

# FAMILY

A stylized illustration of a living room. In the foreground, there is a green sofa with two purple pillows on the left and a red armchair on the right. In the background, there are two windows with light blue panes. The walls are a mix of purple and pink, and the floor is yellow. The overall style is painterly and colorful.

*L*ove

Jeanne McCann

# FAMILY LOVE

Other books written by Jeanne McCann include:

“Lucky In Love”

“A Love Not Lost”

Soon to follow:

“What About Love”

“Again I Love”

“Love Times Four”

# FAMILY LOVE

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*Jeanne McCann*

Writers Club Press  
San Jose New York Lincoln Shanghai

## **Family Love**

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Writers Club Press  
an imprint of iUniverse, Inc.

For information address:  
iUniverse, Inc.  
5220 S. 16th St., Suite 200  
Lincoln, NE 68512  
[www.iuniverse.com](http://www.iuniverse.com)

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ISBN: 0-595-73513-4

Printed in the United States of America

To my brother and sisters who are a wonderful example of family,

Patty—who was my first friend—any sister who would agree to sing to the Lennon Sister's record over and over has to be a special one.

Susie—all emotion and love—a woman who loves her children and grandchildren above everything.

Sally—a creative, free spirit—an open and loving mother to her own children and the wounded children that come under her care.

Peter—a loving brother—a man who would do anything for his boys and his family, and a brother any sister would love.

You have all provided the inspiration for me to be able to write about the special love that parents have for their children and the commitment it takes to be a family.

Thank you.

# *Acknowledgements*



I would like to acknowledge my partner, who continues to support my writing, and loves to hear about my stories, to my editor who teaches and guides, and most of all to the gays and lesbians who actively choose to raise children and create wonderful, love-filled families. I hope you enjoy this story it is one of my favorites.

## CHAPTER 1

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“Amena, go get your shoes on,” Tamara called as she wrestled with dressing Banta. “Banta quit playing around.” She was a little irritated. They were all running late this morning.

“Here, let me take care of Banta, honey.” Lindy smiled at her currently half-dressed and frustrated partner. “Go get dressed.”

“Thanks sweetie, I owe you.” Tamara handed the struggling five-year-old to her stylishly dressed lover. Even after two years, the sight of Lindy could take her breath away. Lindy’s dark hair was cut to shoulder length and its layered style flowed around her beautiful face. Her brown eyes twinkled as she looked at Tamara.

“You look terrific.” Tamara placed a quick kiss on Lindy’s smiling lips.

“Thank you, now go and get ready for work.” Lindy grinned. “Not that I don’t like what you’re wearing.”

Tamara blushed as she gathered her bathrobe around her body. Her nightshirt hid very little as Lindy’s gaze slid over her body. “Love you.” Tamara’s blond hair was tousled from her night’s sleep, her blue eyes glistening, and Lindy loved her with every breath in her body.

“Love you, too.” Lindy turned to the unruly five-year-old boy. “You, buster, are another matter. Come on and get dressed before you make us all mad.”

“I don’t want to wear this shirt!” Banta was adamant; his stocky little body was still with irritation.

“Okay, then you pick a shirt to wear,” Lindy calmly suggested.

The tiny dark-haired boy did as she asked and headed for his drawer. Lindy watched him with loving eyes. It was hard for her to believe she had lived with him and his two sisters for only two years. He was a part of her, just like twelve-year-old Maria and eight-year-old Amena. Who would have known that two and a half years ago she would meet and fall in love with Tamara and her ready-made family.

“Here.” Banta stuffed a purple shirt in her hands. His favorite; she should have known.

“Okay, purple people eater, let’s get you dressed.” Lindy quickly slid the shirt on Banta, who smiled widely. The problem disappeared as rapidly as it appeared. Hugging him quickly, she rushed him downstairs.

“Now go eat your breakfast.” She swatted him on his backside as he bolted for the kitchen table.

“Okay, lunches, who wants one?” She pulled five lunch bags out of the refrigerator.

Maria, a beautiful young lady of twelve, entered the kitchen. Her sister Amena followed her. Even though the two of them had been adopted at different times and were not related by blood, they were inseparable. Both had come from Columbia and had recognized in each other the same need to be loved. From the moment they were introduced, they had become sisters in every sense of the word. They argued and fought just like all sisters, but had a tight bond that brought them quickly back together quickly with hugs and laughter.

“Lindy, I need to go to dance class this afternoon,” Maria reminded her.

“I remember, beautiful.” Lindy smiled at her darling stepdaughter. “I’ll pick you up at five.”

“Thanks.” Maria hugged Lindy.

“No problem, doll. Now go eat your breakfast.” Lindy placed glasses of juice on the table. “Hey pee wee, don’t you look nice.” Lindy hugged Amena hello.

“Are we going to go to the zoo this weekend?” Amena stood on her chair and hugged Lindy tightly.

“We are, little bug, now sit down and eat your breakfast.”

“How are my favorite people?” Tamara asked as she entered the kitchen. Hugging and kissing each of them, she helped with the children’s breakfast. “What time does Payton arrive tonight?”

“Her plane’s due to at eight-thirty.”

“Are you excited?”

“I am. It’s been so long since I’ve seen her and so much has changed.” Lindy slid her arm around Tamara’s neck.

“At least she’s staying long enough for you two to spend some quality time together.” Tamara hugged Lindy.

“You know it’s because of her that I got the nerve up to tell you how I felt. She convinced me to come here and talk to you.”

“Then I’ve got to be sure to thank her, because my life became perfect when you entered it.” Tamara smiled, kissing Lindy gently.

“I plan to thank her several times myself.” Lindy grinned. “Now come on guys, grab your lunches, it’s time to go. Okay Banta, let’s get out of here. Kiss your mom and sisters goodbye.”

Lindy and Tamara shared another quick kiss and they all tumbled out the front door. “Okay girls, buckle up. Banta, give me another kiss.” Tamara leaned over so her son could kiss her sloppily on the lips. “Be a good little boy today.”

“I will, mom.”

“Lindy, I’ll call you later. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

The two of them headed for their respective cars and the day ahead of them, their start to the day being relatively painless. That was not always the case with a family of five, but it was a family, full of love and laughter.

## CHAPTER 2

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Payton had already been at work for two hours by the time Lindy and her family left their home. Since she was taking the next two weeks off for vacation, she needed to clear her desk as much as possible before she headed for the airport. It had been over a year since Payton had taken any time off and she needed a break. She was very much looking forward to seeing Lindy. She and Lindy had been friends for eight years and even after Lindy moved down to Long Beach to be with Tamara, they remained close. It was Lindy who flew up and consoled Payton when her lover of twelve years left her for someone else. Lindy had flown back to Seattle and spent a week with Payton while she grieved and fumed with anger. It was also Lindy who pointed out that the relationship had been falling apart for several years. She calmly listened and spoke to Payton until Payton finally began to accept the reality that she was newly single at the age of forty-five. It had not been a pleasant time but Payton had moved on. Her life continued, and except for some financial relationships, Payton and Alice, her lover of twelve years, went their separate ways.

The breakup had been over a year earlier and Payton's life had since then become all work. With the exception of a few dates, Payton worked hard and spent most of her time with friends. It had been Tamara, Lindy's girlfriend, who had talked her into vacationing for two weeks in Long Beach. Actually, Payton was looking forward

to staying with them. She loved Tamara and the kids and she couldn't be happier for Lindy. They made a wonderful family.

"Payton, we need to go over this project file this morning." Glen, her long time boss and close friend, disturbed her memories.

"Now is as good a time as any." Payton sighed, pushing her wavy hair back. She really needed a vacation.

The rest of Payton's day was packed with meeting after meeting. At four thirty, she flew out of the office, heading for the waiting taxi outside the front entrance to her building. She handed her suitcase and garment bag to the driver and shoved her computer bag into the car, sliding in behind it.

"Sea-Tac, please."

The taxi cab driver grunted and drove rapidly the thirty minutes to the airport. It was all Payton could do not to scream in terror as the car rocketed from lane to lane. She breathed a sigh of relief as she paid for the taxi and gathered her luggage. She checked in and headed for the gate. She wouldn't be able to relax until she was on the airplane. She would finally be on a vacation, a much needed and special one.

Payton was not one to pamper herself and she tended to work long hours with little regard for herself. She was a beautiful and talented woman, well liked at work, and treasured by her small circle of friends. She kept busy by working out and going out for an occasional night of dancing, but very rarely dated, not that women didn't approach her, Payton just wasn't interested.

Payton settled herself in her seat, opened her book, and prepared for the flight. She smiled in anticipation of seeing Lindy and her family. She was envious of what Lindy and Tamara had. They had a very loving and special family. Tamara had adopted all three children before she met Lindy. They were children in need of a home, orphans from countries where they would have lived in abject poverty. They all arrived with severe problems but Tamara had taken them in and made them her own. Maria and Amena were both from

Columbia, Maria found hiding in a large cardboard box having been raped. She still woke up screaming. Catholic missionary nuns found Amena near death from starvation. She still would steal things and hide them. She also hoarded food under her bed. A medical relief team had found Banta, starving to death, protecting his dead mother's body. He woke up terrified and screaming most nights. Tamara wouldn't trade her children for anything. When she and Lindy had professed their love for each other, those children had become Lindy's. They protected and healed their children, loving them above all else.

"Amena, Maria, you stick close to Lindy." Tamara requested. "Banta honey, don't stand on the chair. I'll be right back, I need to use the bathroom."

"Mom, I need to go." Amena announced.

"Okay honey, let's hurry, Payton's plane is due."

Linda watched Amena and Tamara hold hands while walking to the bathroom. She loved the fact that Tamara and her children were so loving and affectionate. Considering where they all came from, it was a tribute to Tamara's mothering that they were so healthy.

"Come on Maria, Banta, let's go watch for the plane." Lindy took hold of both of the children's hands as they walked to the window. Tamara and Amena joined them several minutes later.

"Banta, look there it is, see the plane?."

"I see it! I see it!" Banta excitedly jumped up and down.

"Come on, let's go find Payton." Tamara corralled Banta as the five of them stood by the gate.

Payton smiled as she walked out of the gate. Tamara and Lindy were grinning from ear to ear and their children watched with big eyes.

"Come here, girl." Lindy called as she hugged Payton tightly. "You look gorgeous."

"I've missed you," Payton whispered. "You look terrific yourself."

“Payton, give me a hug.” Tamara smiled and hugged her affectionately. “I’m so glad you’re here.”

“So am I Tamara, so am I.” Payton’s eyes filled with tears. “Now show me these beautiful kids of yours.”

“Maria, Amena, do you remember Payton?”

“Aren’t you both beautiful, and you are so big. The last time I saw you, you were so little.”

“Hi Payton,” Maria spoke, while Amena giggled.

“This must be Banta? Hello, you probably don’t remember me. I saw you when you were just a little guy.”

“Hello. Did you fly the plane?” Banta asked seriously.

“No, a pilot flew the plane. I just sat in the back and read.”

“Come on guys, let’s get Payton’s luggage and go home,” Tamara suggested. “Banta, don’t let Payton get lost.”

“I won’t, Mom.” Banta latched onto Payton’s hand. She smiled in happiness, her heart full of feeling as she held the little boy’s hand.

“Okay girls, let’s hurry, we’ve got ice cream waiting at home,” Lindy announced, grinning.

Two hours later after bowls of ice cream, much conversation, and lots of hugs and kisses, the children headed off for bed.

“I am going to leave the two of you alone so you can catch up. I’m awfully glad you’re here, Payton. Lindy has missed you terribly.” Tamara quickly hugged Payton and bent over to kiss Lindy good-night.

“I won’t be long,” Lindy promised with a smile.

“Wake me.” Tamara touched Lindy’s lips with her fingers. The two of them exchanged a loving gaze before Tamara left the room.

“You are happy,” Payton announced, grinning at Lindy.

“Deliriously.” Lindy laughed softly. “I didn’t know how perfect life could be until I met Tamara and her family.”

“And to think I had to convince you to tell her you loved her,” Payton teased her.

“I owe you big time.”

“You don’t owe me a thing.”

“Enough of that. Tell me how you’re doing. How you are really doing.”

“I’m fine. Work’s good, except for the hours.”

“What are you doing besides work?”

“I’ve been getting out. Jeff, Rich, and I have been out dancing quite a bit.”

“Payton, what about women?” Lindy impatiently interrupted.

“I’ve gone out on a couple of dates recently, I just haven’t met anyone I want to sleep with, let alone marry.” Payton sighed. “Besides, the only women I seem to attract lately are too young and want someone, mainly me, to take care of them.”

“You’ll meet someone. You are too damn special to be single for long.”

“You are prejudiced. Have you ever thought you might be the only one who thinks I’m special besides my brother?” Payton chuckled quietly.

“Tamara thinks you’re special too.”

“Like you haven’t influenced her opinion.”

“I have very little influence, with her. If she didn’t like you, you would know it, and she loves you.”

“Very little influence my eye.” Payton grunted.

“When’s the last time you slept with someone?”

“Where did that come from?”

“Answer me.”

“It’s been quite awhile, a long while.”

“Maybe you need to get lucky while you’re here on vacation.” Lindy grinned.

“Don’t even try to fix me up. I came here to visit with you and Tamara, and the kids.”

“I promise, we won’t. We’re just glad you’re here. I missed you buddy.”

“I miss you, too. I’m so glad you’re happy. Your kids are terrific.”

“They are great kids, and I can’t believe how much I love them.”

“I always knew you would make a great mom.”

“It’s Tamara who is fantastic. She takes care of the kids and me.”

“Speaking of Tamara, don’t you think you should go to bed?”

“I’m on my way. Do you need anything?”

“Not a thing, now go crawl in bed with your girlfriend.”

“Love you, Payton.”

“I love you Lindy. And thanks for sharing your family with me.”

Payton and Lindy hugged tightly before the two of them headed to their separate bedrooms.

“Goodnight Payton.”

“Goodnight.”

Lindy slipped into her darkened bedroom and headed into the bathroom to get ready for bed. It was wonderful having Payton visit. She missed her very much. They had been close friends for such a long time. Sliding into her nightgown, she turned out the lights and headed for her side of the bed. Tamara held the covers open for Lindy to climb in next to her. Lindy slid her body tightly against Tamara’s.

“How is Payton doing?” Tamara asked, as she pulled Lindy over on top of her body, their faces inches apart.

“She says she’s fine but I think she’s very lonely. She isn’t dating anyone. In fact, I think all she does is work.”

“She’s gorgeous. It’s hard to believe women aren’t breaking down her door.”

“If she doesn’t go out, it is hard for her to meet anyone.”

“Maybe we need to introduce her to some nice women.”

“I promised Payton I wouldn’t try to fix her up.”

“I didn’t promise her anything.” Tamara grinned, nuzzling Lindy’s neck.

“Have I told you today how much I love you?”

“How about you show me how much you love me?”

“I can do that.” Lindy did just that as she and Tamara made love until the early hours of the morning.

“Lindy, I love you.” Tamara whispered as they held each other tightly.

“I love you, Tamara.”

“Did you ask Payton if she would be your maid of honor?”

“No, I want us both to ask her.”

“Okay, we’ll both ask her Monday night when we go out to dinner.”

“Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For you, the kids, and my life.”

“Honey, you made my life perfect.”

“We are so lucky. I just wish Payton could be.”

“She will be. We’ll make sure of it.” The two of them snuggled closer together and fell asleep. It would be very early when the kids got up.

## CHAPTER 3

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Tamara slowly woke up, pulling Lindy into her arms. “Honey, it’s awfully quiet this morning. What time is it?”

“It’s after eight-thirty. It’s not like Banta to sleep in. I’m going to go check on the kids.”

“I’ll be right out. Do you think I could get a good morning kiss?”

“Certainly.” Lindy kissed Tamara slowly and then headed for the door. “I don’t think the kids have ever slept in this late before.”

As Lindy walked down the hallway she stuck her head into Banta’s bedroom and both girls’ rooms. No kids, and Payton’s bed was made, her room empty. Something was up. She could hear quiet talking in the kitchen.

“Payton, do you think Mom and Lindy will be really surprised when we give them breakfast in bed?”

“I’m sure they are going to be very surprised, Amena. Banta, how are the flowers coming?”

“Good.” Banta was shoving flowers into a vase.

“Maria, how is the tray coming?”

“Good, almost done.”

“Okay, Amena, let’s finish the eggs and bacon.”

“Lindy, why are you standing in the hallway?” Tamara whispered, coming up behind her in the hallway.

“Shsh, look. The kids are making us breakfast in bed with Payton’s help.”

“They are? How sweet. We had better crawl back into bed, so they can surprise us.” The two of them snuck back down the hallway and climbed back into bed, grinning at each other.

Meanwhile, the children were cooking up a storm in the kitchen. “Okay, Banta, go wake your mothers up and ask them to stay in bed, then come back to help us.”

“Okay, Payton.” Banta ran down the hallway. “Mom, Lindy, are you awake?” He called loudly as he whipped the bedroom door open.

“Morning Banta, sweetie.”

“Mom, you and Lindy need to stay in bed, okay?”

“Okay, Banta.” He turned and ran back out of the room, while Lindy and Tamara laughed out loud.

“Maria, you carry the tray, Amena you bring the juice, I’ve got the coffee, and Banta will carry the flowers. Ready guys?”

“Ready?” The three grinning children paraded down the hall with their part of the breakfast. They were so proud of themselves. Payton smiled broadly. They were such good kids.

“Morning Mom, Lindy, we made breakfast for you,” Amena announced.

“You did? Isn’t that nice of you guys,” Lindy responded.

“Here Mom, put this tray between the two of you.” Maria handed the tray of food to Tamara.

“Can I have a kiss?” Tamara hugged her eldest daughter tightly. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Maria blushed as she went over to Lindy to kiss her.

“I love you, Maria.” Lindy kissed her.

“I love you, Lindy.”

“I’m next.” Banta yelled as he handed his mother a vase with two flowers in it. “Here.”

“Come here, you, and give me a hug.” Banta squirmed as Tamara hugged him. “Go give Lindy a hug.”

Banta climbed onto the edge of the bed and crawled into Lindy’s lap, hugging her happily. “Amena, what do you have?” Lindy asked.

“I’ve got orange juice for you both.”

“My favorite. Thank you. Why don’t you hand those to me?” Lindy kissed her on the cheek.

“You guys did a wonderful job. This is a great breakfast. I can’t believe how you surprised us.” Tamara grinned at her kids.

“Payton did most of the cooking.”

“She did?” Tamara responded. “Well, then I guess we should kiss her, too.”

“Here is your coffee, madam.” Payton grinned as she handed the cup to Tamara.

“Come here and give me a hug.” Tamara hugged Payton tightly. “Thank you,” She whispered.

“You’re welcome,” Payton responded quietly.

“Hey buddy, is that cup of coffee for me?”

“It is, here you go.” Payton grinned at Lindy as she lay in bed, Banta lying on her lap, sharing her breakfast. “I’ll be right back. I am going to go get my own cup of coffee.”

Payton stepped out of the bedroom, intent on letting the family enjoy their breakfast alone. She was going to clean up the kitchen. She started washing the dishes and was enjoying the quiet when Maria entered the kitchen.

“Maria, why aren’t you eating breakfast with your family?”

“I came to get you. Mom told me to tell you to come eat breakfast with your family.”

Payton didn’t know how to respond to that statement. Maria took her by the hand and dragged her down the hall and into the bedroom.

“Have a seat, please. We are having a family meeting and need to ask you something,” Lindy announced as Maria and Payton sat on the edge of the bed. Family meetings were common in their home.

“In two months Lindy and I are going to be married, and Lindy and I want to know if you will be one of our maid of honors?” Tamara asked as Lindy grinned at her.

“I would be honored to stand up with you.” Payton couldn’t have been happier or more surprised.

“Now, join us for breakfast.” Tamara suggested, as she gazed at Lindy fondly. Lindy had started crying. “I think Lindy needs a hug, Banta.”

“Do you need a bear hug?” Banta asked as he turned to Lindy and hugged her.

“I do.” Lindy hugged him tightly in return. Payton couldn’t help but get a little teary herself. She liked this family very much.

It was over an hour before the six of them carried their dishes into the kitchen. The children had excitedly told Payton about the wedding plans while Lindy and Tamara raved about their terrific breakfast meal.

“Okay guys, get your stuff together for the zoo. Reina, Molly, and Max will be here in an hour and we have to be ready,” Lindy requested.

“Okay Lindy. Come on Amena, let’s go get our packs.” Maria and Amena raced down the hallway.

“Banta, how about you go play in your room while I get dressed?” Lindy suggested, as he too shot down the hall.

“Payton, thank you for the breakfast. We love it.”

“You are very welcome, Tamara. You guys have great kids.” Payton began to clean the kitchen. “Now you two go get dressed. I’ll finish cleaning up.”

“You are company.”

“No, I am family,” Payton reminded them with a smile.

“Hello, anyone home?”

“Reina, we are in the kitchen, come on in.”

“Hey Molly, Max, how are you guys?” Lindy hugged the two darling kids.

“What’s this, you and Lindy sitting in here drinking coffee? Where are the kids?”

“In the backyard. Max and Molly, why don’t you go on outside?” Tamara directed as she took their hands and walked them to the open back door.

“Look at them.” Lindy laughed as she watched the kids through the window.

“What are they doing?”

“Payton is playing soccer with them. They have been playing for almost an hour.”

“They look like they’re having a blast.”

“They are. Payton has a way with kids. She knows how to make things fun.” Lindy smiled at Reina. “You watch. She will have Molly and Max giggling before you can count to ten.”

Sure enough, Payton took Molly and Max by the hand and within moments they were running around giggling with the big kids.

“Reina, sit down and have some coffee with Lindy and I. How often do you get a break?” Tamara reminded her as she poured her a cup.

“So that’s Payton.” Reina stared out the window. “She’s gorgeous.”

“She’s also smart, funny, and very sexy,” Tamara added.

“And one of the best friends a person can have.”

“Is she single?”

“Yes. She works too hard to date,” Lindy volunteered.

“Well, Max seems to like her.” Tamara laughed. The tiny, dark-haired little boy was hanging on Payton’s leg, giggling as she dragged him around while she played with the other kids.

“Look at Molly kicking the ball!”

“Oh that’s so cute. They are giving Molly high fives, just like a real soccer player.” Lindy laughed.

“Well, we had better call them in so we can get to the zoo.”

“Guys, come on in. We need to get going if we’re going to the zoo,” Lindy called out.

The crowd of children burst through the door, with Payton bringing up the rear. “Okay guys, let’s all go to the bathroom and get our coats. We are leaving in a half hour, ready or not,” Tamara directed the group.

“Reina, this is Payton Bender. Payton, this is Reina Landers.” Lindy introduced the two of them.

“Hello, it’s nice to meet you.” Reina smiled at Payton.

“So, you are this one’s mother.” Payton grinned as she tickled Max. “It’s nice to meet you. Your kids are terrific.”

Molly was holding hands with Payton, and Max hung from her other arm. “Thank you. They’re usually not this affectionate. You must be pretty special.”

Payton blushed bright red as she listened to Reina. She found herself tongue-tied. The woman was so beautiful. She had long curly blond hair that fell to the middle of her back. Her eyes were very large and bright blue, and she had two dimples that deepened as she smiled. Her son and daughter both had curly hair and dimples just like their mother. Max had dark brown hair and dark eyes and his hair sprang from his head in wild curls. Molly had long, curly, blond hair that fell to her shoulders, and light hazel eyes. They were both as beautiful as their mother.

“Come on you two, give Payton a break. Let’s go use the bathroom before we head for the zoo.” Reina gathered Max and Molly and led them out of the kitchen. Reina spoke with a slight Australian accent. She had been born in the United States, but grew up in Australia until she was in high school. Her father’s company transferred them to Australia when she was in nine. She had come back to the states with her parents after high school and enlisted into the Navy.

“Payton, quit blushing, she left the room,” Lindy teased.

“Lindy, don’t tease Payton.” Tamara scolded. “Reina’s beautiful, isn’t she?”

“Yes, very, and so are her kids. Is she from Australia?”

“No she just grew up there.”

“What does she do?”

“She’s in the Navy and has been for almost twenty years. She’s a helicopter pilot. It’s hard to believe she has been a Navy helicopter pilot for over fifteen years. I’ve known her for that long.”

“They let her wear her hair that long in the service?”

“She’s an instructor now, and an officer who represents the Navy with several companies working on military contracts. She has to wear her hair up a lot, but she doesn’t have to keep it short.”

“And she is single.” Lindy grinned at Payton.

“Lindy,” Payton groaned. “Don’t get any wild ideas.”

“Payton, are you going to the zoo with us?” Molly and Max raced up to her while their mother trailed behind them.

“I am. In fact, I need to get my jacket and camera and then I’ll be ready to go.”

“Can I go with you?”

“Sure, come on little man.” Payton picked up Max as he squealed with laughter. “Do you mind?” Payton asked Reina.

“Not at all. I doubt if you could get rid of them.” Reina smiled.

“Who would want to get rid of these two jewels?” Payton carried Max and held Molly by the hand. “Let’s go get my camera, so I can take your pictures.”

Payton’s voice echoed down the hall. “So big Max, what is your favorite animal?”

“Monkey.”

“I should have known. Molly, what is your favorite animal?”

“A mermaid.”

“Well, I’m not sure they’ll have a mermaid at the zoo today. We’ll look for one though.”

Lindy and Reina laughed. “Your kids have adopted Payton.” Tamara chuckled.

“I don’t blame them.” Reina grinned.

“Oh ho, so you are interested?” Lindy grinned.

“I’d be nuts not to find her interesting. She has a smile that could knock your breath away, let alone she’s a doll. I thought from what you said that she was a lot older.”

“She’s forty-six.” Tamara revealed.

“She certainly doesn’t look it.”

“She’s pretty shy, but she is a very special person.” Lindy volunteered. “She is a genuinely nice woman and my best friend.”

“Okay mom, Maria and I are ready.” Amena and Maria came into the kitchen wearing their packs. Reina didn’t have a chance to respond.

“Where’s Banta?”

“He’s in Payton’s room.”

“Lindy, I’m going to grab Banta and make sure he’s ready. Can you and the girls pack the treats and some bottled water in our packs?”

“Will do. Will you snag my sweatshirt off the bed?”

“I’ll get my own kids,” Reina volunteered, as she followed Tamara down the hall.

“Payton, do you have a little girl?” Molly asked as she and Max sat on the bed. Banta was jumping in the middle of it.

“No, I don’t have a little girl. Banta, if you don’t stop jumping on my bed I won’t let you take any pictures with my camera.”

“Okay, Payton.” Banta flopped flat on his stomach on the bed.

“Do you have a little boy?”

“No, I don’t have a little boy.”

“How come?”

“I wasn’t lucky enough to have any kids like you guys. Okay, let’s go. Come on Banta, no somersaults, please.” Payton grabbed her jacket and camera, along with her wallet.

“Banta, I am sure Payton doesn’t appreciate your messing up her bed.” Tamara snagged her very active son. Reina smiled at Payton as she gathered her two children.

“Come on, let’s go get in the van.”

“Mom, can I sit with Payton?”

“You had better ask her.”

“Can I sit with you?”

“Of course you can.” Payton grinned at Molly. Who could say no to this beautiful little girl? Molly slipped her hand into Payton’s and they followed Reina and Max out to the van.

It took twenty minutes before all three adults and five children were buckled up and settled for the drive to the zoo. Lindy drove the van and, while the kids chattered, the adults visited.

“Tamara and Lindy told me you are in the Navy. What made you join?” Payton asked Reina.

“I wanted to fly helicopters and it seemed like the easiest way to learn.”

“Do you get to fly a lot?”

“Not as much as I’d like to, but I get to test fly new designs and I do some instructing. What do you do for a living?”

“I’m a project manager for information technology projects at a large manufacturing company. I’ve been working there for about nine years.”

“And she works way too hard,” Lindy interrupted. “Which is why she is on vacation with us for two weeks. Rest and relaxation, and lots of fun.”

Payton rolled her eyes in good humor. “Reina, Payton agreed to be our maid of honor.” Tamara smiled. “The two of you better get to know each other since you are both in our wedding.”

Payton blushed as Reina chuckled. “It’s two months away.”

“And I can’t wait.” Lindy grinned.

“I can’t either, sweetie.” Tamara blew her a kiss.

“They are pretty cute,” Reina admitted as she and Payton watched Lindy and Tamara flirt with each other.

“They are,” Payton agreed. Actually, Payton wanted what the two of them had, their love for each other, and their happy family. What she wouldn’t give to have that kind of love.

“A penny for your thoughts,” Reina spoke softly as she watched Payton’s face. It was a beautiful one that hid very little from someone who watched carefully.

“I was thinking they are very lucky,” Payton responded with a smile.

“They are very lucky.” Reina gazed at Payton as she spoke. Reina thought Payton was beautiful, her curly dark hair had strands of silver sparkling through it, and her eyes gleamed with humor and warmth. She was wearing a pair of dark green shorts and a pale green shirt, her trim body looking healthy and much younger than her age. Reina couldn’t help but notice Payton’s hands, especially since her daughter Molly was holding on tightly to one of them. Her nails were trimmed short and buffed to a shine, her fingers slim and tan. Reina flushed with heat as thoughts of Payton’s hands sliding over her body slipped through her mind. Shaking her head slightly, she scolded herself silently. What would a single woman like Payton find sexy in a mother of two children, whose body couldn’t hide the fact that she had delivered a couple of babies? Add on top of that, her idea of a fun night was being able to put Molly and Max to bed early and have a few hours to herself. Someone would have to be crazy to want to get involved with her.

Payton, at that moment, was having the exact opposite reaction toward Reina. She found her breathtakingly beautiful, with long curly blond hair tied loosely in a ponytail, and her blue eyes large and clear, with long blond eyelashes ringing them. She was taller than Payton’s five six height by about three inches, with long slender legs. She was wearing a pair of faded jeans and a turquoise sweater with the sleeves pushed up. She obviously was in as great a shape as

her slight frame indicated, but it was her dimples and mouth that captured Payton's attention. Her lips were full and pink and very kissable looking, and Payton couldn't help but think of how wonderful it would be to kiss her. The fact that she was the mother of two very cute kids just made her even more appealing.

"Okay, guys we're here," Lindy announced. The car full of children became animated as the group pulled into the parking lot.

"Okay kids, before we get out of the car, let's go over the rules." Tamara turned to the van full of people, young and old. "None of you are to leave the group. We all watch out for each other. Now we will assign buddies for each of you and you must always know where your buddy is. Did all of you understand me?"

"Yes, mom."

"All right then, Maria, Lindy, and Amena, you are buddies. Banta, you and I are going to watch out for each other, Reina, you and Molly are going to be a pair, and Max you are going to watch out for Payton." Tamara smiled at the very excited children. "Did you understand what I just explained?" There were a chorus of yeses and head nods in acknowledgement. Moments later the small crowd headed for the ticket booth.

Payton grinned at her young, very excited partner. Max could barely stand still as he twisted around Payton's leg, his hand tightly clenching onto hers. His little legs could barely keep up as he walked next to Payton.

"Hey little man, how about you sit on my shoulders and tell me which way to go?"

"Okay, Payton." Payton easily placed the tiny little boy on her shoulders and gripped his legs tightly. "Max, you hold on tight."

"I will. Look mom, look Payton, monkeys!" He squealed as he caught sight of a gorilla poster.

"That's right, Max." Reina and Molly stood next to Payton. "Payton, if he gets too heavy, give him to me."

“He won’t get too heavy,” Payton reassured her. “Molly, how about I give my camera to you and your mom and you guys take some pictures for Max and I?”

“Can I, Payton?” Molly’s dimples deepened as she smiled happily.

“Here you go.”

“Payton are you sure?” Reina asked hesitantly.

“I’m sure, just look at the little screen, point, and push the little silver button.”

“Okay Molly, we are in the picture-taking business.”

“Is everyone ready?” Tamara asked as they headed down the paved path toward the bears. “Let’s go look at some very big bears.”

It was a happy group for the next couple of hours, as they moved from cage to cage gazing at the different animals, but it was the monkey cage that Payton found the most enjoyable. Max had been getting increasingly tired and bored until he came to the monkeys and then he woke right up. Asking question after question, Payton and Reina did their best to answer, he stared for thirty minutes before they could convince him to move on. It was Payton’s suggestion that he take pictures of the monkeys that finally convinced him he could leave.

Payton had allowed each of the children to take pictures with the camera throughout the afternoon and she had been able to take quite a few herself.

“Can I take a few?” Reina asked.

“Certainly.” Payton handed the camera to Reina. “More monkey pictures?” Payton teased.

“Actually, I have something else in mind.” Reina smiled as she took several pictures of Payton and Max.

“Come on everyone, the bats are next!” Banta yelled as he and Tamara led the way.

For several more hours the kids continued their tour of the zoo, with the exception of Max who had quickly fallen asleep. Payton held him against her shoulder as they headed for the exit. By the time they

made it back to the van Payton had to admit she was starting to get tired herself.

“Okay everyone, let’s pile in. We’ll be home pretty soon and then we’ll have pizza for dinner,” Lindy suggested. The word pizza didn’t have its usual effect on the kids, their exhaustion keeping them from getting too excited.

“Reina, why don’t you and the kids stay the night? The kids can swim tomorrow and it would be easier than going home tonight and coming back in the morning.”

“Are you sure? That’s quite a crowd.”

“We have plenty of room. We’ll make up the bed in the family room.”

“Okay, if you don’t mind three extra.”

“Not at all. Now let’s get these tired kids home for an early dinner and then to bed,” Tamara suggested.

“Okay, seatbelts everyone.”

Payton had placed Max between her and Reina to keep him warm and comfortable. He had woken up but was content to cuddle against Payton.

“You have one sleepy son here,” Payton whispered.

“He’s exhausted but he had a great time.” Reina smiled lovingly at her son. “Thanks for taking such good care of him.”

“Believe me, it was my pleasure,” Payton admitted, smiling at Reina. The carload of people was subdued as they made the quick trip home.

“I’ll throw the pizza in the oven and start a salad,” Tamara volunteered. “Lindy, would you make sure that Banta washes up? He has snow cone all over his face and hands.”

“I will. Okay kids, let’s get washed and have a pajama party. Amena, will you loan Molly one of your nightshirts to sleep in? I’ll get a shirt for Max. Payton, why don’t you and Reina make up the bed in the family room? Tamara could you get the sheets and blankets?”

“Yes, honey.”

Payton carried the tired little boy into the house and into her bedroom, placing him on her bed. “Max, why don’t you stay right here while we make your bed?”

“Okay, Payton.” He hugged her before letting her go.

“Here are the sheets and blankets, and a couple of pillows.” Tamara handed the pile to Payton. “Reina, I’ll put a stack of towels in the bathroom.”

“Thanks, Tamara.”

“No problem. I’ll go get some pajamas for the kids. Molly, come with me and we’ll get you some cool stuff from the girls.” Molly followed Tamara out of the room.

The family room was connected to Payton’s bedroom by a shared bathroom, and Payton followed Reina through the connecting doors. Max was seated on Payton’s bed playing with a little stuffed monkey Payton had purchased for him at the zoo. As Payton followed Reina she couldn’t help but admire her trim backend. She didn’t feel at all guilty until Reina turned abruptly and caught her watching. Her eyes never left Payton’s as she stared at her for a few minutes, until Payton felt herself blushing profusely. She was acting like an idiot around Reina. Payton never acted like this, staring at a woman and blushing like a teenager. She had always prided herself on her self-control and composure and now she had just lost it.

Reina pulled the rollout couch flat and handed part of the bottom sheet to Payton. They stretched it flat, before tucking it in. The top sheet went next, along with a heavy blanket. Reina and Payton remained silent as they worked but the glances between the two of them became longer and more frequent. As Payton slid the pillowcase on one of the pillows, Reina spoke.

“I can’t thank you enough for taking care of Max today. He tries so hard to be like the big kids but he is still so little.” Reina leaned toward Payton, plumping the pillow on the bed. Her dimples deepened as she smiled.

“You don’t need to thank me. I can’t remember when I’ve enjoyed a trip to the zoo so much. He was wonderful but he must be exhausted.” Payton placed her pillow on the bed, smiling in return. “I’ll be surprised if he stays awake long enough to eat his dinner.”

“You don’t know my son.” Reina chuckled. “He wouldn’t miss pizza. It’s his favorite food.”

“He’s got good taste.” Payton laughed. “It’s one of my favorite things.”

“Mom, look,” Molly called from the doorway. She was wearing a long white tee shirt with a whale on it. It hung past her knees, but she obviously was very excited about wearing it. “Maria let me wear her favorite shirt.”

“That was very nice of her.” Reina picked up her tiny daughter and hugged her.

“Look Payton, it’s a whale!”

“I see that. Can I take a picture of you?” She looked so darn cute.

“Okay.” Her mom placed her back on to her own feet.

“Come on then.” Payton headed back into her bedroom where Max was still lying on the bed. Payton and Molly busied themselves with the camera while Reina sat down next to her son.

“Here’s a tee-shirt for Max to sleep in and I have a nightgown for you, Reina.” Tamara handed both to her. Reina grinned as she took the nightie from her. It was a short white silk nightshirt and not much bigger than the tee shirt for Max.

“Tamara,” Reina protested as she held it up.

“It will look perfect on you.” Tamara raised her eyebrows and grinned. “And it is very sexy,” She whispered.

“Come on Max, let’s put this tee-shirt on you.” Reina chose to ignore Tamara as she left the room, smirking. She untied Max’s shoes and removed his shirt and pants until he stood in front of her in his underwear. Before she could slip the tee shirt over his head, he took off giggling, standing just out of reach of his mother.

“Come here, you.” Reina smiled good-naturedly at her half naked son.

Payton and Molly had been taking pictures when the near naked little boy teasing his mother diverted Payton’s attention. She started taking pictures of Max and his mother as they played. Reina reached for Max again and he ran straight for Payton. She grabbed the giggling boy and picked him up.

“Come here, monkey boy.” Payton teased him as she tossed him on the bed next to his laughing mother.

“My son the exhibitionist. For some reason he enjoys running around with very few clothes on.” She struggled to put the tee shirt on him.

“Is this a family trait?” Payton teased Reina.

“Well, he didn’t get it from me.”

“That’s too bad.” Payton grinned and looked Reina up and down. It was Reina’s turn to blush.

“Come on guys, it’s dinner time.” Lindy stuck her head in the bedroom door.

“Come on Miss Molly, let’s go polish off a pizza.” Payton took her by the hand and headed for the kitchen. Reina and Max followed moments later.

