

# Love Lost and Found

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Ring

by Donna

The room was filled with candles and the fireplace flickered, casting shadows on the walls, as Jack set the stage for his evening alone with Erica. It seemed like forever since they found themselves in this room, and he could not help but remember the last time they had made love on this very sofa. He reached down and picked up one of the cushions and held it close to his heart, allowing his mind to travel back to that afternoon when they found each other again.

Neither of them had anticipated finding themselves in each other's arms, but there they were where they had always longed to be, and where they always seemed to land. At the time, Erica was engaged to Chris Stamp and, to everyone's knowledge, she seemed very much in love with him. Jack had written Erica off romantically after the Mike Roy fiasco-- at least that is what he told his heart every night he climbed into bed without her.

Jack and Erica were longtime lovers who never seemed to get it right. They were runners up in the game of love and chose friendship as the consolation prize. For years, they danced in and out of each other's lives, settling at last for a life apart. Each seemed comfortable with the other's decisions. They had both apparently found some measure of happiness in being "just friends". But, the day had come when they found themselves alone and in need of each other. Without warning, the old feelings surfaced and they began to kiss. The kiss had been gentle at first. Their initial nervousness quickly gave way to a familiar passion. As the kiss intensified so did their need to be close to each other. There was no where to hide, and no where to run, except to each other. The image of that day flashed through Jack's mind and there he was back in Erica's arms again. He moved his hands down her shoulders and around to the front of her jacket slowly and cautiously, taking his cues from her, waiting for her to stop the inevitable, but Erica did not resist. Instead, her eyes begged him to make love to her.

Jack was caught up the memory of Erica, the smell of her skin, the sound of her laughter, the way her hands seemed to capture every feeling he had within. There was nothing about this woman that he could not remember.

The sound of the key in the door bolted Jack back to reality as he scurried around the room to find a place to hide his special gift for Erica. As the door opened, Jackson's eyes gleamed with anticipation of the night's events. He could hardly catch his breath as he waited for her to come through the door. She was a little surprised by his presence in her penthouse, but she did not seem to question why he was there. Instead, she ran over and pulled him in for a passionate kiss. Caught up in the moment, Erica did not notice all the candles burning around her, nor did she notice the picnic style dinner that Jackson had laid out by the fireplace. As he pulled away, he turned her around to face the room so she could marvel at his efforts. In one corner was a white candle burning brightly, and beside it was a rose of the same color. As he slowly moved her around the room she could see that in each empty corner a candle was burning and a rose of the same color was strategically placed beside it. When her eyes came full circle, there was a red pillar candle with what seemed to be a million red roses staring back at her. She tried to catch her breath as the tears streamed down her face, but no matter how hard she tried she could not stop herself from crying.

He turned her around so that she was now facing him and kissed her softly on the cheek wiping away her tears with his lips. He placed his hands on her face and brought her in for a kiss that took her breath away. He pulled away suddenly trying to stop himself from getting lost in the moment. She walked towards the red roses and reached out to bring one closer, but was stopped by Jack who took her hand and walked her to the center of the room so that she was now facing the white candle again. He gently kissed one hand and place the white rose in the other and said, "white represents the purity of my love for you, no matter where our lives took us, my soul has always remained true to you."

He stopped at every candle and placed each color rose in her hand like it was a testimony of his love for her. Each color rose represented a different period of their lives together. When he reached the yellow candle, he picked up the rose and placed it against his lips and than

gave it to Erica and said, "yellow is for the friendship that always seems to hold us together. No matter how far we go away from each other, our mutual respect and friendship always pulls us back into arms reach."

Jackson's gesture evoked a flood of emotions in Erica's heart. Her tears seemed to warm his soul. Finally, he turned her petite frame to the red candle which was surrounded by 16 dozen red roses. Before he began to speak again he reached around and brought out the gift that he had hidden earlier. As he held the gift in his hand, he softly said, "red is for the passion that I always feel when I am around you." He stopped to catch his breath and to take in her reaction. He always seemed to marvel in taking Erica off guard and tonight was no different. He began to speak again, "the 16 dozen roses are for every year that I have loved you.....And tonight I give them all to you, with this gift. If you accept it, I promise I will always be the light that will keep you out of the dark and the love that will keep you warm at night. I love you Erica, not just because of who you are, but because of who I am when I am allowed to love you freely."

Jackson took her hand and guided her to the sofa, where he motioned for her to sit. At first, Erica was not sure where this evening was going, but when Jackson kneeled in front of her and held the gift out it all seemed much clearer. Her hands were shaking nervously as she tried to open the gift that Jack placed in the palm of her hands. "It's not my birthday," Erica said jokingly, "and it's not Christmas, so---" Before she could finish, Jack placed his hand on top of her hand and opened the top of the box.

Although Erica had an idea what was inside the box, she could not believe her eyes. The ring sparkled in the candlelight and reflected back in her eyes the love that came from Jack's heart. He looked at her hoping for an answer, but no words fell from her lips. He smiled at her and said, "Erica, I think you know what the question is, now will you please say something, please say yes." She did not respond. Instead, she sat silently staring at the magnificent ring that Jack had just given her. He reached over and looked her directly in the eyes, searching her soul for an answer to his question. And there it was, hidden in her tears. She spoke softly, but her words were crystal clear.

She held Jack's gaze and replied, "I have spent half my life running towards you and the other half running away, and tonight for the rest of my life I just want to be with you. Yes, Yes, Yes...Jackson Montgomery I will marry you."

No other words were necessary. Jackson lifted Erica into his arms and carried her towards the bedroom. Piece by piece, their clothes fell to the floor as they allowed the passion to overtake their minds and souls. Jack lay Erica gently on the bed, his hands traveling the familiar terrain of her body, caressing every curve and exploring every spot he knew would drive her wild. His mouth followed the same path that his hands had taken earlier, leaving a breathless Erica begging for more. He knew the effect his touch had on her and he enjoyed every moment of her surrender. When he reached her mouth, she could not stop herself from running her fingers through his beautiful blonde hair and pulling him in for a deep passionate kiss. Now it was Jack's turn to surrender.

It was not until Erica began planting soft, sensuous kisses down his chest that Jackson lost his resolve. Desire consumed his body and love fueled the flames of passion causing a flushed Jack to pull Erica's warm body up on top of him so that she was now looking directly into his eyes. He took her face in his hands and captured her tongue with his mouth. He slowly moved his head back and forth in disbelief over the effect that she had on him. When their eyes met again, the playfulness was gone, and in its place was a look of vulnerability that Erica had never seen from Jack before. He reached in for a kiss and softly whispered in her ear. "No more games! I need you to be as close as you get to me now and forever. Show me Erica. Show me that you love me."

For hours they made love until their bodies fell back on the bed in exhaustion. In this moment, they felt invincible. Erica lay quietly in Jack's arms wondering how she had ever lived without him. As he gently moved his fingers up and down her arm, he whispered, "Happy?" There was no question in Jack's mind how she felt, and she knew this, but Erica could not resist an opportunity to flash him one of her famous smiles. "Happier than I have ever been in my life," she beamed.

As he moved in to his kiss her lips, he caught a glimpse of what

seemed to be a person standing in the doorway to Erica's bedroom. Quickly picking up on Jack's confusion, Erica turned to look towards the entrance. At that moment, the shadowy figure emerged from the doorway startling both Jack and Erica. Before either them had a chance to speak, move or react, they were stopped by the deafening sound of gunfire ringing out in the bedroom air.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Paradise Interrupted

by Joy

Erica screamed as the lamp by the bed shattered from the bullet. Jack's instincts kicked in, as he managed to quickly grab Erica and roll off the bed as 5 more gunshots rang out in quick succession before the sound of running footsteps and a door slamming signaled the intruder's exit. Jack and Erica continued to lay on the floor still tangled in the bed sheets, their hearts thudding madly, though this time for a far different reason than the usual passion. "Are they gone?" Erica finally found the strength to speak. "Yeah," Jack said numbly as he began easing himself into a sitting position, peering over the side of the bed to be sure. Surveying the dark holes located on the pillows and the mattress where they had been lying just moments before. They looked at each other, eyes wide with fear as sirens began sounding in the distance. "We'd better put on some clothes", Jack broke the stare as he reached for his silk boxers. They had just gotten robes on when the pounding on the door began. They opened it to see Derek and a couple of officers standing there.

"There was a report of gunshots from the penthouse? Any trouble here?" Derek asked, his eyes quickly scanning the penthouse for any threats.

"Just a little target practice." Jack stood back opening the door for them to enter. "Problem is, we were the targets." He finished his sentence as he led Derek to the bedroom.

"I want a crime lab here now." Derek spoke into his walkie-talkie as he surveyed the damage in the bedroom.

After he did a quick walk through of the rest of the penthouse, they proceeded to sit in the living room while the crime lab did their work,

as Derek asked questions about what had happened. They told him all they knew, which unfortunately was not much. They had seen the dark figure aiming the gun, but the person had been dressed all in black and was wearing a mask, so they couldn't even tell if it was male or female from their brief glimpse.

After all the questions had been answered and the scene thoroughly investigated, it was nearly 4 a.m. and everyone was exhausted. "Do you have any idea who would want to kill you?" Derek asked one final time, as he was putting up his notepad. "Come on Derek, I'm the D.A., there could be several people out to get me." Jack said in tired frustration.

"I guess we can put you both in protective custody, since it's a fair assumption this person might very well strike again, or we could offer police protection if you'd rather stay in your own homes." Derek sighed as he rose from the sofa. "I'll give you two a moment to discuss it," he said as he walked over to the officers.

"What do you think? Do you want to go to a safe house?" Jack turned to Erica, pulling her into his arms as he asked the question.

"I don't know, it's so much to think about." Erica shivered despite the warmth of the room.

"Whatever you decide is fine by me sweetheart," Jack said as he pressed his lips to her forehead.

"As long as I'm with you," Erica sighed. "Though I think I'd feel more secure in a familiar environment than a foreign one."

"I agree. So we could stay here, or my apartment, or back at your house, or... anywhere you like." Jack's voice trailed.

"The house is too big; I'd like to stay somewhere small where there are not so many entrances and less dark corners," Erica decided.

"Ok. So here or my apartment then?" Jack agreed. "My apartment is only 2 rooms, so it's smaller."

"Not to mention the mattress here is ruined. And we're definitely going to need a working mattress." Erica smiled seductively, the decision made. They informed Derek of their decision, and he arranged a police escort for them to Jack's apartment. He also

arranged for them to have a uniformed officer to stand outside the door, and an unmarked car for the street.

“I’d like for you two to make a list of people who might want to harm you, either separately or together,” Derek asked as he left them, now secure at Jack’s apartment. “And make sure you don’t go anywhere without police protection. I’ll come back later this evening to collect your lists.”

“Thank you Derek, officer.” Jack nodded to the young man who had taken guard by their door.

“Oh Jack, I’m so tired.” Erica stretched.

“Let’s go to bed then,” Jack agreed, yawning as he led her to his bed. They curled up tightly in each other’s arms, soon falling asleep after the stress of their ordeal.

*A figure approached in the dark, viewing the sleeping couple as it raised the gun, determined not to miss this time as the trigger was squeezed twice in quick succession, then an evil chuckle at the picture of the two lifeless bodies lying on the bed. Blood was trickling down Jack’s forehead, staining his blond hair a dark red as his eyes stared lifelessly at the ceiling. Erica was still lying against him, her sightless eyes still showing shock from the quickness of the attack.*

“Nooooooooo!” Erica screamed, cold sweat streaming down her body. “No, no, no” She thrashed about, still in the grip of her nightmare. “Shhh... honey, it’s OK.” Jack shook her, bringing her back to consciousness, and holding her close as the sobs and shaking began to quiet.

