Two: Erica. Jack again. Sweetheart, I really need to talk to you. Today. Please call.*

*Message Three: Erica. I know you must be getting these messages. I understand that you probably don't want to talk to me right now. Please call, I need to talk to you.*

*Message Four: Erica, I want to talk to you. No, I need to talk to you. I need to see your face. Sweetheart, please, call soon.*

*Message Five: Okay, Erica. I hate to sound desperate. But, truth is that I am. I'm desperately in love with you. I'm sorry about what happened earlier. I promise to make it up to you. Please, Erica, call me.*

*Message Six: You haven't called me back. I can only assume that you don't want to. I know you're hurt and angry. We've both been under a lot of pressure. I need you Erica. I want you. I love you. I want to spend my life with you. Whenever you're ready to talk, I'll be here waiting. I'm never giving up on us Erica.*

Erica sat in stunned silence, her eyes brimming with tears. Jack's voice had sounded so sincere, so full of love and longing. Jack took the seat next to her. "Now do you believe that I want to marry you?" Erica nodded yes.

"In case you were wondering, I do forgive you. I know that you needed to hear that. I also know that you've done things that were not entirely above board. But, I realize that you did them out of love\_\_\_love for Bianca and love for me." His voice was heavy with emotion as he spoke the words.

Erica nodded again "yes."

"So, " Jack persisted, "will you marry me?"

Erica looked up at Jack with tears of happiness. She pulled him close and whispered "Come here." She brushed her lips gently against his. He captured her lips with his as they sealed their deal. Years of love, passion and friendship all met in a single kiss\_\_\_\_\_two souls intertwined in a dance ordained by destiny. Erica's choice was clear. No words were necessary. Her heart had found its home.

**The End**