

DOUBLE TROUBLE RJNOLAN



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By

RJ Nolan



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* * *

Dedication

To: ETJ. None of this would be possible without your love and support. You are the wind beneath my wings.

Double Trouble

CHAPTER 1

THE STADIUM WAS rapidly filling as Kris Rawlings and Jerry Parks made their way to their seats. It had been their tradition since high school to attend the first baseball game of the season each April between the San Diego Padres and Los Angeles Dodgers. This year, Jerry was hoping his beloved Padres would make a decent showing. In recent years, the team had finished near the bottom of the rankings. He still bragged about the 1984 season when they competed against the Detroit Tigers in the World Series, even though the Padres ultimately lost the series.

Jerry ran into Kris's back when she stopped abruptly. Peering around her broad shoulders, he saw what had captured her attention. In the row they were heading for, three people were already seated. A man and woman were sitting together. It was the beautiful brunette sitting next to them that had obviously caught Kris's attention.

"Save the eye candy for later, Kris. Let's get in our seats," Jerry said, urging Kris forward.

Kris made her way carefully past the couple and then, tripped over the dark haired beauty's feet. The woman looked up and their eyes met briefly. Kris allowed her gaze to glide down the woman's body; she was even more gorgeous up close. Her long hair was braided and resting over her shoulder. Kris's eyes made it back up to the woman's breasts and stopped. They were full and straining

against the material of her shirt. She unconsciously licked her lips as she wondered if they were as soft as they looked.

Kris finally met the woman's warm brown eyes and blushed when she realized that she had been blatantly ogling the woman. The woman allowed her eyes to run up and down Kris's tall body, returning the perusal. She appeared to take in Kris's heavily muscled legs displayed beneath khaki shorts as well as her well-toned physique encased in a tank top. Short blond hair and vivid blue eyes completed the stunning package. Kris was uncharacteristically flustered by the woman's open appraisal. She stumbled over her own feet this time, and murmured an apology as she finally made it to her seat. She flopped down into the chair and lowered her face into her hands in mortification.

Jerry met the brunette's sparkling eyes as he carefully maneuvered past her legs. "Don't mind my butch friend; she's usually not so boorish. She must've been stunned stupid by your beauty."

Kris lifted her head enough to pin Jerry with a glare, then growled at him.

"What... what did I say? It's true, girlfriend."

"Shut up and sit down, Jerry," Kris said. She glanced over at the woman apologetically. Sure, she loved to look at women, but she was usually more subtle. When the brunette smiled at her, Kris felt her face color again.

Jerry was having a great time. He hadn't seen his friend this flustered by a woman since she was first coming out in high school. He checked the seat numbers and grinned. He sat down next to the dark haired beauty, then called to Kris.

"Hey, Kris, our seats are over here."

Kris looked up and groaned when she realized Jerry was sitting next to the beautiful woman she'd just ogled. She

got up, mumbling to herself, and made her way over to sit next to Jerry.

Jerry ignored Kris when she flopped down next to him. Turning to the woman seated on his other side, he offered his hand.

"Hi, my name is Jerry, and my less than articulate friend over there is Kris."

"Hi, Jerry," she said with a smile. "I'm Erin and these are my friends, Larry and Rita."

Jerry shook hands with everyone, then turned and elbowed Kris in the ribs.

"I'm Kris, nice to meet you, Erin." She offered her hand to Erin, who took it and held it just a little longer than necessary. Kris then greeted Larry and Rita.

Everyone settled back in their seats. Jerry kept up a running conversation, asking questions and telling them how he and Kris attended every opener between San Diego and LA.

Finally, the game started and the crowd noise became too great for real conversation.

* * *

Kris only had half her mind on the game. She couldn't help sneaking peeks at Erin. She appraised the way Erin was dressed in faded jeans, a tight T-shirt and high top sneakers. Of course she couldn't tell by looking, but she couldn't help wishing there was a chance she might be gay. Kris sighed and turned back to the game. Her luck never ran that way. The woman was probably straight as an arrow.

After listening to Jerry whine for two innings, Kris finally got up and bought them both some beer. When she returned to her seat, she found Jerry had moved over,

leaving the seat next to Erin open. She glared at him but he looked at her innocently.

As the game progressed, Kris silently debated with herself. Erin intrigued her and though she couldn't quite say why, she wanted to get to know her better. They had spoken casually during the game and she was incredibly funny, and articulate. She wasn't wearing a wedding ring either. Kris had checked.

Rita decided it was time for more beer and convinced Erin to go with her. They were just coming back when the Padres hit a triple. Erin hadn't regained her seat but was standing in front of it with three beers on a tray. The crowd surged to its feet. A man seated in front of their row knocked Erin backward when he jumped up. She tried to keep the beer from spilling and, at the same time, remain on her feet. She wasn't successful in either endeavor. A cup of beer landed in Kris's lap as Erin's feet slid out from under her and she started to fall.

Kris gasped when the ice cold beer soaked her shorts. Seeing Erin about to fall, she instinctively reached out and wrapped her arms around Erin, pulling her onto her lap. The rest of the beer spilled over both of them. As the crowd settled back down, Kris sat with a still stunned Erin in her lap. Rita jumped out of her seat and stood facing Erin and Kris.

"Are you alright?" Rita asked.

Erin shook her head still a bit stunned from almost falling. She was covered in beer and could feel it running down her sides and between her legs. She suddenly realized just where she was sitting. Her face flamed in embarrassment and she scrambled off Kris's lap.

She turned to Kris. "I'm so sorry..." she started to apologize, then caught a glimpse of Kris's shorts. She

looked like she had wet her pants. Erin couldn't help it, she started laughing.

Kris growled at Erin, which made her laugh even harder. "Laugh it up, Erin. You look worse than I do."

Erin looked down, seeing what Kris had said was true. She was soaked. Her T-shirt was plastered to her body and the front of her jeans was saturated and dripping beer onto the ground.

After everyone had had a good chuckle at their expense, Kris and Erin decided to head to the restroom to try and clean up some of the damage. Erin was momentarily startled when Kris stood to her full height. Erin knew she was tall for a woman at five-eight, but Kris was considerably taller.

Kris grinned at Erin's surprised expression knowing the cause. At six-one, her height attracted a lot of attention. Kris glanced down at the man who had caused Erin to fall and spill the beer. He was oblivious and hadn't even bothered to apologize. She waited for him to take a drink of his beer, then she stepped forward, ramming her knee into the back of his head. His face went forward and he spilled his beer down the front of his shirt.

He spun around in his seat and glared at Kris. "Hey, watch it!"

"Oh, sorry," Kris said sweetly, plastering an innocent smile on her face.

Erin slapped her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing. She reached out and grabbed Kris's hand.

"Let's go, before you get into any more trouble," she said, pulling Kris toward the aisle.

"Hey, I didn't do anything. He's the jerk who didn't even apologize."

Erin just laughed and led Kris by the hand toward the restrooms. Kris was struck by how comfortable and right it felt to hold Erin's hand.

* * *

They tried to dry as much of the beer off themselves as possible but it was a lost cause.

Erin grimaced, pulling her soaked shirt away from her body. "I smell like a brewery," she said.

Kris laughed. "Yeah, I think I'm going to call it a day. I don't see how they're going to pull this one out anyway."

"I agree. Not exactly how I planned on spending my day out. Of course, it wasn't all bad," she added, winking at Kris.

The wink did it. Kris decided to take a chance. What was the worst thing that could happen? Erin hadn't been angry when she'd ogled her earlier. If the woman was straight and got offended, then Kris would just write the experience off and walk away.

"So, I was wondering if maybe, you'd like to have dinner with me tonight?" Seeing Erin hesitate, Kris hastily added, "if you don't have any other plans, that is."

"I'm sorry, Kris. I have to pick up my kids from my ex-husband. He just had them for the day. I don't think I could get a babysitter at such short notice."

"You have kids?" Kris stammered. *Boy, you really misjudged this one*, she chided herself, *not only an ex-husband but kids too!*

Erin smiled brightly. "Yes, twins. A boy and a girl, Christopher and Jenna."

"Well, maybe some other time." Kris was disappointed, she felt strangely drawn to Erin. It had been a long time since any woman had interested her for anything except a

quick lay. She knew she would never see the woman again, and besides, she was obviously straight.

"Is it the kids?" Erin asked, disappointed by Kris's response. She'd felt an immediate attraction to the tall blond and wanted to get to know her.

"Huh?"

"It's okay. I understand if you don't want to go out with me because I have children. I try and let women know right up front I have kids and how important they are to me."

Kris wasn't sure what to say. She was confused, and it showed on her face.

Erin suddenly laughed. "Oh, I get it. You thought you were off base; kids, ex-husband... big ole straight girl, right? Well, I can assure you, you're right on base. I'm gay."

"You are?" Kris said, her surprise evident.

"Yeah, I'm gay. I just made a mistake. I married my ex for all the wrong reasons."

Kris grinned. She wanted to get to know this woman and wasn't put off in the least about her children. She loved kids.

"So, how old are your twins?"

"They'll be four in June. I don't know where the time has gone. Every day is an adventure, some days more than others." Erin laughed, indicating her wet clothes.

"I remember when my niece was that age," Kris said, smiling fondly in remembrance. "She's eight now. My brother and his family lived here in San Diego 'til Lindsay was four. I don't get to see her much anymore. My brother's in the Navy and they move around a lot."

"That's a shame. They grow up so fast," Erin said.

"So, how about dinner some other time?" Kris tried again. She didn't want Erin to get away without making plans for a date with her.

"That'd be great. Would a weeknight work for you? I could probably get Alice to watch the kids one evening this week."

"A weeknight is fine with me." Kris quickly fished in her back pocket for her wallet with her business cards. She patted her pockets, then looked sheepishly at Erin. "Got a pen?" Erin pulled a pen out of her purse and offered it to Kris with a smile.

Kris wrote down her home and cell phone numbers for Erin, then handed her the card. "Why don't you give me a call and let me know what day would work best for you?"

"Got another card?" Erin asked.

Kris looked slightly puzzled but handed over another of her business cards. Erin flipped it over and wrote her personal information on the back before handing it back to Kris.

"I'll give you a call as soon as I get in touch with Alice."

A brilliant smile lit Kris's face. "Great! I look forward to it."

They had stopped just inside the tunnel to make their plans and exchange information. As they made their way back to their seats, neither could tame the big smiles they were sporting. When they reached their seats, they were met by curious stares from their companions.

Things broke up quickly when Kris and Erin both expressed their wish to call it a day. Goodbyes were said all around before each group went its separate way.

Jerry noticed that Erin and Kris shared a parting grin. His interest was piqued when Erin winked at Kris before turning away.

CHAPTER 2

AS THEY MADE the trip home, Jerry watched Kris stare out of the window of the truck with a stupid grin on her face. Finally, he couldn't stand it anymore. "You scored, didn't you?" he asked with a smirk. He wasn't surprised. It wouldn't be the first time Kris had taken someone she had just met into the bathroom for a quickie. Not that he could blame her, Erin was gorgeous. Most straight men they knew envied her luck with the ladies.

Kris's head swung around and she stared aghast at him. "What? No! Of course not."

Jerry's eyebrow quirked in surprise, not because she hadn't scored, but the fact that she sounded so appalled at the very idea.

Kris couldn't believe Jerry would think she would do something like that with Erin. Sure, she'd done it in the past but Erin was... Erin was different. She shook her head, unable to understand it herself.

Jerry looked at Kris curiously. "So, what happened?"

"She told me about her ex-husband and two kids," Kris said, trying to keep a straight face.

"Oh, man... I'm so sorry. She was fine too."

Kris couldn't hold it in any longer and started to laugh. "That's what I thought too. She quickly informed me she was family. Soon as she can get a babysitter for her kids, we have a date!"

"Kids, as in more than one?"

"Yeah, twins – a boy and a girl."

"Are you sure about this, Kris? I mean, you sure you want to get involved with a woman with kids and an ex-husband?" Jerry was shocked. This wasn't Kris's usual type.

Kris turned to her friend her expression turning serious. "I know... I can't explain it. I just feel drawn to this woman... I want to get to know her. And I don't mean just to bed her. It's really strange."

He could see her confusion and smiled reassuringly. He had never seen Kris react to a woman this way. First, she was flustered by Erin, then she admitted that she wanted to get to know her. After what happened with "the bitch", Jerry didn't even want to think her name, Kris hadn't been interested in any woman for anything more than a quick romp between the sheets. Maybe she was finally ready to move on with her life and let the past go. "Well then... you should give it a shot my friend. Just be careful."

"I hear that," Kris said.

Kris spent the rest of the trip home lost in thought about Erin, and wondering when she would see her again.

CHAPTER 3

KRIS LEANED BACK and took a sip of wine. She was stretched out on her couch relaxing after showering and then making a quick dinner. Her thoughts once again turned to her encounter with Erin. There was just something about the woman that intrigued her. She wasn't quite sure what to make of it.

For the past four years, Kris had been happy with casual encounters. She had lost her heart once and vowed never to let that happen again. But something drew her to Erin. It scared her now that she had time to think about it, but at the same time it was too strong to ignore. Kris was pulled from her thoughts by the phone ringing.

Picking it up, she checked the caller ID. *Scott Patterson? I don't know anyone by that name.* She set the phone back on the coffee table and let the answering machine pickup. There was a pause as the message finished, then she heard her.

"Hi, um Kris, this is Erin... from the game."

Kris snatched the phone off the table. "Hi, Erin, I'm here!" She was unable to hide her excitement. "Sorry, I didn't realize it was you."

"Screening your calls, huh?" Erin laughed.

Kris blushed and started to stammer.

Erin laughed again. "No problem... I do it too. I'd forgotten the phone is still in my ex-husband's name. I never bothered to change it."

Not wanting to hear about Erin ex-husband, Kris quickly changed the subject. "So, did you manage to get rid of the beer smell? Jerry whined that the inside of his truck smelled like a brewery by the time we got home."

Erin chuckled. "You should've heard my kids, 'You stink, Mommy!' Neither of them would hug me and they walked around holding their noses 'til I showered. But I've since been given the duo's seal of approval, so I think I managed to finally get rid of it."

Kris laughed quietly at the image of the two kids' antics. "Sounds like they're a handful."

"Well, I can honestly say there's rarely a dull moment around here." Erin quickly got down to why she'd called. She knew most women were bored hearing about other people's children. "Anyway, I spoke to Alice and she's free to watch the kids on Tuesday, if that would be good for you. Um, if you still want to go out."

"Tuesday works for me," Kris said. She was encouraged when she heard Erin's audible sigh of relief. She wasn't the only one looking forward to this date. "What time should I pick you up?"

"How about I meet you somewhere?" Erin countered, sounding a bit nervous.

Shit... she's in the closet. Kris groaned internally. She had been out since high school and would not hide who she was or pretend to be something she wasn't for anyone. Wanting to give Erin the benefit of the doubt, she tried again. "I'd be more than happy to pick you up."

Erin took a deep breath before responding. She had lost the chance at a few dates with what she was about to say. "If you don't mind, I'd just as soon meet you at the restaurant. To be honest, I don't like to introduce my kids to the woman I'm dating until I get to know her a little better. I hope you understand."

Kris didn't respond right away. She wasn't sure if she was offended and couldn't help wondering if Erin was being totally honest.

Erin sighed when Kris didn't respond. She tried again, hoping she would understand. "Kids get attached so easily, and they don't understand when someone doesn't come around anymore," Erin said. From her tone, it was obvious that she was speaking from personal experience.

Kris felt relieved. She respected Erin's honesty and her concern for her children.

"I can understand that. Do you like seafood? We could meet at Anthony's in La Mesa around six," Kris said.

"Sure, I'd like to check that out. I've never been there. We usually go to the one at the Embarcadero."

"We could go there, if you prefer."

"No, Anthony's in La Mesa sounds fine. That's actually closer to me. I look forward to it, and thank you."

"For what?"

"For understanding about my kids. Most women don't," Erin admitted sadly.

"Not a problem," Kris said. "Your kids come first and they should."

"I'll see you on Tuesday then."

Kris and Erin both sighed as the call ended. They were now nervous and excited about their upcoming date.

CHAPTER 4

KRIS TAPPED HER fingers on the table nervously as she waited in the bar for Erin. She had arrived early and decided to have a glass of wine to relax before Erin appeared. Looking down at her clothes, she hoped she was appropriately dressed. A dark blue polo shirt and cotton khaki pants covered her lean frame but she wondered if a fancier shirt would have been a better choice. Kris couldn't remember the last time she was so nervous before a date, then again, she reminded herself, she hadn't been out on an official date in a very long time.

She turned toward the door when she felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. Erin was just entering the restaurant. She was dressed casually too, in pants and a short sleeve button down shirt. Kris breathed a sigh of relief. She took a moment to watch Erin walk gracefully to the reservation desk before rising to meet her.

Erin was checking out the décor of the waiting area when Kris approached.

"Unique, isn't it?"

Erin jumped at the sound of Kris's voice, then smiled as she continued to look around. They were standing in what appeared to be an undersea grotto with rocky walls decorated with sponges, mussels, starfish and clamshells. Moray eels stuck their heads out from small caves dotting the wall. Dangling overhead was a school of fish and octopi draped themselves over the light fixtures.

Erin chuckled. "That's one way to describe it."

"Check out the bar," Kris said, pointing to her left.

The bar seemed to have been carved out of rock, forming a cave with bottles of liquor and assorted bar ware residing in recessed niches in the back wall.

"It always reminds me of the nautical version of a Fred Flintstone bar," Kris said, making Erin laugh.

The hostess announced Kris's name and informed her that their table was ready. As they made their way into the restaurant proper, Erin continued to look around. Most of the seats were vinyl upholstered booths. Some were decorated with bright purple seats and seashell cushioned backs, while others had vibrant colored seaweed streamers and teal seats. The primary colors of the whole place seemed to be purple and teal with a healthy smattering of yellow, red and green. Rocks decorated like a coral reef surrounded the booths. If that wasn't enough, sitting prominently on each table was a large chunk of rock with convenient slots to hold the salt and pepper shakers as well as sugar packets.

"What were they thinking?" Erin asked, taking her seat.

Kris snickered. "Well, it did earn them a well deserved Onion."

"Onion?"

"Have you ever heard of the Orchid and Onion awards?" Erin shook her head. "It was an annual event sponsored by a local chapter of the American Institute of Architects. They used to give out the awards every year for the best and the worst in local architecture, landscape architecture and interior design. The awards were suspended two years ago. I personally think it was because so many of the Onion recipients complained. Anyway, Anthony's was awarded an Onion the year they remodeled."

Erin glanced around again, laughing. "I agree. It was well deserved." Her laughter stopped abruptly. "Oh, that's beautiful."

Kris followed Erin's line of sight to see what had caught her attention. A tile mosaic took up most of the wall opposite them. It was twenty feet long and five feet high. It depicted Neptune and a mermaid riding in a chariot pulled by two white stallions through a seascape of seahorses, swordfish and other assorted marine life.

"That," Kris said, nodding toward the beautiful mosaic, "and the glass wall," she pointed to the floor to ceiling wall next to their booth, "along with the lagoon are about the only original elements left from before the remodeling."

Erin turned to look out the glass wall next to their table. She had been so stunned by the interior she hadn't even noticed the large lagoon outside the window. It had a large fountain in the center illuminated by multiple lights. It was a peaceful, tranquil setting to enjoy their dinner. She laughed outright when she spotted the large whimsical fish heads extending from the side of the building spouting water into the lagoon.

Their perusal of the lagoon was interrupted by the arrival of their waiter.

"Good evening, I'll be your server tonight. Would you like to start with a cocktail? We're offering a new drink called Blue Ocean Potion. It comes in a souvenir fishbowl glass with a goldfish-shaped straw." The waiter picked up a display placard from the table advertising the drink.

Erin glanced at the description of the concoction. "I think I'll pass," she said with a polite smile.

Kris stared at the advertisement for a second then looked up at the waiter. "Can we get the glasses without anything in them?"

"Sure, you can buy just the glasses if you like."

"Great, we'll take two," Kris said. She glanced over at Erin and saw her puzzled look. "I thought you could take them to Christopher and Jenna. I bet they'd get a kick out of them."

The brilliant smile lighting Erin's face told Kris she'd done well. "Thank you," Erin said, incredibly pleased at Kris's thoughtfulness. She met Kris's eyes and quickly got lost in their vivid blue depths.

The waiter cleared his throat, reminding Erin and Kris that they had an audience. "Drinks?"

Kris encouraged Erin to go first. "I'd like a glass of the house Merlot."

"Sounds good. I'll have the same," Kris said.

Erin reached over and clasped Kris's hand where it rested on the table. "That was sweet of you to order those glasses for my kids." Erin smiled appreciatively at Kris. "Thank you again."

"No thanks are necessary. It's not a big deal." Kris was happy Erin was pleased but hadn't done it for any other reason than because she thought the kids might have fun with them.

Erin squeezed Kris's hand one more time before releasing it. "It is to me."

The waiter arrived with their drinks and a basket of piping hot bread and special spicy cheese butter to go with it.

"Are you ready to order?"

"No. Give us a few more minutes," Kris said, picking up her menu. "What sounds good to you?" she asked Erin after perusing the menu for several minutes.

"I'm partial to anything with shrimp," Erin said.

They spent some time discussing the merits of different dishes before finally making up their minds.

* * *

After the waiter took their order and departed silence reigned as each woman buttered some bread and sipped her drink. Neither made eye contact, each seemed to have suddenly been struck with a case of jitters.

Finally, Erin broke the silence with a soft laugh. "I know why I'm nervous. I've only been out on a handful of dates since my divorce, but what's your excuse?" she asked with a teasing tone. She was surprised when a vivid blush covered Kris's face.

Kris was embarrassed that her nervousness was so apparent. She wouldn't meet Erin's eyes as she tried unsuccessfully to think of something to say.

Erin was immediately contrite. "I'm sorry, Kris. I was just teasing."

Kris looked up. She felt bad upon seeing the concerned look on Erin's face. "No, you're right, I am nervous." She took a deep breath before continuing. "I haven't been out on a date in a very long time. Guess I'm kind of out of practice," she admitted sheepishly.

"You've gotta be kidding," Erin said, obviously surprised. "No offense, but I find that hard to believe."

"Why?" Kris was taken aback by Erin's response.

"Just look at you! You're gorgeous and you have a body that won't quit," Erin said, then blushed furiously when she realized what she had said. "Not to mention the fact that you're smart, fun to be around and own your own business," Erin added quickly.

"Nice save," Kris said. *She thinks I'm gorgeous!* she crowed internally, her self-confidence bolstered.

Erin laughed, her face still bright red.

"Let me return the compliment. You're very beautiful." Kris's eyes dropped to Erin's breasts, "and talk about a body that won't quit," she said huskily, unconsciously licking her lips.

The blush that had just started to fade came back in full force. Erin felt a thrilling tingle at the look on Kris's face.

The waiter interrupted with their dinners. When he walked away, they started to laugh, the earlier tension broken.

Having regained her confidence with Erin's admission, Kris smiled at Erin as she started the getting to know you process of every first date. "So, what do you do for a living when you're not hanging out at the ballpark?"

"I'm a Medical Transcriptionist. I work out of my home for a local company that provides transcription services for several local hospitals. That way, I'm able to work and still be home with Jenna and Christopher."

"It's great that you have a job that permits you to be at home with your kids. How long have you been a transcriptionist?"

"Almost four years. I started not long after the twins were born," she said. "I originally wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. I got my degree and teaching certificate but never got to teach a class of my own," Erin added, surprising herself. She normally didn't tell people about her teaching ambitions.

"Why not?" Kris asked, interested.

"I got pregnant."

Kris couldn't miss the sadness in her voice.

"So, I take it they weren't planned?"

"No... definitely not," Erin said, her eyes clouding over with the admission.

This time it was Kris who reached out to rest her hand on top of Erin's, giving it a comforting squeeze. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring up bad memories."

"No, it's okay. As I told you before, marrying their father was a mistake but I've never regretted having Christopher and Jenna. I hope someday, when they're older, I can start my teaching career."

"What about you?" Erin inquired with a quick change of subject. She didn't want to talk about her ex. "So what made you decide to start your own computer company?"

"You know, now that I think about it, I don't remember telling you what I do," Kris said, arching an eyebrow at Erin in question.

Erin laughed. "You gave me your business card... remember?"

"Oops... forgot about that," Kris said with an embarrassed chuckle. "Let's see... where do I start?" Kris paused to think for a minute before answering. "I went to college and majored in computer science. At first, I thought I'd just be happy doing tech work. You know repairing computers, fixing software glitches... that type of thing. I took a basic programming course and was hooked. My company writes and installs custom security computer software. Most of our work is in the aerospace industry. There's a big problem with industrial espionage. I work with companies to secure their computers from external and internal spying."

"Wow, that must be fascinating work," Erin said.

"It gets interesting sometimes, especially when a company calls us in after they've had a problem. Usually, we have to track down the suspect employees and any

software they may have installed before we get down to work. Actually, writing a program can be tedious but we've been at it long enough to have several templates which we customize for each client's needs. That way we don't have to start from scratch every time."

From there, the conversation turned to common interests. They discussed movies they had recently seen. Though in Erin's case that was pretty much confined to recent Disney releases. They were both pleased to learn that they shared a love of 1950s rock and roll music and anything related to science fiction. Kris told Erin of her extensive collections of Oldies music and her huge movie library. The conversation was easy and relaxed without any uncomfortable silences that could happen on first dates.

The waiter returned to ask if they wanted dessert.

Erin and Kris looked down at their plates in amazement. They were surprised to see they had eaten without noticing, having been so engrossed in getting to know each other.

Kris looked over at Erin questioningly.

"I'm pretty full."

"They have great New York style cheesecake... with strawberries," Kris tempted.

Erin hesitated for about half a second, then laughed. "You twisted my arm, but how about we split a piece?"

"Make that one piece of cheesecake with two forks," Kris instructed the server.

Erin glanced down at her watch. She looked up at Kris in shock. "Do you realize we've been here over two hours?"

"No kidding?" Kris said, a quick glance at her watch confirming Erin's observation. "What time do you need to

be back?" Kris knew Erin had a babysitter but she would probably need to be home soon.

"I told Alice I'd be back by ten. She has to work very early tomorrow."

Kris was disappointed. She didn't want the night to end. She was consoled by the fact that Erin wore the same look of regret.

Kris was just about to ask for another date when their dessert arrived. She waited until the server left.

"Could I see you again soon?" Kris asked. "Maybe we could go to dinner, then a show?"

Erin smiled in response. "I'd like that very much, Kris."

As they shared dessert, they made plans for their next date but Erin had to wait until she could talk to Alice before making a final commitment.

The waiter set the bill on the table just as they were finishing dessert and brought over the two fishbowl glasses and straws Kris ordered. Both women laughed at the glasses which did look like miniature goldfish bowls.

"Thanks again for these. The kids are going to love them," Erin said as they got up to leave.

Kris took care of the bill and they made their way outside.

"Did you park down here or up there?" Kris asked, pointing up the hill to the upper parking lot.

"I parked up there," Erin said, heading toward the upper lot.

Kris caught her hand and led Erin to a path she hadn't noticed before. The narrow walkway was surrounded by bamboo. "This leads up to the parking lot too," Kris said as she led Erin forward.

Instead of climbing up the steep hill, which Erin had walked down earlier that evening, there were several sets of steps leading up. Kris stopped on a large landing overlooking a stream spilling into the lagoon outside the restaurant. Tall bamboo surrounded the landing with only a small area trimmed back to afford a view of the stream. The stream was illuminated by hidden lights, making it sparkle. It was secluded enough that they couldn't be seen from below and someone would have to be on the steps directly above to spot them. Kris knew the parking lot was well illuminated so she had stopped them with a specific purpose in mind.

Erin gazed at Kris questioningly when she drew them into a corner of the landing. She hadn't been this close to Kris since she had unexpectedly ended up in her lap at the baseball game.

"I thought maybe we could say goodnight here," Kris said. Her voice, normally low and husky, seemed to have dropped even lower. Erin shivered at the tone as a delicious tingle swept her body.

"You okay?" Kris asked in concern, placing her hands on Erin's shoulders.

"I'm good," Erin finally managed to stutter. She had never been affected by anyone like she was by Kris. She could feel the heat emanating off Kris's body and it was attracting her like a magnet. Unconsciously, she took a step forward bringing her body into contact with Kris. The resulting sensation caused both women to gasp.

Kris looked deep into Erin's dark brown eyes. Even in the dim light, she was close enough to see the golden flecks mixed with the brown.

"I'm going to kiss you now," Kris said as she lowered her head.

"Okay," Erin whispered just as their lips met for the first time.

The kiss was soft, their lips just barely brushing. Erin groaned and pressed closer to Kris. The second kiss was firmer, with just a hint of passion behind it. When Kris broke contact and pulled back, she gazed down into Erin's dilated pupils. Kris's hands slid off Erin's shoulders and she wrapped her arms tightly about her, drawing her even closer. She could feel her heart pounding and it was matched by the rapid beat of Erin's heart against her breast.

Erin rose up on her toes, her hand going to the back of Kris's neck. She pulled her down into another kiss. Feeling Kris's tongue begging for entry against her lips, Erin opened her mouth to the welcomed intruder. She heard a moan as Kris's tongue slipped inside but wasn't sure who made it. At this point, she didn't much care.

The sound of children's laughter alerted both women to the fact that they were about to have an audience. They pulled apart reluctantly, both breathing heavily. They separated just as two young boys came charging down the stairs followed quickly by their parents. They smiled and nodded to the couple and their children as they passed.

Once they were gone, Kris tried to take Erin back into her arms but Erin backed up quickly. Kris looked at her in concern.

Erin smiled reassuringly. "One more kiss like that and I won't be able to drive home."

Kris smiled in understanding; she was pretty worked up herself. "I had a good time tonight."

"I did too, Kris. I promise I'll speak to Alice as soon as I get home and call you tomorrow."

"Come on, I'll walk you to your car." Kris reached out to claim Erin's hand.

When they reached Erin's van, they lingered next to it, neither wanting to leave. Kris wanted so badly to kiss Erin again. She glanced around the parking area at all the people getting out of their cars and making their way to the restaurant. It was busy even on a Tuesday night. She settled for a quick kiss on Erin's cheek.

Erin had seen Kris look around and knew why she had chosen the secluded landing to say goodnight. Erin climbed into her van and rolled down the window. "Goodnight... talk to you in the morning," she said before reluctantly driving away.

Kris watched until Erin's taillights disappeared before making her way to her own vehicle.

CHAPTER 5

"GOOD DATE?"

Erin jumped at the unexpected voice. She had been standing in the kitchen lost in thought about her date with Kris.

"You scared me, Alice," she admonished the older woman. "I thought you'd fallen asleep upstairs. And yes, I had a very good time."

"I figured as much since you were staring off into space with a big smile on your face."

Erin looked over at her mother-in-law and scowled. Well, technically she was her ex-mother-in-law. "I was not."

"Yes, you were," Alice said. "How did things go?"

Her relationship with Alice was very open and honest from the beginning. Sometimes, it was hard to remember she was her ex-husband's mother. She had been very supportive of Erin when she divorced Scott. Alice had stood by her side and informed her son that he was an idiot. Even when Erin confided to her that she was a lesbian, her support had been unwavering. It had been a welcome change from her own mother who never supported her no matter what she did.

"It was great. We really hit it off. She seems to be such an open and caring person. She even ordered these souvenir glasses for the kids just because she thought they'd get a kick out of them," Erin said, showing Alice the two goldfish bowl glasses.

"Good. You need to find someone, Erin. You've been alone too long. The kids are getting older and don't demand anywhere nearly as much of your time as they once did. Find a good woman and settle down."

Erin shook her head in disbelief. "Your son would have a fit if he heard you talking like that. Aren't you supposed to be encouraging me to get back together with Scott?"

"He may be my son but Scott doesn't deserve you. Not after the way he treated you while you were pregnant and right after the twins were born. I thought we raised him better," Alice said, shaking her head in disgust at her son's behavior. In retrospect, she and Robert had catered to Scott too much when he was growing up.

"I realize now we shouldn't have pressured you to marry him. You could never be happy together." At the time, Alice thought she was doing what was best for Erin and Scott. She had not known Erin was gay, but now that she did, it made all the difference in the world. Alice had personal experience with the tragic consequences of trying to force someone to be something they weren't. Although she had died when Alice was a teenager, she still grieved for her Aunt June. Her mother's sister had committed suicide after her family refused to accept that she was gay and tried to force her into an arranged marriage.

Alice walked over and laid her hand on Erin's forearm. "I think of you as the daughter I never had, and if being with a woman is what makes you happy, then that's the way it should be. I'm just happy you allow us to share your life and the lives of our grandchildren."

"You know I would never stop you from seeing the kids," Erin said.

"I know, Erin. And Robert and I are eternally grateful for that," she said, reaching over to hug Erin. "Enough of

this serious stuff. I need to head home, six a.m. comes early."

"Oh, before you go, could I ask you to watch Christopher and Jenna on Friday night?"

"Got a hot date?" Alice asked.

"Only if you watch the kids," Erin countered, grinning.

"No problem, why don't you let them spend the night?"

"You don't have to do that. We're just going to dinner and a show. We shouldn't be too late."

Alice scowled at Erin. "Okay, let me put this another way. Robert and I would appreciate it if you'd let the kids spend Friday night with us."

Erin hugged Alice conveying her appreciation.
"Thanks."

After they said their goodbyes and Alice headed home, Erin glanced at the clock in the kitchen wondering if it was too late to call Kris. Finally, deciding she didn't want to appear too anxious, she chose to wait until morning.

CHAPTER 6

ERIN KEPT AN eye on the entrance to the rapidly filling movie theater. The line had been much longer than expected. Knowing the movie was going to be packed, she had offered to go save them a seat while Kris stopped at the snack bar. Erin smiled and waved to Kris when she spotted her. She stared incredulously when she saw what she was carrying.

"What?" Kris asked, seeing Erin's look.

Kris had two large drinks, a brimming bucket of popcorn and a package of chocolate candy balanced carefully on a tray.

Erin shook her head as she reached up to take them. "We just finished dinner."

Kris grinned. "It's a rule. You can't go to the theater to see a movie without eating popcorn. And if you have popcorn, you have to have a drink."

"And the candy?" she questioned laughingly.

Kris leaned over close to Erin to make sure she wasn't overheard. "Well, since it's unlikely I'm going to get what I really want for dessert, I figured chocolate would have to substitute... for the time being."

A shiver of excitement rippled down Erin's body and landed right between her legs.

Kris laughed at the blush that rapidly covered Erin's face. She leaned even closer, gently nuzzling Erin's ear. "I was talking about cheesecake. What were you thinking?"

"Behave," Erin whispered, elbowing Kris in the ribs. She couldn't believe what this woman could do to her with a few simple words. Dating Kris was definitely going to be an adventure. She was looking forward to every minute of it.

* * *

Kris had her arm around Erin's waist as they exited the theater. The thriller they saw had turned out to be scarier than expected. After the second time Erin grabbed her arm in fright, Kris had put up the armrest between their seats and draped her arm across Erin's shoulders to hold her close. She spent the rest of the movie distracted by the delightful feel of Erin pressed against her side.

They stopped by Erin's van.

"Thank you for a great evening," Erin said, unlocking her vehicle.

Kris didn't want the evening to end. Erin had mentioned earlier that Alice and her husband were keeping the twins overnight. She kept meaning to ask Erin if the couple were friends or family.

"Maybe we could go somewhere for a drink?" Kris asked hopefully.

Erin didn't want their evening to end either. "Sure... where did you have in mind?"

"I know this quiet little bar over on Pacific Highway."

"That sounds good. I'll follow you," Erin readily agreed.

Kris gave Erin directions and they both headed out in their respective vehicles.