“It was horrible Jack, I saw us laying there, both dead,” Erica finally said, her voice quavering as she began to recount her nightmare. “I saw that awful person again also, shooting us and then laughing.” She squeezed her eyes shut as she pulled herself closer to Jack’s comforting body. “I know, honey, it’s alright,” he soothed, gently rocking her as if she were a child as he kept planting tender kisses to her forehead, while massaging her back.

“Just hold me close, I feel so safe with you,” she whispered, enjoying the comfort of his arms. They finally drifted back into a light sleep, hoping to get a few more hours before the day began.

It was late that morning, almost noon, when they finally woke. Both were stiff and sore, yet grateful to be alive. “Some evening of romance that turned out to be,” Jack said with a slight grin as he put a pot of coffee on to brew. “I certainly have no complaints, well up until the end.” Erica smiled back, love shining in her eyes. “Good,” Jack said huskily as he pulled her close to him, their lips meeting in a smoldering kiss that continued to deepen, until Erica pulled away.

“Something wrong with my breath?” Jack teased as he started to pull her back to him. “No, I just realized that I’m in desperate need of a shower.” She smiled coyly as she began walking towards the bathroom, leaving an obviously disappointed fiancé in her wake. Jack stood in the kitchen muttering to himself about people ruining romantic moods as he poured another cup of coffee. His mutterings were interrupted when her voice came down the hall. “Well aren’t you going to come help me?” It only took a second to register what she said as he eagerly went to join her.

They slowly helped each other undress and then stepped under the spray of hot water. Gently washing each other and resuming where the morning kiss had left off, breaking apart several minutes later, laughing when the water ran cold and quickly moving to the bedroom. Some time later, they had re-dressed and were in the kitchen again, brewing another pot of coffee when the phone rang.

“Montgomery,” he said into the receiver. Erica noticed his face pale slightly as a moment later he hung it up. “Jack, who was it?” She asked finally. “I assume our mysterious visitor last night, they said they knew where we were, and then laughed and hung up.” He looked slightly shaken. “I guess it’s back to reality,” he said as he sat down and picked up a legal pad to begin making the lists Derek had requested.

“It’s just not fair!” Erica yelled. “We finally get our lives back together and something ELSE happens. Are we ever going to get to be happy together? Are we ever going to be at a place in our lives where our biggest worry is what time to get out of bed in the morning?”

“I know honey,” Jack sighed, “maybe after getting rid of this crazy person our lives will get back to normal.”

“I hope so. I want to be making wedding plans right now, not a list of

people who might want to kill us.” Erica continued to pout as she too picked up a legal pad to write. It was over an hour of silence later when they both put down their pads, amazed at how many names they had come up with. They put stars by the ones they felt were more probable than the others to go to such extremes. “You know what I’m also wondering?” Erica said, breaking the silence. “I’m quite sure I locked the door last night. So who would have had a key?”

“You’re right,” Jack agreed, “that would definitely narrow down the list of possible suspects. Maybe you should mark everyone on the list who might have had a key. We’ll have to remember to mention that to Derek.” As if on cue there was a knock at the door, signaling Derek’s arrival.

“Derek, hey, did you find anything out?” Jack was eager to know as they let him in.

“Nothing yet, we’ve questioned everyone in the hotel, and looked at the evidence, but no leads so far. Have you been able to think of any new clues?” Derek said grimly, not liking it when there was such a lack of evidence when his friends’ lives were threatened.

“I did think of one thing.” Erica proudly said, telling him of her theory about the person having a key since they had locked the door. Her happiness faded though at the look on Derek’s face.

“The lock was tampered with; actually there was a piece of tape over it so that it never really locked. Whoever did this was planning well ahead. But we’ve still got the lists to go over right?” Derek picked up the two legal pads and glanced over them.

“They also called this morning,” Jack added, “so maybe a tap and a tracer on the phone.” He told Derek about the brief message. Stopping in the middle of it with a look of surprise, “Jack, what is it? Did you remember something?” Derek and Erica spoke almost in unison.

“Yeah, the callback feature, I didn’t think to use it.” Jack rushed to the phone quickly hitting \*69 before putting it on speaker phone.

“Valley Inn dining room, how may I direct your call?” The voice of the hostess came on.

“Sorry, wrong number.” Jack quickly said as he hung up.

“So whomever, it was could have been eating at the Valley Inn, or could live there.” Derek began thinking. “I’m going to go question that hostess, and we’ll start looking over your lists. I’ll be back in touch this evening,” he promised as he began to leave. “Oh Derek, I wanted to ask about protection tomorrow, when we have to go to work.” Erica caught him before he went out the door.

“That’s already taken care of,” he promised as he smiled and left.

Jack and Erica locked the door behind him, holding each other and feeling safe for the moment, completely oblivious to the dark figure in the alley watching their window for signs of movement.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Duck and Cover**

by Christie

Jackson knew how afraid Erica was and, for that matter, he was too. “Well, here we are locked in and alone for the whole night. What can we do Jack?” Erica was smiling up at him now. “Oh honey I can think of a few things that may take us all night.” With that, she felt herself being lifted into Jackson's arms. Jack carried her to his bed and lay down beside her. “Don’t be afraid tonight Erica, not here not in my arms. Nothing will ever harm you here.” Jack began his mission of calming her fears -----just for a while.

It was still early when Erica awoke a few hours later. Erica felt safe and warm in Jackson’s arms and she loved watching him as he slept, but tonight Erica could sense that something wasn’t right... only she didn’t know what. Erica eased herself from the bed, trying not to wake Jackson. He was putting up a strong brave front for her but she could read the fear in his eyes. It wasn’t a fear for himself. It was a fear for her safety that scared him to the depths of his soul.

The phone rang and Erica hurried to answer it before it woke Jack. “Hello. Oh, Opal. Hi.” Erica told Opal about the events just past but Opal already knew something was up and was heading over. Erica hung up and tiptoed down the hall, not wanting to disturb Jack.

Pulling his door shut, she turned towards Reggie’s room. Erica smiled

to herself at the thought of this boy she had come to love as her own son. He had so much of Jackson in him that were he Jack's biological son, her feelings would be no different. She truly loved him. Erica walked into his room and gave a silent thanks that Reggie had gone to spend a few days with Lily. The thought of him in danger was more than she could bear. Reggie and Lily had also become pretty close lately. Lily seemed to adore him as much as Erica did, but then that really didn't surprise her. Reggie was just plain great.

Erica stuck her head out of the door to speak to the uniformed officer that was stationed there. "Ms. Kane. Can I...can I get you something?" he stammered. Erica laughed to herself, but smiled graciously at the young police officer. "Thank you for asking Officer but I just wanted to let you know that my friend Opal Courtland is on her way over. So please let her right in, O.K.?" "Sure Ms. Kane," he managed to stammer and then added, "you are really beautiful. It is an honor to be guarding you." Erica smiled again, "Thank you," she replied, giving him a wink and before ducking back into the loft. A few minutes later the door opened and Opal arrived.

"Hey girlfriend, I knew something was up with you and it isn't good either." Opal said hugging Erica. "Shhh. Jack's sleeping. He needs it, so I am trying to be quiet," Erica whispered to her. Erica and Opal sat together, going over Erica's list of potential suspects. They shot down person after person, arriving at the same dead end every time. "Who could want to hurt me? I just don't understand this Opal" after racking her brain, she was still at the same place...nowhere.

Erica and Opal where finishing up when Jack came into the room "I thought that was you I heard. Hi Opal" Jack said giving her a kiss on the cheek. "Oh Jack!" Opal said turning to face him. She had a bad feeling of doom coming over them all. Jack walked Opal to the door and quietly told her not to scare Erica any more than she already was. He promised to protect her with his life, and Opal was afraid it might just come to that.

They ate a very late dinner. They talked about the kids, even Greenlee. Then they had a long hot shower together, and they were now lying on the floor together, both wearing one of his bathrobes and staring into the fire Jack had made. Erica was lying against Jack's chest, watching the fire. "It seems hard to believe that we are

in any danger right now, Jackson. I always feel so safe in your arms," she said to him.

"Well I plan on making you feel a lot safer by the end of this night," he said turning her to face him. Slowly his lips came down on hers, just brushing his lips over hers in a soft caress.

"Oh Jack, take me to bed," Erica whispered to him, her words exciting him even further. He loved it when she said those words to him. He stood and pulled her up tightly against him and kissed her, letting her feel what her words had done to him. Jack carried her to the bedroom and placed her on the bed, hovering over her and looking into her eyes. He kept his promise and made her forget her fears as they lost themselves in their passion for each other and made love through the night.

They woke early the next morning, made love slowly and were now having a quick bite before leaving for their day of work. They left together, taking the elevator to the garage while making plans for Jack to meet her at Enchantment. "I will come up and get you so please stay put until 2:00," he joked, trying to lighten her worry. They kissed again, lingering for a moment.

Erica was almost at her car when she saw the same shadowy figure from the penthouse just a few feet from her. The person was hiding in the shadows behind the front of some big Sports Utility Vehicle. He was watching Jack watch her. She could make that much out. Looking back to Jack, who was still watching her, she smiled and winked at him. "Don't forget me," she said, "I'll see you at noon." Jackson knew something was off, he had just told her that he would be there at 2:00. Then he saw the look of cold hard fear in her eyes. Jack started to run towards her but the sound of gun shots screamed through the garage.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **A Family in Peril**

By Angie

Erica fell to the ground hard. The sound of gunfire and Jack's voice

ringing in her ears. Before she could react to the sound, it ebbed away.

*Her breath caught as Jack moved toward her. Her eyes took in the sight of him, glorious from head to toe. No other man could come close to looking so sexy in a tux as Jackson did. And the smile he wore as he approached her set her heart aflutter. As he came closer, she could not help thinking of how she wanted to enjoy helping him out of his tux later on. Sliding the white jacket off his broad shoulders, slipping her slender fingers underneath the suspenders, slowly unbuttoning the crisp white shirt. But for now she wanted to be in his arms, to feel those strong arms encircling her body, to lay her head against his chest as their bodies swayed together, fit perfectly together. There was just something about listening to his heartbeat, it made her feel so alive, so connected to him. He took her hand now, tugging on her fingers as he pulled her into his arms. Erica happily snuggled into his embrace, knowing she was where she was meant to be.*

*She was startled when he pulled back. Erica looked up at him, her astonishment fading to contentment, as Jack looked down at her with eyes full of love. Drowning in her eyes, Jack brought his hands up to capture her face, his warm breath feathering her cheeks. "You are my life," he whispered tenderly, "I love you so much." Kissing her lightly on the forehead, he once again enveloped her in his arms. Erica's eyes stung with tears, overcome with emotion at the depth of their love for each other. No other man had ever touched her so deeply or loved her so fully. She had never let anyone get that close. Only Jackson could caress her soul.*

*Even as his head towered over hers, their bodies fit perfectly together, moved as one in perfect symmetry. Their dance was slow, as they luxuriated in holding each other close. Jack lightly caressed Erica's back, anticipating helping her out of that dress later on, unveiling her soft skin. To touch her, to feel her respond to him, was everything he could ever want. His touch induced a small shudder from Erica. His touch was gentle, but it ignited something so powerful deep inside her. No longer content to continue at the same easy, leisurely pace, she wound her arms around his neck, threading her fingers through his blonde hair. She could see his lips moving, but never heard the words. Her eyes were hypnotized by his lips. All she*

*knew was that she wanted to feel those lips on her own. A breath away from her objective, Erica froze as the strident sounds of attack surrounded them. She reached wildly for Jack, but he was gone. And Erica tumbled into blackness.*

Struggling to move, she panicked when she found she could not. She had to get to Jack! Her heart thundered in her chest as her mind contemplated what had happened to him. She squeezed her eyes shut, unable to wrap her mind around the images. If anything had happened to him... she could not bear it. He was her lifeline, the only person who kept her from spinning out of control. She was completely lost without him. Twisting her body around in an attempt to see what was sprawled across her, hindering her escape, Erica nearly squealed in delight. And then in fear. "Jack!" she cried, as she realized it was his body covering hers. Her voice was enough to bring him around, as he opened his eyes, calling her name. They fell into each other's arms, clinging to one another, relieved that they were both unharmed. Their embrace tightened as they heard footsteps approaching, each inwardly vowing to protect the other.

