

# MEANT TO BE

by Anne Boleyn

Summary: Jack and Erica find their way back to one another.

Rating: PG

Timeline: Future

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Feedback appreciated

## Chapter 1

"Mom, you just don't understand. Rain is my friend. That's all. It's not like we're dating or anything." Bianca's voice showed her exasperation.

"I know you think of her as just a friend honey. But she wants more than that. I can tell. And Rain is not the kind of girl you should be involved with. Bianca, I met the nicest man at my parent's group the other night. He has a beautiful daughter who is 18. She's a freshman at Harvard this year, she loves horses just like you do, she'd be someone you could really enjoy getting to know. I gave Richard your e-mail address to pass on to her.

"Mom, I can't believe you did that!" Bianca rolled her eyes. "Oh Bianca, you'll like her. Don't worry. Now if you and Jack will excuse me, I need to fix my lipstick." Erica smiled and left the table. She, Jack and Bianca were having dinner at the Valley Inn.

"Uncle Jack, what am I going to do with her?" "You're asking me?" Jack laughed and patted Bianca's hand across the table. "Come on kiddo, isn't this better than having her cover her ears every time you say the word gay?"

"I'm not so sure." Bianca laughed too. "Can you imagine mom fixing me up with another girl? God only knows what kind of girl she'd choose for me!"

"Oh I don't know," Jack grinned. "Your mother has been known to have pretty good taste from time to time." His smile faded as he saw David Hayward leaving the restaurant with Dixie Martin. " Then again, she has been known to have absolutely appalling taste at times too."

"You never liked David did you?"

"No I didn't. I'm sorry sweetheart. I know that you did."

"Uncle Jack, I barely knew him. Mom broke up with him practically the day I came to Pine Valley. "

"But your mother mentioned several times how much you liked him. I assumed you must have gotten to know each other through phone calls or letters." Jack looked puzzled.

"When Mom told me she was dating him I told her that I remembered him from the hospital and that he seemed nice. After that, every time I talked to her she kept saying how glad she was that I was so fond of David. It made her so happy that it was just easier to let her think I was crazy about him. You know how Mom is."

"Oh yes, if there's one thing I do know, it's your mother." Jack smiled to himself remembering just how well he knew Erica.

Suddenly there was a scream from the doorway. A man was pointing a gun at one of the waitresses. "Did you think I was just going to let you take my kids and walk out? Did you think you could get away with this?" he shouted, waving the pistol wildly. Panic broke out in the dining room as people dove under tables and ran for the kitchen exit. Jack pushed Bianca to the floor and grabbed the man with the gun, twisting his arm behind him and wrenching the gun from his hand. Two hotel security guards ran in and pulled the man out of the dining room. Jack found himself surrounded by the other diners, congratulating him, thanking him, calling him a hero. Bianca pushed her way to her uncle's side and hugged him tightly.

"God, you were so awesome!" she said proudly. "I can't believe you were so brave. Mom, did you see what happened? Wasn't Uncle Jack wonderful?" Jack and Bianca turned and looked at Erica who was standing near their deserted table. Her face was as white as a sheet and she was shaking.

"How could you be so stupid Jack?" Erica's voice was furious. "I can't believe you could do something so incredibly idiotic! You could have been killed!" She turned and walked rapidly from the dining room. Jack and Bianca followed her. They caught up with her as she was talking to the clerk at the desk in the lobby. " Yes, could you please call a limo for me? I'd like to leave as soon as possible."

"You don't need a limo Erica. I'll take you home." Jack's voice was gentle. "Mom, why would you be so awful to Uncle Jack?" Bianca was angry and it

showed. "He saved people's lives and you're treating him like..." "That's enough Bianca," Jack said calmly. "It's all right. Let's just go home now."

## *Chapter 2*

No one spoke on the ride home. When Jack pulled into the driveway Erica barely gave him time to stop before she was out of the car and fumbling with her keys to unlock the front door. Her hands were shaking so much she couldn't get the key into the lock. Jack wordlessly took the keys from her and opened the door.

"I'm so proud of you Uncle Jack," said Bianca, glaring at Erica who had gone straight to the living room and was sitting in the corner of the couch clutching a pillow.

"Honey, there's nothing to be proud of. It wasn't something I thought about. I just reacted. If I'd thought about what I was doing I'd probably still be hiding under a table." Jack was watching Erica closely. He could tell she was close to tears. He walked over to the couch, sat down and took her hand. "Nothing happened Erica. Bianca's safe, I'm safe, everything's all right."

Erica tried to smile. "I know. Bianca, after such an awful experience don't you think you should try to get some rest?"

"Mom, I'm..." Bianca stopped talking as she saw Jack shaking his head at her. "OK, I'll go upstairs." Bianca still wasn't sure exactly what was going on with her mother but that was nothing unusual. She went upstairs and called Leo to tell him what had happened.

Jack waited until he heard Bianca's bedroom door closed. Then he said, "Do you want to yell at me some more about how stupid I was?" But he was smiling and his voice was tender.

"I'm sorry Jack. I didn't mean that. No, actually I did mean it. Why would you risk your life like that?"

"Honey, I didn't stop to think. It just happened."

"You and your knight in shining armour complex. You saw someone in trouble and you had to help." Erica was still on the verge of tears. "But Jack, Bianca and I could never have gotten through these last months without you. You were there for her so many times when I wasn't. You kept me from going completely off the track over and over again. Since Travis died,

you've been more than just a father figure to Bianca, you've been a real father. We....she needs you so much. How do you think she would have felt if you had been killed right in front of her eyes?"

Jack reached out and took Erica into his arms. He only meant to give her a reassuring hug but when he felt her trembling against him his arms tightened around her instinctively. Erica found herself clinging to him without even realizing what she was doing.

They had stayed there a long time just holding on to each other when Bianca came downstairs. Erica pulled away from Jack, smoothing back her hair and saying, "Bianca, what's wrong? Can't you sleep? Do you need something sweetheart?"

"I'm fine Mom. You're the one who was upset, remember? Uncle Jack, I thought you were gone."

"I was just leaving." Jack stood up and picked up his coat from the chair. He kissed Bianca on the cheek and walked back to the couch where Erica was still sitting. "Will you be all right now?"

Erica smiled up at him. "I'll be fine. You always make me feel better." She reached for his hand and squeezed it. "Goodnight Jack." Jack walked to the door, turned around and looked at Erica one last time, then left. Bianca looked at the door then looked at her mother and grinned.

"I have a really good feeling about this," she thought to herself.

### Chapter 3

Jack looked at the clock. 2:30. "Anyone might have insomnia after an encounter with an armed gunman," he thought. But he had to be honest with himself. The incident at the Valley Inn wasn't what was keeping him awake. He couldn't get his mind off of what had happened at Erica's - how fragile she seemed, how good it felt to hold her in his arms after so long. It was getting harder and harder to keep his feelings under control. "How can one woman arouse every single emotion known to mankind?" he asked himself as he poured another scotch.

He knew that if Bianca hadn't come downstairs when she did he might have told Erica just how much he still loved her. But that would have been a mistake. Jack remembered how she had reacted the last time he told her that he loved her. She had immediately let him know that he was a valued friend

but nothing more. Right now things were good between them. He didn't want that to change. "You can keep this going," he told himself. "Being her best friend is better than not being in her life at all."

Across town Erica gave up and turned on her bedside lamp. A long hot bath and a cup of herbal tea usually helped her sleep but not tonight. She kept seeing Jack struggling with the gunman and the image made her feel sick inside. "God, Jack, what if I had lost you tonight?" she whispered. Looking back, she couldn't remember the exact moment when she realized she had fallen back in love with Jack.