“Okay everyone, find a seat,” Tamara directed. “Max, Molly, what do you want to drink, juice, milk?”

“Payton, Reina, how about a glass of wine?” Lindy finished serving plates of pizza and salad to all the children.

“I’ll get it,” Payton volunteered. “Reina, do you want a glass?”

“No thanks, I’ll have a glass of water.”

The children quietly began to eat their dinner as the four adults stood around in the kitchen sipping wine and visiting, keeping their eyes on the kids.

“Eat,” Lindy ordered as she handed a slice of pizza to Reina. “You too, Payton.”

It was a pleasant meal, and the children started to wind down. Banta and Max were yawning in their seats while they finished eating Popsicles for dessert.

“Kids, let’s go into the living room and watch a movie.” Lindy slowly moved the tired group out into the living room and settled them on the couches. “Maria, why don’t you put a movie in the VCR for us?”

“Can we watch ‘Babe’?”

“Sure. I think Molly and Max might like that.” Lindy covered the kids with blankets and made them all comfortable. “Guys, the adults are going to be in the kitchen if you need us.”

“Okay Lindy.”

“I’ll bet you a dollar that Banta and Max will be sound asleep in twenty minutes. Their eyes are barely staying open right now.”

“They had a long day.” Tamara pulled Lindy into her arms and kissed her quickly. “Pray that Banta sleeps in.”

“They all seemed to have fun today and I got some great pictures.” Payton sat down at the table.

“I can’t wait to see them.” Lindy smiled as she sat on Tamara’s lap, their arms around each other.

Reina sat across the table from the two of them. “I took some good ones when you loaned your camera to Molly and I. In fact, I took a darling one of you and Max at the monkey cage. You both looked so cute talking to the monkeys.”

Payton could feel herself blushing as Tamara and Lindy looked on amused. “I’ll go through the pictures early next week and print the good ones for all of you. I promised the kids copies of the ones they took.”

“You spoil them,” Lindy teased.

“And you don’t?” Payton laughed. “Now tell me about your wedding.”

“It only took me three months to convince Lindy to marry me.” Tamara squeezed Lindy as she talked. “I love her madly and I want to officially make us a couple and a family.”

“So share the details.” Payton couldn’t help but smile.

“We’re planning a small ceremony at the public beach. They have a hall all set up for weddings. We have a minister picked out and we are writing our own vows.” Lindy explained. “The children are going to be part of the ceremony and you both will stand up with us. We decided on keeping it small and are only inviting a small number of family and friends. We want it intimate.”

“It sounds perfect,” Reina responded. “What are we supposed to wear?”

“Lindy and I are wearing long dresses, nothing terribly fancy, but you can wear whatever you want. It is your choice.”

“Do you have any specific colors in mind?”

“No, we just want you with us.”

“Thank you for asking me.” Payton smiled at her best friend and her girlfriend. She couldn’t be happier for them.

“We wouldn’t do it without you.”

“Payton, how long have you known Lindy?” Reina inquired. They were obviously very close.

“Let’s see, we met about eight years.”

“Yep,” Lindy agreed. “Tell her how we met, Payton.”

“You could say our girlfriends at the time, introduced us.” Payton grinned.

“They were sleeping together, and Payton and I were clueless. We were double dating, going on vacation together and everything, until Sandy decided to confess the whole thing to me.” Lindy chuckled. “It was quite a surprise to the both of us.”

“I’m sorry.” Reina felt bad for asking about it.

“It’s kind of funny now,” Payton admitted.

“It wasn’t so funny then,” Lindy admitted. “Sandy and I broke up and Payton and Alice went through some rough times.”

“But you and I became best friends and we have stayed that way ever since.” Payton reminded her.

“Payton was the one who convinced Lindy to take a chance on me and look what happened,” Tamara shared.

“I didn’t have to convince her of anything except telling you how she felt. She fell madly in love with you the very first night she met you.”

“I did.”

“The feeling was mutual. It just took us eight months to figure it out.” Tamara laughed, kissing Lindy.

“So what was it that attracted you to Lindy?” Reina asked.

“Her laugh. When she laughs it is so darn sexy. It makes me want to laugh with her. She is also so beautiful. When I first saw her I thought she was the most beautiful woman I had ever met.”

“Lindy, what attracted you to Tamara?”

“The way she looked at me. It was like she could see right into my heart, and I also think she is gorgeous.” They smiled at each other. “I also love the way she is with her kids.”

“Our kids,” Tamara reminded her.

“Reina, what do you look for in a woman?” Lindy asked.

“Trust, commitment, someone who loves me for me, someone who makes me laugh, and takes my breath away when I look at her.” Reina blushed as she spoke.

“What about you, Payton?”

“Trust, definitely trust. Actually, I want everything—passion, love, laughter.” Payton’s face became serious as she talked. “This may sound strange but I want to find someone who is my soul mate.”

“That isn’t very strange.” Reina spoke softly to Payton. She found herself very attracted to this shy, beautiful woman sitting across from her. What appealed to her most of all was the way Payton responded to her children. She was so gentle and sweet and nothing could be sexier to Reina.

“Mom, Banta and Max are asleep.” Amena entered the kitchen and walked up to Lindy and Tamara wrapping her arms around the two of them.

“Are you tired, sweetie?” Lindy asked.

“Yes.”

“How about I take you upstairs and tuck you into bed?” Lindy suggested, hugging her tightly.

“Okay, goodnight Mom.” Amena kissed Tamara goodnight.

“Goodnight, beautiful.” Amena hugged Payton and Reina and followed Lindy into the living room.

“I had better go tuck Max and Molly into bed.” Reina followed the two of them.

“Come on Banta, let’s put you to bed.” Lindy helped him down the hall. “Maria, why don’t you crawl in bed and read?”

“Okay, I want to say goodnight to Mom.”

Payton stepped into the living room as Reina picked up a sleeping Max. Molly was barely awake on the couch. “Can I help with Molly?”

“Thanks.” Reina smiled. “She’s almost asleep.”

“Come on little mermaid, let’s put you to bed.” Payton picked up Molly’s tiny limp body and carried her into the bedroom. Reina had pulled back the covers and placed the sleeping Max on the bed. Payton gently placed Molly next to her brother. “Goodnight Molly, sleep tight,” Payton whispered.

“Night Payton. I love you.” Molly placed a sloppy kiss on Payton’s chin. Payton was so surprised at Molly’s comment she just hugged her tightly.

“Goodnight baby.” Reina kissed her little girl. “I’ll be back in a little bit. I love you.”

“I love you, Mom.”

Payton left the bedroom and watched Reina tuck in her children. Reina watched them sleep for a moment before turning out the light. She smiled at Payton as she propped the door open. “Thanks for the help.”

“No problem. You must be proud of your kids. They are very special.”

“I think they’re pretty special, but they’re mine.” She grinned.

“Believe me, they are.”

“Thanks.”

They entered the kitchen to find Lindy and Tamara cleaning up.

“Why don’t the two of you go to bed?” Payton suggested. “All the kids are tucked in.”

“We’re going to do just that. There’s more wine in the refrigerator if you and Reina want to fill your glasses.”

“Thanks, now go.”

Tamara and Lindy hugged Payton and Reina and headed off for bed. “They make a great couple,” Reina stated as she watched them leave.

“They are. Would you like a refill of your water?”

“Sure, thank you?”

“I think I’ll have another glass of wine.” Payton poured the wine for herself and filled Reina’s glass with bottled water before handing it to her. “Want to sit in the living room?”

“Sure.” The two of them walked over to the couch and sat down. There was a moment of silence before Reina spoke.

“Payton, can I ask you a personal question?” She turned sideways on the couch.

“Sure.”

“Earlier when you were talking about how you and Lindy met, you said your girlfriend and Lindy’s were sleeping together. I know Lindy and Susan broke up. What happened with you and your girlfriend?”

“Alice and I stayed together. She claimed it was a mistake and it had only happened a couple of times.”

“So you worked it out?”

“I thought we did, but we really hadn’t. Alice didn’t quite tell the truth. To make a long story short, we broke up awhile ago because I

found out she had been sleeping around for a long time with a lot of women and lying about it.”

“I’m sorry, that must have been very painful.”

“Actually, by the time we finally broke up it was a relief. We hadn’t had a real relationship for a long time.”

“Have you been with anyone since then?”

“No, not really. What about you? Are you seeing someone?”

“I haven’t seen someone seriously for several years. Most women seem to object to children.”

“You’re kidding?” Payton’s face betrayed her shock.

“No, when I decided to have Molly it broke my relationship apart. At first my having a child was exciting, but after awhile she decided that a child would interfere. I had always wanted to have children so I made a choice to have Molly and not stay in my relationship.”

“How many children do you want?”

“Two or three.” Reina blushed.

“I think that’s wonderful.”

“Mom, I have to go to the bathroom.” Max stood in the doorway of the bedroom.

“Okay honey, I’ll be right there. Payton, I enjoyed spending the day with you.”

“I enjoyed the day too.” Payton smiled at Reina. “Here, let me take your glass.”

“Thanks, goodnight.” Reina gazed for a long moment at Payton before reaching for her son’s hand. Payton watched her enter her bedroom before turning away. Quickly she took the glasses into the kitchen and rinsed them clean before heading for her own bedroom. Rapidly she changed out of her shorts and blouse into a pair of navy silk pajamas. A soft knock on the bedroom door got her attention.

“Yes.” Payton responded.

“Max is done in the bathroom, Payton. Why don’t you go ahead and use it. I’ll use it when you’re done.”

“Okay.” Payton opened her door and waved at Max as he and Reina shut theirs. She scrubbed her face, brushed her teeth, and combed her hair. She wiped up the counter and knocked on Reina’s door. “I’m done.”

“Okay.”

Payton shut her door and headed for bed. She crawled under the covers and turned her light out. She could hear Reina speaking quietly to Max, and then as she cleaned up in the bathroom. Payton was just getting comfortable when the door of her bedroom opened up.

“Payton?”

“Max, what are you doing out of bed?”

“Are you sleeping?” He came to stand next to her pillow.

“I’m trying to. Does your mother know you’re up? Come on little man, you need to get back in bed.”

Payton got out of bed and picked Max up. She carried him into his bedroom where Molly was soundly sleeping. “Okay buddy, let’s put you back to bed.”

The bathroom door opened at that moment, to reveal Reina dressed in the white silk nightshirt that ended at the top of her thighs. The light from the bathroom shined behind her, making the nightshirt transparent. Payton stopped breathing. She couldn’t believe how incredible Reina looked. Her hair was piled up on top of her head in a loose bun, her face devoid of any makeup. Payton didn’t know quite what to say.

“Max decided to visit me while you were in the bathroom.” Reina gazed at Payton as she spoke but remained silent. She was as surprised as Payton to be caught in her nightgown. “I brought him back.”

“Thank you. Come on Max, climb into bed.” Reina walked up to Payton and took her son out of Payton’s arms with a smile. “He seems to have fallen for you.” She grinned.

Payton felt her stomach flutter in reaction to Reina. Max climbed into bed and Reina slipped in next to him. Payton turned to leave the room. “Payton. Kiss please!” Max called from the bed.

“Okay, little man.” Payton stretched over Reina to kiss Max goodnight. “Go to sleep buddy.” She hugged him and he flopped over on his side, closing his eyes. Payton started to stand up when she caught Reina watching her.

“Where is my kiss goodnight?” Reina whispered.

Payton stared at Reina, before leaning down to place a kiss on Reina’s lips. She had only planned to kiss her quickly, but Reina had another idea as her lips responded to Payton’s kiss. Payton moaned and slid her hand under Reina’s neck to pull her close as Reina’s arm snaked around Payton’s neck. She murmured with pleasure as her lips opened to Reina’s tongue. The kiss grew in intensity, passion exploding between them. It was several moments before the kiss ended, leaving them both gasping for breath.

“Reina.” Payton started to speak but Reina’s lips covered hers again and Payton’s words flew out of her head. They kissed for several more minutes before pulling apart. Reina smiled up at Payton, her arms still around Payton’s neck.

“Goodnight, Payton.”

“Goodnight, Reina.” Payton slowly stood upright. She was still dazzled by the kisses they had shared.

“Sleep tight.” Reina called as Payton left the room.

“Not after that goodnight kiss. I’ll be lucky if I sleep at all.” Payton grumbled on her way out the door. She could hear Reina laughing as she headed toward her bedroom. She moved very slowly, wondering what had just happened. Had she really just shared a kiss with Reina? She crawled into bed, still a little dazed by the kiss and the overwhelming reaction she had. It was a long time before Payton fell asleep, and it was with visions of Reina that kept her restless and unable to sleep.

“Payton, are you awake?” The soft little girl voice of Molly woke Payton up.

“Yes Molly.” Payton rolled over to find both Molly and Max standing next to her bed, their faces lit up with smiles. “Hello you two. Does your mother know you’re up?”

“She knows.” Reina smiled from the bathroom door. “I kept them away from you as long as possible.” Reina entered the room fully dressed.

“Well, come here then.” Payton gathered the two little children in her arms and rolled with them on the bed, tickling them. They began giggling as she teased them both.

“Mom, come help us tickle Payton,” Molly requested, hanging on Payton’s neck.

Reina came over to the bed and sat down. Grabbing her daughter and tickling her, she responded, “Help you tickle Payton? I am going to get you, you little rascal!”

The four of them wrestled together on the bed with lots of laughter and fun. Every time Payton touched Reina, she tingled with arousal, and it was hard to keep it hidden.

“What’s all this noise?” Tamara and Lindy were watching from the bedroom door, grinning from ear to ear.

“We are tickling Payton,” Molly volunteered as the four of them looked up from the bed. They were in a tangled heap of bodies, with Payton half across Reina and Max lying on top of her. Molly was preparing to launch herself at the three of them.

“Molly and Max, why don’t the two of you come eat breakfast? Banta is already in the kitchen and Maria and Amena are getting dressed,” Tamara suggested. She and Lindy wanted to leave Reina and Payton alone for a while. They were hoping Reina and Payton might do a little bit more than just stare at each other. The two were obviously attracted to each other, but Lindy and Tamara weren’t even sure if they had figured that out yet. They just wanted to give them a little nudge.

“Okay.” Molly climbed off the bed along with Max. Max’s tee shirt hung off his shoulder and fell well below his knees. Payton couldn’t help but laugh as she watched the two children leave the room.

“Your children are darling.” Payton turned to look at Reina, who was leaning on her elbows watching Payton closely.

“They aren’t the only ones who are darling.” Reina’s dimples deepened as she leaned over to Payton. Payton couldn’t look away as she watched Reina’s lips meet hers. Softly they kissed and Payton’s arms reached out to surround Reina holding her gently. She sighed and deepened the kiss, her mouth and tongue tracing Reina’s. Reina pulled Payton tightly against her body as her tongue slid into Payton’s mouth. Their kisses became almost frantic. They couldn’t get enough of each other. Payton rolled on to her back, pulling Reina with her. She kissed Reina’s mouth, her chin, and nuzzled her neck, breathing in the delicious fragrance that floated on Reina’s skin. Reina’s hair was still piled on top of her head and Payton placed her face against it and breathed in the wonderful scent. She loved the taste of Reina’s skin as she tasted and kissed her. Reina’s lips laid kisses on Payton’s eyelids and cheeks before covering Payton’s mouth once more, drawing a cry from Payton. Both of their hearts beat loudly in their chests as they shared another wet hot kiss. As the kiss ended, they held onto each other tightly, trying to catch their breath.

“Payton, I like you very much and I would like to spend some more time with you while you are here.” Reina traced Payton’s mouth with her finger, causing Payton’s stomach to jump. “And my kids love you.”

“I like your kids a lot and I would love to spend some more time with you. I would really like to see you and get to know you better. I think you’re very beautiful. I can’t get over how sexy you are.” Payton kissed Reina softly.

“And I think you’re sexy and gorgeous and very, very special.” Reina kissed her in return. “Will you go out to dinner with me tomorrow night, just the two of us?”

“I would love to.” Payton smiled at the beautiful blond woman currently lying in her arms. She had fallen for Reina the minute their lips touched the first time in a breath-stealing kiss. It was only an added benefit that she had also fallen irrevocably in love with Molly and Max.

“Good.” Reina smiled at Payton and Payton’s stomach fluttered. She loved Reina’s dimples and the way her blue eyes crinkled when she smiled. Molly’s eyes did the same thing even though they were brown. She was definitely her mother’s daughter. “Much as I would like to stay here all day with you, I need to go rescue Lindy and Tamara.”

They shared one last searing kiss before slowly getting off the bed. “I’ll be out shortly.” Payton hugged Reina and they held hands for a moment gazing at each other. Reina was the first to pull away and walk to the bedroom door. Payton stood in the center of her bedroom trying to catch her breath long after Reina left the room. She found it impossible.

Never in Payton’s wildest dreams did she think someone like Reina would find her attractive. She was tingling from head to toe. The kiss the night before had caught her by surprise. She had never reacted so immediately and deeply before. It was all new to her. She was in serious trouble and she knew it. There was no way to turn back her feelings for Reina and her children. They just bubbled out of her. When she left at the end of her stay it would be very painful no matter what happened between them.

Sighing heavily, Payton headed for the shower. She didn’t know if her heart could take that kind of pain again. It might be easier not to get involved with Reina; maybe she could avoid a broken heart. It wasn’t much later that Payton lingered in her bedroom drying her hair. She had showered and dressed in a pair of shorts, a tee shirt, and a pair of sandals. As she put down the hair dryer, she looked at herself critically in the mirror. At least the gray hair showing up on her head in rapid fashion was silver in color. It didn’t bother her that

much that she was getting older. She didn't feel any different. She did mind that it was getting harder and harder for her to stay in shape. She had always found it incredibly easy to stay slim, but lately she had to work very hard at it. She had always been slender, but now she wondered what Reina thought of her. A knock on her bedroom door forced her to turn away from the mirror.

"Come on in."

"Hey sweetie, I brought you a cup of coffee." Tamara smiled as she handed the cup to Payton. "Are you okay?"

Payton smiled shyly. "I'm okay, thanks for asking."

"You like Reina," Tamara stated, touching Payton on the arm to get her attention.

"Very much," Payton admitted, her face revealing her fear.

"Sit down honey. I think we need to talk." Tamara shut the bedroom door and then sat next to Payton on the bed. "Is there something wrong with caring about Reina or falling in love?" Tamara asked softly, as she took Payton's hand in her own.

"No, there is nothing wrong with falling in love. It's what happens after that, that is so painful." Payton looked sadly at Tamara.

"Oh honey, you know that isn't always true. Look at Lindy and I." Tamara hugged Payton tightly.

"You two are special."

"So are you and so is Reina." Tamara held onto Payton's hands as she spoke.

"You know how hard it was for Lindy to tell me how she felt, can you imagine how hard it was for me to tell Lindy about my feelings? I was a much older lesbian mother with three kids, who had fallen in love with a beautiful young woman. Adding on top of that the fact that I lived in another state made it seem impossible. I also was not the best candidate in the world for committed relationships."

Payton listened quietly as Tamara talked. She'd listened to Lindy's fears about admitting to Tamara how she felt, but it had never crossed her mind how difficult it was for Tamara. "Do you know

how hard it is to think someone finds you sexy and beautiful when you're exhausted from work and taking care of three children? That someone could love you enough to put up with all the difficulties of two women raising a family?"

"But Lindy loves you and the kids."

"She does, but I didn't know that at the time. I only knew I was deeply in love with her and my children were crazy about her. I also knew that I couldn't move, which meant that the only way we could be together was if Lindy quit her job and left her home to be with me." Tamara's eyes filled with tears. "Thanks to you, Lindy overcame her fears to tell me how she felt and it was the luckiest day of my life."

"She didn't take much convincing," Payton assured her with a smile.

"The hell she didn't." Tamara chuckled. "She was scared to death and she should have been. I had three kids who, even though I love them to death, are very hard to handle. I have a job that requires a lot of time and travel and, think about it, I made such a good impression on her. My track record included a lot of screwing around. Lindy should have run in the opposite direction and never looked back."

"She was madly in love with you," Payton reminded her.

"And very brave. I look at her at night sometimes when she's sleeping and thank God for putting her in my life." Tamara couldn't prevent the tears that slid down her cheeks. "Now, we need to talk about you and Reina."

"We just met."

"And if I'm not mistaken by the look on your face when you look at her, you are very attracted to her." Tamara grinned.

Payton's head dropped. "She's gorgeous. I've never met anyone so sexy and beautiful," Payton admitted.

"She is beautiful, a fantastic mother, and a wonderful friend. She is also scared to death that you won't find her attractive, that you wouldn't date someone who has two kids."

“But I can barely breathe when I look at her. I tingle from head to toe. And I love her kids. They’re terrific,” Payton protested.

“Honey, I already know you would be perfect for Reina.” Tamara chuckled.

“But I live in Seattle.”

“So what? You could move.”

“But I don’t even know Reina. We just met.”

“And bit the dust. Now you just have to convince Reina how much you would love her and her children. I know you’ve been hurt very badly by your ex-girlfriend. If I had my way, she’d be painfully injured for what she did to you. Reina was also hurt very deeply by her ex.”

“What happened?”

“She always planned on having children, it was no secret. She and her girlfriend went to the doctor and Reina was artificially inseminated and became blissfully pregnant.”

“She must have been very beautiful.” Payton smiled. She would have loved to see her pregnant.

“You know what, doll? I just love you.” Tamara hugged her tightly and sighed. Hearing Payton say that erased all her uneasiness about Reina and Payton. She had been right about Payton; she would love Reina unconditionally. “Three weeks before Reina delivered Molly, her girlfriend left. She couldn’t handle Reina being pregnant. It broke Reina’s heart.”

“She left her alone?”

“Yes, and Reina did not have an easy pregnancy,” Tamara revealed. “Reina’s heart was painfully damaged but she had a little girl to raise. Eventually, Reina met someone else when Molly was about a year old and again she shared her heart. It wasn’t until Reina shared her plans about having another child that the woman decided to leave. She had fun sleeping with Reina, she just didn’t want any responsibilities.”

“You are kidding!” Payton’s eyes grew heavy with tears.

“No, and Reina decided at that moment that she would concentrate on her family and not try to have a relationship. She hasn’t had a serious one since.”

“But if she doesn’t want a relationship, why are you encouraging me?”

“Because since Max was born I have never seen Reina respond to anyone like she has to you. More importantly, you would never choose to be with Reina if you didn’t know you could love her for the mother she is. She is wildly attracted to you and she didn’t walk away like she usually does. You love her kids and if Reina is lucky enough to fall in love with you, she would love you forever. That’s if she let herself.”

“So where do I go from here?”

“Just be open to falling in love, Payton. And if it happens let her know how much you would love her as a mother, and understand if she gets scared.” Tamara hugged Payton tightly. “Just be yourself honey. Reina won’t stand a chance.”

“Tamara thanks. I don’t know what is going to happen, but I will keep an open mind.”

“You’re very welcome, and I know you would be perfect for each other. Now, let’s go join those two stunningly beautiful ladies in the kitchen.”

As Payton and Tamara entered the kitchen, Lindy grinned. “Hey guys, it’s about time.”

“What are the kids up to?” Tamara asked kissing her girlfriend. Payton smiled at Reina as she sat down at the table. Reina slipped her hand into Payton’s and squeezed her fingers quickly. She tried to pull her fingers back but Payton wouldn’t let her and threaded her fingers with Reina’s.

“They are in Maria and Amena’s room playing,” Lindy shared. “Reina and I have been talking and we decided to have a barbeque this afternoon. What do you think?”

“I think that sounds terrific. I promised all the kids they could go swimming later, so we can eat afterwards,” Tamara suggested.

“Good. Reina and I are going to do some shopping and pick up some clothes for her and the kids.”

“I’ll bring back their swimming suits.”

“Perfect. I’ll put Payton to work folding laundry while you’re gone.” Tamara grinned.

Lindy laughed out loud. “Better you than me, Payton.” Payton just grinned. She was still holding Reina’s hand and at that moment she would agree to just about anything to keep Reina close to her.

“Mom!” Maria cried as she entered the kitchen. “Banta is cheating and he won’t stop.”

“Okay Maria, I’ll be right in, honey,” Tamara responded to her distressed daughter. Maria turned and headed down the hall.

“I knew it was too quiet,” Tamara moaned. “Banta can’t sit still for that long.”

“Want me to take him with Reina and I?” Lindy asked.

“No honey, you and Reina go on ahead. I’ll take care of Banta.”

“Reina, I’ll be right back. I just need to get my wallet,” Lindy explained.

“Okay Lindy.” Reina smiled as Lindy followed Tamara out of the kitchen.

There was a period of silence before Reina spoke to Payton. “Are you sure you want to put up with me and my kids for another day?” She seemed nervous as she asked.

“Reina.” Payton turned to face her, taking her other hand in her own. “I want to spend every minute with you and your children.”

“Are you sure?” Reina whispered as she watched Payton’s face.

“Reina, look at me.” Payton placed her hands on Reina’s shoulders. “I love your kids and I want to see as much of the three of you as I can.” Payton kissed Reina softly.

Reina’s arms surrounded Payton’s waist. “You may get tired of us.” She grinned as she kissed Payton in return.

“No, I won’t. And I’m not going anywhere,” Payton pledged as she met Reina’s lips with another kiss. “I want you, Reina, and I like the fact that you are a mother with two kids.”

Reina’s eyes glistened as Payton’s words sunk in. “Payton, I know we just met, but I trust you.”

“You can trust me,” Payton promised. They shared another kiss. “Are you going to bring back your own bathing suit and go swimming with me?”

“I can do that.” Reina grinned as she picked up Payton’s hand and kissed her palm.

“I can’t wait.” Payton found it hard to breath as Reina’s tongue touched her palm. “Reina.”

The kiss they shared was not gentle, as Payton pulled Reina onto her lap and devoured Reina’s lips with her own. Reina whimpered as Payton’s tongue swept through her mouth.

“Payton,” Reina gasped and tucked her head against Payton’s neck.

“I know we shouldn’t be doing this.”

“Yes, we should, but I don’t want to stop and now is not the time.” Reina chuckled as she got up off Payton’s lap.

Payton grinned at Reina. “I guess we just have to find the time.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea.” Reina hugged her. “Now let’s go find my kids so I can tell them where I’m going.”

Reina held onto Payton’s hand as they headed down the hall to the girls’ room. They could hear giggling as they approached. Sticking their heads in the door, they couldn’t help but laugh—all the children were piled on Lindy and Tamara in the middle of the room.

“Payton!” Max yelled and launched himself into her arms.

“Hey little man, what are you doing?”

“Hi Molly. Are you having fun?”

“Yep. Maria braided my hair.”

“It’s very pretty. Did you thank Maria?” Reina kissed her little daughter.

“I did, Mom.”

“Good girl. Molly, can you and Max stay here with Payton and Tamara and her kids while I go pick up your bathing suits?”

“Yep. We are going swimming, aren’t we?”

“Yes, we are. And we’re going to have a picnic.”

“Payton, are you going to swim with us?”

“I wouldn’t miss it, Molly the mermaid.”

“Payton!” Molly giggled, her dimples showing in both cheeks. Payton leaned over to the little girl and whispered something in her ear.

“Okay, Payton.” Molly grinned and whispered back. “I won’t.”

Payton still held Max tightly in her arms, his face tightly tucked against her shoulder, his arms wrapped around her neck. Reina watched the exchange between Payton and her daughter and smiled. At that moment her heart ached and she wasn’t sure what to do about it. She cared about Payton very much.

“Come on Lindy, let’s get our chores done,” Reina suggested. She needed to talk to Lindy about Payton before things went too far. Maybe she and the kids should stay away. It would be less painful now than later. She felt sad at the thought of never seeing Payton again.

“Goodbye, guys. Take care of Mom and Payton until we get back.”

We will, Lindy,” Banta promised as he tackled his mother.

“Bye sweetie.” Reina hugged Molly. “Go play.”

“Okay, Mom.” Molly joined in the pile of children trying to tickle Tamara.

“Max, give me a kiss.”

“Bye, Mom.” Max pulled Reina close with one arm so he could kiss her, his other arm still around Payton’s neck. After a quick kiss from Max, Reina glanced at Payton and found her gentle, loving eyes watching her. She couldn’t resist kissing her softly. “Max, take care of Payton.”

“Okay, Mom.” He promised solemnly, hugging Payton tightly. Payton smiled at Reina almost as if she knew that Reina was fighting some inner battle.

Reina headed for the front door behind Lindy. “Let’s take my car,” Reina suggested.

“Okay.” Lindy turned to look at Reina as they walked the short distance to the car. “Are you okay?”

“Yes, but I need to talk to you.”

“Okay, honey. Come on let’s get going.” Lindy slipped her arm through Reina’s. They both got into Reina’s Honda and pulled out of the driveway.

“I thought we could stop by my house first before the grocery store,” Reina suggested.

“Reina, cut the small talk and tell me what is going on,” Lindy demanded. “And I know it has everything to do with Payton, so talk.”

“Lindy, I kissed her last night and again this morning.”

“Good for you. So what’s the problem?”

“Lindy, I could really fall for Payton. In fact, I think I already have.”

“I’m happy for you, because I know Payton is falling in love with you.”

“How do you know that?”

“I know Payton better than anyone. I can tell by the way she looks at you. I also know that Payton doesn’t kiss just anyone. She has always been very slow to get physically involved with a woman and it’s been a long time since Payton has chosen to be with someone. She’s special, Reina. And so are you.”

“But Lindy I’m pregnant. What will she think when she finds out?” Reina’s voice trembled as she spoke.

“She will be very happy for you. You couldn’t choose a better person to love you and your family.”

“Lindy, I don’t know. What if my being pregnant turns her off? I am scared to death. I don’t know if I can deal with that again.”

“I know you’re scared, honey. Don’t you think I was scared when I realized I was in love with Tamara? She wasn’t exactly someone who had worked at a relationship. But do you know what Payton asked me?” Lindy smiled as she spoke. “She asked me if I was willing to pass up what might be the one chance I might have for happiness. Would I be willing to give up a lifetime of laughter and love? Would I let my fear prevent me from finding out? She was right, Reina. If I hadn’t told Tamara how I felt, we would have never gotten together. I would not have a wonderful family and a gorgeous sexy girlfriend who I trust and love beyond belief.”

“Lindy, I’m still afraid that I’ll fall in love with Payton and she won’t want a pregnant girlfriend with two young children.”

“Do you want to get to know Payton?”

“Yes, very much, I think I am already falling in love with her.”

“Then tell her you’re pregnant and explain to her how scared you are. She will understand. I know Payton. Besides, I can’t think of anyone who would be more perfect as a partner for a pregnant lover and two children.”

“Do you really think so?”

“I know so.” Lindy smiled. “Reina, if you let Payton love you and your children, you would be one of the most loved women I know.”

“Lindy, it’s happening so fast.”

“It usually does when you meet the right person. And I think it’s fantastic!”

“I’m still scared, but I think Payton is wonderful. Can you believe how Molly and Max responded to her? They love her already.”

“She loves them.”

“Lindy, she lives and works in Seattle.”

“So did I, Reina, but Tamara and I worked it out. So will you and Payton.”

“I hope so Lindy, I hope so.”

“Come on Max, let’s go fold some clothes,” Payton suggested to the tiny little boy. Max padded after Payton into the laundry room. “Here, you sit up here and fold these towels.”

Payton seated Max on the washer and handed him a couple of towels. The two of them worked in silence as Payton folded clothes and Max worked very hard to fold his towels. “Good job, Max.” Payton helped him finish. “Let’s go get some lunch.”

Max had gotten a little fearful when his mother left and hadn’t left Payton’s side. He seemed to feel safe with Payton. “Let’s go make some sandwiches for everyone.”

Tamara was cleaning one of the bathrooms in the hallway. “I’m going to make the kids lunch, any suggestions?” Asked Payton.

“There is sliced turkey and cheese for sandwiches, and apples and oranges.”

“Okay. Come on Max, let’s go get the rest of the kids.”

Tamara smiled as the two headed down the hall. Max and Payton could be mother and son. It was wonderful to see how Max responded to Payton. It was obvious that Payton cared a tremendous amount for the young boy. Lindy had been right. Payton and Reina had fallen for each other immediately.

An hour and a half later, Reina and Lindy entered the kitchen with three full bags of groceries and Reina’s duffle bag full of bathing suits and clothes.

“Hello girls.” Tamara kissed Lindy and began to unpack groceries.

“How are the kids?” Lindy asked as she and Reina emptied the other grocery bags.

“The girls are in the back bedroom painting their fingernails and toe nails. Sorry Reina, it’s hot pink.” Tamara grinned. “I put Banta down for a nap before he drove everyone crazy. He was cranky, and nasty, and driving me nuts. Max and Payton are also taking a nap. Max fell asleep eating lunch so Payton put him to bed but he kept waking up. He wouldn’t stay in bed without Payton so they are both taking a nap.”

Reina smiled. "I think I'll go check on the two of them."

Lindy and Tamara smiled as they watched Reina leave the room. "She's interested in Payton." Lindy stated as she hugged Tamara.

"Payton is interested in her."

"I told you so." Lindy grinned.

"Yes, you did." Tamara kissed her very smart and beautiful girlfriend.

Reina slowly pushed the bedroom door open. Payton was lying flat on her back sound asleep, Max held tightly in her arms as he lay against her, his head on her shoulder. Reina's heart flipped as she watched the two of them sleep. It was several minutes before she realized Payton's eyes were open and watching her.

"Hi." Reina walked over to the bed and sat on the edge.

"Hi." Payton spoke quietly so as not to wake Max.

"How long has he been sleeping?"

"Not long. He was exhausted." Payton smiled at Reina. She was so beautiful, her eyes so large and blue, and so scared.

Reina leaned over and kissed Payton. "Thank you for taking care of Max."

"You're welcome." Payton touched Reina's cheek with her fingers. "Talk to me Reina. What's wrong?"

"Payton, I am so frightened. Things are happening so fast. I'm falling for you in a big way and that's scaring me to death."

"Why are you scared?"

"I don't think I could handle falling in love with you and then having it end."

"Why do you think it would end?" Payton placed her hand against Reina's cheek again. "Reina, if we loved each other why would it end?"

"Oh, Payton." Reina kissed her and held her tightly.

"Reina love, I'm not going anywhere right now. We have time to figure things out. Unless you don't want me to be part of your family?"

“Payton, I would be honored to have you be a part of my family.”  
Reina was close to crying.

“Then what is scaring you?” Payton held her as she spoke.

“Payton, I’m pregnant.” Reina cried.

“Reina, that’s fantastic!” Payton responded with a grin. So that was why Reina was so scared. “When is the baby due?”

“I’m six weeks along.” Reina tearfully looked at Payton.

“I’ll bet you are gorgeous pregnant.” Payton grinned, her eyes gazing at Reina’s body.

“Payton.” Reina couldn’t say anything else as she kissed Payton thoroughly. “I think I might have to love you for the rest of your life.”

“You think?” Payton teased her.

“I know.”

“So tell me, how long before you start showing your pregnancy?”

“A couple of months and then I’ll just keep getting bigger and bigger.”

“Do you have morning sickness?”

“No, I feel terrific.”

“Reina, I think you are gorgeous now, and I can’t wait to see you nine months pregnant, that is if you’ll let me.”

“Oh, I will let you, honey.” Reina grinned.

“Do you think Max will be okay if I get up?”

“He’ll be fine.” Reina looked fondly at her sleeping son, his hair standing up in wild curls.

“He looks like you.”

“Actually, I was just thinking he looks a little like you.” Reina hugged Payton tightly.

“Thank you.” Payton was humbled by the remark.

“Payton, are you sure you want to date a woman with two children?” Reina’s voice betrayed her fear.

“No, actually I think I want to marry a woman with three children.” Payton placed her hand on Reina’s currently flat stomach.

“Three beautiful children.”

“You think?” Reina teased.

“I know.” They shared another kiss before leaving the bedroom. They held hands as they walked into the kitchen.

“Payton, are you still meeting me for lunch tomorrow at my office?” Linda inquired as she stood in the kitchen, waiting for the children to finish getting in their bathing suits.

“I am.”

“She is going out for dinner with me tomorrow night, just the two of us,” Reina announced, still holding onto Payton’s hand. “And she knows I’m pregnant.”

“Good,” Tamara responded, smiling. “What do you think, Payton?”

“I think Reina is going to be beautiful pregnant. I can’t wait.” Payton beamed as she hugged Reina.

Lindy winked at Reina. “I’m going swimming with the kids.”

“I’ll go get Molly and put her suit on,” Reina responded.

“Is it okay for you to go swimming?” Payton’s face revealed her concern.

“Oh honey, you are so cute.” Reina kissed her happily. “I’m fine, and yes, I can go swimming. How else are you going to get to see me in a bathing suit?” Reina grinned at a blushing Payton before she left the kitchen.

“I’m happy for you, Payton.” Lindy hugged her.

“I don’t know what’s going to happen, Lindy.” Payton admitted.

“Payton, everything is going to be just fine. It will work out,” Tamara reassured her.

“I hope so.” Payton sighed.

“Come on girl, go get your bathing suit on.”

Payton was a little nervous wearing her suit in front of Reina. It’s not like she was twenty-one anymore. She had always been fairly shy. She slid her shorts back on in order to walk back out to the pool. Lindy and Tamara both had their suits on along with all three of their children.

“Okay guys, what are the rules?” Lindy asked the excited group.

“No running and no jumping.” The kids replied in unison.

“Right, and we all watch each other when we are in the pool. No one swims alone.”

“We promise, Lindy.”

“Okay. Now Banta, you don’t go in the pool without Mom or me.”

“Why?”

“Because that’s what your mom and I have decided.”

“But why?”

“Because you’re still learning to swim and, until your mother and I think you’re ready, you don’t get into the pool without us.”

Payton smiled as she watched the battle of wills between Banta and Lindy. She was surprised to see Banta back down. He was always testing Lindy and Tamara. “Okay,” he grumbled. “Can we swim now?”

“Yes.” Lindy laughed as she hugged the disgruntled little boy. “Last one in the pool is a rotten egg!”

Lindy and Banta headed for the stairs at the shallow end of the pool. It had taken several years of love and understanding to help Banta feel safe. Lindy played a big part in helping Banta heal. She talked to him about his fears, held him when he cried, and loved him unconditionally. Banta loved his family and was very close to Lindy.

“How’s Banta doing, Tamara?” Payton asked as she watched Lindy and Banta interact.

“He’s doing very well. He’s flexing his little muscles just to see if we will still love him if he misbehaves. It’s a little nerve wracking, but Lindy is wonderful with him.”

“It must be tough on you and Lindy, and the other children.”