"You two got some 'splainin' to do," the voice insisted. Jack and Erica looked up and burst into uncontrollable laughter.

"Fine," Tad complained, "I save your sorry butts and run after that crazy person. Did I mention run? And now you're laughing at me?"

"Did you get him?" Jack asked, suddenly serious.

Tad shook his head, "But I winged him...or her," extending his arm as Erica and Jack spied the gun in his hand for the first time. Pointing across the parking lot, he added "And they left quite a trail of blood. Maybe the police will be able to find a match."

"Will you please put that gun down," Jack requested uneasily.

"Sure thing, Dad," Tad mugged, putting the gun away. "Speaking of the police, where is your trusty guard?"

"That's a good question," Erica said, serious now as well.

"Well, in any case, you two need to get out of here," Tad instructed. "I know a place outside of town. It's not the Ritz, but it will do." Jack listened as Tad gave him directions and he and Erica started across

the parking lot, only to be stopped by Tad.

“Two gorgeous people, but not so smart,” Tad sighed. “You won’t be wanting to take either of your cars,” tossing Jack his keys. Thanking him, they started off again, only once more to be called back.

“Sorry,” Jack apologized, tossing his own keys to Tad

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Pushing open the door, Jack burst into laughter.

“Oh come on, Jack, “ Erica proclaimed, from behind him, “It can’t be that bad.”

“Wait till you see this,” Jack told her, stepping aside so she could enter. “Bring back any memories, sweetheart?”

“It sure does,” Erica purred seductively. Giving him a playful shove, she asked, “Did you have anything to do with this?”

Jack gave her a “how could I have known?” shrug and went off in search of food. After eating, they began to sift through the stacks and unearthed an old record player. “I wonder if it still works,” Jack said as music filled the room. Holding his hand out in invitation, Erica giggled as he spun her into his arms. They swayed together, their bodies melting into each other, moving seamlessly, until the rhythm of the music gave way to a rhythm all their own. “For a while there,” Erica whispered, “I nearly forgot everything that’s been going on.” She whimpered when Jack’s body broke contact with hers, until she caught the hunger in his gaze that matched her own, and sighed as his hands found their way to her hips.

“Let’s see if we can’t do some more forgetting,” Jack suggested, gently lifting her on top of the pool table. Erica immediately pulled him to her, wrapping her legs behind his back and her arms around his neck. Their lips met in a soft kiss, clothes falling away, as they gave into their raging desire and lost themselves in making love.

“So this is what it’s like to make love on a pool table,” Erica finally uttered much later, her warm breath floating across Jack’s bare chest where her head lay.

“Is that a complaint?” Jack teased, wrapping his arms even tighter

around her body.

Shaking her head back and forth, as much as their closeness would allow, Erica breathed, "I always wished we had."

"As much as I hate to break this up..." Jack said, sitting up, "As much as I really hate to break this up," he reiterated as Erica gave him her best sultry pout, "I need to check in with Reggie and Lily." Erica nodded, as he pulled on his pants and rifled through their discarded clothing for his cellphone, giving her one last remorseful glance. Jack didn't turn back to face Erica for a moment, trying to compose himself. When he turned around, Erica was already frightened, hearing from his side of the conversation that things were not well.

"What's happened?" she asked, her voice quavering.

"I don't really know," Jack said honestly, sounding a bit lost. "There was no answer in Lily's room and they said that she and Reggie are both gone."

"Gone?" Erica repeated incredulously, "Gone where?"

"I don't know," Jack said again, sitting down wearily on the pool table. Erica wrapped Jack's shirt around herself and slipped onto his lap, stroking his hair.

"They will be okay," she tried to assure him. "They WILL be okay," she said again, a bit more defiantly, with a bit more confidence. "Reggie will make sure of it." Neither one was saying it, they didn't dare. But still it hung in the air. "If they hurt my little girl..." Jack thundered emotionally, caught between anger and fear. Erica embraced him tightly, offering him her strength and her comfort.

It struck them both at the same time. "Bianca," they breathed. Erica tried to remain calm and not to frighten Maggie when she answered the phone. But fear surged through her when Maggie told her that Bianca was not there.

"But don't worry Erica, I'm sure she is fine," Maggie assured her, "Reggie called and she and Kendall left together." Erica thanked Maggie and hung up.

Turning to Jack, she said, "They're together, our kids are together."

“Maybe not all of them,” Jack said, dialing Greenlee’s number. After trying several numbers, he punched yet one more and was relieved when Tad picked up the phone. “I need a favor,” Jack said, explaining that the children could be in danger as well, and that they believed Bianca and Kendall were with Reggie and Lily But Greenlee was still unaccounted for. “I need you to find her and keep her safe,” Jack requested.

“Sure thing,” Tad agreed.

“It may not be that easy,” Jack warned him, “But please promise me you’ll do it.” Tad promised he would and told Jack just to sit tight.

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Tad came off the elevator at Fusion and spotted Greenlee coming his way. “Piece of cake,” he muttered. Walking right up to her, he proclaimed, “You have to come with me.”

“I do not,” she refused, spinning in the opposite direction and stomping off.

“Well maybe not,” Tad muttered grumpily. Chasing after her, he looped his arm around her waist, easily hoisting her off the ground. He yelped as her fists pummeled his chest and she kicked him fiercely. Lugging her into the elevator, he had to maneuver around her to hit the button, as she had twisted herself around so that her legs were wrapped around his waist and her arms around his neck. “Do you want to hug me to death?” Tad smirked.

Inches from his face, Greenlee hissed, “I want... to strangle you!”

\*\*\*\*\*

Tad finally got his door open, with Greenlee slung over his shoulder. She was kicking him in the stomach and beating on his back. “I thought,” he seethed, depositing her on the couch, “I told you to stop that!” Greenlee’s only answer was a well-practiced glare. “Would it help matters any if I explained why you are here?” Tad asked.

Greenlee was silent for a moment before answering with a measured, “Maybe.”

Tad told her how Jack and Erica, as well as their children, may be in

danger. And how Lily and Reggie had disappeared. The concern etched on her face was a surprise to Tad. This was a new side of Greenlee. In an attempt to assuage her fears, he told her that Kendall and Bianca were believed to be with Lily and Reggie. He reassured her, "So they are together, they will all be fine." She did not look reassured. In fact, she looked sad.

"They are together," she said unhappily, "but I'm not with them. Why can't I ever fit in?"

"You will, one day you will," Tad promised.

"I only fit with one person, and now he's gone," Greenlee admitted sadly. "What do you do when the biggest part of you is gone forever?"

She knew that he knew it like no one else. Tad began to put his arm around her. "You're not going to hit me again are you?" he hesitated. Shaking her head, Greenlee smiled before laying her head on his shoulder.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jack and Erica huddled together. "What are we going to do?" Erica cried, "This crazy person is trying to destroy us, and now our children may be in danger. And we don't even know who it is!" Jack had no answers for her, the same questions were haunting him. They could only hold onto each other, and pray their family would be safe.

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The assailant held a towel against the wound. The towel was already soaked with blood. "I'll get you too, Tad Martin," he growled. Turning to the picture, centered on the table in its usual place of honor, he promised, "I will not let you down this time...."

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### Erica's Decision

By Sallye

Jack and Erica had fallen asleep in each others arms in front of the fireplace. Jack woke up later and saw that the fire was dying down.

Since there was no more firewood, he knew he needed to go to the wood shed to get more logs. Jack got up, trying not to awaken Erica, and started dressing. Erica's eyes fluttered open. "Jack, where are you going?" asked a sleepy Erica.

"Sweetheart, I'm just going outside to get more firewood," Jack said as he bent down to kiss her soft lips. "Go back to sleep and I'll be right back."

"I can't sleep when you're not with me. Besides, I'm awake now. I'll get up and see if I can find any food in here and fix us something to eat."

"Oh, I can hardly wait," Jack said under his breath.

"I heard that Jackson Montgomery. Jack, I'm so worried about our kids. I feel so helpless just sitting here," Erica cried.

"Shh, everything is going to be ok. I called Tad and he's checking on Greenlee and is working on finding out where the others are," Jack said as he kissed away her tears. "Now for the firewood. I promise I'll be right back."

Erica dressed and started searching the cupboards to see what she could find for them. It seemed like Jack had been gone longer than he should have. Just as she was about to go outside to look for him, her phone rang. Thinking that it might be Bianca, she quickly answered. "Bianca, sweetheart, is that you?" asked an anxious Erica.

"No Erica, its Tad." "I just tried to call Jack on his phone but didn't get an answer. I wanted to tell him that Greenlee is fine and that she is with me. I also wanted to talk to him about a lead that I got from Derek. Is everything ok?"

"Tad, I don't know," replied a worried Erica. "He went out to the woodshed to get some more firewood, but he has been gone an awful long time. I was just going out to see if I can find him."

"No, Erica! Stay inside and do not open the door to anyone except Jack or me," Tad exclaimed.

"Tad, I hear something at the door. It may be Jack needing help getting in."

"No, don't open the door Erica! I'm on my way!!" screamed Tad.

But Erica had already laid the phone down and was running to the door. "Jackson, what took you so long?" she cried as she opened the door. Erica screamed. Standing before her was the stranger who had been after her family. Lying before her was Jack's limp body. "What have you done to him?!! Jack, darling, are you ok? Wakeup! Please Wakeup!"

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The stranger was dressed in black and wearing a ski mask. "Erica, you are still as beautiful as ever," he laughed.

"Who are you and what have you done to Jack and my family?" asked a terrified Erica.

"I will reveal myself to you when the time is right. As for your fiancé, he 'bumped' his head on the end of my gun. Your children are safe---- for now. The state of their health and that of Montgomery is all up to you," sneered the stranger. "What you decide in the next few minutes will be the most important decision you have ever made in your life."

"What do you mean 'up to me'? What decision?!" yelled Erica.

"The proposition is simple, my dear," sneered the intruder. "You come away with me and your family will live long, healthy lives. But, if you don't do as I ask, your family will die right before your eyes, starting with the DA," he said as he pointed his gun at Jack's head.

"No, I'll do anything, but please don't hurt Jack or my children," Erica begged. As she said this she grabbed the stranger's arm causing him to yell out in pain. She jumped in surprise. "So Tad did hit you," Erica said nervously.

"Yes, and he will pay dearly for this," growled the intruder. "If it hadn't been for David Hayward, I probably would have bled to death."

"David," inquired Erica. "How do you know David?"

"Hayward and I go back a long way. He owes me big time so I decided to start collecting what is due me. Enough questions. What is your decision?"

"You don't leave me any choice. But first I want two things from you." answered Erica.

"If I can grant them I will," replied the stranger.

"First, I want you to take me to my children so that I can tell them goodbye and tell them how much I love them. Second, tell me who you are and why you are terrorizing me and my family."