* * *

Erin looked around the small bar with its tiny two person tables and intimate booths. There was an oak bar situated against one wall and in the far corner of the room

was a postage stamp sized dance floor. She checked out the patrons and quickly realized it was a gay bar.

Kris noted Erin's perusal. "Is this okay?"

"It's great," Erin said with a smile.

"Why don't you grab us a seat while I get our drinks?" Kris suggested as she started toward the bar.

Kris smiled broadly when she saw Erin had chosen one of the secluded booths in a quiet corner despite the fact that several less intimate tables were open. Kris slid into the booth and over next to Erin. The length of their thighs pressed together beneath the table.

They talked about the movie and other inconsequential things, each taking note of how comfortable she was with the other. The atmosphere at dinner had been just as relaxed. They had spoken on the phone every day, sometimes several times in the same day, since their first date, which most likely accounted for their ease.

Curious about something Kris had said on their first date, Erin hesitated, not quite sure how to phrase her question. "I was wondering..." she began, uncertain how to continue.

Kris's eyebrow rose in question, wondering what was on Erin's mind that was making her so tentative all the sudden. "What is it? You can ask me anything," Kris said. She had some questions of her own and hoped if she was honest with Erin, then she could ask them.

Erin took a deep breath before beginning. "You mentioned before that you hadn't been out on a date in a long time. I was just wondering, why not?"

Kris was tempted to give a flippant answer, like she just hadn't met the right woman, until now. She didn't want to talk about her past but knew she couldn't put it off forever. If she had any hope of having a relationship with Erin she

needed to be honest with her. Besides, she was interested in hearing about Erin's past and, if she wanted answers, it was only fair to provide some of her own first, no matter how painful. She felt Erin's eyes on her, watching and waiting.

Sighing mentally, she began, "About five and a half years ago, I got involved with a woman I met at a business seminar. I had dated casually in college but for the first couple years after graduating, I was too busy getting my business off the ground to date much. Angela was my first serious relationship. I thought she was 'The One'." Kris paused to take a sip of her drink. She could feel all the emotions from that time trying to surface.

"My business had finally taken off and we had secured several contracts. I was working long hours but I thought I had it all – a successful company and a beautiful girlfriend I loved. I would've married her if I could. After dating for six months, we bought a place and moved in together. We were planning on spending the rest of our lives together. Well, at least that's what I thought. By that point, we had even talked about starting a family." Kris scrubbed her hands across her face, trying to push her rising emotions aside. She took another large sip of her drink.

"From there, things started to deteriorate. We had some problems before we moved in together but I thought maybe it was just the stress of trying to keep up two households. But things got worse, not better. No matter what I did, she wasn't happy. Angela complained bitterly about my long hours and how I was neglecting her. When I did take time off, she complained that I was smothering her." Kris couldn't help the bitterness that had crept into her tone. She looked over to see Erin's reaction.

Erin reached out and clasped Kris's hand, giving it an encouraging squeeze, silently urging her to continue.

"We'd been living together about a year when it all came crashing down. I came home early one Friday

afternoon. I wanted to surprise her. I'd rented a suite for the weekend at the Hotel Del Coronado. I thought, maybe, if we had some time to ourselves we could talk things out, get our relationship back on track. I was surprised to find Angela's car in the driveway when I got home, as well as a car I didn't recognize parked behind it. I quietly let myself in..." Kris's voice trailed off, her throat tight with emotion. Very few people knew the real reason behind her breakup with Angela.

Erin's hand tightened on Kris's reassuringly. She reached out with her free hand and stroked Kris's arm. "You don't have to tell me the rest." Erin could guess what had happened. She couldn't imagine how terrible it must have been to find her girlfriend with another woman.

Kris shook her head. "No... I need to." Erin nodded. "I didn't find anyone downstairs, then I heard voices coming from upstairs. The only thing upstairs was our bedroom and the master bath." Kris met Erin's understanding eyes. "I caught them in our bed in the middle of the act," she said, her voice harsh with remembered pain.

"Oh, Kris, I'm so sorry."

"That's not the worst of it. I found out later she'd been seeing him for months and was pregnant with his child," Kris said bitterly.

"Oh my God! It was a guy!"

Kris nodded miserably. "Tell me about it. It would've been hurtful enough if it had been another woman, but that was a real slap in the face."

Erin didn't know what to say, she was stunned by the revelation.

"I went into a deep depression for almost a year. I swore I'd never allow anyone to get close enough to hurt me

like that again." Kris shook off the bad memories. "That was four years ago, and I haven't been out on a date since."

Erin quickly realized what a chance Kris was taking emotionally to date her. Not only did she have an ex-husband but also children by him. After Angela, Erin was amazed that Kris would even consider seeing a woman who had been married.

"I'm so sorry you had to go through that. I want you to know, Kris, I give you my word. I'm not going to go back to my ex-husband. I promise. Some day soon I'll tell you how I ended up marrying him. But I have no doubts. I am a lesbian."

Kris wasn't sure how she knew, but she was sure Erin was telling the truth. She would not have risked opening herself to her otherwise. Kris readily admitted to herself that it didn't make a lot of sense. She barely knew Erin. Yet somehow, she had to give this, whatever it was, a chance. She had to believe Erin or there was no way anything could ever develop between them. After her experience with Angela, Kris never thought she would trust anyone with her feelings again but, as crazy as it was, she trusted Erin.

"I do believe you. I have to," Kris said, her turbulent emotions evident in her voice. "I was drawn to you from the first moment I saw you. I know this doesn't make any sense. I mean, this is only our second date but I feel very strongly for you. I want to see where this goes. I want to let go of the past and start anew."

"Thank you," Erin said, placing a sweet kiss on Kris's lips.

"What was that for?" Kris asked when the kiss broke. "Not that I'm complaining," she added with a smile.

"For giving me a chance despite my past. I know how hard that must be for you. You make me feel something I've never felt before. It's like there's a built-in connection

between us, and it feels good," Erin earnestly tried to explain, hoping Kris would understand.

"I know. I feel it too."

"So, where do we go from here?" Erin questioned intently.

"My place?" Kris offered teasingly while waggling her eyebrows.

Erin laughed. "I don't think I'm ready for that just yet." She glanced over and noticed several women dancing to the music from the jukebox. "Dance with me?"

Kris smiled brightly and stood, offering her hand to Erin.

* * *

Kris opened her arms as they stepped onto the dance floor. Erin willingly moved into the circle of her arms, pressing her body close. They fit together perfectly, like two pieces of a puzzle. They began to dance as if they'd done it a hundred times before. There was none of the awkwardness that usually accompanied a new dance partner. Kris shuddered in arousal when Erin buried her face in her neck and pressed even closer.

Erin was lost in the sensations coursing through her body as Kris moved against her. She had danced with Cathy a few times while they dated but it had never felt anything like this. She could feel her nipples tightening in reaction to the pressure of Kris's breasts and belly brushing against her as they swayed to the music. Erin groaned when Kris's hands slid down and cupped her butt, pulling her close and then, pressed her thigh between her legs. Erin's hips jerked in reaction against Kris's thigh. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest and dampness pooling between her legs. Her arms tightened convulsively where they were wrapped around Kris's back. She lifted her head and lost

herself in Kris's vibrant blue eyes. Her lips parted unconsciously in invitation.

Kris readily accepted the silent request, leaning in to capture Erin's lips in a heated kiss. Erin readily opened her mouth, sucking Kris's tongue deep, causing them both to groan. Neither woman heard the music end. When the torrid kiss finally broke, they were standing alone on the dance floor. They blushed when several women winked and gave them a thumbs up as they made their way back to their booth.

Erin stared shyly at the table once they were seated and seemed unwilling to meet Kris's eyes. She was embarrassed by how ardently she'd responded to Kris.

"Are you okay?" Kris asked, wondering if she'd overstepped with the kiss. She had just gotten so caught up in the feel of Erin's body against hers that she hadn't been able to stop herself.

Erin looked up when she heard the concern in Kris's voice. "I'm fine... I just... never had that happen before."

"You've never been kissed on a dance floor before?"

"Yeah, I mean I have but I never lost all sense of my surroundings from just a kiss. It was like no one existed but us," she said, still amazed at the intensity of the kiss they shared.

Kris grinned cockily and buffed her nails on her shirt. Erin laughed and reached over to playfully smack her on the arm.

"I should probably get going," Erin said reluctantly.

Kris glanced down at her watch and was surprised at the lateness of the hour. They had been in the bar much longer than she realized. Time just seemed to fly when she was with Erin.

"Please let me see you home," Kris said. Erin visibly hesitated. "I won't get out of the truck. I just want to make sure you get home safely. It's late and I don't feel comfortable with you driving the streets alone." Kris sighed in relief at Erin's nod of acceptance.

They shared a good night kiss in the parking lot before heading out in their respective vehicles. True to her word, Kris followed Erin home, and then waited in her truck for a light to come on inside the house before driving away.

CHAPTER 7

"**A**RE YOU GOING to pout all night?"

Kris crossed her arms over her chest and glared at Jerry. "I'm not pouting."

Jerry mimicked Kris's stern posture, laughing at her. "Yes, you are. But being the wonderful friend that I am, I came over to save you from yourself." He reached over and poked Kris in the ribs. "Come on... so she canceled on you, it's not the end of the world. Come out with Tony and me."

"Forget it. I don't want to sit around all night and watch you two throw yourselves at each other."

Jerry tried to look hurt but Kris wasn't buying it. She continued to scowl at him. "We're going to Drake's to play pool. Come on, it'll be fun. Who knows, you might see some hot chicks. That'll take your mind off your troubles," he said.

"Not everything is about getting laid! I'm not interested in picking up a woman for a quickie in some bathroom," Kris said acerbically.

Jerry snorted. "Oh sure, girlfriend... since when?"

"Bite me!"

"Eww! Now you're just being gross," Jerry said. "Come on, Kris, what's going on? This just isn't like you. What's the big deal? Erin canceled 'cause her kids are sick."

"I know. I was just looking forward to seeing her. I had a great dinner planned. I was even going to cook." She glared at Jerry when he smirked. "Not only that, but I

haven't gotten to talk to her for more than five minutes at a time in days," Kris whined, a pathetic look on her face.

Jerry shook his head in amazement. He hadn't seen Kris act like this about a woman in years. *Not since Angela*, he mused silently, scowling at just the thought of her name. "You're serious about her, aren't you?"

"Yeah, I am. I told her about Angela," Kris said.

Holy Shit! Jerry was stunned. This was more serious than he thought if Kris had told Erin about Angela. As far as he knew, he was one of only a handful of people who actually knew what happened between them. "What'd she say?"

"That she was sorry I had to go through something like that. She assured me she was gay and had no doubts." Kris smiled in remembrance. "She also thanked me for giving her a chance, regardless of her past."

Jerry took a good look at Kris's expression. *She's a goner!* He had only seen that look on her face once before, when she fell for Angela. He just prayed this would turn out differently for her. He had his doubts about her getting involved with a woman who not only was a divorcee, but also had children. If Erin were ever to decide she was straight after all, Kris would never recover.

The very fact that she admitted she felt strongly for Erin was amazing in itself. Her telling Erin about Angela was, in his opinion, nothing short of a miracle. He knew he would have to tread carefully.

"That's good, Kris, but... um... do you believe her?" he asked cautiously. He flinched when Kris's face clouded over. He knew an explosion was coming.

Kris was ready to blast Jerry for questioning Erin's integrity but realized his concern was valid. She forced herself to calm down and tried not to snicker when she saw

Jerry visibly relax. "Yes, I believe her. I don't know how to explain it, but it feels like there's a connection between us. She says she feels it too. It's different from what it was like with Angela – with her, I realize now, I was just in lust at first and came to love her later. With Erin, it's... I just..." Kris hesitated to put what she was feeling into words.

"Sounds pretty serious," Jerry said.

Kris looked Jerry right in the eye. "I've fallen for her Jerry... hard! I'm sure I'm in love with her." Kris felt her heart flutter in her chest. There, she had actually said it. Kris had thought about it long and hard when she'd returned home the night she told Erin about Angela. That's when she realized she had fallen for the beautiful brunette. But Kris was also well aware of the fact that it was too soon to tell her.

It took Jerry several tries to get his voice to work. "Have you told her yet?" he finally squeaked out.

"No... it's too soon. I don't want to scare her off. We've only been on two dates although we've spoken at length on the phone every day since our first date or at least we did 'til her kids got sick. Hell, I haven't even met her kids yet," Kris groused.

"What about the kids, Kris? Are you sure you want a ready-made family? What if they're real brats?"

Kris laughed. "Knowing Erin, I'm not worried about it. Everything she's told me about them, good and bad, has just made me want to meet them more. I've been worried sick about them all week. Erin sounded worn out when we did manage to chat for a few minutes this week."

Jerry knew there was no sense in airing his doubts. Kris had already made up her mind. He just prayed she was right.

"Well, in that case, I hope everything works out for you and that Erin feels the same."

"I don't know if she's in love with me, but I know she has strong feelings for me. I can see it in her eyes," Kris said hoping to reassure her friend. She knew what he must be thinking.

"So, what's her story, anyway?" Jerry asked, curious to know more about this woman his best friend had fallen for. "How did she end up not only married to some guy but having his kids, if she's gay?"

"I don't know," Kris admitted sheepishly.

"What?" Jerry shouted. "What do you mean you don't know?"

Kris sighed in frustration. "I know! She promised to tell me all about it. I was going to ask her about it at dinner tonight."

This is going to be Angela all over again. Jerry groaned, he just knew it. "That's crazy, Kris! How do you know this isn't just some kind of experiment? Do you know if she's even been with another woman? Do I have to tell you the statistics of how often a woman stays with her first? My God, girl... you've got to get a hold of yourself."

Kris's expression sobered. "I know all that. I know this must sound crazy to you. Hell, it sounds crazy to me... but none of it matters. I have to try. I can't explain it. I just have to try... no matter what." Kris met Jerry's eyes, begging him to understand.

There was nothing else he could do. Jerry leaned over and gave Kris a warm hug. "You know I'll be there, no matter what." He stood up.

"Now, enough of this serious stuff. Get your butt in gear and let's go play pool!" He forced himself to smile, not wanting Kris to see just how worried he was about the situation.

"I can't –"

"No excuses. Move it woman!" Jerry tried to drag Kris off the couch.

"No, really, I can't. Erin said she would try to call tonight after she got the kids down. I don't want to miss her call."

Jerry stared at his friend incredulously. "You're going to spend your Friday night sitting by the phone just in case some woman might call?" Jerry snickered. "My, my, how the mighty have fallen," he said. "Hello, Miss Computer Geek... ever heard of a cell phone?"

Kris scowled. "She's not just some woman and I don't want to try and talk to her over the noise in Drake's."

Jerry threw up his hands in surrender and headed for the door. "Okay, if you change your mind, you know where we'll be."

CHAPTER 8

KRIS SNATCHED the phone off the table before the second ring. She grinned when she saw the caller ID.

"Hey there. How are you?"

"Hi, Kris, I'm tired but good. The kids are much better," Erin said, obviously relieved. "I'm sorry about having to cancel our dinner. I just didn't feel right leaving them after they'd been so sick all week."

"I'm sorry we missed our dinner but there's no need to apologize. The kids needed you and that's where you should be. I understand they're your first priority, as they should be," Kris said.

"Thanks for understanding. How can I make it up to you?" Erin asked.

Kris went off into fantasy land as her mind filled with images of all the ways Erin could make up for their broken date. She was pulled out of her fantasy by Erin's voice.

"Kris? Kris?"

Kris blushed fiercely, glad that Erin couldn't see her face. "Sorry about that," she said, her voice dropping to a husky purr, velvety with arousal.

Erin gulped, surprised at her body's response to Kris's voice. Suddenly, she wasn't feeling tired at all. "That's okay," Erin managed to croak out. "So, what can I do to make up for tonight?"

Kris forced herself to focus on the question and not slip away again. "How about dinner at my place as planned, you bring dessert?"

Erin shocked herself when her mind immediately fell into the gutter at the thought of what, or rather who, she'd like for dessert. She shivered with arousal at her thoughts. This just wasn't like her; she had never entertained such sexual thoughts about anyone before.

Kris grinned at the extended silence, wondering if Erin was thinking anywhere along the same lines.

"Earth to Erin," she called out teasingly.

"Sorry... I um... I..." Erin stuttered, causing Kris to chuckle. She cleared her throat several times. "That sounds great. When?"

"You pick the day."

"How about Sunday? That'll give me a chance to make sure the kids are really okay," Erin said.

"It's a date," Kris readily agreed.

"Great," Erin said. She cleared her throat nervously, her demeanor turning shy. "Um... I wanted to tell you... I've missed talking with you every day."

Kris's heart soared. "I missed you too, Erin."

They stayed on the phone for another hour before Erin's exhaustion became apparent and Kris urged her to hang up though they could've easily talked for hours.

They both went to bed that night with a smile, happier than they had been all week.

CHAPTER 9

Kris glanced around her living room one last time. Erin was due any minute. She gulped nervously when the doorbell rang. Brushing nonexistent wrinkles from her clothes, she went to answer the door.

Kris couldn't help staring at Erin. She looked wonderful in soft faded blue jeans and a short sleeve shirt opened to the waist revealing a yellow v-neck T-shirt underneath. Kris realized just how much she'd missed her over the last week. Finally, remembering her manners, she motioned Erin inside.

Erin had been enjoying her own perusal. Kris looked great in tight fitting black jeans that hugged her muscular thighs and a dark blue tank top that set off her light blond hair and made her blue eyes appear even darker than normal. Erin was reminded again that Kris was a strikingly beautiful woman.

Kris closed the door and turned, startled to find Erin standing so close that they were almost touching.

"Hi," Kris said. "I'm so glad you could make it."

"Hi, yourself," Erin said with a soft smile. "Thanks for inviting me."

Kris saw Erin's lips move but wasn't aware of what she said. Not allowing herself time to think about it, she closed the small distance between them and drew Erin into her arms. Seeing no resistance in her eyes, she kissed her softly at first, then deeper when she started to respond. Kris groaned and felt her knees grow weak when Erin's tongue pressed gently into her mouth. She eagerly accepted the

offered appendage and their tongues danced together in her mouth.

Erin moaned, her body trembling with arousal. She pulled back from the kiss feeling out of control. She looked up into Kris's eyes, shocked at the burning passion she saw there. No one had ever looked at her that way before. She felt excited and slightly scared. An electric tingle spread through her body right down to her toes. Knowing she wasn't ready to go where that fiery gaze promised to take her, she slowly pulled away from Kris.

Kris whimpered in protest at Erin's withdrawal, her body was on fire. She couldn't remember any woman ever stirring her so with just a kiss. Erin placed a restraining hand on Kris's chest when she reached for her again. Kris saw the uncertainty and fear in Erin's eyes and fought to curb her raging libido. The last thing she wanted to do was scare her away. Kris took a deep calming breath to regain her composure.

"How about I show you around?" Kris finally asked.

Erin smiled gratefully, thankful for Kris's understanding. She knew Kris was very aroused but the fact that she was willing to put it aside to make her comfortable meant a lot to Erin. "Thanks," she said softly.

Kris nodded her head in understanding. She led her guest into the main living area. The living room was a good size, with track lights running the length of the ceiling giving the room a warm glow. The room had a casual lived in appearance and was furnished with comfortable looking overstuffed furniture. In the open dining area, a sliding glass door provided a fantastic view into the wooded canyon below. The kitchen was separated from the dining room by a wall of cabinets and a counter.

Kris led Erin out of the kitchen and into a study located just off the front foyer. It was the first clutter Erin had seen

since entering the house. The large desk had two computer monitors sitting side by side and was covered in jewel cases and file folders. There were boxes stacked on the floor and the bookshelves lining one wall bulged with a wide array of computer parts.

Kris grinned, a bit embarrassed by the disarray in the room. "As you can see, this is where I do most of my work."

"So, you work from home, you don't have an office?" Erin asked.

"We do have an office. It's a small company, only ten of us including Betty, our secretary. She mans the office, answers the phone, sends out the bills, everything that keeps the business running. I visit prospective clients to decide what they need and write up the proposals. I'm usually on-site when we set up our system and get it up and running. At that point, my employees take over and provide any additional services the client needs. I do most of my work here or on-site with the client. I try to get into the office a couple of times a week or Betty gets on my case. You'll have to meet her. She's a real character." Kris laughed self-consciously. "That was probably more than you wanted to know. I tend to get carried away when I talk about my business."

"No, I want to know everything about you," Erin said.

Kris smiled brightly. "Come on, I'll show you the rest of the place. The bedrooms are downstairs."

There was a short hallway at the bottom of the stairs. "I use this as a workout room," Kris said, stopping in the first doorway off the hall. Next to it was a full bathroom with a large Jacuzzi. Erin glanced into both rooms before following Kris down the hall. At the far end was the master bedroom – a large sleigh bed dominated the room. The furniture was all darkly stained oak. The walls were painted a warm blue with the carpet set in a deeper blue tone. The bed was

covered in a southwestern style comforter accompanied by several large pillows in matching shams.

Erin gazed at the big bed, wondering what it would be like to share it with Kris. She shivered slightly at the thought. Looking up, she found Kris's eyes on her. She glanced away and a light blush spread across her cheeks. When she looked back, Kris raised an eyebrow and smirked as if she knew what Erin had just been thinking. Erin felt her face flush bright red.

Kris grinned, then motioned toward a door in the far wall. "And last but not least," she said, stepping into the master bath.

Erin gasped when she walked into the bathroom. Not only were the floor and countertops made from granite, but so was the largest shower she had ever seen. It ran along the length of one wall and was enclosed by floor to ceiling glass walls. In addition to multiple showerheads, there was a wide bench opposite the showerheads. Kris opened the shower door so Erin could look out the window set in the back wall of the shower stall. It offered a view of the canyon below but strategically placed trees blocked anyone from looking in.

"Wow! I've never seen anything like this. Christopher and Jenna would love it. Our shower is too small for all three of us to shower together. I have to take them in with me one at a time but we could all fit in here."

Kris smiled wistfully, wanting to be included in that "we".

"Did you add this shower?" Erin asked.

"No, this was all here when I bought the place. Only thing I added was the Jacuzzi in the other bathroom. I like to soak and I don't exactly fit in a standard tub." Kris's stomach chose that moment to growl loudly. "Ready for some dinner?"

"Sure," Erin said. She continued to look around as they made their way back upstairs. "You have a beautiful place here, Kris. I hope you're not disappointed when you see my house. With two young children, it's decorated in early American clutter."

Kris's eyes widened in surprise and she turned to look at Erin, wondering if she realized the significance of what she had just said.

Erin's startled expression answered that question. Kris started to give Erin an out but she cut her off.

"No, I meant it, Kris," she said. "Maybe not tomorrow but if you're still willing, I'd like to invite you to my place and introduce you to my children... soon."

Kris pressed a warm kiss on Erin's lips but pulled back before it could escalate.

"I take that as a yes?" Erin said.

"Definitely a yes," Kris said as they came to the dining room table that had been set for an intimate candlelight dinner for two. "I hope you're hungry. I have salad, baked potatoes, corn on the cob and steaks to grill." A sudden thought occurred to Kris. "You do eat meat, don't you?" she asked, mentally kicking herself for not having asked sooner.

Erin smiled and reached out to give Kris's arm a quick squeeze. "It all sounds great! What can I do to help?"

Kris smiled in relief and directed Erin into the kitchen.

CHAPTER 10

ERIN AND KRIS sat on opposite ends of the couch sipping wine. Dinner had been an enjoyable affair. Kris told Erin of her current projects at work then inquired about her week and the twins. She knew how hard it must have been on Erin and several times during the week, she had wished there was some way she could help. It wasn't often that she felt so helpless. Erin, at first, seemed reluctant to share the details but at Kris's gentle insistence and obviously sincere concern, she finally relented. It made Kris feel like Erin was letting her into her life by sharing her concerns about her children.

Erin smiled at Kris. She had been surprised when Kris asked about the twins over dinner. Overcoming her reluctance to talk about them, she was pleased at Kris's genuine interest.

"Dinner was wonderful, Kris."

"Thanks for your help," Kris said with a smile.

Erin laughed. "I hardly consider putting the salad on the table and flipping the steaks once much help."

"You helped clean up the kitchen." She had tried to convince Erin to leave the dishes but she refused. Kris had finally given in and they had cleaned up together.

"It was the least I could do after such a great dinner. I didn't feel right leaving you to clean up the mess later."

"So, what time do you need to get back?" Kris asked, hoping Erin wouldn't have to leave right away.

"I told Alice I'd be back by eleven. She has to work tomorrow. She's a Red Cross volunteer at a local hospital. Her husband, Robert, works three half days a week at the same hospital. He's a radiologist. After his heart attack three years ago, he semi-retired. He doesn't want to give it up completely."

"Are Alice and Robert friends of yours?"

Erin hesitated, wondering how Kris would react to her relationship with Alice and Robert. "Um... actually Alice and Robert are my, um... ex-in-laws."

"Excuse me?" Kris was sure she hadn't heard right.

"They're my ex-husband's parents. They live up the street from me."

"Oh..." was all Kris could think to say.

"I know this probably sounds strange but Alice, especially, was incredibly supportive not only during my pregnancy but also later when Scott and I divorced. She was the first person I came out to," Erin said.

Kris stared at Erin in astonishment.

"I guess, maybe, it's time I told you about my past, huh?" Erin asked rhetorically. Kris nodded her head. "Could I have another glass of wine?" she asked, knowing she was going to need it to get through the story.

Kris headed into the kitchen to refill their glasses. Erin used the time to try and bolster her courage for the coming revelations. She had never told any of her dates the whole story of her marriage. Kris had been more than forthcoming about her relationship with Angela. She could do no less. She needed to tell Kris the truth, even though she realized it was less than flattering to herself. She wanted no secrets between them. When Kris returned with the wine, Erin patted the seat next to her. She needed the comfort of having Kris close.

Erin sat quietly sipping her wine for quite some time. Kris was beginning to wonder if she had changed her mind.

Finally, Erin said, "I met Scott at the library during my junior year in college. He was in graduate school for his MBA. Up to that point, I'd rarely dated. I wanted to concentrate on my studies and I'd never been much for socializing anyway. He pursued me for several weeks until I finally relented and we started dating. Dating Scott seemed safe somehow... I liked him, but I didn't have a strong sexual attraction towards him. I'd seen my mother ruled by her passion for men and I swore I would never let that happen to me. Even then, I think I knew deep inside that I was attracted to women but I just couldn't admit it to myself. Not long after we started dating, I met his parents. I realize now that I fell in love with Scott's family and the security and loving acceptance they provided. I'd never had that before."

"What about your folks?"

"My mom got pregnant with me while she was still in high school. I never knew my father. According to my mother, she didn't know who fathered me. It could've been any one of several boys she 'dated'," Erin said bitterly.

"Do you have any contact with her now?"

"No! Last I heard, she was in Florida with husband number six, I think."

Kris wanted to ask more but knew from Erin's tone that the subject of her mother was closed.

"Anyway, back to Scott and his family. Right from the start, I was invited to all the family functions. They made me feel like part of the family. I convinced myself that I was in love with Scott. We'd been dating for about six months when I slept with him for the first time. It wasn't a bad experience. I didn't feel much of anything aside from a little pain." Erin looked at Kris to see how she was taking all this.

Kris's expression was carefully neutral but Erin was encouraged when Kris reached out and gently stroked her arm.

"Then what happened?"

"We continued to date when Scott's schedule permitted. We saw each other until the end of my senior year. Scott had received his Masters at the end of my junior year and started working for a small investment firm. We slept together infrequently. Truthfully, I never got much out of it but it made Scott happy so I went along with it. In a way, it made me feel in control of the relationship because I wasn't ruled by my libido as it seemed so many of my friends were when it came to the men they dated. A month before I completed my student teaching assignment, I found out I was pregnant."

At Kris's questioning look, Erin said, "I can't take birth control pills; they give me migraine headaches. So, I was using a diaphragm..." Erin picked up her wine and took a sip. She looked into her glass refusing to make eye contact. "Scott didn't like to stop sometimes so I could put it in. He complained that it ruined the spontaneity of the moment and he absolutely refused to wear a condom. I was stupid and didn't insist and well... I got caught," Erin said, her face flushing with embarrassment.

What a jerk! Kris thought, but carefully kept her opinion to herself.

"When I told Scott I was pregnant he insisted I get an abortion."

"Bastard!" Kris said, unable to stop herself. "Sorry," she quickly apologized, not wanting to offend Erin.

"It's okay, no need to apologize. I called him that and worse at the time," Erin said. "Are you sure you want to hear the rest of this?"

"I want to know everything about you, Erin."

That earned her a bright smile and a quick kiss on the lips before Erin took up the story again.

"When Scott's parents found out about the pregnancy, they immediately began to encourage us to get married. Scott's an only child and both Robert and Alice were excited about their first grandchild. I wanted my child to grow up knowing their father. I saw the wonderful relationship Alice and Robert had and convinced myself Scott and I could have that too. Scott was reluctant. I think he knew he didn't love me and he'd made it clear he didn't want a child. But eventually, he bowed to pressure from his parents to be responsible and marry me. I quickly found out dating Scott and being married to him and pregnant were two very different things. I guess I was so enamored with being part of a family that I never allowed myself to see how self-centered and selfish Scott really was. If it wasn't about him, he wasn't interested."

Erin stopped to take a drink of wine and compose herself. Kris waited patiently and rubbed her arm in silent support. Erin smiled gratefully at Kris, then took up her story again.

"I had terrible morning sickness early in my pregnancy. Scott was less than supportive and angry at the disruption of his schedule. I used to attend work related social events with him while we were dating. He always seemed so proud to have me on his arm but the bigger my belly got, the more distant he became. He resented my advancing pregnancy and complained that I wasn't supportive of him or his work. He was furious when he found out I was having twins. It was like I'd planned it intentionally to spite him. I shouldn't have been surprised, he'd made it clear he never wanted a child, much less two..." Erin's voice trailed off when she noted the growing anger on Kris's face.

Kris couldn't believe anyone could be so cruel and callous to the woman carrying his children. "I'm so sorry, Erin. Pregnancy should be a magical time," Kris said, fighting her rising anger at Erin's ex.

"It's not your fault. You weren't there."

"I wish I had been!" Kris's throat tightened and she fought back tears. She ached for the terrible way Erin had been treated.

Erin felt tears come to her eyes at Kris's words.

Kris knew there was more. "Tell me the rest."

Erin sighed heavily. Kris reached out and put her arm around Erin's shoulder and drew her close. Erin rested her head on Kris's shoulder and prepared herself to tell the rest of the story. She had worked hard to let go of the pain and anger from that time, but telling the story was bringing back very painful memories.

"By the time I reached my sixth month, we were sleeping in separate bedrooms. Scott complained bitterly that my restlessness disturbed him. He needed his sleep 'cause he worked for a living."

Kris shook her head in disbelief. *Could this guy be any more of an ass?*

"Alice and Robert were a godsend during my pregnancy. They were both appalled by Scott's behavior. Alice was the one who attended my doctor's appointments with me and ensured that I took care of myself."

Kris reached out and cupped Erin's chin urging her head up until they made eye contact. "You're doing great. Keep going."

After taking another healthy sip of wine, Erin settled back against Kris and continued, "I went into labor early one morning. I told Scott before he left for work. He said,

'Fine, these things take time; I've got an important day today. Call me if the contractions get closer.' I spent the day by myself. By that time, I was so large I could barely get around. I called Scott at work late that afternoon and told him I needed to go to the hospital. He said he'd call his mother and get her to take me. He had an important dinner meeting with a client and couldn't miss it." Tears started to slide down Erin's face and she angrily brushed them away.

"Why didn't you call Alice earlier?" Kris asked gently. She could see that this was an emotional subject for Erin.

"I don't know." Erin shrugged. "I guess by that point I felt like a big, fat, useless burden on everyone," she said as tears continued to fall.

"Oh, sweetheart, I'm so sorry." Kris pulled Erin into her lap and hugged her tight.

Erin looked deep into Kris's eyes and saw nothing but understanding in her loving gaze. If she hadn't been in love with Kris before, she was now. She wiped her eyes and gave Kris a somewhat watery smile.

"Sorry about that, even though it's been awhile, the memories of that time are just hard..." Erin tried to explain, embarrassed by her loss of control.

"Don't worry about it. I'm sure it was a very emotional time for you." Kris was more than sympathetic.

With Kris's reassurance, Erin took up her story again. "After Christopher and Jenna were born, things just deteriorated further. Everything about them irritated Scott. They cried too much; they woke him up at night; I devoted too much time to them and didn't have time for him or his needs. The list just went on and on. That's when I realized things were never going to get better. I admitted to myself that I didn't love Scott and never had. I finally understood that I had used him to try to get the family I'd never had growing up. I felt more for his parents than I did for him."

Erin looked up at Kris. Kris leaned down and placed a soft loving kiss on Erin's lips. Thus fortified, Erin continued her story.

"I figured I'd rather have the kids grow up with just me than to get older and realize that their father thought of them as nothing more than a nuisance. He started staying out late at night and on weekends. I don't think he ever touched one of them in the two months he lived with us after their birth."

Erin sighed as memories of the time flooded her. She shook away the depressing thoughts.

"When they were two months old, I asked Scott for a divorce. I think it was more of a relief if anything by that point. Plus, he had the added satisfaction of being able to say I asked for the divorce. It was as if it absolved him of any responsibility for the break-up. Alice was my champion during that whole time. She and Robert stood by my side and supported me during the divorce."

"What happened wasn't your fault, Erin. You tried to make it work," Kris said.

Erin smiled lovingly at Kris, pleased by her support. "Scott was shocked and angry with me when his parents didn't rush to his side. He claimed I'd turned them against him. They helped whenever they could with the kids. Alice has been a lifesaver many times in the last five years. I don't know how I would have managed without her and Robert."

Erin sniffed, wiping away her tears. She looked Kris directly in the eyes, wanting her to know how important this was to her.

"But the truth is, although I made a mistake marrying Scott, I've never regretted for a single moment having Christopher and Jenna. I can't even begin to tell you what they mean to me. As hard as it is sometimes to be a single mom, I wouldn't trade my life for anything."

"We all make mistakes, Erin. You're luckier than most that your mistake also brought you your greatest joy. The important thing is you learned from it and moved on with your life. Looking back now, I saw all the warning signs with Angela that things weren't right but I ignored them. I didn't want to admit I'd made a mistake. You tried to make the best of the situation you found yourself in and provide the best home possible for your children. I think you're an amazing lady to be raising two children on your own."

Erin was warmed by Kris's understanding and compassion. She didn't say anything, just tightened her arms around Kris's waist and buried her face in her neck. She was overcome by a sense of peace and security she had never felt before. It was a sense of finally being where she belonged.

"How are things between you and Scott now?" Kris asked.

Erin looked up at Kris and smiled trying to lighten the mood. "Things have gotten better in the last two years. Scott and I reached a point where we accepted that we were both responsible for what happened and that our marriage was a mistake." Erin met Kris's eyes and shrugged resignedly. "I can't say we're exactly friends, but we do manage, for the twin's sake, to spend holidays as a family with Alice and Robert. And he has gotten better about the twins. Just this year, he started picking them up and spending one Saturday a month with them. Unfortunately, now that I've accepted my sexuality and started to date, it's gotten kind of rough again. He still hasn't accepted the fact that I'm a lesbian, but that's hardly surprising."

The moment was broken by the ringing of a phone. Erin realized it was coming from her purse. The only person who would be calling her was Alice. She quickly slid off Kris's lap and grabbed her purse.

"Hey, Alice, is everything alright?" Erin listened intently for several moments. "No way!" she exclaimed loudly. "Thanks for letting me know, I'll be home as soon as I can."

Kris listened to Erin's side of the short conversation. "Is everything alright?"

"Yeah, that was Alice, she was worried. It's after midnight!"

Kris's eyebrows flew up in surprise and she glanced over at the clock on the mantle. "I had no idea."