He had been a tower of strength for her and for Bianca since Travis's death. When Bianca came out, Jack was there to offer her the love and support she needed when Erica couldn't. He was there to mediate between them when it looked like their mother/daughter bond might be broken forever. He was loving and supportive when Erica was finally able to accept her daughter's sexuality. The three of them had formed a family unit that grew stronger as the days went by. Gradually she had realized that she was happy whenever Jack was nearby, that she missed him when he wasn't, that she was thinking about him constantly, fantasizing about him when she should be concentrating on Enchantment. Tonight, she had wanted him to go on holding her forever, to carry her upstairs and.....

Erica got up and looked at herself in the mirror. "I'll need lots of concealer in the morning," she said as she examined the circles under her eyes. "I've got to do a better job of controlling my feelings. The last thing Jack wants is for our relationship to change. If I start acting like a lovestruck teenager, he'll pull away so fast he won't leave any tracks behind." She remembered the night that Jack had told her that he couldn't live with her day to day because it was like being too close to the sun. He didn't want that kind of relationship again. "I can do this. I can keep everything the way it is now. I won't ruin things by telling him how I feel. I'm not going to lose him again."

#### Chapter 4

"Are you sure you won't come in for coffee or a brandy?" Erica asked. She and Jack had just come in from having dinner at Courtland Manor. Somehow Opal had managed to retain the elegance of the dining room even though half of the downstairs was taken up by the Glamorama.

"I'd love to stay but I really need to get some work done tonight," Jack replied. "I have closing arguments tomorrow in the Crawford trial and I

want to make sure everything is in order."

Erica smiled at him. "I won't say good luck because you won't need it. I'm sure you'll be brilliant as usual."

"It's too bad you aren't on the jury." They both laughed. Jack leaned down to kiss her goodnight. He meant to kiss her on the cheek but somehow her lips were there. His heart started pounding as he felt her arms slip around his neck and her lips open under his. Their kiss deepened. Just then the phone rang. They sprang apart, shaken.

"You get the phone. I have to go." Jack was out the door in a split second. He stopped on the porch and leaned against a pillar. "Way to go Montgomery. You swear to keep things at friendship and you end up with your tongue halfway down her throat. What am I going to say to her about this?"

Erica looked down at the Caller ID to see just who it was that she hated more than anyone else in the world. "Hello Val, you're fired! No I'm not serious but your timing is awful. Tell me what's going on with the campaign." Erica listened to Val but her mind was racing. "God, could you be more obvious? You were all over him! No wonder he couldn't get out of here fast enough." As she listened to Val tell her about the unacceptable way the newest Enchantment model was behaving on a publicity tour she had an idea.

"Val, I think I should go and handle this myself. I'll join the tour tomorrow and take care of everything personally. Will you please make all the arrangements?" She hung up the phone and said to herself, "I'll put some distance between us until I can get myself back under control. It's the best thing for everyone."

### Chapter 5

"Bianca, you're perfectly welcome to come with me on this tour. You can afford to miss a few days of school and you could see the business end of Enchantment rather than the modeling side." Bianca was watching her mother pack her bags the next morning.

"Mom, I'd rather stay here. I have tests coming up and a history paper to write and..."

"And you're afraid I'd find a way to stick you in front of the cameras."

"No I'm not." Bianca laughed. " What is the problem on the tour?"

"The spokesmodel for the new fragrance apparently has started to believe she's as wonderful as her press notices. She's showing up late for personal appearances, has been rude to the press, and she's giving the company bad publicity. But I can take care of her. You know the old saying, it takes a diva to handle a diva." Erica paused for a moment then said, " Honey, while I'm gone I want you to stay with Uncle Jack."

"Mom, I'm almost 17. I don't need a babysitter."

I know sweetheart but I don't want you in this big house all alone. Jack would love to have you and I'd feel so much better knowing he was taking care of you. You love spending time with him don't you?"

"Yes, it's almost like being with Daddy again." Bianca smiled a little sadly. " I guess I can stay at Uncle Jack's ."

"Wonderful. I'm really glad the two of you are so close." Erica hugged her daughter. "I'm going to miss you terribly sweetheart. I'll be back in a few days."

Later that afternoon Erica looked out the airplane window. She hadn't wanted to face Jack after last night so she had left a message on his answering machine telling him about her trip and asking him to look after Bianca. She had thought about apologizing for the kiss but then thought better of it. "Maybe if I never mention it, he'll forget about it," she thought.

Jack listened to the message on his answering machine for the 6th time. Erica's voice sounded odd, almost formal. He was glad to have Bianca stay with him but he still felt terrible. "You drove her out of town," he said to himself. "You know she doesn't want anything but friendship from you and you couldn't keep your hands to yourself. If you don't get yourself under control she's going to push you out of her life."

## Chapter 6

Jack and Bianca sat in the airport waiting for Erica's flight to arrive. She had been gone for a little over a week and Jack had missed her more than he thought was possible. She had called Bianca every day and Jack almost always talked to her too. At first their conversations were a little awkward but gradually they lasted longer and longer, discussing Bianca, Erica's work on the tour, his court cases, anything else that crossed their minds. Almost

anything else. Neither of them ever mentioned the kiss. The last two nights Jack had been concerned. Erica had sounded very tired and she had been coughing . When he questioned her about it, she told him that everyone on the publicity tour had a touch of the flu and the CEO of the company was no exception.

"She's here," Bianca said as she saw the first class passengers disembarking. "Mom, over here." She waved and ran to hug her mother. Jack followed slowly, allowing mother and daughter a few private moments. Erica looked as tired as she had sounded on the phone last night and she was still coughing.

"Jack, it's so sweet of you to come to the airport with Bianca," Erica reached up to hug him. She held on for longer than she had planned. She was so tired and his arms felt so strong.

"My pleasure ," he answered. His cheek brushed against hers and he pulled back and put his hand on her forehead. "Sweetheart, you have a fever. Have you seen a doctor?"

"I don't need a doctor Jack, it's just this silly flu thing. I'll be fine once I get home and get a good night's sleep."

Jack's concern deepened by the time they arrived at Erica's house. Bianca had chattered away in the car, filling her mother in on all that happened in Pine Valley while she was gone. Erica hardly responded and finally fell asleep waking up only as the car stopped in front of the house.

"Mom, Coral has all your favorites for dinner tonight," Bianca said. "You can tell us all about your trip while we eat."

"I'm sorry sweetheart, I'm not very hungry. I ate on the plane." She coughed again. "That's not really a lie," Erica thought. " I did take a bite of the salad."

"You two go ahead and eat. I think I'll go to bed early. I have a terrible case of jet lag on top of this bug and I'd be awful company." Erica was feeling worse by the minute. Her head was pounding, she was chilled, and her chest hurt every time she coughed. She hated for Jack to see her looking like this. "Vanity is stronger than the flu, " she thought.

After she went upstairs Bianca looked at Jack. "She really looks sick Uncle Jack."

"Don't worry honey. I'm sure some rest will do her a world of good. But just in case I'll make an appointment for her to see Joe Martin tomorrow. You can make sure she goes."

"Thanks a lot. Give me the hard job." Bianca laughed. Jack laughed too but he had to admit to himself that he was worried.

### Chapter 7

Erica awoke the next morning to find Bianca standing by her bed with a tray. "Breakfast in bed, Uncle Jack's orders." Bianca set the tray down on the bedside table. "You're supposed to spend the morning in bed. Coral is making chicken soup for your lunch and I'm coming home after 6th period to drive you to Dr. Joe's office. You have a 2:30 appointment."