"I will take you to your children before we leave Pine Valley forever. And as far as who I am, I'll let you figure that one out. Who was it that you and your friends, Janet and Skye, tried to do in and bury in the garden? Who did you three bitches aid the police in capturing? And, here's the bonus question: who, thanks to you, did the DA send to prison for life?" sneered the stranger.

"No it can't be! He's in prison", yelled Erica.

"Oh no, my dear Erica, I'm here!" the stranger replied as he pulled the ski mask off. Erica screamed. "Now, Erica, it's time for us to leave." As they were leaving the cabin Erica turned and ran to Jackson. "I love you, my darling, for always." She kissed him as her captor grabbed her and left the cabin.

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Tad was running to the car with Greenlee on his heels. "You stay put!" Tad yelled at Greenlee.

"No way! Jackson's my father and I'm going to him whether I go with you or take my own car!" screamed Greenlee.

"Ok, Ok. Jump in," Tad said, as the two drove off to where Jack and Erica were hiding.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **You Get What You Pay For**

by Claudine

"Get your hands off of me!" Erica commanded as Jonathan Kinder dragged her to David's secluded cabin. "David won't let you get away

with this, you monster.”

“Too bad for you, Erica. David left right after he fixed my arm. He’s got his hands full overseas.” He shoved her into a vacant chair in the mad cow themed room. Jonathan looked around while putting away the key David had given him. “I see Davey’s taste in decorating hasn’t improved since Medical School.”

“Medical school? You and David? I don’t believe it.”

“Too much of a coincidence for you? That’s because it wasn’t, my darling. He was doing me a favor, babysitting, if you will. After everything I taught him as an upperclassman, after every test I manipulated so he’d do well, after all the money Vanessa gave me? It’s the least he could do. But he’s such an egomaniacal cretin he couldn’t leave well enough alone. Criss-cross. You want sex drugs and cures for ailments you don’t even have, you go to David...when you need to keep someone in a coma, I’m your man.”

He reached out to caress her face, but Erica slapped his hand away. “Let me go, Jonathan,” she looked at him with pent up hatred. “I hate you!”

“After all we’ve been through? I’ve thought about you day and night, pussycat,” he sneered. “Dreamt of what I’d do to you and the D.A., and imagine the fit of the giggles I had in cellblock C when I read that you two got engaged... again... and again. Good old...”

“Don’t you even say his name. You’re not worthy.”

“How noble. I guess Count “Bats in the Belfry” finally saw your claws or counted one too many men in your bed.”

“Oh, you really are a pathetic excuse for a man. You always were.” She tossed her hair insolently. He grabbed her arm and pulled her out of the chair to face him. Erica could taste his breath but she held his gaze in defiance despite her fear of what he could do to her. She flashed back to the time she woke up with him in her bed. She had been drugged. What was he planning this time?

“You wound me, Erica. I have a lovely night planned for us,” he whispered as he pushed Erica down, back in the chair. He reached for his waistband, and Erica broke his gaze for the first time in

disgust. That's when she heard the noise, a cocked pistol.

"What are you going to do? Shoot me?"

"Now, I know you have more creativity than that, Erica. No, I'm going keep you a... captive audience." Jonathan instructed Erica to tie her own feet together with a computer cable he yanked out of one of David's computers. He rifled through a desk drawer and snorted when he found what he was looking for. Handcuffs. He shook them at Erica. "David is just so predictable." He threw them at her and made her put them on at gunpoint.

"You animal. You said you'd take me to my children!"

Jonathan turned her chair toward the bedroom. "But Erica, I have." He left her side and opened the bedroom door revealing Kendall, Reggie, Lily and Bianca's bodies all lying across the bed... lifeless.

"Noooooooooooooooooo!" screamed Erica, as tears poured forth.

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*"I love you, my darling, for always," Erica said very slowly. Jackson saw her through a haze. Everything was bathed in a blinding light. "I'll never tire of hearing that. Come here, you." He pulled her close to him, leaning down to make a connection between their lips. Slowly he teased her, before finally bringing them into contact. They breathed each other in and the kiss deepened. Erica moved her hands up his chest and around the back of his head as he picked her up against his straining length, deepening the kiss. He pulled back to look at her because every now and then Jackson still couldn't believe how he ever managed to have this woman for his own. Then everything went dim and Jackson heard a faint voice...*

*"Get off of me, you pathetic has been!" ...Erica?*

*"You could use a muzzle." Jackson knew that second voice was a man's voice, not Erica's. He slowly began to regain consciousness...*

"Muzzle? You Martin men all sound alike! Neanderthal, troglodytic, misogynists!" Greenlee quipped at Tad.

"And you're just Christmas morning and a brand new puppy all rolled into one?" Tad laughed as he made his way to the cabin. "Now,

please shut up. Or are you trying to get us both killed?”

“You’re half right,” she threw back.

“You get that from your mother’s side, don’t you?” Greenlee punched Tad in the stomach. “Oooof!” Tad bent over holding his stomach as Greenlee nursed her wrist.

“You hurt me!” she whined.

“I hurt *you*? What about...” Tad stopped mid-sentence as he heard a rustling near the cabin they were approaching. It could be the gunman. He grabbed the oblivious Greenlee and pulled her against him, covering her mouth with his hand to keep from giving away their location. That’s when she bit him. “Aiiie!”

“Pig!”

“I swear, if you weren’t Jackson’s daughter, I’d just dump you in the middle of nowhere... somewhere.” Again there was the sound of movement and a low moan. Tad took out his gun and followed the line of the house until he reached the front where the noise was coming from. Greenlee followed a few footsteps behind, afraid to be left alone and also afraid of what they’d find. Tad saw him first. Jackson was still on the floor, slowly regaining consciousness. Tad dropped down and patted Jack’s shoulder. “Jack, can you hear me? Are you alright, old buddy, o’ pal-o-mine?” Tad looked around and aside from some traces of blood on Jack’s forehead there didn’t appear to be any further damage.

“Daddy?” Greenlee said meekly, almost afraid to fully come into view for fear of what she might see.

With Tad’s help Jack slowly sat up, rubbing his temple. “Call 911...” Tad started. Greenlee whipped out her cell phone.

“Don’t,” said Jack. “I want to catch that S.O.B. myself. And God help him if I do.”

“Jack, I don’t think that’s a good idea. You’re bleeding and need to be checked out.” Tad motioned to Greenlee to continue the call.

“Where’s Erica?” Jack looked around trying to remember what happened. He had gone out to the woodshed and someone came up

behind him and then it all went black. “Erica!” There was no answer. He got up and went into the cabin, Tad and Greenlee followed.

“Jack, take it easy. My father’d shoot me a withering look if he knew I let you go running around with a head injury.”

“Erica!!!” Jack’s deep voice reverberated throughout the cabin. There was no answer. “He’s got her. Tad, he’s got her and I have to find her. I can’t lose her now. I won’t.”

“Jack, I think you better sit down. Derek got a major lead earlier, and you need to know about it.”

Jack was pacing, frantic. “I don’t have time to sit down! Someone is trying to kill us and for all I know... Tad, tell me who has her or I swear I’ll...”

“I know.” Tad looked down not knowing how to phrase this. “I know.”

“Just tell him, already!” Greenlee barked.

“Okay!” Tad squinted at Greenlee. “Jack, Jonathan Kinder is loose. He broke out of prison a few weeks ago. The prison guard was found unconscious. Drugged.”

Outside the sounds of an ambulance and the police invaded the cabin. “Chances are, he’s got Erica.”

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“We need a list,” Jackson started, springing into action. “A list of people Kinder was associated with. Janet, Skye, Marian, we have to contact them.”

“Derek said that he was pulling the records of prison visitors and would meet us here.”

The EMT’s arrived, along with a few officers. After Jack was checked out and bandaged up. Jack spent most of the time on his cell phone calling in favors and chasing leads. Tad was doing the same on his phone, until Derek arrived.

“You’re not going to believe this one,” Derek said as he threw a file on the table in the kitchen, their makeshift base of operations. Jack picked it up and flipped through the pages, the logs of all the visitors

that Kinder had at prison. Scanning the list, he stopped short at one of the names.

“Ho... why am I not surprised.” Jack said, disgusted. He threw the papers on the floor, and shook his head while a snarl formed on his mouth. He rubbed his jaw. “We are losing time here. Each minute that passes she’s farther from me. Issue an APB, for Pete’s sake!”

“We put out an APB already, Jack. You’re not going to like what we found on his credit card records.”

Tad rejoined the other two after hanging up. “No luck on my end. What’s in the file?”

“You want to tell him or should I?” Derek asked.

“Hayward, Tad. Hayward used to visit Kinder in prison. Now, what about those credit card records?” Jack asked.

“Left for Zurich last night.”

“Good,” said Tad. “That means we can check out his cabin without any difficulty.”

“You don’t think he’s with Kinder, do you?”

“I wouldn’t put anything past him.”

Greenlee had been sitting in the corner wrapped in a blanket since the EMT’s had arrived. “David wouldn’t do that,” she stated. “There has to be something more. Maybe there’s some other reason he fled the country. There are loads of reasons to go to Switzerland.”

“Sweetheart, I know you feel protective of David because of Leo, but right now he’s our only lead.”

“Fine. I’ll just call him and ask,” she took out her cell phone.

“In Zurich?”

“Please. I have an international plan.”

“Well,” said Jack. “While Greenlee tries the direct approach, I say we get over to the cabin and do a little digging.” He picked up his cell phone, his car keys, and tucked a gun into the back of his pants.

“What do you think you’re doing, Montgomery?” Derek asked. “This is a police investigation and I won’t have you playing vigilante ... or you, Tad, riding off to play detective.”

“I have a license and everything.” Tad quipped.

“And if you think I’m sitting here counting ceiling tiles with Erica kidnapped, while you let another criminal run free, you’re dead wrong, Derek!” Jack was visibly upset now. “I’m not going to stop until I have Erica back in my arms and this whole thing is nothing but a bad dream!”

Derek tried to stop the two men, but it was Greenlee who was successful. “David knew nothing about Erica’s kidnapping. I told you so. He said that he owed Kinder a favor and that’s all. He also said that he patched up a wound on him last night before leaving town on an emergency.”

“An emergency in Zurich? Smells fishy to me, Greensleeves. At least we know that it was Kinder I clipped last night when I fired that shot. He’s wounded, that’s in our favor.”

“That’s progress, I suppose. Let’s get going.”

“Not without me, you’re not!” countered Greenlee.

Jack pulled her aside. “Sweetheart, you have to stay here with the police. I don’t want you in danger too. Don’t argue with me.”

She paused for a moment and then replied, “Fine, just be careful. I’ve already lost one father and I was just getting used to the “New and Improved” model.” He gave her a kiss on the forehead as he joined Tad and Derek heading out the door. Once they’d left, Greenlee shrugged off the blanket she was wearing. “Like hell I’m going to lose another man I love.” She grabbed her purse and the keys to Tad’s car. “Besides, Erica’d have to acknowledge my existence if I saved her sorry butt.” She opened the back door and left, her stiletto heels clicking out the door and into the night.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Up In Flames**

By Mary

Erica sobbed hysterically as she saw the bodies on the bed. Bianca, Kendall, Reggie and Lily - none of them moving. "How could you do this?" she screamed at Jonathan Kinder. "They've done nothing to you!"

"Calm down, drama queen," Jonathan said with a laugh. "They're not dead. Just taking a little nap. You can always count on David to have some interesting concoctions lying around here."

Erica closed her eyes in relief as her breathing slowly returned to normal. As long as the children and Jack were safe, she could handle anything. "What do you want, Jonathan?" she asked.