"I know, me either. I told her I'd be right home."

Kris nodded in understanding and escorted Erin to the door. She drew her into a heartfelt hug. "Thank you for sharing that with me, I know how difficult it must've been," she said softly near her ear.

Erin lifted her head off Kris's shoulder and met her eyes. Erin's look was open and vulnerable.

Kris leaned down and placed a gentle kiss on her lips. It was filled with promise. "When can I see you again?" Kris asked when the kiss broke.

"I'll give you a call tomorrow after I talk to Alice," Erin promised before placing her head back on Kris's shoulder.

They hugged for several long minutes, basking in each other's warmth before Erin pulled away. She knew Alice was waiting.

Kris walked Erin out to her van, then made her way back to her condo. Her mind was whirling with everything Erin had told her that night.

CHAPTER 11

KRIS LOOKED around the park, trying to spot Erin.

She was shocked when Erin called the day after their dinner date and asked if she would like to join her and the children at the park on Saturday. When Erin said she wanted her to meet the children soon, Kris hadn't thought she meant this soon. They had talked on the phone everyday since their last date the previous weekend. Something seemed to have changed between them after Erin confided in her about her ex-husband and their marriage. She seemed much more willing to let Kris into her life. Thus, for their fourth official date, Kris would meet the twins.

They had chosen to meet at Mission Bay Park. It was right on the water and featured large open areas of grass, picnic tables, and a special section of the park just for kite flying. Kris had brought along a large box kite, hoping the twins might enjoy it.

A smile broke out on Kris's face when she finally spotted Erin. She was sitting on a quilt with her legs stretched out in front of her, surrounded by quite a number of toys. A picnic cooler sat nearby. Erin was wearing a tank top and shorts. Kris stood for a few moments enjoying the view. Her arms were well defined and Kris unconsciously licked her lips as her eyes slid lower to the tight tank top hugging Erin's full breasts. Kris felt her libido spring to life.

Forcing away the welcome but distracting thoughts, she turned her attention to the young boy and girl playing in the grass near Erin. From where she stood, she could see that the boy was a blond like herself and the little girl had dark hair braided down her back like her mother's. Both children

were dressed in tank tops and shorts like Erin. They had to be Christopher and Jenna. Kris quickly made her way to the group.

"Hi," she greeted Erin just a bit nervously. This was a big step for both of them, meeting Erin's twins.

Erin smiled up at Kris and stood to greet her. "Hi, Kris," she said giving her a warm hug.

Kris felt the tension leave her at Erin's warm welcome. She tightened her arms around Erin, enjoying the feel of her in her arms for just an extra few seconds before releasing her. She wanted very much to kiss her but knew it would be inappropriate at this stage of their relationship with her children present.

Erin smiled warmly at Kris as she reached up to give her a kiss, but then she remembered her kids. Smiling apologetically, she stepped away from Kris and turned to call to the children. They had been so busy playing they hadn't noticed Kris's arrival. As the two little ones scampered over to stand on either side of their mother, Kris got a closer look at them. Christopher was not only blond but shared her eye color as well. Jenna had her mother's dark hair, though her eyes were hazel instead of Erin's dark brown. There was no mistaking Jenna was Erin's daughter. Even at this age, Kris could see the strong resemblance. Kris assumed that Christopher must take after his father.

Erin placed a hand on each child's shoulder. "I'd like you to meet my children, Christopher and Jenna," she said, and then looked down at the kids. "Remember, I told you we were going to meet my friend?" she asked. At two answering nods, she completed the introductions. "This is my friend, Ms. Rawlings."

Kris chuckled. "If it's okay with you, I'd rather they call me Kris."

"This is my friend, Kris." Erin corrected with a smile to let her kids know it was okay to call this particular adult by her first name.

Jenna looked up at Kris and smiled. "Hi, Kris," she said confidently.

Kris held out her hand to the little girl. Jenna grinned and tried to shake hands with Kris. She could barely close her grip around three of Kris's fingers.

"Nice to meet you, Jenna," Kris said, smiling down at the little girl.

Christopher clutched Erin's leg and refused to make eye contact with Kris. Erin was about to speak to him about his bad manners when Kris squatted down so she was at eye level with the little boy.

"Hi, Christopher," she said softly. When he looked up hesitantly, Kris smiled and held out her hand to him. "I've been looking forward to meeting you and your sister."

She smiled in pleasure when he let go of Erin's leg and cautiously reached out to shake her hand.

"Hi," he said with a shy smile and an adorable blush.

Kris looked over when she felt a tug on her shirt.

"Would you come play with us... please?" Jenna asked with a sweet smile.

"Sure," Kris said reaching for the duffel bag she'd brought along.

"Oh Kris, that's not necessary. They can play with each other," Erin said, not wanting Kris to feel obligated to play with her children.

Kris looked up at Erin. "I want to," she said before turning her attention back to the kids. She reached into her bag and pulled out a partially assembled kite. "Who'd like to help me put this together so we can fly it?"

Jenna began to jump up and down excitedly. Christopher stayed close to Erin but looked interested. Erin watched as Kris patiently let each of them have a turn helping put the struts of the kite in place. Christopher was reluctant at first but with a little gentle coaxing from Kris, he finally joined in. She could have easily assembled the kite alone in minutes but she never rushed the kids when they fumbled or seemed impatient. Once it was complete, she attached it to what appeared to be the handle of a small fishing rod with a reel loaded with string.

"Ready to fly this baby?" Kris asked the kids. She smiled at the enthusiastic yells she received in response. "How about you, Mom... gonna come fly with us?" she asked Erin with a grin. It was obvious she was having a great time.

Christopher and Jenna raced over to Erin and grabbed her hands, urging her over to Kris and the kite. The foursome headed over to the kite park to test out their creation.

* * *

Kris gazed down at the blond head resting on her leg. She reached out and stroked the perspiration damp hair. Christopher stirred in his sleep, rolling closer to Kris and wrapped his arms around her thigh. They had played at the kite park for almost two hours. She could feel how tight her muscles were from not only holding on to the kids but repeatedly reeling in the kite, just to let it go again. Both kids had a blast with the kite. Kris only wished she had half their energy. By the time she was ready to drop, they were still going strong. Erin had finally called a halt and insisted everyone have lunch.

After Christopher's shy greeting that morning and his initial reluctance to join in with the kite, he had quickly warmed up to Kris. When they returned to have lunch, he had surprised her when he plopped down next to her on the

blanket and leaned against her as they ate. Once they had settled down and eaten, both kids quickly faded. Kris had smiled, strangely content when Christopher settled against her thigh and fell asleep. Jenna was in the exact same position against Erin. Kris was brought out of her thoughts by Erin's voice.

"Thank you for being so great with the kids and bringing the kite for them to fly. They've never done that before. You were wonderful with them."

"Hey, I had a great time too. It's been years since I flew a kite. Last time was with my niece, Lindsay. I don't think she was much older than these two at the time."

"It wasn't too much? I mean they can be a handful," Erin said. She wanted so much for Kris to like her children.

As if sensing what Erin wasn't saying, Kris shifted over slightly until she could reach out and stroke Erin's arm. She glanced down to make sure both kids were still asleep before leaning further and placing a soft kiss on Erin's lips.

"The kids are wonderful, and it was a lot of fun. I look forward to spending time with all of you," Kris said, emphasizing that she meant the three of them. "Stop worrying!" she said with a mock stern look.

Erin sighed, her lips still tingling from Kris's brief kiss. "I'll try," she said. "I do have to admit I'm a bit surprised at how quickly Christopher has taken to you. He usually stands back and watches Jenna without interacting with other people himself. He's always been shy and very reserved around people he doesn't know. He normally doesn't warm up to people very quickly either."

"I noticed at first he seemed pretty unsure of me. But you're right, it doesn't seem to be a problem now," she said with a smile, indicating where Christopher was wrapped around her thigh.

"I guess I should wake these two and head home. It's getting late," Erin said reluctantly.

Kris was sorry to see the day end. She had enjoyed spending time with the three of them. Both kids were well mannered and just adorable. She was surprised by Jenna. Her language skills were highly developed for being not quite four years old. Christopher was quieter but she sensed he was just as advanced.

"How about I help you pack up before we wake the munchkins?" Kris said.

Erin laughed. "You know, they've never seen the *Wizard of Oz*. I guess that's going to be next on our rental list, now that they have a new nickname." Kris had referred to the twins several times during the day as munchkins. When Kris had explained to them that munchkins were little people like themselves who lived in a special place called Oz, both kids had readily latched on to their new nickname.

"I'll bring it over to watch with them. It's one of my favorite movies!" Kris said, then realized that she might be pushing too fast. "I mean... if you thought that was okay."

"It's more than okay, Kris. As someone told me earlier, quit worrying!" Erin punctuated her sincerity with a quick kiss.

Kris blushed. "I know. I just don't want you to feel like I'm trying to push myself on the kids... or I um... I just..." Kris sighed. She wasn't sure how to articulate what she was feeling.

"Tell you what, how about we both don't worry about it or try to second guess each other and just go with the flow." Erin stuck out her hand. "Deal?"

"Deal," Kris said and shook on it.

After carefully extricating themselves from the sleeping children, they set to work picking up the remains of their

picnic and the children's toys. Christopher stirred awake, looking a little scared until he spotted Kris and his mother. He got up and walked over to his mom tugging on her shorts until she leaned down. He whispered in her ear.

Erin turned to Kris. "Could you please keep an eye on Jenna? We need to find a restroom."

"I need to go too. I could just take him with me," Kris said.

Christopher tugged frantically on Erin's pants and grabbed himself, his urgency apparent.

Erin looked down at Christopher, not sure he would go with Kris. She decided to leave it up to him. "Christopher, is it okay if Kris takes you?"

"Come on, buddy, let's find the bathroom," Kris said, holding her hand out to him.

He hesitated for just a second, then slipped his hand into Kris's. Kris grinned at Erin before heading out with the little boy.

Erin watched as the two headed for the restrooms. It was quite a walk across the park to the building that housed the facilities. They hadn't gone very far when Kris bent down and lifted Christopher into her arms. Erin smiled brightly when her son wrapped his arms around Kris's neck.

She turned back to packing up their gear, content in the knowledge that her son was in good hands.

* * *

"No!" Christopher protested when Kris started to enter the women's restroom. He squirmed in her arms, trying to get down. Kris set him on his feet and he immediately headed for the men's room.

Kris stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. She was positive Erin wouldn't allow the little boy to go into the men's room alone.

"I can't go in there, Christopher. We need to go into the women's restroom," Kris said.

"My daddy lets me," Christopher said.

"Your daddy lets you go into the men's room alone?" Kris tried to clarify. At Christopher's emphatic nod Kris thought fast. "How about your mommy?" Kris knew she was right when Christopher refused to answer her. She knelt down in front of the little boy. He was holding himself again and she knew they didn't have a lot of time for discussion. "Your mommy would be mad at me if I let you go into the men's restroom alone. You don't want her to be mad at me, do you?"

Christopher shook his head. Kris breathed a sigh of relief and led the little boy into the women's room. She had always gone into the stall with her niece when she was this age but wondered if it was the same with boys. She held open the stall door for Christopher and he looked at her expectantly. *That answered that*, she thought as she followed him into the stall. She helped him with his clothes, knowing at his age it was very easy to lose control. She didn't want him to have an accident. Christopher looked up at her gratefully and smiled shyly. She squeezed his shoulder in understanding, glad that he was comfortable enough with her to allow her to help.

* * *

Jenna woke up not long after Christopher and Kris left. Erin picked up all their supplies, then she and Jenna stowed them in the van. They returned to the picnic spot and saw Kris and Christopher coming toward them. Christopher was once again in Kris's arms. Erin hadn't noticed it before, but with their matching blond hair and blue eyes they could

easily be mistaken for mother and son. It wasn't uncommon for people to thoughtlessly comment on the fact that Christopher didn't resemble her and Jenna. She knew how much it hurt the little boy's feeling and she always made a point to mention that he resembled his father, but that never seemed to be much consolation for Christopher.

"All set?" Erin asked when they met up.

"Yeah, all taken care of," Kris said, then she winked at Christopher. He responded with an adorable shy smile.

Jenna ran over to Kris and begged to be picked up like her brother.

Kris bent down and scooped Jenna up in her other arm. Erin's mouth dropped open in surprise. She had trouble carrying one of them for very long since they'd gotten so big. Erin couldn't help but admire Kris's sleek muscles prominently on display as she easily supported their combined weight.

They headed toward Erin's van, both kids happily ensconced in Kris's arms.

* * *

The twin's were buckled into their car seats and it was time to go. Even as Erin closed the van door, both kids continued to call their goodbyes to Kris. She turned to find Kris mugging to the kids through the window.

Laughing, she shook her head at her antics. Coming to a sudden decision, she touched Kris's arm to get her attention.

"Come home with us. Please."

"Are you sure? I mean I don't..." Kris grinned repentantly when an exaggerated scowl appeared on Erin's face. "Right, go with the flow. I remember." Kris laughed. "I'd love to. How about I stop and pick us up something to eat... pizza maybe?"

"You don't have to..." Erin started to laugh when the same scowl she'd just used appeared on Kris's face. "That's a great idea." Erin leaned in the window. "How would you two like Kris to come over and have pizza with us?" The enthusiastic yells from the back of the van quickly answered that question.

After settling on the details of what type of pizza to order, Erin headed home with the twins and Kris for the pizza parlor nearby.

CHAPTER 12

KRIS SETTLED back on the couch to wait for Erin. She had asked her to stay while she took the twins upstairs for a bath and to get them ready for bed. The evening so far had been very enjoyable. The kids dominated the conversation at dinner, talking excitedly about their day at the park, but Kris didn't mind it a bit. She was pleased they had had such a good time and liked her.

Hearing Erin call her name from the top of the stairs, Kris got up and went to the bottom of the stairs.

"Hey, Kris, the kids would like to say goodnight to you. Come on up."

Kris followed Erin down the hall into the first bedroom on the right. It was painted a bright blue and decorated with the cartoon character, Scooby Doo. Kris couldn't help chuckling. Scooby was her favorite character too. There were two twin beds separated by matching nightstands. Stacking bins along one wall held a multitude of toys. Both children were already in bed.

"Hi, my little munchkins," Kris said, making both children giggle. She stepped over to Jenna's bed first, leaning down, she placed a soft kiss on the little girl's forehead. "Night night, Jenna," she said before starting to turn toward Christopher.

"Kris?" Kris turned back to the little girl. "Could we fly your kite again?" Jenna asked hopefully.

Christopher piped up before she could answer. "Yeah, I'll make it go so high," he boasted.

"I'm sure you could." Kris laughed. "I'd love to go kite flying with you both again, but we have to ask your mommy," she said. Kris flashed Erin her best pleading puppy dog look. "How about it, Mom, can we go back to the park... please?"

The twins immediately started to bounce in their beds. "Please, Mommy, please."

Erin mock scowled at her when Kris artlessly batted her eyelashes and tried to look innocent. "Alright, settle down," Erin said. She laughed, shaking her head in exasperation at their antics. There was no way she could resist those pleading looks. "If Kris is free next Sunday, and the weather is good, we'll go to the park."

Erin groaned as Kris and the twins high-fived each other excitedly. If this was the way things were going to go in the future, she was in big trouble. She had a hard enough time saying no to the twins, add Kris into the mix and it was a lost cause. Once the celebration was complete, Erin insisted it was bedtime and both kids needed to calm down.

Kris looked over sheepishly, knowing she had a part in riling them up. She helped Erin settle the kids in and calm them down. Eventually, Christopher and Jenna quieted down and the adults said their goodnight before making their way back downstairs.

* * *

Kris squirmed on the couch and tried to stretch her tight shoulders. She was not used to carrying around two kids as she had today, though she would never admit it. Erin had gone into the kitchen for some wine.

She smiled at Erin when she returned. "Thanks," she said, taking the offered wineglass from Erin's hand.

"Is your back bothering you?" Erin asked, noticing Kris's uncomfortable movements.

"Nah, my shoulders are just a little tight."

"I'm not surprised. You shouldn't have carried those two around this afternoon. They're heavier than they look," Erin said, looking concerned.

"It was nothing. Their weight didn't bother me. I'm stronger than I look," Kris said with a wiggle of her eyebrows. Erin arched her eyebrow and looked Kris up and down skeptically. Kris set down her wineglass and before Erin could react, stood up and swept her up off the couch and into her arms.

Erin gasped at suddenly finding herself in Kris's arms. She instinctively wrapped her arms around Kris's neck. "Put me down, you big goof. You're going to hurt yourself."

Kris shook her head. "Nope, I got you now. You're all mine." She grinned.

"Oh... really, what are you going to do with me now that you've got me?" Erin asked saucily.

"This..." Kris took Erin's lips in a searing kiss.

Erin moaned, her arms tightening around Kris's neck as the kiss deepened. She opened her mouth, inviting Kris inside. Erin felt her nipples harden where they were pressed against Kris's chest. Her heart was beating frantically. She could feel Kris's arms starting to shake. She pulled out of the kiss and gulped for air.

Kris was breathing just as heavily. Her eyes had darkened to a deep blue and her pupils were dilated with arousal. She sat back down on the couch with Erin in her arms.

Neither spoke for several moments. Kris couldn't resist the tempting body in her lap. She leaned forward and kissed down the column of Erin's neck, stopping to nuzzle that sensitive spot at the base of her throat. When Erin tipped her head back, offering Kris more of her skin to explore, she

happily took the hint as her lips slipped down further to Erin's upper chest exposed by her tank top.

Erin groaned. "God... that feels so good."

Kris murmured contentedly, gently nudging the edge of her shirt lower with her chin to reveal the top of Erin's breasts.

Erin gasped when Kris licked the top of her cleavage. She had never felt anything like this before. Although she was not very experienced, she had made out with another woman and while it had felt good, the sensations had never been this intense. She could feel the throbbing between her legs and the wetness pooled there. Her nipples were rock hard and begging to be touched. Not only that, but she wanted, no needed, to touch Kris. All the feelings whirling through her were new and exciting. Shocking both of them, she brought her hand up and cupped Kris's breast through her shirt.

The sexy sound that escaped Kris's throat as she pressed herself into Erin's hand urged her on. Erin squeezed the pliant globe, feeling the nipple rubbing against her palm. She leaned down and captured Kris's lips, pressing her tongue deeply into her mouth to explore every inch. Wanting more, she jerked Kris's T-shirt out of her jeans and slid her hand underneath, groaning into Kris's mouth when her hand met the bare skin of her stomach. Continuing to slide up, she again captured the bra covered breast and began to knead it.

Kris couldn't believe what was happening. In the past, women always expected her to make the first move and that was the way she usually preferred it. She never expected Erin to be the aggressor, but what she was doing felt too damn good to protest. Deciding she had been passive long enough and wanting to feel Erin's body under her hands, Kris's hand slid down and pulled Erin's tank top from her shorts as they continued to kiss passionately. Her hand slid

up under her shirt and expertly released the clasp of Erin's bra.

Kris paused when Erin pulled back and broke the kiss. She looked deeply into Erin's eyes looking for any sign that she wanted her to stop. Not seeing any, Kris let her hand slide off her back and around to the front. Erin blushed lightly but didn't protest. They maintained eye contact as Kris's hand continued its journey upward.

Erin's head snapped back and she moaned when Kris's hand closed on her bare breast. She thought she was going to come on the spot. It was like her breast was directly linked to a spot between her legs. Every squeeze of Kris's hand on her breast caused an answering twitch below. Unthinkingly, her hand still under Kris's shirt, tightened on Kris's breast, making her gasp.

Kris couldn't think clearly with Erin's hand squeezing her breast. She gently removed Erin's hand from under her shirt, kissing her to quiet her whimper of protest. She shifted Erin off her lap and onto the couch. Kris carefully lowered her onto her back and slipped both hands under Erin's top. Erin's back arched and she cried out when Kris began to knead her breasts and roll the nipples expertly between her fingers.

"I want to see you... please," Kris said reaching for the bottom of Erin's shirt.

Erin sat up and stripped off her shirt and bra without hesitation before lying back down. She expected to be nervous or at least shy at allowing Kris to see her for the first time. Strangely, what she felt, besides roaring arousal, was the rightness of the moment.

Kris's arousal soared higher at the sight before her. Erin was absolutely gorgeous. Her full breasts lay slightly on her chest from their weight. The light brown nipples were tight

buds that just begged to be touched. She was slim with not an ounce of excess fat on her body.

Kris reached out to touch Erin's breasts but stopped and met her eyes, silently seeking permission to proceed. Again, Erin surprised her by reaching out for one of Kris's hands and placing it on her breast.

"You are so beautiful," Kris murmured as she stroked Erin's breasts reverently.

Erin's eyes fluttered shut and her back arched, trying to press more of herself into Kris's hands. This was the most incredible thing she had ever experienced. Her thighs clenched when she felt Kris placing open mouth kisses on her breasts. She reached for Kris, drawing her closer to slip her hands under her shirt. She ran her hands up and down Kris's muscled back as Kris continued to kiss and caress her chest, driving her totally crazy.

Kris was in heaven as she explored every inch of Erin's upper body with her hands and lips. She had avoided Erin's nipples up to this point but finally couldn't resist the temptation. She laved one of the tight buds with her tongue before sucking the whole thing into her mouth.

Erin's hands came up and buried themselves in Kris's hair, holding her to her chest. Scott had never paid this much concentrated attention to her breasts. The feel of Kris's mouth tugging on her nipple and her fingers rolling her other nipple was about to send her over the edge. She couldn't believe what was happening. She rarely had climaxes when she had sex with Scott.

"Mommy!"

Erin tried to force her eyes open, fighting against her whirling senses. *What?*

"Mommy!" She distinctly heard it this time.

Kris pulled back looking confused; she'd obviously heard something too.

"Mommy!"

Erin groaned. It was Christopher. She couldn't believe she had forgotten all about the kids. She grabbed her shirt and jerked it on. She scrubbed her hands over her face, trying to focus, her arousal making it difficult. With a quick apologetic glance at Kris, she headed for the bottom of the stairs.

"What is it, honey?" she called to her son.

"I'm thirsty. Can I have a drink of water?"

"Sure, go back to bed and I'll bring it up." She glanced back over toward Kris who was sitting on the couch, watching. "I'm sorry," she said before heading into the kitchen, then upstairs to take care of her son.

* * *

By the time Erin returned, her arousal had cooled to a low ache and she felt more in control of herself again. She realized how out of control things had gotten. Her passionate response to Kris scared her. If Christopher hadn't interrupted, she knew they would have made love on the couch. She wasn't ready to take that step in their relationship.

Kris had spent the time trying to regain control of herself. She was amazed at what had happened. She knew it was too soon for them to sleep together but she just had not been able to stop herself. None of her previous lovers had ever made her lose control like that before, not even Angela. She had forgotten not only where she was but also the fact that Erin's children were right upstairs. Thank God, Christopher had called from upstairs and not walked down. She didn't want to even think about him finding her suckling his mother's nipples. She dropped her head into her hands

and feeling sick at the very thought. Kris jumped when she felt a hand on her shoulder. She had not heard Erin return. She hoped she wasn't too angry.

Kris was extremely contrite. "I'm so sorry, Erin, that was totally inappropriate. I promise it won't happen again."

Erin sat down next to Kris. "It's okay, relax. It wasn't your fault. I started it."

"But I should have..."

Erin reached out and placed her fingers on Kris's lips, stopping her. "It's fine... we just have to be more careful next time. Just because the kids are asleep doesn't mean they're going to stay that way."

Kris smiled happily at the knowledge that she hadn't angered Erin or scared her away. Not only that but she was talking about next time, which Kris took to mean she enjoyed what they had done.

She leaned over and kissed Erin softly in what was meant to be a gentle kiss of gratitude. Before either one of them realized it, the kiss flamed out of control and Kris pressed Erin back against the couch. Fighting to control herself, Kris pulled away and stood up, backing away from Erin. She was breathing heavily and it was taking every bit of her self-control not to push Erin down on the couch and finish what they started earlier. All her good intentions had flown with one sweep of Erin's tongue into her mouth.

Erin was fighting a similar battle with her own raging libido. It wasn't something she was used to dealing with. The rapid return of the throbbing pulse between her legs shocked her. She just wasn't this easily aroused. She struggled to control the almost overwhelming need to feel Kris's hands on her and the impulse to touch every inch of Kris.

"Maybe I should go..." Kris said hoarsely, still struggling for control. She reminded herself that it was too soon for her to make love with Erin, regardless of the fact that it was what they both wanted... desperately, if the look on Erin's face was any indication. And she was sure she had a similar look on her face.

"Mommy!" called a voice from upstairs again. Erin couldn't believe it, this couldn't be happening. The kids rarely got up at night and now Jenna was up. Maybe somebody was trying to tell them something.

"I'm sorry, Kris. This is unusual for them."

"Mommy!"

"I'll be right there, Jenna, go back to bed," Erin called to the little girl.

"It's okay. I'll let myself out. Go take care of Jenna. I'll call you tomorrow," Kris said and after a quick kiss, she was gone.

Erin headed up the stairs to take care of her daughter.

* * *

Erin stared at the wall of her bedroom in frustration. She finally got both children settled and down for the night. After trying unsuccessfully to read for awhile, she had finally given up and gone to bed. Every time she closed her eyes her mind insisted on playing out the scene earlier on the couch. Her body was thrumming with arousal. She didn't understand what was happening never having experienced the kind of arousal Kris inspired. *This is ridiculous. How can I be so worked up just thinking about what happened?*

She closed her eyes again, determined to get some sleep. As soon as she started to relax, the images reappeared. She saw herself on the couch as Kris leaned over to take one of her nipples into her mouth. Erin groaned, rolling onto her back. She rarely pleased herself; she

never felt a strong need to do so. Tonight was different. Instead of fighting the images, she let her mind free and soon became lost in the fantasy.

In her mind, they weren't interrupted. Erin moaned, her legs spread open and her hand slipped down between her legs as Kris removed her shorts and panties. The hand stroking in the soaking wetness between her thighs became Kris's hand. The one tugging on her nipple became Kris's mouth suckling her. Totally lost in the fantasy now, her legs slammed shut and her body jerked repeatedly as a powerful orgasm swept through her. It was several long minutes before Erin came back to her senses. She was still shaking slightly and her legs felt like jelly. *Oh my God*. Never in her life had she experienced an orgasm so overwhelming. Whether pleasuring herself or having sex with Scott, at most she'd felt some fluttering of her internal muscles and a bit of tingling of her thighs. Nothing had prepared her for the intensity of what she just experienced.

Erin shivered at the thought of what it would be like to really be with Kris. Pulling a pillow from the other side of the bed and wrapping her arms around it, she wished it was Kris. Her body sated and limp, she slipped into a contented sleep.

CHAPTER 13

ERIN SMILED brightly and her heart picked up speed as she stepped back to let Kris into the house. She had invited her over for a Friday evening dinner with her and the children. It was the first time they had seen each other since the previous Saturday, though they had spoken on the phone every day. Just the thought of what had occurred on that last date was enough to bring an immediate flush to Erin's cheeks.

"I'm so glad you could make it," Erin said, wrapping her arms around Kris in a warm hug. She was unprepared for the surge of arousal the innocent contact caused. Stiffening, she quickly pulled away from Kris, fighting the temptation to kiss her senseless. She reminded herself that her children were in the other room.

"Thanks for inviting me. I stopped and picked up a movie." Kris held up the box for Erin's approval. "I hope this is okay?"

Erin's smile was a bit strained and she wouldn't meet Kris's eyes. She struggled to get control of her libido. "Sure, it's fine."

Kris was a bit puzzled by Erin's behavior. Christopher and Jenna rushed into the room calling to Kris excitedly. She pushed away her concerns and knelt to accept the children's hugs.

* * *

Kris slid Christopher off her lap and onto the couch next to his sister, telling the kids she would be right back.

She was determined to find out what was going on. Erin had been acting strangely all evening.

It started as soon as Erin met her at the door. All during dinner, she was a bit distant and unwilling to meet Kris's eyes. After double checking to make sure the kids were engrossed in the movie, Kris headed for the kitchen where Erin had gone to replenish their drinks.

Erin gripped the counter, struggling to control her whirling emotions. She had been aroused from the second Kris walked in the door. Uncomfortable with the feeling of being so out of control, she kept a polite distance from Kris all evening. To make matters worse, since their encounter on the couch, she had pleased herself every night for the last week. She fantasized it was Kris touching her and had climaxed explosively each time. Now, with the object of her erotic fantasies in the same room, Erin felt like she was about to spontaneously combust. A warm flush crept up her body and her heart rate accelerated as her mind wandered.

"Erin." Kris looked at Erin worriedly when she jumped, before turning around to face her. Erin's face was flushed and she was breathing a bit heavily. "Are you alright?"

Kris's concern increased when Erin looked down and seemed unwilling to meet her eyes. Kris stepped over directly in front of Erin. She'd had enough. "What's going on, Erin?" When she didn't get a response, she reached out and placed her fingers under Erin's chin and tilted her head up, forcing her to make eye contact. She studied Erin's face, noting her flushed cheeks and dilated pupils. Her eyes tracked downward taking in Erin's rapid breathing and the fact that her nipples were hard and straining against her thin cotton shirt.

A smirk formed on Kris's face when she realized the significance of what she was seeing. Leaning down, she pressed her lips to Erin's, her tongue immediately slipping out to plunge into Erin's mouth.

When Erin moaned and surged forward, Kris pressed her back against the counter and parted her thighs with her knee. She pressed her leg between Erin's thighs, pushing hard into her center. Her hands slid up to cup Erin's breasts. Kris felt Erin gasp and her hips jerk. When two hands came down and grasped her ass, pulling her closer, Kris began to thrust against Erin as she continued to knead her breasts. Their tongues wrapped around each other in Erin's mouth.

Childish laughter from the other room caused them to jump apart and break the torrid kiss.

"Damn!" Kris muttered, panting heavily as she tried to regain control of herself. She forced her hands off Erin's breasts and placed them on either side of the counter behind Erin, gripping it tightly. She had done it again, losing all self control when she touched Erin.

Erin clung to Kris. She was the only thing keeping her from hitting the floor. Her knees were shaking and her heart felt like it was trying to leap out of her chest.

"God... Kris... do you have any idea what you do to me?" Erin whimpered. She put her head on Kris's shoulder and buried her face in her neck, still trying to catch her breath. She could still feel herself throbbing insistently against Kris's leg.

"Same thing you do to me I hope... You make me crazy!" Kris whispered huskily into Erin's ear, her hot breath making her shiver.

Erin looked up at Kris and laughed shakily. "Crazy doesn't even begin to cover it," she said. "Wild would be more like it."

"I like wild..." Kris leaned down to place open mouth kisses on Erin's neck.

Erin moaned loudly as she pressed herself hard into Kris's body. "God... we have to stop. The kids are in the next room."

Kris reluctantly stepped back, putting a little space between them. She could not think when she touched Erin. "Tell me what's been going on tonight. Why wouldn't you even look at me? You seemed so uncomfortable earlier."

A bright blush colored Erin's face but she forced herself to meet Kris's eyes. "I um... I well... I..."

"Erin, if this is going to work, we have to be honest with each other."

Erin took a deep breath knowing she owed Kris an explanation. "I just didn't know what to do. I've never had this happen before."

Kris looked at Erin curiously. She didn't understand. "What do you mean? Never had what happen?"

The blush that had just started to fade returned with a vengeance. "When you came over, as soon as I saw you I was... I was... aroused," Erin finally managed to get out. "I was afraid if I touched you, I would lose control, and as you just saw, I did." She looked at Kris helplessly. "It scared me to feel so out of control. I've never felt like this before... wanting someone so much. I just don't know how to handle it," she said. "And it's not exactly something I want my kids to see."

Thrilled on the one hand that she had such an effect on Erin, but on the other, Kris felt bad that she too had lost control of the situation. "I'm sorry, Erin. I didn't help by coming in here and kissing you. I was worried that you were having second thoughts, but when I realized you were aroused, I just couldn't help myself. I know it's not appropriate in front of your kids and I should've had better control of myself. I want you too. Badly."

Erin stepped back into Kris's arms and wrapped her arms around her waist. "Like I told you last time, you have no reason to apologize. You didn't do a single thing that I didn't want you to. I was a very willing participant. I guess we both just need to have better control."

She unconsciously stroked her hands up and down Kris's back as she spoke. "At least, while the kids are awake," she added with a light laugh. "Truthfully, this has never been a problem for me before. I've never reacted to anyone the way I do to you. Hopefully, once we've slept together, it won't be quite so acute and I can stand to be in the same room with you without wanting you so much I feel like I'm losing my mind."

Kris blinked, then a huge grin spread across her face. Erin had stated as a fact that they were going to sleep together. She knew Erin desired her but to hear it out loud made her feel wonderful.

Erin blushed again when she realized what she had just said. She mock scowled at Kris, and then grinned. "Oh please, like you haven't thought of us sleeping together."

"You bet." Kris's mouth quirked up in a sexy little smile. "But Erin, when it happens, I promise you, it will involve very little sleeping."

Erin felt a strong flash of arousal at Kris's words and shivered slightly. "You're dangerous... you know that."

Kris just laughed. Jenna calling to them from the living room ended the moment.

Kris happily headed back to the children, glad to know that nothing was wrong. *At least not anything there isn't a very pleasurable cure for.*

* * *

Erin sat in the rocking chair in the twin's bedroom. Kris was seated on the floor between the kids' beds, singing them

an Irish lullaby from her childhood. She had explained to the twins that it was her favorite song when she was their age. Kris's mellow alto voice sent a tremor down Erin's spine.

After watching the rest of the movie, Kris had helped her give Christopher and Jenna a bath and readied them for bed. Erin could not remember the last time she had laughed so much in a single evening. Kris had kept the kids and her in stitches by creating foam animals out of their bath soap.

She had expected Christopher, at least, to be shy when it came to bath time. After all, this was only the second time he had seen Kris. He tended to be extremely shy with people, but surprisingly he never hesitated. He had quickly stripped and jumped into the tub with Jenna. She had never seen him take to anyone like he did Kris. He participated in the conversation around the dinner table more than he ever had before when they had company. After dinner, he sat in Kris's lap throughout the movie. It was quite clear that he was very taken with Kris and watching them together, it was obvious the feeling was very mutual. Jenna, on the other hand, easily took to people and Kris was no exception, the two got along great.

Erin was drawn out of her thoughts when she realized Kris had stopped singing. She glanced over and saw that both children were sound asleep. She walked over to Kris and offered her a hand up from the floor.

"You do good work," she whispered.

Kris smirked and leaned down close to Erin. "You have no idea!"

Erin flushed as her mind immediately landed in the gutter. She looked up at Kris with a mock scowl. "Behave!"

Kris bit her lip to keep from laughing. She watched Erin lean down and tuck in each child before placing a soft kiss on each forehead. Kris looked into their sweet sleeping

faces and felt her chest tighten. She had already fallen for Erin and now, she realized she was falling hard for her kids as well. She knew she was in trouble from her first date with Erin, now she realized she was in double trouble, but what pleasant trouble it was.

Erin turned and took Kris by the hand, leading her out of the room. They went downstairs to the living room and sat down together on the couch. She sighed when Kris wrapped her arm around her shoulders and pulled her close to her side. Erin rested her head on Kris's shoulder, totally content. She was so used to trying to divide her time evenly between the twins that it had been wonderful tonight when Kris helped out. And the kids obviously loved it too.

Erin looked up to find Kris staring at her. She raised up just as Kris leaned down and their lips met in a warm kiss. Erin felt her ardor rising and pressed for entrance into Kris's mouth. Kris groaned, opening for her and Erin quickly accepted, sweeping her tongue into Kris's mouth.

Erin wasn't even sure how it happened but when the kiss ended she found herself straddling Kris's lap, her hips pressing urgently against Kris's tight abdomen. She buried her face in Kris's neck with a moan.