"Jack certainly is taking over isn't he? I suppose I should humor him and keep the appointment." Erica started to laugh but coughed instead. She had to struggle to catch her breath.

"Mom, are you okay?" Bianca's voice was anxious.

"I'm fine baby. I probably need some antibiotics but I'm sure Dr. Joe will take care of that. Now you'd better hurry or you'll be late for school."

After Bianca left Erica looked at the breakfast tray. She just couldn't handle the thought of eating right now. Maybe she would just wait for lunch and the chicken soup. She smiled a little sadly remembering a time when Jack's suggestions of a morning in bed wouldn't have included chicken soup and doctor's appointments. "Those days are over. You might as well deal with it," she thought. She felt like her fever was getting worse but the thought of getting up to get an aspirin was too tiring. She finally drifted off into a deep sleep.

Jack looked at his watch wondering if he should call Erica again. When he called earlier Coral told him that Erica had been asleep all day. She had promised to wake her up in time to keep her appointment with Joe Martin. "I should go over there myself and make sure she's all right," he thought. As he started out the door his phone rang.

"Uncle Jack". It was Bianca. He could tell from her voice she was very upset.

"What is it?"

"I'm at the emergency room. Mom is so sick Uncle Jack. When I got home Coral couldn't wake her up. Her fever is so high. We called an ambulance and she's in with Dr. Joe now. Uncle Jack, I'm scared!" Bianca was crying.

"Honey, I'm on my way. Don't be scared. Everything will be all right. I promise." As Jack raced to the hospital he thought, "Please God, don't let that be a lie."

### Chapter 8

"Dixie, did you ever stop to think that maybe it would be good for Jr. to stay with his father for a while? Boys need their fathers. I know how much I needed my father at that age. Look, Dixie, we'll talk about this later, I'm being paged." David hung up the phone. He wasn't being paged but he was tired of the conversation.

Somehow the idyllic life he had envisioned with Dixie once he broke up her marriage hadn't worked out quite the way he had planned. Maybe if that bratty son of hers was out of the way things would be better. Bringing up his father had been a master stroke. That always made Dixie feel sorry for him. She was still his strongest champion. He enjoyed watching her take on Palmer, the Martins, Dimitri, everyone who questioned his integrity. Sometimes listening to her defending him he almost forgot that he was guilty of everything he was being accused of.

He walked out into the hallway where the nurses station was buzzing. He heard the words "Erica Kane" and "emergency room". David began to smirk. So Erica was up to her old tricks. He remembered how when they were together she would leave emergency messages with his service and even came to his office complaining of chest pains. "I wondered when she'd show up for another fix in her David addiction," he thought. "She lasted longer than I thought she would but I knew she'd be back." As he started down the hall he saw Bianca and Jack Montgomery in the waiting room. Jack seemed to be comforting Bianca. This was unexpected. Erica must be a patient on this floor. David turned and went back to the nurses station. "Give me Ms. Kane's chart," he ordered.

"Is Ms. Kane your patient?" asked the floor supervisor. "Don't question me until you have an MD after your name!" he snapped. He looked at the room number on the chart and headed down the hall.

"Dr. Joe says Mom has pneumonia Uncle Jack. Her fever was over 104 and

she was having trouble breathing. " Bianca was shaking. "I keep thinking about the night Daddy died. Do you remember when I told her I wished that she had died instead? What if she's thinking about that now? What if she thinks I want her to die?" Bianca burst into tears in Jack's arms.

"Bianca look at me." Jack tilted her chin up to where she was looking into his eyes. " Do you remember what your mother did after you said that? She opened up her arms to you and held you. She loves you more than anything and she knows you love her. She knew you didn't mean it."

Jack looked up and saw David Hayward opening the door to Erica's room. He was surprised at the surge of anger that went through him. Some of his friends in the DA's office had tipped him off that Hayward was about to be brought down in the Libidozone incident. The last thing Erica needed right now was that lowlife moving back in on her.

"Bianca, I'm going in to see your mother now. Will you be all right here.?" "I'll look after her Jack." It was Leo who had just arrived at the hospital. Bianca hugged Leo as Jack left the waiting room.

Erica was drifting in and out of consciousness. She knew she was in the hospital but she couldn't remember how she got there. All she knew was that she felt sick and scared. She opened her eyes when she heard someone say her name.

"Erica, it's me. David."

Erica closed her eyes. She didn't want David. There was only one person she wanted. She forced her eyes open again and whispered, "I want Jackson." "I'm sorry Erica. He's not here," David replied surprised that Erica was asking for another man.

"The hell I'm not," Jack said from the doorway. He pushed David aside and took Erica's hand in both of his. "I'm right here sweetheart. You knew I would be." Then he looked at David. "You can leave now. She doesn't need a cardiologist."

Erica was struggling to stay awake. " Jack, please stay with me. Please don't leave me."

"I'm not going anywhere," he said, stroking her hair. "I promise I won't leave you."

Just before she fell asleep she whispered, " I love you so much Jack. I know you don't want me to, but I can't help it."

### Chapter 9

You're doing much better Ms. Kane," the nurse said as she took Erica's vital signs. "I wouldn't be surprised if you get to go home in a few days."

Erica leaned back against the pillows. The first few days she had been in the hospital were hazy. Her fever had been high and it took a second antibiotic before the infection began to recede. She vaguely remembered fighting the oxygen mask, feeling like it was suffocating her. She knew that Bianca had been there frequently and she recalled hearing the voices of Myrtle, Opal, Palmer, Dimitri, even Leo. But the one constant had been Jack.

It was his name she had murmured every time she woke up, his hands that she clung to, and his voice that reassured her when she felt like she might die. For the last two days Erica's condition had improved steadily. Jack had still been by her side every minute until last night when she insisted that he and Bianca go home and rest. She had teased them that they looked worse than she did. "I've got to start weaning myself away from Jack," she thought. " He's too wonderful to stop me from leaning on him while I'm sick but I'm better now. I've got to stop clinging to him."

Jack opened the door to Erica's room. He had a strange expression on his face.

"Good morning beautiful," he said. "How do you feel?" He leaned down and kissed her, first on the forehead, then on the lips.

"Much better, Jack. I'm a lot stronger this morning."

"Good. Do you think you're strong enough for us to have a talk?"

Erica nodded her head, afraid of what he might say. He was probably going to let her down gently. She wondered if she was really strong enough to hear him tell her that they could never be together again.

"Honey, do you remember what you said to me the first night you were here?"

"Not really Jack. I'm not sure what was real and what wasn't."

"Well, I remember. I've replayed it in my head a thousand times. You said 'I

love you so much Jack. I know you don't want me to but I can't help it."

Erica looked down at her hands. This was going to be worse than she thought. She remembered thinking that but she hadn't realized that she actually said it.

Jack continued, "Do you remember what I've said to you over the last few days? How I told you that I loved you more than anything in the world? How I said that my life was empty without you and that I needed you to be with me forever?"

Erica looked at him in amazement. "I thought I dreamed that!"

"No sweetheart, all of that was real. And all of it was true." Jack caressed her face with the tips of his fingers. "Erica, why did you think I wouldn't want you to love me?"

"You said you couldn't live with me Jack. You said you didn't want that kind of relationship again. I thought if you knew I loved you, that you'd pull away from me." Erica's eyes filled with tears. "I had to have you in my life, I couldn't risk scaring you away."