"Exactly what I told you. You're leaving with me. If you go quietly and don't give me any trouble, the children and your precious fiancé will be fine. If not, well, let's just say I can't make any promises."

"Where are we going?" Erica asked him.

"Someplace far, far away," Jonathan sneered. "Our flight is leaving shortly. And it's a one-way trip, my dear," he laughed. "Now stay put while I make sure we're still alone." He turned and walked out the front door with the gun in his hand.

Erica looked around the cabin desperately. She had to find a way to get help. Her thoughts raced to the last time she had seen Jack lying helplessly on the ground. He had to be OK - he just had to be. She had to let him know where she was or she would never see him again. Her gaze fell on the phone on David's desk. It was all the way across the room but maybe she could move the chair she was tied to and get to it. With a quick look at the door, she started toward the desk.

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The headlights on Jack's car cut through the darkness as Jack, Tad and Derek drove to David's cabin. "I can't believe David doesn't have something to do with this," said Jack. "It's just too much of a coincidence."

"Well, you know my feelings about Hayward," Tad said, "but helping Kinder kidnap Erica seems like a little much - even for him. Maybe he

didn't know what Kinder was planning."

"I'll feel a lot better once we check out the cabin," said Jack grimly. "Derek, how the hell did this happen? Jonathan Kinder escapes from prison and no one thinks to warn us?"

"I guess they were trying to find him without starting a panic," said Derek. "They thought they had him at one point but he disappeared."

"Great job they're doing," muttered Jack. "This is Erica's life we're talking about - and my children's. I suppose still no word on them?"

"No. Sorry, Jack," replied Derek. His voice was drowned out by a deafening sound as the car went over a rocky patch on the unpaved road. The steering wheel jerked in Jack's hands. He swore, stopped the car, and opened the door. Derek and Tad quickly followed him out of the car. Jack didn't even stop to look at the flat tire. He reached back into the car and grabbed a flashlight before he started walking up the hillside. Tad caught up with him.

"Don't even expect me to wait, Tad," Jack told him.

"I didn't," replied Tad. "I'm just not letting you go alone."

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Greenlee sped up the hill toward the cabin. She knew that taking this shortcut would get her to the cabin well before Jack, Tad and Derek. She was sure that there was no way David could be involved in this but maybe she could find something at the cabin that would help Jackson find Erica. She was worried too about Bianca, Kendall, Reggie and Lily.

"Just my luck," she thought. "I find out a great guy like Jackson is my father and I have to deal with him being madly in love with my worst enemy."

She was thinking that she wouldn't put it past Erica to stage her own kidnapping to get Jack's attention when she approached the cabin. To her surprise there was a pickup truck she didn't recognize parked outside. She quickly stopped the car and got out. No one would expect her to be coming from this direction. Hardly anyone knew about the shortcut. She quietly circled the cabin.

“I’ll just go up and look in the window,” she thought, “and then, if I have to, I’ll call for help.” She reached the front of the cabin and slowly approached the window.

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Erica was making painstakingly slow progress toward the phone. With her feet tied and hands handcuffed, she could barely move. She wasn’t even sure if she would be able to use her hands to pick up the phone and dial a number, but she had to try.

She finally reached the desk. Taking a deep breath, she managed to knock the cordless phone off the cradle. She quickly realized she couldn’t pick it up but she was able to use her fingers well enough to turn it on and dial the number for Jack’s cell phone. “Please God, please let him answer,” she prayed as she listened to the ringing.

“Jack Montgomery,” his voice in her ear made her breath catch in her throat. She could barely speak through her tears. At least he was all right. “Jack---”

“ERICA?” relief mixed with the fear in his voice. “Sweetheart, where are you?”

“Jack, I’m----” she stopped as she suddenly heard noises from outside. Footsteps approached the door. “Jack, I love you,” she said with a sob and quickly placed the phone back on its cradle. She managed to get halfway back across the room before the door opened. Her heart sank as Jonathan entered the room. With him was a terrified Greenlee, the gun pointed at her head.

“Looks like we have some company,” Jonathan announced, pushing Greenlee into the room. “You had better be alone.”

“I already told you I was,” Greenlee replied nervously. “What’s going on here? Who are you?”

“So you just happened to be looking in the window, Ms. Du Pres? Yes, I know who you are,” he said at her surprised look. “In fact, if I hadn’t run out of time, you’d be in the other room with the rest of your twisted family.”

“I was just coming to visit my brother-in-law,” said Greenlee. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Erica could see that Greenlee was terrified but she wasn't sure if she was telling the truth. Was it possible that Greenlee had just been coming to see David? Still, Tad had said Greenlee was with him so she must be aware of what was going on. But where was Tad?

"Well, I'm not taking any chances," said Jonathan, pushing Greenlee into a chair behind the desk. Erica's heart sank when he suddenly noticed the phone and threw it at the wall. Keeping the gun trained on them, he rummaged through the drawers of the desk.

"Once again, David never disappoints," he laughed, taking out a length of rope. He tied Greenlee's hands and feet to the chair and then tied the chair to one of the heavy legs of the desk. "Sit tight, my lovely guests. I'll be back after I check for more company. You had better hope no one else is coming - for their sakes," he turned and left the cabin, once again brandishing the gun.

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"Erica!" Jack screamed into the phone. "Erica- damn it!" he slammed the phone back into his pocket.

"What did she say?" asked Tad. "Where is she?"

"She didn't say. Just - just that she loved me," his voice broke. "We have to find her, Tad. I'm not losing her - not after all we've been through."

"I know, Jack. Believe me, I know," Tad said, thinking of Dixie.

"I know you do," said Jack, putting his hand on Tad's shoulder. "Thanks for coming with me, buddy." They both quickened their pace up the hillside, neither daring to think of what they might find at the top.

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"Are you OK?" Greenlee whispered loudly to Erica from across the room. "Yes, I'm OK and so is everyone else," Erica quickly filled Greenlee in on the condition of the others. "I thought you were with Tad." "I was," replied Greenlee. "It's a long story." She told Erica everything that had happened up until she arrived at the cabin. "They should be here any minute. In fact, they should have been here by now." She sounded worried. They stopped talking as Jonathan came

back in. "Time for us to leave," he announced. "A man and a plane are waiting for us. Sorry we don't have room for three," he said to Greenlee. "So you'll just leave her here with the others," Erica stated it as a fact. "Oh, I'll be leaving her here, all right," laughed Jonathan. He went into the bedroom and came out carrying Bianca. It filled Erica with terror to see her so motionless. "What are you doing?" she demanded. "Keeping her safe, of course," Jonathan replied. "You wouldn't want her to get too close to the flames, would you?" "*Flames?* Jonathan, no, there's no need for any of this!" Erica cried. "I said I would go with you."

Greenlee and Erica stared at each other in horror as Jonathan carried each of the girls' bodies out of the cabin. When he came back in for Reggie, he stopped and said to Erica, "The fire won't get anywhere near the shed before it's discovered and put out. Your children will all be safe." "But what about Greenlee? She's Jack's daughter, too," Erica said. "I need to leave a little reminder that I mean business," said Jonathan. "I don't want to be followed. And seeing that she caused me grief and worry by barging in here, she's going to be an example of what happens when you cross Dr. Jonathan Kinder." He disappeared into the bedroom for the last time. Greenlee looked at Erica with tears running down her face. "I can't believe it. I came up here to look for a clue, maybe even to find you and impress Jackson, and I'm going to die here!" The end of her words came out in a terrified sob. Erica looked around the cabin desperately. There had to be something she could do. As relieved as she was about Bianca and the others, she couldn't leave Greenlee here to die. She suddenly spied something on the table near the fireplace. Jonathan came out with Reggie and crossed the room. As soon as he left the cabin, Erica moved her chair across the room toward her purse. Greenlee snorted in disbelief. "Only you could get kidnapped and manage to bring your purse," she said, "but I don't think the latest shade of Enchantment lip gloss is going to get us out of this." "Just be quiet so I can hear him coming," snapped Erica. "Jonathan said I needed my passport when he kidnapped me so he let me take my purse." She managed to open her purse and shake out the contents. Finding what she was looking for, she grabbed it and quickly returned to where she had been. "Listen to me, Greenlee. You need to find a way to pick these up," Erica dropped the manicure scissors on the floor and kicked them under the desk to which Greenlee was tied.

"Are you crazy? I can't pick those up!" Greenlee protested. "Yes, you can. I don't care how you do it but pick them up, cut those ropes and get out of here as soon as we leave," Erica instructed her. Jonathan came back in carrying a can of gasoline. He started spreading the gasoline around the cabin with an evil grin on his face. Satisfied, he stepped back. He came over to Erica, untied her feet, and pulled her with him toward the door. He grabbed her purse as they passed the table.

"Wouldn't want to be without your passport," he said. He grabbed the matches from the fireplace mantle and took one out as they reached the door.

"Erica, if - I mean - *when* you see Jackson again, please tell him that I was really happy to find out that he was my father," choked out Greenlee.

"You can tell him yourself, Greenlee, when *you* see him," Erica said as their eyes met across the room. Greenlee nodded her head in understanding and tried to smile.

Jonathan struck the match and dropped it. The flames raced across the room and he pulled Erica outside. The cool air hit her like a knife. She couldn't bear to think that Greenlee wouldn't escape but she realized that she had to try to leave something for Jack to find in case Greenlee couldn't tell him what had happened. Something to let him know that she was alive. As they rounded the corner of the cabin, she knew what she had to do.

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They both smelled the smoke at the same time. Up ahead there was an orange hue to the night sky. Jack and Tad broke into a run as they reached the clearing where the cabin was. The flames were already shooting from the windows.

"No, Erica, NO!!!!" Jack shouted as he ran toward the cabin.

Tad grabbed him and held him back. "Jack, we don't know if anyone was even in there. You can't help Erica if you're dead. Let's check for vehicles or signs that someone was here."

Jack was beyond reasoning as he and Tad split up to circle the cabin.

“She can’t be dead, she just can’t be,” he told himself. Even the thought was unbearable. As he rounded the corner of the cabin, he shone his flashlight in the dense brush. Something caught his attention as it glittered on a low-hanging shrub. He stepped closer and slowly, hardly daring that it could be true, reached out his hand to touch Erica’s engagement ring.

“She’s alive,” he said out loud, taking it off the branch and closing his fingers over it. “Thank God, she’s alive.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Tad had come to the conclusion that there was a good possibility that there was no one in the cabin. He didn’t even want to think of the alternative. As he approached the back of the cabin, however, he saw a dark shape near a path he hadn’t even known existed. As he got closer, he saw that it was a car. After a few more steps, he realized it was *his* car. The realization hit him like a ton of bricks. “Damn it, why don’t you ever do what you’re told?”

“GREENLEE!!!” He turned and ran toward the cabin just as it exploded in flames.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Search Is On

by Sue

Erica's mind was racing. She was trying desperately to keep the tears that were threatening to burst forth from coming. Her thoughts immediately went to her children. When Jonathan had opened the door to reveal the four of them laying on the bed she had felt her heart break. She had never before felt the despair that she experienced in that one brief moment. And then she had to watch him take each limp body from the cabin, not knowing if the words he had spoken to her were true. Did he actually put them in the shed where they would be safe from the flames or had he secretly killed them? And then there was Greenlee. Erica said a silent prayer hoping against hope that Greenlee had made it out of the cabin alive. She couldn't help the single tear from falling when she thought of her

family. She shivered as the fear again made it's presence known.