Kris knew she couldn't take much more. She gently eased Erin off her lap and set her back down on the couch. She shifted over slightly, leaving a bit of space between them, and then gently cupped Erin's cheek.

"I should probably go," Kris said though that was the last thing she wanted to do.

Erin pressed her face into Kris's hand and met her eyes, losing herself in their vibrant blue depths. She placed her hand over Kris's, not wanting her to go but knowing she couldn't stay.

"I don't want you to, but I know you have to," Erin said. Trying to take their minds off what was foremost in both

their thoughts, she quickly changed the subject. "Are you sure Jerry doesn't mind about tomorrow?" she asked. Erin did not want Jerry to feel like she was monopolizing all of Kris's time. Kris had told her a lot about him and how much he meant to her.

Kris had invited Erin to attend a Padres game with her and Jerry. They usually tried to attend several Saturday home games during the season.

"No, of course not," Kris said. "I want you to get to know Jerry, and he wants to get to know you, though, you may change your mind after being around him for a while. He can be such a drama queen," she added with a laugh.

"I look forward to it." Erin smiled.

"Great, I'll pick you up at six. Sound okay?" Kris asked as she stood to take her leave.

"Um hum... that would be good," Erin murmured, stepping into Kris's arms and pressing against her.

"God... Erin... you have to stop." Kris groaned as her libido, never far from the surface all night, sprang back to life.

Erin forced herself away from Kris, blushing at her wanton behavior. She just could not seem to keep her hands off Kris.

"I'm sorry... I..."

"No, it's okay. I just... God... I want you so much." Kris shoved her hands into her pockets to keep from pulling Erin back into her arms. "I have to go!"

Neither could resist one last lingering kiss at the door before Kris forced herself out into the cool night air and into her truck.

CHAPTER 14

ERIN'S ATTENTION was pulled from the standoff by a knock on the back door. She glanced over and motioned for Alice to come in.

Alice made her way over to Erin and the twins. Erin stood facing Christopher and Jenna whose stances matched hers, arms crossed over their chests. Erin nodded in acknowledgment of her arrival but the twins never moved or reacted to her presence in anyway, they just continued to stare at their mother. Alice was surprised. Normally, Christopher and Jenna greeted her enthusiastically with hugs and kisses. Whatever was going on must be serious. She had come over to pick up the kids as they were spending the night with her and Robert.

"What's going on, Erin?"

Erin sighed and turned to face Alice. "These two have decided they don't want to spend the night with you and Poppa," Erin said with an aggravated expression.

Alice knelt down in front of the kids with her back to Erin. "How come?"

The twins glanced at each other then Jenna spoke. "We want to go with Mommy and Kris!"

Erin scowled. "I already explained –"

Alice held up her hand to stop and Erin subsided. Alice held out her hands to the kids. "Come with me," she said, "and you," she pointed at Erin, "stay here." For a moment she thought the kids would refuse, then they took her hands

and she led them into the living room leaving a frustrated Erin in the kitchen.

* * *

Erin watched Alice lead the kids away. She was at her wit's end with them. They had been excited this morning when she told them that Nan would be coming to pick them up and that they were going to be spending the night with her and Poppa. The kids always looked forward to spending time with their grandparents. That had lasted until she mentioned that she was going out with Kris. The kids had immediately started begging to go with her instead. She had tried to explain that they were going to a baseball game and that it was her adult time with Kris. They had pleaded with her to let them come along too. She had reminded them that they would be spending the day with Kris tomorrow when they all went to the park. They were excited at the prospect but still whined at the missed opportunity this evening. Erin had finally told them firmly that they could not come with the adults, but had reached an impasse when Alice arrived.

Erin snuck over and peeked into the living room. Alice was sitting on the couch with Christopher and Jenna in her lap. They were engaged in a serious conversation from the look of things. She smiled when both children placed a sweet kiss on Alice's cheek. She quickly ducked back into the kitchen when she saw them start to get up.

* * *

Erin was surprised when Alice came back into the kitchen alone.

"So, what time did you want me to bring them back tomorrow?" Alice asked.

Erin's jaw dropped in surprise and her eyes narrowed suspiciously. "What did you promise them?"

Alice tried to look innocent but failed horribly. "That we'd take them to a movie, then out for pizza."

"Alice! You shouldn't bribe them. They have to understand they can't always have their way."

"Nan's privilege, and besides..." Alice looked toward the door to make sure the twins had not returned. "That's what we were going to do anyway," Alice said with a sheepish smile.

Erin shook her head and sighed. "I just don't know what's gotten into them. I've gone out on dates before and they've never acted like this."

Alice had listened to the children go on and on about Kris and all the fun they had with her. The best she could figure was that they had only met Kris twice but she had obviously managed to make a lasting impression.

Alice still remembered the one woman Erin dated that she had met. Cathy was a medical transcriptionist like Erin. At first, she acted like she liked the kids and wanted to do things with them and Erin. That had quickly changed once she got close to Erin and then, she made it quite clear how much she resented the kids infringing on their time.

Erin had quickly ended the relationship but it had been hard on the kids. They didn't understand why someone would like them, and then stop liking them. Though, she admitted to herself, that she had never taken a liking to Cathy. Right from the beginning, something had just struck her as being false about the woman. For Erin's sake, she had kept quiet and hoped she was wrong.

Hopefully, Kris was genuinely interested in Erin and her children. After hearing Christopher rave about Kris, she wanted to meet this woman. He had been polite but never warmed up to Cathy. That certainly did not seem to be the case with Kris. Alice had been very surprised when

Christopher told her of Kris helping with their bath and singing to them.

"Well, after listening to Christopher and Jenna, this Kris must be something special."

Alice smiled to herself when Erin blushed at the mention of Kris. It was obvious Christopher and Jenna weren't the only ones who thought she was pretty special.

"I definitely want to meet this woman," Alice said.

Erin was nervous but realized she could not put off introducing Kris to her in-laws for much longer. If things went the way she hoped, Kris would be a big part of their lives in the foreseeable future.

"Maybe I could invite her to Sunday morning breakfast sometime," Erin said. About once a month, Alice and Robert had them over on Sunday morning and Alice would make chocolate chip pancakes with the twins. The kids loved getting to help in the kitchen and it would be a great way to introduce Kris to Alice and Robert. "Though, I thought maybe we could have breakfast here," she said, figuring it might be easier on Kris if they met here instead of Alice and Robert's place.

"Good. We'll do it tomorrow morning. Jenna mentioned Kris was coming over and you were all going kite flying. Ask her to come earlier," Alice said, considering the matter settled.

Erin started to panic. She didn't quite mean that soon. "I... um... don't know if she has other plans."

Alice grinned, easily reading Erin's anxiety. "I'm sure it won't be a problem. I could stay 'til she gets here and ask her myself." It was all Alice could do to keep from laughing at the look on Erin's face.

Erin sighed, bowing to the inevitable. "No, that's okay. I'll ask her."

The twin's arrival halted any further conversation.

Christopher approached his mother and held out a piece of paper. It was a picture of four stick figures holding hands. There were two small figures in the center, one with blond hair and the other dark haired. The two taller figures each had different color hair as well, the blond holding the blond child's hand and the brunette holding the dark haired child's hand. "Thank you," she said, smiling softly down at him.

"It's not for you, Mommy. It's for Kris," Christopher said.

Erin blinked in surprise realizing the blond adult in the picture wasn't Scott, as she had assumed, but Kris. "I promise I'll give it to her as soon as she gets here. Okay?"

Christopher reached up and Erin scooped him up in her arms. He wrapped his arms around her neck in a tight hug. "Love you, Mommy."

"I love you too, Son," she whispered in return as she set him back down.

Jenna had a picture as well, which she offered to her mother. In Jenna's picture, there were the same four figures but in this one they were all holding onto a string that was attached to a large kite.

"Is this for Kris too?" she asked. Jenna nodded, then took her brother's place in Erin's arms for a goodbye hug and kiss.

"We'll be back tomorrow morning at nine for breakfast. Make sure Kris is here," Alice said. She shut the door before Erin could reply.

After the twins left with Alice, Erin's gaze went back to the two drawings on the counter. Obviously, she was not the only one who had fallen for Kris. Shaking her head, she made her way upstairs and got ready for her date.

CHAPTER 15

KRIS GLANCED UP from the pool table when she heard Erin's distinctive laugh. Erin was standing off to the side with Jerry. They had quickly bonded during the game and he convinced them to come to Drake's for a drink and to shoot pool after the baseball game. Watching the two of them, you would think they had been friends for years. Jerry had his arm draped lightly around Erin's shoulders, shielding her from the crowd. Her head was thrown back, laughing at something he had said. They looked good together, Erin with her dark good looks and Jerry with his tanned, blond, Hollywood pretty boy appearance. If Kris didn't know for a fact the Jerry was as gay as the day was long, she might have been jealous.

Distracted by watching Erin, she missed the shot. "Your shot," Kris said, holding out the cue to Jerry, snickering when he got a look at the table.

The only stripe left on the table was trapped between one of Kris's solids and the eight ball which rested just on the edge of the pocket. Jerry scowled at the table. He had won the first game but knew there was no way out of this one. "Best two out of three?" he asked, eyeing the two twenty dollar bills laying on the edge of the table.

Kris laughed. Jerry hated to lose at pool. She stepped over to her date. "Do you mind staying for one more game? We can head out if you want."

"Nope... don't mind at all," Erin said, her warm brown eyes sparkling. "You guys go right ahead and play." She had been enjoying the stories Jerry was telling about Kris, as well as the teasing banter that had been going on between

the two friends. Of course, there was the added pleasure of watching Kris as she leaned over the pool table to make the shots. She was having a great time and didn't want it to end any time soon.

Jerry took the shot and watched as the solid was knocked out of the way. "Yes!" he hollered, then cursed when the cue ball struck the eight ball a glancing blow, sending it into the pocket and ending the game. He racked the balls for a new game and gave the cue to Kris.

Kris took the cue and went over to Erin. "Come on. I'll show you what to do," she said, taking Erin by the hand and leading her over to the table. She had invited her to play earlier but Erin had admitted that she had never played pool before and declined, stating she was happy to merely watch.

"No, that's okay. I'll just watch. I don't want you to lose your money," Erin said.

"I won't. Come on... please. It'll be fun."

"Yeah, Erin, go ahead, I can use all the help I can get," Jerry said.

Erin laughed and stuck her tongue out at Jerry.

Kris leaned down, close to Erin's ear. "Don't waste that on him." Kris grinned when she felt Erin shiver. She dodged Erin's playful attempt to elbow her in the ribs.

Kris handed Erin the cue. She pressed into Erin's back as she helped her into the correct position.

"Hmm... that's it... rest it in the V... that's right... now, let it slide freely... just like that... see how smooth it slides... how nice it feels..." Kris instructed in a sexy purr.

Erin's thighs clenched and she felt herself growing damp. How to play pool was the absolute last thing Kris's words inspired. She could feel Kris's breasts against her back and her pelvis pressing into her butt. Kris's arm was

brushing against the side of her breast with every move of the pool cue. Erin struggled against the urge to push her ass back into Kris.

Kris had felt Erin's breath hitch and her muscles tighten when she leaned over her. She had only meant to tease her with her instructions but it had backfired. Kris was aching and it was only through force of will that she refrained from thrusting herself against the tight backside in front of her.

It was a clean break and Kris set about clearing the table with Erin's help. She was growing more and more distracted by the feel of Erin's body moving against hers. Kris was almost relieved when they missed a shot and turned the table over to Jerry. She looked down at Erin and saw the matching arousal in her eyes.

It was quickly their turn again when Jerry scratched after sinking only three balls. Kris took up her spot behind Erin and got into position. There were only two more stripes on the table; both were easy shots, then the eight ball. Jerry still had four solids to go.

"Ready?" she asked Erin, her voice low and husky with arousal.

Erin whimpered and nodded, her head swimming. She could feel the soaking wetness between her thighs.

With her hands lying over Erin's, Kris set them up to take the shot. Shifting slightly, she growled low and deep when Erin pressed back against her. She couldn't stop herself and her hips thrust twice against Erin.

Jerry snickered. "Hey, Kris. This is pool, not foreplay!"

Kris growled under her breath and muttered, "Bite me," as she struggled for control. She drew back the cue to take the shot...

"That could be arranged," was whispered erotically in her ear.

The cue jerked as Kris's breath left her chest in a whoosh. The cue ball spun off down the table, completely missing the shot. It smacked the eight ball dead on and shot it into the nearest pocket.

Jerry whooped, jumping up and down. Kris scowled good-naturedly when he danced over and picked up the money off the table. She was much more interested in the feel of Erin's body still pressed close to hers. She glanced down at Erin and saw her worried look. She stood up releasing her.

"Don't worry about it. It was worth it. Believe me," she said, leering at her and waggling her eyebrows.

Erin laughed, reassured and hugged Kris. She glared at Jerry when he came over grinning widely and placed a quick kiss on her cheek.

"You can come play pool with us anytime, girlfriend," Jerry said. It was a rare day when he beat Kris at pool. Though, he did admit, tonight wasn't quite a fair contest.

Jerry cringed in mock terror when Erin vowed her revenge.

CHAPTER 16

KRIS PULLED INTO Erin's driveway but kept the truck engine running. "I had a great time tonight."

"Me too," Erin said though her thoughts were drifting as to how she hoped to spend the rest of their evening. Her libido was still screaming after spending so much time pressed against Kris as they played pool. "Come inside," she invited warmly.

Kris looked at Erin, then over at the darkened house. Erin had told her earlier that Jenna and Christopher were spending the night with their grandparents. "I um... I should get going," she stammered. She knew what would happen if they went inside. Although she wanted Erin desperately, now that the moment was here, she was scared to take that next step in their relationship. Once they crossed that line and made love, there was no going back. She tried hard to ignore the snickering voice in her head telling her it was already too late.

Erin lifted herself up and sat on the console between the seats. Reaching out to turn Kris's face toward her, she cupped her face in her hands. She leaned down and gently kissed Kris's lips, deepening the kiss when she started to respond. Pulling away slightly, she kissed along Kris's cheek making her way over to her ear. "Come inside... please," she whispered huskily, running her tongue along the delicate tissue before nipping at her earlobe.

Kris grasped the steering wheel tightly, groaning as flames shot through her body as Erin placed open mouth kisses along her neck, working her way down to Kris's pulse point. Biting down lightly, she pulled the rapidly pulsing

skin into her mouth. Adding her hand to the passionate assault, she cupped Kris's breast and kneaded it gently. Kris clenched her thighs together when she felt the first warning twitches of impending orgasm. Her head was thrown back as she gasped for air.

"Oh... God... wait... stop..." She panted breathlessly. "I'm going to come if you don't stop."

Erin reluctantly stopped and looked into Kris's passion glazed eyes, seeing her struggle for control. She turned off the engine and took Kris's hand. "Come inside with me," she said.

Kris nodded in surrender. Legs shaking from arousal, heart beating rapidly in her chest, she followed Erin into the house.

Erin locked the door and turned on a table lamp to light their way. She took Kris by the hand and led her upstairs and into her bedroom. They stopped next to the queen size bed.

Erin had expected to be nervous when the moment finally came to give herself completely to Kris. Surprised not only by her lack of fear but also her total comfort with what was about to happen, Erin looked into Kris's eyes and saw the matching desire. There was also an unmistakable hint of fear. She cupped Kris's face in her palm, lightly stroking her cheek with her thumbs.

"It'll be okay; I promise. I love you, Kris," Erin professed tenderly.

She was amazed at how easily those words slipped out, finally understanding what they truly meant. She had never felt for anyone what she did for Kris. There was this feeling of an incredible bond between them, as if they had known each other for years instead of the mere weeks they had been dating.

Kris's heart clenched and she felt something let go deep inside her at those three little words. She had already admitted to herself that she loved Erin, even though she had never said the words out loud to her. Something had been holding her back, keeping her from letting go totally with Erin. Now, she realized that this was what she had been waiting for. She pulled Erin into her arms and hugged her tightly.

"I love you too," Kris said her voice choked with emotion. She pulled back needing to see Erin's face.

Her heart soared at Erin's love-filled gaze. She took Erin's lips in a searing kiss of passion and joy. All her fear gone, her arousal soared anew. Her hands slid down Erin's back to cup her ass and pull her tighter into her body. One of them groaned. It didn't matter which one. They were lost in the burning sensation pulsing through their bodies. Kris began to pull Erin's shirt from her pants impatiently, slipping her hand underneath to stroke warm flesh. She pressed her free hand down between them and cupped Erin through her jeans.

Erin moaned loudly, her hips jerking as she tried to press herself harder into Kris's hand. She felt her knees threatening to give way. "I... have to lie down... I'm going to fall."

Kris turned Erin toward the bed intent on pressing her into it. She froze, struck suddenly by the realization that this was the bed Erin had shared with Scott. All her insecurities came rushing back.

Erin looked at Kris questioningly when she felt her stiffen. Her arousal was so acute she was having a hard time thinking. "What's wrong?" she whispered hoarsely, her throat dry from panting. When Kris didn't respond, she followed her gaze to the bed. It quickly dawned on her what the problem was. She pulled away from Kris and grasped her hand.

"Follow me."

She led Kris out of the room and back downstairs to a short hallway off the kitchen. Erin opened a door that led into a room that held a queen size bed and a desk with a computer on it. Large sliding glass doors took up one wall of the room and looked out into the backyard.

"This was my bedroom while I was pregnant and 'til Scott moved out. No one has ever slept in this bed except me," Erin said.

Kris felt bad about her reaction upstairs. "I'm sorry. I just —"

Erin placed her fingers on Kris's lips. "Shh... I understand," she said before leaning up to kiss her.

Kris groaned. Her earlier arousal returned with a vengeance when Erin's tongue pressed into her mouth. Pulling Erin close, she took control of the kiss, her hands sliding quickly back under Erin's shirt. "You have way too many clothes on," she said huskily when the kiss broke. Reaching out, she pulled Erin's shirt over her head before unfastening her bra and slowly sliding it down her arms. Her hands went to Erin's jeans and began to unzip them.

Erin was perfectly content to let Kris undress her and stood with her hands on Kris's shoulders. She couldn't hold back a gasp when Kris's warm hands slid into her underwear and took them down along with her jeans. She kicked off her shoes and stepped out of her jeans and panties, standing surprisingly unselfconscious in all her glory in front of Kris.

Kris felt her mouth go dry and her ardor burn brighter at the incredible sight before her. Her eyes perused Erin's body, from her full lush breasts down over her flat stomach and trim hips, to the dark patch of hair nestled between her thighs hiding her womanhood. She was absolutely perfect and Kris's hands trembled at the thought of touching her.

Erin felt her body grow flush at the look of desire on Kris's face. It was as if nothing else in the world existed but the two of them in this moment. That was a daunting thought. No one had ever looked at her like that before. She felt a momentary surge of doubt. Would Kris be pleased with her as a lover?

Kris drew Erin into her arms and felt her shiver and press closer. Taking her cue from Erin, Kris led her over to the bed and urged her down onto it. Stretching out next to her, she began to stroke her body with her fingertips, mapping all the dips and curves, cataloging each little gasp and groan. Slipping her arm under Erin's shoulders, she pulled her close in a lover's hold. Bringing her lips into play, she followed in the wake of her fingers, kissing, licking and sucking at the quivering flesh under her lips.

Erin began to thrash on the bed, barely capable of rational thought. Her fantasies were nothing compared to the real thing. She was becoming wild with arousal. Nothing, no experience, no fantasy could have prepared her for the reality of Kris making love to her. She could feel her juices flowing down between her legs and soaking the bed. She never dreamed she could be this aroused. When Kris latched onto a nipple and began to suck, her mind started to blank out as the pleasure began to peak. Desperately, she grasped Kris's hand and pushed it between her legs.

"Please..." she begged, "oh... please."

Kris had been fighting her own raging arousal as she explored Erin's body. She wanted to go slow, to make the experience last. Instead, she lost control when she felt the soaking heat between Erin's legs. Her fingers slid down and in, pressing deep. With each thrust, her palm pressed hard against the center of Erin's pleasure.

"No." She whimpered as she felt internal muscles clamp tight, locking her fingers in place. "Not yet..." Kris watched helplessly as Erin's body went taut and began to

jerk. Tightening her arm around her lover's back, she pulled her close when her body went limp, cuddling her and stroking her back soothingly as the aftershocks rippled through her body. When the tremors around her fingers finally stopped, she gently withdrew, causing a long groan from Erin.

She continued to hold her lover's spent body in her arms and tried to ignore the demanding pulse between her own legs. It was quite some time before Erin stirred.

Erin rubbed her face against Kris's shirt-covered chest. She looked up into Kris's face with a lazy sated smile. "Oh my Lord, I had no idea it could be like that! I'm still shaking."

Kris grinned. "It was okay?"

"Okay... are you serious? It was fantastic... I..." Erin's voice trailed off as something suddenly occurred to her. "Oh Kris, here I am babbling and –" Feeling selfish, she realized that not only was Kris still fully clothed, but that she must be painfully aroused. "I um... don't you want me to..." Erin began to stammer, her excitement rising at just the thought of touching Kris. "I mean... don't you need me to..." Erin was at a loss for words, not knowing quite how to say what she wanted to do. Her hands tugged on Kris's shirt hesitantly.

Kris felt unexpectedly uncertain when Erin began to stammer. Not wanting her to do anything she didn't want to, Kris sighed heavily. "No. It's okay... I'm fine."

"You don't want me to touch you?" Erin was surprised at the jolt of pain that possibility invoked.

Kris couldn't miss the emotion in Erin's voice. She pulled her back into her arms. "God, yes. Of course I do. I just didn't want you to think you had to... I... mean..." Kris stammered. Just the thought of Erin touching her had her almost whimpering with need.

Erin pulled away with a determined look. "Take off your clothes!" she said urgently, frantic to touch Kris.

Kris gulped but scurried off the bed to comply. Erin watched as Kris began to remove her clothes. She was surprised by the surge of pulsing arousal caused by watching her undress. Pressing her thighs together, she tried to ignore the returning pressure.

Kris paused, a grin appearing on her face when she realized the effect she was having on Erin. She began to exaggerate her movements in an impromptu striptease.

Erin moved to the side of the bed to get a better view. She knew her mouth must be hanging open but she couldn't help herself. Magnificent was the first word that came to mind as Kris completed disrobing. Her arms and chest were lightly muscled while her breasts were small and pert, and topped by light pink nipples. She had never seen a woman with such defined abdominal muscles. Her hands shook with the thought of running her hands along those tight muscles. Erin's eyes continued down to the narrow hips and the neatly trimmed patch of hair between Kris's legs. She had always wondered...

Seeing Erin's grin and noting where her eyes were locked, Kris laughed. "Yes, I'm a natural blond."

Erin groaned and rose up on her knees at Kris's approach. Kris stopped directly in front of her, their bodies only inches apart. She could feel the heat radiating from Kris's skin. Placing a hand behind Kris's neck, she brought their lips together in a scalding kiss, pressing her tongue deeply into Kris's mouth. Kris's body surged forward bringing them together. They both moaned into the kiss as their bare bodies made contact for the first time.

Erin broke the kiss and backed up, pulling Kris onto the bed. She urged her onto her back and slid on top of her while pressing their bodies tightly together. Erin continued

to kiss her passionately. Her hands stroked Kris's body, trying to touch her everywhere at once. Fighting her own pulsing arousal, she tore her lips away from Kris's and slid down, placing open mouth kisses over her chest and on her breasts before finally making her way to a tight nipple and laving it with her tongue before sucking it into her mouth.

Kris knew she wouldn't last much longer; she could already feel the first warning tingles. She spread her legs and pressed her hips hard into Erin's stomach trying to get the friction she needed.

Erin was lost in the sensations of touching Kris, realizing for the first time how exciting it could be to pleasure someone. She wanted to learn every inch of her skin. Her taste and her scent were intoxicating. She finally became aware of Kris's frenzied movements and her escalating moans. Unsure exactly what to do, Erin started to panic. She had started this but she didn't know how to finish it.

"Tell me what to do... what you need," she begged Kris.

Kris was almost beyond words, her hands clutching desperately at the blankets. She was panting for breath. "Touch me. It won't take much..."

Erin hesitated only for a moment, then slid off to the side before determinedly sliding her hand down Kris's abdomen and into her slick folds. She had never touched a woman so intimately before and was shocked when her own hips jerked at the sensation of her fingers slipping through the sopping wetness. Not entirely sure what to do, Erin stroked Kris as she herself liked to be stroked. Kris moaned loudly and her hips thrust urgently against Erin's hand. Encouraged by the reaction, Erin stroked more firmly in a rapid circular motion against Kris's clit.

"Yes..." Kris hissed, "right... there... ohhh." Her thighs slammed shut, trapping Erin's hand in place as her back arched off the bed.

Erin watched in awe as an orgasm pulsed through Kris's body. Kris slumped to the bed and Erin quickly drew her shaking body into her arms, holding her spent form in her arms even as the aftershocks rippled through her.

"I love you," Erin said as she held Kris close. She knew at that moment that her life had been forever changed.

* * *

Kris didn't know how much time had passed. She hadn't experienced an orgasm that powerful in a very long time, if ever. She lay in Erin's arms with her head resting on her lover's chest. Erin's hands were stroking up and down her back. She leaned over and kissed the tight, swollen nipple directly in front of her face, smiling at Erin's sharp intake of breath.

Lifting her head she met Erin's eyes. "Hi," she murmured with a languid smile, before leaning up for a kiss. Kris hummed with renewed arousal as the kiss escalated.

Erin was panting by the time the kiss broke. After the incredible orgasm she experienced earlier she could not believe that she was aroused again. Groaning, she pressed her hips into Kris.

Kris rolled onto her back and took Erin with her. She spread her legs and positioned Erin between them so that their centers were intimately aligned. "Lift up, babe," Kris said.

Erin moaned, her hips urgently pressing between Kris's. She lifted her upper body off Kris, gasping as the new position brought them even closer together, causing them to slide against each other in the gathering moisture.

"Just like that," Kris encouraged as she brought both hands up to cup Erin's breasts, lightly tweaking her nipples. Kris began to thrust up carefully into Erin.

Erin immediately got the hint and countered her thrusts, quickly establishing a rhythm. She groaned in protest when Kris stopped.

"What's wrong?"

"Lift your weight off me for a second," Kris instructed huskily. When Erin complied she slid her hand down between their bodies. She placed her hand palm up against her own mound and extended two fingers.

Kris could read the slight trepidation in Erin's eyes when she looked down between their bodies. Kris wiggled her fingers and grinned. "Come on, baby. It'll feel good. I promise."

Erin carefully lowered herself onto Kris's fingers. She gasped and her hips jerked as they easily slipped deep inside. Moving her hips tentatively, she groaned loudly at the sensation between her legs.

"God, Kris... that feels so good."

Kris moaned as each downward thrust of Erin's hips pressed the back of her own hand hard against her clit. The feeling of being inside Erin added to the exquisite pleasure.

Erin had never felt anything like this before; she had never been on top. It felt as if Kris was touching places deep inside her that had never been touched before. She felt herself losing control and her hips began to pump frantically.

"Kris... oh... oh. I can't... I'm going to..." Erin's body stiffened and her arms gave out as she ground herself into Kris.

Her frantic movements pushed Kris over the edge and she cried out Erin's name as she climaxed.

Erin lay sprawled on Kris as they struggled to regain their breath. Finally, she lifted up and Kris gently removed her fingers. Erin whimpered, immediately missed the contact. She cuddled against Kris's side, wrapping her arm across her chest. She leaned over and kissed Kris tenderly.

"You are amazing! I knew it would be different with a woman, but I never in a million years thought it could be that mind blowing," Erin said with an astonished look on her face.

Kris grinned, rolling onto her side to press the length of their bodies together. "You were pretty incredible yourself," she said, making Erin blush. Kris blinked in surprise when the rest of what Erin said sunk in. "But, you've been with a woman before... right?" Kris asked in confusion. Erin told her she had dated other women. She just assumed she had slept with one of them.

Erin felt a shot of fear wondering how Kris was going to take the coming confession.

"Erin?" Kris's apprehension grew when she felt Erin grow still.

Erin met Kris's eyes and saw the concern in them. "Well... um... I've never actually been with anyone except Scott before tonight."

"What!" Kris pulled away, looking at Erin in shock, cringing at the mention of Erin's ex-husband.

"Wait, Kris, let me explain."

Kris lay back. Erin curled back against her, pressing close.

"I told you the truth. I have dated other women but it never evolved beyond light petting and that was... well, all

above the waist through our clothes," Erin said with a vivid blush. "I didn't want it to go any further. I never," she locked eyes with Kris, willing her to see the truth in them, "never, in my life, wanted someone the way I want you. I feel things for you I didn't think were possible to feel for another human being. I love you with all my heart."

Kris felt tears prickle behind her eyes at Erin's heartfelt words. "I love you too!" Kris said, drawing her close. "But why didn't you tell me? I would have been gentler, made sure that it was..." Kris struggled for words.

"Oh Kris, it was unbelievable. I couldn't imagine a more perfect first time. I thought I would be nervous, but it just felt so right and you made me wild," she said with an endearing blush. "What made it even more extraordinary was that it was us, loving each other." Erin frowned looking at Kris worriedly. "Didn't you like it? I mean... I thought you... um... came..." she stammered, her throat tightening with emotion. "Did I do something wrong?"

Kris felt bad that she had upset Erin on a night that was supposed to be wonderful. She had just been shocked to find out Erin had never been with a woman or anyone else for that matter, besides Scott. Hoping to change the somber mood they had fallen into, she quirked an eyebrow at Erin. "God, no, Erin... you did everything perfectly. You're a natural. If you were any better, I'd be dead," Kris said. "Believe me, I can't remember when, if ever, I had an orgasm that incredible."

"Really?" Erin asked needing the reassurance.

"Absolutely," Kris said, before pressing Erin onto her back and kissing her passionately for long lazy minutes. She moved down to take an already hardening nipple in her mouth and sucked it gently.

Erin groaned. "I don't think I can again." She had never had two orgasms in one night, much less three. The renewed throbbing between her legs belied her words.

"Yes... you can." Kris pulled Erin beneath her, using her knee to press her legs gently open. She arranged herself between Erin's thighs, reaching down to spread Erin open before slipping into position. She growled when Erin moaned and began to rock against her. Lifting herself up for leverage, her hips picked up speed as her passion rose. The sensations rapidly spiraled out of control when Erin grabbed her ass and began to squeeze in rhythm to her thrusts.

"I can't hold it..." Kris whimpered. "I'm going to... Erin!"

Kris's climax triggered Erin's and she cried out, jerking against Kris. Her hips raised them both off the bed before she slumped back, still twitching from the aftershocks.

Kris rolled off Erin and onto her side, afraid she would crush the smaller woman. Her arms and legs were still shaking and she felt limp. She wrapped her arms around Erin and drew her against her body. She could feel the residual tremors rippling through Erin's body.

"I love you," she murmured into Erin's ear, smiling faintly at the sleepy, "I love you," in return.

CHAPTER 17

ERIN'S EYES fluttered open as she slowly drifted up from sleep. She smiled contentedly when she felt Kris's warm body spooned up against her back, her arm wrapped possessively across her chest, a hand cupping her breast. Her body flushed when memories of the previous night came flooding back.

Kris woke when Erin stirred in her arms. She lifted up enough to brush a soft kiss against Erin's temple.

"Good morning," Kris said in a sleep roughened voice.

Erin sighed at the gentle kiss. "Good morning to you too."

Stretching languidly, Erin wondered what time it was. The sun shining in her face had woken her. Glancing over at the clock on the nightstand, she gasped, then panicked. Erin pulled away from Kris and jumped out of bed.

"Oh my God! Oh my God..." she babbled as she madly gathered her clothes off the floor. She looked over at Kris, stunned to find her still in the bed. "Wehavetogetoutofhere," she cried before running into a bathroom Kris had not noticed the night before and slamming the door.

Kris sat frozen in shock. "What the hell just happened?" The water turned on in the bathroom. Kris tried to piece together the last thing Erin had said to her. When she did, she felt a sharp stab of pain. She couldn't believe it, "*you have to get out of here, you have to get out of here,*" reverberated in her head. No explanation, no goodbye kiss, nothing. All her insecurities came flooding back. Getting quickly out of the bed and gathering up her clothes, she

hurriedly dressed and let herself out the sliding glass door. Tears dripped down her face as she started her truck and drove away.

* * *

Erin hurried out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around her body and stepped into the bedroom toweling the water off her hair. She had calmed down a bit after realizing that they still had a little time before everyone arrived but Kris would need to be quick if she wanted a shower too.

"It's all yours but you need to hurry. Robert and Alice will be here with the kids soon. I'm going run upstairs and get dressed," Erin said without even looking up. When there was no response she looked around.

"Kris. Kris!" That's when she noticed Kris's clothes were gone. *Maybe she went upstairs to shower.*

She made her way upstairs but the main bathroom was empty, as was her master bath. Getting concerned, she got dressed and checked the rest of the house. More worried by the minute, she finally looked outside.

"What the hell?" Kris's truck was gone. *Why would she just leave?*

* * *

Kris drove slowly toward home. Her eyes lit on the two childish drawings on the dashboard. She felt tears start to flow again and angrily brushed them away. She remembered how thrilled she felt when Erin had given her the drawings from Christopher and Jenna. Erin had told her what a hard time they had given her that day. She had immediately offered to take them along but Erin had refused, insisting they needed their adult time together.

Kris was devastated by the way Erin had treated her this morning. *You'd think I would have learned about these straight women by now.* If she wanted her to leave, then

fine, but she could have at least said goodbye instead of leaving her sitting naked in bed like a one night stand, and then expecting her to be gone when she got out of the shower.

Kris jumped when her cell phone rang. Glancing at the screen, she was surprised to see it was Erin. She debated answering the phone. She had a lot of nerve to call. Finally, unable to resist hearing an explanation for her behavior, Kris answered.

"Yeah."

"Kris?"

"Yeah."

Erin's brow furrowed, Kris sounded so strange. "Where are you? Why did you leave?"

"What do you mean, why did I leave?" Kris's tone turned sarcastic. "How quickly you forget. You told me to leave."

"What? I did not! I got out of the shower and you were gone," Erin said.

Kris could not believe Erin was denying her words. "Erin, I heard you. Right before you took off and left me sitting there like some one night stand, 'you have to get out of here'. Well fine, I'm out of there." She couldn't hide the hurt in her voice.

Erin wracked her brain trying to figure out what Kris was talking about, then it hit her. Realizing what had happened, she felt horrible.

"Kris, listen to me. I didn't mean for you to leave. I said, 'we have to get out of here'. I was talking about us. When I saw the clock and realized Alice and Robert were going to be here in less than a half hour for breakfast, I panicked. I didn't want the kids or Alice and Robert to catch

us naked in bed together. That's not a part of our life they need to see. I just meant for us to shower and get dressed before they arrived. Us... Kris. Us! Please believe me. I asked you last night to have breakfast this morning with the whole family, remember? I never meant for you to leave. Please come back."

Oh shit... breakfast! Kris had been pleased and nervous when Erin invited her to have breakfast with the family and meet Alice and Robert. She had forgotten all about the invitation. Her past experiences had fueled her insecurities and without thought she had simply fled.

Kris shook her head forcing away the bad memories. She could hear a commotion in the background and thought she heard Jenna. "I should probably go change first. I only have the clothes from last night and I kind of stink."

"I don't care and the kids won't either... just please, come back."

Kris laughed feeling some of the tension that had been twisting her insides let go. "Well, the kids might not notice but I don't want to meet Robert and Alice reeking of sex!"

Erin blew out a breath in relief. "You'll be here soon?"

"Forty-five minutes tops, I promise, and Erin... I love you."

"I love you too, Kris. We'll be waiting."

* * *

The kids were disappointed when Kris wasn't waiting for them at home but Erin assured them that she was on her way. Everyone was in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Erin stayed by the window to watch for Kris's truck. She let out a big sigh of relief when it pulled into the drive and she stepped out on the porch to wait for Kris.