“Lindy makes it so much easier. She has so much patience and when I lose it she covers for me.”

“Wow!” Payton had just noticed Reina and her children coming from the house. Reina had on a bright blue one-piece bathing suit,

which did nothing but emphasize her well-toned body. Payton's mouth went dry and her stomach flipped.

"Payton, close your mouth." Tamara poked her, smirking.

"She's stunning."

"And you are gorgeous, now take your shorts off and go swim with your new girlfriend and her kids."

Payton removed her shorts and smiled very shyly as Reina approached with Max and Molly. Molly had a tiny little bikini, on her hair tied up on top of her head, and Max had on an equally small pair of bathing trunks.

"Hey guys, you ready to go swimming?" Payton spoke to the two of them, avoiding looking directly at Reina for fear she would give away her reaction to her stunning figure.

"Yes." Molly took hold of Payton's hand. Max shook his head vigorously.

"Come on then." Payton picked Max up and took Molly's hand.

"Payton," Reina said softly.

"Yes." She finally got the nerve to look at Reina directly.

"Come here." Reina smiled and crooked her finger at Payton.

"Yes." Payton nervously stood inches away from Reina. Reina leaned over and whispered in her ear. "You look terrific in your bathing suit." Reina's eyes gleamed.

"You look beautiful," Payton admitted.

"Thank you." Reina smiled, their faces inches from each other, the physical draw to kiss each other crackling around them.

"Come on, Payton." Molly tugged on her hand.

"Okay sweetie." Payton gazed one last moment at Reina before turning away.

"Payton's pretty shy, Reina." Tamara chuckled. "She was blown away by the sight of you in a bathing suit."

"Come on Tamara, quit teasing." Reina blushed.

"Reina, I am not teasing you. She could barely speak when she saw you."

“She is the sexy one. I love the way she moves. She’s so sure of herself.” Reina watched Payton slowly enter the pool with her two children. “And Tamara, she certainly isn’t shy.”

“She isn’t?” Tamara grinned at Reina.

“She kissed me last night but I was the one who made the first move. Can you believe that! I never do that!” Reina blushed as she spoke.

“Honey, you two are perfect. Whatever happens is okay. The two of you have your own relationship.”

“I’m afraid if we go too fast it won’t work out, but if we don’t move quickly Payton will leave and it won’t work out either.”

“Listen Reina, I’m not the best person when it comes to this stuff. Do you know what I did to Lindy when I first met her? I was all over her at a bar in Seattle one night. I was just after a quick night of fun, nothing serious. She refused to go along with my plan. In fact, she didn’t want anything to do with me.” Tamara laughed. “She thought I was a jerk and she was right!”

“Then how did the two of you get together?”

“We kept seeing each other out and about whenever I traveled to Seattle, and the harder I tried, the angrier she got. There was something about her that appealed to me. I just couldn’t let it go. Finally one night at a party I really came on strong and she blew up. She started to leave the party very pissed, and I felt bad. I followed her out to the car to apologize to her but she wouldn’t accept it. She informed me she would not be another notch on my very busy belt. She was very angry.”

“What did you do?”

“I listened to her yell at me. She was right. I was avoiding commitment because I didn’t think I deserved to be happy. She yelled at me for over an hour. She was fantastic.” Tamara smiled at her memories.

“So tell me, when did you guys get together?”

“That night.”

“You’re kidding?”

“No, I fell in love with Lindy that night. It just took us eight months to admit it to each other.”

“So tell me how did the two of you get together that night?” Reina was very curious.

“When she finished yelling at me, I told her she was right, that I was afraid of failing. I also told her I thought she was beautiful, sexy, and smart, and then I kissed her.”

“What did she do?”

“She kissed me back and I was hooked. She took me home with her that night. I knew the minute she touched me, she was the one.” Tamara looked at Lindy lovingly. “She taught me how to love, and it was easy to make a commitment to her. By that point I didn’t want to live without her.”

“Then why did you leave her in Seattle?”

“I was scared. I couldn’t get up the nerve to tell her I was in love with her. I didn’t think she would want to quit her job, move, and join me with three kids. It was Payton who convinced Lindy to come visit and tell me how she felt. I have been in heaven ever since.”

“I couldn’t move to Seattle with my kids right now,” Reina admitted.

“I bet if you and Payton work things out you won’t have to ask her to move. She will volunteer.”

“Mom, watch!” Molly screamed from the pool.

Molly stood on the side of the pool and jumped in, paddling like mad to where Payton waited holding Max on her shoulders. When she reached Payton, she was lifted safely into Payton’s arms, where she received a celebratory hug.

“Good job, Molly,” Payton praised her, grinning widely. “You are a regular mermaid.”

“Molly, that’s terrific!” Reina raved.

“Go swim with your kids and your girlfriend,” Tamara encouraged.

“Thanks, Tamara.”

“Your welcome. And quit worrying.”

Reina walked to the pool stairs and entered the pool, her eyes on Payton, and the children. She had the most wonderful feeling in her heart as she watched the three of them.

“Mom, stay there. Watch.” Molly took a big deep breath and began paddling toward her mother. Reina proudly watched as her tiny daughter struggled to swim to her.

“Wow, Molly! You are swimming so well.” Reina picked up her very excited daughter.

“Payton showed me.”

“She did? Well let’s go thank her,” Reina suggested. The two of them joined Payton and Max where they were bobbing in the pool.

“Hey mermaid Mom, what do you think of Molly?” Payton grinned as she and Max dripped with water.

“I’m very proud of her, she’s a good swimmer.” Reina hugged her daughter.

“She is very good.”

“How’s Max doing?”

“Pretty good. He’s not quite ready to swim yet, but we’ve been holding our breath and floating on our back.”

“Max, why don’t you come with me and give Payton a break?”

“Okay.” Max twisted in Payton’s arms, placing a wet boisterous kiss on her lips, before he threw himself at his mother.

Payton’s face had a surprised expression on it as Molly reached out for her. “Max has no problem with letting you know how he feels.” Reina smiled. “Either does my daughter.”

“Do they get that from their mother?” Payton teased her.

“I’d like to think so. Do you need to know how I feel, Payton?”

Payton blushed, holding a busy Molly. Reina stepped up very close to Payton as she spoke. “I find you beautiful, loving, sexy, and I can barely keep my hands off of you. I think you would be a wonderful partner and second mother to my children.” Reina touched Payton’s cheek.

“Thank you,” Payton responded.

“My only question is what you really think about my being pregnant?”

“I think...”

“Payton, I don’t want you to answer my question now. I want you to think about it very hard. We can talk about it tomorrow night.”

“But, Reina...”

“Payton, please wait until tomorrow night.”

“I don’t need to think about how I feel.”

“Payton, please. It’s just one day,” Reina whispered softly.

“Okay, I will wait until tomorrow night.” Payton couldn’t refuse Reina anything.

“Thank you, honey.” Reina kissed her quickly and smiled. “Now let’s do some swimming.”

The rest of the afternoon was very pleasant. Both the adults and the children played until they were exhausted. Lindy and Reina did the barbequing while Payton and Tamara prepared the salad and a plate of fruit. They all ate dinner outside and enjoyed the nice warm weather. It was after seven o’clock before Reina, Max, and Molly prepared to go home.

“Okay, I have packed everything,” Reina announced. “Max and Molly, go say goodbye to Maria, Banta, and Amena.”

“Okay, Mom.” Molly and Max headed down the hallway.

“Lindy, Tamara, I’m going to borrow Payton for a few moments.” They just grinned, as Reina took Payton’s hand and dragged her down the hall to Payton’s bedroom. She pulled her inside and shut the door. Before Payton could speak, Reina had her in her arms, kissing her wildly. Payton’s response was immediate; she backed Reina up against the door, her kisses unrestrained. Payton’s hands slid down Reina’s back to her hips, pulling her tightly against her body.

“Payton,” Reina gasped, her hands sliding over Payton’s hips. Payton’s mouth and tongue traveled along Reina’s neck and shoulders. She was wearing a tank top, and Payton’s lips tasted the skin along

the top of Reina's breasts. Placing kisses along her cleavage, Payton breathed in Reina's scent.

"You are so beautiful," Payton whispered.

"Honey, I have to go, I don't want to but I have got to get my children home," Reina whispered as she kissed Payton's jaw and neck. "I'll pick you up tomorrow night at six for dinner."

"Reina, about your question earlier?"

"Payton, please wait until tomorrow night to answer me."

"I already know how I feel."

Reina kissed Payton thoroughly, preventing her from saying any more. "Tomorrow night," She whispered.

They shared one final kiss and embrace before leaving the room and gathering Max and Molly. At the car, Payton helped buckle the kids in and hugged them goodbye. She stepped away and waved. She couldn't prevent the feeling of loneliness that engulfed her as they drove off. She already missed Reina and the kids. It was hard to believe how quickly she had come to care about Reina and her children.

"Are they off?" Tamara asked Payton as she came back into the house.

"Yes."

"You already miss them."

"Yes," Payton admitted.

"That's a good thing."

"We just met."

"Time has nothing to do with feelings."

"Reina asked me a question earlier and she wouldn't let me answer it until tomorrow night."

"What was the question?"

"She wanted to know how I feel about her being pregnant."

"Honey, she is scared to death. She thinks you'll find her advanced pregnancy unappealing."

"But I wouldn't." Payton was adamant.

“Payton, I know that, but Reina doesn’t. She thinks she’s giving you an out.”

“An out, why would I want an out? I’m not that kind of person.”

“Then prove it to her.”

“How?”

“You’ll figure something out.” Tamara patted her arm.

“Payton, we need to leave by seven tomorrow morning to get the kids to school and get me to work on time.” Lindy entered the kitchen.

“I’ll be up and ready, Lindy.”

“I’ll leave written instructions on how to get to my office for lunch. I have also arranged for you to meet with several of the managers of the company.”

“I can’t wait to see what you do and where you work.” Payton smiled.

“Good, now I don’t know about you guys, but I’m tired. I’m going to go get the kids ready for bed and then I’m heading there myself.”

“I’ll help,” Tamara volunteered.

“I’ll finish folding the clean clothes.”

“It’s been a hell of a vacation so far.” Lindy grinned. “And you’ve only been here for a couple of days.”

“I wouldn’t change a thing,” Payton responded with a grin of her own.

It was nine o’clock before Payton climbed into bed intent on reading a good book. A knock on the door interrupted her not moments later. “You awake, honey?” Tamara called from the doorway.

“Yes.”

“You have a telephone call.” Tamara entered the room and handed her the telephone.

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome, doll.”

“Hello,” Payton said into the phone.

“Hi.” It was Reina.

“Hi.” Payton smiled.

“I miss you. I wish you were here.”

“I miss you too, and I would love to be with you right this minute.” Payton lay back down on her bed.

“What are you doing?”

“Lying in bed trying to read a book. Unsuccessfully, I might add. I keep thinking about you and your kids.”

“They miss you, too. Molly asked why you couldn’t come home with us,” Reina admitted. “I didn’t have a good reason for why you hadn’t.”

“Kiss them goodnight for me.”

“I will, but what about my goodnight kiss?”

“I’ll have to make it up to you tomorrow night.”

“I’m going to hold you to that.”

“I won’t forget.”

“Payton, I know this is pretty new and happening very fast, but I want you in my life.”

“I feel the same way, Reina. I just want you to be sure you want me there with you and your kids.”

“Payton, I have no doubts. I know you would be perfect. I want you to help me raise Molly and Max. I also know in my heart you could be the one for me.”

“Reina, what is still bothering you?”

“Payton, I’m pregnant. I have two children, and a full time career in the Navy.” Reina explained. “You would be signing up for a very different life.”

“Do you think I couldn’t handle it?”

“Payton, I know you could handle it, but I can’t move, honey.”

“So, is that the only solution you’ve come up with?”

Reina remained silent. Payton waited for her to respond. When she didn’t, Payton answered her own question. “I guess you have it all figured out. You have a family, a job, and a home. Moving is not an option, so that’s it then, there are no other choices.” Payton’s heart

felt like it was breaking. They hadn't even started their relationship and it was over.

"Payton, that's not what I meant. How can I ask you to give up everything to be with me? Your job, your home, your friends, and for what?" Reina's voice was strained.

"For a family, for two children who I could love beyond words, a woman who will laugh and love with me for the rest of our lives, and a new life that could enter this world with a wonderful mother and her partner."

"You would do that?" Reina spoke softly.

"If I was asked to share my life with someone I loved there is nothing I would not do, absolutely nothing."

"Payton, I wish I was right there this minute. I want so badly to kiss you right now."

"Reina, I would give anything to be kissing you."

"I don't want to hang up this telephone but I have to get up early."

"Go to sleep, honey. I'll see you tomorrow night."

"Payton, I..."

"Reina sweetheart, we will figure things out, I promise. Now, go to bed."

"I'll miss you, Payton."

"I'll miss you, too. Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

Payton hung up the telephone and turned off her light. Sleep would not come quickly.

## CHAPTER 4

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“**R**andall, this is Payton Bender. Payton, this is Randall Fields, our chief operating officer.” They were standing in Lindy’s office.

“Payton, it is nice to meet you. I have heard nothing but good things about you.”

“Thank you. It’s nice to meet you.” Payton shook hands with the gentleman.

“Has Lindy given you a tour?”

“Yes. This place is impressive.”

“We like it, don’t we Lindy? We’re growing like crazy, so things are a little hectic.”

“It is pretty crazy around here, but it’s fun.” Lindy loved her job.

“So, Lindy mentioned you might be thinking of moving here.”

“She did?” Payton glanced at Lindy, whose face was showing signs of guilt.

“If you’re looking for a position, do me a favor. Come see me. Lindy’s told me quite a few things about you and I would sure like to talk to you about opportunities with us.”

“Well, thank you. I haven’t made a decision yet but if I decide to relocate here I will talk to you.”

“Good. We need talented people.”

“Thank you.”

“Randall, we are off to lunch. Thanks for your time.”

“No problem, Lindy. And I’m serious Payton, contact me.”

“I will, Mr. Fields.” Payton shook his hand.

“Randall. Call me Randall.”

“Randall then.”

“Good, enjoy your lunch, ladies.”

“Thank you.”

Payton didn’t say a word to Lindy until they were in her van heading for lunch. “So, do you want to tell me what you told Randall?” Payton watched her carefully.

“I might have mentioned that you were thinking about moving here.”

“And...”

“I might have shared a little bit of your work history?”

“How much of my work history?”

“A lot of it.”

“When did you do all this?”

“A month or so ago.”

“Why?”

“I thought if I could convince you to visit for awhile you might consider moving here.”

“Lindy, thank you.” Payton grinned at her. “I can’t believe you did that.”

“So when are you going to move here?” Lindy grinned.

“I’m not sure what’s going to happen between Reina and I.” Payton sighed. “She’s not sure I’m committed enough to be with a pregnant woman with two children and one on the way.”

“Payton, she’s just scared.”

“I know she is.”

“So how are you going to convince her?”

“I’m going to love her into submission.” Payton grinned. “She won’t be able to resist me.”

“Sounds like a good plan to me.” Lindy grinned.

“Now, I need you to give me directions to a couple of places.”

“Okay, what’s up?”

“I’ll tell you at lunch.”

Payton was dressed and ready for her date with Reina at five-thirty. She had helped fix dinner with Tamara before dressing in order to keep from focusing on her nerves. It hadn’t helped. She was shaking, she was so nervous.

“Doll, you look terrific.”

“Thanks Tamara. I can’t believe how nervous I am.”

“You’ll be fine as soon as you see Reina,” Tamara reassured her.

By the time Reina arrived, Payton was a nervous wreck. Reina walked in to say hello to everyone and Payton could only stare. Reina was wearing a silk pants outfit that was copper and gold in color. She wore her hair up and she looked so elegant and beautiful, it intimidated Payton.

“Hi.” She smiled as she gazed at Payton. “You look fantastic.”

“So do you.” Payton was wearing a navy blue pants suit. One she had just purchased. Reina reached out and took her hand, which helped calm Payton’s nerves.

“Reina, you look wonderful.”

“Thanks, Lindy.”

“Payton, you have your key?”

“Yes.”

“Where are you going?”

“I thought we would go to Saro’s.”

“So, you plan to dance with this gal?” Lindy teased.

“I thought we might try it.” Reina smiled shyly. “We have reservations at six forty-five.”

“You’d better get going then.”

“I’ll see you in the morning,” Payton reminded Lindy.

“Have a great time.”

“Bye Reina, Payton, have fun.”

“See you later.”

Reina and Payton were silent as they walked to the car and climbed in. Reina smiled at Payton as she spoke. "Are you as nervous as I am?"

"I'm scared to death." Payton grinned.

"I missed you all day." Reina leaned over and kissed Payton.

"I missed you so much." Payton sighed as she kissed her in return.

"Ready?" Reina grinned as Payton nodded her head. They were going on their first real date.

After a brief drive, Reina parked the car in front of a small restaurant. They visited quietly as they entered the elegant front entrance. "Hello, we have reservations for two under the name of Landers."

"This way, please."

The restaurant was quiet and dimly lit, very romantic, and, as Payton followed Reina and their host to their table, she noticed that most of the couples were same sex couples. "Here is your table." The host sat them both on the same side of the table and Payton was thrilled. She didn't want to be separated from Reina, not even across a table.

"Your waitperson will be right with you."

"Thank you."

"How was your day?" Payton was still a little nervous.

"Busy and very long." Reina clasped Payton's hand in her own. "How was your lunch with Lindy?"

"Very nice. I liked her place." Payton wasn't about to share with Reina the possibility of a getting a job there.

"Lindy seems to like working there."

"Reina, I want to answer the question you asked me to think about."

"Payton, it's okay, I'm sorry I made such a big deal."

"Reina, look at me, please."

Reina's eyes revealed her fear as she gazed at Payton. "Reina, this may seem very quick and if you don't feel the same way, please tell me. I find your being pregnant beautiful and miraculous. I want to

see your body change as this life grows inside you. If you can't share your family with me I will understand. But if you feel anything close to what I feel at this moment, you will trust me when I say I will never leave." Payton spoke softly to the gorgeous woman sitting next to her.

Reina's eyes filled with tears as she smiled. "I feel the same way. I want to share my family with you, and I want to believe you won't leave."

"That's all I ask, Reina. Give me some time to show you that you can trust us." Payton's heart was pounding.

"Payton, I love you." Reina smiled at her.

"I love you, Reina." They shared a soft kiss as the waitperson approached the table. Payton ordered a glass of wine, Reina seltzer water, and they began to talk about their jobs, their families, and their dreams. Dinner slipped by as they held hands, stared at each other, and kissed frequently. As the table was cleared, the two of them were in no hurry to leave.

"Payton, I would like to dance with you," Reina asked shyly.

"Well, then, let's just do that." Payton grinned. "Let's go find a table in the bar."

The restaurant was divided into the dining area where soft, romantic music drifted out, and a section for dancing where disco music played. Payton took care of the bill despite Reina's protest, and the two of them entered the dimly lit bar. They sat at an empty table looking at each other, waiting for the perfect song to dance to. A sultry love song started to play and Payton smiled at Reina and stood up.

"Madame, would you like to dance with me?" Payton held out her hand to Reina, who grasped it, smiling.

"I would love to."

Reina followed Payton onto the dance floor and slid into her arms. Payton gasped softly as her body came into contact with Reina's. Payton's arms tightened around Reina's neck and Reina

placed her arm around Payton's waist. Payton's face was tucked against Reina's as they moved to the music, their bodies as one. Reina's lips slid along Payton's neck before she gently, softly, kissed her. Payton melted, returning Reina's kiss.

"Payton, I can't get close enough to you. I love kissing you, holding you, but that isn't enough for me. I want to make love with you."

"Reina, I want that, too. I love holding you and kissing you. But I don't want a couple of nights of sex with you."

"I don't want that either. I haven't slept with someone for a very long time."

"You know if you sleep with me, you have to marry me." Payton grinned.

"I do." Reina laughed. "If you make love with me, you are committing to three other people."

Payton recognized the importance of that statement as she watched Reina carefully. "I wouldn't sleep with you if I wasn't ready to commit myself to you and all of your children."

"I love you, Payton." Reina whispered, her mouth covering Payton's. Payton's lips and tongue teased Reina as they danced, their bodies tightly tucked against each other. Reina couldn't believe how quickly her body responded to Payton's. Never before had she felt such painful pleasure, as her breasts rested against Payton's. They ached to be touched, along with the rest of her body. What made her flush with heat were the visions she had filtering through her head of stripping Payton of her clothes and making slow passionate love to her. It wasn't just physical attraction she felt toward Payton, it was the jolt her heart received when Payton interacted with her children. It was Payton's gentleness, patience, and genuine affection for Max and Molly that Reina found sexy.

Payton breathed in deeply as she slowly moved with Reina to the music. The perfume Reina was wearing teased her senses. As her lips grazed Reina's cheek, she could smell it. When she kissed her neck it drifted in the air, making Payton tingle. Her body shivered as she felt

desire course through her. She was physically drawn to Reina like no one ever before. Her wavy blond hair, beautiful blue eyes, and matching dimples, made Payton's heart flip as she looked at her. Her long legs and slender frame were very appealing, and her full breasts rubbing against Payton's made her crazy with want. She badly desired to slowly remove Reina's clothes and kiss her from head to toe, to taste every inch of her body. She wanted her mouth on those beautiful breasts, her hands on her gorgeous body. More than anything, she wanted to hear Reina cry out with pleasure, as Payton loved her.

"Payton, can we get out of here?" Reina asked. "I need to hold you."

Payton looked into the serious eyes of Reina and nodded her head, smiling. "Yes, please. I want to be alone with you."

Reina took Payton's hand and led the way out of the restaurant and into her car. Neither one said a word as they climbed in. It was the glow in Reina's eyes in the darkness that made Payton moan and reach for her. Their lips devoured each other, their breath coming in gasps as they hungrily kissed. It was Reina's hands, which opened Payton's jacket and found her swollen breasts.

"Oh God!" Payton cried out when Reina's fingers surrounded her nipples.

"Payton, I want to make love with you," Reina confessed, her mouth joining her fingers, tasting Payton through her silk shirt and bra. Payton wanted to shed her clothes immediately.

"I'd like nothing more than to make love with you, but where do we go?" Payton's voice betrayed her frustration.

"My home. I will take you home in the morning, I promise." Reina kissed Payton thoroughly.

"I brought nothing with me," Payton whispered.

"You don't need anything."

"I need you."

They shared one more kiss, before Reina sat up away from Payton, her face flushed. "Are you sure you want to come home with me?"

"Reina, I am more than sure." Payton smiled and took her hand. "Now hurry, we're wasting valuable time." She grinned.

Reina laughed and started the car. It would only take thirty minutes to get home, but that could be a long thirty minutes.

Payton grew very nervous while waiting for Reina to thank the babysitter and pay her. Once alone in Reina's living room, they just stared at each other. It was Payton who broke the silence. "Would you show me your home?"

"I'd love to." Reina smiled and held her hand out to Payton.

Reina's house was an open design with high ceilings, the living room, dining room, and kitchen all one big area. It was hard to believe she had two small children, because the house was spotless and elegant. They walked down a wide hallway, and Reina opened the first doorway on the left.

"This is Molly's room," She whispered.

The tiny little girl was blissfully sleeping on her back, her hair curling wildly around her. Her room was painted with stars and clouds, which matched her bedspread. It was a perfect little girl's room. Reina led the way to Molly's bed and bent down to give her a kiss. Molly stirred a little and opened her eyes.

"Hi Mommy."

"Hello love. You go back to sleep, honey."

"Hi Payton."

"Hi Molly."

"Can I give Payton a hug?"

"Of course you can, sweetie." Reina smiled as her tiny daughter grinned happily.

Payton smiled widely and bent to hug Molly. Molly's arms tightened around Payton's neck and she hugged her very tightly while Payton gently held her.

"I love you gobs, Payton," She whispered.

“I love you gobs, Molly.” Payton’s heart flipped and her eyes filled with tears. In the space of two days this little girl had found a huge place in Payton’s heart. “Now you go to sleep, honey.”

“Goodnight.”

“Sleep tight.” Reina tucked her in.

Payton left the room and waited outside for Reina. Reina gazed at Payton’s face with a half-smile. She didn’t need to be told how much Payton was affected by Molly’s words. Her face gave her away, as did the tears glistening in her eyes.

“She loves you, honey.” Reina slid her arms around Payton.

“I find that so amazing,” Payton explained as she kissed Reina. “Can you show me your house in the morning?”

Reina just grinned and pulled Payton down the hallway to a set of double doors at the end. “This is my bedroom.”

She opened the doors to the bedroom and let Payton enter first. The room was dimly lit but Payton could see how large it was. It was double the size of Payton’s bedroom at home. The king-size bed was in the far corner covered by a colorful quilt and matching pillows. There was a small sitting area and the furniture in the room was Scandinavian in style. It looked like Reina.

“Payton, look at me.” Reina quietly shut the bedroom doors. Payton turned to face her, trying hard not to look nervous. “You look scared to death.”

“I am.” Payton admitted, grinning at Reina as she stepped into her arms. Payton kissed her with all the pent up passion she felt. Her lips tasted Reina’s as her tongue swept through her mouth. Payton moaned as Reina’s mouth opened to hers and they shared a breath-stealing kiss. Payton’s lips trailed along Reina’s neck, her tongue once again memorizing the texture and taste of Reina’s skin. Reina’s hands stroked Payton’s back and hips as they stood in each other’s arms. Payton’s lips met Reina’s again with tenderness, slowly and thoroughly loving her with her mouth. Reina’s hands became impatient, unbuttoning Payton’s jacket and sliding it off her shoulders. She

placed kiss after soft kiss along the neckline of Payton's silk shell, tightening her arms around her. Payton's body vibrated as Reina's hands clasped her hips tightly against her own. Payton could feel the strength in Reina's legs.

"Payton, I can't go slow," Reina gasped, her hips rolling against Payton's.

Payton smiled and began to unbutton Reina's silk shirt. "Then let's not go slow."

Reina's fingers pulled Payton's shirt from her pants, as she kicked her own shoes off. Payton reached for Reina's zipper and rapidly shed Reina of her pants and nylons. Reina stood in front of Payton in her bra and panties, both a lacy cream color and extremely sexy. Payton's eyes caressed the voluptuous figure revealed to her.

"You are so beautiful," Payton breathed, reaching for Reina.

"No, you don't." Reina chuckled as she rapidly removed Payton's pants from her slim hips and dropped them to the floor. Payton had no time to blush as Reina's mouth covered hers, her hands floating over Payton's shoulders and arms before linking with Payton's hands. Payton's heart pounded as she and Reina devoured each other's lips.

"Payton," Reina whispered when their bodies slid against each other. Reina's body ached to be touched, as their skin melded from head to toe. Payton traced Reina's back and ribs with her fingers until they brushed against her full breasts.

"Oh God!" Reina cried, as Payton's hands spread around her breasts.

"You are so beautiful," Payton whispered as she caressed Reina. Her mouth followed her fingers, nuzzling the tops of Reina's breasts. Reina's body arched toward Payton and her head fell onto Payton's shoulder. As Payton stripped Reina's bra from her body, she stopped for a moment to appreciate the full firm breasts and thrusting nipples. She leaned over and took Reina's nipple into her hot, wet mouth, suckling and teasing with her tongue, drawing a moan of pleasure from Reina. Payton covered Reina's breasts with kisses and

passionate stroking until Reina's body shook. Payton could wait no longer as she dropped to her knees, her tongue tasting Reina's stomach and hips. Pushing her panties off her hips and dropping them to the floor, Payton covered the tops of Reina's thighs with kisses as her arms surrounded Reina's hips, pulling her tightly against her mouth. Reina's breaths came in gasps when Payton's mouth and tongue traced the inside of her thighs, before gently touching her swollen, throbbing, and wet center. Payton moaned, as she tasted Reina for the first time. Sliding her tongue in and out of Reina slowly, she stroked her pulsing core. Reina's hands clenched Payton's shoulders and her legs began to tremble. Payton could feel the first tremors of an orgasm as Reina cried out. Her fingers joined her tongue as she plunged them inside Reina, drawing another cry of pleasure.

"Oh God, oh God." Reina gasped. Payton continued her attentions while Reina's body twisted and shuddered in the throes of an orgasm. Payton held Reina tightly until her body softened then Payton stood up and cradled Reina's body kissing her softly.

"Reina, I love you," Payton murmured, holding her still trembling body.

"Payton, I love you," Reina pledged as she stared into her eyes, her head resting on Payton's shoulder. "I've never felt like this before," She confessed. Reina was usually the one in control, but Payton had changed all that.

"Reina, I love the way you respond to me."

Reina smiled and took her hand, leading her to the bed. Without a word she removed Payton's bra and panties and pushed her gently onto her back on the bed. Settling her body on top of Payton's, she began kissing her with long drawn out kisses. Payton could feel the heat course through her body as she reveled in the feel of Reina's body on hers, Reina's thigh pushed between Payton's, forcing her legs apart so Reina's hips could settle on hers. Payton could barely breathe, as Reina's hands and mouth were everywhere. She covered Payton's breasts with kisses until Payton was all but begging for

release. Reina's hips slid from side to side until Payton could feel an orgasm well up inside her. As her body shivered, Reina's fingers found her wet and waiting, and slid into Payton slowly. Payton reacted immediately to her touch, her hips slamming against Reina's. Crying quietly with pleasure, Payton found Reina's mouth as her orgasm increased in intensity.

Stroking Payton rapidly, Reina whispered, kissing her, "Come for me, love."

Payton's body exploded with pleasure as she undulated under Reina, no longer in control. Wave after wave spread through her body. Reina held her tightly.

"Reina." Payton looked up at the beautiful face above hers and was overwhelmed. Tears slipped from her eyes as she hid her face against Reina's.

"Honey, it's all right," Reina soothed her, kissing and licking the tears away.

"I love you."

"I love you."

They lay in each other's arms for several minutes, savoring the closeness. "Payton, this has been overwhelming," Reina admitted, kissing her gently.

"I know." Payton grinned. "I think I'm going to have to make love to you again, just to make sure it's real."

"I think that's a perfect idea." Reina laughed as she rubbed her breasts against Payton's.

"In fact, it might take me all night to be convinced." Payton's eyes glistened with pleasure and humor and she rolled Reina over onto her back.

"Then we'd better get started." Reina's lips met Payton's again as their passion for each other flared. Payton's mouth and tongue covered every inch of Reina's body until Reina was once again shivering with pleasure.

“Please,” Reina pleaded, as Payton’s tongue tasted her again and again. Reina’s hips rose up to meet Payton’s mouth, an orgasm shimmering through her body and exquisite pleasure flooded her senses. “Payton!” She cried out.

Payton covered Reina’s body with her own, holding her tightly while Reina quietly wept. Payton’s heart pounded in her chest as she brushed soft kisses on Reina’s eyelids, her cheeks, and her lips.

“Honey, why are you crying?” Payton smiled, holding her gently, wiping Reina’s face clear of tears.

“You are so special. When you touch me I feel completely loved. It’s so overwhelming how much I feel for you in such a short time. It’s like I’ve known you forever.” Reina kissed Payton thoroughly. “I don’t sleep around, Payton, and I have never slept with someone after only a few days.”

“Reina, I haven’t made love with a woman since my ex and I broke up. I made love with you because I fell in love with you. I love you.”

“Payton, I’m going to love you so completely,” Reina pledged as her hands slid to Payton’s breasts, drawing a moan from her before she melted from Reina’s touch. It was over an hour before they lay against each other, enjoying the closeness two people feel after making love. Reina’s legs were tucked between Payton’s as she lay on her back. Payton was turned on her side, her head propped up on her elbow, while she and Reina talked.

“Can I ask you a question?” Payton asked.

“Certainly.” Reina ran her fingers down the center of Payton’s breasts, making her shiver.

“Do you feel the baby move?”

Reina smiled and she took hold of Payton’s hand that currently rested on Reina’s thigh. She placed it on her flat stomach, holding it there with both hands. “I feel a little flutter once in awhile, but it’s too soon to feel the baby move a lot.”

Payton’s hand slid across her stomach, stroking softly. “How long?” She bent over and placed a gentle kiss on Reina’s stomach.

“A couple of months or so.” Reina smiled at Payton as Payton placed featherlike kisses all over her hips and stomach.

“I can’t wait.” Payton whispered, her lips teasing.

Reina felt the sting of tears as her heart reacted to Payton’s words. She wanted so badly to believe that Payton would stay around. She had such fear over being abandoned during her first pregnancy. Nothing had prepared her for having to make the choice between her child and her girlfriend. The choice had been simple but heartbreaking. Her children would always come first.

“You are going to be so beautiful when you show your pregnancy, I can’t wait to watch your body change. It’s magical and so perfect.”

Payton’s words were making as much love to Reina as her touch. She covered Reina’s hips and thighs with wet kisses, her tongue touching, tasting, and sliding along her skin, driving Reina crazy with pleasure.

“Payton, please,” She pleaded once again, holding Payton’s head in her hands. Payton responded to her plea as her mouth found Reina wet, trembling center. Stroking with her tongue, Payton felt Reina’s body respond. Her fingers once again joined her mouth, as she pushed Reina over the edge, the sound of Reina’s response encouraging her. Her fingers plunged into Reina rapidly, bringing her to another shuddering orgasm. Payton smiled as she held Reina’s hips against her mouth. She loved the fact she could provide such pleasure to her.

Reina reached down and gathered Payton into her arms. “I need to hold you.” Her eyes glistened as she smiled at Payton. Reina could barely speak as she wrapped her arms around Payton’s neck, her faced pressed against Payton’s chest. “I love how you make me feel.”

“I love how you respond,” Payton reassured her, nuzzling her neck. Reina’s lips met Payton’s as she expressed her emotions with her kiss. She continued her kisses while her hands once again claimed Payton’s breasts.

“You are so sexy, so beautiful.” Reina traced Payton’s body with her touch. Within minutes Payton was gasping with pleasure, as once again Reina made love to her. Payton had no control over her body, a series of orgasms chasing up and down her spine. She held on tightly to Reina as the explosion of sensation caused her heart to race. Reina’s body cradled hers; her legs wrapped around Payton’s, her arms held her tightly.

Within minutes the two of them drifted off to contented sleep. It was several hours later before Payton woke up to find Reina’s naked body tucked tightly against her own. Payton slept on her stomach with Reina lying against her back, her arms surrounding Payton’s waist. Reina’s face was pressed against the back of Payton’s shoulder. Payton’s arms were meshed with Reina’s, held tightly against her. She felt so overwhelmed with her feelings for Reina. They happened so quickly and were so strong. She was so afraid that her relationship would end in a little more than a few weeks, and she would be heart-broken. Her heart ached even now as she thought of leaving Reina and her children. She unconsciously tightened her arms around Reina’s, wanting to hold onto her.

Reina stirred against Payton’s back and she too tightened her hold on Payton, her lips brushing against Payton’s neck. Payton breathed deeply as Reina’s mouth opened against her shoulder, her tongue tasting her skin, creating a shiver of delicious feeling to ripple up Payton’s spine. Reina murmured quietly, her hands sliding up to capture Payton’s breasts, her thigh pushing between Payton’s legs.

Reina was obviously very much awake, as she rekindled Payton’s passion with her attentions. Within minutes Reina’s hand between Payton’s legs drew cries and moans from her as she once again shivered with pleasure. Reina’s mouth found Payton’s and she cried again in response to Reina’s lovemaking. As her body settled back down, she turned in Reina’s arms, showering her with kisses. It wasn’t much longer before Reina was twisting and turning in Payton’s arms in the throes of her own orgasm.

Again, they held each other tightly, drifting off to sleep. Their enjoyment with each other was getting stronger and stronger, as they became more familiar and comfortable with each other.

“Payton honey, wake up.” Payton responded to Reina’s words and her soft kisses, her eyes opened to a Reina smile. “Hey sleepyhead, we need to get up now so I can get you home in time.”

Payton sat up as she smiled at Reina in return. “Good morning.”

“Payton love, I don’t just want to take you home.” Reina’s voice was strained and the look on her face was very serious. “I don’t want a one night stand with you.”

“Reina, I don’t want that either. I want to spend more time with you.” Payton kissed the obviously distressed woman. “I love you.”

“I love you, and I don’t know what to do.”

“Let’s get dressed and get your day started. We’ll figure everything out later.”

“You promise?”

“I swear on my heart.” Payton sealed her pledge with a kiss. It was amazing to Payton, but in one hour she and Reina were both fully dressed, as well as Max and Molly, who were happily eating breakfast. Both children were extremely excited to see Payton, and Max wouldn’t leave her side. It was a happy group that climbed into Reina’s car to take Payton home before dropping the two children off at their daycare.

“Have a great day, guys.” Payton hugged the two children.

“Okay, Payton.”

“Payton, come here.” Reina requested with a smile, leaning across the driver’s seat. “I’ll call you later and I want to see you tonight. Tonight, and every night.”

They kissed quickly and Payton prepared to get out of the car. “Payton?” Reina called softly.

“Yes?”

“I love you.”

“I love you, Reina.” Payton grinned and waved as Reina and her children drove away. She turned and headed for the house.

“Hey, busy night?” Tamara called from the front door, a big grin on her face.

“Beautiful, fantastic, terrific night.” Payton grinned as she hugged Tamara hello. “I really don’t know what to do about it, I’m so frightened.”

“Why? I know you, and I know Reina. Neither of you take sleeping with someone lightly.”

“That’s just it. We both are taking this seriously. But I live in Seattle. She lives here.”

“What does that have to do with it? You certainly can move.”

“Of course I can, but Reina has to want that.”

“She doesn’t?”

“I don’t know what she wants. She’s so worried about my reaction to her being pregnant.”

“Do you want to be with Reina while she has her baby?” Tamara watched Payton carefully as she prepared breakfast for her kids.

“Yes. I love the fact that she’s pregnant. I can’t wait to watch her body change.” Payton smiled as she spoke. “Can you imagine how beautiful she will be?”

Tamara couldn’t help but smile as she took in Payton’s words. She wasn’t surprised at Payton’s feelings. She had known Payton almost as long as she had known Lindy. She had liked her from day one. Payton’s heart was open and loving, and she was a major reason why Lindy and Tamara had fallen in love with each other. No matter how badly Tamara had behaved before she met Lindy, Payton saw the love Tamara had for Lindy. It was Payton who convinced Lindy to see beyond Tamara’s past transgressions, to judge her on her treatment of Lindy, and her own children.

“Payton, I never had any doubt that you would find Reina’s pregnancy anything but fantastic.”

“It’s still scary.”

“Do you think it was easy for Lindy to fly to my home and ask me to commit to her?”