Kinder turned to Erica and smiled as he saw her shiver. He knew that she was suffering and that knowledge brought him euphoria. He couldn't help but laugh out loud when he saw the tear on her cheek. She tried to turn away from him so that he couldn't see her reaction to his obvious pleasure, but he roughly grabbed her chin, forcing her to look at him directly. "I am in total control of the rest of your life. How does it feel to know that from this moment on you will do whatever I say? I had a lot of time in prison to think about what I wanted from you Erica and believe me, I can't wait to get started on my very long list." He moved his fingers from her chin and grabbed her hair pulling her towards him. Erica cried out from the pain as it felt as if her hair was being pulled from her scalp. She closed her eyes as Jonathan kissed her on her cheek and shuddered as he whispered into her ear. "You are mine."

\*\*\*\*\*

Jack was thrown backwards by the blast as the cabin seemed to explode. He turned his head and saw the flames shooting high into the sky. He breathed a sigh of relief knowing that the love of his life had not been inside. He saw the flash a few feet from him and realized that he had dropped his one link to Erica. He moved quickly to it, picking it up and holding it close to his heart. It was then that he saw a figure moving in the distance. His heart skipped a beat as he placed the ring in his pocket. "Erica," he whispered as he took off, desperate to get to the woman he loved more than life itself.

\*\*\*\*\*

Tad awoke and for a few seconds couldn't remember where he was and didn't understand why he was lying on the ground. He rubbed his head, feeling for any sign of injury and, after confirming that he was uninjured, he stood up and turned towards the burning cabin. He looked around and when he saw his car, everything came back to him. "Oh my god, Greenlee!" he said aloud even though there was no one around to hear him. He ran towards the cabin but the heat coming from within pushed him back. He tried once again, but the flames were too strong, the cabin was fully engulfed. "What am I going to tell Jackson? Erica is in the hands of some madman, four of his children are missing, and now the daughter he just found out he

had is dead," he thought to himself. He took a deep breath and went to find Jack.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jack was almost upon her when he saw the figure drop, only it wasn't Erica. Jack gasped as he saw his daughter lying at his feet. "Greenlee?" he questioned out loud, standing shocked for only a moment, before dropping to his knees beside her. "Oh my god Greenlee!" He looked at her disheveled appearance. Her clothes were covered with soot from the fire. He glanced briefly at her chest to make sure that she was breathing and felt a wave of relief overtake him when he saw the upward and downward movements. Jack grabbed her shoulders and gently began to shake her. "Greenlee! Sweetheart come on! Come back to me baby!" He couldn't help the tears that began to fall from his cheeks. He hadn't known about Greenlee being his daughter for very long, but the bond was already a strong one. He couldn't imagine not having her in his life. "Come back to me Greenlee," as panic began to set in.

\*\*\*\*\*

Kinder let go of Erica's hair and pushed her away from him. "As much as I want to continue our reunion, this will have to wait until I have both hands free. You will remember that I am very good with my hands Erica." He laughed as he saw Erica's obvious discomfort. Deciding that he had tormented her enough for the moment, he turned back and concentrated on the road.

Erica felt as if she were going to throw up. Her stomach was twisted into knots and her lungs felt as if they were closing in on her. She knew that if she let herself give in to the fear she would lose all control. Closing her eyes she tried to take some deep breaths but found she couldn't. She needed to focus and to do that she thought of the one person who always made her feel safe. She let her mind wander and instantly she was back in Jack's arms dancing to the music from the old record player they had found in the cabin. She remembered the strength of his arms as he lifted her on to the pool table and the warmth of his body as they had made love. She could feel his breath on the top of her head and could hear the beat of his heart against her ear. Erica was jolted back to reality when the car suddenly swerved. She heard Kinder swear under his breath. It was

then that Erica knew what she needed to do.

\*\*\*\*\*

Greenlee's eyes slowly fluttered open. It took her a few moments to focus but when she did, the first thing she saw was Jack staring down at her, his furrowed brow showing his concern. "Daddy?" she whispered.

"Shhhh, honey. I'm here." Jack felt some of the weight lift off his shoulders when he had seen her eyes start to open. But his heart surged when he heard her call him daddy. Greenlee began to cough but was trying desperately to talk. "Sweetheart, don't try to talk, you've inhaled a lot of smoke. Just lie still." Jack tried to assess if Greenlee had suffered any other injuries. He glanced at her wrists and saw the blood. She had obviously been tied up. His heart twisted at the thought of his daughter bound and held against her will.

"Oh thank god she wasn't in the cabin," Tad managed to get out as he bent over trying to catch his breath. "Is she okay Jack?"

"Daddy you don't understand," Greenlee again tried to speak, but was soon coughing, her lungs aching for clean oxygen.

"Jack, there is no sign of Erica here. If Kinder had her here, they have obviously moved on."

"They were here Tad. I know they were here." Jack looked down at his daughter. "Honey, did you see Erica? Is she hurt?"

"She saved my life dad," was the response.

\*\*\*\*\*

Erica moved slightly closer to Jonathan every chance she had, careful to do so only when he had to focus his attention away from her. She saw the sign on the side of the road announcing the impending curves and knew that this was her opportunity. She couldn't do it halfway. She knew that she was risking her life, but what was her life worth without her children and without the man that she loved more than life itself? She sent her silent prayer up to the heavens, then gathered every ounce of strength she had in her tiny body. Just as the car headed into a sharp curve she threw her body against Kinder's arms, knocking them from the steering wheel. The

last thing Erica saw was the tree which seemed to have a life of it's own and was surging forward, preparing to meet their car head on.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jack closed his eyes in relief. He knew when he found Erica's ring that she was alive but to hear Greenlee's words brought even more comfort. "Was she okay Greenlee? Did he hurt her?" He needed to know that she was alright. The thought of Erica, scared and alone, and possibly hurt, made his whole body ache.

"She was okay when I saw her but everyone else dad, you have to help them." Greenlee's eyes started to close as the exhaustion from her escape started to creep in.

"Everyone else? Greenlee, stay with me, what do you mean everyone else?" Jack began to feel the emotion that had overtaken him the last couple of days. Panic was definitely not his friend.

"Bianca, Reggie, Kendall, Lily...the shed. Help them, " she was struggling to stay awake. "drugged and in the shed," she managed to get out before sleep finally took her.

"Oh my god! Tad stay with Greenlee!" Jack shouted as he was already running towards the smaller building. He stopped suddenly, hearing a faint almost inaudible cry.

*"Jackson, help me. Please help me. I need you."*

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **A Prayer for Hope**

By: TJ

The trees above seemed to sway and move before her eyes. Gingerly, she made her way into a sitting position, and slowly began to get her bearings straight. Her head hurt, and her sides felt as though they were on fire. Running a cold hand to her face, she could feel some stickiness there. Looking at her now wet palm, she saw she was bleeding.

Putting the pieces together, she realized her plan had worked.

Looking around, without moving from her current position, she saw the car. The front end had curled up upon impact, and smoke rose from the engine area. Her celebration was short lived though, as the pain in her head grew, and the blackness began to encompass her once more. With her fleeing consciousness, she managed one more prayer to the heavens, knowing he would hear her.

“Jackson, help me. Please help me. I need you.”

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Glancing around the woods, he could see no one. Yet, he had heard her. Reaching into his pocket, he quickly pulled out the ring he had found and kissed it softly. “I will find you Erica, I will.”

Shoving the ring back into his pocket, he continued his trek to the shed. His feet seemed to move slowly across the ground, and it felt like an eternity before he finally reached the small building. The door was slightly ajar, and he flung it open the rest of the way. Peering into the darkness, he could see nothing. Moving slowly around, carefully, he found nothing. As he exited, he heard someone finally.

“Yo, J, over here man.”

“Reggie, are you okay? What’s going on? Where is everyone?”

“Whoa, man, slow down. We’re aight, Lily and Bianca managed to get us outta the shed.”

“Good. What about Erica, Reggie. Have you seen her, or know where she might be?”

“No man, when we came to, we were in this shed.”

Taking all this in, Jackson stared into the woods, wondering what was going on. The blue and red lights signaled the arrival of the paramedics. Helping the kids get situated and down the slope of the hill, Jackson checked once more on Greenlee, before pulling Tad to the side.

“Okay, detective man, what’s going on here?”

“Jack, I don’t know. The only thing we got are some tire tracks over off the side of the cabin. Its gonna be hard to pick up a good trail, and

match it to a person tonight.”

“If you’re about to suggest I go home and rest Tad, I may not be able to resist the urge to hurt you.”

“Jack, relax man, you getting stressed isn’t going to help Erica any. You need to go to Enchantment, see if she’s been there. Find out if anyone knows anything.”

“Tad, that’s not----“

“Jack, just do it man. I’ll call you with any news. Check the apartment too. See if she’s taken anything that could be of importance.”

‘What about the kids, I need----“

“Jack, the medics are here, Reggie is alright, he’ll help out, and they’ll be fine. We have them here Jack. We don’t have Erica. Go find Erica.”

Knowing Tad was right, Jack made his way to the car, looking back only once to see the scene behind him. The paramedics were taking care of everyone, and they would all be fine. He had to focus, figure this thing out. He had to find Erica, because without her, he had no reason to go on.

\*\*\*\*\*

The world spun, and moved before Erica’s eyes. She tried to focus, but it did no good. Apparently she had hit her head harder than she first realized. The pain became a dull constant thud, but she scarcely noted it. It was the dizziness that worried her. She needed to get away from here, to get to safety.

Standing up finally, she moved closer to the tree line. Looking back, she could see the wreckage of the car. There was something missing though. Among the tangle of tree and car, Jonathon was gone.

Erica began to panic now. Scanning the near area, she couldn’t see him, but she knew he was somewhere nearby. He must have hit his head on the wheel, how far could he get? “Oh Jackson, please help me. I need you.”

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The Enchantment office held no information for him. The top drawers of her desk yielded nothing. No clues to where she might be, nothing.

“Dammit Erica, where the hell are you.” Jack continued to flip through drawers and notebooks, hoping something would come across to him, give him any kind of clue. Checking the bottom drawer, he noticed something, or perhaps the lack of something. Her passport was no longer tucked in the file. Pulling his cell phone out, the numbers were quickly dialed.

“Hello.”

“Tad, its Jack, we’ve got a problem. Her passport is missing. Whoever got her, they might be on a plane already.”

“I don’t think so Jack. Get back out here. The police just found a car off the highway leading away from Haywards cabin. Looks like it veered off the road and into the woods.”

“Is it Erica, is she there?”

“Haven’t seen her. There’s some blood out here, but no bodies. Just get out here Jack. We’re on the Northbound side of Highway 111, at the Pine Valley/ Center City border. Listen, I’ll head over to the hospital, check on the rest of your brood and see if I can turn up any more clues. We’ll compare notes later.” The other side clicked off, but Jack remained there, phone to ear, too stunned to move. A car, in the woods. Blood. Cabin. It had to be Erica.

Slightly recovered, he slammed the file door shut, and made his way out of the building. It was quiet here, he thanked the sky, he wasn’t sure he could handle dealing with anyone tonight. The front door opened, and he made his way into the parking lot. Scanning around, there was nothing out of place here.

Looking to the sky once more, he sent a prayer. “Please let her be okay. Mona, I know you are looking down, let me find her, help me find her. I can’t go on without her. Please.”

With that, he ducked and got in his truck The drive was a short one, yet he felt hours had passed before he’d even gotten to the highway leading back to the woods. Then he saw it, the blur of red and blue lights. A sick feeling set in his stomach, and he clutched the wheel as

he drove closer. "Please, don't let this be it. Please."