Kris got out of her truck and spotted Erin. She walked over, wondering at her reception. She felt guilty for just running off.

Erin threw herself into Kris's arms as soon as she stepped onto the porch. "I'm sorry. I just panicked. I wasn't thinking straight... I..."

Kris held Erin tightly to her chest. "Shh... it's okay. Everything's fine," Kris said. When Erin looked up at her with pleading eyes, Kris could no more ignore the plea than she could stop breathing. She lowered her head and took Erin's lips in a deep, loving kiss.

"We're okay," Kris said when the kiss broke, "and I sure hope you weren't thinking 'straight' after last night."

Erin snorted, playfully slapping Kris on the belly. If she was joking around then they were okay. "I am sorry... I..."

Kris placed a finger against Erin's lips stopping her from saying anything further. "I owe you an apology as well. I shouldn't have just run out without giving you a chance to explain. It's over. It was just a misunderstanding."

Erin kissed the finger against her lips. "I love you. Now, come on, it's time to meet the in-laws." She snickered at Kris's panicked look. "Relax, Kris, they're not that type of in-laws." At least not yet.

CHAPTER 18

"**K**RIS!" JENNA squealed and scurried off the stool when she spotted her . She and her brother were helping mix the batter for their grandmother's special recipe of chocolate chip pancakes.

Kris smiled at the little girl and knelt to greet her.

"Jenna, wait!" Erin tried to stop her daughter, but it was too late.

Jenna wrapped her arms around Kris's neck and clasped her batter-covered hands against the back of Kris's shirt.

"Hi, my little munchkin," Kris said with a grin and a hug, trying to ignore the cold batter soaking through her shirt. Christopher hurried over to join in. He hugged Kris, adding the mess on his hands to her shirt too.

Alice and Robert watched with interest as the twins greeted the woman enthusiastically. All the two could talk about last night was Kris and going to the park today.

Feeling eyes watching, Kris glanced up to see an older man and woman intently observing her interaction with the twins. The woman was small and slim, with reddish hair that was going gray, and blue eyes very similar to Christopher's. The man was tall, with broad shoulders that topped a trim build. His once dark hair was now mostly silver, but his hazel eyes still sparkled with vitality.

Kris helped Erin get the kids back to work on the batter before turning her attention to the other two adults. Kris swallowed nervously. She knew how important Alice and

Robert were to Erin and she wanted to make a good impression.

Erin stepped to Kris's side and wrapped an arm around her waist. She squeezed gently in reassurance when she felt Kris's tension.

"Kris, I'd like you to meet Alice and Robert, Jenna and Christopher's grandparents."

Alice got her first good look at Kris. Her eyes widened as she took in her imposing height and beautifully sculptured features. She had to give Erin credit. Cathy had been a pretty woman but Kris was gorgeous. Alice only hoped her personality matched her striking looks. Kris didn't appear angry or seem the least bit concerned about the mess the kids had just made of her clothes. That was a good start.

Kris reached out to accept Alice's outstretched hand, then blushed in embarrassment and pulled back when she noticed the pancake batter all over it. "Sorry," she said, quickly wiping her hands on the dishtowel Erin offered.

Alice laughed good-naturedly. "Not to worry. It's a common hazard around those two," she said, accepting Kris's hand and giving it a firm shake.

"Nice to meet you, Kris," Robert greeted pleasantly and shook her hand as well.

Pleasantries exchanged, Alice and Robert's attention turned back to the breakfast preparation.

Erin leaned closer to Kris. "Sorry about your shirt."

Kris smiled down at Erin. "Don't worry about it."

* * *

When preparations were complete, Kris quickly volunteered to accompany Erin upstairs to help the twins change clothes before breakfast was served. They were both covered in batter. She had been well aware of Alice's

watchful eyes as she helped Erin set the table. The woman looked like she was bursting with questions. She scooped both children up into her arms much to their delight and headed upstairs.

Erin smirked at Alice's frustrated frown; she knew she was dying to pump Kris for information. Laughing, she headed up the stairs after Kris and her kids.

Erin followed the sound of laughter up the stairs. She stepped into the children's bedroom and found Kris on the floor with Christopher and Jenna on top of her. She was squirming to get away from them as they tickled her mercilessly.

"Help. Help," Kris begged between bouts of laughter.

Erin got down on the floor and reached in for one quick tickle on Kris's side before tickling both children. It turned into an all out tickle fest and they ended up piled together in a breathless heap. Kris was on the bottom of the pile and struggled to free herself. Erin finally managed to untangle her legs from Kris and lifted the kids off of her. Christopher and Jenna were bouncing around excitedly. Erin helped Kris off the floor and together they corralled the kids and got them cleaned up and changed.

Kris's shirt was a mess. Not only was it covered in pancake batter but it was twisted and wrinkled almost beyond recognition. Erin's had not fared much better after joining in the wrestling bout.

"Alright, you two heathens," Erin called to get the kids attention, making them giggle. "Go downstairs and tell Nan we'll be down in a few minutes. I'm going to change and see if I can find Kris a clean shirt."

The two little ones scampered downstairs.

* * *

Kris followed Erin into her bedroom. She watched as Erin rummaged in her dresser looking for a shirt for her.

"I don't think I can wear anything of yours. This shirt is fine. I can just sponge some of the batter off."

"I know you can't wear my size," Erin said, admiring Kris's broad shoulders. "But I'm pretty sure this will fit." She held up a man's extra large tee shirt. Erin grinned at the look on Kris's face when she caught sight of the graphic on the front.

"Cool," Kris said, grabbing the shirt out of Erin's hands. She held it up in front of herself to display the large image of "Star Trek Voyager's" Seven of Nine.

"Alice bought that for me for my birthday. She knows I'm a big Star Trek fan," Erin said laughing. She knew Kris was just as big a fan of the sci-fi series. She pulled out a second clean shirt for herself.

Her laughter died in her throat when Kris pulled her soiled shirt off over her head. The sight of her flexing abs and the lithe muscles of her chest as she removed her shirt caused an unexpected flash of heat to rush through Erin's body.

Kris glanced at Erin curiously, wondering what had caused her sudden silence. She gulped audibly when she met her passion-filled gaze.

In the blink of an eye, before either of them thought about what they were doing, they were locked in a passionate kiss. Kris's hands slid down to grasp Erin's butt to pull her close as she pressed her thigh between Erin's legs.

Erin's hands rose to knead Kris's breasts through her sports bra. She groaned as the kiss broke. "I thought this was supposed to get easier, not harder. God, I want you so much right now." Erin pressed herself against Kris's hard

thigh. She couldn't believe how quickly she had become aroused. Giving in to the pulsing throb between her legs, she pushed up Kris's bra and captured an already hard nipple in her mouth.

Kris gripped the back of Erin's head with one hand to hold her in place, while her free hand glided down and jerked open the button to Erin's jeans and then, quickly unzipped them. She slipped her hand inside and down to settle between firm thighs. Growling eagerly at the wetness that greeted her fingers, she began to stroke Erin vigorously.

Erin moaned, thrusting rhythmically against Kris's hand. "This is crazy..." she gasped but couldn't seem to stop herself. Erin felt the orgasm coming and so did Kris.

Worried that Erin would cry out, Kris pressed Erin's face against her breast to muffle her outcry. Erin's body shook as the peak hit. She slumped in Kris's arms as her knees gave out.

Kris pulled her hand out of Erin's underwear and tightened her arms around her, holding her close as she recovered.

"I can't believe we just did that. Everyone is waiting downstairs. You make me so crazy!" Erin whined but made no move to leave her lover's arms.

"Don't blame me, you started it!" Kris laughed, cuddling Erin against her chest. She was throbbing but knew they had already taken more of a chance than they should. "I better get downstairs. Why don't you wash up a little then come down?"

Erin could feel how flushed her face was and knew her underwear was soaked. She leaned up placing a soft kiss on Kris's lips, and then brushed her fingers across her exposed nipples. "Put some clothes on before I lose control again," she said.

Kris groaned as the pulsing between her legs intensified. She clutched Erin's hand and pressed it against her breast...

"Erin, Kris! Breakfast is ready!" Alice called from downstairs.

They pulled apart guiltily. Kris pulled her bra back into place before drawing the borrowed T-shirt over her head as Erin hurriedly fastened her pants.

"We'll be right there!" Erin yelled back, worried that Alice would come looking for them if she didn't answer.

Erin placed one last lingering kiss on Kris's lips. "I love you," she said. "Please tell everyone I'll be right down." Erin grabbed her clean shirt and reached into a drawer and pulled out a clean pair of underwear before heading toward her bathroom.

"Love you," Kris said.

Erin turned to smile at her lover before closing the bathroom door.

Kris stepped into the hall outside Erin's bedroom and took a deep breath, scrubbing her hands over her face to force away the lingering arousal. She whimpered when she smelled Erin on her fingers.

She made a quick stop in the bathroom to wash her hands and splash cold water on her face before joining everyone downstairs.

CHAPTER 19

ERIN WATCHED as Kris and the twins rode the carousel. They were laughing and waving wildly as they passed by. After it had proven too windy to fly kites at the park, the very disappointed group had headed home. On the way home, Kris remembered that the kiddie train was running in Balboa Park and suggested they stop. It would be quite some time before Erin forgot the sight of Kris trying to squeeze her big body into that little train car. She snickered just thinking about it.

When Kris invited Alice and Robert to accompany them on their outing at the kite park, Erin had been shocked. It proved to her once again just how special Kris was. At best she had hoped Kris would be able to accept how much Alice and Robert meant to her. She never expected her to include them in one of their outings. After all, despite her attachment to them, they were Scott's parents and therefore a reminder that she had been married to him. Robert had declined as he had a regular Sunday tee time with his golf buddies. Alice had been pleasantly surprised by the invitation and readily accepted.

After the train ride, Kris noticed that the carousel was up and running and invited everyone to hop on. Erin and Alice had both refused, stating the motion made them sick so Kris took the munchkins for a ride.

* * *

Erin looked into three flushed faces shining with excitement, and smiled.

"Can we go again, can we?" two little voices pleaded.

"May we ride again... please," Kris prompted, exaggerating the last word to remind the little ones of their manners.

"Please, Mommy. Please. May we go ride again?" Jenna said. Christopher added his own begging.

"Sure, if Kris doesn't mind." Erin mock scowled at Kris when the three conspirators high-fived each other. Obviously, from the mischievous grin on her face, Kris had put the kids up to asking for permission.

Erin laughed, shaking her head in amusement as the three of them raced back to the carousel.

"She's great with them," Alice said as she watched Kris lift the children up onto the animal of their choice and strapped them in. Kris then climbed onto her own animal and mugged for the kids, making them laugh. "And she's just a big kid herself, isn't she?" Alice asked, chuckling at Kris's antics.

Erin smiled looking over at Kris with her children. "She is wonderful with them and the kids just adore her."

"It's really nice that you found someone who gets along so well with your children," Alice said, careful to keep her voice neutral.

She knew Erin cared for Kris. The lingering looks that had passed between them at breakfast assured her of that. But she could not help wondering just how deep her feelings ran. She hoped there was more to their relationship than just the children.

Erin caught the caution in Alice's voice. "I couldn't be with someone who didn't honestly care for my children, but it's so much more with Kris. I've never met anyone like her before. Even though we don't get to spend a lot of time together due to her schedule, not to mention mine, plus the kids', she still takes the time to call me every night when she

gets home. If she has time, she calls during the day, just to say hello and see how I'm doing. We talk on the phone at night for hours on end about nothing and everything," Erin said, her eyes were shining as she talked about Kris. "I feel like I've known her for years. I can tell her anything and know she'll support me. She not only listens to me and knows what's important to me, but she's incredibly thoughtful. Last week, I mentioned in passing that I needed to look for a new computer keyboard because my wrists bothered me after working for several hours. Do you know what she did?"

"What?" Alice asked.

"She researched what keyboard was supposed to be the best to help prevent repetitive stress injuries. The next day, a FedEx delivery arrived with a brand new ergonomic split keyboard and wrist rest. She called that same day to make sure I liked it. She didn't want me to use a keyboard that was hurting me for even one more day."

"Kris sounds like a very special lady," Alice said, surprised at the amount of emotion in Erin's voice. She had never heard her talk so expressively about anyone, including her son.

"Yes, she most certainly is that." Erin turned to face her mother-in-law and looked her right in the eye. She didn't want there to be any doubt in Alice's mind. "I'm in love with her."

Alice's mouth dropped open in shock but she could not deny the glowing happiness on Erin's face. "Does she feel the same way?"

Erin's smile could have lit a city. "Yes, she sure does."

Alice reached out and clasped her hand. "I'm so happy for you, honey."

"Really? I wasn't sure... I mean, I know you always said, but Scott... he's your son..."

Alice pulled Erin into a hug. "And you're my daughter. I want you to be happy. And if being with Kris makes you happy," Alice laughed at the quick glance Erin shot toward the carousel and the bright smile that flashed across her face, "and it obviously does, then I support you one hundred percent."

"That means so much to me," Erin said, blinking away tears.

"Hey, none of that."

"I'm going to invite her to the twin's birthday party."

Alice's eyebrows shot up. Scott would be at that party. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. She's going to be a big part of our lives and the sooner Scott accepts that the better." Erin's eyes hardened. "I'm not going to hide her. She deserves better than that."

"Oh Erin, I would never want you to do that. You're right. If Kris is going to be part of our family then she should be at the party. Besides, the kids would be crushed if she didn't come."

Any further conversation was cut short by the arrival of Kris and her cohorts.

"That was a blast!" Kris said as she strode up with her two little shadows in tow.

"Did you see me, Mommy? Did you see me ride the tiger by myself?" Christopher asked.

"I sure did and he was big too," Erin said. "How about you Jenna, did you like the zebra?"

"I was scared at first. Kris said it would be okay, that she would be right there with me," she said, looking up at her new hero.

Erin looked over at her lover with a warm smile. Kris blushed and leaned down to hug Jenna.

Alice smiled at Kris. "So, what do you say to an early dinner?"

"That sounds great. I'm starving. How about Frankie's?" Kris asked, grinning down at the kids.

Christopher and Jenna began to jump up and down yelling excitedly. Erin scowled and Alice groaned.

Kris sobered when she got a look at Erin's face. "Um... guys, maybe we should let your mom pick the place."

The duo immediately began to beg.

Frankie's Hamburger Heaven and Playtown was a local restaurant that catered to families with young children. There was a sit-down dining room where meals were served, but their main attraction was several play areas made up of swinging walkways, slides, pits full of soft balls and a maze of tunnels. It was designed in a way that encouraged parents to participate with their children.

Erin was surprised that Kris even knew about Frankie's, then remembered Kris telling her about her young niece. She walked over next to Kris. "Oh no, big guy. You got yourself into this now you can suffer the consequences. Come on, gang, Frankie's it is," she said, taking the twins' hands and walking away.

Kris looked over at Alice nervously, wondering just what she had gotten herself into. *It couldn't be that bad... could it?*

Alice took Kris's arm. "Have you ever been to Frankie's?"

"No. I just remembered my niece saying how much she liked it, so, I thought it might be fun." Kris cringed when

Alice began to laugh hysterically. Now, she was seriously worried about how bad this was going to be.

Alice wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes. "Come on, it won't be that bad..." she said, totally unconvincingly. "Oh, and Kris..."

Kris looked down at Erin's mother-in-law, curious at her tone of voice.

"Welcome to the family." Alice squeezed her arm before walking away to catch up to Erin and the children.

Kris's jaw dropped. She was still amazed at how accepting Alice was of her and her relationship with Erin. She couldn't help comparing it to her own mother's reaction to finding out she was gay. Refusing to give into those depressing thoughts, she quickly followed Alice.

CHAPTER 20

"OH YEAH RIGHT there. Ohh... harder..."

Erin chuckled at Kris's hedonistic groans and moans. "I told you that you shouldn't have tried to crawl through those tunnels," she said, pressing harder against the knotted muscles of Kris's back, being careful to avoid the large scrape between her shoulder blades. Erin winced in sympathy when a particularly pathetic groan issued from the body beneath her.

They had spent a relatively quiet evening after getting home from Frankie's. Erin had given the children their bath soon after arriving home, then she and Kris had spent time reading to them quietly before tucking them into bed.

Kris's muscles had stiffened up from the unaccustomed activity just as Erin had predicted. When she offered a backrub Kris quickly accepted. She was lying face down on the living room floor on a blanket Erin had spread out. She had her shirt off and Erin was straddling her thighs as she continued to massage her back.

Their trip to Frankie's had gone pretty much as Erin had expected. As soon as they arrived, the twins had begun to clamor for everyone to come play in the playland. Alice had declined, saying she was perfectly happy to watch. Erin had insisted everyone eat first before tackling the massive play area.

After dinner, she and Kris had taken the twins to play. Erin knew her limits and was content for the most part to watch, encouraging the children to climb and explore. She had played on the swinging walkways with them as well as

the climbing nets. The foursome had a great time. Calling a halt after half an hour, she informed the group it was time to head home. After much whining and begging, she agreed to an additional thirty minutes.

She and Alice sat on a bench and watched the threesome play in the pit filled with soft balls. Kris had stood over the pit, picking up the kids and then dropping them into the balls only to fish them out and do it again. The twins screamed in delight and egged Kris on. Erin watched in disbelief when Jenna managed to talk Kris into climbing into the tunnels with her and her brother. Erin had tried to warn Kris just what she was getting herself into. She herself hated tight spaces and always refused. Due to Kris's height, she had to crouch down and almost crawl to make her way through the maze of tunnels. She had done fine until the last set of tunnels, though Erin knew she would pay the price later for all the unaccustomed bending. The last tunnel was just too narrow for her broad shoulders which was how she had scraped her back.

"I'm getting old!" Kris whined. "I can't believe it; those two wore me out. How do you do it every day?" she asked. "They just keep going and going and going..."

Erin laughed. "You get used to it and learn to pace yourself," she added, continuing to knead the tight muscles under her hands.

"Do they always play that horrible circus music so loud in the play areas? I'm going to be hearing that in my head for days!"

"Oh no, when they host a birthday party, the birthday song plays over and over and over."

Kris groaned, banging her head on the floor. "Oh God."

Erin laughed. "Speaking of birthdays, Jenna and Christopher's fourth birthday is in two weeks. I was wondering if you'd like to come to their party?" Erin asked a

little nervously. She wanted Kris to come but did not know how she would take the news that Scott would be there.

Kris rolled over suddenly, almost unseating Erin. She grabbed hold of her arms to keep her from toppling off to the side. "I'd love to come to their party," she said with a sweet smile. Kris was thrilled that Erin would want to include her in a family event.

"Well, before you agree, I think I should warn you. There're going to be ten children attending, all three and four year olds. Jenna and Christopher invited some of their friends from preschool and the neighborhood to the party."

Kris's expression sobered. "We're not going to Frankie's or any place like that are we?" She had learned her lesson and vowed never to mention that place again in front of the twins.

Erin laughed so hard she slid off of Kris and onto the floor.

Kris scowled as Erin continued to laugh. She slid on top of Erin and pinned her to the floor. "You think that's funny, huh?" Kris growled and began to tickle Erin mercilessly.

"Stop... please stop..." Erin gasped. "I'm gonna pee my pants!"

Kris subsided but did not free Erin. Unable to resist the tempting visage before her, she leaned down for a kiss. It quickly escalated when Erin opened her mouth and whimpered. Never one to turn down such an open invitation, Kris plunged her tongue into Erin's mouth. She gently pressed Erin's legs open and slid between them. Erin thrust up into her making them both groan. When the kiss broke, they were both gasping for air. Suddenly, remembering where they were, Kris rolled off Erin with an aggravated growl.

Kris sat up and ran her hands through her hair in frustration trying to get control of herself. She grabbed her borrowed shirt off the couch and pulled it on. "Sorry about that."

"Stop apologizing. I'm just as guilty as you are."

Kris smiled at Erin and leaned back against the couch. "Come here." Kris sighed in contentment when Erin snuggled against her side. "Okay, so there's going to be ten little Energizer Bunnies™ at the party. Where's it going to be?" Kris asked.

"Here at the house. It's not going to be anything fancy, a few games for the kids to play and a piñata. I'm going to order pizza and then have ice cream and cake afterward. Alice and Robert are going to help with the kids."

"Okay, sounds like a plan to me. I'd love to celebrate the little ones' birthday with them. What can I do to help and what can I bring?"

"Are you sure?" Erin asked, pleasantly surprised at Kris's generosity. She had asked Scott to help out and he had insisted he didn't have time.

"Of course, I'm sure, Erin. I want to help out anyway I can. Jenna and Christopher are very special to me... just like their mom," Kris said, her eyes shining with love.

Erin's eyes filled with tears at the heartfelt statement. She pressed herself against Kris's chest and held her tight. "I love you," she whispered, throat tight with emotion.

"I love you too," Kris said. "Now, what can I do for the party?"

"Would you be willing to help out with the kids... make sure everyone gets something to eat and that they all play nice?"

"Sure, I can do that, no problem."

"There is one other thing..."

Kris looked down at Erin curiously.

"Scott's going to be there," Erin almost whispered, fearing Kris's reaction.

Kris blinked several times as if trying to process what Erin had just said. She quickly realized she should have expected it. After all, they were his children too. "Is that going to be a problem?"

"Not as far as I'm concerned. I told Alice that I was going to ask you to come to the party. Like I told her, the sooner Scott gets used to the idea that you're an important part of mine and the children's lives, the better."

"Did you happen to mention inviting me today while we were at the park?" Kris asked with an amused grin. Now she knew what had prompted Alice's comment. If Alice and Robert were accepting of her relationship with Erin, even though Scott was their son, she figured she didn't have anything to worry about as far as Erin's ex went.

"Yeah... how did you know that?"

"When we were leaving the park, Alice welcomed me to the family."

A huge smile spread over Erin's face and she chuckled. "She likes you and so does Robert."

"Well, I have to admit, I was a bit unsure about meeting your ex-husband's parents." The expression on Kris's face identified that as the understatement it was. "But it turned out much better than I expected. And I like them as well."

"I'm glad everyone got along. I was pretty nervous introducing you. And it was nice of you to invite them to the park today."

Kris hugged Erin and placed a soft loving kiss on her forehead. "So, when exactly is the party and what time should I be here to help set up?"

"It's in two weeks, on Saturday. Everyone is supposed to arrive around two."

"Wait, two weeks... is that the twenty-seventh?"

"Yes. The twins' birthday is actually on Friday but the party is Saturday."

"Oh damn!"

"What's wrong? Is that a bad day for you?"

"I have a client coming in from out of town. He owns a large aerospace company in Portland. We work with several of the company's smaller subsidiaries here in San Diego. It's my largest account. We've been providing their computer security for the last four years. The contracts up to this point have been year to year. The new contract is for a period of five years. He and his wife already had plans to fly into San Diego to vacation for the week. Harold contacted me last week and said he wanted to meet with me before he signed the new contract. I'm scheduled to meet him at one o'clock for lunch on that Saturday to discuss it."

Erin was extremely disappointed but tried not to let Kris see it. This was about Kris's business and she knew how important that was. "It's okay, Kris. If you're free maybe we could get together on Sunday and celebrate with the kids."

"No, there's got to be some way I can work this out. I don't have to meet Harold 'til one. What if I came here early and help you set up. Then, when I'm done with my meeting I could come back?"

"You don't have to do that. It would be too much running back and forth."

"I don't mind. I feel bad I can't be here the whole time. Please let me do this."

Erin smiled and leaned up to kiss Kris sweetly. "You're one special lady, you know that?"

Kris blushed. "So, what time do you want me here? Would nine be okay? That will give me almost three hours to help you decorate and set up everything before I have to leave to get ready for my meeting."

"That would be great, Kris. Thank you." Erin snapped her fingers. "Oh, I almost forgot. Next Saturday is Scott's day to take the children. So, I was wondering, if you're free, would you like to get together and do something?"

"Yeah, I'm free. What did you have in mind?" she asked as she mischievously ran her hand up the inside of Erin's thigh, making her jump.

Erin grabbed the wandering hand before it could go any higher. "Behave!"

Kris laughed and reluctantly pulled her hand back after one last squeeze.

"There is a new exhibit at the Museum of Man on Egyptian mummies and ancient burial practices. I thought it might be interesting."

"I saw that in yesterday's paper. That's a great idea," Kris said.

"It's a date then."

"What time is Scott picking up the kids?"

"Around ten, so if you picked me up about ten-thirty, we'd have the rest of the day to ourselves. He's supposed to bring them home around six."

Whatever Kris had been about to say was interrupted by a huge yawn. "Sorry about that, I guess the kids really did wear me out. I should get going." Though leaving was the

last thing Kris wanted to do. She wanted to spend the night with Erin wrapped in her arms.

Erin tightened her arms around Kris. "I don't want you to go."

"I don't want to either, babe, but what about in the morning, when the kids get up?"

Erin sighed, knowing she was not ready for that. "I know. I just wish..."

"We'll work it out. Don't worry," Kris said.

They cuddled for a while longer and shared several loving kisses before Kris finally made her exit.

CHAPTER 21

"Hi," KRIS SAID when Erin opened the front door, offering the bouquet of fresh flowers in her hand.

"Thank you, they're beautiful," Erin said, stepping back to let Kris in. She gazed up into Kris's eyes and quickly became lost in the warm blue depths.

They had not seen each other for a week. Kris had been working long hours preparing for the upcoming contract review. This new agreement meant quite a bit more money and the added security of a longer commitment.

Kris stepped inside before leaning down to kiss Erin. Just as their lips made contact—

"Kris!" squealed a high pitched voice.

Kris jerked back from Erin, surprised to see Christopher. The little boy raced excitedly across the room and threw himself at Kris's legs. She knelt down and hugged him. Erin wasn't the only one who had come to look forward to Kris's visits and her daily phone calls. Kris tried to call in the evening right before the twins' bedtime to tell them goodnight and talk to them for a few minutes about their day.

She looked up to meet Erin's frown. "I'm sorry, Kris. Scott isn't here yet. He's late," she said in an aggravated tone.

Jenna chose that moment to come into the room. "Mommy, where's my—" Jenna let out a whoop when she spotted Kris. She ran to join her brother in Kris's arms.

"Are you going to take us today instead of Daddy?" Jenna asked excitedly.

Kris threw a panicked look at Erin.

"No, Jenna. Daddy is coming to pick you up. He's just running a little late. Kris is here to pick me up."

"But we want to go with you, Mommy," Christopher said. The two began to beg to be included.

Not this again! Erin groaned, realizing now she should have met Kris at the museum after Scott picked up the children... if he picked up the children.

Before things could escalate any further, Kris stood up. "Hey, you two, come over here with me for a minute." The two followed Kris over to the couch and climbed into her lap. Erin watched, wondering what Kris was up to. "I bet your daddy would be very disappointed if you didn't go out with him today. He doesn't get to see you very often because he works very hard, long hours." Kris didn't know if it was true but it sounded good. Even with everything Erin had told her about Scott, she wasn't going to run down their father.

"Tomorrow, I'll come over and we'll all go to the zoo. How does that sound? If your Mom says it's okay," Kris added hastily with a quick glance at Erin. She didn't want to make a commitment without consulting her first.

Erin smiled. "Sounds fine to me."

Jenna and Christopher exchanged a look. "Do you promise?" Jenna asked. It was obvious they had been disappointed in the past. Kris couldn't imagine Erin making promises to the kids she didn't keep, so she assumed it was Scott who didn't follow through.

"I promise," Kris said. She was met with enthusiastic cheers. "Okay, it's a date." She grinned at the kids then winked at Erin. "Now, go finish getting ready, I'm sure your

daddy will be here soon." Kris stood, urging the two on their way. Both kids hugged Kris and placed kisses on her cheek before scurrying upstairs to get their stuff.

"Thank you for that," Erin said. "But you didn't have to do that. They can't always get their way."

"I know, but I do enjoy spending time with them. Unless you had other plans..." Kris said, worried now that she had put Erin on the spot.

"No, of course not. I just didn't want you to feel obligated –"

Kris pressed her fingers to Erin's lips. "We need to get something clear, right now. I, in no way, shape or form, feel obligated to do anything with the kids. I do it because I enjoy being with them... no other reason. I love the twins, Erin. Those two are just too precious for words."

Erin felt her eyes fill with tears. The most heartbreakingly painful thing in her relationship with Scott was his callous disregard for their children. She had hoped, in her heart of hearts, that he would feel differently once they were born and he held them in his arms. But that had not been the case. They meant little or nothing to him as far as she was able to discern. To hear Kris profess her love for Jenna and Christopher openly and without reservation was a balm to her wounded heart.

Kris read her expression easily and pulled an unresisting Erin into her arms. Erin's eyes met hers and she answered the call to taste her sweet lips.

Erin pressed closer to Kris, soaking up all the love and tenderness she had to offer.

They pulled apart abruptly at the sound of giggling. Both women flushed at the sight of their audience. *Busted!* They unknowingly thought in unison.

Kris and Erin shared a worried look, wondering how the kids would react to what they had seen. Both children were grinning and didn't appear the least bit disturbed by what they witnessed. Before Erin could say anything, she heard a car door slam.

Jenna ran to the window. "Daddy's here."

Kris couldn't miss Erin's panicked look. She felt the same way. This was not how she wanted to meet Erin's ex, after the children caught them kissing for the first time. She spied the flowers Erin had laid down on the table.

Kris quickly grabbed the bouquet. "I'm going to go put these in some water. Have fun you two. I'll see you tomorrow," she said, before quickly disappearing into the kitchen.

Erin looked gratefully after Kris as a knock sounded on the door.

* * *

Kris glanced at the display in front of her barely seeing it. It had been a bit awkward hiding in the kitchen until Scott and the children left. Kris had managed to resist the urge to peek in the living room and get a look at Erin's ex. She figured she would meet him soon enough and didn't want to take the chance of him seeing her. They had left for the museum almost immediately after Scott and the twins left.

Kris was much more interested in watching Erin than looking at any displays. They had only slept together that one time and after being apart for a week, Kris was anxious for a repeat. She tried to concentrate on the burial display, reminding herself how much she had wanted to see it. Problem was she wanted to see Erin's naked body even more. Groaning at the images that filled her mind, she glanced over at Erin, surprised to find her staring at her breasts.

Erin was having much the same problem as Kris. Now that the kids weren't around, her libido was rapidly reasserting itself and telling her there were much more interesting ways to spend her day than looking at three thousand year old bodies. There was a body she was very interested in seeing, up close and personal, and it was not three thousand years old!

Erin's eyes slid down Kris's body from the breasts she'd been ogling to the V between her legs. She unconsciously licked her lips, feeling herself grow extremely damp.

Kris bit her lip and silently moaned. Seeing the hungry look in Erin's deep brown eyes made her instantly wet.

Erin started in surprise when Kris grabbed her hand. She looked up into her face and saw how flushed she was and how dilated her pupils were.

"Let's get out of here!" Kris said, tugging on Erin's hand to hurry her along.

Erin followed willingly, not bothering to ask where they were going.

* * *

Neither spoke during the drive. Erin contented herself with merely watching Kris. She was afraid of what would happen if she touched her. Her previously much valued self-control seemed to be nonexistent when it came to the beautiful blond. Surprisingly enough, it didn't even bother her. When they pulled up in front of Kris's condo, it confirmed her guess as to their destination.

Kris opened the door and pulled Erin inside. The door barely had time to close before Kris pressed Erin against it. Their bodies strained together, each trying to increase the contact. Kris took Erin's lips in a searing kiss, pressing her tongue deep into her mouth. Groaning, she pressed her leg between Erin's thighs, her hips already beginning to thrust.

Kris pulled away from the torrid kiss gasping for breath. Her pupils were dilated. Her heart pounded in rhythm to the pulsing between her legs.

"God, I need you so much," she whimpered, placing open mouth kisses down Erin's neck, her hips moving against Erin's in an ever increasing pace.

Erin was already wild with desire for Kris. Kris's thrusts against her were driving her closer to the edge. She could feel how close Kris was by her frantic movements and she was determined to be touching her when she came. Reaching down, she pressed a hand between them and jerked open Kris's belt, quickly unzipping her jeans.

"God... yes, please." She tried to help Erin push her tight jeans down over her hips.

Erin shoved Kris's hands away and jerked her pants and underwear down just enough to give her access. She wasted no time in delving into the wet heat between Kris's thighs. She was not the least bit hesitant in her ability to please Kris as she had been the first time they made love.

Kris's hips arched, trying to draw Erin deeper. She braced her forearms on either side of Erin's shoulders, trying to stay standing as Erin stoked her determinedly.

"Oh... I'm... I..." Kris moaned as she neared the edge. "Inside... please."

Feeling Kris begin to crest, Erin thrust two fingers deep inside. Erin whimpered, feeling her own center clench and ripples of pleasure flow over her.

Kris cried out and came hard, her hips jerking as her climax hit. Her body went limp and she slumped against Erin once more pinning her to the door.

Erin wrapped her arm around Kris's waist taking as much of her weight as she could while trying to hold them both up. They were both shaking from the intensity of the

encounter. Only the sound of their heavy breathing filled the foyer.

Kris, finally sure her legs were going to hold her up, eased away from Erin. She groaned loudly when Erin withdrew her fingers from her depths.

She glanced down at Erin with a silly grin on her face. "Wow... I thought I was going to self-combust there for a minute."

Erin was still a bit stunned. She had never come before from just touching her partner. She stared at Kris.

"Are you okay?" Kris asked, becoming a bit concerned.

Erin shook herself. "I'm fine." She grinned. "Just wasn't expecting that."

"What?"

Erin blushed. She wasn't used to talking about sex. "Never mind."

Kris reached out and gently stroked Erin's face. "Tell me."

"I came when you did." Erin smiled shyly at Kris. "I never knew it could be so exciting to make your lover come." Her amazement was evident in her voice.

Kris smiled down at her. Erin always seemed so at ease that she tended to forget about her lack of experience in being with a woman. Kris pulled her pants back into place but didn't bother fastening them. She leaned down and placed a sweet kiss on Erin's lips. "Come on. Let's see what else we can learn together," she said, taking Erin's hand and leading her toward her bedroom.

They stopped several times to kiss and remove an article of clothing, leaving a trail of clothes in their wake.

Kris removed Erin's panties, the last barrier between them when they reached the side of the bed. Quickly pulling back the covers, she pressed Erin down into the bed.

Erin whimpered and her hips bucked when their bare bodies came into contact. She tried to press herself harder against Kris's firm body, seeking some relief from the renewed throbbing between her legs.

"Easy, I'll take care of you," Kris said, vowing to go slow this time and not lose control. She was determined to sample everything her lover's beautiful body had to offer.

Kris started at the top and slowly worked her way down. By the time she reached Erin's breasts, she was already frantic with arousal.

"Please... Kris... Please..." Erin reached down to clasp Kris's hand, intent on pressing it between her legs. Even though incredibly aroused, she was cognizant enough to be a bit surprised at her boldness. She had always been very passive in bed.

"Oh no, not this time," Kris said. She grasped both of Erin's hands and pressed them above her head. "Keep those there and don't move them."

Erin clenched her hands together and closed her eyes in willing submission.

Kris continued her perusal of Erin's body, slowly moving lower as she kissed, nipped and licked all the delicious skin she encountered in her descent.

Erin couldn't hold back a relieved groan and her hips arched when Kris gently spread her legs open. Her eyes flew open in shock when Kris placed a kiss on the top of her mound. She looked down to find Kris on her stomach between her widely spread legs. The sight inspired equal parts anticipation and uncertainty on her part. She unconsciously tensed.

Kris looked up when she felt Erin stiffen. She met her nervous gaze, then realized maybe she should have asked first before assuming Erin would want her to pleasure her like this. She had been so lost in the delight of making love to Erin she hadn't thought about it.