Jack pulled her into his arms and held her tightly. "I thought you only wanted friendship from me. I've been fighting telling you how I felt for so long."

Erica leaned back on the bed pulling Jack with her. "I can't believe it took a raging fever for us to finally be honest with each other." She kissed him, loving the feeling of his mouth on hers. "Jack, I want this to work this time. I want you in my life every day. I'll do whatever it takes to be the woman you can spend your life with."

Jack kissed her deeply. "You don't have to do a thing but be yourself. I know I said being with you was like flying too close to the sun but I've learned that life isn't worth living without the sun's warmth and light."

Erica looked him straight in the eyes. "Are you sure you're willing to risk it? You're not just saying this because I've been so sick?"

"I don't think I've ever been this sure of anything in my life," he answered.

### Chapter 10

Jack there is one thing we haven't talked about."

Jack was sitting on the bed with his back against the wall holding Erica against his shoulder. He smiled down at her. "Do you want to know if I still like to sleep on the left side of the bed?"

Erica laughed. " You can sleep on whichever side of the bed makes you happy."

She reached up to kiss him. "I'm serious Jack. This is going to be a big surprise for Bianca. I don't know how she'll react. She loves you so much. If anything she may resent having to share your love with me but..."

"But I'm still the man who broke up her parent's marriage all those years ago," Jack finished her sentence. "Our being together may bring back some of those angry feelings she had as a child."

"I hope not but I think we have to consider it," said Erica. "She's coming by after school and I'd like to tell her alone. Do you understand why?"

"Perfectly," Jack said. "She needs to feel free to express any reservations without having to worry about hurting my feelings."

"I think she'll be fine with this darling," Erica touched his cheek with her fingertips. "But it may take her a little time. I just hope she doesn't feel blind-sided. I'm sure our getting back together was the last thing she expected."

"Mom, you look so much better." Bianca bent down to hug Erica. "I feel so much better," Erica answered. She held on to her daughter and stroked her hair for a moment. "Bianca, there's something I need to tell you."

Bianca looked frightened. "There's not something else wrong with you is there? The doctor's didn't give you bad news?"

"No baby, this is something wonderful. At least I hope you'll think it's wonderful. Bianca, Jack was here for a long time this morning." "Mom, he's always here."

"That's right Bianca. He's always been here and he always will be." Erica chose her words carefully. "Honey, you know that Jack and I have loved each other for years. No matter how many times we tried to fall in love with other people and move on, something always pulled us back together. We realize now that we just can't stay apart any longer."

Erica looked closely at Bianca's face trying to gauge what her daughter was

thinking. "Baby, I know this has been a shock for you. I realize it's going to take you some time to get used to the idea."

Just then Opal appeared in the doorway. "How's my best gal pal doing?"  
"Much better Opal. But this isn't a very good time for a visit. Bianca and I were discussing something important."

Bianca got up and picked up her backpack from the corner. She took out a five dollar bill and handed it to Opal. She was grinning from ear to ear. "You win," she said.

Opal beamed at Erica. "You and Jackson are back together! I couldn't be happier girlfriend."

"What? How did you know?" Erica looked puzzled.

Bianca laughed. "Opal and I had this bet Mom. She said that you and Uncle Jack would be back together before you ever left the hospital. I thought it would take a couple of weeks. Myrtle thought you were both so stubborn it would take a month."

"Hey everyone, look who I ran into in the elevator," Jack said as he and Leo entered the room. Leo was carrying a bouquet of balloons. Opal waved the five dollar bill at him.

"Damn, you two couldn't wait three days! Binky, do you have any money I can borrow? I spent my last dime on these balloons."

"Pay your own debts Leo," Bianca said good naturedly. "Opal probably takes IOU's."

"What's going on?" Jack asked.

"Apparently there's been some betting going on about when we would get back together," Erica told him. "Just who else was in on this?" She looked sulky.

Oh, let's see," Opal was enjoying this. "There was Val, Coral, Dimitri. I thought Dimitri might win actually. He said you'd give in some time in the middle of your first night back home."

"Don't forget Olga, Stephanie from your office Uncle Jack, and the whole 4th floor nursing staff," Bianca added. Everyone in the room laughed.

"Hey, are you pouting?" Jack traced Erica's lips tenderly with his thumb.

"No." But she didn't sound very convincing. "I just don't like the idea of being so transparent to everyone."

"Sweetheart, if it makes you feel any better, Brooke told me months ago that she knew I was still in love with you."

"But that's different." Erica smiled as she said that realizing how silly it sounded.

"Oh, so everyone can know that I was eating my heart out over you but no one should guess that you were pining away for me. Is that it?" Jack was laughing.

Erica tilted her head to one side and smiled up at him. "Exactly." The room was filled with the laughter of their family and friends.

Later as everyone drifted out, Jack stopped Bianca. "Is this really OK with you?"

"Who do you think organized the betting pool?" Bianca looked very happy. "And guess what? No one was betting against the two of you getting together. Everyone knew it was meant to be."

## Chapter 11

"Jack, you know I love having you with me every second, but darling if you don't go in to the office soon you'll lose all your clients. I don't want to be responsible for the collapse of your law practice."

Erica and Jack were sitting in the solarium at the hospital. Walking down there had tired Erica more than she wanted to admit and she was glad for a chance to rest before going back to her room.

"I'm not worried about the practice. You see, I know this very wealthy woman, world famous, runs her own company. She's crazy about me. I'm thinking about ditching the law and letting her support me."

Erica laughed. "So that's your plan? Becoming a kept man? Though if I don't get back to work soon I might not be able to support you in style."

Jack looked serious. "We're not even going to talk about you going back to work until your 100% better."

"Now that's what I like to hear," Joe Martin said, walking up to where they were sitting. "I have good news for you Erica if you'll promise to cooperate."

You can go home tomorrow but with a few conditions. You have to promise that you'll rest for at least three days. Then come back in for a check up before you resume any activities at all."

"Joe you don't mean bedrest do you? Just taking it easy?"

"I mean absolutely no strenuous activity. Nothing more than walking from the bed to the couch. Jack, I trust you'll see that she sticks to it." Jack looked at him with raised eyebrows. Joe grinned. "Opal hit me up this morning for my five dollars."

"I think Opal made enough money off of us for a trip to Tahiti," Jack said in amusement. "Don't worry Joe. I can handle Erica."

As Joe left the solarium Erica smiled at Jack seductively. "I can't wait to get home so you can show me just how you plan to handle me."

David slammed into his office and threw a stack of folders off of his desk. He was in a terrible mood. Jr. had moved out of Dixie's suite at the Valley Inn last night and she had cried like he was going to another planet instead of across town to the Chandler Mansion. When David tried to calm her down she had even yelled at him that sex wasn't a cure for everything. Of course when he pulled his hurt little boy routine and told her how much he needed her, she fell right into his arms but afterwards she went back to her own suite instead of staying with him. She said she wanted to be home if Jr. called. One of the things that had attracted David to Dixie was her devotion to her son, but was it asking too much for her to show him the same kind of devotion? Then when he got to the hospital the whole staff was buzzing about true love and romantic reunions and how Opal Courtland had won that stupid bet. He'd like to place his own bet with all these sentimental saps on how

long Erica stayed with Jack before she came back to him for the best sex she had ever known. Now he had a message from Dimitri Marrik asking for a meeting with him tomorrow morning about the Andrassy Foundation.