## CHAPTER TEN

### The Connection

By: Courtney

The closer he got to the scene the more twisted his stomach became. When he arrived the police tried to stop him, but when he explained the situation to them they waved him through and as he pulled up he lost his breath and felt like he might faint at the sight of it. He knew that she wouldn't have gone anywhere willingly and was just hoping that if this was part of her plan to escape that she hadn't sacrificed herself in the process. He got out of his car and slowly walked toward the twisted steel and smoke that was left of the car that was now surrounded by police and investigators.

He tapped an officer on the shoulder and said, "My name is Jackson Montgomery, I'm the D.A. of Pine Valley, and I believe that my fiancé may have been involved in this accident. Who is in charge of the investigation?" The pain and desperation in his voice didn't go unnoticed by the young officer and she smiled at him, took his arm and led him to the Center City police chief.

"Sir, this is Jackson Montgomery. He has some questions regarding the people who may have been involved in the accident."

Jack turned back and thanked the young girl who had helped him. When he turned back to speak with the chief the fear in his eyes was obvious and the terror he felt looking at the accident was beginning to manifest in anger. "Do you have any leads yet? My fiancé was taken against her will and after an extensive search I believe she may have been involved in this accident."

The officer shook Jack's hand and led him over to a few folding chairs they had set up earlier. "Mr. Montgomery, my name is Chief Taylor, I am so sorry to hear of your situation. Tad Martin filled us in. We don't really have any leads as of yet, but we just arrived here ourselves not an hour ago so it's really too soon to tell."

Jack nodded his head that he understood and stood up. "Would it be

ok with you if I looked around myself? I might be able to spot something you wouldn't know to look for." The chief led him over to the car and told the officers to allow Jack full access to anything he wanted. All he could do was stare at the wreckage for a moment. It wasn't until he shook his head out of the fog he had slipped into that he heard a faint cry in the distance.

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Erica had floated in and out of consciousness as she continued to try to walk toward the break in the forest. She could hear the sirens now and hoped that they would notice somehow that she had been there. All she could see was Jack's face and all she could hear was his voice telling her to stay calm and that he would find her. She thought she was running toward something, but in reality she was barely walking in circles. She was using all of her strength just to stand but she knew if she had any hope of being discovered before Jonathan found her she would have to call out for help. Each cry she let out took everything in her but somehow she managed to get out a few good screams and with each one she felt weaker and weaker. She knew that she would eventually have to choose between trying to walk toward help or calling out for it and staying put, her body just wouldn't allow her to do both much longer. Once she had found a tree that had fallen across her path she decided it must have been fate telling her to stop and sit down and just focus all of her attention on calling for help. She sat down and took several deep breaths before she began again. This time the screams were more focused and more survival driven. She knew that her only chance to live through this was to get someone to notice her anyway she could. She couldn't really tell how far away the police lights were, but she knew they couldn't be that far if she could make them out clearly. As if she could sense he was near her somewhere, Erica began to call for Jack. It was almost as if she was in a trance as she called out his name like a mantra. Everything in her could feel his presence and if it was the last thing she did she would will him to her.

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The officers looked at Jack like he was crazy as he told them to be quiet and listen. All anyone else could hear were the sirens and the commotion from the crowd that had formed, but Jack could hear

something else. It was like an injured animal crying out to be helped. At first he didn't allow himself to believe it could actually be her until another one of the officers said he could hear it too. "I can't believe I am saying this, but I think Mr. Montgomery is right. I can hear something although I am not exactly sure what it is."

Jack took off like a bolt of lightning calling back to the group chasing after him. "I know what it is...It's Erica." He focused solely on the sound of her voice. He pushed through the brush and the trees as he found himself getting closer and closer to the sound. The officers tried in vein to keep up with him, but if any man had ever been on a mission to find the love of his life it was Jack. He cleared the center of the forest and when he arrived at the break between the trees and the highway he saw her. She was just sitting there calling out for him over and over again staring out into the darkness. At first he didn't believe it. He stopped dead in his tracks and shook his head from side to side making sure she wasn't just a figment of his imagination. Her back was to him, but he would know her silhouette anywhere and her voice was unmistakable. Jack slowly approached her not wanting to startle or scare her and when he reached out and put his hand on her shoulder he could feel her body react to him. She knew who it was and she knew she was safe.

She took a deep breath before she turned around to face him. She knew who it was the minute his hand brushed her shoulder, but after everything she had been through she wanted to make sure this was real. When their eyes met, the tears were both spontaneous and involuntary. Neither of them could stop the flood of emotions they were feeling nor did they want to. He kneeled down in front of her so that he could be eye level with her. Reaching up and wiping the tears from her cheek he could hardly believe she was right there in front of him. "I knew you would find me Jack. I could feel you with me all along." With that, he pulled her to him and hugged her tightly. He didn't want to hurt her, but at the same time he wanted her as close to him as possible. "Are you ok Erica?" He was whispering in her ear now. It was like the next few minutes of their lives would only belong to them and what they said would only be shared between the two of them.

She wrapped herself around him so tightly he could hardly breathe. "I'm fine Jack...battered but not down for the count." He pulled back

smiling as he looked into her eyes. They were so lost in the moment that they didn't notice the police and EMT crew standing around them.

"Mr. Montgomery, we need to take her now and get her to the ambulance." Erica immediately stiffened up and began to shake at the thought of being taken away from Jack even for a moment. Jack stood up taking Erica into his arms and holding her close knowing that she would never allow anyone to touch her right now. "I understand that you guys need to check her out, but the only way I am putting her down is if you bring the ambulance to us. Now since I know that isn't possible given that we are in the middle of a forest, why don't you just let me carry her out of here and I'll deliver her to you personally."

They could see that she would be worse off if they tried to remove her from Jack's arms and so they cautiously agreed. Jack leaned in and kissed her as he swept her carefully into his arms and she wrapped her arms around his neck and buried her head into his chest. As they walked into the clearing made by the police, Erica looked up and saw the car still sitting there and began to panic. She knew that there was still one part of the puzzle that needed to be found. Jack could feel her start to tremble and while he knew that seeing the accident scene would probably trigger something inside of her he never imagined she would react like this. He put her down and once she got her balance she looked up at Jack and with a fear in her eyes that he had never seen before she asked him, "Did they find him yet Jack? Did they find Jonathan?"

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### Reality

By: Mel

"No, honey, they haven't found him yet," Jack said very calmly, pulling her to him. Trying desperately to comfort whatever emotions were running through her. Erica's eyes quickly surveyed the accident scene once more, and then she buried her face in his chest, trying to erase the images of mangled steel.

Erica looked up at him. “Greenlee, is she...?” Jack read her mind. Even after all they had been through with Greenlee, Erica still cared about his daughter. It warmed him inside to see her love for their family, despite her current condition.

“Greenlee is fine. She got out of the cabin. Thanks to you. She is with Tad and all of our other kids at the hospital.” Erica’s face was etched with worry at these words. “Stop worrying,” He gently brushed her cheek with his hand. “They are all okay, just needed to be checked out. Besides, we are headed to the hospital to join them because even the great Erica Kane needs to be examined after surviving a wreck like that.” Jack’s expression was so soft and warm. Slowly he pulled back from their embrace and walked her over the ambulance.

Within ten feet of the vehicle, paramedics descended upon them. However, they all quickly realized that Jack was attached to Erica at the hand and wherever she went, he went. After getting her set up on the gurney with an IV for hydration and oxygen to clear her lungs of the fuel fumes, the days’ events caught up with her and Erica drifted off to sleep. Jack hopped in the back of the ambulance, never releasing her hand. His presence had a calming effect on her, even in her sleep, Erica felt at peace knowing she was safe with her one true love again.

Jack’s eyes never left her. If Erica could see herself, she would demand no one look at her. Not that she was vain, but Erica Kane has always been an incredible beauty. The tabloids would love to get just one shot of her like this. Erica’s clothes were torn and her hair was in shambles. With cuts and bruises all over her body, Jack couldn’t believe how beautiful she was. Her skin, though covered with dirt and blood, was soft to the touch, but tough as iron. Erica had endured so much in the past few days, fearing for her children, for him and then for herself, yet she was so strong. As always, Erica had come out on top. She was safe from her captor. Jack’s eyes suddenly flashed with anger. Kinder. Kinder had done this to his family, to the love of his life. Kinder was the evil that had hurt them all, the entire Montgomery family. Kinder would pay dearly for this, Jack thought, as he focused back in on Erica’s sleeping form.

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*Erica awoke from her daze. All around her was a dense fog, slowly*

*things became clearer. She was still in Jonathan's car. "Oh God, it was just a dream." Erica's head was pounding, and her whole body was aching. Quickly turning to look at her left side, Jonathan's body was still there. His head was bleeding against the steering wheel. Although he seemed to still be alive, Erica prayed he was unconscious and would continue to be that way, until she could find help.*

*"Damn it, where's Jack? I thought he had saved me." Erica fumbled with her seatbelt. Finally freeing herself of it, she focused on the door. Glass was everywhere, and although the window was gone, she was tried to open the door. When that failed, she carefully slid her body out of the car window, checking on Jonathan every few minutes to make sure he remained there.*

*In the distance, she heard a voice, "Erica, Erica." She took off in as fast of a run as she could towards the voice. "Jack," she shouted. "Someone please, help me." Slowly Erica's body gave out, although she was in great shape, she could not continue to run forever due to the toll the wreck had put her body through. Just as she felt her body was about to completely give out, Jack's arms wrapped around her waist, holding her up. "Oh, Erica, Thank God you are alright." Erica was peppering his face with kisses, when they heard the clear sound of a revolver cocking.*

*"You thought you could get away, did you?" a sneering voice asked. Turning suddenly, Jonathan's cold, cruel face was staring at them. Slowly he raised his hand, pointing his pistol at her, "Time for you to pay for all your past deeds, Ms. Kane." Just then the chamber was emptied, one shot released from the gun.*

*"NOOOOOOO!" Erica shot up. Monitors were blaring. Jack, having never left her side, grabbed her to him, trying to soothe her. "It's okay, honey. It's okay. We are here in the hospital. We are safe. It's okay, Erica. I'm right here." Jack's hand rubbed her back soothingly, while his other hand held her head to his chest.*

*Sobbing heavily, Erica let her body meld into one with Jack's. As she calmed down, Erica noticed that they were not alone. Greenlee, Kendall, Reggie, Bianca, and Lily were all huddled around her bed.*

*"Oh, Thank goodness you are all okay. My God, I was so worried."*

Erica opened her arms to their children and a huge, mixed family hug ensued.

“We were worried about you too, E. I mean, that psycho sure could have hurt you,” Reggie said with his usual flair.

“Naw, Reggie, he couldn’t hurt me. I’m Erica Kane,” With her amazing smile, the entire family laughed.

“Yes you are, but you need your rest, Erica,” Jack voiced his displeasure over all the activity. “In fact, you all have been put through hell, oh sorry sweetheart,” Jack kissed Lily’s forehead at her admonishing look for saying hell. Handing Kendall his keys, “Why don’t you all go back to the penthouse and get some rest? I will stay here with Erica until they release her.”

Not willing to argue, plus recognizing the couple probably needed some time alone, the kids traipsed out of the hospital room after hugging them both goodbye. Erica withdrew into herself the minute they were alone. Jack knew she had to be having a hard time with the whole Kinder mess, but she usually clung to him, during situations like this, not pull away.

“Erica, honey, are you okay?” Jack took her hand, looking very concerned. Erica came back to reality from her thoughts.