"Is this okay? I'd like to taste you," Kris murmured huskily.

Erin struggled to find her voice. She didn't know how to answer that question. "I um... yes... no... I don't know," she stammered with a vivid blush.

Kris immediately abandoned her position and moved up next to Erin. "It's okay, if you'd rather I didn't," she said, trying to hide her disappointment.

"It's not that... it's just." *God, this is hard.* "No one has ever done that before..." Erin's face went hot with her admission. She looked everywhere but at Kris.

It took Kris a couple of seconds to get it. "Scott never went down on you?" she blurted incredulously, then cursed herself for mentioning him. Although, she couldn't help thinking again what an idiot the man was.

Erin groaned and covered her face with her hands. She could not believe they were discussing her previous sex life or lack thereof. "No," she said, totally embarrassed. She had always been curious what it would be like but it was certainly not something she could ever imagine Scott doing.

Kris gently pulled Erin's hands away from her face and kissed each palm. She leaned close to Erin, her hot breath blowing in Erin's ear as she spoke. "Would you let me taste you... please?"

Erin shivered. "Okay," she whispered, even as another blush covered her face.

"It'll be okay. I promise. If you don't like it just tell me and I'll stop."

Erin tensed a bit when Kris moved, expecting her to immediately resume her place between her legs.

"Relax... just feel," Kris said huskily.

She started back at Erin's shoulders, once again slowly working her way down her lover's beautiful body, pushing her arousal higher with each passing moment. By the time she arrived back between Erin's legs, Erin was more than ready. Kris met no resistance when she gently spread Erin's legs and reclaimed her spot between them.

She kissed the insides of Erin's thighs, drawing a whimper from her. Slowly but surely, she worked her way closer to Erin's center. The scent of Erin's arousal was about to drive Kris mad. She leaned down and placed a gentle, soft kiss on Erin's sex, drawing a startled gasp from her but she didn't pull away.

Kris grinned at the death grip Erin had on the sheets, knowing she was already close. Gently spreading Erin open, she leaned down and began to lap at the abundant juices she found, savoring the flavor that was all Erin.

Erin's head arched and her hips jerked at the first stroke of Kris's tongue. The feel of a warm, wet tongue lapping between her legs was exquisite, sending her higher than she had ever been before. It felt like her heart was going to beat right out of her chest. She grabbed a pillow and pressed it against her face, embarrassed by the guttural sounds issuing from her mouth. She had always been extremely quiet in bed. When Kris's mouth closed over her and she began to suck, Erin felt the orgasm gather strength. Her legs began to tremble and then, suddenly, it exploded, washing over her with stunning force. Her back arched completely off the bed and she screamed into the pillow pressed tightly over her face.

Kris contentedly licked up everything Erin had to offer. She had known it was going to be fast. She glanced up when

she realized Erin still hadn't moved. She lay with her legs splayed open limply on the bed. Kris grinned when she spotted the pillow covering her face.

Kris slid up next to Erin and pulled back the pillow, revealing a flushed face with a very glazed look. "You okay?"

Erin's eyes slowly fluttered open. "Am I dead?" she muttered, still shaking from the powerful orgasm. She looked up into Kris's grinning face. "That was... my God... that was indescribable. That was the most incredible thing I've ever experienced! If that's not heaven, I don't know what is."

Kris chuckled. "So I take it you enjoyed that?"

"Enjoyed? You've got to be kidding. It was stupendous, amazing, incredible, fantastic..." Erin's voice trailed off as she ran out of adjectives.

Kris drew Erin into her arms and kissed her, sharing her essence with her.

Erin licked her lips cautiously at the unfamiliar flavor. She had never tasted herself before.

Kris leaned down for a deeper kiss, pressing her tongue into Erin's mouth.

Erin smacked her lips and grinned when the kiss broke. "I taste pretty good," she said, then blushed at her boldness. She had been worried wondering if Kris would like how she tasted.

"Yes, you do. It's wonderful," Kris said, making a show of licking her lips. "But that was kind of quick. Next time I'll make it last longer."

Erin drew back with a startled look to see if Kris was serious. "Longer..." Her eyes glazed over just thinking about

that. "I don't think I'd survive!" She shivered, her arousal soaring again just thinking about it.

"Oh, you'd be surprised what the body can endure," Kris said, her voice growing husky with renewed hunger. She rolled on top of Erin, intent on showing her just how much pleasure a body could experience.

* * *

Kris stretched languidly, drawing a protest from the body on top of her. She tightened her arms around Erin's back and placed a soft kiss on the top of her head. Erin murmured never fully awakening.

Kris's stomach growled, reminding her that they had not eaten any lunch earlier. They had planned on a late lunch after the museum but had gotten pleasantly sidetracked. Kris glanced at the clock on the bedside table.

"Oh shit!"

Erin jumped, then lifted up blinking groggily. "What's wrong?"

"It's five-thirty."

Erin echoed Kris's curse. She scrambled out of bed, and began frantically looking for her clothes. Scott was due back with the twins at six and it was a good twenty-minute drive to her house, if they didn't hit any traffic.

"Wait, Erin," Kris said, before she could disappear down the hall in search of the rest of her clothes. "You need to wash up first. I'll find your clothes." She took the clothes Erin had managed to gather out of her hands. "There are washcloths and towels in my bathroom."

Erin realized Kris was right. She most likely reeked of sex. She hurried into Kris's bathroom to try and make herself presentable.

Kris was dressed by the time she returned. She gratefully accepted her clothes and hurriedly donned them. "I'm so sorry to run off like this. Alice and Robert had other plans or I would have had him drop them off there."

"Don't worry about it. I know the constraints you're under," Kris said. "Everything will work out."

Erin still looked worried. After what happened last time, she didn't want Kris to feel like a one night stand.

Kris drew Erin into her arms and kissed her long and lovingly. Erin smiled up at Kris when the kiss broke. "Now come on, maybe I can still get you home before Scott and the kids."

CHAPTER 22

FOR ONCE SCOTT was late returning with the children. Kris had dropped her off with a promise to be back early the next day to go to the zoo with the twins. They had shared a quick kiss in the driveway before Kris drove away, not wanting to be there when Scott arrived. Scott pulled up mere minutes later. Erin figured they must have passed Kris's truck coming down the street.

"Hi, my little munchkins," Erin greeted her children, kneeling down to accept their hugs, unconsciously using the nickname Kris had for them. "Did you have fun today?"

Both children nodded unenthusiastically.

Scott interrupted. "I want to talk to you, Erin."

Not liking the tone of his voice, Erin stood and placed a hand on each child's shoulder. "Go upstairs and get ready for your bath. I'll be up in a few minutes."

"I'm hungry, Mommy," Christopher whined.

"You should have eaten your dinner at the restaurant. You can just go to bed hungry," Scott said curtly. "What?" he demanded at Erin's angry look. "You cater to them too much. I took them to a very nice restaurant and they barely touched their dinner."

Jenna tugged on Erin's pants and she leaned down. Casting a defiant eye toward her father, she whispered to Erin. "It was too hot, Mommy. We didn't like it."

Knowing they were about to have an argument, Erin insisted the kids go upstairs. Seeing her stern look they

quickly obeyed although both were crying by the time they reached the stairs.

Erin turned back to Scott with a scowl. "Where did you go to eat?" she asked as calmly as she could.

"We went to that Thai place in Clairemont... you know the one on Balboa?"

Erin grimaced. "Scott!"

"What? It's a nice place, and expensive too. I blew forty bucks on food they didn't eat."

"They're not even four years old yet, Scott. Thai food is way too spicy for them."

"Candy's nephew eats it," Scott muttered defensively.

"Huh? Who's Candy?"

Scott wouldn't meet Erin's eyes. "She's a woman I'm dating. She enjoyed the food there and was surprised Christopher and Jenna wouldn't eat it. She said her nephew loves the stuff."

"How old is her nephew?"

Scott shrugged. "I don't know. How am I supposed to know what they'll eat?"

Erin sighed. She wanted to remind Scott that he was their father but knew it was a lost cause. Something he had just said sunk in. "So, Candy was with you today with the kids?"

"Yeah, so what if she was? She enjoys spending time with me," Scott said.

"I was just wondering, Scott," Erin said, softening her tone, trying to be conciliatory. "I'm glad you found someone."

Scott stared at Erin suspiciously for several moments, doubting her sincerity. "Who's Chris?" he asked suddenly.

"He was all either of the kids could talk about today. Chris this... Chris that... So, who is this paragon, some guy you're seeing?" he asked snidely.

Erin looked momentarily startled. She should have realized the twins would talk about Kris. "Yes, Kris is someone I'm dating. But as I've tried to explain before, Scott, I'm gay. Kris is a woman."

Scott watched Erin in growing disbelief as what could only be described as a glowing smile spread over her face. "Have you slept with her?" Scott sneered.

"That's none of your business," Erin said. She couldn't stop the bright blush that covered her face when she flashed back on a vision of Kris's brilliant blue eyes shining up at her from between her legs.

"Christ, Erin, you slept with her. That's just sick!" Scott's face twisted in disgust.

"I'm not going to have this conversation with you again, Scott. My personal life is just that, personal."

"Fine! Do what you want. You always have!" he yelled.

"What did you want to talk to me about?" Erin asked, hoping a change in subject would calm things down.

"Oh, I can't make it next Saturday, not 'til five."

"Damn it, Scott! The party will be almost over by then. You promised them you would be here. Is it too much to ask you to give the kids a couple of hours of your time on their birthday?"

"What's the big deal... I'm going to be here. Give me a break. Why do you have to make everything such a major crisis?" Scott asked.

"Fine. What is so earth shattering that you can't be here for your children's birthday?"

Scott shifted uncomfortably and suddenly wouldn't meet Erin's eyes.

Erin knew that look. "Well, let's hear it."

He looked up at Erin defiantly. "There is a special showing at the Museum of Modern Art. It's a big charity event and tickets are very limited. That Saturday is the last day of the exhibit."

"Let me get this straight, you're going to a museum instead of your children's birthday party."

"I said I'd be here," Scott said, his exasperation with the situation was obvious. He didn't like Erin questioning him. "This event is very important, it raises a lot of money to save our oceans."

Erin shook her head in disbelief. "You couldn't go any other day?"

"No, I had already bought the tickets when you told me about the party. They're three hundred bucks apiece," Scott said, as if that explained everything.

"I told you about the party over a month ago, Scott. You could have told me sooner and I might have been able to change it."

"You did not. You told me two weeks ago! You're not going to blame this on me, Erin... like you always do."

Erin knew there was no sense arguing with him. She stared at him, suddenly suspicious. "Are you going to this event alone?" Scott had never been one with a big social conscience unless it benefited him in some way.

She growled when Scott refused to meet her eyes.

"It's important, Erin. I have to socialize and be seen by these larger investors. You never understood that or supported what I needed to do," he said with a long suffering sigh. "Candy is happy to go with me. She supports

my work," Scott added, wanting to remind Erin of her shortcomings.

Erin rolled her eyes. "Fine, Scott... whatever. Oh, by the way, I invited Kris to the twin's party."

Scott's jaw dropped open and he glared incredulously at Erin. "I hardly think that's appropriate —"

Erin cut him off. "She's coming... end of story. Your folks already met her and really like her." Erin couldn't resist getting in her own digs.

The veins in Scott's forehead started to pulse and his face turned brick red. He finally managed to regain a measure of his composure. "Alright, then I'm sure you won't mind if I bring Candy," he shot back, confident that Erin could not stand to see him with another woman.

"Sure, feel free to invite her."

Scott stared at Erin, unable to believe her calm reply.

"Fine. I'll just do that," he snorted before storming out.

Erin grasped the kitchen counter and brushed away the tears she would never let fall in front of Scott. She wished things were better between them, at least for the children's sake. These scenes always took an emotional toll on her. Shrugging away the depressing thoughts, she set about making them all something to eat. Maybe after they were settled she would call Kris. Just the thought of her lover brought a smile to her face.

CHAPTER 23

KRIS SWORE colorfully under her breath at the traffic. They were only two exits from Erin's house but at this rate, it would be at least an hour before they got there. She jerked and glared at Erin when she poked her sharply in the ribs. Erin shot a warning glance into the back seat. Kris flushed.

"Sorry."

Erin reached out and patted Kris's thigh. "Just don't say anything you don't want to hear repeated... in a very loud voice," Erin said.

Kris groaned and looked nervously into the rear-view mirror, worried that the two young passengers had heard her. She breathed a sigh of relief when she realized they weren't paying any attention to her and Erin's conversation.

She knew both of them had to be tired after walking around the zoo all morning. They had originally planned to go on Sunday but had to postpone a day because of bad weather. Kris shouldn't have taken the day off with the new contract looming but could not bring herself to disappoint the twins. It had been a lot of fun, and Kris was glad she had done it. It was interesting to see things through the eyes of a young child.

"Look, Mommy, it's a pony!" Jenna said excitedly.

Erin looked up in time to see a huge animal dart into traffic. It looked to her like an extremely large Dalmatian.

Christopher squirmed in his seat, trying to see. He finally spotted the animal as it ran toward his side of the van.

"It's Scooby Doo!"

Another motorist slammed on their brakes to avoid hitting the dog. Luckily, they were moving very slowly due to the heavy traffic.

Both children cried out in horror. Erin looked away, not wanting to see the impending collision.

Kris began honking the car horn. Maneuvering as quickly as she safely could she got Erin's van off to the side of the road.

"What are you doing?" Erin said and grabbed Kris's arm when she stopped the van and opened the door.

"I'm going to get the dog."

"Kris... No! You can't." Erin frantically clutched Kris's arm, trying to stop her from leaving the van. "It's too dangerous."

A squeal of brakes sounded again and several horns blared.

Kris looked up at Erin beseechingly and Erin released her arm. "Be careful!" she said.

The three watched as Kris headed down the shoulder of the road directly in front of them. She quickly spotted the frightened dog two lanes over in traffic. Not knowing what else to do, she whistled piercingly. The dog immediately turned and looked at her.

"Come here, boy. Come on, that's a good dog," Kris patted her thighs hoping to encourage the animal toward her.

Thankfully, traffic had stopped as the motorists watched the unfolding drama. Kris and the dog faced each

other, two lanes of cars separating them. Kris took several steps forward and the scared dog turned to bolt.

"No! Stop!" Kris yelled in a panic.

Amazingly, the dog froze in its tracks. Kris whistled again, calling the dog to her in a calm but insistent voice. The dog turned cautiously toward her and then seemed to come to a decision. It calmly walked over to Kris, tail wagging.

Realizing the dog didn't have a collar, Kris pulled off her belt and quickly wrapped it around the dog's neck. She looked up when several cars honked, making the dog jump. Several of the drivers in the front row of traffic who had seen her rescue the dog were smiling and gave her the thumbs up.

Kris carefully made her way back toward the van with her large charge in tow as traffic started to move again. It was a very large dog, dingy gray in color with black torn patches of color spaced irregularly all over his body. Kris looked the dog over as they walked back. It was a male. His coat was filthy dirty and he was skinny. A large scrape marred his shoulder and foreleg.

Erin stepped out of the van, keeping her eyes nervously on the big dog. His head stood well past her waist. The dog stepped forward and sniffed Erin, then licked her hand. He looked up at her with his large, trusting blue eyes. Erin sighed and melted. Kris grinned then quickly tried to cover it when Erin scowled at her.

"Do you have any idea what he is?" Erin asked.

"Christopher was right. It's Scooby Doo." Kris laughed at the aggravated look on Erin's face. "I'm pretty sure he's a Great Dane."

Erin looked at the dog then back at Kris. "Okay, you got him out of traffic... now what?"

"He's hurt. We need to get him to a vet."

Erin leaned over and saw the scrape on the dog's shoulder and winced. She patted the big dog consolingly.

"Think you can get him to jump into the back of the van?"

"Sure, no problem," Kris said with more confidence than she felt.

Erin snorted and walked toward the rear of the van and opened the hatch.

The twins squealed excitedly when they saw the dog. The dog backed up and pressed against Kris's leg, nervously eying the children.

"Okay, you two, calm down. The dog is hurt and we need to be real quiet so he stays calm," Erin said. The kids immediately quieted down.

Kris patted the floor of the van. "Okay, boy, come on... jump up."

The dog stared at Kris uncomprehendingly.

Erin snickered. Kris mock glared at her and reassessed the situation. Inspiration struck and she grinned. Backing the dog up away from the van, she ran with him straight toward the open hatch of the van, urging him to jump in. He skidded to a halt at the last second. Kris groaned in frustration and shot Erin and the twins a quelling look when they laughed.

Kris spoke to the dog. "Okay, boy, I guess we do this the hard way." She leaned down, careful of his injured leg, and lifted his front paws up to rest on the floor of the van. "Okay, I'm going to boost you up," she told the big dog.

Kris strained but managed to lift the dog from the rear. He was skinny but still heavy. He filled the back of the van

and was unable to stand to his full height. Kris carefully shut the hatch and headed back to the driver's seat.

As she slid into the seat, the dog began to make a strange woo wooing sound. She turned to look back. He was staring right at her. "It's okay, boy. It's okay," Kris said trying to reassure the dog. She looked over at Erin helplessly.

"Why don't you get in the back with the twins and I'll drive," Erin said as the dog's volume increased.

Kris quickly slipped into the back and wedged herself between the twin's car seats. The dog immediately quieted and lay down, seemingly grateful. He lifted up enough to prop his big head on Kris's shoulder.

She spoke softly to the dog and petted his head. Getting Christopher and Jenna to settle down also seemed to help keep the dog calm. Soon, they were all speaking quietly to him and gently petting him.

Erin glanced into the rear-view mirror as she started the van and groaned when she saw the children's faces alight in pleasure as they stroked the big dog. She knew exactly where this was going.

"Where to?" she asked Kris.

"There's a vet clinic not far from my house. Several of my neighbors have mentioned taking their animals there." Kris provided directions and they set off toward the clinic.

CHAPTER 24

KRIS LOOKED around the room, wondering just what she had gotten herself into. Her original plan had quickly gone up in flames. She had planned to drop the dog off at the vet clinic and have them find the owners. The staff informed her that unless she was willing to pay the dog's medical expenses they would have to call Animal Control and turn the dog over to them. Animal Control would make the decision as to whether to treat the dog's injuries, and then hold him for four to six days before putting him up for adoption if the owners didn't claim him. It was up to his owners to find him.

Kris had agreed to pay for the dog's care and boarding. A tech had scanned the dog for a microchip but he did not have one. Kris planned to put an ad in the paper's pet Lost and Found section as well as checking with local animal shelters. The problem came when they tried to take the big dog into the back. He had pressed himself against Kris and trembled violently. When the tech tried to force the issue, the dog began to whimper pathetically refusing to be separated from her. Erin and the twins had accompanied her into the clinic. The twins had begun to cry, becoming more upset with each passing moment.

That was how Kris came to find herself sitting in an examination room with the big dog at her feet. She had taken Erin and the kids home, transferred the dog to her truck, and then returned to the clinic. Though, she was honest enough to admit, she had not wanted to leave the dog in the first place. She had fallen in love with him the second she put her belt around his neck and he had looked up at her so trustingly with those big blue eyes.

The door opened to admit a woman about Kris's age, her clothes covered by a long white lab coat. She was a little taller than Erin. Her dark curly hair was cut in a short bob and her eyes were a striking blue-gray color.

Glancing down at the chart in her hand, the woman introduced herself. "Hello, Ms. Rawlings. I'm Dr. Kody Garrett."

"Hi, Dr. Garrett," Kris said, rising to shake hands with the woman. "I'm Kris."

The doctor nodded, her attention going to the big dog on the floor. "And who do we have here?" she asked.

"I don't know. I found him wandering around the freeway this afternoon and rescued him."

The vet knelt down next to the big dog and began her exam. The dog remained docile and never protested in any way throughout the entire procedure.

Dr. Garrett stood up and faced Kris. "Well, I can tell you he's somewhere between two and three years old. He's in good overall health. The scrape on his shoulder and leg looks worse than it is. It's pretty superficial and already starting to heal. He is underweight. And he could use a good flea bath," she added with a laugh. "He's probably been on the streets awhile based on his condition."

Kris grinned. He was pretty ripe.

"If you can't find his owner are you going to keep him?"

"Well..." Kris looked down at the dog lying trustingly at her feet and sighed. She wanted him but was still a bit hesitant about taking on such a big dog. "I'm not sure."

Dr. Garrett smiled. "They really are great dogs. As a matter of fact, I have a Great Dane myself. They're great company and very laid back."

"How are they with children?" Kris asked. This question alone she knew would decide the ultimate fate of the big dog.

"They're good with kids, though they do need to be trained. They have no idea how large they are and can knock down a small child unintentionally. I have had several clients with young children who own Great Danes. They all say you couldn't ask for a better friend and protector for your child. You have an advantage with this big guy as he is, hopefully, past the rambunctious puppy stage."

Kris looked down at the big head resting on her knee. After the doctor finished her exam, the dog had laid back down at her feet without a word from her. She silently prayed she wouldn't find his owners.

"What else does he need? Is there anything else I should be doing for him," Kris asked, wanting to do her best by the big dog.

Dr. Garrett laughed to herself. This woman was hooked whether she knew it or not.

"If you don't find the owners, I recommend you vaccinate him just to be safe. You also should have him checked for worms. Give him plenty of good quality dry food. I'd recommend three meals a day at first, and plenty of water to drink."

"Thanks, Dr. Garrett. I appreciate it. Any specific food you would recommend for him?"

"No problem. As far as food goes there are several brands that would be appropriate." She wrote out a list of foods and handed it to Kris. "You should be able to find any of these at a pet superstore. If you have any other questions or problems with him feel free to give me a call."

Kris shook hands with the doctor again, appreciating the woman's offer. She looked down at the big dog when the doctor exited. "Come on, boy," she said, leading her dog out the door.

* * *

Kris glanced down at the big dog stretched out in front of her couch. She was going to have to come up with a name for him, even if it was only temporary until she found his owners. She cringed at the thought, trying to convince herself that she wouldn't find them. Due to his condition, Dr. Garrett had said that she thought he must have been on the streets for quite some time.

She couldn't wait for Erin and the kids to see the dog. He looked nothing like the animal they had rescued just a few hours before. After a quick stop at a pet store, one of the first things Kris had done when she got him home, after getting him something to eat, was to give him a much needed bath. It had taken repeated washings to get all the stubborn dirt off. The scrape on his shoulder and leg looked much better with all the crusted dirt gone. The dog had been extremely cooperative, standing still patiently in the shower as she washed his coat. It turned out that his base color was not gray as she had first assumed, but a brilliant white. Kris had seen pictures of a Great Dane like this in a book. He was, she now realized, a Harlequin. His gleaming white coat set off the irregular torn black patches of color that dominated his coat. She was happy to note that his ears had been left natural and not cropped.

"Hey, big guy," she called softly to the dog. His eyes opened but otherwise he didn't move. "What should we call you? Let's see how about... Jake... Spot... Duke... Moose." Kris watched the dog as she tried out the names, hoping for a response. "Well, I know what the twins want to call you but Scooby Doo is already taken." She laughed. "I guess the real question is, will you be mine or —"

The dog jumped up suddenly and started to wag his tail. Kris looked at him puzzled, wondering what had caused the reaction. She thought back to what she had just said. "Is that your name, Scooby Doo?" He stared at her, his head cocked to the side as if trying to figure out what she was saying. Kris thought a minute. "Will you be mine?" she repeated, watching the dog carefully.

He reacted immediately, wagging his tail and trying to lick her face.

Kris laughed. "Well, I don't think calling you that will work, but how about if we just shorten it a bit. How about Willy?"

She jumped when the big dog let out a loud woo woo and tried to climb onto her lap. "Okay, okay," she said between bouts of laughter as she tried to push the big dog off. "Willy it is."

* * *

Erin laughed. "You've got to be kidding."

"I'm serious; you should have seen him last night." Kris hadn't been able to resist calling Erin to tell her all about how she had ended up naming the big dog.

"Are you sure that's such a great idea, Kris? What if someone responds to the ad you put in the paper?"

"I know... I know. But I want him," Kris whined, sounding suspiciously like the twins. They had been pestering Erin all day to see the dog.

"I hope you understand why I don't want you to bring him over here. The kids are going to be sad as it is if his owners show up. I don't want them to get any more attached than they already are. It'll break their hearts, Kris."

"Alright, I understand," Kris said, sighing heavily.

"So, how did he do with you last night? Does he make a good roommate?" Erin asked, trying to lighten the mood.

"He settled down pretty well. I put a blanket on the floor in my bedroom."

"What, you didn't let him sleep on the bed with you?"

"No way, that spot is reserved for you," Kris said. "I missed you last night."

"I missed you too, Kris. We need to talk about when we are going to tell the kids. I want you to be able to stay over at night."

"I'd like that too. I don't want to hide what I feel for you from them."

"Do you think you'll be able to make it over during the week?"

Kris sighed regretfully. "Probably not. I'm still in the middle of this contract review. I need to tour all the plants covered by this contract. I want to make sure everything is perfect before Harold gets here next week. I'm sorry." Kris felt guilty for how much time her work was taking and worried that Erin would resent it like Angela had. But this contract was incredibly important to her business and she had to make sure it was right.

"Don't worry about it, Kris. This is your livelihood and I understand that. I won't say the kids and I don't miss you but I understand. You need to concentrate on work. Are you sure you want to help with the set up of the party on Saturday? It's going to mean a lot of running back and forth for you."

"I'm going to be there, as promised," Kris said. "I wish I didn't have to leave at all but I will be back absolutely as soon as I can finish up the meeting with Harold."

"Thank you, that means a lot to us."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world."

"Just don't bring Willy. Okay?"

Kris grimaced. That was exactly what she had planned on doing. "Okay."

"Speaking of Willy, what are you doing with him while you're working? You didn't leave him free in your condo, did you?" Erin asked. She cringed at the thought of how much damage such a big dog could do.

Kris laughed. "No, he's lying here sound asleep next to my desk as we speak. I was going to leave him but he kicked up such a fuss I brought him with me."

Erin groaned. Oh yes, she could see it now. Willy was going to be a permanent fixture in their lives if no one turned up to claim him.

CHAPTER 25

ERIN STARED OUT the kitchen window lost in thought. The party guests had arrived and were playing in the yard, supervised by Robert and Alice. Erin was waiting for the pizza to be delivered.

Kris had shown up as promised to help with the setup that morning. Erin had been a bit relieved when Kris arrived with several large packages brightly wrapped in Scooby Doo decorated paper. Despite her request not to bring him, she had been afraid Kris would try to give Willy to the children for their birthday. The twins had begged for Willy to come stay with them but so far, Erin had managed to stand firm.

In the week since finding the dog, Kris had not been able to locate his owners. The newspaper ad had expired yesterday. She had not received a single response to it nor to any of the fliers she posted in the area where they found the dog. After a trip to the vet, and then Animal Control to get his license, Kris officially adopted Willy. Now that Kris had adopted him, Erin wondered how long it would take before Willy took up residence with her family. She sighed, knowing it was inevitable.

What neither of them had anticipated were the twins' reaction when Kris had to leave before the party started. They were very upset but Christopher, in particular, had a meltdown. He cried and clung to Kris, begging her not to leave. Kris was nearly in tears herself by the time she managed calm him down. She had pulled the little boy into her arms and hugged him tight, repeatedly assuring him that she would return later. Erin had finally managed to coax

Christopher to her. He had buried his face in her neck and cried brokenly when Kris left. She felt terrible for subjecting Kris to such an ordeal when she was just trying to help out.

Erin jumped when she felt a hand on her shoulder.

"Is everything alright?" Alice asked, having seen the sad look on Erin's face.

"Yeah. I just wish Kris hadn't had to leave. I know she'll be back later but Christopher is just heartbroken," Erin said, looking glumly at her son.

Alice looked out the window to where Christopher sat by himself at one of the tables. She and Robert had tried to draw him out of his mood and get him interested in the party to no avail.

The two women were interrupted by the doorbell.

"I'll get that; it's probably the pizzas," Alice said.

* * *

Alice opened the door and a huge smile spread over her face. "Erin! Could you come here, please?"

Erin hurried into the living room, figuring Alice needed help with the pizzas. She stopped dead in her tracks and stared for several seconds before rushing across the room. She threw herself into her lover's arms and kissed her soundly.

"What are you doing back so soon? Was there a problem with your meeting? It's not even two-thirty yet, I didn't expect you until after four. Is everything alright? Can you stay? " Erin questioned rapid fire.

Kris just grinned, waiting for Erin to run out of breath or questions, whichever came first. "Hi, Alice," Kris said when Erin finally subsided.

Alice smiled up at Kris and squeezed her arm. Christopher and Jenna were going to be ecstatic when they saw her.

Erin blushed, having forgotten that Alice was standing there.

"I'm back so soon 'cause I just couldn't stand not being here. I explained the situation to Harold and asked if we could reschedule the meeting. He said he had missed way too many of the important events in his children's lives and that I shouldn't make the same mistake. We're going to meet tomorrow for lunch," Kris said. "So, I'm all yours for the rest of the day."

"Oh, Kris, you don't know how much this means to me and the children," Erin said.

"Well, I felt terrible about this morning. It just broke my heart to leave them. The Morgans are very nice people and were very understanding. Claire said it was nice to see someone so devoted to their family," Kris said with a shy blush.

Erin hugged Kris again and kissed her. "You are one special lady."

Alice cleared her throat, reminding both women that she was still standing there. "Well, I'm going to go check on Robert and the children. You two carry on," she said with a teasing grin.

Both women blushed but did not let go of each other.

"You look wonderful," Erin said once Alice was gone. She had never seen Kris dressed so formally before. Her dove gray trousers were streamlined and belted at the waist. A soft white silk blouse and a dark navy blazer completed the ensemble.

"Hmm." Kris was much more interested in the feel of Erin's body against hers than conversation. She leaned down

to sample Erin's sweet lips but the doorbell rang, interrupting them before things could get out of hand.

"That must be the pizzas," Erin said, reluctantly pulling away.

* * *

"Kris!" Christopher screamed. He raced across the yard and crashed into her legs, almost knocking her and the pizzas she was carrying to the ground.

Erin made a frantic grab for the pizza boxes, catching them before they fell.

Kris scooped Christopher up into her arms.

"You came back!" Christopher said, hugging her neck tight.

"I promised I would."

Jenna ran over to Kris and wrapped her arms around her legs. Kris leaned down and lifted the little girl up to join her brother.

* * *

Alice shook her head in amazement. Kris sat with Jenna on one knee and Christopher on the other. She was surrounded by eight other youngsters who were riveted to her every word. She was telling them a story about a young prince and princess who, with the help of a little dragon, saved their kingdom. Erin was standing close to her back with her hands resting lightly on Kris's shoulders, listening to the story just as raptly as the children.

"Looks like Erin picked a winner this time," Robert said close to her ear. "I've never seen her so happy. And the children are just as smitten."

Alice smiled lovingly up at her husband. Robert, though initially shocked to find out Erin was a lesbian, had been very supportive of her and her choice of lifestyle. He too

had been appalled at their son's treatment of Erin. It was something they had talked about many times over the past few years.

"I'm just worried about how Scott is going to react. He hasn't taken the fact that Erin is gay very well," Alice said.

"You can hardly blame him, honey. No man would take it well, having his wife not only divorce him but decide that she preferred women."

"Erin would have stayed with him, if he'd treated her right," she said a bit heatedly. "Even though we both know she would have never been happy denying who she really is."

Robert held up his hands. "That's true. She would have. I agree with you. He doesn't deserve Erin. But that doesn't mean he is going to accept her lifestyle."

"I want Kris to be part of our family holidays." Her expression made it clear just how determined she was to make that happen.

"I don't have a problem with that," Robert said. "Just don't expect Scott to welcome her with open arms. It's not going to happen. The best we can hope for is that he will be a gentleman."

Alice grimaced. So far her son's behavior had left a lot to be desired.

"Speaking of Scott, where is he?" Robert asked.

Alice related to him what Erin had told her about her conversation with Scott the previous weekend. Robert shook his head. He would never understand his son's priorities or his thinking. He was ashamed that his son was so self-centered and blamed himself for not doing a better job of instilling a sense of responsibility in him. He was the epitome of a spoiled only child.

* * *

"I'm so sorry about your clothes," Erin apologized again.

"Will you stop already? I don't care about the clothes. That's what they have dry cleaners for," Kris said.

Erin looked at the mess the children had made of Kris's dress clothes; she had food stains all over. She had taken off her blazer after it suffered an additional insult when Christopher accidentally dropped a full plate of cake and ice cream on it. Kris had been more concerned that Christopher might have hurt himself when he tripped than she was about what he had done to her jacket.

The party had been a huge success and was currently winding down. The kids had eaten enough pizza as well as ice cream and cake to feed an army. Kris had been totally amazed at the amount of food the young children had been able to put away. They were all inside watching a new video Jenna had received while they waited for their parents to pick them up. Alice and Robert had just left; they had another commitment. Scott had yet to make an appearance.

"Ah... that must be one of the parents," Erin said when the doorbell rang. She quickly headed for the door.

* * *

"Hi, honey, I'm home."

"Well, how nice of you to make it, now that the party is over!" Erin said.

Scott scowled. "I got here as soon as I could, Erin. I didn't even stop to change." He was dressed in a blue pinstriped suit with an understated maroon tie and off-white shirt.

"Where are the kids? I've got something for them," Scott said, holding out a professionally wrapped package.

Erin stepped closer to Scott, her eyes narrowing suspiciously. His eyes were slightly glazed and she could smell alcohol on him. "You've been drinking!"

"They had cocktails at the museum. What's the big deal?"

"It's a big deal when you come in here smelling of booze. Go upstairs to the bathroom and use some mouthwash, and splash some cold water on your face," Erin demanded. She didn't want to take the chance of him running into any of the children by using the downstairs bathroom. "Come into the living room when you're done. Everyone's in there." Erin spun on her heels and walked away not giving him a chance to say anything else.

Scott growled under his breath but headed up the stairs.

* * *

"Scott's here," Erin said, stepping up next to Kris. Erin saw Kris glance toward the doorway. "He's upstairs. He'll be down in a few minutes," she said. "I'll be right back." She wanted to make sure he didn't still smell like liquor before he came down.

Kris couldn't help wondering what Scott was doing upstairs and why Erin was going up to join him. She kept her concerns to herself.

* * *

Kris looked at the man who stepped into the room. He was about Erin's height with dishwater blond hair and blue eyes. He would have been handsome, if not for the weasel-like look of his eyes. He had the appearance of a man not to be trusted.

Scott spotted the tall blond immediately. The woman was gorgeous, with a great physique. He wondered which one of these little rug rats was hers and if she might be single.

"Daddy!" called Jenna, drawing him out of his thoughts.

She got up and ran to her father, intent on hugging him.

He reached out and placed a restraining hand on her forehead stopping her before she could touch him. "Don't mess up daddy's good clothes," he said sternly.

Jenna's arms dropped to her side and the smile faded from her face. "Okay, Daddy."

Christopher came over to greet his father but made no attempt to touch him.

Kris watched the interaction with growing anger. Jenna was obviously hurt by her father's rejection.

Erin entered the room and hurried toward Kris as Scott stepped over to her, totally ignoring his children.

"Hi, I'm Scott," he said with a wolfish smile. He frowned when he caught sight of her soiled clothes.

Erin scowled at her ex and wrapped an arm around Kris's waist. She could feel how tense she was. Taking a deep breath, she plunged ahead. "Kris, this is Scott. Scott, this is Kris." Erin grimaced at Scott's blank look. "Kris and I are dating. Remember, I told you about her."

Scott was overwhelmed by a blinding jealousy. This was not at all what he was expecting. She couldn't possibly be the woman his wife was dating. *She doesn't even look like a dyke!* The woman was not only beautiful and incredibly built, but she easily topped him in height by quite a margin.

"Hello," Kris said, determined to be polite despite Scott's behavior.