“I know it wasn’t.”

“Do you think it was easy for me to open my family to Lindy? What if Lindy didn’t love me enough to deal with me and my kids?”

“It will never happen.” Lindy spoke from the kitchen door. “I will love you forever.”

“I know, honey, and I will always love you.”

“Now Ms. Payton, do you want to tell me why you didn’t come home last night?” Lindy teased as she kissed Tamara good morning.

“I was falling deeply and madly in love,” Payton admitted.

“We already knew that.” Lindy chuckled.

“I’m not sure what to do about it.”

“Move into Reina’s for the next few weeks and figure it out.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“Well, I came here to visit you guys.”

“And?”

“Reina hasn’t asked me.”

“She will,” Tamara reassured her.

“Aren’t you guys going to be late for work?”

“No, we’re doing just fine. Why don’t you go change before you drop me off at work? No offense Payton, but you are a little overdressed for dropping the kids off at school,” Lindy teased Payton.

“Oh, be quiet Lindy,” Payton growled as she headed down the hall to her bedroom.

“Aren’t we a little crabby this morning. Maybe you need to try and get more sleep at night.” Lindy’s voice carried down the hall as she chuckled at her own humor.

“I can’t hear you,” Payton responded with a roll of her eyes before closing her bedroom door to change.

It was a very nervous Payton who headed back to the house after taking the kids to school. She was beginning to think she would

never hear from Reina again. What if she didn't feel the same way? Maybe Reina would change her mind and not want to pursue a relationship with her. By lunch time Payton had sorted all the clean clothes, ironed, and put everything away. She had also vacuumed the house, and was just starting to dust when a car pulled into the driveway. Payton glanced out the living room window to see Reina getting out of her car. Payton's heart began to pound as she went to the door to let her in. She wished she were wearing something other than shorts and a tee shirt.

Payton opened the door before Reina could knock. The smile on Reina's face was enough, as Payton stepped into Reina's arms. Payton kicked the door shut and found Reina's mouth with her own. Lips and tongues meshed; their reaction to each other was immediate. Payton's fingers fumbled with Reina's clothes as they stumbled into Payton's bedroom. Payton removed Reina's clothes in record time. Her mouth covering Reina's nipples, first one and then the other, teasing her already tingling breasts until Reina moaned. Payton's fingers found Reina wet and waiting, and she slid them into her body. Reina cried out and slumped against Payton, immediately flooded with an orgasm. She gasped and held tightly to Payton's neck as her body continued to react to Payton's lovemaking.

Reina's lips found Payton's as she struggled to remove Payton's own clothes. "I couldn't get you out of my mind all morning," she gasped as she pulled Payton's shirt off. "I didn't plan on coming over here to make love. I wanted to tell you how I feel."

Payton helped Reina with her shorts. "How do you feel?" She whispered as Reina's hands began their magic.

"I want you to come stay with me and my family. I want to get to know you, to love you." Reina's words warmed Payton's heart, while her hands and mouth heated her body.

"Yes," Payton breathed into Reina's mouth as her body dissolved. "Yes."

It was quite awhile later before Payton and Reina took a break from their lovemaking. They were lying side by side in Payton's bed visiting.

"How did you get out of work?"

"I took the afternoon off."

"Do you do that often?" Payton kissed Reina's hand.

"Never. See the effect you have on me?" Reina chuckled.

"I'm certainly glad you took this particular afternoon off."

"How glad are you?" Reina grinned.

"Extremely glad," Payton responded. "How about I show you how glad." Payton rolled her body onto Reina's, as she prepared to do just that. It was another hour before the two of them were up and dressed, sitting in the kitchen. "Are you really going to come stay with me?" Reina was very nervous all of a sudden.

"Reina, I want to come stay with you. I want to spend every minute with you. But what about Max and Molly, will they understand?"

"Honey, they'll love the fact that you're there."

"But what about when I leave, will they understand that?" Payton dreaded saying the words as she saw the look on Reina's face.

"We will deal with that when the time comes. I don't want to think about that now."

Payton decided not to respond when she saw the effect the discussion was having on Reina. "Okay, honey. How about I pack my things and go home with you and the kids after dinner. Lindy and Tamara are still planning on your coming for dinner tonight."

"We are. I will go pick up Molly and Max early and bring them back. They can't wait to see you, they love you, sweetie."

"I love them."

"I know you do." Reina hugged her tightly. "Payton, I took next week off so we could spend as much time as possible together."

"That's perfect."

“Will you go to the Lesbian Mother’s Day Dance with me? It’s a week from this Saturday night. Lindy and Tamara are going, and I already talked to Tamara this morning. We can all go together.”

“Of course I’ll go.”

“You have to go in costume. It’s a swing dance set in the Forties.”

Payton groaned as Reina laughed. “Tamara said you’d hate the costume part. I promise I’ll make it worth your while.”

“Oh, I know you will. You haven’t forgotten about this weekend’s camping trip, have you?”

“No, and if I can go camping with five kids and two other women with no alone time with you for two nights, you can wear a costume,” Reina grumbled happily.

“It’s a deal.” Payton would have agreed to anything to be with Reina.

“Payton, I’m falling deeply in love with you.”

“Is this a problem? I’m already in love with you.”

“No, it’s not a problem, except that you currently live and work in Seattle.” The look on Reina’s face was devastating to Payton. Her heart ached as she waited to respond.

“We will work it out Reina, I promise. We will work everything out.”

Reina left not long after that to pick up her children. Payton took the opportunity to pack her things before picking up Lindy and the kids. She and Lindy began talking the minute she got into the car and kissed the kids.

“Are you packed, sweetie?” Lindy knew Payton was scared to death.

“Yes.”

“I know you’re nervous, Payton, but everything is going to be fine.”

“I hope so. We just met Lindy. Now I am going to go stay with her and her two children. What if it doesn’t work out?”

“Honey, this could be the real thing. Do you want to pass this up because it might not work, or do you want to give it a try?”

“But what if it isn’t for Reina?”

“I have known her long enough to recognize that she is head over heels in love with you. You both deserve this. You are going to have to trust your heart, Payton.”

“Thanks, Lindy. This is happening so quickly and I don’t want to make another mistake.”

“Honey, you aren’t making a mistake. Need I remind you what you said to me when I made that very same statement several years ago?” Lindy prodded her memory. “You told me it only takes a moment to fall in love forever, but it takes forever to stay in love.”

“I said that?”

“You did. Now put your money where your mouth is, girl.” Lindy snorted. “Tonight after dinner you are going to go home with Reina and start working on the forever part of the relationship.”

“Thanks, Lindy.”

“You’re welcome, doll.”

Payton still couldn’t keep the nervousness from settling in her stomach. Even after Reina arrived with Molly and Max, Payton still felt fearful. What if Reina changed her mind?

“Payton, can I see you in the other room for a minute?” Reina requested, watching Payton closely. She knew Payton was very nervous and she was going to do something about it.

“Sure.” She followed Reina into her current bedroom.

Reina turned to face her and slipped her arms around Payton’s neck. “Are you all packed?” She asked, kissing Payton softly.

“Yes, everything is right here.”

“Payton, what’s the problem then?” Reina kissed Payton’s neck.

“I’m nervous, that’s all,” Payton admitted, as she kissed Reina’s neck in return.

“There’s no reason to be nervous. I love you and everything is going to be perfect.” Reina followed her words with an earth-shatter-

ing kiss. Payton's nervousness disappeared as Reina kissed all of her fears away.

"Why don't we take your things out to the car now?" Reina suggested, squeezing Payton's hand and smiling.

The rest of the evening went by quickly with lots of noise and laughter, as the children enjoyed their dinner with their company. They talked excitedly about the weekend's camping trip. The adults prepared lists for the weekend and divided up the preparations. It was a happy group that climbed into Reina's car.

"Payton, are you living with us now?" Molly asked when she was buckled into her seatbelt.

"For a little while Molly, if that's okay with you?"

"Yep."

"Good, because I'm really looking forward to staying with you and Max, and your mom."

Reina just smiled as she listened to the conversation. She wanted so much for those next few weeks to work with Payton. Maybe then she could ask Payton to come live with her and her family. They quickly made the trip home.

"Okay, Max and Molly, let's help Payton put her stuff away," Reina announced as they stood in the living room.

"Okay, Mom." The two of them grabbed the handle of Payton's smaller suitcase, and with their mother's help, struggled down the hallway with it.

"Let's put her in my room."

"Is she sleeping with you, Mom?"

"Yes Molly, she is." Reina answered her little daughter. Reina always told her children the truth.

"Good." Molly's response drew smiles from both Reina and Payton.

"Okay, Max, let's put this bag on the bed." Reina helped her tiny son. "Then I need to put the two of you in your own bed. If you're

going to keep Payton company tomorrow you need to get a good night's sleep."

Max and Molly helped Reina and Payton put away her things. Reina had cleared a drawer and a section of her closet. She had also cleared an area of the bathroom for Payton. It made Payton not only feel welcome, but also a part of her family.

"Okay guys, last one in your pajamas is a rotten egg!" Reina called out, and the two little children raced for their bedrooms, while Payton watched them, laughing.

"They are so cute."

"They are great kids. Now you'd better hurry. Those cute kids are going to expect us in our pajamas."

"You're kidding." Payton grinned.

"Nope." Reina rapidly started to shed her clothes, her eyes flashing with humor. "I think you're going to be the rotten egg."

"No way." Payton's clothes fairly flew as she got herself into her pajamas in record time.

Both Reina and Payton had changed by the time Max returned still struggling with his shirt. Molly was only moments behind him. "I am the rotten egg!" She cried grinning.

"Yes, you are, doll." Her mother picked her up and hugged her before flopping on the bed with her laughing daughter. Max looked at Payton with a grin before he launched himself into her arms, laughing. The four of them were soon in a pile on the bed, snuggled up to each other.

"Well, I think it's time for bed," Reina announced as she gazed happily at her children and Payton.

"Can Payton come help tuck us in?" Molly asked as she hugged her mom.

"Of course she can."

The four of them headed first down the hall to Max's room. He immediately crawled into his bed.

“Goodnight, my handsome son.” Reina kissed him and tucked his covers around his slender shoulders. Molly gave her brother a quick kiss and headed for her own room.

“Good night, little man,” Payton whispered as she kissed him. She turned out the overhead light but left his door open just in case he might need his mother at night.

Reina was speaking quietly to her daughter as Payton entered the room. Molly was tucked in and turned on her side, her mother’s arm around her.

“I love Payton, very much.” Reina answered her little daughter’s question.

“Does she love us, Mom?”

“I love you very much,” Payton volunteered as she stood next to Reina.

“Are you going to live with us forever, Payton?”

“Well, that’s kind of up to you and Max, and your mom.” Payton tried to answer Molly honestly.

“Okay.” Molly smiled her sweet little girl smile and it made Payton’s heart flip.

“Good night, honey.” Reina hugged and kissed her.

“Good night Ms. Molly.” Payton also hugged and kissed her.

“Night Mom, night Payton, love you.”

“We love you, little bug.”

Reina and Payton padded down the hall to her bedroom, stopping halfway down the hall to take Payton’s hand. “I’m glad you’re here,” she whispered.

“So am I.” Payton kissed her softly.

They entered the bedroom and shut the door. “You know, you should probably get a good night’s sleep since the kids will be up at six-thirty and you won’t get a moment’s rest, except during their nap time,” Reina volunteered as she gathered Payton into her arms.

“A good night’s sleep, huh?” Payton rolled her eyes before she started to unbutton Reina’s pajama top. “I’m planning on a good night of something other than sleep,” she promised.

“Is that so?” Reina rapidly removed Payton’s pajama shirt and pants. Any comment Payton meant to make was lost, as Reina backed her up to the bed and, none too gently, pushed her onto her back, immediately covering her with her naked body. It was several hours before either one of them thought of sleeping.

“Payton,” Reina whispered, snuggling tightly against her back.

“Yes?”

“I’m glad you’re here.”

“So am I, honey.”

“I like the feeling I get when I think about going to bed with you and waking up with you next to me. I can’t tell you how much you mean to me.”

Payton turned to face Reina. “I know how much it means to me. I love you, Reina.”

“I love you.” Reina and Payton shared a slow, gentle kiss.

“I could make love with you all night.” Reina grinned as she stretched her body against Payton’s.

“Honey, you have to get up in less than six hours for work.”

“So I’d better not waste any time then.” Reina grinned as she reached for Payton’s breasts. Payton sighed and covered Reina’s lips with her own. Their lovemaking was slow and intense as they reveled in their ability to provide each other such pleasure. They were both exhausted when they drifted off to sleep several hours later.

## CHAPTER 5

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Payton heard the alarm ring and turned to hug Reina awake. “Reina, wake up honey. It’s time to get up.” Payton nuzzled Reina’s cheek.

“I don’t want to get up.” Reina complained, responding to Payton. “I want to stay in bed with you.”

“I wish you could.” Payton hugged her tightly.

“I’m not the only one who needs to wake up. You’d better hide this gorgeous body in a pair of pajamas. Molly and Max will be in here shortly.” Reina laughed as she got out of bed.

Payton scrambled for her pajamas while Reina showered and dressed. She also started a pot of coffee while waiting for Reina to finish getting ready for work.

“Thanks for the coffee, sweetie.” Reina hugged her tightly. “You go crawl back into bed, the kids will come wake you.”

“Have a wonderful day.”

“You too, I’ll call you later.” Reina and Payton kissed passionately for several minutes. “What you do to me.” She grinned.

“I’ll make it up to you tonight.” Payton grinned in return.

“Goodbye.”

“Bye sweetie.” Payton waved from the doorway as Reina drove down the road. After she pulled out of sight, Payton grabbed a cup of

coffee and returned to the bedroom. She intended on doing a little reading.

“Payton?”

“Hey Max, what’s up?” Max climbed onto the bed with her. “You want to crawl in here with me?”

Max grinned and slid under the covers next to Payton. He snuggled up to her and shut his eyes.

An hour and a half later the telephone rang, waking Payton up. “Hello.”

“Hi sweetie.” It was Reina. “How is everything going?”

“Just fine. Your two little guys are asleep in bed with me.”

“I wish I was there with all of you.”

“We miss you. How’s your day going?”

“Good, very busy, but good. I need to cover everything before I’m off next week, but things are falling into place. In fact, I think I can get out of here by noon on Friday, maybe Thursday night.”

“That’s great, Reina. Is it okay if the kids and I fix dinner for tonight? We want to surprise you.”

“Of course, but you might need to do some shopping. I’m not sure what I have.”

“We can handle it.”

“But you don’t have a car.”

“We’ll walk. It’s not that far and I’ll put the groceries in my backpack.”

“Okay, I will give you some money when I get home.”

“No you won’t,” Payton responded with a tiny bit of irritation. “I’m staying here, so I can help pay.”

“Okay, honey.” Reina’s voice contained a hint of humor. “I’ll be home around five-thirty. Can I bring anything?”

“Nope, we’ve got it covered.”

“Payton, I love you.”

“I love you, Reina.”

“I’ll call you later.”

“Okay, doll.” Payton smiled as she hung up the telephone. Both Molly and Max were in a tangle of bedclothes and pillows, asleep. Payton picked up her book and began reading. She would wait for the kids to wake up before she planned anything.

“Payton, we set the table.” Molly and Max were busily placing silverware around the kitchen table in preparation for dinner. They were very excited about fixing dinner for their mother.

“Good job guys. Do you want to help me with the flowers?”

“I do.”

“Okay Max, come here and you can arrange them.”

The kids had been excited all day long about fixing a special dinner for their mom.

“Hello, anyone home?” Reina called as she entered the front door.

“We’re in here,” Payton answered.

“Hey guys, doesn’t the table look nice?”

“Hi, Mom.”

“Hello Max, Molly, did you guys do all of this?”

“Payton helped us.” Molly hugged her mother hello.

“She did? Well isn’t she a doll.” Reina grinned as she hugged Max.

“I think we’ll keep her.”

She leaned over and dropped a kiss on Payton’s smiling lips. “Hi.”

“Welcome home.”

“What a welcome. Can I help with dinner?”

“Yes, you can go change into something more comfortable. Max, Molly, and I will fix dinner. Would you like a glass of wine?”

“I’d love one, thank you honey. The doctor says a glass of wine once in awhile is okay.”

“Good, here, now go change.”

“After I get a hug from you.” Reina and Payton hugged tightly. “I love you, Payton.”

“I love you, Reina.”

Max and Molly joined the two of them, giggling and hugging.

“All right guys, let your mom go change and we’ll finish fixing dinner.”

“Okay, Payton.” The three of them began their activities as Reina walked to her bedroom to change. She smiled as she listened to the laughter and conversation coming from the kitchen. Obviously, the three of them had gotten along famously.

The dinner was a complete success as the four of them chattered, laughed, and genuinely enjoyed themselves.

“Okay, Max and Molly, show your mom your pictures while I clean up,” Payton suggested as she began clearing the table.

“I can help,” Reina volunteered.

“No, you can’t. Besides, your little guys worked real hard on their pictures.”

“Mom, come look. We have them in my room.” Molly grabbed her mother’s hand and dragged her out of her chair. Max grabbed her other hand and tried to help. Reina laughed good-naturedly as she allowed them to pull her out of the kitchen. They entered Molly’s room and, lying on the floor, were brightly colored collages. One had Molly’s name in child-like letters and the other one had Max’s name printed on it.

“See?” Max pointed excitedly at the pictures.

“I see them Max, they’re beautiful. Did you guys make these today?”

“Payton helped us.”

“These are wonderful. Why don’t we pin them up in the kitchen?”

“Mom, don’t touch them,” Molly squealed. “Payton said we have to let them dry.”

“Okay honey, I won’t touch them.” Reina smiled at her children. “You both did a good job on these pictures.”

Reina and her children talked for about twenty minutes before rejoining Payton in the kitchen.

“The kid’s pictures are beautiful. When did you have the time to work on the them?”

“This afternoon before we fixed dinner. When we walked to the store we picked up everything we needed. It’s just colored tissue glued on white paper. Molly and Max tore the paper into small pieces and then we dipped them in watered down Elmer’s glue. We did it in the kitchen on the table. They did a great job.”

“Thanks, Payton.”

“For what?”

“For everything.” Reina’s smile made Payton’s heart flutter.

The evening was pleasantly normal, while Molly and Max giggled and played, Payton and Reina shared their day’s activities. Payton loved the family atmosphere.

“Mom, can Max and I take a bubble bath?” Molly asked.

“You sure can.” Reina tickled her two children. “You two stay here and keep Payton company, while I get the bathtub filled.” Reina and Payton, along with help from the children, had just finished cleaning the kitchen up. Reina went to prepare their bath while Payton and the kids entertained themselves.

“Simon!” Max yelled.

“You want to play Simon Say’s?”

Max nodded his head vigorously.

“Okay, little man. Come on Molly, let’s play.”

Amid much giggling and quiet discussion, the three were oblivious of Reina watching them. They were so cute.

“Okay, Simon Says touch your nose,” Payton instructed.

“Max, touch your nose,” Molly whispered.

“Okay guys, Simon Says go take your bath,” Reina called. The two children took off for the bathroom like they had been shot out of a cannon.

“I take it they like bubble baths.” Payton laughed.

“They love them.” Reina grinned as she took Payton into her arms. “Almost as much as they love their Payton,” Reina observed as she kissed her thoroughly.

“They were very good kids today. They actually didn’t take naps though.”

“That’s okay. They’ll just go to bed earlier.” Reina and Payton shared another kiss. “I had better check on my two water babies.”

“I think I’ll take a quick shower and put my pajamas on.”

“Okay, honey.”

Payton headed for the bedroom and Reina entered the main bathroom. Payton smiled as she heard the giggling coming from the room. This family was a very happy one. She appreciated the fact that Reina went out of her way to make her young children’s lives fun.

Forty-five minutes later, while Payton sat in the living room reading, Max and Molly joined her. They were dressed in their pajamas, their faces shiny from their bath.

“I smell two very clean kids,” Payton announced as she gathered the two children in her arms. They giggled and squirmed while Payton nuzzled their necks, tickling them.

“Max and Molly, time for bed,” Reina called. “Kiss Payton goodnight.”

“No.” Max adamantly stood his ground, his little body stiff with purpose.

“Then I guess you can stay up all by yourself because Molly, Payton, and I are going to bed.”

This didn’t sit well with Max and he did as his mother asked. He and Molly kissed Payton goodnight and headed for bed.

“Honey. I’m going to take a shower. Why don’t you bring your book into the bedroom? I turned the fireplace on so it should be warm and cozy on the couch.” Reina spoke from the hall.

“Shall I turn the lights out?”

“Please. I already locked up.”

Payton headed for the bedroom and made herself comfortable. She felt at home with Reina and her children. It was amazing, considering she had met them less than a week ago.

“Hello.” Reina sat down next to Payton. She was dressed in a nightgown and bathrobe. She slid her arm around Payton’s shoulders.

“Hi, don’t you smell wonderful?” Payton buried her face against Reina’s shoulder.

“Thank you. Payton, do you mind if we talk for awhile?”

“Of course not. Is something wrong?” Payton sat up and looked at Reina carefully.

“No, everything is perfect,” Reina reassured her. “I just want to get to know you.”

Payton snuggled back up against Reina. “You mean you don’t just like me for my body?” She teased.

“I love your body, I also love the person that I’m getting to know.” Reina linked fingers with her. “I want to know what your job is like, where you live, what you do for fun. I don’t even know your birthday.”

“My birthday is July fourteenth and I’m going to be forty-seven. When is yours?”

“April third, and I just turned thirty-seven.”

“That’s ten years difference in our age. Is that going to be a problem?”

“Honey, you don’t look forty-seven and no, it is not a problem. Payton, I love who you are, and that’s a gorgeous forty-seven year old woman with a very loving heart.”

“I just want to make sure that you don’t have any reservations about our relationship. I am ten years older, you don’t know me very well, and you have two children. I want you know how much I respect your commitment to your children. I’m not someone who takes relationships for granted.”

“The only reservation I have is that you live in Seattle and I live here. I can tell by the way you treat Max and Molly that you care about family. Payton, I don’t get involved easily. It is very important that you understand my children come first to me. I have always

wanted a partner that would love my children and me. I want a family, lover, and partner. You are someone I could find that with, and I want to take that chance. If you are willing, we will figure everything out.”

Payton relaxed as she and Reina talked about anything and everything. They visited for several hours and they shared their hopes and dreams. Family, love, commitment, and mutual attraction were important to the both of them. Payton shared her desire to be part of Reina’s growing family, and her promise to be there for every step of Reina’s pregnancy. It was after midnight before the two of them climbed into bed. A feeling of contentment filled Payton as she and Reina shared a long goodnight kiss. One kiss led to another as their mutual passion for each other was unleashed. They made love slowly, teasing each other with gentle touches, soft kisses, and quiet words. Payton nearly cried aloud as Reina’s fingers found her wet and waiting. Her hand slipped between Reina’s legs and found her in a similar state. They made love, exchanging kiss after kiss. Reina’s body arched away from Payton’s as an orgasm shudder through her, driving Payton over the edge as she was inundated with an orgasm of her own. Their breathing came in gasps, their bodies moving against each other’s.

“Payton,” Reina whispered, her face tightly against Payton’s.

“Reina,” Payton breathed. Neither one needed to say anything else as they held tightly to each other, their breathing slowly returning to normal. Then they slipped off into comfortable sleep, tucked in each other’s arms.

“Payton, sweetie. I’m leaving for work, honey.”

“What time is it?” Payton shook herself awake.

“It’s early. If I can get everything done today, I won’t have to go in tomorrow.” Reina hugged her tightly.

“I’ll miss you.”

“I’ll miss you, honey.” Reina kissed her. “I’ll call you later.”

“Have a good day.”

Reina waved her hand at Payton before heading out for work. She had lots of things to get accomplished.

Payton rolled over and prepared to go to sleep. Then it dawned on her. She had better put her pajamas on before the kids woke up. She quickly slipped into them and crawled back under the covers, not a moment too soon, as Max tiptoed into the room.

“Good morning, little man.” Payton opened up the covers and helped Max into bed. Max was still too sleepy to answer, and he wrapped his little arms around Payton’s neck and settled against her. The two of them were sound asleep in minutes.

It was after nine o’clock before Payton and now both Max and Molly woke up. The three of them decided to go for a walk after breakfast, and then sat in the backyard enjoying the warm weather. They read books, looked at flowers, colored, and just enjoyed the day. They had just come inside to make lunch when the telephone rang.

“Hello.”

“Hi, how’s it going?” It was Reina.

“Just fine. We’re fixing lunch.”

“I thought the four of us could go out to dinner tonight. What do you think?”

“Sounds good. Should we dress up?”

“No, we can go to the Mexican restaurant about a mile from the house. Max and Molly love the place.”

“Great. I’ll make sure we’re all cleaned up by the time you get home.”

“Perfect. I’ll pick you all up around five-thirty.”

“How is your day going?”

“Crazy, but I’m actually getting everything cleared up so I can relax next week.”

“It’s going to be a fun week.”

“I can’t wait to get home tonight.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

“I love you, Payton.”

“I love you.”

“I’ve got to go. Kiss Max and Molly for me.”

“I will.”

“I’ll kiss you later.” Reina chuckled.

“I’ll hold you to that promise.” Payton laughed in return.

“It will be my pleasure.” Payton couldn’t keep from smiling as she hung up the telephone.

“Hey little guys, we are going out for dinner tonight.” The two children were studiously trying to spread peanut butter on their bread.

Molly and Max became very excited as Payton explained their mother’s plans.

“We had better finish lunch and take naps if we are going out for dinner.”

“No nap,” Max responded.

“Then I guess you don’t want to go out for dinner?” Payton asked while she placed his sandwich in front of him. “If you don’t take a nap, you don’t go out for dinner.”

That reasoning seemed to set well with Max, and he began eating his lunch. It wasn’t much later that Payton put the two children down for their naps. Max fussed a little but was soon sound asleep, and Molly lay in her bed quietly looking at one of her books.

While the children napped, Payton ironed her outfit and cleaned up the kitchen. An hour and a half later she checked on Max and Molly. She decided to wake them up, and slowly the two did. They went back out in the backyard and spent several hours coloring and reading books, while Max played with his blocks.

At four-thirty she herded the two inside and washed them up, before helping them dress. Then the two joined her in Reina’s bedroom while Payton cleaned up and dressed. She was just finishing combing Max’s hair when Reina entered the bedroom.

“Well, don’t you guys look nice?” She kneeled down and kissed her two children hello.

“Hi, Mom.”

“You look pretty terrific, too.” Reina stood up and grinned at Payton, her eyes sliding over Payton’s slender body. “These are for you.”

Reina handed Payton a large bouquet of multi-colored flowers, and kissed her hello. “Thank you.” Payton blushed as she took them. “They are beautiful. Look, Molly and Max, aren’t these flowers pretty? Let’s go put them in a vase.”

Reina smiled as she followed the threesome into the kitchen. Both children were clean and dressed, their hair combed. Payton was wearing a pair of khaki pants and a yellow shell. She looked very sexy.

“You look beautiful,” Reina whispered, hugging Payton quickly.

“Thank you,” Payton responded. She looked Reina up and down. “You look pretty terrific yourself.”

“Mom, look at my hair,” Molly demanded. “Payton braided it for me.” It was obvious she was very proud of how she looked.

“It’s very pretty, honey.” Reina hugged her tiny daughter.

“Mom.” Max needed his mother’s attention also.

“Max, you look very handsome.” She hugged him tightly. “Okay guys, let’s go to dinner.” The four of them headed for the door and the car.

It was a very pleasant dinner as Reina and Payton shared their conversation with Max and Molly. It was over two hours before the happy group headed for home. Even with their naps, both Molly and Max were yawning by the time they’d gotten back to the house and put their pajamas on.

“How about Payton and I read you two a story and then you go to bed? You need all your rest before we go camping.” The two children didn’t argue. Reina held Molly and Payton held Max, while Reina read from one of Molly’s favorite books.

A half hour later the sleepy children were put to bed and Reina and Payton sat alone in the kitchen. Tamara and Lindy had called earlier and reminded the two of them to be packed and at their house by four. Reina and Payton were in charge of Friday night's dinner and Sunday morning's breakfast, so they had shopping to do. They also needed to get out blankets and pillows, and clothes for the kids.

"I can't believe we're taking five kids and four adults camping," Reina groaned, sliding her arms around Payton's neck.

"It'll be fun," Payton reassured her as they kissed. "Besides, I promised Max and Molly they could fish."

"Great, but you're baiting the hook, not me." Reina grimaced as Payton laughed.

"What do you say to meeting me in the bedroom and making good on your promise?" Payton's sexy smile caused Reina's stomach to flutter.

"I think that's a wonderful idea." Reina kissed her slowly, her hands traveling down Payton's back and settled on to her hips. "You know, I think it's going to take me all night."

"I think I can deal with that." Payton smiled and followed Reina down the hall and into the bedroom.

"We'd better make the most of tonight, because for the next two nights we're sleeping with Max and Molly," Reina reminded Payton, quickly helping her out of her clothes.

"Honey, I plan on making the most of every night," Payton promised as she slid her hands under Reina's blouse and surrounded her breasts. Reina hissed as Payton's fingers stroked Reina's nipples.

"Let's get you out of these clothes." Payton's lips pressed against Reina's lips, her cheek, and her neck.

"Please." It was all Reina said, as Payton ever so slowly slid off Reina's blouse and equally as slowly undid her bra. Her mouth and hands covered every inch of Reina's breasts before she removed the rest of her clothes.

“You are so beautiful,” Payton whispered, kneeling in front of Reina. Her lips and tongue teased Reina, and she traced her hips and stomach until Reina’s hips twisted and turned in Payton’s hands. Payton could wait no longer to taste the very center of her. Her mouth covered Reina as her tongue slid in and out until she could feel Reina’s response. Her fingers joined her tongue, driving Reina crazy with desire. A series of orgasms had Reina’s body shuddering in Payton’s arms, as she cried out in pleasure.

“Hold me Payton,” Reina cried. Payton stood and pulled Reina into her arms as she wept softly against Payton’s shoulder.

“Honey, why are you crying?” Payton asked gently kissing the tears that slid from Reina’s eyes.

“I love you, Payton.”

“I love you. Why the tears, sweetheart?”

“I can’t stand to let you go, to never see you again. I want to be with you.”

“Honey, I’m here and I’m not going anywhere. I want this to work.” Payton spoke quietly as she held Reina. She knew what Reina meant but she couldn’t acknowledge her own fears.

“Payton, I’m serious. I really want to be with you.” Reina looked into Payton’s eyes. “Do you think you would consider moving here, living here with me and my kids? You could wait until after I have the baby and see if you still want to be with me.”

“Reina, honey, listen to me. I don’t want to wait until after you have your baby. I want to be there the whole time, if you’ll let me.”

“Are you sure?” Reina’s eyes were shiny with tears as she gazed at Payton.

“I am very sure. I want to be with you and all three kids. The question is, do you want me in your life with you and your children?”

“Payton, I want you here. I can’t think of anyone I would rather spend my life with, and I know you will always take care of Max and Molly.”

“And the new baby. So what’s the matter then?”

“Payton, I’m going to have a baby and I’m so fearful that you’ll look at me in a couple of months and leave.”

“Reina, I won’t leave, I promise. I love that you are having a baby.” Payton dropped to her knees and covered Reina’s stomach with kisses.

“Payton, I love you.” Reina pulled Payton to her feet and kissed her. Her hands slid along Payton’s hips, pulling her tightly against her, her mouth meeting Payton’s with hunger. Reina was not gentle as she devoured Payton’s body with her mouth and hands, murmuring her love. Somehow the two of them found themselves on the bed as Reina renewed her efforts and made love to her thoroughly. They continued their lovemaking until the early hours of the morning, before they fell into exhausted sleep, still in each other’s arms.

It was still dark when Payton felt delicious soft kisses against her neck and back. Moaning with happiness, she enjoyed Reina’s wet mouth while Reina’s hands reached around and floated over her breasts. The flash of heat and pleasure was instantaneous and her nipples tightened in response. Payton leaned back against Reina’s body, her arms reaching back to hold on to Reina’s hips. Payton’s sighs encouraged Reina; her fingers continued their magic, tracing Payton’s flat stomach and hips. Reina’s lips tasted Payton’s neck and shoulders and her hand slid between Payton’s legs, parting her moist curls.

“Oh God!” Payton cried as Reina touched her softly, her body jerking in response.

“Payton, I love how you feel, how you respond when I touch you. You are so beautiful, so sexy.” Reina’s words came in quiet whispers as she made love to Payton.

Payton was beyond words and was completely overwhelmed by a series of orgasms that shook her to her toes. Payton turned her upper body toward Reina as they kissed thoroughly, their tongues sliding together as their mouths meshed.

Hungrily, Payton turned her body until she faced Reina. Her mouth wouldn't be satisfied as she covered Reina's breasts with mouth-watering kisses. Her fascination with Reina's very full breasts and nipples caused Reina to shiver as Payton's hot mouth sucked and teased. Reina's breathing became labored when Payton's tongue tasted her stomach and bathed the tops of her thighs. Payton's tongue slid along the inside of Reina's thigh and Reina shivered in anticipation, as Payton's mouth hovered over her very center before taking pleasure in Reina's gasping response. Payton's tongue stroked lightly and then increasing its pressure until Reina's body began to vibrate. Her fingers gripped Payton's shoulders and her thighs clenched and shook. Payton's tongue and mouth drove Reina mindless until she was limp with exhaustion. Payton held tightly onto Reina's hips, her face resting on Reina's stomach. Reina reached down to Payton and pulled her up into her arms, hugging her tightly as she tried to catch her breath.

No words were necessary. They just held onto each other, enjoying the closeness and the overwhelming emotions they felt at that moment. Again, they drifted off to sleep, Payton's body draped on top of Reina's, their hands clasped together, their faces tucked against each other's.

"Reina, honey, you'd better put your nightgown on, Max and Molly will be here any minute." It was early morning.

"Do I have to?" Reina grinned as her arms stretched around Payton's neck. "You know what I want?"

"What?" Payton smiled at her very sexy lover, enjoying the feel of Reina's body stretching against her own.

"Twenty-four hours of uninterrupted time with you."

"Sounds heavenly, but it won't be today." Payton sighed.

Reina raised her arms so that Payton could slide the nightgown on. The view of Reina's naked breasts so close to Payton's mouth was too much of a temptation, and she surrounded Reina's nipple, sucking lightly.

“Payton,” Reina hissed, leaning into her.

“I can’t resist you,” Payton admitted as she sat up and pulled the nightgown over Reina’s breasts. “You are just too beautiful to cover up.”

“I don’t want you to resist me.” Reina grinned and pulled Payton onto her lap. They shared several intense kisses before smiling at one other and sitting quietly in each other’s arms. It was several minutes before Reina rose and went in to shower and Payton got up.

“Reina, I started a pot of coffee, would you like a cup?”

“Yes, please. And then we need to talk.” Reina stood in the bathroom drying her hair.

“About what?” Payton’s heart pounded as she gazed at Reina.

“About how I’m going to talk you into moving and living here with me and my kids forever.” If the words hadn’t gone directly to Payton’s heart, the brilliant smile on Reina’s face would have had the same effect.

Payton looked at Reina for the longest moment as a slow smile showed her happiness. She walked to the side of the bed next to Reina and spoke. “You just have to ask me.” Payton held her breath.

“Payton, will you come live with me and my kids and be a part of my family? Will you be with me while I have our third child? I will love you forever, I promise.” Reina’s voice shook with emotion as she spoke, her hands trembling.

“Reina, yes, my answer is yes.” Payton couldn’t help but cry as she reacted to Reina’s words. “I want to come live with you and be part of your family, and more than anything I want to be with you when you have your baby.”

“Our baby,” Reina corrected her with a whisper, and she kissed Payton gently, taking her hands. “It will be our baby.”

Payton’s tears flowed freely as she held Reina tightly in her arms. She couldn’t believe that she had just agreed to move in with Reina and her children. She had only known Reina for less than a week.

“Honey, are you sure you want to quit your job and give up your home?”

“My home would be here with you and the kids.”

“How long will it take you to move here?”

“I’m not sure. I’ll need to find a job and put my condominium up for sale.”

“If you don’t like this house we can find another.”

“Reina, I love your home, and Max and Molly are used to it.”

“I promise that you and I will make it our home.”

“Mom, are you up?” Molly called as she entered the bedroom.

“Yes, Molly. Come here and give Payton and me a hug. Is Max awake?”

“Nope.” Molly hugged Payton and then her mother. Reina held Molly on her lap as Payton stood next to them.

“Reina, I’m going to get us both a cup of coffee. Molly, do you want a glass of juice?”

“Yes, please?”

Payton took one last look at Reina and Molly talking quietly to each other, before she left the room. The thought of spending the rest of her life with Reina was so wonderful, but to see Max and Molly grow up was an added blessing. The fact that Reina was pregnant made the relationship even more special. It was a huge step, one she was very nervous about. She needed to talk to Lindy.

The rest of the day passed swiftly as Reina and Payton packed things in preparation for the camping trip. After loading the car, the four of them headed to the grocery store for the food they needed. While Payton pushed the cart with Max riding in the seat, Reina held Molly’s hand as they strolled through the aisles.

“Payton, kiss.” Max demanded as his tiny arms tightened around Payton’s neck.

“I’d love a kiss, little man.” Payton kissed Max back and hugged him tightly. For an almost three-year-old little boy, he had lots of charm. He was very difficult to resist. In fact, Payton had given up

resisting either child. She had fallen madly in love with the two of them. At four years old, Molly was already showing all the signs of being just as beautiful as her mother. Payton would love to see the two of them grow up.

Reina watched Payton and Max as she and Molly picked out some apples. She loved how Payton responded to her children. Her genuine affection and gentleness was second nature to her. Payton caught Reina's gaze as she hugged the little boy, and she smiled. Reina and Molly came over to the cart to put their bag of apples away. Reina bent close to Payton and whispered quietly.

"I love you, Payton."

"I love you, Reina."

They smiled at each other, wishing they were anywhere but the grocery store. Reina touched her cheek quickly with her finger.

"Later," She promised as she and Molly continued with their shopping. Payton just nodded her head happily.

"Hey guys, right on time," Tamara called from the driveway of her house where she loaded sleeping bags into the back of the van. "Bring your stuff over here and we'll finish packing the van."

Reina and Payton unbuckled the kids, and with their help carried all of their things to the van.

"Max, Molly, and Payton, why don't you go inside and help Lindy and the kids?" Tamara said. "Reina can stay and help me finish putting everything in the van."