Things hadn't been going well for the foundation. No new projects had been developed. Drug companies were reluctant to use the foundation facilities after the Libidozone scandal and other hospitals weren't referring patients to the studies that were ongoing. David glared at his empty appointment book. Several of his patients had asked for referrals to other cardiologists and he hadn't picked up any new patients to take their place. The Martin's were blackballing him in medical circles; he was sure of it. Could this week get

any worse?

Dimitri, Alex and Edmund were talking over lunch at Wildwind. "I still think we have every right to ask for David's resignation. His reputation is hurting the foundation.,"Dimitri said. "It carries my family name and I won't stand for seeing it tarnished."

Edmund looked at his brother, wondering if he meant to sound so pompous. "I agree that he needs to be removed. But do you need grounds to do it? I think we should ask Jack about the legal steps we need to take before David finds out we're trying to get rid of him."

"Edmund's right Dimitri. We may need something concrete to keep David from suing the foundation for dismissing him. I know he was responsible for drugging an entire boatload of people with Libidozone at Ryan's party but I can't prove it. And my word isn't strong enough to convince anyone. Not after I was missing for weeks and couldn't explain my whereabouts when I returned. I promised the British government I would never say a word to anyone but my family about the time I was gone."

"All right then," said Dimitri. "Edmund, you call Jack and see if we can set up an appointment with him this afternoon. Let's get the ball rolling to get rid of David Hayward."

### Chapter 12

"Thank you for coming over tonight Jack," Edmund said as he led Jack into the living room at Wildwind.

"No problem," said Jack. "I wanted to take care of this tonight. Erica's coming home tomorrow and I want to be with her."

"I stopped by to see her this afternoon. She looks like she's making a full recovery. She also looks very happy, " Dimitri added.

"I intend to make sure she stays that way," Jack told him. He and Dimitri would never be friends but they had reached an understanding over the years.

"Jack, we need your input on how to dismiss David Hayward as director of the Andrassy Foundation." Alex was ready to get down to business. "If we ask for his resignation on suspicion only are we opening up ourselves for a lawsuit?"

Jack hesitated for a moment. "Can I count on everyone to keep what we say here completely quiet?"

"Of course," Dimitri said. Alex and Edmund chimed in their agreement.

"I'd like for you to hold off doing anything right now. You know I still have a lot of contacts in the DA's office. PVPD is working right now on gathering enough hard evidence to get an indictment on Hayward for the whole Libidozone mess. Adrian Sword called some old friends as a favor to the Martins and they've located the lab technician who has been missing since the scandal broke. If he can be persuaded to testify, then along with some circumstantial evidence they've collected, they'll have a pretty solid case."

"What kind of evidence?" asked Edmund.

"Jake Martin found an audiotape that he believes David destroyed the day his records were audited. The tape has been mangled but ..."

"I think I can help here," Alex interrupted. "There is technology that can recover what was on a tape under almost any circumstances. Let me make a few phone calls. There are people in England who owe me a few favors."

"This is wonderful Bianca. What did you say it was called?" Bianca and Leo had sneaked a picnic basket into Erica's room. Erica couldn't bear one more day of hospital food. "Death by Chocolate. It's the best dessert the Valley Inn makes." "You'll have to try eating dessert once in a while Erica. It's amazing what they can do with a huge amount of calories," Leo grinned at her. "Hey Bianca did you tell her who you've been e-mailing lately?" "Who?" asked Erica with a trace of concern. "Do you remember giving my e-mail address to one of your friends from your Parents of Gays group? You wanted to fix me up with his daughter. Well, she heard from her father that you had been sick and she e-mailed me to ask about you. We started IMing and we do have a lot in common. We're going to try to get together on her next break from school."

"Oh sweetheart, that's wonderful. Sometimes I actually do something right don't I?"

"I guess so," Bianca smiled as she said it. "Getting back together with Uncle Jack was one of your better moments."

"I agree with you there," Erica's smile was radiant. "I'm glad it makes you

happy baby. More than anything I want the three of us to be a happy family. I've always regretted that I never gave you that."

Leo felt a little envious. He knew that he had stayed at Erica's house too long and that moving out was a step towards independence for him. But he couldn't help wishing that he was going to be a part of that happy family that Erica was talking about.

### Chapter 13

Ohh, it's so good to be home." Erica sighed happily and leaned back against Jack. That morning when Jack carried her through the door she had been touched to see the house full of her favorite flowers. Bianca had skipped her first few classes of the day to welcome her mother home and Myrtle's presence had been almost like having Mona there.

"I think it's time I took you up to bed," Jack said. He was trying not to hover over her but he couldn't help watching every move she made and she was starting to look tired again.

"That sounds wonderful," Erica turned to face him with a flirtatious smile on her face.

" Don't look at me like that Erica. There are only so many cold showers a man can take."

She laughed delightedly, enjoying the effect she had on him. "Joe didn't say we couldn't make love."

"He said absolutely no strenuous activity and lady believe me, what I have in mind for you lends new meaning to the word strenuous." It was Jack's turn to be seductive. "But for now, I plan on tucking you in and watching you sleep. We have plenty of time for making love when you're strong enough to keep up with me."

He picked her up from the couch and carried her to her bedroom, placing her gently on the bed. For all of her bravado, she really was exhausted just from the effort of leaving the hospital. She fell asleep almost instantly. Jack watched her for a moment, wondering again if your heart could explode out of your chest from loving someone so much. Then he lay down next to her, wrapping his body around hers.

Leo was surprised when he opened the door of his new apartment to find

Dixie Martin standing there. He knew that she was involved with his brother but he couldn't imagine what she wanted with him. "Come in Dixie," he said. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"It's not for me, it's for David. Today's his birthday. Did you know that?"

"No, I can't say that I did."

"I wanted to do something special for him, maybe have a few people over for a little party and I hoped you'd come."

"Dixie, David and I don't get along. We never have. I don't think he'd consider me on his A-list of party guests."

"But Leo, you're his brother." Dixie looked upset. "Can't you put your differences aside for one night? I know he cares about you. He was soconcerned last year when your mother let you be arrested for killing Paolo."

"David wanted revenge on Vanessa, that was all. Family doesn't mean a thing to him. Dixie, I've probably had five conversations with him in all the time I've lived in Pine Valley. Besides, Erica just got out of the hospital today and I want to stop in and see how she's doing" Leo felt sorry for Dixie."

Look, you should just invite some of your friends over and forget about trying to make David and me into the Brady Bunch."

"But we don't have any friends," Dixie thought as she walked out into the hall. It wasn't like when she was with Tad and they could have a huge party full of family and friends at the drop of a hat. All of her old friends hated David, accusing him of all kinds of awful things. They just didn't know him the way she did. She could imagine their reactions if she called to invite them to a birthday party for him. David's colleagues at the hospital didn't like him either. Some of them might come but it wouldn't be the sort of warm happy gathering that she wanted for him. She had hoped that Leo would come and maybe bring Laura or Bianca. "I'll just have to do everything I can to make the day special for him," she thought. It made Dixie sad to think of what David's birthday might have been like if she wasn't in his life. "He really needs me," she said to herself. "I'm all he has."

### Chapter 14

Erica came into Joe's office from the examining room. "Tell me Joe, am I fully recovered?"

"You're doing very well Erica. I think as long as you take things slow you can go back to your normal routine."

"Would you tell that to Jack? He's been treating me like I'm made of porcelain for the past few days. I'm surprised he didn't actually carry me into your office." Erica was smiling affectionately.

"Let's call him in here," Joe said. He pushed the button on his intercom.

"Carrie, would you send Mr. Montgomery in please?"