Scott glared angrily when he had to look up to meet Kris's eyes. He made no attempt to respond to her greeting.

The two stood staring at each other in an apparent standoff. The sound of the doorbell broke the tense moment.

"That'll be the parents coming to pick up their kids," Erin said. She looked between the two of them nervously. The air was thick with tension. She was hesitant to leave them alone. The door bell rang again. "I'll be right back."

"I'll go with you, honey. It's the least I can do for being so late," Scott said with a patently fake smile.

Erin's mouth dropped open in shock. Scott walked away to answer the door before she could recover. Erin looked at Kris helplessly.

Kris didn't know what was going on but she didn't like it one bit.

* * *

Parents trickled in over the next half hour to pick up their children. Scott played the dutiful father to the hilt. He introduced himself as Erin's husband and spoke to each parent, telling them how proud he was of his children. A number of the parents looked at him strangely knowing that Erin had said she was divorced. Erin corrected him each time he said it but he just smiled at her condescendingly. Several times, he wrapped his arm around her shoulder and pulled her against his side as they stood saying their goodbyes to each group. Erin shrugged his arm off more than once and glared at him when no one was looking. She was furious but refused to create a scene in front of all the parents and their children.

Kris didn't know what to think. She was sitting on the couch with the twins in her lap. She couldn't hear the conversations but Erin and Scott looked very cozy together. She grimaced when Erin leaned close to Scott's ear to say something to him. Erin came over to her several times but Scott always found some way to intervene, calling her back to the door to speak to some new arrival. Kris was totally

confused, especially after everything Erin had told her about her relationship with Scott.

She watched them at the door, chatting with one of the parents. Scott's arm was draped casually over Erin's shoulder and she was standing close to his side. Kris couldn't help the surge of jealousy that raged through her. She was so blinded by it, that she didn't see the elbow Erin slammed into Scott's ribs as soon as the door closed on their last guest.

Scott headed her way. Kris's mouth dropped open in shock when Scott practically jerked the twins out of her lap.

"Hey! Careful!" Kris didn't give a damn if the kids were his or not, he shouldn't treat them like that.

Scott ignored her and headed upstairs with the children firmly in tow.

"Good night, Kris," the two little ones called to her.

Erin approached Kris. "I'm sorry, Kris. Scott wants to give the twins their gift and tuck them in. I'll be back down as quick as I can."

Erin hurried upstairs after Scott intent on getting rid of him as quickly as possible.

Kris stared after Erin's retreating form, not sure what to do. It sounded like she wanted her to stay. She sighed and headed into the kitchen to start cleaning up the mess from the party.

CHAPTER 26

"WHAT ARE YOU still doing here?"

Kris turned from the sink to see Scott leaning nonchalantly against the door frame. He had removed his jacket and tie. His shirt was open at the collar with several buttons undone and his shirt sleeves partially rolled up. He looked comfortable and totally at home.

He strode across the kitchen and stopped barely a foot from Kris. "You're not wanted here. Just leave."

"That's not for you to say," Kris said, trying hard to keep her cool. She wondered where Erin was.

"She's never going to stay with you. It's just a phase. You can't seriously believe she could ever be happy with you."

Kris met Scott's angry sneer, but refused to respond.

Scott's anger rose at Kris's seemingly calm demeanor. He wanted to hurt her, just like seeing Erin with her hurt him. "You might as well just leave and save yourself some embarrassment. You must be pretty pathetic in the sack, 'cause Erin asked me to spend the night," he goaded, trying to get a rise out of her.

"That's a lie!" Despite her words, the seed of doubt had already been planted. Kris flashed back to earlier when Erin had stood so casually next to Scott with his arm draped comfortably over her shoulders. She had been so wrong about Angela. Maybe she was about Erin as well.

Scott laughed cruelly. "She's upstairs getting the kids down for the night so we won't be interrupted." His insinuation was clear.

Kris growled angrily. "You're lying!"

Realizing he had finally opened a chink in her armor, Scott pressed the advantage. "Just remember who was there first. Do you think about it when you fuck her? I bet you can still smell me on her."

Kris clenched her fists at her side, fighting to keep her temper. It was taking all her willpower not to reach out and wipe the smug look off of Scott's face with her fist.

Scott stepped a little closer, well into Kris's personal space "Yeah, while you're home tonight in your empty bed, I'll be here with Erin. I can just see it now." Scott reached down and cupped his crotch. "I'll spread her wide before I bury myself deep inside her."

Kris shoved Scott away. "Shut up!"

Scott continued to taunt Kris. "I've been inside her in a way you can only dream about. She used to beg me for it you know."

Kris could see everything he was saying. She could see Erin with him. She felt her stomach roil. It was Angela all over again.

"Who knows, after tonight maybe she'll be pregnant? You gonna play daddy and help her raise my bastards?" Scott laughed cruelly. "Or maybe you'd like to watch and see how good she is at sucking me off?"

Kris couldn't take any more. "You son of a bitch! I'll kill you!" She grabbed Scott by his shirt and slammed him against the refrigerator, drawing back her arm to strike.

Scott cowered back, trying to pull away from Kris.

"Kris! No!" Erin raced across the room and grabbed her arm. She had come in just in time to hear Kris threaten Scott.

After giving the twins their gift and saying goodnight, Scott had left the room while she was still trying to get them settled for the night. Erin was stunned by what she had just seen and heard. What could have possibly transpired in the short time they had been alone?

Kris's arms dropped to her sides, she was breathing heavily, trying to regain control. She glared at Scott, still totally enraged.

Scott seeing his opportunity pushed Kris away. "Is this the kind of psycho you bring into the house to be around our children?" Scott rounded on Erin angrily. "You see what she's capable of? How do you know one of the children won't be next if they piss her off?"

Erin was shaking; she didn't know what was going on. She was scared by the enraged look on Kris's face. She couldn't believe she threatened to kill Scott. Kris had always been so kind and gentle. She just wouldn't have believed her capable of this type of violence. It was a shocking revelation.

Even though deep in her heart she knew Kris would never hurt her or the children, Erin was shaken by what she had witnessed. Afraid that they would still come to blows if they weren't separated, Erin looked up at Kris. "I think you should go."

Kris stared down at Erin incredulously. Her mouth worked for several seconds but no sounds came out. She spun on her heel and headed for the door. She stopped at the back door and looked back at Erin. She could see the fear and worry on her face. She started to speak, then caught a glimpse of Scott's triumphantly smirking face over Erin's

shoulder. Everything he said came rushing back. She left without a word.

"What the hell is going on?" Erin demanded as soon as the door closed behind Kris.

"Your girlfriend attacked me; that's what's going on!" Now that Kris was gone, Scott was going to do his best to drive a wedge between them.

"What did you say to her?"

"Nothing. When I came downstairs, she told me to leave. I said she didn't have the right to tell me that, only you did. That's when she attacked me."

"I want you to leave, Scott. Right now!" She knew Scott was lying. She would call Kris after he left and find out what really happened.

"What! I didn't do anything. I was just trying to see my children on their birthday. It's your psycho girlfriend that went off the deep end. I wonder what my parents will think when I tell them all about how she threatened to kill me. Bet they won't think she's so wonderful then!"

"Just go, Scott."

He took a step toward Erin going toe to toe with her trying to intimidate her. "You can't throw me out of my own house. I have a right to be here. I'll go when I'm damn good and ready."

"I mean it. Get out of here!" Erin was so furious she was shaking. "Don't make me call the police because I will!"

Scott stomped to the front door and jerked it open. He slammed it as hard as he could on the way out.

* * *

Kris jerked her truck over to the side of the road and jumped out. She barely made it to some bushes before she vomited. No matter how hard she tried to push them away,

she kept seeing the images Scott planted in her mind. She tortured herself with thoughts that Erin at that very moment was with Scott. *I actually trusted her. How could I have been so stupid?*

If she had but looked up, she would have seen Scott drive past after Erin threw him out of the house.

Kris finally got back in her truck and managed to drive home. She paced for several hours, going over and over again everything that had happened and been said. She couldn't help but come to the conclusion that Scott had been telling the truth. After all, she was the one Erin had told to leave, not Scott.

Kris felt a searing pain in her chest at the realization that Erin was Angela in another guise. She did the only thing she knew to do to try and escape the pain.

CHAPTER 27

ERIN SLAMMED down the phone in frustration. It was early evening and she had been trying to reach Kris since last night. She had repeatedly called her home and her cell phone, leaving multiple messages on each. Erin was determined to find out exactly what had happened between Kris and Scott last night. She had spent a restless night, remembering the look of pain and hurt on Kris's face before she walked out the door.

The children had been asking after Kris all day. She didn't know what to tell them. Kris had promised the twins she would set up the computer she had built for them for their birthday after her meeting with Harold. It was the first promise she had ever broken.

* * *

Erin set the phone down and buried her face in her hands. *Where are you, Kris?* It had become a familiar refrain. It had been three days since the twin's birthday and she still hadn't found Kris. Erin lost count of the number of messages she left on her cell phone and home machine. Yesterday, as soon as Kris's office opened, she had called Betty. She had met Betty two weeks earlier when Kris had needed to stop by the office to pick up some paperwork.. Betty had been warm and friendly, showing her around the office and explaining some of the things she did while she waited for Kris to collect her paperwork. This time, the woman was frostily polite. The only thing she would tell Erin was that Ms. Rawlings was not available. She had left a message for Kris anyway, hoping she would get it. She had called twice more yesterday and again today, only to receive

the same cold reception from Betty. Stopping by Kris's condo hadn't worked either. Her truck wasn't there and no one answered the door.

Erin didn't know what else to do. The twins had cried themselves to sleep the last two nights. Nothing she could say would console them. Then it hit her; she didn't know why she hadn't thought of it before – *Jerry!* He would know where Kris was. She scrambled to find the business card he had given her.

* * *

"South Side Realty. This is Jerry Parks, how may I help you?"

"Hi, Jerry. This is Erin." Dead silence met her greeting. "Erin Patterson... Kris's friend."

"I know who you are. I've got nothing to say to you," Jerry huffed angrily.

"Jerry... Jerry... wait!" The dial tone sounded loudly in her ear.

Erin couldn't believe he hung up on her. He had obviously talked to Kris and knew what happened. Determined to set this right, she called Alice and asked her to look after the twins. She hadn't told her about what had happened after they left. Obviously, Scott hadn't carried through with his threat to inform them.

* * *

"Mr. Parks is with clients right now," the receptionist said.

"That's fine. I'll wait," Erin said.

She waited for over an hour before Jerry appeared with two men in tow. He said his goodbyes to his clients and turned back toward his office.

"Mr. Parks, you have someone waiting for you," the receptionist said.

Jerry scowled when he spotted Erin. She had a lot of nerve coming here. Not wanting to create a scene in the middle of his workplace, he irritably motioned her to follow him.

He closed his office door behind Erin, never saying a word to her as he walked across the room and settled himself behind his desk. "You made a trip down here for nothing. I already told you, I've got nothing to say to you," he said without bothering to look up.

"Jerry, please just listen to me."

Jerry looked up and took a closer look at Erin. She looked completely stressed out and on the verge of tears. Her deep brown eyes appeared dull and she had dark shadows under her eyes. Her normally immaculately braided hair was pulled back into a loose ponytail.

"What?"

"Do you know where Kris is? I've been trying to reach her for days."

"Maybe you should take a hint. She obviously doesn't want anything to do with you," Jerry said. Erin was just Angela all over again. But she had done Angela one better and plunged Kris into a black depression he was afraid she would never recover from.

"But why?" Erin brushed away the tears that came so readily the past few days. "Did she tell you what happened?"

Erin's tone turned pleading when Jerry just started at her. "I need to know what happened, Jerry. I came into the kitchen and Kris had my ex-husband pinned to the refrigerator, threatening to kill him. Scott swears he didn't

say anything to her but I know he's lying. Please, I'm begging you... tell me what happened."

"So, you knew he was lying but you threw Kris out!" His anger at the way Erin had treated his friend was clearly evident.

"I didn't throw her out! I was scared and thought they were going to start punching each other. She had her arm cocked back to hit him when I came in. I didn't know what to do!" Erin raked her hands through her hair in frustration. "I know all too well what Scott is like. I knew Kris would leave peacefully. You think I wanted to see them fight?" Tears streamed down Erin's face. "After Kris left, I had to threaten to call the police to get Scott to leave. What was I supposed to do?"

Jerry had not given a thought to Erin's side of this whole situation. When Kris showed up in tears, he had thought of no one but his friend. Jerry came out from behind his desk and led Erin over to the couch set in the corner of his office.

"I'm going to ask you something, Erin, and I need you to be totally honest with me."

"Anything! Just ask."

"Did you ask Scott to stay and spend the night with you, the night of the twin's birthday party?" Jerry was pretty sure now what the answer was going to be but he needed to hear it from her.

"What? Of course not!" Erin said, offended and appalled. That's when it hit her and she realized just what Scott had done. "Oh my God... No!" She buried her face in her hands.

Jerry reached out and patted Erin's back trying to calm her. He had to know what had happened from Erin's point of

view. "Tell me everything that happened, from the time your ex showed up 'til you asked Kris to leave."

When Erin had finished, Jerry shook his head sadly. *God, what a mess!* His phone rang, interrupting them. "I'll be right back."

He was on the phone several minutes. Erin looked up gratefully when she heard him cancel the rest of the day's appointments. Now that she knew what Scott had told Kris, she knew why she had run. Although she was hurt that Kris had again run from her and thought the worst, without taking the time to ask if it was true. The only thing she couldn't figure out was why Kris had been so furious. She could understand her feeling upset and betrayed, especially after knowing about her past with Angela. But there had to be more to it than that. She had been totally enraged that night. Erin knew Jerry had heard the whole story from Kris and was determined he was going to tell her.

Erin met Jerry's eyes squarely when he sat back down. "Tell me what happened between Kris and Scott. I have to know everything that bastard said to her."

Jerry was torn. He wanted to help Erin as he believed she was telling the truth. On the other hand, Kris would be furious with him if he betrayed her confidence. Not to mention the fact that Erin's ex had said some incredibly ugly things to Kris that he did not want to repeat.

Erin could see Jerry debating with himself. She knew how loyal he was to Kris but she had to convince him to help her. "Jerry, please listen to me. I love Kris with all my heart. I'm not going to let my bastard of an ex-husband break us up. We belong together! It's not just me that's being hurt here. My kids, Christopher and Jenna have cried themselves to sleep for the past two nights. I'm sure she's told you about them... hasn't she?"

Jerry nodded. Kris loved those children like they were her own and talked about them incessantly.

"Well, they keep asking me where Kris is and if she is mad at them. They think she doesn't love them anymore because she went away. I tried to tell them she was working but they don't believe me. She made them a promise and broke it, something she has never done before." When Jerry started to squirm, Erin knew she was getting through to him.

"I need your help, Jerry. I need you to tell me exactly what happened so I know what I'm up against. Please, help me bring us all back together."

Jerry was impressed by Erin's passionate, heartfelt appeal. He just hoped Kris wouldn't hurt him too badly for what he was about to do. It was in her best interest, though he knew in her current state of mind she might not see it that way.

"Alright, alright. I'll help you." Jerry's eyes widened in surprise when Erin threw herself into his arms and began to sob. The emotions of the last few days had obviously taken their toll.

"It's okay. Everything will be okay," Jerry said, patting her back consolingly. He prayed he wasn't giving Erin false hope.

Erin sat up and wiped away her tears. "Tell me what happened, please."

Jerry still hesitated. "Are you sure you want to hear this? It's pretty ugly."

"I need to know."

Jerry proceeded to tell Erin exactly what had transpired in her kitchen that night. Kris had repeated what Scott said word for word, the words seemed to have been seared into her brain.

Erin's face grew paler and paler as the story unfolded. By the time Jerry finished, she had a death grip on the couch cushion where she was sitting and looked like she was going to be ill.

Jerry started in surprise when Erin jumped to her feet. She whirled around and ran for the door.

"Wait! Where are you going, Erin?"

"To kill my ex-husband!" Erin snarled over her shoulder as she raced away.

"Oh, God!" Jerry bolted after her, but he was too late. She was already in her van and peeling away before he could reach her.

CHAPTER 28

JERRY GRABBED the phone on the first ring. The realty office where he worked had closed half an hour ago. He had stayed at the office, praying Erin would either return or call. He couldn't go home and tell Kris what happened especially when he didn't know where Erin was.

"Hello."

"Hey, Jerry."

"Thank God!" Jerry said. "Where are you, Erin? Is everything all right?"

"I'm okay," Erin said, sounding anything but. "Could you come pick me up?"

"Where are you?"

"I'm at Mercy Hospital," Erin said.

"What happened? Are you sure you're alright?" Jerry questioned anxiously

"I'm okay. I'll meet you outside the ER and explain everything."

"I'll be right there," Jerry said.

* * *

Jerry easily spotted Erin. She was leaning against a post outside the ER bay doors. He rolled down the passenger window and called to her. When she opened the door the dome light came on, giving him his first clear glimpse of her appearance. Her hair was down and wildly tangled, more alarming was the blood on her shirt and the fresh cast on her hand.

"Damn girl, what happened to you?" Jerry asked, his eyes locked on the blood stains on the front of her shirt.

Erin looked down. "It's not mine."

Jerry was getting a bit worried about the glassy look in her eyes. She was acting very strangely.

"Tell me what's going on, Erin. Where's your van and what happened to your hand?"

"Where's Kris, Jerry?"

"I'm not telling you anything else 'til you tell me what the hell happened after you ran out of my office."

Erin sighed and laid her head back against the headrest, closing her eyes. "Could we go somewhere where we can talk?"

Jerry wasn't sure where to take Erin. He couldn't take her home. Kris was there. Not having any idea what was going on he figured it might be a good idea to keep Kris out of the equation until he found out. Making up his mind they headed out.

* * *

Erin looked up in surprise when they pulled up in front of Freddie's Cafe. She thought Jerry would take her to his place to talk. That's when it dawned on her.

"Kris is staying with you... isn't she?" This whole day had been a disaster and she was tired of Jerry's evasiveness. All she wanted was to see Kris and have a chance to explain. She felt like her life was crumbling before her very eyes.

Jerry looked stubborn, refusing to answer. He cut Erin off before she could say anything else. "Let's go inside and get something to eat, then you can tell me what's going on." He reached into the backseat and pulled out a hooded sweatshirt. "Here, this will cover up your shirt." He got out

of the car and headed into the restaurant, not even looking back to see if Erin followed.

* * *

"Well?" Jerry asked when Erin sat down. She had gone into the bathroom and cleaned up a bit, washing her face and pulling her hair back into a ponytail.

Erin sighed, resigned. "There's not much to tell," she said. "After I left your office, I went over to Scott's condo. I knew he would be there. He plays golf on Tuesdays so he leaves work early. When I confronted him about what he had done at first he denied it. I told him he was a damned liar."

Erin straightened her shoulders and seemed to mentally shake herself before continuing. "He finally admitted it, every last word, then he started laughing."

Jerry's mouth dropped open. Erin's ex was one cruel bastard.

"That's when I lost it and just started swinging. The blood is his. I broke his nose," Erin said. "I also broke my hand on the bastard's face."

Jerry didn't know what to say. He just couldn't believe what she'd done. The way she talked so calmly about it, it was like it had happened to another person. He wondered if she was in shock.

"Okay, now I told you what you wanted to know. Now, you tell me. Where is Kris?"

Jerry was concerned by Erin's mental state. "Two more questions." He wanted to keep her talking.

"What?" Erin scowled, visibly impatient.

"Where's your van and where are the twins?"

"My van is parked in front of Scott's condo, or at least it was. He was standing in his doorway with blood pouring

down his face, screaming that he was going to call the cops. I just crossed my arms over my shirt and quietly walked away. No one tried to stop me and I didn't hear any sirens. He lives about ten blocks from Mercy, so I walked over there."

"And your kids?"

"I called their grandmother and asked her to watch them before I came to your office. I called her from the hospital and told her I had gotten tied up with friends and asked her to let them spend the night. Satisfied?"

"Maybe I should take you home. You look like you need to rest. I'll take you to Kris tomorrow," Jerry said.

"No!" Erin was adamant.

Jerry could see there was no dissuading her, and in her current state of mind he wasn't sure what she would do.

"You were right, Kris is staying with me. But I need to warn you Erin. I've never seen her like this, not even after Angela, and I thought that was bad. It's like she's pulled inside of herself to a place where no one can reach her. She just shut down that night after she left your house. She barely speaks unless it has to do with work. The only thing she has anything to do with is that damn dog. He hasn't left her side. I'm not sure she will even be willing to listen to you."

"You have to help me, Jerry. Make her see reason. I didn't invite Scott to stay, she has to believe me."

"I don't know, Erin. When she gets like this she won't listen to anyone. She just shuts down emotionally," Jerry said, trying to prepare her.

"Take me to her, Jerry... please."

* * *

Erin's heart was pounding in her chest as Jerry opened the door and they stepped inside his condo.

"Kris... Kris... I'm home," Jerry called. He motioned for Erin to stay put and went in search of Kris.

He returned a few minutes later. "She's not here."

Erin glared at him suspiciously and tried to move past him. He reached out and took hold of her arm, stopping her.

"But, I'm pretty sure I know where she is," he said. "Come on."

* * *

Neither of them spoke during the drive. Erin's eyes widened when Jerry pulled up in front of Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery.

Jerry got out of the car and motioned to Erin. "Follow me."

Though it was almost seven, it was just now turning dusky. The light reflected off the San Diego Bay and lit the headstones with an unearthly glow.

Erin started when Jerry stopped suddenly. He pointed over to his left. There sitting on the ground next to a headstone was Kris with Willy by her side. Her head was down and Erin wasn't able to see her face. Erin looked at Jerry questioningly.

"She comes out here when she's hurting," he said.

They walked quietly over to where Kris sat. In the waning light, Erin could still make out the inscription on the stone. "John W. Rawlings Sr. Beloved Husband and Father, LT US Navy, Vietnam, 1947-1971."

"Oh, Kris." Kris had never mentioned her parents. Erin had just assumed that they were estranged.

Kris's head jerked up at the sound of Erin's voice. She quickly spotted Jerry standing next to her and glared at him.

"How could you bring her here?"

When Kris lifted her head up, Erin could see tears running down her face. She dropped to her knees next to Kris and tried to take her into her arms.

Kris backpedaled and jumped up to keep Erin from touching her. "Just leave me alone. Leave me alone!"

Jerry rushed over and grabbed hold of Kris. She tried to pull away. Jerry might have been smaller than Kris but he spent a lot of hours in the gym and was very strong for his size.

"Calm down, Kris... just calm down."

She sagged into his arms, crying. In this place, of all places, her defenses were down.

Erin stepped over and again tried to touch Kris. She drew back in hurt when Kris flinched and Jerry shot her a warning look, telling her to back off. Willy stepped between the two women and pushed Erin back further away from Kris. Erin looked down at the big dog in shock when he growled softly.

Jerry held Kris tenderly, lightly stroking her back. "Listen to me, baby... you know how much I love you. I didn't bring her here to hurt you. You need to listen to what she has to say."

He sighed when Kris shook her head adamantly. This was exactly what he was afraid would happen.

Erin's heart was breaking seeing Kris like this. "Please, Kris, I'm begging you. Just listen to what I have to say, then if you want me to, I promise I will go away and never bother you again."

Kris looked up and met Erin's eyes for just a second then looked away. "Okay," she whispered in a pain-filled voice.

"Could we go somewhere, so we can talk?" Erin asked.

Kris shook her head and sat back down next to her father's tombstone. Willy quickly lay back down at her side, eyeing Erin warily. Erin took up a seat at the foot of the grave. Jerry walked away and sat down on a nearby bench, still near enough to hear what was being said.

Erin quickly began to explain everything. She told Kris what had actually gone on during the end of the party, about how angry she had been with Scott for the games he was playing, acting the dutiful father with all the parents but how she had not wanted to create a scene in front of all the children.

Kris glared over at Jerry when Erin told her that she knew all about what Scott had done.

"You have to believe me, Kris. I swear to you on the lives of my children, I did not ask him to stay the night. I would never do that! I don't love Scott and I never have. I love you and I would never intentionally do anything to hurt you. I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am for what Scott did."

Kris stared at the ground, her hand gently stroking Willy's coat. She showed no reaction to Erin's heartfelt apology.

Erin sighed, tears running down her face. She had tried her best but it was no use. Scott had managed to destroy any chance she had had at happiness. "I understand," she said softly. "I just have one thing to ask you. I know with everything that's happened, you don't want to see me anymore but please... please, don't cut Christopher and Jenna out of your life. If you could find it in your heart to continue to be their friend, it would mean so much to them.

They both love you very much. They are innocents in all this. Please don't make them suffer because of it."

Kris continued to stare at the ground. Erin waited patiently but it soon became clear she wasn't going to respond. With one last longing look at Kris, Erin got up and slowly made her way back to Jerry's car. Once inside, she broke down and began to sob from the tearing pain of Kris's rejection.

* * *

Jerry watched Erin walk away with a heavy heart. He walked over to Kris and squatted down next to her, wrapping a comforting arm around her shoulders.

"I believe her, Kris." Jerry felt Kris stiffen. "Just hear me out. She loves you very much and I know you love her. If you let this tear your relationship apart, then you've let that bastard win. He'd love nothing better than to know he managed to break you up. This is Scott's doing, not Erin's. She's hurting just like you are. She's not Angela, Kris."

Kris didn't speak or even acknowledge that she had heard him.

"Think about it, Kris. Think about it long and hard. The chance at real happiness only comes around once in a lifetime, if you're lucky," Jerry said. "Don't let this homophobic bastard take away your family!" He sighed, then turned and walked away.

* * *

Erin stepped into her living room and stopped dead in her tracks. "What are you doing here?" This was the last person she wanted to talk to.

Alice walked across the room toward Erin. "Oh my God, honey. What happened to you? Was there an accident?" Alice's face paled as a sudden revelation seemed to strike. "Erin, did Kris hurt you?"

That last part got Erin's attention. "What? Of course not! What would make you think —" Erin's shoulders slumped. *Scott, you bastard!* He had finally gone through with his threat to tell his parents what had happened the night of the party.

"Are the kids here?" Erin asked. She didn't want them to see her with blood all over her shirt. The cast was going to be hard enough to explain.

Alice blinked at the rapid change in subject. "They're with Robert at our house."

Erin breathed a sigh of relief then walked over to the couch and flopped down on it.

"Scott called you, didn't he?"

Alice nodded her head. She had known something was wrong between the two women on Monday. Erin had been acting very strangely and the twins had been upset. Erin had tried to convince her that Kris was busy working but she hadn't believed it. Her suspicions were confirmed when she found out from the kids that Kris had not even called. When Erin asked her to babysit earlier, she had hoped they were going to try and work things out. The second phone call later in the day, asking her to keep the twins overnight, had given her hope that they had made up.

Scott's call, after Erin's, had been shocking if even half of what he claimed was true. She and Robert had talked about it and both of them had their doubts. Scott might be their son but he didn't seem to be capable of telling the truth where Erin was concerned. But they just could not take the chance that even some of what he said was true which was why Alice had come over to Erin's.

"Tell me what happened, Erin. After the party and tonight... please, honey. Robert and I are very worried about you," Alice said, drawing Erin into a comforting hug.

Alice watched in dismay as Erin's already fragile emotional control crumbled and she began to cry. "It's alright. Everything will be alright. Tell me," Alice said.

Any other time, Erin would have tried to protect Alice. Many times, during her marriage to Scott, she had tried to gloss over things he had said and done. This time Erin was so emotionally devastated by losing Kris that the whole horrible story came pouring out including every vicious thing Scott had said to Kris and her.

Alice gasped when she got to the part about breaking Scott's nose. Her eyes widened in shock and she stared at Erin's cast. "You broke his nose? He said Kris did."

"What! That's not true. Kris never touched him!" Erin fairly shouted.

"I'm so sorry, Erin. I should have known Kris wasn't capable of hurting you."

Erin stared at Alice in shock. "You thought she..." She held up her cast. "Alice, you have to believe me. Kris would never hurt me or the kids."

Alice was reeling with everything Erin had told her. "So, what happened after you left Scott? Did you ever find Kris?"

Erin's tears started again, she just couldn't help it. She told Alice about Jerry taking her to the cemetery and everything that had transpired there.

Alice shook her head sadly. "I guess I was wrong about Kris hurting you."

"She didn't. Alice. I –"

"No, not physically but she hurt you just the same, Erin. This is Scott's doing, not yours. And Kris should be able to see that."

"I know, but she has her reasons." Even though Kris had hurt her deeply, she still loved her and wouldn't have Alice thinking badly of her.

Erin then told Alice about Angela, figuring at this point Kris couldn't hate her more than she already did. She wanted Alice to understand just what kind of damage Scott had caused and why Kris reacted so badly.

Alice had tears in her eyes when Erin finished. "I'm sorry... for everything my son has done to you. I'm sure you wish you'd never met our family."

It was Erin's turn to comfort Alice. They had had this conversation before. "You know better than that. I used Scott too. And you know I've never regretted having Jenna and Christopher. You and Robert are the best grandparents any child could hope for and I'm happy you are part of their lives. I would never want that to change, no matter what Scott does."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I honestly don't know. It just hurts so much. I feel like there is this huge empty hole inside of me," Erin said, starting to cry again.

"Robert and I will help you any way we can," Alice said, though she knew in her heart there was only one person who could fix this.

CHAPTER 29

IT HAD BEEN several long, lonely days since her encounter with Kris in the cemetery. Erin tried to accept the fact that Kris just didn't love her as much as she claimed she did. Otherwise, she would have never given up on them so quickly.

Jerry had called to let her know Kris had gone back home that same night after their confrontation. Erin felt bad that she had gotten Jerry involved and caused a rift between him and Kris. Jerry had assured her she had done the right thing, and he felt Kris was being unfair to her.

She was thrilled and felt a surge of hope when Kris called. Her excitement was quickly dashed when Kris asked if she could come over today to set up the twin's birthday gift. It was obvious from her tone of voice that she was simply fulfilling an obligation. After that, she had asked to speak to the children. Christopher and Jenna had each spoken to Kris. Both of them had cried but were happy about Kris's upcoming visit. Erin had hoped Kris would ask to speak with her when she was done but Jenna had hung up the phone after speaking to Kris.

Erin jumped, drawn out of her thoughts by the sound of a truck door slamming. She glanced nervously toward the door. Although she knew Kris was coming to see the twins, Erin was honest enough to admit to herself that at this point she was happy to see her for any reason. She still loved her deeply.

* * *

Kris glanced up nervously at the house. She had tried to convince herself that she was only here out of a sense of obligation but she knew in her heart it wasn't true. After she fled from Erin's that night she had tried to close herself off emotionally. She tortured herself with visions of Scott with Erin and berated herself for being such a fool. That all changed that fateful night in the cemetery. She never expected Erin to come looking for her. Even though she hadn't acknowledged it at the time, she heard every word Erin said.

Kris still loved Erin deeply but was not sure how to get past what had happened. Despite knowing the truth about that night, she couldn't seem to get Scott's words out of her mind. Sighing, she made her way reluctantly to the door.

The echo of the doorbell hadn't ended when the door was pulled open. Kris felt herself choke up as soon as she saw Erin.

"Hello," she finally managed to murmur around an emotion tightened throat.

"Hi, Kris." Erin could see the pain in Kris's eyes. It matched her own. She wanted so badly to pull Kris into her arms and hug her tightly. She resisted, not knowing if her touch would be welcomed.

Christopher and Jenna pushed past their mother and wrapped themselves around Kris's legs.

"Come on, you two, let Kris in the house," Erin said, trying to peel the twins off Kris's legs.

"It's okay," Kris said, leaning down and sweeping the two children up into her arms.

Erin watched as the three of them exchanged kisses and hugs. Her heart ached, wanting so much to join them but fearing Kris's rejection.

Kris and the children disappeared into the twin's bedroom to set up their computer. Erin remained downstairs.

* * *

Kris pulled the computer components out of the boxes as the twins bounced around excitedly. They were so ecstatic to see her. Kris felt guilty for staying away. Erin was right. These two were innocents in all that had happened. She glanced repeatedly at the door waiting for Erin to appear. She was equally relieved and disappointed when she didn't.

She spent over an hour with the children after she had everything set up, showing them how everything worked. Their favorite part so far was the start up of the computer. Kris had customized the startup of the operating system. When the desktop screen appeared, Scooby Doo ran across the screen and sat down. "Herro Jenna, herro Christopher," Scooby said. "What would roo like to do today? Hehehehehe."

They both started to cry when Kris informed them it was time for her to go. She had missed them terribly over the last week. Though she had told herself she wouldn't, she promised them she would come back again and bring Willy with her. After many hugs and kisses she left them happily playing with the computer.

Then, she quietly made her way back downstairs.

* * *

Erin stepped into the foyer when she had heard Kris coming down the stairs. They stood and stared at each other, each hurting but neither knowing what to do to heal the rift between them. Erin had done everything she could. Though she felt horrible, she was not responsible for her ex-husband's actions. She had not done anything wrong.

Kris felt just as torn. She knew what had happened wasn't Erin's fault but she just didn't know how to reach out to her. She had been hurt terribly by what Scott had done but knew she had hurt Erin as well.

"I have to go," she said in a pain-filled voice.

Erin nodded sadly. "Will you come back?" she asked.

"I promised the twins I would bring Willy over. If that's okay with you?" Kris added nervously.

"Of course it's okay, Kris. You're welcome here any time."

Kris smiled tentatively before turning to leave.

Erin managed to hold her tears at bay until the door closed behind Kris.

CHAPTER 30

ERIN PUSHED away the computer keyboard. She was finally caught up on all the reports she needed to finish transcribing for work. She had already called and let her employer know she would not be accepting any new reports for a few weeks until her hand healed. It had been a lot of extra work typing them one-handed but it had been a welcome distraction, keeping her from slipping further into the depression she'd fallen into since her breakup with Kris. She was thankful for the children, they helped keep her grounded as well. Alice had stopped asking about Kris after the first few days once she realized how painful it was for Erin.

It had been a little over a week since Kris's visit. She had called the kids every night since to wish them goodnight. She and Kris had spoken for a few minutes each time but it was stilted and they only spoke of mundane affairs, such as the weather or sports. It was nothing like the hours of conversations they used to have. But Erin consoled herself with the fact that it was at least something.

The doorbell rang drawing her out of her morose thoughts.

* * *

Erin was rendered momentarily speechless by the sight of her visitor. Pulling herself together, she finally greeted her guest.

"Hi, Kris."

"Hi."

They stood staring at each other awkwardly, neither quite sure what to say. Erin sighed. *It shouldn't be this hard.*

"I'm sorry but the kids aren't here right now," Erin said, assuming that was why Kris was here. "They're at preschool 'til two-thirty."

Kris shifted nervously. "I know. I... um... was wondering if we could talk."

Erin flinched, expecting the worst. She was sure Kris had come to tell her she wasn't going to see the twins anymore and didn't want to do it with them here. Erin nodded and led Kris inside. They settled on opposite ends of the couch. When the silence grew uncomfortable Erin spoke up. She wanted to get this over with as quickly as possible.

"So, you said you wanted to talk?"

Kris looked over at the woman who held her heart. She knew it was up to her to fix this. She had spent the last week trying to decide what to do. She had been furious at first at Jerry for bringing Erin to the cemetery. But she loved the big queen and couldn't stay mad at him. Jerry had been adamant in his defense of Erin, telling Kris what a fool she was to let someone like Scott ruin what had been the best thing that had ever happened to her. After many tears and sleepless nights, in the end it came down to the undeniable fact that she loved Erin with all her heart and felt like a piece of herself was missing without her. Erin was as much a victim of Scott's viciousness as she was. She just wasn't sure where to start.

"Yeah..." Kris cleared her throat and met Erin's pain-filled eyes. "I wanted to apologize. I know it wasn't your fault what Scott did. I'd... I'd like us to try again... if you're willing."