The three of them headed for the house, Payton holding onto the children's hands. Reina watched them until they disappeared into the house.

"I recognize that look." Tamara chuckled as she hugged Reina quickly. "You've fallen in love with Payton."

"I have, and I couldn't be happier." Reina smiled at her best friend. "I asked her to move here with me and the kids."

"And?"

"She said yes." Reina began to cry.

“She loves you, Reina.” Tamara smiled. “Why are you crying?”

“Tamara, what if she goes back to Seattle and changes her mind. What if she realizes that she doesn’t want three children in her life? I don’t think I can go through this again. It hurt so badly the last time and I have Max and Molly to think about.”

Tamara hugged Reina tightly. “Trust Payton, she will come back. Reina, you can’t run from a relationship. I know Payton and I know you, neither one of you take falling in love lightly. Reina, Payton loves children.”

“I hope so. I know it’s been less than a week but I can’t imagine my life without Payton in it. Max and Molly love her to death.”

“Reina, it’s going to be very hard for Payton. She’s leaving her job, her home, and her friends. It will take her some time to make all these changes and it will make her very sad. It is a big move to leave Seattle, she has lived there all of her life. I know from watching Lindy when she moved. You need to help her by being understanding and patient.” Tamara sat next to Reina in the back of the van. “Reina, I know you. You’re going to have to talk to Payton about how you feel. You aren’t very good at communicating your feelings.”

“I’m not that bad.” Reina punched Tamara in the arm, good-naturedly. She knew she needed to work on communication. She found it uncomfortable to talk about her emotions.

“Yes, you are, and if you want this relationship to work, you need to be better at it.”

“Okay, okay, I’ll talk.” Reina smiled at her friend. “I want this to be a forever relationship.”

“From everything I’ve seen with Payton, she’ll want nothing less than forever.”

“She is special, isn’t she?”

“Yes, she is. She and Lindy are a lot alike. Payton is generous, loving, and very loyal.”

“And extremely sexy.”

“She is that.”

Lindy looked out the window of the kitchen while she and Payton finished washing and drying the dishes. She watched as Tamara and Reina visited. She could tell by their expressions that it was a serious conversation.

“Aren’t those two of the most beautiful women you’ve ever seen?”  
Lindy grinned.

“They are gorgeous,” Payton agreed as she gazed at Reina and Tamara.

“Payton, are you sure about Reina?”

“More sure than anything else in my life. I know I love her, but it still frightens me.”

“Remember when I moved? You took time off from work and helped pack everything up.” Lindy laughed as she remembered. “You and I went on a road trip for three days.”

“It was fun.”

“And you stayed and helped me unpack and get settled.”

“You are my very best friend.”

“Yes I am, and it looks like we’ll go on another road trip.”

“I don’t know, Lindy. She asked me to live with her, but we haven’t discussed any details.”

“You will, honey. Now let’s go round up the kids and get this camping trip started. Who’s idea was this anyway?”

Payton raised her eyebrows in humor as she looked at Lindy. “It was your idea.”

“I know, and it’s going to be great fun.” Lindy hugged Payton, chuckling. “Now let’s go grab the kids. I promised Banta I would take him fishing.”

The two of them headed down the hall to collect the children. They were all in Maria and Amena’s room playing. Even Banta was behaving.

Twenty minutes later, while Tamara and Payton belted the children in their seats, Lindy locked the front door and joined Reina in the front seat of the van.

“Everyone got their seatbelts on?” Lindy called out. With a chorus of yeses, the large group headed down the road. “Okay, who knows a camping song?”

Tamara and the children began singing one of several songs that Lindy had taught them. Payton recognized the song and joined in as Max and Molly listened intently. It wasn’t much longer before everyone in the van was singing.

The hour and a half trip to the campgrounds went very quickly and, before Lindy had the van fully parked, the children were ready to tumble out. The campground they had chosen was already filling up with campers who were setting up their campsites. It was a popular, modern facility up in the woods, with a lake, hiking trails, and access to a beautiful waterfall. Lindy looked for several weeks before she had made the reservations.

“Hey guys, listen up,” Tamara called out loudly. “No one goes anywhere by themselves. Everyone stays by our van and tents unless you are going somewhere with Lindy, Payton, Reina, or me. Do you understand?” She looked at every child as she spoke. Safety was number one.

Yeses and nodding heads from the children told Tamara they had heard her. The excited crowd exploded from the van. Since this was the first time any of the children have been camping they were squealing with happiness.

“Tamara, why don’t you and Reina take the kids to the bathroom, while Payton and I put up the tents?” Lindy had purchased two four-person tents just for the trip. They were still in their original bag.

“Okay, honey,” She and Reina counted heads and then headed for the restrooms.

“When is the last time you put up a tent?” Lindy giggled

“Try never.” Payton’s response said it all as she rolled her eyes at her.

“Well then, I guess we’re in a lot of trouble.” Lindy laughed, playfully shoving Payton. The two cracked up as they looked at the two

tents currently waiting to be assembled. There must have been a hundred parts lying on the ground. And that was just for one tent.

“How hard can it be?” Payton remarked as she pulled the directions out of the first bag. “I’ll read the directions and you do the work.”

“Okay, then read.” Lindy eyed the stack of poles and stakes carefully. She wasn’t as optimistic as Payton was about putting the tent together. “Besides, what’s the worst that can happen? We all could sleep in the van.”

Payton looked at her in disbelief before spreading the directions on the ground in front of her. She wasn’t going to let a little obstacle like assembling a tent get in the way.

“Okay, we need to find the four poles that have a bend at the top.”

“Payton, there must be fifty poles here.” Lindy started sorting them.

“You know Lins, we could have practiced this before the trip.” Payton always prepared for everything. It was a quality that made her successful at project management.

“What would be the fun in that?” Lindy grinned. Payton just shook her head and smiled. Lindy was the creative and spontaneous one. At times, it could drive her nuts.

By the time the crew came back from the bathroom, the first tent was standing, a little crooked, but upright and sturdy. Lindy and Payton had only two arguments, and a minor emergency when Payton pinched Lindy’s finger while hammering a stake in the ground. Thankfully, the children were still away from the campsite because both Lindy and Payton had resorted to a few swear words while wrestling with a very stubborn tent pole. They were just starting on the second one and having similar results.

“Boy, Payton. These tents should come with a warning. Beware of injuries while assembling.” Lindy was having a frustrating time putting the correct poles together.

Payton could only agree with her as she wrestled with the tent, trying to lay it out flat before placing the poles.

“Good job!” Reina responded. The kids headed for the first tent.

“Guys, be careful of the poles, please,” Payton called as she and Lindy struggled with the second one. She would hate to have to put it up again.

“Lindy what do you want us to do?” Tamara asked as she smiled, watching her girlfriend’s frustrated look as she struggled with the tent.

“Find a motel, just kidding. Why don’t you, Reina, and the kids empty the stuff out of the van?” Lindy pushed the hair out of her face and sighed. “Tamara, try and be careful around the tent. Payton and I had to work very hard to get it to stand up.”

“Okay, honey.” Tamara grinned, chuckling at the expression on Lindy’s face.

Tamara put the children to unloading the van and cleaning the campsite while Reina put Lindy and Tamara’s things in the first tent. It wasn’t long before the second one was up and she and Payton were putting their things away. They took the opportunity to steal a quick kiss before joining the others outside.

“I wasn’t sure you and Lindy were going to get the second tent up.” Reina teased.

“I wasn’t so sure either.” Payton admitted, with a grin. “It is harder than it looks.”

Moments later they were all sitting around the picnic table making plans for the day.

“All right, what should we do this afternoon?” Lindy asked the expectant children.

“Fishing.” Banta yelled. Lindy and Banta had been planning this fishing trip for over a month and he was through waiting.

“Okay Banta, get your fishing pole,” Lindy suggested and the little boy ran for the van. “Max, we brought a pole for you, so go help Banta get them.” Max’s face lit up and he ran after Banta.

“The girls are going on a small hike with Tamara and me while you guys fish,” Reina announced. She didn’t find fishing appealing.

“Can I go fishing, Mom?” Molly asked.

“Sure you can.”

Payton, Lindy, and the three children headed off for the lake their poles safely being carried by Lindy. Thankfully, Lindy had brought four poles and lots of bait. “Come on guys, let’s go catch dinner.” Payton lifted Max onto her shoulders. It was a long walk to the lake. It was stocked with trout and she was hoping that the children would be lucky. She was bringing her camera just in case.

“Good luck,” Tamara called as she and Reina laughed. “They’ll be lucky to get their lines in the water before it’s dark.”

“Come on, Amena and Maria, let’s go for a hike,” Reina called, and the four of them headed in the opposite direction.

Twenty minutes later, Payton and Lindy baited all four poles and while the three children sat on the side of the lake, their lines in the water, Lindy and Payton visited.

“Do you think they will catch anything?” Payton asked as she watched Banta dip his pole up and down. “Banta, hold your pole still.”

“Okay, Payton.”

“Molly, see your pole? I think you might have a fish on the line.” Lindy chuckled while she reached over to help the little girl.

Payton watched amazed as Lindy assisted Molly in landing the good-sized trout. “Look Molly, you caught a fish!” Payton pulled the camera from her pack and started snapping pictures.

“Way to go, Molly.” Lindy unhooked the fish from the line. “Do you want to keep him or put him back in the lake so someone else can catch him?”

“Put him back in the lake.”

“Good,” Lindy patted the little girl on her shoulder. “Payton did you get a picture of Molly and her fish?”

“I did.”

“Okay. Let’s put this guy back in the lake.” Lindy returned the fish as the three children watched her intently.

Two hours later while Reina, Tamara, and the two girls started dinner, a weary group of fishermen arrived at camp. Max was sound asleep in Payton’s arms and Banta and Molly looked exhausted.

“Mom, we caught four fish!” Molly cried as she ran to Reina.

“Congratulations!” Reina hugged her excited daughter.

“Banta caught two, Max caught one, and I caught one.”

“They were very good anglers,” Payton volunteered proudly. “Max got a little tired on the walk back from the lake.”

“Dinner is ready, let’s wake him up so he can eat. Then I’ll put him to bed.” Reina took her sleeping son from Payton. She kissed Payton on the cheek as she held her son. “He caught a fish?”

“A big one.” Lindy grinned. “We all decided to put them back in the lake so someone else can catch them.”

“I took pictures,” Payton explained. “We got pictures of all four fish.”

“Why don’t you go wash up and come back for dinner?” Tamara suggested as she hugged Banta.

“Okay. Reina, let me take Max and I’ll make sure he’s ready for bed,” Payton suggested.

“Okay, honey.”

Payton took the sleeping boy in her arms. Molly held on to Payton’s leg while they headed off to the bathroom. At that moment she gazed at Reina and realized just how much she loved these two kids and their mother.

“Reina?”

“Yes?” Reina looked at her, puzzled.

“Thank you.”

“For what?” She came up to Payton and the kids.

“For this moment.” Payton’s voice cracked as she spoke, emotion overwhelming her.

Reina smiled and pulled Molly, Payton, and her sleeping son close. "Payton, I'm as thankful as you are. This is the most perfect time I've had with my children. You are a part of us now. We are a family."

Payton's eyes welled with tears as the four of them stood together for a moment. "Come on, Molly, let's go get you cleaned up. Then you can tell your mom how you caught your fish." Payton gazed at Reina as she spoke. "I love you," she whispered, and she and Molly and Max headed for the bathroom. Reina watched as the three of them headed down the well-worn path.

"I think Molly and Max are lucky," Tamara said as Reina joined her to help finish preparing dinner. "Payton loves those kids."

"I think I'm the lucky one."

"She obviously loves you very much."

"Tamara, she even likes the fact that I am pregnant."

"Why wouldn't she?" Tamara smiled at Reina. "Payton loves you because you are a mother. Lindy explained it to me."

"What do you mean?"

"When someone loves you completely, they love every part of you. That's what Lindy loves in me. She told me that a part of what appealed to her was that I was a good mother."

"So you think Payton loves me because I'm a mother?"

"That, and because you're drop dead gorgeous."

"Tamara."

"Well, next to Lindy I think you're one of the prettiest women I know, and Payton is one of the sexiest, so what's to figure? You guys are meant for each other."

"Tamara, quit teasing."

"Reina, I am serious. I think you and Payton are meant for each other. When the two of you stand next to each other you look perfect."

"I believe we are meant for each other," Reina agreed. "And Tamara, she is very sexy." She grinned happily.

“I don’t want to hear about it.” Tamara grumbled. I haven’t had a full night alone with Lindy in weeks. Between our schedules, the kids, and Banta’s problems we haven’t slept one full night without a child in bed with us.”

“Why don’t Payton and I take the kids for a night next week? I took the week off. We can get the kids to school and you and Lindy could have a night alone.”

“Are you serious?”

“Of course.”

“You’re on.”

“Good, you just need to tell us what night.” Reina replied. “Is Banta still going to a counselor?”

“I’ll talk to Lindy and let you know what night. We are all going to a counselor. He was pretty small when his mother was killed but he still wakes up terrified. The adoption agency found a lot evidence of physical abuse and he was severely malnourished. They think he was alone with his mother’s dead body for at least a day. They found him in a very rural village in Columbia. Drugs were everywhere and they think his mother was killed because of them. We don’t know much else. When I adopted Banta they warned me he would have a difficult time adapting.”

“Is he still hitting and biting Amena and Maria?”

“Yes, when he gets scared he acts out. Lindy can usually calm him down.”

“Do you remember how Maria was when you brought her home?”

“It’s hard to believe she used to steal and scream for hours on end.”

“Look at how she is turning out. Tamara, you do wonders with children who need extra love.”

Tamara blushed with embarrassment. Years earlier, when Tamara began her adoptive family, she made the decision to adopt children others might not consider. Maria had been the first and she had been abandoned in a garbage dump at the age of four. She was like a wild

animal when Tamara first brought her home. It took a long time before Tamara could get Maria to trust her. She still had times when she acted out but for the most part she was a well-adjusted young girl. Amena came from a similar situation, abandoned at a young age, and placed in an orphanage. She still hid food in her bedroom when she felt threatened.

“I needed the extra love, Reina.” Tamara loved her children. “Lindy is incredible with them. They open up to her and tell her how they are feeling. You know it’s our anniversary the night of the dance?”

“I know.”

“Hey guys, what’s for dinner?” Lindy hugged Tamara, as the rest of the group returned from the bathroom.

“Lindy, Reina volunteered to take the children for a sleep over one night this week. We will have one full night to ourselves.” Tamara’s eyes glistened with pleasure.

“That sounds heavenly.” Lindy hugged her girlfriend quickly.

The rest of the group quickly joined them. Max was awake and clean but clinging to Payton. “Can we help with dinner?”

“No, we have everything covered. Why don’t you join the girls at the picnic table,” Reina suggested.

It was a happy but quiet group that shared stories of their adventures. It was especially exciting to listen to Banta talk about catching his two-foot long fish. Payton and Lindy wisely let him spin his wild story, finding enjoyment in the little boy’s excitement. Max and Molly were the first to yawn, and Banta wasn’t far behind them. While Lindy and Payton washed dishes, Tamara and Reina put the children to bed and then rejoined them by the campfire.

Reina sat next to Payton on the ground and put her arms around her while Tamara sat on Lindy’s lap. “I think the kids will all be asleep shortly.” Tamara volunteered as Lindy held her tightly. “They are all exhausted.”

“They are having a great time,” Lindy remarked nuzzling Tamara’s neck.

“Honey, we are sleeping with these children in the same tent. Don’t start anything.” Tamara teased, kissing her thoroughly. Lindy just groaned.

Reina and Payton sat with their arms intertwined, content with just holding each other and enjoying the contact. The four visited for another hour before they decided to call it a night. Payton and Reina walked to the bathroom together before turning in. They washed and brushed their teeth and headed back to camp. As they approached their tent, Reina stopped and pulled Payton to her.

“Can I have a kiss goodnight?” She whispered, her hands sliding up Payton’s arms and around her back.

Payton’s lips found hers and they clung to each other. Reina’s tongue slid along Payton’s lips and she opened her mouth. Their bodies were sealed against one another’s, Payton’s hands sliding the length of Reina’s back before gripping her hips. Reina moaned when Payton’s hips ground against her own, their breasts pressing together.

“Reina, we can’t do this,” Payton gasped as Reina’s hands slid under her shirt and clasped her breasts.

“I know. But I want you so much.”

“I want this, but we can’t.” Payton’s head rested on Reina’s shoulder.

“I love you, Payton.” Reina kissed her softly.

“I love you, Reina.” They hugged tightly and then released each other before entering their tent. The two of them crawled into the sleeping bags with Max and Molly and snuggled up to each other.

“Good night, Payton.”

“Goodnight, Reina.” Reina was on Payton’s left, with Max next to her, while Molly was on Payton’s right. Payton reached for Reina’s hand and squeezed it tightly. She fell asleep holding Reina’s fingers as Reina’s head lay on her shoulder.

It was several hours later when a quietly spoken plea woke Payton from a sound sleep. “Mom, I need to go to the bathroom.”

“Okay, Molly, honey. I can take you. Let’s let your mom sleep. You put your shoes on and I’ll find the flashlight.” Payton slipped her own shoes on as Max began to stir. “Max, sweetie, come on. Let’s take you to the bathroom while you’re awake.”

“Okay.” Max climbed into Payton’s arms.

“Let’s try and be real quiet so we don’t wake everyone up.” The three of them headed for the bathroom.

Reina was wide-awake and smiling, listening to the three of them visit while they walked. “Payton, what was that sound?” Molly asked as she clung to Payton’s leg.

“Molly, that is an owl. You remember we saw one at the zoo.”

“I remember.”

The three held a running conversation the whole way to the bathroom and back. “Okay Molly, you crawl into bed next to your mom. Max, you come get in bed with me.” Molly hugged and kissed Payton before climbing under the covers. Payton and Max slid in their side of the sleeping bag and lay down. “Max, your feet are as cold as ice, come here and let’s put some socks on.” She and Max finally settled down and Payton snuggled her back up to Reina’s. Reina turned and fit her warm body against Payton’s from head to toe.

Payton’s reaction was immediate, as passion flared. As if she read her mind, Reina’s hands slid under Payton’s shirt around her ribs and to her breasts, while her lips kissed the back of Payton’s neck. Payton leaned back against Reina and whispered, “We can’t.”

“I know, but I have to touch you.” Reina hands roamed across Payton’s body. Payton turned her head and met Reina’s lips with her own in a searing kiss that left them both breathless. Reina’s hands ceased their caresses but still lay against Payton’s stomach. Payton reached her right hand back and placed it on Reina’s hip and pulled Reina tightly against her.

“I love you,” Reina breathed into Payton’s ear.

“I love you,” Payton responded. With that, the two of them drifted off to sleep again.

Payton was rudely awakened several hours later by a head butt to her chin as Max snuggled against her. Sleeping with a tiny little boy was an art, one she hadn’t figured out yet. “Max, where are your socks? Your feet are freezing.” She ought to know, he put them against her legs. They were ice cold. “Come here, you.” She hugged him tightly as he grinned at her. He was obviously wide-awake. Molly was stirring on her side of the sleeping bag and Reina smiled as she opened her eyes.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning to you. How did you sleep?”

“Good, but frustrating.” She grinned, her hands finding Payton under the covers.

“I know the feeling.” Payton laughed as Max launched himself on top of her and Reina. Soon Molly joined him as the four frolicked under the covers.

“It’s my job to fix breakfast this morning, so I’d better go get cleaned up. I’m going to take a shower. Do you want me to help with Max and Molly?”

“Why don’t the four of us take a shower together?” Reina suggested.

“Together?” Payton looked at her, her face full of panic.

“Honey, I have showered with Max and Molly many times, and if you’re going to live with us you might as well get used to it. They are too little to take one by themselves.”

“Okay.” Payton wasn’t too sure about showering with two small children.

“Honey, it’ll be fine,” Reina promised her with a hug. “Come on guys, let’s put your shoes on while I pack some clothes. Payton love, will you grab those towels and washcloths? The soap should also be there, and please bring the bag of quarters for the shower.”

Ten minutes later the four of them arrived in the empty restrooms. It was still very early and the camp was very quiet. “Payton, why don’t you start your shower and then I’ll send the kids in one at a time.”

“Do you want to wash their hair?”

“Not Molly’s, it’ll take too long to dry. But go ahead and wash Max’s.”

Payton felt very self-conscious as she undressed, started the shower, and began showering. She washed her hair and scrubbed her body before Reina put Max in the shower with her.

“Okay little man, let’s scrub you clean.” Payton suggested as she lathered Max up and scrubbed him from top to bottom. “Now let’s wash your hair. Close your eyes, buddy, and keep them closed.”

Soon Max was squeaky clean and smiling at Payton as he played in the shower. “Molly you start showering while I get out of my clothes.” Reina directed her young daughter, and before Payton knew it both children were showered and clean. Reina slipped into the shower with the three of them and Payton couldn’t resist a look of longing, as she gazed at her naked lover’s beautiful body. Reina returned the look with a smile, before suggesting that Payton and Max go dry off and get dressed.

Payton stepped from the shower and took Max by the hand. She picked him up and stood him on the bench in front of her. Quickly, she rubbed him dry with a towel and wrapped it around him. She dried herself off and dressed quickly into her shorts and tee shirt. She then dressed Max, and was just finishing when Molly joined them.

“Okay, Miss Molly, let’s dry you off and get you dressed.” Payton had both children dressed and was rubbing Max’s hair dry when Reina stepped out of the shower. Her sleek, sexy body dripping with water, and her hair piled on top of her head, was almost more than Payton could stand, and her mouth went dry. Reina’s eyes found Payton’s and she gave her a look so full of promise that Payton’s knees weakened.

“You can’t look at me like that,” Reina teased as she covered herself with a towel.

“It’s not something I have much control over,” Payton grumbled.

“I don’t want you to control it.” Reina stood close to her whispering. “It’s how I feel when I look at you.”

“Sunday night is going to be very busy,” Payton promised.

“I know.” Reina grinned impishly as she kissed Payton on the cheek.

“Come on, guys, let’s let your mom get dressed,” Payton suggested and led the two little ones out of the shower stall. “Let’s visit the bathroom while we’re here.”

Before long the four of them were back in camp quietly preparing breakfast. Lindy was up first from the other tent and joined in with the preparations. She and Reina peeled potatoes for hash browns.

“Reina, you look very happy,” Lindy observed, watching Reina gaze at Payton, Max, and Molly, while they mixed pancakes and scrambled eggs.

“I am beyond happy.” Reina looked at Lindy. “I didn’t know how wonderful my life could be until I met Payton.”

“She is special.”

“Yes, she is, and I love her.”

“She loves you.”

“Lindy, is it fair of me to ask her to move? I know you did it.”

“Do you want to be with Payton?”

“More than anything.”

“Then it’s fair. I’ve known Payton a long time and all she’s every wanted was to fall in love and live happily ever after. She has this huge capacity to love and I can’t think of anyone I would rather see her with than you.”

“Thank you.” Reina blushed.

“Reina, Payton loves you. I can see it in her eyes when she looks at you, and I hear it in her voice when she talks about you, Max, and

Molly. She also thinks your being pregnant is fantastic. Let her be a part of the pregnancy. She will be there if you let her.”

“It still scares me to let her go back to Seattle.”

“She won’t change her mind. You just need to reassure her that you want her to come back. I don’t know how much of Payton’s past you know about, but Payton needs someone who goes out of her way to let her know she is loved.”

“Why is that?”

“Reina, I know you have been hurt very badly and so has Payton. In many ways, Payton is very naïve and way too trusting. Some women have taken advantage of that. Reina, just love her and talk to her.”

“I will. Lindy, thanks.”

“For the record, if I had to choose someone for Payton it would be you.”

“Why?”

“Because I’ve seen you with your children and other women. You also have a wonderful capacity to love. I think Payton is lucky that you’ve fallen in love with her.”

Reina smiled gratefully at Lindy and then hugged her. “Thank you.”

“No thanks needed. Besides, I promised Payton I’d help her move. She moved me, so it’s the least I can do.” Lindy chuckled. “Payton and I are good at road trips.”

“Hey ladies, how are the potatoes coming?” Payton called across the campsite. “The bacon is almost done.”

“They’re ready to be fried.” Lindy responded. “I’m going to go wake the kids and let Tamara sleep awhile longer.”

“Tamara is up.” Tamara stepped out of her tent. “I don’t know about you folks, but my body is way too old to sleep on the ground.” She groaned as she hugged Lindy. “Coffee, I need coffee.”

“Your wish is my command.” Lindy grinned and retrieved a cup of fresh coffee for her partner.

“I’ll remind you of that statement when we get some alone time,” Tamara teased, as she looked Lindy up and down. Lindy just laughed as she entered the tent to wake up the rest of the group.

Forty-five minutes later a very happy crew quietly ate a breakfast of pancakes, scrambled eggs, potatoes, toast, and bacon. “Very good job, Payton,” Tamara remarked as she sipped her coffee. “I don’t think Banta has eaten this big of a breakfast in a long time.”

“It’s the fresh air. Look at Max, that’s his fourth pancake,” Reina responded. Max was seated at the picnic table, pancake syrup smeared all around his mouth while he shoveled another large bite into his mouth. Banta’s head was down while he continued to plow through his breakfast. The three young girls were much more sedate while they giggled and finished their breakfasts. The adults also enjoyed their camper’s meal as they leisurely drank their coffee while waiting for the children to finish.

“Since you cooked, Payton, we clean up.” Tamara announced.

“Sounds good to me. How about I take the two young men here to the bathroom and clean the syrup off?”

“Great.” Girls, would you please help me clean up the camp?”

Maria, Amena, and Molly loved to be included and jumped up to assist Tamara. By the time Payton and the boys came back to the camp, they were almost done.

“So, what are the plans for the day?” Lindy asked, while the children played cards at the picnic table.

“We promised the kids a hike to the falls and a picnic. Then I believe you and Payton have some more fishing to do.” Tamara outlined the day. “Reina and I thought we could come with you guys to the lake and enjoy the sunshine.”

“Sounds good to me,” Lindy responded. “We just need to finish cleaning up and pack a picnic.”

“I’ll pack the lunch. You, Tamara, and the kids need to get dressed.” Payton volunteered. “Max and Molly will help me.”

“Thanks, Payton.”

"I'll help pack the picnic lunch," Reina suggested, and the group's day began.

The early morning hike was fun and the trip to the lake was uneventful. All of the children sat on the side taking turns fishing. Tamara and Maria were taking pictures, while Reina sat with Molly. Banta and Lindy were seriously holding their poles. Max was a little bored and played with his pole while Payton sat with him.

"Max, buddy, let me check your bait." Payton took the pole and reeled the line in. The hook was empty.

"Okay, you hold your pole while I fix it for you." Payton took the line and prepared to put fish eggs on the hook. Being an inquisitive little boy, Max began to turn the handle on the reel jerking the hook in Payton's hand.

"Max!" Payton cried out as the hook tore into her hand. She hissed with pain, trying not to swear in front of him.

"Payton, are you all right?" Reina came up to her to help.

"I've got a hook in my hand."

"Max, you take this pole while I help Payton."

"Okay, Mom." Max was unaware that he had seriously injured Payton and sat quietly with the other children on the side of the lake.

"Reina, let me help?" Lindy spoke as Tamara watched closely. Reina didn't know what to do.

"Okay, Lindy."

"Damn, Lins, this hurts." Payton was close to tears.

"Let me get the tackle box and we will get the hook out. I have to cut the barbed end of the hook off before getting it out." Lindy worked quickly but she warned Payton before she pulled on the hook. "This is going to hurt like hell."

"Okay." Payton held her breath then hissed with pain while Lindy pulled the hook out with a pair of pliers.

"Oh, Payton, it's a good sized tear. Do you want to go back to camp? We need to clean it out."

"I'll wash it in the lake and clean it better later."

“Okay, sweetie.”

“Thanks, Lins.”

“No problem.”

Reina hugged Payton quickly. “I’m sorry.”

“It was an accident.” Payton tried to smile.

“Want me kiss it and make it better?”

“Yes, please.”

Payton’s hand throbbed but Reina’s gentle kiss on her hand did wonders. “There that will make it feel better.”

The children started to get bored by lunch time so after their picnic, they hiked back to the falls. They spent several hours playing in a grassy meadow with the children until they all decided to head back to the campsite. Dinner of hotdogs, baked beans, and potato salad awaited all of them and Lindy had promised they could roast marshmallows for dessert.

By seven o’clock that night the tired but happy campers sat around the campfire singing songs and roasting marshmallows. A sleepy Max sat in his mother’s lap, Molly in Payton’s, while Lindy held Banta with Maria on one side, Tamara and Amena cuddled up to her other side.

“Where do you and Lindy come up with these songs?” Reina asked after they finished a round of singing.

“We both went to camp when we were younger, and learned all of them. You don’t forget a good camp song, do you Lins?”

“Nope, they’re forever in your memory.”

“Well, Banta and I need to head to the bathroom and wash up. I think it’s almost time for bed. Max and Molly, do you want to come with me?” Tamara led the three little ones to the bathroom while Payton and Lindy prepared the sleeping bags.

“How is your hand?” Reina entered the tent to help Payton.

“It’s a little sore but it’ll be fine.”

“I want to clean it again and put some more antiseptic cream on it.” Reina took Payton’s bandaged hand in her own. Tamara had cleaned Payton’s torn hand earlier and professionally bandaged it.

“But it will sting,” Payton whined as she hugged Reina to her with her other arm.

“I’ll kiss it and make it better,” Reina promised, sliding her arms around Payton’s neck and kissing her.

Payton’s lips opened to Reina’s tongue as they shared a hot, wet kiss. “What I wouldn’t do for an hour alone with you.” Reina groaned.

“One more night,” Payton promised, and pulled Reina tightly against her as they kissed again. Voices broke them apart and they exited the tent.

“Come on Molly, Max, let’s get you into bed.” Reina took the two of them into the tent, while Payton joined Lindy and the two girls at the campfire. Tamara was putting Banta to bed.

“Are you girls having a good time?” Payton asked, as she looked at Amena and Maria snuggled up against Lindy.

“Yes, especially the waterfall, that was cool.” Maria had been especially impressed with the waterfall. Lindy had taken her on a special hike, with just the two of them. They climbed all the way to the top and took pictures. It was a very special day for Maria.

“I took some great pictures while we were there so I’ll share them with you. In fact, Lindy can show you how to look at them on the computer.

“Cool.”

“Payton, can you come and kiss Molly and Max goodnight?”

“Sure.”

Payton entered their tent to find Molly and Max in the center of the sleeping bag, covers up to their chins. Reina lay next to Max, leaning on her elbow to look at her children. She looked so beautiful with her long hair tied back. Both children showed signs of exhaus-

tion on their shining little faces. Payton kneeled and bent down to hug Molly tightly.

“Goodnight, Molly girl.” Payton kissed her.

“I love you, Payton.”

“Molly, I love you lots.”

Max, not to be ignored, stood up and climbed over Molly to wrap his arms around Payton’s neck. “Goodnight little man,” Payton whispered, as she hugged the little boy and returned his very enthusiastic kiss. “I love you Max, lots.”

She helped him back under the covers, then sat back and watched the two children close their sleepy eyes. Payton’s heart felt full as she stared at the two beautiful kids.

“Lindy’s right. I can see how much you love Max and Molly when you look at them,” Reina said softly.

Payton looked at Reina before answering. “Can you tell how much I love you when I look at you?”

Reina sat up with a smile and leaned over the quiet children. “As much as I love you.”

Payton met her halfway and they kissed briefly, content to just look at each other.

“We had better get out there before they come looking for us.” Reina touched Payton’s cheek with her fingers. “Payton, how long do you think it’s going to take for you to move back here with me and the kids?”

“I’m not sure. I need to sell my place, and I need to give two weeks notice at work and pack everything. It would also be nice if I had a job to count on.”

“How long?” Reina asked again, her hand against Payton’s cheek.

“Three weeks, no longer than four?”

“Good.” Reina smiled. “I’ll put that date on my calendar. I you aren’t here by then I’ll come get you.”

“I’ll be here,” Payton promised with a soft kiss.

“I have a doctor’s appointment next week to check on my pregnancy. Will you come with me?”

“Of course I will. Is everything okay?” The look of concern on Payton’s face warmed Reina’s heart.

“Everything is fine. It’s my scheduled appointment. Payton I want to share having this baby with you. It’s your family, too.”

The look on Payton’s face said it all as Reina hugged her tightly. Payton couldn’t speak, she was so overwhelmed with emotion. She clung to Reina tightly.

“Are you guys going to stay in there all night?” Lindy’s amused voice carried to them. They both chuckled as they exited the tent.

“Are you two always going to be like this?” Lindy grinned as she sat on Tamara’s lap while Tamara kissed her neck.

“Look who’s talking?” Payton retorted. “I thought we were going to play cards.” Lindy had lit lanterns in order to light the area around the picnic table. They were all wearing jackets as the evening was starting to cool down quickly. Thankfully there were no bugs to bother them. The campground during dinner had been fairly noisy but as evening set in almost everyone was settling down for the night.

“Put your money where your mouth is, big stuff.” Lindy poked her in the arm. “Remember what happened the last time.”

Payton groaned as she remembered her last visit. “Don’t remind me.”

“I took her for thirty bucks,” Lindy bragged as the four of them sat at the picnic table.

“It’s not nice to gloat, Lindy,” Tamara reminded her, grinning while she dealt out the cards. “Reina, would you count out the chips. Each one is worth a quarter.”

The four of them spent a humorous couple of hours playing poker. Despite Payton and Lindy’s competitive natures, Reina cleaned out everyone’s bankroll. Payton and Lindy whined the whole time.

“Why didn’t you tell me she was such a good poker player?” Lindy complained.

“I didn’t know.”

“You’re sleeping with her and you didn’t know?” Lindy was indignant.

“The subject of poker didn’t come up.” Payton glared at Lindy. Tamara just laughed at the two of them.

“Have you ever seen such sore losers?”

“Lindy, Payton tells me you volunteered to help her move.” Reina grinned at the bickering twosome.

“She’ll have to pay me now. I’m broke,” Lindy laughed, teasing Payton. “When do we move you?”

“She promised no longer than four weeks,” Reina announced.

“I still need to find a job.”

“What’s wrong with working for my company?”

“Your boss wasn’t serious.”

“Yes, he was. Just give me the word and it will happen.”

“You’re kidding?”

“No, I’m not.”

“Then, everything is settled.” Reina grinned. “Payton will be moved here in four weeks.”

“Very cool.” Lindy nodded.

“Tamara, can you give me your contractors name? I think we need to add a few more rooms to the house.” Reina hugged Payton as she spoke.

“Are you going ahead with your remodel?”

“Only if Payton agrees,” Reina replied. “It’s going to be her home, too.”

The four of them visited for a couple more minutes, and then Lindy and Tamara went to the bathroom to clean up.

“Reina, about your house,” Payton started.

“Our house.”

“I would like to contribute to the house. I should be able to sell my place for more than what I paid for it, and I’ll need to reinvest the money. Why don’t I give that to you for the remodel?”

“I’ve got a better idea. You put your money in the bank, and I sign over half the house to you. Then we pay for the remodel out of our money.”

“Your house is worth a lot more than my condominium.”

“It’s a house, Payton. If we are going to be a family, we share everything.”

“Reina, I’m actually not penniless. I’ve invested my money over the last couple of years and have done quite well.”

“Define quite well,” Reina asked, hearing the note of pride in Payton’s voice.

“Let’s put it this way. I set a goal ten years ago that I would be a millionaire at fifty.”

“And?”

“I beat that goal by five years.”

“You mean I’m sleeping with a wealthy older woman?” Reina teased as she kissed Payton.

“An extremely wealthy older woman,” Payton corrected, kissing her in return.

“Good thing, because you have three kids to raise.” Reina chuckled.

“I know, isn’t that cool?” Payton grinned.

“Okay girls, your turn.” Tamara’s voice broke them apart.

Payton and Reina got their things and headed for the bathroom. After they washed and brushed their teeth, Reina insisted on cleaning Payton’s hand. This brought a round of complaints on Payton’s part and soothing words and kisses from Reina. They headed back to the camp hand in hand; once Reina had convinced Payton she would kiss her some more in the privacy of their tent. They took their time walking back, enjoying the quiet solitude, and the night sounds. The gravel path meandered through the campgrounds where many oth-

ers were enjoying their campfires, while others were settled down for the night. By the time they made it back to camp, Lindy and Tamara were in bed. The two of them hadn't any more than crawled under the covers when Molly woke up and asked to go to the bathroom. Reina decided to take both children, so they woke Max, and the four of them headed back down the path. The one thing about camping with little children, you spent a lot of time walking to and from the restrooms.

It was over a half an hour before both children were settled in bed and Reina and Payton could kiss goodnight. It was a little difficult, with Max and Molly settled back to sleep between the two of them.

They shared a tight hug and a thorough kiss before lying back down for the night.

"Payton?" Reina whispered in the darkness.

"Yes?"

"This was our second family function together."

"What was our first?"

"The zoo."

"That was before you asked me be a part of your family."

"That was the day Max and Molly fell in love with you. It's also the day I did."

"I love all three of you, Reina."

"We love you, Payton."

A smiling Payton closed her eyes. "Goodnight, honey."

"Goodnight, love." The four of them were sound asleep in minutes.

Payton felt soft lips against her own as she slowly woke up from a sound sleep. "Payton honey, wake up." Reina was kissing her gently.

Payton's arms surrounded Reina. "Where are Max and Molly?"

"They're drinking hot chocolate with Lindy and the others."

"I can't believe I slept through your getting up." Payton started to sit up.

“Wait a minute.” Reina gently restrained her. “Do you think I went to all of this effort to get you alone for a few minutes to let you get up?”

“Heck no.” Payton grinned. “Come in here and join me.” She covered Reina with the sleeping bag and her body. She kissed Reina passionately, and Reina’s response was immediate. Her mouth opened to Payton’s tongue as they exchanged kiss after kiss. Reina murmured quietly while Payton’s mouth did heavenly things with her own. Reina’s hands were under Payton’s tee shirt sliding along her back, and their bodies rubbed against each other. It was several moments before the two of them clung to each other, breathing heavily.

“I can’t wait until tonight when we put the kids to bed,” Reina admitted, as her heart pounded against Payton’s.

“I know, but it’s going to be so much fun.” Payton grinned, kissing Reina one more time. “Come on honey, before we get into trouble.”

Reina just groaned as she climbed out of bed. “I’m going to roll these bags up while you go get dressed, and then I’m cleaning your hand again.”