Jack was in Joe's office instantly, trying to look unconcerned but not succeeding very well. "Is everything all right?" he asked.

"Everything's fine. I was just telling Erica she could resume her normal activities as long as she remembers to rest when she feels tired."

"And if my normal activities include making love to this wonderful man...."

"Erica!" Jack laughed and covered her mouth with his hand. "Is it okay Joe? I don't to rush things if you don't think she's strong enough."

"Normal activities include sex. There shouldn't be any problem."

Erica and Jack left Joe's office with their arms around each other. As soon as they reached the parking lot Jack pulled out his cell phone.

"Stephanie, cancel all my appointments this afternoon." He looked at Erica and smiled. "Hell, cancel all of my appointments for tomorrow too."

Not long after Erica and Jack left Joe's office Derek Frye entered. "Good news Dr. Martin. Adrian's friends at Interpol have located Gordon Feemster. He's willing to testify if he's granted immunity for his role in the Libidozone scandal. He says he knows enough to hang Hayward from the rafters.

The DA's office agreed to immunity and Gordon's on his way back to Pine Valley."

"That's wonderful Derek! I can't wait to get that man off of my staff. I know I resent him for what he's done to my family but this isn't a personal vendetta. I've worked most of my life building the reputation of this hospital into something to be proud of. I'm not going to let Hayward destroy it."

Erica was snuggled in Jack's arms, absolutely and totally happy. They had made love all afternoon - the first time they barely made it in the front door before they gave in to the passions that had been building for such a long time. The next times were slower, sweeter, each one doing everything they knew gave the other pleasure. Now they were lying as close as two people could be, unable to stop touching even for a moment. "Happy?" Jack asked just to hear the answer.

"Happier than I've ever been in my life. I love you so much Jack. I want to spend the rest of my life proving to you just how much I love you."

"You're doing pretty well so far," he said teasingly. "But if you'd like to make your point one more time I suppose it would be all right." His hands started caressing her as he kissed her, feeling her body responding to his touch one more time. Soon they were completely lost again in making love.

### *Chapter 15*

Erica stood at the window watching Bianca back out of the driveway, closing her eyes as her daughter narrowly missed hitting Jack's car. She still didn't like the idea of Bianca driving but she was 16 and so proud of her driver's license.

Jack came up behind her, wrapped his arms around her and kissed her on the neck. She turned and smiled up at him. "Don't you have to go to work?"

"I took the day off, remember?"

"I didn't think you were serious."

"Why don't you let me show you just how serious I am?" Jack lifted her off the floor to where her lips were even with his. Just as he moved to kiss her the phone rang. They both looked at the phone and then at each other as it continued to ring. Jack set Erica on her feet and looked down at the caller ID. "It's your ex-husband."

"Which one?" Erica grinned at him.

Jack picked up the phone. "This had better be important Dimitri."

"It is Jack. The lab technician who did Hayward's dirty work is going to make his statement to the police at 10 this morning. I'd like for you to be there as a representative of the Andrassy Foundation. The Libidozone Hayward used came into this country with the understanding that the

Foundation would be using it. I want to make sure we can't be held accountable for any of the consequences of Hayward's actions."

"I don't know if that will work Dimitri. It's not exactly according to procedures to mix private interest with police business."

I know that. But between the two of us we should have enough contacts so that exceptions can be made."

"You're right about that." Jack thought for a moment. "All right, I'll be there at 10."

Jack hung up the phone and looked at Erica. "This really is important honey."

"It's all right. I'll find something else to occupy my time. I really need to get back to work myself." Erica wrapped her arms around Jack's waist. "Just remember where you left off and we'll continue this tonight."

Jack listened carefully, taking notes from time to time as Gordon nervously continued his story. He knew that he had been granted immunity from prosecution but he was afraid if David Hayward found out what he was doing that his life might be in danger. "Hayward called me from the Fidelity that night and told me that a patient was being brought in to the ER, a young woman suffering from hypothermia. He said that I needed to make sure that all traces of Libidozone were erased from her bloodwork and from anyone else's bloodwork that came in that night. Hayward had already threatened me that my involvement was deep enough to bring me down with him if I told anyone. " "How did you get involved in the first place?" asked Derek. "Hayward was taking the drug himself. I took the blood samples to analyze how different dosages affected him. I thought it was really a part of a legitimate study until I realized that he was using it for his own purposes."

"When was that exactly?"

" I suspected it when he told me an experiment had failed and he needed more of the drug. I checked in the computer and no test results had been recorded for any studies conducted by the Foundation. Then about two hours before the party on the Fidelity I went to his office. I overheard a woman talking to him. She sounded upset, confused and angry. She was telling him that she didn't know what had happened the night before, that she had felt so out of control and she wanted to know why. He was blowing her off but I knew that what she was describing were the effects of Libidozone. I

realized that he must have drugged her to have sex with her."

Derek leaned forward. This woman might be another potential witness. "Do you know the woman's name?"

"Oh yeah," Gordon answered. "It was Erica Kane."

### *Chapter 16*

Jack's hands gripped the steering wheel as he headed for Pine Valley Hospital. He was trying but failing to get his anger under control. He kept remembering that afternoon at the Valley Inn when Erica had been so seductive with everyone - him, Dimitri, David, even Palmer. He recalled how when Erica was sitting on his lap, David had been trying to persuade her to go home with him. "I knew something was wrong. Why did I let her leave with him?" he thought. He parked the car and headed for the fourth floor and Hayward's office.

David was standing at the nurses station going over charts and giving orders to anyone in sight. It was time for a shift change and the area was crowded. He didn't notice Jack approaching until Jack called his name. He looked up in time to be sucker punched in the stomach, in the jaw and kneed in the groin. David collapsed on the ground. Jack kicked him in the abdomen and walked toward the elevator without looking back. David was writhing in pain on the floor. He tried to whisper, "Call security" but no one heard him. As he lay there he heard the sound of applause, first one pair of hands then two, then more until gradually the whole staff was clapping and cheering.

Jack walked through the front door and went straight to pour himself a drink. He was glad that Erica wasn't home yet. He knew that he had to tell her what Gordon had said. He couldn't count on this not leaking to the press and she would be devastated enough without the tabloids being her first clue as to what had happened to her. But he couldn't bear the thought of hurting her when she had been so happy for the last few days. When he heard the door open he prayed for the strength to do this right.

"Darling, you're home. Couldn't wait for tonight could you?" Erica was laughing until she looked at Jack's face. "What's wrong? Is Bianca all right?"

"Bianca's fine. But I have some bad news for you." He took Erica's hand and led her to the couch.

"Jack, you're scaring me."

"I'm sorry Erica. Honey, David Hayward is going to be arrested this afternoon for the Libidozone drugging on the Fidelity as well as some other charges."

"That's too bad, but Jack you can't think that I'd be upset about it. Darling, David's been out of my life for a long time."

"I know that. But the guests on the Fidelity weren't the only people who David drugged with Libidozone. I sat in on a questioning session with a former lab technician at the hospital. He knew of a time earlier that week where Hayward drugged a woman and then..." Jack paused as he saw the truth dawning in Erica's eyes.

"Oh my God," she said in a whisper. "That day at the Valley Inn." She turned pale. "I even told him I felt drugged. I couldn't understand what was happening to me. But he just laughed at me. He even told me I was addicted to him." Her voice was bitter. Then she tightened her grip on Jack's hand. "Oh Jack, I'm so sorry!"

"Sorry? Baby what do you have to be sorry for?"

"It must have been so humiliating for you, to sit there and hear about David and me."