“Yes, sorry. I was thinking about my dream. Jack, it was so real. I was in the car with Jonathan, after the wreck, and I managed to get out of the car and started running towards your voice. I reached you, right as my body was about to give out and then Jonathan shot me. I was there in your arms, my safe place, but he still shot me.” Erica’s body shook involuntarily with fright. The thought of her safest place in the whole world, Jack’s loving arms, not being safe, broke both their hearts. Jack moved to sit beside her on the bed, wrapping his arms around her.

“Sweetheart, my arms will always be safe for you. I would never let anyone hurt you. I would die before they would hurt you, you know that.”

“Jack, wait a minute. Safe place...safe place...Jack, call Derek I think I know where Jonathan is heading.”

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### Revelations

by Pam

"It's all coming back to me," Erica began excitedly, as Derek and Jack listened intently. "Jonathan was in a hurry to leave town. He told me that there was a plane and a man waiting for us. He made me take my passport. So, he was clearly heading out of the country. As for who he was going to meet, you're not going to believe this, but I think it's----"

"Hayward!" Jack exclaimed, completing her thought.

"Yes! David. But, how did you know?" Erica asked, her moment of clarity giving away to confusion once again.

"Erica, we have discovered that David had been visiting Kinder in prison," Derek explained. "A credit card check revealed that David is in Zurich. But, when Greenlee called and spoke to him, he said he knew nothing about your disappearance or Kinder's possible connection to it."

"I never believed that for a minute!" Jack added irately. "Derek, we need to drag Hayward back into the country for questioning."

"We'll do what we can, Jack. In the meantime, we'll get our people out to all of the nearby airports and we'll have all outgoing flights grounded." With that, Derek left to make some calls and mobilize his officers into action.

Jack continued to question Erica. "Sweetheart, did Kinder say *anything* that would give us any clues about Hayward's relationship to all of this?"

"No, Jack. Not really. He just said that David 'owed' him. Apparently, they knew each other in medical school. He was mostly vague about the nature of their relationship. But, I think he implied that David's medical degree was purchased and not earned. Oh, and Jonathan went to David for medical attention after Tad shot him. That's about it."

Jack's mind was racing. He was trying in vain to fit the pieces of the puzzle together. He speculated aloud. "So, we have two medical school cronies with a questionable connection. Hayward visits Kinder in prison. Then Kinder shows up at Hayward's cabin seeking medical attention. He knew that Kinder was a fugitive from justice. But, instead of turning him in to the authorities, Hayward decides to help him. Not only does he treat Kinder's gunshot wound, but he also turns over the keys to his cabin and leaves for Zurich. I don't believe for a minute that Hayward did all of that out of the kindness of his heart, or because he was afraid he'd be discovered to be the quack that everyone already knows he is. There has to be more to it than that. It makes no sense" Jack began pacing, asking rhetorically, "Where does Hayward fit in all of this?"

"I'd like to know the answer to that question myself," came Tad's voice from the doorway. "Hayward is up to his beady little eyes in this. That much is certain." He joined Jack at Erica's bedside, greeting Erica with a kiss on the cheek. "You sure are a sight for sore eyes," he added, clearly relieved that she was unharmed. Then, turning back to Jack, he added, "I spoke to Kinder's prison guard. The last thing that he remembered was accepting a piece of gum from one of Kinder's visitors. Wanna guess who the visitor was?"

"Hayward?"

"Bingo. The gum was apparently laced with a drug that rendered him unconscious long enough for Kinder and Hayward to get out of there undetected."

Derek Frye reentered to update Jack on the status of the investigation into Kinder's whereabouts.

"Were you able to find out why Hayward is in Zurich in the first place?" Jack asked Derek, his impatience with the speed and efficiency of the investigation evident in his tone.

"No. Not yet. Look, Jack, we will get to the bottom of this. You have my word on that," Derek stated ruefully, feeling guilt and shame for not following up on the David Hayward connection sooner. "My people are out in force looking for Kinder. All outbound flights have been grounded. If he was headed out of the country, he's in for a big surprise."

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Jonathan Kinder was a man on a mission. He was fortunate to have sustained only a few minor abrasions in the accident and, in the hours since he left Erica lying lifelessly in the tangled mess that was his car, he had managed to hitch a ride to the Center City Municipal Airport. He had arranged for a private charter to take him to Canada. From there, he would board another plane to Zurich.

Once he was safely aboard the plane, he placed a call to Zurich. "There has been a change in plans. Ms. Kane will not be accompanying me after all. Never mind the details. Let's just say that I should have known better than to get into a car with that she-devil again. What? No. Your name never came up. Here's the deal. I'll need a new identity and a place to live. Speaking of which, you weren't really attached to that cabin of yours, were you? Never mind. Anyway, as I was saying.... Hello? David? Hayward! Damn you!" Kinder clutched his cell phone, angrily yelling into the mouthpiece long after he realized that David Hayward had hung up on him.

"What the hell is taking us so long?" Jonathan snapped at the pilot impatiently.

"Sir, there will be a delay. Apparently, all outgoing flights have been temporarily grounded. I haven't been given any details, but I think we should be on our way soon." Jonathan looked out the small square window of the jet. The ground below was swarming with police cars. With no place to run and nowhere to hide, his great escape had been thwarted.

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"David, is everything alright honey?" the pretty blonde asked sweetly. She noticed the dramatic change in his mood following the telephone call.

"Yeah, sweetheart. Everything is fine," he lied. "You know, I was just thinking. Now is the perfect time for a nice long getaway. Let's get packed," he smiled innocently, his mind racing as he calculated his next step.

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Jack was asleep at Erica's bedside when the call came in. It was Derek Frye. He was calling to tell them that Jonathan Kinder had been taken into custody. "You need to come down to the station, Jack. He's ready to talk."

Even when the cards were stacked against him, Jonathan Kinder was a sanctimonious son-of-a-bitch. "I want to make a deal," he announced to Derek and Jack.

"You've got to be kidding me!" Jack laughed, barely able to resist the urge to personally rid Kinder's face of its evil smirk. "Let's see. We have you on attempted murder, kidnaping, and arson----and that's just for starters. What makes you think we would want to negotiate with you?"

"Two words: David. Hayward. Sure, you've caught me. But, I'm just a guppy. David's a much bigger fish. If you'd rather let him off the hook, who am I to stop you? Speaking of 'the one that got away', please tell that sexy little vixen of yours that it was so good to see her again," he added with a smirk.

"You smug bastard!" Jack screamed as he leapt towards Kinder. Derek pulled him back as his fist came within an inch of the man's face.

"Jack! Come on, Jack. You've got to calm down," Derek reasoned, pulling Jack away from Kinder and off into a corner of the interrogation room. "You wanted to know Hayward's connection to this, right? I think we should listen to what he has to say," he whispered.

"Ok. Alright." Jack sighed, returning to face his nemesis.

Jack reluctantly agreed that no further charges would be brought against Kinder. He would simply return to prison to finish the balance of his original sentence. In return, Kinder would supply him with detailed information regarding his dealings with David Hayward. Derek and Jack listened in rapt attention as Kinder told his story.

"David and I have known each other since medical school. His mother, Vanessa, and I entered into a mutually beneficial business arrangement. Cash for grades. So, when I read that the esteemed Dr. David Hayward, world renown cardiologist, had moved to Pine Valley,

I contacted him from prison to talk about old times.”

“You mean you tried to blackmail him into helping you escape from prison.”

“Now, now Mr. Montgomery. 'Blackmail' is such an ugly word. Let's just say that I reminded him of the value of my continued silence,” he laughed. “But, he didn't bite, not right away. I knew he'd come around eventually. So, I just bided my time. And, true to form, David came to me a few years later, seeking my help.”

“What did he want?”

“He was trying to develop a drug that would significantly impair long term memory. He promised to help me escape from prison in return for my assistance. Foolish me, I believed him.”

“Did he develop the drug?”

“He did. But, Davey Boy didn't keep his end of the bargain. Left me in prison to rot. He knew that no one would believe me, that I would not be able to prove anything.”

“What were his plans for the drug?”

“He wouldn't tell me. But, as I said, I'm a patient man. I knew that if I could find out what his plans were for the drug, I'd be able to 'convince' him to get me out of prison. So, I did some digging, called in some favors from people who agreed to act as my eyes and ears on the outside, and I finally struck gold.”

“What did you find?”

“Shortly after I gave David the formula for the drug, I came across a very interesting piece of news.”

“Which was?” Jack was growing tired of the cat and mouse.

“ I read the newspaper accounts of Dixie Martin's car accident in Zurich.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“You lawyers need to have everything spelled out for you,” Kinder chuckled, rolling his eyes. “David's fixation with Dixie Martin was the

talk of the town. Even *you* must have known about that,” he added sarcastically. “Through my contacts, I discovered that he left for Zurich a few days before Dixie’s car accident. When I heard that Dixie’s body was never found, I put two and two together. I called some contacts in Zurich and they confirmed that David was seen with a blond woman fitting Dixie’s description. This was *after* she supposedly died. I confronted David with my suspicions. He couldn’t deny it. He confessed that Dixie Martin is still alive.”

Jack and Derek sat in stunned silence. It took a while before Jack could speak again. “He used the memory erasing drug on Dixie Martin?”

“So, you’re not just another pretty face,” Kinder responded. “Yes. He used the drug on Dixie. He returned to Pine Valley so no one would become suspicious. He has been leading a dual life. When I found out, he agreed to help me get out of prison and out of the country, in return for my silence.”

“But, why involve Erica? You could have gotten away with it if you hadn’t -----“

“Revenge,” he interrupted. “Plain and simple. It would have been the sweetest revenge of all. By breaking out of prison and making off with the D.A.’s girlfriend, the woman who was instrumental in putting me behind bars in the first place, I would have thumbed my nose at an entire town. So, after David agreed to help me, I spent over a year carefully planning her abduction. It was flawless. Well, almost.”

“What were you planning to do with her?” Jack demanded.

“Live happily ever after, of course,” he laughed. “David was to insure our safe passage out of the country. As for the ‘happily ever after’ part, well, I have drugs for that.”

Jack rose from his chair, his jaws and fists tightly clenched. He turned to Derek. “Get him out of here.” When they left, he dialed the number of his best friend. “Tad. We found Kinder. Buddy, I’ve got some good and bad news for you. You should sit down....”

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The next day, Erica was scheduled to be released from the hospital.

Jack had already told her about David's involvement in her abduction, and in Dixie's 'accident'. The news was now slowly making its way through the Pine Valley grapevine. Intent on finding Dixie and bringing her home, Tad had left for Zurich the moment he heard the news.

When Jack arrived to take Erica home, she was lost in thought. "Hey you. A penny for your thoughts."

"I hope he finds her," Erica smiled up at Jack as he pulled her into an embrace.

"He will, sweetheart," Jack replied, kissing her gently on the forehead.

"You sound pretty confident."

"I am. I'm confident that true love will always find its way home. I'm confident that two people who were meant to spend eternity together will always find their way back to one another, no matter what. That's the way it is for Tad and Dixie...and for us." He spoke softly, hugging her tightly against his chest, breaking away to kiss her softly on her lips. "So, your place or mine?" he added with a smile.

"Well, while you were off chasing bad guys counselor, I did a little undercover work of my own," Erica grinned playfully.

"Oh, really? And what did you uncover?"

"There's a brand new mattress waiting for us at my penthouse. I say we pick up where we left off before we were so rudely interrupted," she quipped, her voice ripe with seduction.

"Mmmm...I love it when you go undercover. Come here."

They stood holding each other for several minutes. Neither of them spoke because, in this moment, no words were necessary. There was a familiarity to their closeness. Yet, there was a renewed passion in their embrace. They had found their way back to one another again, both physically and emotionally. But, this time would be different. This time there would be no doubts, no turning away, no turning back. This time was forever.

**THE END**