“Again?” Payton grumbled.

“We can’t have you impaired in any way tonight.” Reina grinned.

Payton laughed and gathered her things. She couldn’t agree more. “I’ll be back shortly.”

The adults cleaned up camp after breakfast, folding tents and packing all but the food, before heading off for another trip to the lake. They had decided to give up on the fishing and just go for a short hike. It was after lunchtime before they returned and, after preparing sandwiches and fruit for everyone, they were ready to pack up and head for home. The children were a happy, tired, and dirty group as they climbed into the van.

By the time they drove back to Tamara and Lindy’s, unpacked, and headed for home it was four-thirty, and both Max and Molly were sound asleep in the car.

“They are exhausted.” Payton looked at the two sleeping children.

“They had a wonderful time.”

“I took some terrific photographs. Wait until you see the ones I took when they caught their fish.”

“I can’t wait to see them. I got some good ones when we sat around the campfire. And Lindy took some of the four of us.”

“I want to have a couple to take back to Seattle with me so I can brag.” Payton smiled.

“We’ll make sure you have some good ones. We’re your family.”

“I love that.”

“Good, let’s do it then.”

They pulled into the garage and decided to leave the kids asleep until they unloaded everything else.

“I think we should just put them into bed and let them sleep. I’d hate to wake them just to eat dinner.”

“They’re kind of dirty.”

“Let’s clean their faces and hands and call it good.”

They each took a sleeping child and headed for their bedroom. They undressed them, gently washed their face and hands, and kissed them goodnight.

“They are out like lights,” Reina said to Payton as they headed for the kitchen.

“Okay, let’s put this food away and throw the dirty clothes in a pile.”

“Payton.”

“Yes?” Payton turned to look at Reina standing in the doorway of the kitchen.

“If you think I’m waiting one more minute.” She crooked her finger at Payton.

Payton’s grin was her answer as she followed Reina rapidly down the hall. They entered the bedroom and barely got the door closed before they were both shedding their clothes, their lips greedily kissing. Payton backed up until she found the couch, and pushed Reina onto it. Her hands and lips were everywhere as she kneeled in front

of Reina. She covered every inch of her body until Reina begged for relief. Payton's lips slid across Reina's stomach while her fingers traced patterns on the insides of Reina's thighs. Reina's lifted her hips off the couch and Payton's fingers hovered between her legs before sliding into her. Reina's body tightened around Payton's fingers as she was stroked. She spoke in gasps as Payton made love to her. The rippling of an orgasm began in Reina, and Payton's mouth joined her fingers, driving Reina over the edge. Reina's body twisted and turned, as Payton loved her completely.

"I love the way you taste," Payton whispered, her tongue teasing while another orgasm flowed through Reina's body.

"Payton," Reina cried out, shivering, and reaching for Payton. "I need to hold you."

Payton cradled Reina in her arms, picking her up and pulling her onto her lap, holding her tightly. Reina tucked her face against Payton's neck while Payton spoke softly, telling Reina how much she loved her and how beautiful she was as she held her snug in her arms. Reina began to kiss Payton's neck as she sat up in Payton's arms.

"I love the way you touch me. You make me feel beautiful when you look at me." Reina slid to her knees next to Payton on the couch.

"I love your body. It's so strong and healthy, and your breasts are so full." Reina's lips teased Payton's nipples, while her hands traced her shoulders and arms. Payton could only sit and allow the pleasure to course through her body.

Reina stood up and pulled Payton to her feet, kissing her ribs and stomach. She turned Payton around and kissed her shoulders and back, causing Payton to shake with anticipation.

"You know one of my most favorite parts of your body is your nice, tight backend."

Reina's voice was muffled as she kneeled behind Payton and placed kisses on her hips and buttocks. Her tongue slid down the crevasse between Payton's cheeks causing her knees to buckle. Pay-

ton reached back to hold onto Reina's shoulders as she reacted to her lovemaking. Reina's lips traveled over the backs of Payton's thighs, while her hands traced up and down her legs. It was Reina's tongue between her legs that was Payton's undoing and she moaned in response. Reina held her tightly while her fingers found her wet and trembling. Reina's tongue tasted and stroked while her fingers slipped into Payton. Her orgasm was immediate and earth shattering, and she crumpled against Reina, her body pulsing with unbelievable pleasure. Reina renewed her efforts as Payton again cried out, wracked with another series of orgasms that shimmered through her body. Reaching behind her, she gently lifted Reina up until she could turn and hold her, her breathing so heavy she could hardly speak.

"Reina." It was all Payton could say, tears leaking from her eyes.

"Payton, I love you, more and more every day." Reina soothed her. "I absolutely love making love with you."

"I need to hold you," Payton requested. "I want to feel your body next to mine."

Reina headed for the bed and, still holding onto Payton, she pushed the covers back and gently pushed Payton onto the bed. Payton was in a haze and almost unable to respond, she was so overwhelmed. Reina slid her body on top of Payton's from head to toe. Payton's eyes had closed and tears still slipped from them, her arms holding Reina tightly, her heart pounding heavily. Reina slowly kissed the tears away from Payton's cheeks, her arms sliding around Payton's neck.

"Payton, look at me," she whispered, and Payton's eyes slowly opened, still glazed with passion. "I'm not going anywhere but here. I love you honey, and you're just going to have to get used to having me around."

"I couldn't stand it if I didn't see you anymore."

"You can't get rid of me. You're stuck with me for a lifetime."

"Well I then I'd better get started." Payton smiled.

“Started with what?”

“Making love with you again, because a lifetime just isn’t long enough.” Payton did just that, loving Reina from head to toe and several places in between. It was several hours later before they got up, put everything away, and fixed themselves a bite to eat.

Reina stood in the kitchen with Payton’s shirt on and nothing else. Payton was similarly dressed in her silk nightshirt. As Reina opened the refrigerator door to put something away, Payton couldn’t help but admire her lover’s body. One thing led to another and the two of them were suddenly in a heap in the middle of the kitchen, trying to locate their clothes after making frantic love on the kitchen floor. They giggled, helping each other dress, and then headed back to the bedroom for several more hours of lovemaking, before drifting off to sleep a little before dawn.

“Mom. Wake up please. It’s time for breakfast.” Molly shook her mother lightly.

“Good morning, sunshine.” Reina sat up and looked at the clock. It was after nine.

“You’re awake.” Payton came into the room with a cup of coffee.

“How long have you been up?”

“Not long, Max and Molly woke up around eight and we decided to make you breakfast in bed.”

“That sounds perfect. Can I get a kiss good morning from my Molly and my Payton?”

Molly kissed and hugged her mother and then stared while Payton bent over to kiss Reina. “We are being watched,” Payton whispered.

“I know.” Reina smiled and kissed Payton softly on the lips. “Good morning.”

“Here’s your coffee.” Payton handed her the cup with a sweet smile of her own. “Come on Molly, let’s go get breakfast.” Molly took Payton’s hand and skipped down the hall with her.

“Okay, Max, how’s the toast?” The tiny little boy was standing on a chair to reach the counter, doing his very best to butter the toast. He

actually had more butter on his fingers than on the toast, but it was the effort that counted.

“Good.” Max was very serious about finishing his job.

“Good, this toast looks perfect to me. Why don’t we take your toast and Molly’s eggs down to your mom?”

“Okay.”

“Let’s clean you up, little buddy.” Payton wiped his hands clean of butter. “Okay Molly, you carry the plate, and Max, you carry the toast. I’ll bring the flower and the juice.”

“Okay, Payton.” It was two very serious children who carried breakfast in to their mother.

“What have we got here?” Reina asked as the children came toward the bed.

“Mom, I made the eggs and Max did the toast.”

“You did? Well let’s see this breakfast. Molly, these eggs look delicious and Max, this is the best toast I have ever seen. Can I eat it?”

The two children dissolved into giggles, as their mother ate the breakfast and raved about the eggs and toast. Payton placed the two kids on the foot of the bed while Reina ate. She sat next to Reina and enjoyed the morning. It was a pleasant start to their day as the four of them played games and sat around the house. Lindy called at eleven and spoke to Payton.

“Payton, can you meet with my boss on Thursday? He wants to formally interview you for a job.”

“You are kidding?”

“No, I’m not. He really wants to hire you.”

“I’ll be there. What time?”

“Nine o’clock. Also, Tamara wanted me to remind you that we have to pick out costumes for the dance on Saturday night.”

After a little more conversation, Lindy and Payton hung up. “Reina, Lindy and Tamara would like to pick out costumes tomorrow afternoon while the kids are still in school. What do you think?”

“That will work. I can get Mrs. Lenahan to watch Max and Molly for a couple of hours.”

“Okay. Lindy will pick us up around one.”

“Payton, how about we bring Lindy and Tamara’s kids over here for the night? We have an early doctor’s appointment to go to so we could drop the kids off at school.”

“Fine with me, but what about Max and Molly?”

“I’ll call Mrs. Lenahan right now. She is almost like a grandmother to the kids. Speaking of grandmothers, what’s your family going to think when you tell them you’re going to move?”

“I only have a brother. My mother and father have both passed away. He lives in Eugene, Oregon with his wife, and two kids. I think he’ll be very happy for me. I know he will like you. What about your family?”

“My parents live in Boston. They retired there. I have a brother who lives in Atlanta with his wife. I thought I’d call my parents next week and tell them. They can tell my brother. He doesn’t exactly like the way I live.”

“I’m sorry, Reina.”

“It’s no big deal. My parents are going to love you.”

“I hope so.” Payton didn’t look forward to meeting Reina’s parents. What if they didn’t approve of her?

“Don’t worry, honey,” Reina reassured her. She sat in thoughtful silence while Reina made her call.

“Mrs. Lenahan is available. She will watch them at her house today and tomorrow. Saturday night she’ll come over here to watch them.” Reina leaned over Payton’s shoulders and hugged her around the neck. “Honey, you don’t need to worry about my parents. If I choose to love someone and share my life with them, my parents will be very happy for me.”

“I hope so. My brother will be very happy for me. He keeps teasing me about being too picky. I’ll have to tell him that I found the woman of my dreams.”

“Tell him you were waiting for me,” Reina teased.

“I was waiting for you.” Payton hugged her. “Come on, let’s go play with the kids.”

“Costume time,” Lindy announced, as the four of them entered the costume supply house a little before two. It was a huge warehouse jam packed with every type of costume imaginable. “Remember, swing clothes around the nineteen forties, the gangster era.”

“Lindy, you are not going to go to this dance dressed as a gangster,” Tamara grumbled.

“I was thinking more along the lines of a zoot suit. Why can’t all four of us wear one?”

“I like that idea,” Reina chimed in.

“What’s a zoot suit?” Payton asked.

“Just follow me, buddy.” Lindy pulled Payton by the arm. “I’ll find something cool.”

Tamara and Reina followed the twosome. An hour later the four of them had chosen their costumes. Following Lindy’s direction, Payton found a canary yellow suit with wide yellow and black suspenders, a black body suit, and a matching yellow hat. Reina’s suit was bright red with a red and white striped vest, and a white hat. Lindy and Tamara chose similar outfits, Lindy’s bright blue and Tamara’s a deep dark purple. Payton didn’t feel too bad about wearing a costume, since all four were dressed similarly. Besides, she would wear anything just to go to the dance with Reina. Payton had plans for that night. She needed Lindy’s help to get everything accomplished. She had already explained it to her, and Lindy was more than happy to help.

“Are you sure you want all five kids tonight?” Tamara asked as they pulled into the driveway. “You two don’t have too many days before Payton heads back to Seattle.”

“Of course we want the kids. Payton is coming back as soon as possible.” Reina couldn’t help but see the stricken look on Payton’s face. She hugged her tightly, unable to prevent the knot of worry in

her own chest. Payton couldn't stop the ache she felt at the thought of leaving Reina and the kids. Lindy saw how troubled she had become, and asked her to come to the kitchen with her.

"Payton, stop thinking about leaving, it will ruin the rest of your week."

"I know. I just can't help but worry that once I leave it'll be over."

"Honey, you're moving here with Reina and her kids. Now, let's talk about Saturday night. We're coming over at six, and the limousine is arriving at six-thirty."

"That's the plan. The flowers and champagne will be in the limousine when it arrives."

"Good, now don't worry, honey."

"Okay, Lindy. Thanks." Payton hugged her quickly.

"I hear the sweet little voices of three children." Lindy grinned. "And they're going home with you."

It took almost an hour for the kids to get their things together for the evening, and to kiss Lindy and Tamara goodbye. A quick stop to pick up Max and Molly, and they were home. Reina and Lindy had switched the car for the van in order to hold all of the children.

"Okay everyone, put your pajamas on. We're having a pajama party!" Reina announced. "I'm fixing home-made pizza and ice cream sundaes for dessert. Amena, you, and Maria will sleep in Molly's room. Banta, you will sleep in Max's room. Now, why don't you all go change your clothes? Max, you stay with me, please."

The four children took off quickly to change. Max was too little to keep up with them. "Come on, little man, why don't we both get our pajamas on together," Payton suggested, picking him up and tossing him on her shoulder like a sack of potatoes, drawing giggles from him.

"Before you leave, how about a kiss?" Reina requested with a smile. First Max, then Payton kissed her, and then they headed down the hall while Reina began preparations for dinner.

Dinner went seamlessly, all five children visited and enjoyed their pizza. Dessert was even more popular, as the children were allowed to make their own sundae. After putting the dishes in the dishwasher, they all went into the living room. Payton had promised to tell a story, and Maria, Amena, and Banta were very excited. They had heard her stories before.

“All right, Maria, can you explain to Max and Molly how this works?”

“You think of something you want in the story and Payton tells it.”

“Right. Now how about if Banta starts?” Banta was snuggled up to Reina, who had Max on her lap. Molly and the girls were seated on the floor.

“I’ll start!” Banta shrieked.

“Okay, Banta, what do you want in the story?”

“A monkey!” Payton grinned. Between Banta and Max everything was about monkeys.

“Okay. There once was a monkey who lived in the forest all by himself and he was very lonely. What’s next? How about Molly, what do you want in the story?”

“A mermaid.”

The story continued as each child chose something to put in it. As Payton listened to each request she wove a story of magic and friendship, with mermaids, butterflies, a princess, a monkey, and Max’s fish. She had the children giggling and then sitting quiet with anticipation until the very end.

“The end,” Payton stated with a smile.

“Another one!” Banta requested.

“Not tonight, Banta. It’s time for you to crawl into bed.”

The five children went to bed with very little fuss, and Reina and Payton sat together on the couch enjoying the silence while the children drifted off to sleep.

“You are quite a story-teller.” Reina leaned into Payton.

“It’s something my mother used to do with me.”

“The kids and I loved it.” Reina snuggled up to Payton. “Now, I want to talk to you about your worries about leaving.”

“There’s nothing to talk about. I know I have to leave on Sunday and it makes me sad.” Payton clasped Reina’s hands in her own.

“It makes me sad too, love, but I know you’re coming back as soon as you possibly can. I trust you, Payton. Now you need to trust me. I’m going to miss you terribly but we will be together forever.”

“Reina, for the first time in my life I am totally and magically in love. The miracle of it is, that you are in love with me and you come with two beautiful kids and another one on the way. I don’t want to miss any time with you.” Payton’s look of love melted Reina’s already brimming heart.

“Payton, that is the most perfect thing you could say to me.” Reina kissed her thoroughly and then held her tightly. They sat quietly in each other’s arms, content to hold each other for the rest of the evening. It was quite awhile before Banta’s crying from Max’s bedroom disturbed them.

“That’s Banta. He has nightmares once in awhile.”

“I had better go to him.” Reina rushed into the bedroom and picked up the frightened little boy. With soft words and rocking, she slowly soothed the little boy’s fears as he clung to her. Payton watched from the doorway while Reina worked her own form of magic. Banta slowly relaxed and slipped back into sleep, cradled in Reina’s arms, love and gentleness pushing his horrible nightmare away. She lay the sleeping child back down under the covers and quietly left the room.

Payton took her hand as they walked down the hall together. “He doesn’t have nightmares too often anymore, but once in awhile he will have a bad one. He still thinks he is in danger here. I think it’s going to take a long time for him to forget all the bad things he has seen.”

“That sweet little boy. It’s so sad, what he had to go through.”

“Lindy and Tamara are helping him heal.”

“He couldn’t have two better people to take care of him.”

“Speaking of good people, I think you’re a very good person.”

“I think you’re a little prejudiced.” Reina nuzzled her as they entered the bedroom.

“Of course I am.” Payton grinned, slowly removing Reina’s clothes. The two of them were one minute playful and the next overwhelmed with passion. They made love joyously, but also with a sense of impending deadline. Then they both fell into exhausted sleep, their bodies still tightly entwined.

The alarm woke them both early, and they immediately dressed and fed all five children before dropping some off at school and Max and Molly off at the babysitter’s.

It wasn’t long before Reina and a very nervous Payton sat in the front room of the doctor’s office waiting for Reina’s appointment.

“Are you sure you want me to be in there with you?”

“I’m sure. Now, relax, honey.” Reina smiled patiently.

“Reina Landers, please follow me.” Payton wiped her moist hands on her slacks as she trailed behind them. She wasn’t sure what to expect and she was so nervous. While she followed Reina and the nurse down the hall, her stomach churned. They entered the exam room and the nurse directed Reina to disrobe and put on the exam gown. After a blood pressure test, pulse, and temperature, they were left to wait for the doctor. Reina sat on the examination table, Payton on the chair next to her holding her hand. Reina bent and kissed Payton softly and then looked at her with a smile. A knock at the door startled them both.

“Hello, Reina, how are you feeling?” A woman in a white lab coat entered the room, stethoscope in hand.

“Fine, Doctor Levine. This is my partner, Payton Bender. I’d like her to be here for the examination.”

“That’s great. It’s nice to meet you, Payton. Reina, why don’t you lay down on the table while I explain what I’m going to do.”

After a brief explanation, the doctor began her examination. Payton held Reina's hand the whole time, watching Reina's face for any sign of discomfort. "Well, Reina, everything looks according to plan. You should be putting on some weight, and I want you to take the vitamins I gave you the last time you were here."

"I am taking them and I feel terrific."

"I think that might be due to more than just the vitamins." Doctor Levine winked at Payton. "Do either of you have any questions?"

Neither one did, so the doctor reminded Reina to make another appointment in a month and then left.

"See, that wasn't so bad," Reina teased as she hugged a relieved Payton.

"I'll get the hang of this," Payton promised with a kiss.

"As long as you are here with me that's all that matters."

"I'll always be with you," Payton pledged as they stared lovingly at each other.

The two of them did some grocery shopping and went out to lunch, before picking up the children. The four of them spent the afternoon swimming and then had an early dinner. It was a nice quiet evening and, after the children were tucked into bed, Reina and Payton cuddled in their own bed, reading books. It was a night of hugging, soft kisses, and holding hands. Touching each other, and gazing lovingly in each other's eyes felt perfect. They went to sleep early tucked against one another, Payton's hands stretched over Reina's stomach protectively, while Reina's hands lay on top of Payton's holding them tightly against her.

It was still dark out when Payton woke up. She had turned over on to her side and Reina was snug up against her back, her arm around Payton's waist. She rolled over and watched Reina sleep, her blond hair loosely tied back and tossed over her bare shoulder. She was so beautiful that Payton held her breath for a moment just in case it wasn't real.

“Hey beautiful.” Reina opened her eyes and returned Payton’s gaze.

“You’re the beautiful one.” Payton’s finger traced Reina’s lips. Reina sucked on Payton’s finger before finding her lips. What was soft and quiet the night before was urgent and frantic, as the two made love wildly and completely before going back to sleep, once again content in each other’s arms.

Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday slid by as Payton and Reina shared their hopes and dreams, made plans, and grew closer together. On Thursday, Payton’s interview at Lindy’s company went better than expected. Not only did they offer a position to Payton that sounded extremely interesting, they had also offered her a substantial raise, a vested pension plan, three weeks of vacation, and offered to pay relocation expenses. Reina and Payton discussed it at great length before Payton called on Friday afternoon to accept the offer. She agreed to start in four weeks. It was frightening and wonderful, and one more step closer to moving.

The rest of their time together they played and talked with Max and Molly, going on long walks, and spending every minute together. Friday night they waited to have dinner until after the children went to sleep, and celebrated Payton’s new job with a candlelit dinner for two. It was filled with kisses, hand holding, and some tears as they realized Payton was leaving in two days. They decided to take the children to the aquarium on Saturday and make it a family day. Payton wanted to spend the whole day with them. She would miss them terribly. That evening she had gave them both a bath, dressed them in their pajamas, kissed them, and tucked them in.

After their romantic dinner, Reina and Payton took a shower together, making love while dripping wet, and then again after crawling into bed together. They whispered and giggled until early in the morning before making love with each other again. Sleeping together had become as natural to Reina and Payton as breathing.

Even though it had only been two weeks, it was like they'd known each other forever.

The aquarium was a hit with everyone as they spent four hours wandering through the tanks and windows of fish. Payton took loads of pictures of Reina and the children to remember the day. They ate lunch at a small restaurant, sitting outside to enjoy the warm spring day. After another two hours of wandering in and out of small shops, they headed for home with two very tired children.

"I'm going to get them dressed for bed so Mrs. Lenahan won't have to deal with changing their clothes."

"I'll do it, if you want." Payton wanted to spend as much time as possible with Max and Molly.

"Go ahead, honey. I'll go take my shower and wash my hair. I want to look my best tonight. It is our first dance together."

"You'll look terrific as usual." Payton kissed her.

"I can't wait to see you in your suit."

"I'll take a shower when you're done, and you'll just have to wait an hour or so."

"I'm looking forward to this evening and dancing with you all night." Reina headed down the hallway to her bedroom.

"Come on, little man, Molly mermaid, let's go get your pajamas on." The two giggling children hung off Payton's arms as she dragged them down the hall to their rooms.

Forty-five minutes later Reina found Payton in Max's room reading them a story. Reina stood silently in the doorway for several minutes before the children noticed her. She joined the three of them while Payton finished the story.

"Honey, you'd better go take a shower. Tamara and Lindy will be here in an hour."

"Okay, Reina."

"Okay kiddos, let's get dinner started." Reina and the children headed for the kitchen where Reina fixed grilled cheese sandwiches and soup for them. She was sitting with them while they ate when

Mrs. Lenahan arrived. She was a matronly, older woman, with a ready smile, and a soft, gentle voice. She was a retired teacher, who had recently become a widow. Her two children were grown and lived across the continent from her, so Max and Molly were her surrogate grandchildren. It was a perfect situation, the children loved her, and she returned their love.

“Reina, I’ll watch the kids, you go get ready.”

“Thanks, Ruth.” She kissed both kids on the top of their heads. “You guys tell Ruth what we did today.”

While the children both spoke at once, Reina raced down the hall. She had thirty minutes to dress. As she entered the bedroom she stopped short at the sight of Payton in her costume.

“Wow, you look terrific!” Payton had the bright yellow pants on and a black body suit that hugged her breasts. She was just putting on the suspenders.

“Thanks. You’d better hurry.” Payton grinned.

“I know. But Payton, you look so sexy.” Reina’s eyes roved over Payton’s body as she walked toward her.

“We don’t have time,” Payton moaned, her eyes caressing Reina.

“Damn. Honey, would you go get the wine out of the refrigerator please? Glasses are on the kitchen table.”

“Okay, and Reina?”

“Yes.”

“I love you.” Payton smiled.

“I love you, sweetheart.” Reina went to Payton and kissed her. “Now go. It’s hard enough keeping my hands off of you and I need to get dressed.”

Payton grabbed her suit jacket and hat and headed into the living room. The kids and Mrs. Lenahan were seated on the couch reading a story. Payton introduced herself again and then opened the wine bottle as Reina had asked. A brief knock on the door preceded Tamara and Lindy’s entrance into the house. They both looked very cute in their colorful suits and matching hats.

“Hello, guys,” Lindy said as she hugged Payton hello.

“You both look fantastic!”

“You look pretty good yourself,” Tamara grinned. “Is that shirt sprayed on?”

“It is a little snug,” Payton admitted.

“And perfect.” Reina spoke from the living room hall. “Why don’t we go into the kitchen and have a glass of wine before we go?”

Payton looked at her watch; six forty-five, and the limousine was due any minute. The four costumed adults went into the kitchen and Payton poured them all a glass of wine.

“A toast.” Tamara lifted her glass. “To Reina and Payton. One month from now may the four of us be sharing a glass of wine in this very same place.”

The four toasted and shared a sip of wine as the doorbell rang. “I’ll get the door,” Reina announced, a puzzled look on her face.

Payton and Lindy shared a grin before following Reina and Tamara into the living room. Reina opened the front door to a man wearing a tuxedo.

“Reina Landers?”

“Yes?” She was very bewildered.

“Your limousine awaits, ma’am.” The tuxedo clad gentleman, elegantly bowed.

“My limousine?” Reina turned to Payton. “Do you know about this?”

“Yes.” Payton grinned.

“You did this?” Reina laughed happily.

“I did.” Payton could see by the look on Reina’s face she was pleased. “I wanted tonight to be perfect.”

“This is so fun.” Reina hugged Payton.

“It’s a special night,” Payton whispered. “Happy Mother’s Day.”

“Ladies, shall we depart?” Lindy grinned widely.

“You two go ahead. Payton and I need to kiss the children good-bye,” Reina suggested.

“We’ll meet you in the limo.” Tamara and Lindy followed the driver to the car.

Payton put away the wine and placed the glasses in the dishwasher, then joined Reina in kissing Max and Molly goodnight.

“Sleep tight little man. Goodnight Molly mermaid.” Max and Molly affectionately kissed Payton goodnight.

“Ruth, we’ll be back around one-thirty or two. Feel free to curl up on the couch and sleep.”

“Have a good time, Reina. It was nice meeting you again, Payton.”

“Nice seeing you, too.”

“You guys take care of Ruth.” Reina waved goodbye.

She and Payton walked to the limo, a shiny gray Lincoln, where the driver opened the door for them. Tamara and Lindy were kissing in the elegant leather seats.

“Mind if we join you?” Payton teased as she and Reina climbed in.

“I believe these are for you.” Payton handed her a bouquet of twelve long stem red roses that were waiting on the leather seat.

“Oh my, these are beautiful, Payton.” Reina kissed Payton softly. “I love that you did this.”

“How about a glass of champagne for the two of you?” Lindy offered to pour as the limo pulled away from the house. They had reservations for dinner at seven-fifteen.

Dinner was a candlelit meal filled with lots of laughter and friendly banter. Tamara and Lindy were going to the airport with Reina and her children to see Payton off, so they avoided talking about her leaving. No one wanted to disturb the festive atmosphere.

The four arrived at the dance thirty minutes after it started but the hall was already packed with hundreds of costumed women. They were meeting friends of Tamara, Lindy, and Reina’s, who had reserved a large table for the group.

“Everyone looks terrific. I can’t believe how crowded it is.” Tamara stared around the room. It was filled with hundreds of women in all

manner of costumes. Fifties music and jitterbugging couples made it very festive.

Lindy spied their friends at the table and grabbed Tamara's hand. "Ladies, follow me." Lindy led them through the maze of dancing women.

"It's about time." Alice, a long time friend of Tamara and Reina's, exclaimed as she stood up and enveloped Tamara in a hug. "You guys look terrific!"

"Thanks, so do you. Where is Joni?"

"Gone to rustle up some drinks." Alice and Joni had been together for eight years and had two children. "Hi Lindy. How are you doing, doll?"

"Good, Alice. How are Joni and the kids?"

"Terrific, fantastic, wonderful." Alice always responded to everything with enthusiastic optimism. She loved her life. "Now, who is this babe?"

Payton blushed bright red, as Alice looked her up and down. "This is Payton Bender, my girlfriend." Reina proudly put her arm around her.

"Payton, it's nice to meet you. So how long has this been going on? Reina, we need to talk." Alice took Reina by the arm.

"We'll talk later." Reina promised, holding tightly to Payton's hand.

The dance was enormously fun. It was obvious that the group they sat with was out to have a good time, and they did. They talked, laughed, and danced until well after midnight.

"Look." Lindy pointed to Reina and Payton on the dance floor as they danced. Both had taken their jackets and hats off and, while Payton had on her black body suit, Reina had chosen to wear the vest without a shirt on underneath. Their bodies were pressed against one another as they moved to a slow, sultry, love song. It was obvious to anyone who looked at them, that they only had eyes for each

other. Reina's hand rested on Payton's cheek and their faces were tucked against one another's.

"They are so cute together." Tamara smiled as she watched them. "I've never known two people more perfect for each other besides you and I."

"I can't wait to get home." Lindy wrapped her arms around Tamara's neck.

"I'll make it worth it." Tamara kissed her thoroughly.

"I know you will." Lindy grinned.

Payton and Reina returned to the table and sat down, joining in on the conversation and thoroughly enjoying themselves for about twenty minutes until a tall, slender, very pretty woman approached Reina.

"Reina, you look wonderful. How are you?"

Payton felt Reina stiffen as she turned to the woman. "Hello, Lana, how are you?"

"Good. It's been awhile. How are Max and Molly?"

"They are fine." Reina was uncharacteristically cool as she spoke.

"I was hoping to see you tonight." Lana put her hand on Reina's shoulder. Payton's stomach flipped as she watched the woman flirt with Reina.

"Lana, don't!" Reina glared at the woman. Lana stood up straight, still smiling at Reina. She wasn't going to be easily discouraged. She liked Reina a lot. She just wasn't sure what she thought of being with a woman who had children. It had been a big issue when she and Reina dated.

"Reina, I'd like to stop by and see you and the kids."

"No, Lana. I don't want you to stop by." Reina reached for Payton's hand. "Lana, I would like you to meet my girlfriend, Payton. Payton, this is Lana Miller."

"Hello." Payton acknowledged the woman.

"Hi." Lana's expression didn't change. "Well I'd better get back to my table. It was nice to see you, Reina." Lana wasn't worried about

Reina having a new girlfriend. She had great faith in her ability to get Reina's attention again. Dating Reina was an appealing idea and she wasn't going to let a little thing like a new girlfriend stand in her way.

As the woman walked away, Payton watched Reina carefully. "Are you okay?"

Reina smiled at Payton. "I am more than okay. I'm sorry I overreacted to Lana."

"Is she the woman you were last with?"

"She and I dated for several months. I told you about her. We parted company after I mentioned that I was planning to have a third child. She doesn't like young children."

"Do you still care about her?"

"Honey, I haven't cared about Lana for a long time. And I love you. I am totally and absolutely in love with you." Reina slid her arms around Payton's waist. "For the first time in my life I feel complete. You already are my family. You love me, and I know you love Max and Molly."

Payton's eyes filled with tears. Reina took Payton's hand and placed it on her stomach. "Payton, this child will be ours together." Reina kissed her softly.

"I love you, Reina." Payton kissed her in return. "It's going to be so hard to leave tomorrow."

"Don't think about it tonight, love. Please." Payton hugged her tightly. It was all she could think about.

Just before two o'clock, the four of them said goodbye to the group of women they had sat with and went out the front door to the waiting limo. It was a quiet group that made the thirty-minute drive home. Reina and Payton sat wrapped in each other's arms saying very little to each other. Talking was unnecessary. Lindy and Tamara cuddled and whispered occasionally to each other, very aware of how important the evening was to Payton and Reina.

Once home, Payton paid the limousine driver while Reina took care of the babysitter. Lindy and Tamara hugged the two of them

goodbye, confirmed the time to pick them up for the airport, and left for home. Reina shut the door behind them and turned to face Payton. They stared at each other for several minutes before Reina spoke so softly Payton could barely hear her.

“Payton, I have something I want to give you before you leave.” She took Payton by the hand and led her down the hall into the bedroom. “Please sit.”

Payton watched the beautiful blond woman walk to the dresser and take something out of the top drawer. Payton couldn’t help but feel wonder and awe that this woman wanted to be with her.

“I wanted to give you something that would remind you that your family is waiting for you.” Reina kneeled in front of Payton and handed her a slender cardboard box. Payton leaned over and kissed Reina, savoring the taste and feel of her soft lips.

“I don’t need anything to remind me of what I’m returning to.”

“I want you to have this.” Reina smiled at her very sexy girlfriend.

Payton opened the box and pulled out a small silver plated picture frame. She unfolded it to find two pictures encased in the frame. On one side was a picture of Payton with Max on her lap and Molly with her arm around Payton’s neck. All three were laughing. The second picture was of all four of them at the zoo. Reina was standing next to Payton with Molly in front of her, while Max sat happily on Payton’s shoulders. It was a perfect snapshot of the four of them. They looked like a family. The frame was engraved at the bottom.

“To Payton, with love from your family.” It also had a date engraved next to the words.

“The date is the day we all met.” Reina placed her hands on either side of Payton’s face. Payton couldn’t speak as tears rolled down her cheeks. “Honey, don’t cry, please.” Reina kissed her eyelids, her cheeks, and her lips.

“This is perfect,” Payton whispered. “It is so perfect.”

“We love you, sweetie.” Reina kissed her again, and again, murmuring her love for Payton.

“I need to make love with you.” Payton began to undress Reina.

“We have the rest of the night,” Reina promised as she helped Payton out of her clothes.

Payton was overwhelmed with a need to love the woman who now filled her heart and soul. Her hands and mouth covered every inch of Reina’s body as she swiftly removed the last of her clothes.

“I love your hands on my body, the way that you make me feel.” Reina and Payton tumbled onto the bed.

“I’m going to be touching you for the rest of your life.”

Their lovemaking was frantic one minute and slow and languid the next as Payton and Reina loved each other for hours. It was early morning before they lay quietly in each other’s arms.

“Reina, the kids will be up any minute.”

“We had better get dressed.”

“I hate to hide this gorgeous body.” Payton brushed her hand across Reina’s breasts down to her stomach, drawing a sigh from Reina.

“I love what you do to me, Payton.”

Payton just smiled, memorizing how Reina looked at that moment. Her blond hair was loosely pinned up, her skin still flushed from their lovemaking, her eyes large and clear, and her lips full and rosy from kissing. Payton’s eyes traveled the full length of Reina’s body, admiring her full breasts, and curved hips. Her hand still rested on Reina’s stomach, stretched flat and stroking her skin.

“I try to imagine how you’ll look when you’re farther along in your pregnancy.”

“Fat, crabby, and fat.” Reina chuckled.

“I can’t wait.” Payton grinned as she placed gentle kisses on Reina’s stomach. “I’m going to love watching you change as the baby gets bigger.”

Reina placed her hand against Payton’s cheek to get her attention. “I am so lucky I found you. I can’t wait until you’re back here where you belong, here with me and the kids.”

“Soon, it will be soon,” Payton promised, turning her face into Reina’s hand and kissing her palm. “Reina, do you believe in getting married?”

“Do you mean like between you and me?”

“Yes.” Payton’s heart beat loudly in her chest as she watched Reina carefully.

“Are you asking me to marry you?”

“Yes.” Payton held her breath.

“Yes. My answer is yes.” Reina smiled at a very nervous Payton.

Payton released the breath she had been holding. “When?”

“As soon as you return.” Reina pulled Payton into her arms.

“It will have to be after Lindy and Tamara have their ceremony.”

“One day after.” Reina smiled as she kissed Payton thoroughly.

Twenty minutes later found them still in each other’s arms kissing. “We have to get dressed. The kids will be in here any minute.” Payton reminded her reluctantly.

“I know.” Reina sat up slowly and reached for her nightgown while Payton slipped into her pajamas. Not a moment too soon, as Max burst into the room ten minutes later. Molly was not far behind, and the four lounged in bed for over an hour before Max demanded to be fed.

“Come on, little man, we’re going to make pancakes for Molly and your mother.”

Payton and Max headed for the kitchen, while Molly and Reina made the bed and cleaned up before joining them. They enjoyed their breakfast of animal-shaped pancakes, and then Payton and Max took a shower and got dressed. Payton also took the time to finish her packing before finding the three of them in the backyard. They had several more hours before Payton had to head to the airport, and she wanted to spend it quietly with Reina and the children.

As the time drew closer for Payton to leave, she became silent. Molly sat on her lap as they read a book. Payton hugged her tightly,

her heart in her throat. Reina recognized the difficulty Payton was struggling with and took her hand, squeezing gently.

“It’ll be okay, honey.” Payton couldn’t respond without crying so she just squeezed Reina’s hand in return. It was exactly how Tamara, Lindy, and their kids found them when they arrived.

“Come on, Payton, let’s go get your things,” Reina suggested, taking her by the hand again. “Lindy and Tamara, will you watch the kids for us?”

“Sure, honey.” Lindy and Tamara watched Reina and Payton enter the house.

“Poor Payton,” Tamara whispered. “At least Reina has us and the kids.”

“It’s going to be very difficult for her. I know how it feels,” Lindy reminded her.

“I know you do, honey, and I’m so sorry you had to go through this.” Tamara hugged Lindy tightly. She would never forgive herself for the pain she put Lindy through.

Reina and Payton reached the bedroom and, before Payton touched her packed bags, Reina caught Payton by her arm and pulled her into a tight embrace. They hugged silently for several minutes and then Payton began to quietly weep as she held Reina. Reina also began to cry, tears streaming down her face.

“I can’t leave,” Payton whispered.

“I don’t want you to leave.”

Reina and Payton kissed slowly, softly, sweetly. It was an exchange of love, a commitment. Payton looked into Reina’s face, loving her with her eyes, before stepping out of the embrace. She picked up her bags and took one last look around the room, before she and Reina walked back down the hall to rejoin the others.

“I’ll go put my bags in the car,” Payton suggested.

“Let me help.” Tamara took one of Payton’s bags and led the way to the van.

“Here, doll.” Tamara took the bag from Payton. “Honey, a month is not a long time to wait for a lifetime.”

“You’re right. it’s just so damn hard. What if she changes her mind after I leave?”

“Oh Payton, Reina isn’t going to change her mind. She is crazy in love with you.”

The rest of the group came out to get in the van, and they headed for the airport. Payton and Reina sat Max between the two of them, their arms stretched across the back of the seat, fingers clasped together. It was a short, quiet trip, and they parked and herded the large crowd inside. Payton checked her bags and then put Max on her shoulders to walk to the gate. They hadn’t allowed much time for their group to make it through the airport and, by the time they arrived at the gate, the plane was loading.

Payton hugged and kissed Tamara and Lindy and all of their children. The five of them then left Payton with Reina, Max, and Molly.

“Molly, you keep painting your pictures. You can send me one.” Payton already had three in her bag and one of Max’s.

“I will, Payton.”

Payton knelt down in front of her. “You take good care of your mom until I get back.”

“Okay. I love you, Payton.”