"Erica, none of this was your fault! The only thing I felt was rage, that he could treat you like that." He tilted her chin up to where she was looking into his eyes. She was in so much pain that it broke his heart. "Honey I know how this must hurt. I know that you loved him."

"Did I? I was certainly infatuated with him. But I never trusted him and you can't really love someone that you can't trust." Erica shuddered as images from that day flashed through her head. "It's not so much that it was David that used me, it's just, Jack I feel almost the way I did when I was fourteen years old. It feels almost like I was raped again. I think subconsciously I felt that way even when it was happening. I remember that I couldn't wait to take a bath when I got home."

She started to cry softly. Jack reached out, pulled Erica into his lap and cradled her in his arms. She nestled against him and put her head on his shoulder while he stroked her hair gently. "It's going to be all right sweetheart. He's going to pay for everything he's done."

David was holding an ice pack to his jaw when he opened the door to his hotel room.

"David, my God, what happened to you?" Dixie looked worried. David couldn't stand up straight and his face was bruised and swollen. "Jack Montgomery happened. The man assaulted me Dixie."

"Jack? Why would Jack do something like this?"

"I don't know. Erica probably called out my name in the heat of passion. It's a good thing Montgomery's a lawyer because I'm going to press charges."

There was a knock at the door. David opened it to find Derek standing there.

"Derek, you're just the man I wanted to see."

"Somehow I doubt that." Derek took out his handcuffs. "David Hayward you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be held against you in a court of law."

Dixie watched horrified as Derek read David his rights and escorted him from the room.

### *Chapter 17*

After a while Erica lifted her head from Jack's shoulder. "Will I have to testify?" she asked.

"I don't know honey. But if you do I'll be right there beside you."

Erica smiled slightly. "Do you think they'll let me sit on your lap on the witness stand?"

"Hmmm, I'll see what I can do." Jack was relieved to see her smiling. "You're feeling better now?"

"In a way it helps to know I was drugged. Jack, every time I thought about that day I felt such self-disgust. I didn't want to be with David yet there I was. I couldn't believe I had so little self control. But now I know why." Erica looked adoringly into Jack's eyes. "Besides, you make me feel so loved and so secure that I can handle anything."

Jack kissed her softly. "I punched him out you know. After I heard

Gordon's story I went straight to the hospital and let him have it. I'm not sure but I think I got a standing ovation from the nursing staff."

"Oh God Jack! He didn't hit you too did he?" She looked at him anxiously.

"No, Hayward's like most bullies. He picks on people who are weaker than he is but never stands up to someone bigger and stronger."

It was morning when David and Dixie returned to his hotel room. He had spent the night in the Pine Valley jail while Dixie contacted a lawyer to take his case and arranged bail. She was very quiet on the ride home but as they entered the room she began to question him.

"David, how can they arrest you for something you didn't do?"

"Everyone in this town is against me. The Martins hate me, Alex and Dimitri despise me. All of these people have power and they must have pulled strings. You're the only one who believes in me Dixie."

"Why am I the only one David? Is there something I don't see that everyone else does?" Dixie was starting to have doubts.

"No Dixie. You're the only one who does see the truth. You're the only one who knows what I'm really like. I've opened my heart to you. I told you about my father. No one else has ever heard that story. You know it's why I became a doctor. Do you believe that the little boy who watched his father die would risk his medical career by drugging a whole roomful of people?" David put on his most sorrowful look.

Dixie melted at the sight of his sadness. "No, of course not. I do know you better than anyone. I'll help you fight this David. I won't stand by and let them ruin your career." Dixie threw her arms around David and held him tightly as he smirked over her shoulder. "Works every time," he thought.

### *Chapter 18*

Don't worry Erica. I'll see that Bianca gets home after her ride. I'm a little surprised she didn't drive herself over though." Dimitri and Erica were standing at the doorway of Wildwind.

"Believe me, she wanted to. But I was afraid it might get dark by the time she was ready to leave and I'm just not comfortable with her driving after dark yet. "

As Erica turned to leave, Dixie came up to where they were standing.

"Dimitri, I need to talk to you about David. He needs your support. Yours too Erica."

"I'm sorry Dixie. I can't possibly support David. I know him well enough to know that he's guilty." Erica started to walk away.

"But you don't know him. You never did. If you knew what he'd been through as a child, what his mother put him through, how his father..." Dixie stopped suddenly. She couldn't betray David's secret.

"Do you mean how Vanessa goaded his father into committing suicide?" Erica asked.

Dixie was stunned. "You can't know about that. He said I was the only person he ever told!"

"Dixie, you can't trust David. That's something everyone he comes in contact with has to learn. Now, I really have to go." Erica walked away.

Dixie turned toward Dimitri. "How can you turn your back on him after he saved your life? Surely you don't believe he's guilty."

Dimitri led Dixie into the house. "Hayward saved my life and was amply rewarded for it. In turn he betrayed the foundation and risked the reputation of the hospital for his own purposes. "

"There's no proof of that." Dixie was still clinging to her faith in David but it was getting harder.

"Actually there is. I'm sure David's lawyers have already filled him in on the case against him. There's the statement from the lab technician who David bribed to falsify hospital records."

"He could be lying," Dixie insisted.

"There's a video tape showing David dropping a flask into the punch bowl on the Fidelity."

"That doesn't mean it was Libidozone." But Dixie's voice was shaking.

"And there's an audiotape where he calculates the exact dosage that he needs to drug someone. Someone you know Dixie."

"Who?" she whispered.

"Tad," Dimitri told her gently. "Tad was the intended victim. Drugging everyone at the party may have been accidental but David intended to drug Tad from the beginning."

When Jack got back to his office after his day in court Erica was there waiting for him.

"What a nice surprise," he said kissing her. " What brings you here?"

"I couldn't remember if I told you this morning how lucky I am to be with you," she said. "So I thought I'd come over here and show my appreciation for having you in my life." She began to unbutton his shirt.

"I do love it when you're in an appreciative mood," Jack's voice was low and seductive. He reached around to unzip her dress.

"Don't you think you should lock the door?" Erica asked as her dress slipped to the floor. "I'll do better than that." Jack locked the door and then pushed the couch in front of it. He turned and lifted Erica into his arms and laid her down on his desk. "Now tell me again how much you appreciate me."

"I'd rather show you," she murmured pulling him down to her.

### *Chapter 19*

You know Jack, it's after 10:30. We really should get up now." Erica and Jack were still in bed on a Sunday morning. They were lying with their arms around each other, their legs intertwined, and her head on his chest.

"Why? We don't have to go to work. Bianca always sleeps in on the weekends." Jack's voice darkened. "Besides, I don't want to read the paper this morning. The less I hear about Hayward's plea bargain the better."

"It really bothers you doesn't it?" Erica stroked his chest.

"It shouldn't but it does. As a lawyer I know the best thing was to let him plead guilty to a lesser charge. This way there's a lot of publicity for a couple of days and then it will all blow over. If he went to trial, it could have dragged on for months and the Foundation and the hospital might have suffered. But a shorter sentence in a minimum security prison just isn't enough punishment in my opinion."

"He lost his medical license too. Besides, you wanted him drawn and

quartered. I don't think they do that anymore," she said teasingly.

"They could have brought it back just for him," Jack answered. "Sweetheart, did it help at all to know he didn't mean to drug you, that it was really meant for Tad?"