Erin's eyes filled with tears. She had hoped and prayed for this moment but now that it was here, she wasn't sure she could do it. She had spent many lonely, restless nights

thinking about their relationship. If it was ever going to work out between them, some things were going to have to change.

"I'd like to try again," Erin said. "But I don't know if we can."

Kris's face crumpled and she gulped back tears. "Why?"

Erin took a deep breath. "I love you, Kris, with all my heart. But I don't see how we can survive in a longterm relationship if you don't trust me."

"But I do!"

Erin shook her head sadly. "No, you don't. You've run from me twice now. You never gave me a chance to explain or to see if what you thought was even true. I'm not Angela, Kris! And 'til you believe that, in your heart of hearts, we don't stand a chance."

Kris hung her head, everything Erin said was true. "I know you're not Angela. If I thought that for even a second, I wouldn't be here. If you'll give me another chance, I promise you, no matter what, I won't run from you again. I swear it!" Kris vowed, tears streaming freely down her face.

Erin looked deep into Kris's vibrant blue eyes, seeing the truth in her words. She nodded her head, her own tears falling.

Kris scooted over next to Erin and took her hands in hers. It felt so good to touch her. "I love you so much."

"I love you too, Kris."

A puzzled look crossed Kris's face and she glanced down at Erin's hands in hers. "What happened to your hand?" she asked, stroking her thumb curiously over Erin's cast.

Erin looked down, then up at Kris in surprise. "Jerry didn't tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

Erin told Kris the story of how her hand came to be broken.

Kris stared at Erin incredulously. "You broke his nose?" She had been so distracted the last time she was here that she hadn't noticed the cast.

"Yeah, I did. He deserved that and more for what he did to us. He tried to destroy our family and almost succeeded," Erin said. "If I had known that night what he'd done, I would have helped you wipe the floor with him!" She was furious just thinking about it again.

Jerry had never said a word about what happened in his office, only what Erin had already explained, that she had come looking for her and Jerry had told her what happened that night. Kris was struck once again by the realization of just what an incredibly strong and amazing woman Erin was. While she had run from the pain of everything that happened, Erin had faced it head on and fought for what she wanted. Kris knew she should take a lesson from Erin's indomitable spirit.

Kris reached out and gently pulled an obviously angry Erin into her arms. "Easy, tiger," she said, stroking her back. "Everything is going to be okay. We're going to be okay. No one is going to take our family."

Erin melted against Kris, wrapping her arms tightly around her. It was like coming home. They stayed that way for quite some time. Neither speaking, just soaking up each other's love and tenderness.

They were still entwined on the couch when Alice brought Jenna and Christopher home from school. The twins screamed Kris's name when they saw her and ran to join the two women on the couch.

Alice choked back tears as she watched the four exchange hugs and kisses. Turning away, she quietly let herself out of the house, not wanting to intrude on what was a private family moment. She was so happy for both of them that they had worked things out.

* * *

Kris stayed until the twins' bedtime and helped get them ready for bed. She was sitting in the middle of their floor singing to them. As she sang, she smiled at the three sweet faces watching her and realized what a fool she had been to even think about giving this up. Erin and these two little ones were her family and she vowed never to let anyone take them away. While she easily slipped back into the twin's lives, things were still a bit tentative with Erin. They had not even kissed yet. They both seemed to be holding back, suddenly a bit cautious with each other.

Seeing that the children were asleep, she let her voice trail off. Erin got up and kissed each child on the forehead before making her way over to offer a hand up. Kris gratefully accepted and stood with Erin for several minutes staring down at the two little ones. They quietly let themselves out of the room.

Erin stopped in the hall just outside the twin's door. She looked up at Kris, her warm brown eyes filled with love. "Stay with me tonight."

Kris glanced across the hall to Erin's bedroom. She was immediately assailed with images of Erin and Scott. Tears filled Kris's eyes. "I can't."

Erin had followed Kris's gaze. "I just want to hold you, nothing more."

Kris again glanced toward Erin's bedroom door.

"We can stay in the bedroom downstairs."

"Willy's at home. I need to let him out."

"Go get him, bring him here."

"What about in the morning, when Jenna and Christopher get up?"

"I want us to be a family, Kris. I don't want to hide what we feel for each other. I want to tell them about us. I well... I... before all this happened I bought some books for us to read with them. They're meant for children their ages and explain about how every family is different. Beverly, one of the mom's from the kids' preschool recommended several books to me when I mentioned we were dating. She and her partner read them to their little boy before he started preschool."

Kris was amazed to know there were other gay parents in the children's preschool class. Times were certainly changing. She was relieved that Erin had thought all this out. She didn't want to have to worry about showing her affection for Erin around the children. Kris wanted them to grow up knowing how much their mother meant to her. But she was still hesitant about spending the night.

Erin read Kris's reluctance and sighed. "Will we see you again soon?" she asked, trying hard to hide her disappointment.

Easily seeing how hurt Erin was and vowing not to hurt her any further, Kris had a change of heart. "I'll stay, but I would prefer to stay downstairs."

Erin offered Kris her hand. "That's not a problem. Come on."

* * *

Erin had gotten everything prepared while Kris went to get Willy. They had gotten him comfortably settled on a blanket in the corner of the room.

It had been a bit uncomfortable getting ready for bed. Kris had gone into the bathroom to change into the oversize

T-shirt Erin loaned her. Dressed in the T-shirt and her boxers, she had slipped into the bed nervously. Erin chose to change in the room with her. Kris couldn't help but watch and was relieved when she felt herself becoming aroused. She had feared that all she would be able to think about when she thought of Erin that way would be the images Scott had planted in her mind.

Erin smiled when she felt Kris's eyes on her, easily reading her arousal. She had told the truth she only wanted to hold Kris but she was happy to know Kris still found her desirable. She was worried that after Scott's stunt Kris would not want to touch her. Still a bit anxious as to Kris's reaction, she slid into the bed next to her.

Kris opened her arms to Erin and sighed in contentment when she settled into them.

"I love you," she whispered.

"I love you too, Kris." Erin lifted up. She could just make out Kris's face in the moonlight shining in through the sliding glass door but couldn't see her eyes. She leaned down slowly, giving Kris ample opportunity to pull away. She sighed when their lips met. The kiss was soft, gentle and filled with love. Erin settled back against Kris's shoulder when the kiss broke.

Kris tightened her hold, drawing Erin closer to her body. Her heart was pounding from the brief but intense kiss.

Erin wrapped her arm around Kris's chest and snuggled close. They both sighed in contentment and dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER 31

KRIS DRIFTED awake slowly. Last night was the first decent night's rest she'd had in almost two weeks. A bit groggy and disoriented, she felt a warm weight pressing her down into the bed. Not quite fully awake yet, she ran her hands up and down the warm soft skin under her fingers. Her eyes blinked open and she looked down at Erin, sound asleep on her chest. She smiled when the events of the previous day came rushing back and leaned down to place a soft kiss on her head. Her hands were under Erin's shirt, resting comfortably on bare skin. She closed her eyes in pleasure and ran her hands up and down Erin's back. Erin groaned in her sleep and unconsciously pressed closer.

Kris frowned. *What the heck?* She could have sworn she heard a – *There it was again.* She could swear she heard giggling. She opened her eyes and looked around. Her eyes widened in shock when she spotted two little faces staring up at her from the side of the bed.

Erin chose that moment to awaken. She snuggled against Kris, rubbing her face against her chest. Lifting up, she smiled sleepily at Kris. She leaned forward intent on placing a kiss on Kris's lips. Her brow furrowed when Kris pressed back into the pillows and she felt her body tense under her.

"We have company," Kris whispered.

That's when Erin heard it. She turned and spotted Christopher and Jenna staring intently at them. They met her eyes and giggled.

"Hi, Mommy, hi, Kris," they chorused.

"What are you two doing up so early?" Erin asked.

"The big number turned to seven, Mommy," Jenna said, gesturing to the clock on the nightstand. "We got up and couldn't find you. We looked all over the house." It was obvious they had been a bit scared.

Erin had taught the children their numbers and insisted if they woke early, they should stay in their room and play quietly until seven. Otherwise, they would have her up before six every day.

"I'm sorry you got scared, honey. Mommy and Kris decided to sleep downstairs."

Kris felt bad that she hadn't thought about the fact that the kids might be scared if Erin wasn't in her bed.

"Did you have a sleep over with Mommy?" Christopher asked. "How come you didn't sleep in Mommy's bed?"

Kris felt herself flush. She didn't know how to answer that, never expecting the twins to find her in bed with their mother. She glanced up at Erin helplessly not knowing what to say.

Erin tried not to laugh and quickly stepped in to save Kris. "Yes, she sure did," she said matter of fact. Erin glanced around the room, looking for the big dog but he wasn't on his blanket. She wondered where he had gone.

Kris relaxed at Erin's calm response and the twins' easy acceptance. She smiled down at the kids. "Want to join us?"

The two began to clamor excitedly. Erin smiled down at Kris as she slid off her, surprised but pleased by her invitation to the kids.

Kris pulled the kids into the bed and they quickly got settled between the two adults. It was a tight fit in the queen bed but everyone happily snuggled together.

* * *

Erin glanced over at the clock and groaned. She had totally lost track of the time as they laughed and played with the two little ones in bed. She glanced down at Christopher sprawled out on her body, his head resting on her chest. Jenna was in the same position on Kris. The two were listening raptly to the story Kris was telling. Erin felt like her heart would burst with love. After all the pain of the last few weeks, she could not remember ever being happier in her life. This was what a family was supposed to be. Loath to break up the moment, she sighed, but Kris had said she needed to be at work early.

"Kris," she interrupted the story. "You said last night you needed to be to work early. It's after eight."

Kris glanced at the clock in surprise. She had been having such a wonderful time with Erin and the children she hadn't realized it was so late. Not wanting the morning to end she made a quick decision.

"It's okay. I know the boss. I can be late."

"Are you sure?" Erin asked, not wanting Kris to feel obligated to stay.

"I'm sure," Kris said. "Now, who wants to hear the rest of the story?"

Kris grinned when Erin's voice joined the twins' enthusiastic response. She smiled lovingly over at her. This was what a family was supposed to be.

* * *

Kris couldn't help but smile as she gazed down at the little ones sprawled out in front of the TV using Willy as a giant pillow. She thought back to that morning. Erin had had a fit when she found Willy stretched out on the couch when they finally got up. But the children had been so excited to see him she had soon forgotten her ire. She hadn't made it into work until almost ten. After spending a good part to the

morning telling stories, she had stayed for a late breakfast. The kids had been over the moon when Erin allowed Willy to stay for the day. It was difficult to concentrate at work because all she could think about was Erin and the twins. A quick call to Erin had garnered an invitation to dinner. Stopping by the video store on the way over she picked up a movie the kids had wanted to see.

"Kris, could you give me a hand please?" Erin called from the kitchen.

Kris quickly got up and headed for the kitchen. Erin had gone to get them all some dessert. She hesitated as she stepped into the room. Every time she'd been in here since that night, she could hear the echo of Scott's voice.

Erin glanced up and saw the quick flash of pain cross Kris's face. Without a word, she quickly made her way over to her and wrapped her in a warm hug.

Kris sighed contentedly and pushed the memories away. All that mattered was how it felt to hold Erin in her arms and feel the love they had for each other.

Erin lifted her head from Kris's shoulder. Her eyes mirrored Kris's earlier pain. "I'm so sorry –"

Kris pressed her finger to Erin's lips. "Shh... you have nothing to be sorry for. Let it go."

Erin kissed the finger pressed against her lips. "I love you."

Kris lost herself in Erin's love-filled gaze. Answering the unspoken call, she leaned down and brought their lips together. Each tried to pour everything they felt for the other into the kiss, reaffirming the bond they shared. The kiss intensified as the passion flared brightly between them.

Erin pressed for entrance into Kris's mouth. Her hips jerked when Kris opened to her and groaned into her mouth. Things were quickly spiraling out of control. Erin

whimpered when Kris pressed a tight thigh between her legs and her hands slid down to press her closer. Erin couldn't help it. She began to thrust against Kris.

Kris growled, breaking the torrid kiss, her hands dropping to Erin's belt. Her heart was pounding and she was seconds away from losing total control. The sound of childish laughter was like a bucket of cold water on her rapidly overheated libido, reminding her just where she was.

"Oh, God." Kris struggled to regain control.

Erin leaned against Kris breathing heavily. Despite the tribulations they had been through one thing had not change. This woman made her crazy. She looked up with passion glazed eyes. "Stay with me tonight."

"I can't." Kris tightened her arms around Erin when she stiffened in her arms. "I want to... God, I want to, but I have a five-thirty flight to Portland tomorrow morning. I'm sorry. I should have told you earlier."

Erin's heart sank. "You're leaving?"

Kris sighed regretfully. She had been putting off telling Erin about the trip fearing how she would react. The trip had been planned during the time they were estranged. Now she regretted even more putting it off.

"I wish I didn't have to... believe me. There is just no way for me to get out of it. It's very important, Erin. Harold asked me to come to their major plant in Portland. He wants me to tour the facility with him and arrange to provide our services for the plant there as well as the smaller ones we are already doing here in San Diego. That's why he wanted to meet before signing the contracts."

Erin could see the excitement in Kris's eyes. This was big for her company, very big. "Congratulations! I'm so happy for you," Erin said. She knew what this must mean for Kris and her company.

Kris smiled, hugging Erin tight. "Thanks."

"How long will you be gone?"

"Four days." It suddenly seemed like a lifetime. "I'll be back on Saturday."

"We'll celebrate when you get back," Erin said.

"I'd like that," Kris said, leaning down for a kiss. She pulled away before it could escalate, drawing a groan of protest from Erin. She tightened her arms around Erin, thankful they had made their way back to each other. "I'll be home as quick as I can. I promise."

Erin smiled. *Home*. She liked the sound of that.

"What about Willy?"

Kris shrugged unhappily. "Jerry's going to drop him off tomorrow at the vet's to be boarded." She smiled sheepishly. "I couldn't bring myself to do it."

Erin shook her head, knowing she was going to regret this. "There's no need for that Kris, he can stay here."

Kris swept Erin back into her arms and kissed her soundly. "You're the best."

"Kris, Kris!" called a little voice from the other room.

Kris laughed and picked up two pieces of cake Erin had dished up. "Come on, our little munchkins are getting restless."

Laughing joyfully, Erin grabbed the other two plates and followed her lover.

CHAPTER 32

KRIS GRINNED, singing along with the song on the radio as she made her way toward Erin's. She looked over at the dozen red roses resting on the passenger seat of her car. Erin wasn't expecting her until tomorrow but she had finished sooner than expected and decided to take an early flight home. She laughed just thinking of the look on Erin's face when she showed up early. Kris's good mood soared. She was free for the weekend and intended to spend every minute of it with Erin and the twins if she could.

Kris stared at the large delivery truck in front of Erin's house. Pulling up one door down, she slowly walked toward the house. There was a queen size bed and a suite of bedroom furniture resting on the front lawn. Frowning in confusion, she wondered what was going on, she was pretty sure it was the furniture from Erin's bedroom.

The front door was open, so Kris stepped inside. "Hello. Is anybody home?" She heard Willy's booming bark coming from upstairs.

Erin appeared at the top of the stairs. "Kris! What are you doing here?"

Kris swallowed hard, a bit taken aback by Erin's tone. She had thought her lover would be excited to see her. "I'll go if you want."

"What? No!" Erin said, rushing down the stairs to hug Kris. "You just surprised me. I didn't expect you 'til tomorrow. I'm so glad you're home."

Kris relaxed, the tension leaving her body at Erin's reassuring words.

"I missed you," Kris said, holding out the bouquet of deep red, long-stemmed roses.

"Wow. They're beautiful, Kris." Erin leaned up to brush a soft kiss across Kris's lips.

"Ms. Patterson," called an unmistakably male voice from upstairs.

Erin reluctantly pulled away from Kris. "I'll be right there," she called up to the man.

Kris frowned, wondering just what was going on.

Erin smiled. "Well, this was supposed to be a surprise for tomorrow but since you snuck home early on me... come on. It's not quite ready but..." Erin turned and headed up the stairs.

Kris followed curiously. She could hear Willy barking from inside the twin's bedroom and wondered why Erin had him locked in there. Stopping outside of Erin's bedroom door, she stared in amazement. The room had been transformed. There was fresh paint on the walls and new carpet on the floor. New furniture lined the walls. And against the far wall was a brand new king size bed, the gleaming brass head and foot boards shining in the brightly lit room.

"We're all through in here," said the workman who had called to Erin.

"Great, thank you for everything. Oh, and you'll take all the old stuff to the Disabled American Vets donation center... right?"

"Sure Ma'am, not a problem," he said.

Erin followed the workmen out of the room, leaving an open-mouthed Kris staring around her.

* * *

Kris was still standing motionless in the middle of the room when Erin returned. Erin was becoming a bit nervous fearing she had made a mistake.

"Don't you like it?" she asked. "You told me once that you almost bought a brass bed instead of the sleigh bed you have, so I thought –"

Kris pulled herself out of her stupor. She could not believe Erin had done all this and in three days. She swept her up into her arms and kissed her soundly. "You are incredible! This is fantastic... but why?"

Erin snuggled in Kris's arms. It was where she longed to be. "I wanted to get rid of all traces of the past. I want this to be our room, somewhere where you can be comfortable."

Kris noticed that there were two chests of drawers. She gestured over to them. "I didn't know you had so many clothes that you needed two."

Erin blushed. Her expression turning shy she said, "One of them is for you."

Kris's eyes widened in surprise. "Are you sure?" No one had ever done anything that came even close to this for her.

"Yes. If you want," Erin added wondering if she had pushed too far too fast.

"Oh... I want... I want, baby," Kris said, her mind no longer on furniture. She leaned down and kissed Erin passionately. She led Erin over to the unmade bed and pressed her into it. "I missed you," she murmured huskily in Erin's ear.

Erin let out a loud moan when Kris pulled her beneath her. Her libido was quickly overwhelming her logical thought. "Wait. Wait!" she said as Kris's hand slid determinedly down her body.

Kris stopped and looked down at her with passion glazed eyes. "What's wrong?"

"The kids will be home from school any –"

"Mommy! Mommy! We're home!"

"Minute," Erin finished with a frustrated sigh.

At the sound of feet on the stairs, Kris quickly rolled off Erin and sat up.

The twins squealed excitedly when they spotted Kris with their mother. They ran across the room and jumped onto the bed with Kris.

Erin smiled as she watched the three exchange hugs and kisses. There was no doubt in her mind how much Kris loved the children and they loved her just as much. Glancing up, she saw Alice standing in the doorway watching.

Hi, Alice," she said. "Thanks for picking up the kids." Alice went directly by the children's preschool on her way home from her volunteer job. On the days their school and her work coincided, she picked them up.

Alice smiled uncertainly when she caught Kris's eye. "Hello, Kris." She wondered if the other woman would even want to speak to her after what her son had done.

Kris was a bit puzzled by Alice's tentative greeting. They had gotten to know each other a bit better at the twin's party and she thought they had started a friendship.

"Hey, Alice. It's good to see you again," Kris said. Some of the tension seemed to leave Alice's face at Kris's friendly greeting. *I have to ask Erin what that's all about.*

Alice quickly made her excuses and left. Erin finally managed to pry the twins off Kris and sent them to their room to change into their play clothes.

Once they were gone, Erin stepped over to where Kris still sat on the side of the bed. She stepped between her legs and drew Kris into a loving hug.

Kris spread her legs drawing Erin close. She rested her head on Erin's chest, finding the sound of her heartbeat soothing.

Erin ran her hands through Kris's short blond locks. "Stay with me tonight."

Kris looked up into Erin's eyes. "Yes," Kris said, that one simple word conveying a world of meaning.

CHAPTER 33

ERIN DIDN'T KNOW why she was so nervous. It wasn't like she and Kris hadn't made love before. She stood staring at herself in the bathroom mirror. *You're being ridiculous.* Looking down at the sheer negligee she was wearing, she began to have second thoughts. *What if I look stupid, it's not like I have some great body. I should have stuck to the T- shirt and boxers. What if she doesn't like it?* She thought about the silk sheets she had put on the bed and the candles placed around the room. *What do I know about seduction?* Erin was drawn out of her internal monologue by a voice calling to her from the other room. Squaring her shoulders, she slowly opened the door and stepped out.

Her breath caught in her throat and every bit of blood in her body raced between her legs. Kris had pulled down the top sheet and blanket and was lying on the dark satiny sheets completely nude. She had lit several of the candles and her lithe, powerful body seemed to glow in the flickering light. Erin tried to force her legs to move.

She began to tremble when Kris rose up from the bed and approached her. Even in the dim light she couldn't miss the hungry look in her vivid blue eyes. They had darkened to indigo with arousal.

Kris stopped in front of Erin, her eyes drinking in the beauty of the woman standing before her. She reached out and gently ran a finger down the center of Erin's body, smiling when Erin shivered and pressed into the touch.

"Do you have any idea how incredibly beautiful you are?"

Erin shook her head. "I'm not the one that's beautiful."

"Oh yes... you are," Kris said. She leaned down taking Erin's lips in a deep kiss.

Erin's arousal soared higher when Kris carefully opened the ties to her gown and brushed aside the flimsy material. The open mouth kisses Kris was peppering across her chest was pushing her closer to the edge.

Erin whimpered, feeling her knees give out. "Please... I'm going to fall."

Kris pressed Erin tightly against her body. A feral growl of pure arousal slipped from her lips as their bodies met. She swept Erin up in her arms and carried her to the bed. Quickly divesting her of her gown, she slid on top of her. Kris groaned when Erin eagerly spread her legs allowing her to slip between them. While it had been only a little over three weeks since they had been together, it seemed like it had happened in another lifetime.

Kris was so close she knew she wouldn't be able to hold out long this first time. She reached between them and spread Erin's sex open before slipping into position. Fighting for control, she began a gentle, easy thrust against Erin.

It spurred Kris on when Erin moaned beneath her and began to thrust back. The feel of Erin's hands squeezing her ass was too much for Kris. She began to push harder against Erin. "I love you," she panted into Erin's ear.

Erin's body stiffened and she cried out, her climax setting off Kris's. They thrust frantically against each other for several moments before their bodies stilled. The sound of their harsh breathing filled the air.

When the tremors stopped, Kris tried to move off Erin worried she was too heavy for the other woman. Erin's arms tightened around her back.

"No, stay. You feel so good," Erin said.

When Erin finally began to shift under her, Kris lifted up, resting most of her weight on her forearms. She leaned down to softly kiss Erin's sweet lips. Her passions quickly rose again and she intensified the kiss. When Erin pushed against her shoulder she broke the kiss and moved off to the side, releasing Erin from beneath her.

Kris grinned when Erin urged her onto her back, and then straddled her hips. She reached out to touch the tempting breasts in front of her. She was shocked when Erin grabbed both her wrists before she could make contact. Kris looked up at her questioningly.

Erin smiled and something shone in her eyes that Kris had not seen before. Erin pressed Kris's hands above her head and guided her to wrap them around the tubes of the brass headboard.

"Don't move those," Erin said.

"Yes, Ma'am." Kris was secretly thrilled that Erin felt comfortable enough to take control of their lovemaking.

Her grin quickly faded as Erin's eyes swept her body with a predatory look. She groaned as she felt a gush of wetness between her thighs.

Erin began to explore every inch of the body beneath her. She left no spot unlicked or unlicked as she worked her way down Kris's body. Though a bit nervous, she was incredibly excited by what she was about to do. She looked up at Kris and gently spread her legs.

Kris's eyebrows shot up in shock when Erin settled on her stomach between her legs. *Oh God. She's going to...* Her whole body arched as pleasure blasted through her at the first touch of Erin's tongue between her legs.

Erin had been unsure but her first taste of Kris pushed any reservations she might have had right out of her head.

She tastes good! Erin concentrated, trying to figure out what spots garnered the most reaction from Kris. She wanted so badly to be inside Kris but was hampered by the cast on her hand. Remembering how incredible it had felt to be on the receiving end, she slid down a bit and pressed her tongue as deeply inside of Kris as she could. She jerked back in surprise when Kris's hips bucked sharply up into her face. She wrapped her arms around Kris's thighs to hold her in place and did it again. Picking up the rhythm of Kris's hips, Erin continued to plunge inside her. Feeling Kris's inner muscles start to spasm, she pulled out. Closing her mouth over her, she began to suck, lashing Kris's clit with her tongue. Erin started when Kris's thighs slammed shut trapping her in place, but she continued her ministrations until with a loud moan, Kris's body went limp and her legs flopped open.

Erin grinned proudly. She had been uncertain if she would be able to bring Kris to climax, but had obviously succeeded. Kris lay with her eyes closed, her chest heaving as she gasped for breath. Erin slid out from between her legs and lay next to her, gently stroking her chest as she watched her recover.

Kris's eyes slowly blinked open and she looked up into Erin's eyes. "Am I dead?" she whispered.

Erin laughed joyfully.

Kris turned on her side and pulled Erin close. "God... that was... you were..."

Erin tightened her arms around Kris. "You inspired me," she whispered close to her ear, making her shiver. "Remember, you taught me just how much pleasure a body could stand."

The last time they had been together Kris had taken her higher than she imagined possible. In the end, she had begged Kris for release.

Kris's muscles felt like jelly and she was still experiencing twitching aftershocks. She chuckled, pulling Erin close.

"Damn, I'm a good teacher," Kris said. She remembered well the last time they were together. She jumped when Erin slapped her bare butt.

Kris retaliated by tickling Erin's ribs. They wrestled around the big bed, laughing playfully.

Erin finally ended up on top, straddling her stomach. She gazed down into Kris's laughing blue eyes. "I love you so much," Erin said, all trace of laughter gone from her voice.

Lifting herself up, Kris kissed Erin gently, humming at the taste of herself on Erin's lips. "You are an amazing woman, Erin. And I don't just mean about the sex either, though that was fantastic. I still can't believe you did all this for me," Kris said, gesturing around the dark room. "How did you manage it in three days?"

"I had a lot of help. Jerry's help was invaluable. He has a crew that helps him out with houses he's listing and I got to meet Tony. He was... he was..."

Kris rolled her eyes. She was well aware of what Tony was like. She wondered what had ever possessed Jerry to bring him along. "I think the word you are looking for is flaming," Kris said.

Erin laughed. "That would describe him alright, but he was great. He has a wonderful sense of design. Though I admit, Alice and Robert weren't quite sure what to think of him at first. They did eventually warm up to him."

"Alice and Robert helped you do this?" Kris asked.

"Yeah, they sure did. They both felt very badly for what Scott did and were happy we had managed to get back together.

Kris's mouth dropped open in shock. Now she understood Alice's reaction earlier in the day. Even knowing how close Erin and Alice were, she couldn't believe that she had told her what her son had done.

Seeing the look on Kris's face, Erin knew exactly what she was thinking. "Alice was waiting for me that night after I saw you at the cemetery. I was pretty upset and it all just came tumbling out."

Kris regarded Erin solemnly. "I'm so sorry for the way I treated you that night. I—"

"I know." Erin leaned down and pressed a gentle kiss to Kris's forehead. "Let it go. We're together and no one will ever separate us again."

"You got that right!" Kris said, pulling Erin down into a tight hug.

One thing Erin had realized that night was there was still a lot she didn't know about Kris. Erin slid off to the side and laid her head down on Kris's shoulder.

"Can I ask you something?"

Kris pulled Erin a bit tighter against her body. "You can ask me anything."

"Tell me about your father?"

That was a very difficult subject for Kris but she wanted to share it with Erin. "There isn't much to tell. I never knew my father. He was a Navy Pilot and got sent to Vietnam while my mother was pregnant with me. His plane was shot down and he was killed when I was just nine months old. He never even got to see me except in pictures." Kris's breath hitched as she tried not to cry.

"Oh, baby. I'm so sorry." Erin pulled Kris onto her side and wrapped her arms around her. She held her while Kris

cried quietly. Stroking her back, she whispered soothing words to her.

Eventually, Kris pulled back, looking a bit embarrassed. Erin stopped her before she could say anything. "Thank you for sharing that with me. It means a lot to me."

Kris smiled lovingly and hugged Erin tight.

"What about your mother?"

Kris's body stiffened at the mention of her mother. Erin was asking her about all the things she tried so hard to keep buried.

Erin pulled back and looked into Kris's eyes. "I love you."

And it was as simple as that. Kris couldn't deny this woman who so tenderly held her heart anything. "I haven't seen my mother in sixteen years. She lives in Washington State. She was furious when I came out my senior year in high school and kicked me out of the house. I stayed with Jerry and his family 'til I could finish school. I left for college and never looked back."

Erin could see despite Kris's words how much her mother's rejection had hurt her.

"She is convinced that I'm not gay. According to my mother, I'm just going through a phase. She said until I came to my senses and gave up this foolishness she didn't want anything to do with me. She insisted that someday I'd meet a nice man and give her some grandchildren," Kris said.

Erin shook her head sadly. She couldn't imagine turning her back on Jenna or Christopher. Erin slid partway on top of Kris, reaching out to gently stroke her face. "I can't imagine a mother doing that to her child. I promise you we will never do that to our children. We will raise them to be

loving, caring adults and accept them, no matter who they choose to love."

Kris's heart clenched, her throat growing tight with emotion. This was the first time Erin had referred to the twins as theirs. "I couldn't love those two any more if they were biologically my own. I promise you, I will love them and always do my best to protect them and you."

Erin and Kris stared at each other, each very aware of what had just occurred, the commitment to each other and the promises for the future that had just been made. It was a quantum leap forward in their relationship. They shared a deep, soul touching kiss.

Kris snuggled against Erin's warm body, savoring the peace and contentment that settled over her. She knew from this night forward her life would never be the same. The emotions of the evening were catching up to her and she could feel herself drifting off.

"I love you, Erin," she murmured before giving in to sleep.

Erin was still a bit stunned from all that had occurred. She was overcome by a sense of belonging she had never felt before. She pressed closer to Kris, sighing when her arms tightened around her and quickly followed her lover into the arms of Morpheus.

Epilogue – Two months later

KRIS LOOKED around Robert and Alice's backyard. She had come outside to keep an eye on the kids. They were playing happily with Willy. Erin was in the kitchen with Alice, putting the finishing touches on Robert's birthday dinner.

The last two months had been a whirlwind for Kris. Although she still had her condo, she rarely stayed there anymore. Most of her clothes had taken up permanent residence in what had become her and Erin's bedroom. They had sat down with the twins and read the books Erin had gotten about different types of families. She wasn't sure how much they understood but they had happily welcomed her into their family. She looked forward to going home to all of them every night. They accepted her love for their mother as easily as her love for them.

Kris was a bit nervous and knew Erin was as well. Tonight would be the first extended contact with Scott since that fateful night in Erin's kitchen. He was due any minute for dinner to celebrate his father's birthday. Erin had been so angry at him she had refused him visitation of the children for a month. She had been unsurprised when he accepted the prohibition without complaint. Kris had only seen Scott once, just two weeks ago, when Erin had allowed him his monthly visitation and he picked up and dropped off the twins. She had been determined that she wouldn't hide from the man or try to hide the fact that she was for all intent and purposes living with Erin and the children. Neither had spoken to the other and had avoided anything more than brief eye contact.

Kris was no longer angry at what Scott had done. She had worked hard to move past it. After living with Erin these past two months, she had come to the conclusion that she should, if anything, pity Scott. Luckily for her, he seemed to have no idea what he had truly lost. She still couldn't fathom him not wanting Jenna and Christopher. She had stopped thinking of him as their father and considered him nothing more than a sperm donor. She was more a parent to those two little ones than he had ever been.

"I see you haven't given up yet."

Kris glanced up to find Scott standing several feet away. She had been so lost in thought she hadn't heard him walk up.

Glancing over at the twins, she made sure they were out of earshot before standing to face Scott.

"What do you want, Scott?"

In a moment of rare honesty Scott said, "You, out of my wife's life,"

"That's never going to happen. She's not your wife any more. I love Erin and she loves me. There is nothing you can say or do that will ever change that."

Trying another tactic, he gestured toward the twins. "And what about them?"

"What about them? I love them like they were my own."

Scott scowled at Kris. "But they're not yours, they're mine, and always will be," Scott said. He hoped to anger her enough to explode with his parents around so they would see what she was really like.

Kris refused to rise to the bait. "You don't have the faintest concept of what it means to be a parent to those children. Face it, Scott. You had it all – a beautiful,

intelligent wife and two fantastic kids." Kris shook her head. "And you screwed it all up. I don't feel anything for you except pity. You held three jewels in the palm of your hand and you let them slip through your fingers."

Scott took a good look at the woman his wife claimed to love. When he looked into her eyes he saw nothing but peace and contentment. In a moment of clarity, everything Kris had said to him hit home. His shoulders slumped as he realized for the first time everything that he had arrogantly thrown away. Without a word, he turned and left the yard.

Kris watched him go, surprised at the flash of pain she had seen cross his face right before he turned and walked away.

Erin stepped up next to Kris just in time to see Scott disappear through the gate.

"Is everything alright? What was that all about?" She had seen Kris and Scott facing off through the kitchen window and had hurried out.

Kris looked down at Erin and smiled as she drew her into a gentle hug.

"Nothing's wrong. Things couldn't be more right."

Erin gazed up into the eyes of the woman who held her heart. She smiled before pulling Kris down into a loving kiss.

Everything was truly right with her world.

The End

* * *

About The Author

RJ NOLAN lives in Southern California with her life partner. They share their home with their Great Dane. RJ has always been interested in storytelling. She has been actively writing for the last several years. You can contact RJ Nolan at her Web site: <http://rjnolan.com>.

Other Titles By This Author

All Gone – Lesbian: Mystery

Summary

Dr. Kody Garrett is a young veterinarian new to the North Park Animal Clinic. After the untimely death of her previous employer and mentor, she came to work for Dr. Herbert Donaldson. While she enjoys her work at the clinic, she has been less than happy with her new employer. His poor attitude and constant criticism has taken its toll on Kody. For the first time in the eight months that she has worked for the clinic, Dr. Donaldson is leaving Kody in charge of the clinic while he attends a medical conference. She is determined to prove to her boss that she is capable of the responsibility with which he has entrusted her. The young vet's confidence is shaken when less than twenty-four hours after being left in charge of the clinic, previously healthy dogs begin to die unexpectedly.

BJ Braden is a seasoned Animal Control Officer. When she is called by Dr. Garrett concerning the unexplained animal deaths, her suspicions are immediately aroused.

Risking the ire of her boss, Kody teams up with BJ to solve the mystery of what they soon learn are a rash of animal poisonings in their city going back several years. Amidst their growing attraction to each other, they struggle to protect the animals to whom they have devoted their lives.

A new rash of poisonings sets the pair in high gear and eventually costs Kody her job when she defies her boss and continues to help BJ investigate the newest animal deaths. Kody's life is further complicated by one of the veterinary technician's growing obsession with her. The woman

relentlessly tries to pursue a personal relationship with Kody. When Kody repeatedly turns down the woman's overtures, she begins to stalk her.

Kody and BJ's relationship grows even as events begin to spiral out of control. While dealing with the threats of the stalker, the two continue to pursue the pet killers and eventually bring them to justice.

* * *

Back Cover Summary

Double Trouble – Lesbian: Romance

*L*ITTLE DID KRIS know that the traditional first baseball game of the season played each April between the San Diego Padres and Los Angeles Dodgers would change her life. Tripping in front of the dark-haired Erin and caught ogling to boot, was only the preamble for the tall blond, as both ended up splashed with beer in the stands and laughing good-naturedly about the accident and clean-up. So begins what is bound to open old wounds and make both women stronger as they find in each other a connection – love, lust, trust, kids and trouble times two – that will decidedly make their relationship a rocky one but ultimately worth every hurdle they overcome.

* * *

Thank You for Purchasing and Reading **Double Trouble**.

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