“I love you, doll.” Payton kissed and hugged her tightly. She then turned to Max.

“Hey little man, come here.” Max threw his arms around Payton’s neck. “Be good, little buddy.” She kissed him goodbye.

Lindy came over and took Max and Molly with her so Reina and Payton could say goodbye alone.

“Call me when you get home,” Reina requested, taking Payton’s hands in her own.

“I promise, as soon as I get there.”

“I’ll call you every night.”

“I’ll miss you so much.”

“I love you, Payton.”

“I love you.” They hugged tightly, unwilling to let go.

Last call was made for her flight and Payton had to go. They kissed quickly and then pulled apart. Payton held onto Reina’s hand for a moment longer, gazing at her face.

“One month,” Reina whispered.

“One month,” Payton promised. She dropped Reina’s hand and headed toward the gate entrance. She then turned one last time and smiled at Reina and waved to everyone else. She turned away and walked down the long hallway to enter the plane. She was close to tears, her heart already aching, and just wanted to get to her seat.

Reina stared at the empty gate entrance a little longer, wiping the tears from her face. “Come, on Reina. Let’s go, doll.” Tamara put her arm around her. Reina took her children’s hands and went to watch the airplane taxi away from the gate.

After the plane left, all eight headed out of the airport for the drive home. “Reina, do you want Lindy and I to come in for awhile?”

“No Tamara, I think I need some alone time. But I appreciate the offer.”

“Honey, if you need anything, please call.”

“I will, and thanks so much for taking us all to the airport.”

“Oh honey, it was no problem.”

Reina spent the afternoon cleaning her already clean house and washing clothes. She did anything to keep herself occupied, to keep from thinking about Payton and the month ahead of her. She just couldn’t shake the feeling of loneliness. She had just sat the children down for their dinner when the telephone rang.

“Hello.”

“Hi.” It was Payton.

“Hi, how was your flight?”

“Long. God, Reina, I miss you so much.” Payton’s voice cracked.

“I miss you, too.”

“One month. Maybe I can get things taken care of faster than that.”

“Honey, you have a lot to do.”

“I know, but I can’t even think without you and the kids.”

“Payton, we will be here, love. You just get everything taken care of as quickly as possible and come back to us.”

“I will, honey. Kiss Max and Molly goodnight for me.”

“I will, love.”

“Love you.”

“I love you.”

“Goodbye. I’ll call you tomorrow at work.”

“Okay, and Payton? I’ll miss sleeping with you, waking up with you, but most of all I’ll miss your smile.”

“Reina.” Payton’s heart pounded loudly upon hearing her words.

“Goodbye.”

Payton hung up the telephone and looked around her condominium. It just didn’t feel like home anymore. She immediately unpacked and went through her mail. She then made a list of things she had to do. First, she had to give two weeks’ notice at work and put her condominium on the market. Thankfully, she had very little furniture and things to move. She had never gotten around to replacing everything she had left with her old relationship. It had been easier to just walk away. She added finding a mover to her list. She figured it would take a small truck.

By the time she had finished, Payton had a long list of tasks to take care of. Glancing at her watch, she was surprised to see how late it had gotten.

She laid out her clothes for work and changed into her pajamas. She wasn’t looking forward to going to bed. In less than two weeks she’d gotten used to sleeping with Reina. Now, the prospect of sleeping without her made Payton extremely sad. She grabbed a book and crawled into bed. It was almost an hour later when the telephone at

her elbow rang and she picked it up, puzzled as to who knew she was home.

“Hello?”

“Hi, sweetie.”

“Hi, honey.” Payton sighed. It was Reina.

“I needed to hear your voice before I went to sleep. Payton, I can’t sleep without you beside me. I miss you so much.” Reina’s voice cracked with emotion.

“I can’t tell you how glad I am to hear your voice. I can’t sleep either.”

“I don’t care what it takes. I want to go to sleep with you by my side every night.”

“I feel the same way. I’m giving notice tomorrow at work and I will contact a real estate agent to sell my place. I’ll also start packing my things tomorrow night. I should be able to get movers here by next week. Do you have enough room for my things?”

“Honey, I will make room. We will sort everything out later.”

“Reina, I love you.”

“I love you.”

“Call me tomorrow morning at work.”

“I will sweetie, now go to sleep.”

“I kissed Max and Molly for you.”

“Thank you. I wish I could kiss you right now.”

“Soon, very soon.”

“Goodnight.”

Payton placed the telephone down. She turned her light off and closed her eyes. She might not fall asleep quickly but she could certainly dream about Reina and the children.

## CHAPTER 6

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By mid-morning Payton was swamped with work. Not only did her resignation cause a lot of excitement and discussion, but also Payton had promised her boss and good friend, Tim Noble, that she would spend her two weeks training and transferring all of her projects before she left. It was a very tall order. He had tried to convince her to stay but once she told him about her new family, he gave up and congratulated her. Now she was up to her ears in work.

She took a little break and called Reina at work. She answered almost immediately, and they visited for a few moments before hanging up. Payton had promised to call her later that evening. Payton was meeting the real estate agent at her place at five-thirty. She also had an appointment on Saturday morning with the moving company. She had accomplished quite a lot in one morning.

The day was extremely long and still not over. She was meeting a real estate agent at her condominium and it looked like she just arrived. "Hello, my name is Payton Bender. You must be the real estate agent."

"Yes, Mary Neal. Your place is beautiful."

"Thank you. I told you on the telephone that I'm moving in four weeks, so what do you think?"

“In this market the condominium should sell rapidly. It’ll take thirty days for the sale to go through but I already have four people interested in it.”

“Wow, that is fast.”

“Do you have any problem to my showing your place tomorrow night?”

“No, not at all. What time?”

“How about the same time, five-thirty?”

“Okay.”

“Now, can you show me around? And then we can talk price.”

Payton was actually amazed at the price the agent suggested. If everything worked out she would make a substantial profit over what she had paid. After the agent left, Payton headed for the local grocery store to stock up on food and boxes. She returned and fixed herself a simple dinner, and began packing the things she was going to move. She labored for over an hour before a knock on the door interrupted her work.

“Mitch, come on in.” A slim, dark haired man, with a full moustache, and grin to match his twinkling eyes stood in her doorway.

“Hey girl, welcome home.” He hugged Payton.

“Thanks Mitch. Where is Ben?”

“He’s working out. He has to keep his girlish figure.” Mitch grinned. There was nothing girlish about Ben’s body. He was a fanatic about keeping himself slim and trim. He and Mitch were Payton’s neighbors and close friends. Ben was a dark blond six foot three inch well-toned man, who took pride in his physical shape. He and Mitch had been together for over six years and were a solid and loving couple.

“Are you packing?” The look on Mitch’s face was one of surprise and puzzlement.

“Yes. Mitch, I met someone on vacation and I’m moving to Long Beach, California.”

“You’re kidding?” He looked at her with disbelief.

"I'm not kidding. Her name is Reina and she has two children, Max and Molly, and another one on the way."

"You are kidding?"

"Quit saying that." Payton grinned at him. She understood his shock. "I am extremely happy."

"I'm glad for you, Payton. But it's just so sudden."

"I know, but it's what I want. I have a picture of them." Payton quickly retrieved her framed snapshots and proudly showed them to Mitch.

"She's beautiful, and so are her kids."

"She is gorgeous, and she loves me, Mitch."

"What's not to love?" Mitch hugged the obviously ecstatic Payton. "So, when are you moving?"

"As soon as possible. I start a new job in four weeks and I gave notice today at work."

"Wow, you work fast. What can Ben and I do to help?"

"Keep me from going crazy."

"I am serious, girl. What can we do?"

"You can help me pack. I want to be able to move everything in two to three weeks."

"Okay, doll. Let me go leave a note for Ben and I'll be right back."

Payton and Mitch were joined an hour later by Ben, who pitched in and helped pack until they ran out of boxes. The three were taking a break when the telephone rang. Mitch was closest so he answered.

"Payton's house, Mitch speaking." He grinned at Payton and Ben as he spoke. "Is this Reina? Yes, she's here. My partner Ben and I are helping her pack. We live down the hall."

Payton looked on, amused, while Mitch carried on a conversation with Reina. "She showed us a picture of you and your children. Now we know why she's in such a hurry to move. How about I give you our number in case you can't get a hold of Payton?"

After Mitch spoke to Reina a few more minutes, he handed the telephone to Payton. "For some reason she wants to talk to you."

Mitch grinned. "Come on, let's go home, Ben. Payton, pick up some more boxes and we'll finish packing tomorrow."

"Thanks guys, I will." Payton waited until they left before getting on the telephone. "Hi."

"Hi, yourself. How are you doing?"

"Not bad, actually. The real estate agent is showing the condo tomorrow night, and she seems to think I might sell it right way, for considerably more than what I paid for it."

"Good. I'm glad, Payton. I feel bad that I can't help you with any of this stuff."

"Honey, you do help, just by talking to me."

"Speaking of which, I have two very excited people who want to talk to you."

"Payton." It was Molly.

"Hi, Molly. How are you, honey?"

The question brought a wave of sentences from a very excited little girl. Payton could barely respond as Molly told her about everything. "I painted a picture of a frog in school and Mom says to say goodbye so Max can talk."

"Bye Molly, I love you."

"Bye, Payton. I love you gobs."

There was silence on the other end until Payton heard Reina in the background. "Say hello, Max."

"Hi."

"Hi, little man. How are you, buddy?"

"Payton, I love you."

"I love you, sweetie."

There was a period of silence again and then Reina came back on the line. "He doesn't have much to say, Payton, but you should see the smile on his face. He and Molly miss you, and so do I."

"I miss you guys, too. I'm getting things done pretty quickly. I might be able to get there in about three weeks."

“That’s great honey! I can’t wait. Max, quit teasing Molly. Payton, I need to put these two monkeys to bed. Tomorrow night I’m meeting with the contractor to discuss the remodel. We’re going to need a lot more room.”

“Kiss the kids for me. And Reina, I love you.”

“I love you, too. I’ll call you tomorrow.”

The rest of the week flew by for Payton, as her life took on a mind of its own. Amazingly, she had already sold her place, and work was crazy as she helped get everything handed off to someone else. By Friday, she was exhausted, but she spent the evening packing. Saturday evening she was going out with her small circle of friends to say goodbye. It was after ten before she’d gotten ready for bed and called Reina.

“Hi.”

“Hello, honey, how are you doing?”

“I’m exhausted. I have everything I own in a box except what I need for another week or two. I should have a date picked out for the movers tomorrow. I’m going to set it up so they arrive after I get there.”

“Honey, I can take the day off to meet the movers. I’ve cleared out the garage and we can put everything in there and take our time to put things away. Did you get a copy of the remodel plans?”

“Yes, and everything looks terrific. Do you need me to send a check for them to get started?”

“No, honey. We’ll worry about that when you get here.”

“Reina, I have the money.”

“Payton, I’m not worried. You just concentrate on moving and I’ll worry about the remodel.”

“Okay, but Reina, please don’t work too hard. I don’t want anything to happen to you or the baby.”

“Our baby, and I’m fine. I promise I’ll take it easy.”

“I love you.”

“Only three more weeks. And I love you.”

“Sleep tight, honey.”

“Bye.”

Payton stood in the front entrance to her condominium, having just put her name to an agreement committing a large sum money and a date to be moved. It made her stomach churn as she thought about what she was doing. “Ma’am, here is the contract, and we will pick everything up a week from Wednesday. We can deliver it Friday afternoon.”

“Great, thanks.” Payton couldn’t help but feel a twinge of fear. Was she making the right decision? She knew she loved Reina, but was it enough to give up her job and home? She was having huge doubts when she thought about what she was doing.

Payton was well on her way to being moved. Her place was sold, her things were being moved, and her job was all but over. It made her feel a little strange, scared, and lonely. She was doing what she needed to do, but that didn’t make the changes any less terrifying. She called Reina before she left to meet her friends for reassurance and promised to call her Sunday morning. Just hearing Reina’s voice helped her settle her nerves and she felt better as she met her friends for dinner. It was hard to share with them why she was moving. They had no idea how important it was for her to try to make it work with Reina and her children.

It was after midnight before she got home. There had been a lot of reminiscing and a few tears but she’d had a wonderful time. She would miss her friends very much. They were her support system and she wasn’t sure how she would feel without them. She readied herself for bed and crawled under the covers, then reached for the telephone. She needed to talk to Reina.

“Hello.” Reina’s sleepy voice answered.

“I needed to hear your voice.”

“I’m glad you called, love. How was your dinner?”

“Fine, it was nice to see everyone and have a chance to say good-bye.”

“I wish I were there, honey. I know it’s hard.”

“I wish you were here, too.” Payton’s voice cracked. “I miss you so much. Reina, I’m scared.”

There was a long pause before Reina responded. “Are you having second thoughts about us?”

“No. I have no worries about us. I know I love you and your children. I’m just so nervous about moving.”

“Everything will be fine, love. Honey, I love you and miss you terribly. The kids talk about you all the time.”

“I miss you so much. I picked up all the pictures today. I have so many good ones of you and the kids. I’m making a photo album for all five kids and one for Tamara and Lindy. I also started one for you and me.”

“I can’t wait to see it, honey. Are you sure you are okay about all of this?”

“I’m fine, Reina. I’ll feel better once I get there. I’d better let you get some sleep.”

“I’ll call you tomorrow, and you can call me any time you want.” Reina’s voice was strained. She didn’t like what she was hearing from Payton. What if Payton changed her mind? For the first time in her life Reina had met someone she could really trust and love. She didn’t want to lose her.

“I’m going into work until about one.”

“I’ll call you around dinner time so you can talk to Max and Molly.”

“Okay, honey. I love you.”

“I love you.”

Payton didn’t get home from work until after four and felt like crawling into bed. She decided to call Reina, talk to her and the kids, and then climb under her covers. She needed a good night’s sleep. She dialed the number as she struggled out of her clothes. She was exhausted, scared, and very upset.

“Hello?” A woman’s voice jarred her into attention, especially since it wasn’t Reina’s.

“Is Reina there?”

“Can she call you back? She’s kind of busy right now.”

“Could you tell her Payton called?”

“Hello, Payton. It’s Lana. We met at the dance last weekend?”

“Hi, Lana.” Payton’s heart slammed in her chest.

“Reina’s cleaning up Max. He spilled spaghetti all over himself.”

“Just tell her I called.”

“I will. It might be awhile before she can call you.” Lana was going to try her hardest to keep Reina from calling at all.

Payton hung up the telephone and slumped onto her bed. What was Lana doing at Reina’s? What if Reina had changed her mind? Payton could have died at that moment, as she thought of all the reasons why Lana was there, none of them made her feel any better. She began to cry as she thought of what a mess she was in. She had sold her place and made arrangements to move her things. She moved too fast and now she was stuck. She decided to take a hot shower and crawl into bed. She needed to sleep. Before she could manage it there was a knock at her door. She went to answer it.

“Hey Ben, Mitch. Come on in.” Payton tried to hide her feelings from her friends. She couldn’t tell them everything was falling apart.

“Hello, doll. We brought you dinner. You look exhausted.”

“I am. I was just going to pop into the shower.”

“Go do that, honey. Mitch and I will get dinner ready.” Ben hugged her as he spoke.

“Thanks, guys. I appreciate this so much.” She became tearful.

“We know you do, honey. Now go take your shower and put your pajamas on. That’s an order.”

Payton didn’t argue as she headed for the bathroom and a shower. Within minutes she was soaking in the nice hot water. She tried not to think about Reina and the fact that Lana was at her home, but she couldn’t get it out of her mind. It was making her crazy.

“Payton looked upset,” Ben commented as he and Mitch set the table.

“She did. Maybe she’ll talk to us while we eat. She’s had a lot to do this week. She’s probably just overly tired.”

The telephone rang as they finished their preparations. “Hello,” Mitch answered.

“Hello, is Payton there?”

“She is in the shower. Is this Reina?”

“Yes.”

This is Mitch. Ben and I brought her dinner.”

“How is she doing, Mitch?”

“She is exhausted, scared, and in love.”

“I miss her so much. I need to see her.”

“You know there are things called airplanes, and they fly into Seattle quite often from California.”

“Do you think I should?” Reina sounded excited.

“Why don’t you surprise her? I could pick you up at the airport.”

“I’ll do that. Can I call you later once I’ve made all the arrangements? I’m not sure I can get someone to watch my children for the weekend.”

“Sure, doll. We will be up until ten or so.”

“Thank you, Mitch. Payton has wonderful friends.”

“We can’t wait to meet you.”

“Will you have Payton call me when she gets a chance?”

“Sure, doll.”

“That was Reina,” Mitch announced as Ben handed him a glass of wine.

“I figured that out.”

“She will be calling us later at home. She’s going to try and surprise Payton and come for a visit.”

“Good. Payton needs to see her.”

“Don’t say anything,” Mitch warned.

“I won’t.”

“I mean it, Ben. You’re horrible when it comes to keeping secrets.” Mitch grinned as he teased his good-looking boyfriend.

“I promise. Scout’s honor.”

“You were never a scout. You might have slept with a one, but you never were one.” Mitch kissed Ben as he chuckled.

“Hey, knock that stuff off,” Payton called as she entered the room. She had gotten a handle on her emotions for the moment.

“Come on, Payton. Sit down and eat. Reina called while you were in the shower. You are to call her.”

Payton looked at Mitch as she responded. “Okay.” Payton tried to hide how upset she was.

“Payton, what’s going on?” Ben asked, putting his arm around her.

“Reina’s ex-girlfriend answered the telephone when I called earlier.”

He sighed. “Then call her, Payton, and talk to her.”

“But what if she’s changed her mind?”

“She hasn’t changed her mind,” Mitch reassured her. “We’ll wait to eat until after you call her. Now go call.” He shoved her toward the telephone. Payton anxiously dialed the number and waited.

“Hello?” Reina answered the telephone.

“Hi.”

“Payton, I’m so glad to hear your voice. I’m sorry about Lana answering earlier. She just showed up at dinnertime. I didn’t invite her. I asked her to leave as soon as possible. I didn’t want her here.” Reina spoke quickly. She needed to make Payton understand.

“Why did she come over?”

Reina hesitated before answering. “She wanted to know how serious you and I are.”

“What did you tell her?” Payton’s heart pounded in her chest.

“That I am madly in love with you and we are getting married.”

“What did she say?”

“She wished us luck, honey. She won’t be coming over any more.” Reina had made it clear that she wasn’t interested in Lana, when Lana cornered her in the kitchen, but she would keep that information to herself.

“That was nice of her.”

Reina burst out laughing. “You hate that she was here.”

“Yes. I can’t help it. Besides, why would she visit out of the blue?”

“Honey, I love that you feel that way. You don’t have to worry about Lana. I told her she is not welcome here. Besides, I’m going crazy thinking of you in Seattle with all those women.”

“I am certainly not looking. I have the perfect girlfriend.” Payton smiled as she spoke. “I have the perfect family.”

“You do, and don’t you forget it.”

“I won’t. I love you Reina. I’m sorry I overreacted. I never have felt like this before.”

“I love you, Payton. I will never give you any reason to doubt me. I promise.”

“I love you, too. I don’t look at other women. You can trust me.” Payton stayed silent for a moment. “Can I call you later? Mitch and Ben brought over dinner.”

“Of course, honey. Payton, trust me, I will love you forever.”

“I will love you, forever.”

“Now go eat, and call me later.”

“Are you always this bossy?”

“Always.”

“Good.”

“Goodbye, love.”

“Payton, come eat,” Ben called, as Payton stood by the telephone after hanging up.

“Okay, Ben. Have I thanked you guys for doing this?”

“No, you haven’t,” Mitch teased. “Now sit down and eat.”

And eat they did, and they visited, laughed, and enjoyed each other’s company. They got a little nostalgic after dinner, knowing

that this would be one of the last times they might get to spend with each other.

“We’ve got to go, Payton.” Ben hugged her.

“Thanks for dinner, guys. I appreciate it very much.”

“We know, sweetie. We love you, and as soon as you get settled in your new home we’re coming to visit.” Ben grinned.

“I can’t wait.” Payton laughed.

“Goodnight, doll.”

“Goodnight, and thanks again.”

Payton smiled as she headed upstairs. She would miss Mitch and Ben very much. They were two of her very favorite people. They’d been her friends from the very day she moved in. She cleaned up and crawled into bed, reaching for the telephone to call Reina.

“Hello.”

“Hi.”

“Hello, how was dinner?”

“Nice. I’ll miss Ben and Mitch very much. Actually, they want to come visit after I’m moved.”

“Not until you and I spend some quality time together, alone,” Reina growled playfully. “I plan on keeping you all to myself for awhile, and I don’t think you’ll have any complaints.”

“Oh, I know I won’t. Reina, I miss touching you, kissing you, loving you.”

“I miss everything about you. I won’t change my pillowcases because they smell like you and I love that.”

Payton’s breath caught in her throat. Reina couldn’t have said anything more perfect.

“Reina, I love you so much. Sometimes at night I roll over in my sleep and reach for you and you’re not there. I miss that more than anything. I love sleeping with you and rolling over and slipping my arms around you, nuzzling the back of your neck, and feeling you snuggle back up against me.”

“Payton.” Reina breathed into the telephone. “I love you and I can’t wait to see you again.”

“You’d better get some sleep, honey, it’s getting late.”

“You too, sweetie.”

“Goodnight.”

“Love you.”

Payton didn’t fall asleep right away, while thoughts of Reina naked in bed kept her awake for several more hours. Never had Payton felt like this, and she loved how she felt.

Reina was having similar thoughts, as she lay awake, restless, and frustrated. One thing though, that made her frustration a little more manageable. She would be seeing Payton by Friday evening and would stay until Sunday night. She’d made all the arrangements after speaking to Mitch earlier. Just before Payton called she’d confirmed her flight and arrival time with him. Mitch knew Payton was planning to be home Friday night because she was coming over to their place for dinner. He couldn’t wait to see her face when she saw Reina.

The next afternoon as Payton slid into the front seat of her car, she was amazed that, for as long as she worked at the same company, she was actually leaving it. They had surprised her with a small party, inviting many of the people she’d worked with over the years. Her co-workers had planned it for the end of the day just before she packed up her personal belongings to leave. Years of work and it was over just like that. She made the drive home in silence, the traffic uncharacteristically light for a Friday night. She planned to head home, change her clothes, and be at Mitch’s and Ben’s by six-thirty.

Payton changed into a pair of old jeans and a comfortable sweater, combed her hair, headed down the hall to the elevator, and down two floors to the condominium. She carried a bottle of their favorite wine to contribute to the meal. She knocked on their door and Ben opened it.

“Hey gorgeous, come on in.”

“Here’s some wine for dinner.” She kissed him hello.

“Thanks, honey. Why don’t you go in the living room and I’ll go pour you a glass?”

“Thanks, Ben.”

Payton walked into the other room, enjoying the stunning view of the Seattle skyline. They had a perfect picture window that looked out over the city.

“Payton.”

Payton’s heart pounded and she turned rapidly toward the voice. It couldn’t be Reina, but it was. “Reina!”

It was all Payton got out of her mouth as Reina threw herself into Payton’s arms. Payton held on tightly to her, unwilling to release her for even a moment. Reina covered Payton’s face with kisses.

“I’ve missed you so much. I had to see you,” Reina whispered.

“I am so glad you’re here.” Payton’s mouth covered Reina’s, two weeks of pent up frustration released. Reina moaned as Payton’s lips ravaged hers. Reina responded, her tongue stroking Payton’s lips driving her nuts. It was several minutes before the two of them realized they were standing in the middle of Ben and Mitch’s living room. Payton refused to release Reina from her arms as she looked for Ben and Mitch.

“Guys, where are you?” She called.

“We’re in the bedroom,” Mitch called from down the hall.

“You can come out.” Payton’s smile was huge as she hugged Reina to her. “Nice surprise, guys.”

“We thought you would appreciate it.” Ben grinned as he and Mitch joined them.

“I can’t tell you how much I appreciate what you’ve done.” Payton’s eyes filled with tears.

“We didn’t do anything, it was all Reina. Now, there’s a picnic basket on the kitchen counter for the two of you to take with you, and Reina’s suitcase is by the front door. Go home, Payton and Reina,” Ben demanded with a smile.

“Thank you, Ben, Mitch.” Reina happily followed their advice. “Come on Payton.”

Payton grinned at the two men and followed Reina. She picked up the picnic basket while Reina carried her suitcase. They stared happily at each other as they entered the elevator. Payton leaned over and kissed Reina as soon as the doors closed. They broke apart when the elevator opened on Payton’s floor. She led the way to her condominium and unlocked the door, letting Reina enter. She’d just closed the door when Reina pulled her into her arms again.

“I can’t tell you how much I missed you,” Reina whispered as she gazed at Payton’s face, touching her cheek with her fingers. “I love you so much.”

“I have been going crazy not being able to see you, to touch you.”

“I’m here now, and I don’t need to fly back until Sunday night. Mrs. Lenahan is staying with Max and Molly, and you are all mine.”

“I can’t believe you’re here.” Payton’s hands slid down Reina’s back, reassuring her that Reina was actually standing in front of her.

“I think I can convince you,” Reina promised, kissing Payton and releasing all of her pent up emotion. Payton moaned as Reina’s hands stripped her of her sweater. “I need to love you.”

Payton melted against Reina and succumbed to the wonderful sensations that Reina was creating in her body. Reina removed all of Payton’s remaining clothes, her hands and mouth covering every inch of Payton’s body. Reina described her feelings as she made passionate love to Payton until Payton was shaking with want. Reina kneeled in front of Payton, her lips touching her softly between her legs. Payton cried out as Reina’s mouth pleased her. Her fingers joined her mouth, stroking Payton’s wet and trembling center.

“I love the taste of you,” Reina shared as her fingers drove Payton over the edge.

“Reina,” Payton hissed, an orgasm tearing through her body, building with intensity. “Oh God.” She cried and pulled Reina into her arms.

Holding tightly to her lover as her body trembled and shook, Payton began to weep quietly on Reina's shoulder. Reina comforted her. "I can't believe what you do to me," Payton sighed.

"I plan on doing this to you several more times tonight," Reina promised, wiping the tears from Payton's face.

"I think I have some plans of my own." Payton's fingers unbuttoned Reina's blouse. Her lips covered the tops of Reina's breasts as her hands cradled them. Reina moaned with pleasure when Payton removed her brassiere and buried her face in Reina's breasts. She breathed in the scent of Reina before finding her nipple with her lips and sucking gently.

"Payton." Reina held Payton's head and leaned into her. She wanted Payton's mouth on her.

Within minutes, Reina was naked and on her back on the carpet, as Payton kneeled between her legs kissing her stomach and upper thighs. Reina's body had a mind of its own, twisting and turning while Payton's tongue teased her pulsing tissue. Reina cried out as Payton's mouth created the magic that Reina craved. Her hips rose up off the floor and she opened herself fully to Payton. Within moments, Reina was gasping, her body inundated with waves of heart-stopping orgasms. Payton's mouth continued her attentions and her fingers slid into Reina, causing another wave of pleasure to crash through her body. Reina reached down and pulled Payton up until she lay on top of her, bodies touching from head to toe.

"I need to feel your body next to mine," Reina whispered kissing Payton.

"Always. I plan to always be next to you."

"Payton, I hated not seeing you, touching you. I need you in my life. You fill the missing piece."

"You are my heart and my life, you and Max and Molly. I was so lonely without you."

"Two more weeks is all we have to wait."

“Two weeks from hell,” Payton admitted, gazing at Reina. “I missed looking at you, your eyes, your hair, your lips, and the feel of your skin.”

“Honey, we have all weekend together. I promise I will love you enough to last two more weeks.” Reina grinned as she ran her hands down Payton’s hips and thighs.

“Are you hungry?” Payton asked enjoying Reina’s attentions.

“Yes, I’m very hungry,” Reina admitted, rolling Payton onto her back. “For you.”

It was over an hour before they once again lay in each other’s arms, after loving each other completely for the second time.

“I think we need to find your bed,” Reina teased.

“I think you’re right. Let me go get us something to put on.”

“No you don’t. I like you naked.”

“I can handle that.” Payton laughed as she stood up. “Would you like to join me upstairs in bed with this heavy picnic basket?”

“I would.” Reina chuckled as she gathered their clothes and her overnight bag. They both struggled upstairs with their bundles, giggling the whole time.

“Let’s see what wonderful things Ben and Mitch prepared.” Payton placed the picnic basket on the end of her bed.

“I like your bedroom. It looks like you.” Reina eyes traveled around the room. “I’d like to put your bed in our bedroom, and your chest of drawers.”

“What about your bed and things?” Payton asked as she rooted around in the basket.

“We’ll put them in the extra bedroom when it’s done.” Reina sat next to Payton on the bed. “It’s going to be our home, and I think we should mix our things together.”

“Honey, we’ll work it out. I don’t care what our furniture is as long as we’re together.” Payton turned to Reina and kissed her. “Now, quit thinking about the furniture and help me pick out some treats from this wonderful basket.”

“I think the food is going to have to wait.” Reina shut the lid and turned Payton’s face toward her. “I have much better things to do than eat.”

“And what could you be talking about?” Payton grinned as the two of them tumbled onto the bed.

“We should call Mitch and Ben and thank them for this wonderful stuff,” Reina suggested, placing a plump grape between Payton’s lips.

“Honey, it’s after eleven. I suggest we call them in the morning.” Payton enjoyed being fed by her beautiful girlfriend. Reina was leaned up against her, both still naked.

“Where has the time gone?” Reina teased, putting another grape between Payton’s lips and following it up with a kiss.

“I can’t imagine.” Payton grabbed a plump strawberry and placed it on Reina’s stomach, where she bent down to nibble on it, causing giggles from Reina.

It was like they’d never been separated, they were so completely comfortable with one another. They spent several hours alternating between eating treats and making love, before falling asleep clasped in each other’s arms.

Payton slowly woke up and glanced at the clock. It was a little after four in the morning and Reina lay sound asleep half on top of her, her hand securely tucked into Payton’s. Payton watched Reina sleeping, admiring her innocent, relaxed expression. Her lips were slightly open and the tip of her tongue could be seen at the corner of her mouth. Her thick blond eyelashes rested against her cheeks. Her hair was braided and hanging down the center of her back, some of it loose and curled against her neck. Payton sighed softly. The thought of spending the rest of her life watching Reina sleep made her feel warm all over. It was a feeling of such joy and peace that she knew they’d been meant to find each other. She was happy to lie there for the rest of the night holding Reina, listening to her breathing, and feeling her body, but Reina stirred against Payton, stretching, her eyes fluttering open.

The smile Reina blessed Payton with caused her heart to pound. She smiled in return. “How long have you been awake?”

“Not long. I was enjoying watching you sleep.”

“My favorite thing is to wake up and find you here beside me. I can’t tell you how many times in the last two weeks I’ve awakened at night alone and missing you so badly I could’ve cried.”

“I’m here now, thanks to your surprise visit.”

“I’m not going to waste a moment,” Reina promised as she covered Payton’s body with her own and their mouths met in a ravenous kiss. Within moments Reina’s hips moved against Payton’s, while Payton’s legs wrapped around Reina’s thighs.

Their breaths came in gasps their bodies rocking against each other’s while Reina stared into Payton’s eyes. Their movements quickened as the friction between their bodies created more than just heat. Payton’s body stiffened and began to shiver as Reina’s body arched against hers and they both succumbed to multiple orgasms. Reina’s head fell on Payton’s shoulder when her arms could no longer support her. Payton’s arms instinctively surrounded Reina’s shoulders and they melted against one another.

“It’s so magical every time,” Reina whispered with a smile.

“It is magic,” Payton agreed as she kissed Reina softly.

“Payton, I want to marry you as soon as possible. I want to make that commitment to you and have you commit to me.”

“I want that too. Lets make plans as soon as I’m moved. Lindy is flying here Thursday night and we’re leaving Friday morning. We should arrive there sometime Saturday afternoon. The movers are coming on Wednesday and will be at your house on Friday. Will that work for you?”

“You’ll be there Saturday?” Reina grinned.

“Yes, unless you want me to wait another week?” Payton teased.

“Are you crazy? You’re going to be completely moved in by next Saturday?”

“As long as you approve.”

“Oh, I approve all right. I think I just might have to take some more time off with my very sexy girlfriend.”

“That would be very nice.”

“How nice?” Reina teased.

“Why don’t I show you?” Payton suggested as she ran her hands down Reina’s body.

“Have I told you how much I love you?”

“Not in the last few minutes, and I need to hear it often.”

“I love you. I love you. I love you.” Reina whispered covering Payton’s face with kisses.

It was late morning before the two of them ventured out of bed. They both took a shower and then called Mitch and Ben to thank them again. They followed that up with a telephone call to the children, who were being watched for the weekend by Mrs. Lenahan. They spoke to them for twenty minutes, and then went for a long walk. They made plans as they strolled along, discussed the remodel, and enjoyed each other’s company. It was Reina who suggested that they take a trip to a jewelry store. She was not going back to California without exchanging gold bands with Payton. Payton was more than happy to oblige her. It didn’t take either of them very long to decide on the traditional plain gold bands. The rings meant a lifetime commitment and love.

Two hours later, they were back in bed celebrating their love and commitment as they exchanged rings and promised to love each other forever. The rest of the evening they alternated between laughing, playing, and loving, until the early hours of the morning. They once again fell asleep wrapped in each other’s arms.

They woke up at nine and, after making love once more, called Mitch and Ben to invite them to breakfast. The four of them went to a local restaurant and had a very pleasant time. Ben and Mitch could not help but tease them.

“So you two decided to come up for air.”

Payton and Reina just laughed as the two men joked with them, knowing full well, they understood.

“You’ll come visit us?”

“Of course we will.” The four of them got along famously and Reina made them promise to keep in touch.

“Thank you, Mitch.” Reina hugged him.

“You are welcome, doll.” He hugged her in return. “You make Payton very happy, and Ben and I think the two of you are just perfect.”

“We are,” Payton responded.

The four of them headed for home and their respective condominiums. Reina and Payton spent a couple of hours packing and then one last hour of very intense lovemaking before sitting together in the living room talking. As the time grew closer to leave for the airport they became pensive.

“I don’t want to leave,” Reina cried, tucking her head against Payton’s.

“Honey, I will be there in six days, I promise.”

“I know you will, but it’s six days without you.”

“Reina.” Payton picked up her left hand and turned it palm up. She kissed the thin gold band that rested on her left hand ring finger. “I will be there in six days, and every night until I get there you will look at this ring and know that I love you.”

They kissed softly and then sat quietly holding hands until it grew late. They made the trip to the airport in silence, still holding hands. They were fine until Reina had to board the plane and the tears started.

“I hate this,” Reina cried against Payton’s shoulder.

“I hate it, too. Call me after you get home and get to bed.”

“I will, I promise. And Payton, I love you.”

“I love you.” Payton hugged her tightly. “Only six more days.”

“Be careful, please. When you and Lindy drive down I want you to be very careful.”

“Honey, I have a cell phone and you have my number. You can call me any time.”

“I will. Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

“I’ll call you as soon as I get to bed.”

“Go honey, you’ll miss your plane.” Payton held her smile until Reina disappeared from view. Six days, she just had to get through six days.

Payton could have used six more days as she sorted and packed all the rest of her things. Thank goodness she hadn’t replaced everything she had left when her relationship had ended. In the two years since then, Payton had collected very little; otherwise she would have needed a much larger moving truck. By Tuesday evening everything was packed and ready for the movers. She was going to sleep on the floor Wednesday and Thursday night. Poor Lindy, she’d have to sleep on the floor with her Thursday. They planned to leave early Friday morning and get a jump on the traffic. Payton packed her car trunk as full as possible on Wednesday so all she had left to do was clean the condominium. By Wednesday evening she’d finished the bathrooms and the kitchen, so she decided to crawl into her makeshift bed and give Reina a call. They had spoken earlier in the day and Reina had made Payton promise to call her that evening, no matter how late it was.

“Hello.”

“Hi sweetie.”

“Hi sweetie, yourself. How’s the packing going?”

“Good. Actually the packing is all done and I’m almost done cleaning. Tomorrow morning I go in to sign the papers for the condominium and, barring any hang-ups, they’ll mail the check in two weeks. A rather large check I might add.”

“Good for you. I’m not worried about money, we’ll be just fine.”

“I want to contribute.”

“You will certainly be able to, especially when you see the estimate for the remodel.”

“Do you need to commit to the contractor this week?”

“No, I thought you and I could go over the plans together and then decide.”

“Four more days.”

“I can’t wait. How are you doing with all of this? Aren’t you exhausted?”

“Tonight I am, and I’m currently sleeping on the floor since my bed is on its way to California.”

“Honey, I am so sorry. I’ll make it up to you.”

“I’m fine, it’s only for two nights.”

“I’ll make it up to you.”

“I will remind you of that promise.”

“Honey, you won’t have to remind me.” Reina chuckled.

“You get some sleep, doll, because after Saturday night you won’t be sleeping that much at night.” Payton laughed.

“I look forward to every night with you, awake and asleep.”

“I love you, Reina.”

“I love you, Payton. Go to sleep honey, and call me tomorrow when you get a chance.”

“I will. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

Payton was not at all comfortable sleeping on the floor, and she tossed and turned for several hours before falling into a restless sleep. The thought of being with Reina in two days calmed her as she drifted in and out.

By early afternoon, Payton had finished all the cleaning and took one last walk through the condominium. It was strange to see it completely empty. She took a quick shower and headed down to Mitch and Ben’s for one last dinner. Lindy’s plane wasn’t due until nine-thirty, so she had plenty of time to say goodbye to two of her very best friends.

“Come on in, honey. Ben, Payton’s here.”

“Hey, doll. You all packed?”

“Except for what Lindy and I need tonight.”

“Well, let’s enjoy our dinner and relax. Do you want one of us to go to the airport with you?”

“No thanks, Mitch, you don’t have to go. Lindy and I are just going to come back and get a good night’s sleep. We plan on getting an early start tomorrow.”

“Come on you two, dinner is served,” Ben announced.

The dinner was delicious and heartwarming, and the three of them reminisced and relived the fun times they had together. They had many happy memories they could smile and laugh about. Time went very quickly, and all too soon Payton stood up preparing to leave.

“I’m going to miss you both so much.” Payton grew tearful as she smiled.

“We’re going to miss you, doll. You and Reina are good together.” Ben hugged her tightly.

“We’ll come visit, I promise, honey.” Mitch hugged her tightly, wrapping his arms around her while Payton struggled not to cry.

“I love you guys.”

“We love you.”