Erica looked thoughtful. "Not really. He still knew that I had been drugged and he still took advantage of the situation. And he still let me think that what happened was all my doing. "

Jack kissed the top of her head. "Well, if there's any justice in this world, right about now Dr. Hayward is meeting his new cellmate. I'll bet he's about 6'5, around 350 pounds, shaved head." Erica began to giggle. Jack continued, " His name is Bubba and he's been really lonely in prison. He's probably very excited to have a roommate after all this time."

Erica was laughing now. "You're so mean! I'll have to remember not to get on your bad side." She moved to where she was lying on top of him and began kissing her way down his chest.

"Mmm baby you're definitely on my good side now," Jack groaned.

Dixie was still in bed in her suite at the Valley Inn. She couldn't bear the thought of getting up and facing the world. After David's sentencing yesterday, everyone knew what a fool she had been. "Be honest Dixie," she thought. "Most of them already knew." She thought back over the past months and couldn't believe that she could have been so blind. When Leslie was arrested for stalking Tad, she had told the police that David encouraged her to go after Tad and even told her that Tad was interested in her. But David had laughed and said that Leslie was insane and she had believed him.

When Alex came back and told everyone that she knew David was using Libidozone for illegal purposes, David had told her that Alex was a woman scorned. He recounted the story about how Alex had pursued him in medical school and turned on him when he rejected her. Dixie had believed him then too. There was a knock at the door. Dixie pulled the covers over her head but the knocking continued. "Dix, open the door. It's me, Tad." Dixie couldn't believe it. What was he doing here?

"I'm not leaving until you open the door. Come on baby, let me come in. I'm worried about you."

Dixie put on her robe and went to the door. When she opened it, Tad took

her in his arms. Neither one of them said a word, they just held on to each other.

Erica sat at her dressing table brushing her hair. It was almost noon and she and Jack had decided they probably should get up before Myrtle arrived for lunch.

"Jack, do you know what I think we should do next weekend?"

"I certainly hope you're not planning on waiting until next weekend," he said putting his hand on her shoulders and kissing her neck.

"Don't you ever think about anything else?" she laughed hitting him playfully with her hairbrush. Then she stood up and turned to face him. "I want us to drive up and visit Lily at school. I think it's time I really got to know your daughter."

### *Chapter 20 - Conclusion*

"I think that's everything," Tad said as he brought the last of Dixie's suitcases into their bedroom. Dixie turned and smiled.

She was hanging her clothes back into the closet next to his suits. After 3 months of marriage counseling they both felt they were ready to live together again. Counseling had been painful at times for both of them. Tad had to admit that he had never really considered Dixie a partner in their marriage and that in some ways he was more comfortable with Liza because he wasn't afraid of disappointing her.

Dixie was forced to face the fact that her sexual attraction to David was so strong that she had deliberately shut her eyes to the truth about him. But one fact had emerged from the sessions. Tad and Dixie had never stopped loving each other. With the therapist's help they were going to build on that and try to make their marriage work this time.

"I wish the boys were moving back in too," Dixie said a little sadly. While both Jamie and Jr. were happy that Tad and Dixie were trying again, neither one of them had chosen to move home at this time.

"I know, so do I. But I can understand them being leery. We've put them through a lot in the past. It's natural that they'd be a little wary of trusting us to make things work. But we'll prove to them that we've learned from our mistakes this time." Tad kissed Dixie on the forehead. "One of our mistakes

was not communicating and I'm changing that right now."

"What do you mean?" Dixie asked.

"Do you remember when I decided to leave television? I told Dad before I told you. Well, baby you're the first person to hear this. I'm quitting my job at Chandler."

"Tad, are you sure?" Dixie couldn't believe her ears.

"Liza only hired me in the first place to make Adam crazy. And I can see now what my working with her so closely must have done to you."

"I don't want you to give up your job for me," Dixie said.

"I'm not giving it up for you. I'm giving it up for us. Besides, I really don't like the corporate world. It's just not me."

"I never thought it was." Dixie hugged Tad tightly. "I'm glad you're leaving the job. What do you think you want to do?"

"I've thought about this a lot and I realized that the only job I really loved was being a private detective. I'd like to go back to that. What do you think? I'll get a trench coat, maybe a deer stalker cap, it'll be great."

"That sounds wonderful Tad. You know, I've been thinking about going back to work myself. "

"Hey, you can be my assistant! We'll get you your own trenchcoat."

"I'm flattered sweetie, but I really want to go back to teaching. It's what I should have done in the first place instead of taking the job at the hospital with David."

"Dix, you'll be a great teacher. Hmmm, I like this idea a lot." Tad got that devilish sparkle in his eyes. "I'll come by after school and you can make me have detention. Maybe if I'm a really bad boy you can get out the paddle."

"Or if you're a good boy I'll let you clap my erasers," Dixie laughed.

"Is that what you call them? Mrs. Martin, you sure have a nice set of erasers. " Tad reached out for Dixie, both of them laughing. Laughter quickly turned to passion as they fell back on to the bed.

Jack stood by the fireplace watching Erica brushing Lily's hair. Repetitive

actions like hair brushing were very soothing for Lily. Her first week long visit home had been a great success. Lily was only two years younger than Bianca but she was small for her age and her lack of verbal skills made her seem much younger. She and Erica had quickly established a strong rapport during visits at school and that helped her adjust to being in a home setting. To everyone's surprise she was crazy about Leo. He had come for a visit the first morning, bringing his dog Happy with him, and had ended up staying most of the week.

"There sweetheart, do you want to take this back to your room?" Erica handed the brush to Lily.

"I'll take her upstairs Mom," said Bianca.

"Come on Lily, we can listen to music in my room." Bianca winked at Jack as she and Lily walked upstairs.

"Oh Jack, I wish she didn't have to go back to school tomorrow," Erica said sadly.

"So do I, but you know her teachers say she needs a highly structured environment. It's been so good having her here. You're really wonderful with her," Jack said sitting down next to Erica.

"Bianca says I get along so well with her because she doesn't argue with me,"

Erica said smiling. "Now what's on your mind? I can tell you're up to something by that look on your face."

"Erica, there's something I want to talk to you about. Something I want to give you." Jack took a small box out of his pocket.

"Oh Jack! Is that what I think it is?" Erica's smile was radiant.

"It's not an engagement ring, if that's what you're thinking." Jack watched as Erica's smile disappeared. He couldn't help teasing her a little. "After all, you've still got more than one of mine around here somewhere. You never gave any of them back."

Erica looked at him and her eyes flashed angrily. "Do you want the combination to the safe? Go look in there and take them back if you still remember what they look like! Or pick out the ones you like best. You're not the only man who's ever given me a ring you know!"

"Aaahhh, an Erica Kane tirade! We haven't had one of those in a long time. Are you finished?" Jack was laughing. Erica joined in.

"I can't stay mad at you," she said kissing him.

"Now, don't you want to see what's in the box? "

Erica opened it. She looked at Jack in astonishment. "Wedding rings?"

"Honey, we've tried being engaged before. Something always went wrong. I'm not willing to risk letting that happen again. I want us to get married tonight, with just the two of us and our daughters here."

"Is that possible?"

"I know enough people in the legal system to make it possible. I've already talked to the girls. Bianca's thrilled and I think Lily is too. If you say yes, the judge will be here in an hour." Jack knelt in front of Erica and took both of her hands in his. "Erica, we belong together. We both know it. Will you marry me tonight?"

Erica had tears in her eyes. "Of course I will." She threw her arms around Jack's neck. "I've made so many mistakes Jack. Sometimes I can't believe you would still want me after everything I've put you through. But I know that the love we share is unbreakable. I think I've always known that somehow we would end up together. After all, as Bianca told us, it was meant to be."