Payton found it hard to leave as she hugged them both once more. It was difficult to believe she was really moving. Driving to the airport Payton struggled with tears. She made it in plenty of time to pick up Lindy and waited at the gate as the passengers disembarked. Lindy was one of the first people to get off the airplane.

“Hey, buddy.” Lindy grinned. “Ready for our road trip?”

Payton hugged her best friend hello. “I am. Everything is done. I just have to leave the key on the kitchen counter and close the door. If nothing happens to the sale I should get a check for one hundred and thirty thousand dollars.”

“Wow.”

“The rewards of a guilty ex-girlfriend.”

“And a shared house and lots of heartache.”

“That’s all old history.”

“Come on girlfriend, let’s get out of here.”

“Is that all you brought with you?” Payton noticed Lindy’s small carry-on bag.

“Yep, I travel light.” Lindy clasped Payton’s arm with her own. “I had an idea on the airplane. What would you say to our leaving tonight? We could probably get to Long Beach by tomorrow evening. What do you think?”

“I think it’s a great idea. It’s too bad I didn’t bring everything with me.”

“Hey, we’ll just go finish packing everything and get going.”

Forty minutes later they did just that, as Payton and Lindy gathered the last few things to put in the car. “We had better stop for some coffee.”

“You did remember the tunes?”

“Of course.” Payton and Lindy would not think of going on a road trip without a large collection of music. “There’s a whole box of cd’s behind your seat.”

“Cool.” Lindy grinned happily.

“I need to call Reina before we take off.”

“I should call Tamara, too.”

“We’ll have to use the cell phone. The other telephone has been disconnected.”

“No problem. Is that cell phone going to work in California?”

“Yep, I just need to get the number changed next week.”

“Why don’t I take the first few hours of driving?”

“No, you don’t, I’ll drive first. You just got here.”

“Okay, go ahead and call Reina while I choose the music.”

Payton dialed Reina’s number. It was picked up on the second ring.

“Hello.”

“Hi.”

“Hi, honey. Is Lindy there?”

“Yep, and guess what?”

“What?”

“We’re heading out tonight.”

“You two are going to drive all night?”

“Yes, and we should be there late tomorrow night if all goes well.”

“Honey, you and Lindy be very careful. I want you two to get here in one piece.”

“We will. You forget we’ve done this before.”

“I’m going to call you every two hours and make sure you’re okay.”

“I love you, Reina.”

“I love you, Payton. I’ll prove it to you when you get here.” Reina chuckled.

“Is that a promise?”

“Yes, honey. That’s a promise.” Reina laughed.

“Good. Love you.”

“Love you.”

“Lindy, your turn.” Payton handed the cell phone to her. While Lindy spoke to Tamara, Payton locked the car trunk and straightened out the things in the back seat. She wanted to give Lindy as much privacy as possible.

“Okay, partner, let’s hit the road.”

“You got it. How was Tamara?”

“She’s fine. She’s going to call us during the night.”

“So is Reina.”

“Great, between the two of them we’ll be on the telephone all night.” Lindy laughed and Payton joined her.

“You ready?” Payton asked.

“Ready.”

The two best friends climbed into Payton’s car and, with one last look at her condominium, Payton pulled away. They stopped at an

all night market on the way to the freeway and filled their thermos up with coffee. Lindy also collected a bag of goodies for them to munch on, and they were set to go.

Again, the two of them were back in the car and heading onto the freeway. For the first hour of the trip Lindy and Payton talked and laughed as they shared their thoughts and feelings. Their friendship had always been one of humor, honesty, and genuine affection.

“Payton, it’s time for a little music,” Lindy announced, rummaging through the case of CD’s. “How about some disco?”

While Payton continued driving south on Interstate Five, she and Lindy sang to Donna Summer, the Supremes, and many other groups. Two hours later, right on time, Reina called. Payton and Lindy serenaded her with a very bad rendition of “Stop In The Name Of Love”, making her laugh hysterically. She made them promise to drive carefully, told Payton she loved her despite her lack of singing abilities, and promised to call in two hours.

Eight hours and five telephone calls later, three from Reina and two from Tamara, they stopped for a bite to eat and to take a break from driving.

“How are you doing, Payton?”

“Good, how about you?”

“I’m feeling okay. I need some coffee and some food.”

“I’ll drive for the next couple of hours.”

“I can’t believe Reina and Tamara called us all night long. You’d think we were children,” Lindy grumbled.

“They’re just worried about us. And you love it that Tamara called.” Payton poked Lindy.

“I do.” She laughed good-naturedly.

They teased each other while they ate their breakfast at a very busy truck stop. Then they filled the car with gas, and were off again. It was a long and tedious day of driving for huge stretches, then stopping to fill the car with gas, and getting up to stretch and move around. Reina and Tamara continued to take turns calling them as

they headed into their fifteenth hour of driving. They estimated another four to five hours and they would be home. It was a little after five o'clock in the afternoon and they were looking forward to arriving at Reina's by ten o'clock at the latest. Reina had just called and was ecstatic that they were so close to home. Payton got to speak to Molly and Max for a few minutes and they were both very animated, equally as excited. Payton missed them so much. She'd be unable to see them until Sunday morning, since they'd already be in bed for several hours by the time she arrived.

The last few hours Lindy and Payton felt the effects of staying awake and driving for such long periods of time. They sang along to CD's and giggled for no reason, hitting the outskirts of Long Beach a little before nine. They'd made great time and it had taken them less time than they expected. Tamara was waiting with Reina at the house when Lindy called to let them know they were twenty minutes away. Payton could feel the excitement building as she thought about her new home and life.

"We're almost home." Payton grinned widely, laughing aloud.

"Hey buddy, you're officially moved." Lindy laughed with her.

"I am, aren't I?"

Payton turned onto the final block and felt a calmness invade her body when she saw her new home. She and Lindy grinned at each other as they pulled into the driveway and Reina and Tamara tumbled out of the front door. Payton did not hesitate as she turned off the car. Payton shot out of the front seat. She met Reina halfway between the house and the car. Payton caught her in her arms as Reina threw herself at her. Reina's lips met Payton's while they kissed thoroughly and twirled in the yard, hugging each other.

"I'm so glad you're here," Reina whispered, covering Payton's face with kisses. "You must be exhausted."

"I'm just glad to be home," Payton admitted, smiling at her beautiful girlfriend.

“You are home, and you had better go say goodnight to your two kids. They’ve been waiting all evening.” Reina grinned in return.

“You’re kidding?” Payton laughed and pulled Reina behind her into the house toward the children’s bedroom. She went into the first door and found Max’s eyes wide open as he lay in bed.

“Hey, little man.” She sat down on the edge of his bed.

“Payton!” The little boy cried out, standing up on his bed and wrapping his tiny arms around Payton’s neck.

“I’m so glad to see you.” Payton’s eyes filled with tears as she hugged Max tightly.

“Payton, you’re here!” Molly ran across the room into Payton’s arms along with her brother. Reina had obviously gone to get her.

“Hey, beautiful girl. I missed you guys so much.”

“We missed you,” Molly reassured her as she kissed her sloppily and patted Payton on the cheek.

Payton hugged the two children tightly, gazing at Reina while tears slid down her cheeks. She didn’t need to tell Reina how she was feeling, because tears were rolling down Reina’s face also.

“I love you guys.” Payton hugged them again. “Now you two need to get a good night’s sleep so you can wake me up in the morning. We’re going to make breakfast for your mom.”

“Okay, Payton.” Molly smiled and hugged her.

“Get under your covers, Max. I’ll see you early tomorrow morning.”

Max did as she asked, and she bent over and kissed him goodnight. “Sleep tight, little man.”

Payton took one last look at a sleepy Max and then picked Molly up in her arms, holding her tightly. “Come on, little mermaid, let’s put you to bed.” She carried the tiny little girl into her bedroom and put her to bed. “Good night, honey. Don’t forget to wake me up early.”

“Okay, love you gobs.”

“I love you gobs.” Payton smiled at the darling little girl. She left Molly’s room and looked around for the three adults. She heard laughter outside and went out the front door to find the three women unloading Payton’s car. She grabbed a handful of her things and carried them into the house, adding to the pile they had started in the living room. The four of them made several trips before the car was empty.

“Payton, why don’t you pull the car into the garage,” Reina suggested, touching her face softly.

“Is there room? I thought the movers put my things in there.”

“They did, but there’s room for your car.” Reina could not stop touching Payton. She just wanted to hold Payton all night and reassure herself that she was finally home.

“Well ladies, we’re going home”, Tamara announced as she hugged Lindy. “I want to put this tired girl to bed.”

“Lindy, I can’t thank you enough.”

“Honey, you don’t have to thank me. Tamara and I owed you.”

“I love you guys.” Payton held Reina tightly as she smiled at the two of them, tears threatening to fall from her eyes.

“We love you both. Now you two enjoy your evening. We’ll call you tomorrow afternoon.”

“Thanks again for everything.”

“No problem, goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

“Honey, let’s put your car in the garage,” Reina suggested again.

“I don’t want to let go of you.” Payton whispered.

“Sweetheart, I am here forever and so are you.”

Payton hugged her quickly and then did as she asked. As she entered the living room she glared at the pile of stuff in the middle of the living room. “What do you suggest I do with all this junk?”

“I suggest we put it away and go to bed.” Reina caught Payton by the hand. “It won’t take long.”

“Okay, let’s do it.”

The two of them rapidly put Payton's things away. Reina had cleared out half of her closet and chest of drawers so Payton could put her clothes there. She had also had the movers put Payton's armoire into their shared bedroom, and Reina had put all of Payton's clothes away inside it.

"You unpacked my clothes?"

"Of course I did. It's your home." Reina squeezed Payton tightly to her. Payton was too moved to speak. "Honey, I want you to take a nice hot shower and then crawl in bed."

"I plan to do just that." Payton grinned and kissed Reina softly. "I can't tell you how wonderful it feels to be here."

"Oh, I think I know how you feel." Reina assured her with a kiss. "Now, you go hop into the shower, sweetie."

"Can I go peek at the kids one more time?" The look on Payton's face along with her words made Reina's heart pound in her chest.

"Sure honey. I'll start your shower." Reina touched her cheek before turning away. She was close to crying again.

Payton quietly slipped into each of the children's rooms and for a few moments watched them sleep. She'd never felt so full of love as she did at that moment. She re-entered the bedroom and found Reina sitting on the bed. "I missed them so much."

"They missed you. They love you Payton."

"Reina, I love them."

"I know you do, now go climb into the shower."

Payton stepped into the hot water and sighed deeply. It was just what she needed. She washed her hair and let the hot water wash the aches out of her body. She stepped out of the shower and toweled off as Reina entered the bathroom already dressed for bed in her nightgown.

"Here is your night shirt."

"Thanks honey. You look beautiful."

"You look pretty sexy to me." Reina grinned.

"I don't think I'm going to need my nightshirt."

“Payton, you haven’t slept in over twenty-four hours. You have to be exhausted.” Reina held Payton’s naked body against her.

“I’m not that tired,” Payton promised as she quickly stripped Reina of her nightgown. “You are so beautiful.”

Payton ran her hands down Reina’s back and over her hips as their naked bodies melted against each other.

“I’ve missed you so much.” Reina whispered, her hands cradling Payton’s breasts. She placed kisses on Payton’s jaw, her neck, and then her breasts. Payton found it hard to breath when Reina’s lips surrounded her nipple, the wet heat causing her body to shiver. Payton could feel passion unfurl in her body as Reina covered her breasts with kiss after kiss.

“Come to bed, love.” Reina pulled her to the bed and gently lay on top of her. Their lovemaking was slow and deliberate as Reina teased her into one orgasm after another. Payton did not hesitate, covering Reina’s body with kisses from head to toe. Reina’s cries of pleasure made her smile as her mouth covered her wet trembling center. Her tongue teased and tasted Reina until Reina’s hips twisted and turned in Payton’s grasp. Her fingers joined her tongue and she drove Reina crazy, stroking her over the edge. Reina gasped and cried out several times as her body quaked with a series of orgasms. She began to cry as Payton slid up her body and gathered her into her arms.

“I love you, Reina,” Payton reassured her, kissing the tears away as they trickled down her face.

“I love you, Payton.” Reina’s tears still slid down her cheeks.

“Honey, why are you crying?” Payton smiled softly, gazing at her.

“It’s so overwhelming when you make love with me, and you’re here forever.” Reina kissed the gold band on Payton’s hand.

“And I’m going to love you forever.” Payton kissed the ring on Reina’s hand. “I am going to make love with you for the rest of our lives.”

“Payton, you are so beautiful, sexy, and loving. I feel very lucky.”

“I’m the lucky one. I have a gorgeous, unbelievably sensuous, and loving girlfriend, two terrific, darling kids, and another one on the way.” Payton smiled as she ran her hands over Reina’s stomach. “How is that for lucky? I’d better not hear that you were lifting anything heavier than a book, young lady.”

Reina just grinned as Payton glared at her comically. “I’m serious, Reina. I want you to be careful.”

“Payton, I feel terrific, fantastic, wonderful.” Reina kissed Payton rapidly all over her face until Payton giggled.

“Good, let’s keep it that way. Have you felt the baby move yet?”

“No, it’ll be another month or so. But you’ll be the first to know, I promise.” Reina covered Payton’s hands with her own, holding them tightly against her stomach. “We have an appointment with the doctor on Thursday.”

“Great.” Payton grinned, snuggling against Reina. “It feels so wonderful just to hold you, and I get to all night long.”

“You’re going to sleep, doll. I know you’re exhausted.” Reina turned in Payton’s arms. “Close your eyes, Payton.”

“I love you, Reina.” Payton closed her eyes, sliding her arms around Reina and resting her head on Reina’s shoulder.

“I love you, Payton.” Reina stroked Payton’s cheek, watching her fall into exhausted sleep. Reina couldn’t believe how happy she felt at that moment knowing Payton was always going to be there. Just holding her as she slept made Reina smile, as Payton’s breathing deepened and she slumbered. Payton was a beautiful woman when she was awake, her wavy hair casually tousled, her brown eyes, large and trusting. Her lips were full and coral-colored and when she smiled her whole face lit up, but Reina had started to fall in love with Payton the first time she saw her sleeping, her cheeks flushed, and her long eyelashes resting against her skin. She looked so vulnerable and so damn beautiful that Reina had immediately felt the pull on her heart to love her and take care of her. Payton was one of those rare individuals that hid none of her feelings. She loved completely

and unconditionally. It showed on her face and was reinforced by her actions. Reina had no doubt that Payton loved her, and she had been waiting all her life to fall in love with someone she trusted and could love unconditionally. The wait had been worth it. Payton was a precious gift. Reina grinned as Payton pulled her closer. Payton was also very lucky. She would not find another woman that could love her so perfectly. Reina fell asleep with a smile on her face while she counted Payton's blessings.

Reina couldn't help but laugh as she checked on her sleeping family. She went for the camera because she couldn't resist taking a picture. Payton was sound asleep on her back with Max stretched across her stomach sleeping, his thumb in his mouth. Molly was sideways on the bed, her face tucked against Payton's, one of her tiny hands clasped in Payton's larger one. The two children had awoken very early and crawled into bed next to an exhausted Payton. They had immediately fallen back asleep. That had been over two hours earlier and the three of them were still sleeping soundly. Reina took several pictures of the three sleeping beauties and went back into the living room to drink her coffee and read her book. She intended on letting Payton sleep as long as possible.

An hour later a loud series of giggles told her that the sleeping threesome was awake. Grinning widely, she walked down the hall to the bedroom, listening to the laughter coming from the room. She poked her head in the partially open door. The three of them were in a pile in the middle of the bed where Payton was tickling the two kids as they tried to do the same with her.

"Can I join you guys?" Reina asked, heading for the bed grinning.

"What do you think guys, should we let mom join us?" Payton asked.

"Yes, Yes!" Screamed Max and Molly as Payton grabbed Reina and pulled into the fray. The four of them rolled on the bed, tickling and teasing each other and generally enjoying each other's company. Gradually the four of them settled down and Payton and Reina lay

side by side each holding a child. They gazed at each other happily, their fingers clasped in each other's.

"I love you, Payton."

"I love you, Reina, and Max, and Molly."

The four of them took their time getting up and having breakfast, before Payton proceeded to unpack the remainder of her things. At two o'clock the contractor came over and reviewed the remodel plans and the budget. Reina and Payton liked what they saw and agreed to get back to him by Monday evening.

"Payton, we need to go to the bank on Monday afternoon to put your name on the bank account. We also need to go to the school and put your name on the records so they can call you in case of an emergency. They need to know that you are Max and Molly's guardian."

"But I'm not," Payton responded, a little confused.

"Yes, you are." Reina smiled as she handed Payton a piece of paper. "I went to a lawyer and had him draw this up."

Payton read the document. It was written in legal language but the meaning of the paper was clear. Payton was listed as legal guardian for Max, Molly, and an as yet unnamed child of Reina Landers. Payton had to read it twice before she looked up at Reina.

"Is this okay, Payton?" Reina was nervous. Maybe Payton didn't want to have all that responsibility.

"It's more than okay," Payton whispered as she began to cry.

"Honey, don't cry." Reina wiped the tears from her face.

"I can't help it. You are sharing your children with me." Payton was amazed.

"Payton, the day we met I shared my children with you. I've just made it legal. You did agree to marry me," Reina teased.

"Oh, I'm going to marry you, as soon as possible," Payton promised as she picked up Reina and twirled around in circles with her. "I am going to marry you and all three kids!"

“We just need to wait until after Lindy and Tamara have their ceremony.”

“Then we get to plan ours.”

“We can plan it now, we just can’t tell anyone or set a date.”

“Okay, let’s plan it.” Payton agreed as she plopped Reina down on the couch. “Can the kids be in it?”

“Of course.” Reina pulled Payton down onto her lap. “We’re not going to wait until the third one is here, though. I want to get married sooner than that. I would like it small, just a few family and friends.”

“Do we write our own vows?”

“I thought we could.”

“I would like to dress up, something a little dressy, somewhat formal.”

“How about long dresses? And Max could wear a tuxedo.”

“He’ll be so handsome.” Payton grinned as Reina nuzzled her neck. “Where will we have the ceremony? How about here in the back yard?”

“I’d like that. What about the honeymoon?” Reina continued to kiss and nibble on her neck.

“Lots and lots of sex.”

“Payton, I meant where?” Reina laughed.

“I want as much time with you as possible. How about Hawaii? Max and Molly will love the water.”

“Will we have enough alone time?”

“Reina, I want Molly and Max with us. We are a family now.”

“We certainly are.” Reina and Payton kissed passionately.

“Honey, we’d better get you unpacked.”

“Now?” Payton complained as she continued to kiss Reina.

“Yes, now.” Reina chuckled. “But I promise after the kids go to bed that you will have my undivided attention.”

“That sounds like fun.” Payton grinned.

“It will be. Now let’s get to work.”

“Anyone ever tell you you’re bossy?” Payton pulled Reina out to the garage with her. Reina just grinned.

They spent the next three hours carrying things from the garage into the house, before taking a break to fix dinner. Max and Molly insisted on helping Payton unpack and also asked to help prepare dinner. The four of them decided to work together and, between the laughter and the affection, it was an extremely enjoyable time for all of them. Payton looked at the happy faces around the dinner table and sighed. This was her family, emotionally and legally, and she loved the feeling.

Reina saw the look on Payton’s face and touched her cheek. “We aren’t going anywhere; we are a family.”

“That’s what I was thinking. We are a family.” Payton grinned happily.

“So tomorrow I’ll get home at noon and we will go to the bank and then to school daycare.”

“Good, I need an account number to transfer my money into. The real estate agent is sending me a certified check tomorrow. We should put it in an interest bearing account until we need it for the remodel.”

“Honey, we need to get your name on the title of the house. If I sell you half of the house you won’t have to pay capital gains on the money and we can write the remodel costs off if we ever sell it.”

“You need to let me know what the house is appraised for so I can give you half the value.”

“We’ll work everything out. But since you’re stuck with me forever, what’s mine is yours.”

“And what is mine is yours, Max’s and Molly’s. Actually, before I moved I had my will rewritten to include you and all three of the kids as beneficiaries.”

“Thank you, and you are mine. You will also be the guardian of all three children.” Reina hugged her tightly. “But we aren’t going anywhere.”

“Can I have a hug?” Molly and Max had been very demanding of Payton’s affection.

“Of course you can, Molly.” Payton picked her up out of her chair and sat her on her lap, hugging her gently. Max would not be ignored, as he crawled onto his mother’s lap to be hugged.

“You two need to take a bath tonight.” Reina kissed her wriggling son. “If you and Molly get your bath done and get your pajamas on Payton might tell you a story.”

Both children found that plan very acceptable and happily went to prepare for their bath.

“How about you go and relax, I’ll do the dishes and give Max and Molly their bath?” Payton stood behind Reina and draped her arms over her shoulders.

“I have a better idea. How about you give Max and Molly their bath, and I do the dishes? That way as soon as you tell them a story we can all go to bed early.” Reina tugged on Payton’s arms until she was snug against Reina’s back.

“I like that idea.”

“I thought you would.”

Their evening went exactly as planned, and by eight-thirty Payton and Reina were taking their own shower together.

## CHAPTER 7

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Life for Reina and Payton became wonderfully ordinary as their work and home schedules developed a routine. They loved living together and happily spent their evenings with the children. Payton's job proved to be a challenge, and one she was enjoying very much. She'd been working one full month and, even though she and Lindy worked at the same company in the same building, there were days when they never saw each other at all.

On top of that, the remodel project had started a week earlier and was in full swing. She and Reina were extremely excited as they watched the new section of the house go up. They were going to celebrate by getting a babysitter for Max and Molly so they could go out for the evening. They did manage to go out once in awhile to meet friends, and this Friday night they were going to meet up with Lindy and Tamara for dinner and a movie. It was Payton's night for picking the children up from daycare so she was leaving work at four-thirty. She picked the kids up on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and Reina the other two nights.

"Hello, Payton." Shirley, one of the owners of the daycare preschool, greeted her.

"Hi, Shirley, how's it going?"

"Great, thanks for asking. Max and Molly, Payton is here," She called.

Max came running and threw himself into Payton's outstretched arms. "Hey, little man, how was your day?" She kissed him soundly.

"Good." Max was not one to do a lot of talking.

"Payton, look at my picture," Molly requested as she carried a large painting to Payton.

"Let's see it." Payton suggested, and Molly laid it on the floor. "Molly, this is beautiful."

Molly beamed proudly as Payton praised her.

"It's a butterfly."

"I can tell. We'll have to show your mom when you get home, and we'll hang it on the kitchen wall."

"Okay, Payton." Molly smiled at her happily as Payton hugged her tightly. "Have I told you guys lately that I love you gobs?"

"We love you." Molly kissed her loudly.

"Come on, you two. Mrs. Lenahan is coming over tonight and she's going to make chocolate chip cookies with you."

"Yea!" Max clapped excitedly. He loved cookies.

Payton and the two children headed for home. Once they arrived, Payton cleaned them up and put their pajamas on. She then began to prepare dinner.

"Hello, beautiful." Reina greeted Payton with a slow sexy kiss.

"Hi doll, how was your day?"

"Good. All the preparations are ready for next week's test flights."

"Good for you. Are you excited?"

"Very." Reina and Payton shared another slow wet kiss.

"I'm looking forward to this evening. Are you going to hold my hand during the movie?"

"Of course."

"Why don't you go change and I'll get Max and Molly started on dinner?"

"Then I'll sit with them while you change."

"Good, just stop in Molly's room to see her painting. It's a butterfly."

“I will. I love you.”

“Love you, honey.”

As Reina headed out of the kitchen, Payton watched her walk away. Reina was dressed in a stylish maroon skirt and jacket and she looked fantastic. She was just as beautiful in her uniform as she was in her flight jump suit. She didn't wear her hair down at work, but knowing how much Payton liked it long, she would leave it down at home. Payton loved everything about her. And Reina reminded her all the time how much she loved Payton's looks. Payton was continuously amazed at how Reina could make her feel beautiful and sexy with just a look, one word, or a single touch of her hand. Payton smiled as she listened to Reina's conversation with her daughter. It was one more reason why Payton loved her; she was the perfect mother to her children.

“Hello, my sweet Molly. I understand you have a fantastic picture to show me.”

“Hi Mom.” Molly ran to her mother and kissed her.

“How is my beautiful, and talented daughter?” Reina hugged and kissed her. “Will you show me what you made?”

“It's right here. It's a butterfly and Payton said we could hang on the kitchen wall.”

“This is very good, Molly. Shall we go hang it up right now?”

“Okay.” Molly beamed happily as she and her mother returned to the kitchen and reverently taped Molly's picture to the already cluttered kitchen wall. Payton called it their Wall of Family. It proudly displayed pictures, paintings, and things the children had made. While Reina and Molly admired her picture, Payton fondly watched the two of them. Her heart swelled with love as mother and daughter visited. Reina was a very good mother, her children came first. This only made Payton love Reina more, because she felt the same way.

“Molly, this is one of the most beautiful butterflies I have ever seen.”

Payton would have loved to stay and listen, but she left the two of them talking and located Max, who was in his room playing with his trucks. “Hello, little man, what are you doing?”

Max just grinned at Payton. He was a man of few words, and he and Payton had a special relationship. He loved his Payton and he didn’t need to talk all that much. She grinned in return and sat down next to him on the floor. Max stood up and sat on Payton’s lap and returned to playing with his trucks. Payton quietly sat there holding him. She and Max did that a lot. She could read a book while Max sat on her lap playing. They just liked to be close. Reina enjoyed watching the two of them. They would sit for hours like that, just enjoying each other’s company. Reina found them just like that.

“Hey guys, what are you up to?”

“We’re playing trucks,” Payton responded.

Reina kissed Max and gazed at her girlfriend. “I’m going to go change my clothes. Molly is in her room coloring.”

“I’ll check on her.”

“Thanks, honey. I won’t be long.”

Mrs. Lenahan, the babysitter, arrived soon after that and preceded to take the children into the kitchen. They were going to make chocolate chip cookies and nothing was more important than that.

Forty minutes later Reina and Payton were ready to go. “Good-night guys, have a good time and take care of Mrs. Lenahan,” Reina called to them as she and Payton headed out the front door to meet Lindy and Tamara.

“Bye Mommy, bye Payton.”

Payton and Reina climbed into Payton’s car and headed for the restaurant. While Payton drove, Reina rested her hand on Payton’s thigh. That solitary touch was magical to Payton, because it reminded her that Reina liked to be close to her. She and Reina were very affectionate with each other.

“Hello, girls.” Payton grinned, as she and Reina kissed Tamara and Lindy hello.

“Hello, yourself,” Lindy replied. They all sat down at the table.

It was a pleasant dinner as the four of them caught up on things and just enjoyed each other’s company.

“Payton and Reina, Lindy and I have wanted to talk to you about our commitment ceremony.”

“Everything is okay, isn’t it?” Reina asked, concern in her voice. The ceremony was in three weeks.

“Of course. I’m not going to let Lindy get away.” Tamara laughed as Lindy grinned happily at her. “We have another small thing we want to talk to you about.”

Reina and Payton listened intently as Lindy started to speak. “Tamara and I have talked about this, and if the two of you are willing, we want you to get married with us.” Lindy and Tamara watched them carefully, waiting for a response. “We know you love each other and want to get married. We also will understand if you want your own ceremony. We just can’t think of two people we would rather share ours with,” Tamara rapidly explained.

Reina was the first to respond. “I would marry Payton tonight if we could arrange it, but are you sure? It’s your special day.”

“It would be even more special if the two of you joined us. We have the place reserved and we have the minister. You already know what we have planned, you helped us.”

“Payton, what do you think?” Reina turned to her.

“I would marry you right now in this restaurant if you asked. If Lindy and Tamara want us to join them and you want to, I say yes.”

Reina didn’t take her eyes off Payton’s face as a slow smile indicated her decision. “Yes, I say yes.”

Payton couldn’t stop looking at Reina while tears threatened to fall. She smiled in response. “Then, yes it is.”

“All right!” Lindy exclaimed as she and Tamara hugged.

“You have lots of things to do,” Tamara reminded them.

“Like What?” Payton and Reina were too interested in each other.

“Invitations, flowers, clothes.”

Reina groaned. "What are your children wearing?"

"Lindy talked me into getting a tuxedo for Banta, and the girls are wearing dresses. Lindy and I are wearing long dresses but we didn't choose any colors. We thought we would have boutonnieres and corsages for the children and the two of us."

"You invited your parents?"

"Yes, Lindy's and mine are coming. Do you have enough time to get your parents here?"

"I don't know, I will call them tomorrow. Payton, you could call your brother and see if he can make it."

"That's it then. You two are getting married with us in three weeks." Lindy grinned.

"Not quite." Payton spoke up. "We expect to pay for half of everything so you need to tell us what we owe you."

"Payton, we have everything taken care of."

"I don't care, we pay half."

"Okay, okay." Lindy shook her head. "Couldn't it be our gift to the two of you?"

"Asking us to join you is gift enough."

"Thank you. Now what can we do to help the two of you?" Tamara offered. "How about Lindy and Payton take the two boys down to get fitted for their tuxedos, while Reina and I take the girls shopping for dresses tomorrow. We can even pick out flowers. We also need to let the banquet hall at the club know how many people will be attending. Can you make a guest list by tomorrow? The caterer will also need to be told."

"What do you think, Payton?"

"We can do this."

"How about we skip the movie and start now," Lindy suggested

"I think that's a great idea." Reina laughed. "I can't believe we agreed to this."

The four of them happily made their plans, and by ten o'clock they had an additional guest list and a number of tasks to accomplish on Saturday and Sunday.

"We'll be at your house by ten-thirty tomorrow morning. Reina, Tamara, and the girls can take the van, and the four of us can go in your car."

"Sounds good. Reina and I will work on the invitations on Sunday and get those mailed."

"Terrific. I'm so glad you guys said yes." Lindy hugged Payton as they left the restaurant. "Everything is going to be perfect. If you need help writing your vows, call me."

"Thanks, Lindy. We love you guys."

"We love you. Thank you, and goodnight."

Reina and Payton headed for their car and home. Reina was very quiet and didn't touch Payton once while they were in the car and that was not normal behavior. Payton began to worry, and after fifteen minutes of complete silence she finally spoke.

"Reina, is this what you want?"

"Payton, I want to marry you more than anything. Are you sure you aren't feeling pressured to do this?" Reina's voice was strained.

Payton pulled the car over to the side of the road so she could stop and face Reina as she responded. This was a very important moment.

"Honey, look at me," She asked softly as she clasped Reina's left hand to her. "What do you think this gold band means to me?"

"I know you love me, Payton." Reina's eyes glistened in the dark.

"I not only love you, Reina, I love all three children, our life, and our home. I love that I can watch you sleep next to me, the way you play with the kids, and how hard you work at your career. But most of all, I love the way you make me feel, loved and beautiful. When you look at me I feel like I am a part of you."

"You are, Payton. I want you with me forever." Reina smiled happily.

“You have me forever. But would you rather wait and have our own ceremony?”

“No, I want to marry you in three weeks.”

“Good, I love you, Reina.”

“Payton, I never thought I could love someone this much.” They hugged each other tightly.

“Let’s go home. We have a long day tomorrow.”

“And I’m afraid you aren’t going to get much sleep tonight.” Reina grinned.

“Why is that?”

“I plan on keeping you up all night. It’s not every night that a woman agrees to get married.” Reina’s hand sliding on her thigh was Payton’s undoing, and she moaned. She couldn’t wait to get home.

Reina was true to her word, because as soon as Mrs. Lenahan walked out the door for home Reina backed Payton into the bedroom. She proceeded to keep Payton up most of the night as they made slow, heart-stopping love until they were exhausted. They drifted off to sleep with whispered promises of love, their bodies wrapped around each other. Payton was the last to fall asleep, listening to Reina’s measured breathing and watching her sleep. She felt tearful as she held Reina against her body, her hand resting on the now definite mound of Reina’s growing stomach. She was scared, excited, and most of all overwhelmed by the gifts she had been given in life. Nothing could have prepared her for the wonder she felt as she thought of her family. She fell asleep thanking God for blessing her.

“Banta, quit fidgeting, please, and let the gentleman measure your pants,” Lindy patiently requested, as she and Payton watched the two tiny boys being fitted in their tuxedos. They had decided on dark gray with cream-colored shirts and black bow ties. The two children looked darling, but very bored, and extremely uncomfortable.

“Lindy, are we done?” Banta whined, while Max tugged on his tie.

“Almost, honey. You and Max look real handsome in those suits.”

Payton chuckled, watching Max and Banta. “Guys if you will just be patient for a few more minutes we will go to lunch.”

“Okay, Payton.” Max looked up at her and smiled, his dimples deepening in his cheeks and his curly hair standing up on his head. Payton’s heart flipped.

“Max, I love you gobs.”

“I love you gobs.” Max grinned as Payton hugged him tightly.

“That should do it,” The clerk announced, finishing pinning Banta’s pant legs.

“Okay, guys. You go with Payton and change into your clothes, while I take care of the bill.”

Twenty minutes later, the four of them were seated in a restaurant down the block eating lunch. Both boys ordered hamburgers and French fries and happily dipped their fries in catsup, giggling.

“Lindy, I need to find a dress for the ceremony. Have you already chosen one?”

“Yes, but Tamara and I aren’t letting each other see it until the ceremony. Why don’t we go shopping one night after work this week?”

“Good. I also need to find a present for Reina.”

“I’m awfully glad you and Reina are getting married with us.”

“So am I, Lindy. I can’t tell you how happy I am. I feel so lucky.”

“I know you’re happy, I see it on your face when you look at Reina and the kids. I think you two are perfect for each other.”

“I think so too. I need to find something special for Reina.”

“We will. Come on guys, finish your lunch, we’ve got things to do this afternoon.”

By mid-afternoon, Payton and Lindy had taken care of everything on her list. She and Reina had decided to make their own invitations on the computer so Payton had picked up everything they needed. They pulled into the garage and carried all their packages into the house. While Payton and Lindy started dinner, the two young boys played in Max’s room. Reina and the rest of the crowd would be home any minute and Payton wanted to get things rolling. Feeding

nine people was not an easy task. Lindy and she visited as they prepared the meal.

“Payton, did you get a hold of your brother yet?”

“Yes, I talked to him this morning, and he and his wife are coming with their two kids.”

“That’s wonderful!” Lindy knew how important it was to Payton that her brother and his family could come. He was her only living relative and they were very close.

“Reina’s parents are coming, too.”

“That’s terrific!”

“Nothing like meeting the family all in one weekend.” Payton grimaced.

“You’ve talked to Reina’s parents on the telephone. What’s the problem?”

“That’s a hell of a lot different than meeting them in person.”

“Everything will be fine, don’t worry.”

“I’ll worry until everything is over with.”

“Hello.” Tamara walked into the kitchen and kissed Lindy soundly.

“Hi, where’s the rest of the group?” Lindy slid her arms around Tamara.

“Reina and Molly are hiding their dresses from Payton, and Maria and Amena are with them. Where are the boys?”

“They’re playing in Max’s room.”

“How did your day go?”

“Perfect, the tuxedos were fitted to the boys and I’ll pick them up Thursday night before the ceremony. They looked so cute, Tamara. You should have seen them.”

“I can’t wait. Payton, go find Reina. She’s in the bedroom. Besides, I want to kiss my girlfriend,” Tamara teased.

Payton grinned at the two of them and hurried down the hallway. She needed to see Reina. “Hi, girls.” Payton waved at the girls who were giggling in Molly’s room.

“Hi, Payton.”

She stuck her head in Max’s room where the boys were heavily engrossed in putting Legos together, and then knocked on her bedroom door before entering. “Reina, it’s Payton.”

“Honey, why are you knocking on the bedroom door?” Reina pulled Payton into the room and wrapped her arms around her. “I missed you, honey.”

“I missed you.” Payton nuzzled her neck. “You smell so nice.”

Reina sighed as Payton’s lips nibbled on her neck. “Could we send everyone home and have a quiet evening all to ourselves?”

“I think it’s too late for that. I understand you and Molly found dresses.”

“We did, but you cannot see them before the ceremony.” Reina smiled and kissed her. “We ordered the flowers and the cake, and talked to the caterer to confirm that they can handle the extra guests.”

“So everything is taken care of?” Payton and Reina stood in each other’s arms as they talked.

“Everything is perfect. How was your day?”

“Great. Max and Banta looked so cute in their tuxedos. Lindy will pick them up a couple of days before the ceremony. I also picked up everything we need for the invitations. We can print them tomorrow and get them mailed.”

“Payton, I love you.”

“Reina, I can’t tell you how much I love you.” They kissed slowly, thoroughly, and then stood in each other’s arms for several moments without speaking.

“We’d better go help with dinner,” Reina suggested as she kissed Payton softly.

Payton placed her finger on Reina’s lips. “I’ll make it up to you later,” She promised as she led Reina by the hand out of the bedroom and down the hall.

“I can’t wait until later.”

“It’ll be worth it. I promise.” Payton grinned at her before entering the kitchen.

Dinner was chaotic, loud, and full of laughter, as the children and the four adults ate their meal. It was a happy group that visited and giggled.

“Okay kids, all of you take your plates to the counter,” Reina requested as she carried hers and the other three adults. Even tiny Max carried his plate carefully into the kitchen. Reina bestowed a kiss and a hug to each child as they did as she asked. “Thanks guys. You’re all such good kids. Now, why don’t all of you go in the living room and watch a video?”

“If I had known I’d get a kiss for carrying my plate into the kitchen, I would have carried my own.” Payton teased Reina with a sexy smile.

“You will get yours later,” Reina promised with a smile of her own.

“Will you guys go home?” Payton asked, grinning broadly at Lindy and Tamara.

“Payton!” Reina scolded her as she laughed with Lindy and Tamara.

The four adults sat at the kitchen table after cleaning up the kitchen. For the next several hours they divided up another list of tasks they needed to get accomplished the following week. Payton and Lindy were going shopping on Monday night for Payton’s dress and a gift for Reina. The rest of the week all four had several items to take care of. Tamara and Lindy wrapped up their visit and the four adults gathered the three sleepy children and loaded them in the van so the five could head for home.

“Okay, you two, let’s go get ready for bed,” Payton suggested, tossing Max over her shoulders like a sack of potatoes. She walked Molly to her room and tucked her in, then carried Max into his. “Okay, little man, let’s get your pajamas on.”

“I love you, gobs.”

“You know what, Max? I love you gobs and gobs. You are a very special little man and I feel very lucky to be a part of your family.”

Payton finished dressing Max in his pajamas and tucked him in. “Sleep tight, Max.” Payton hugged and kissed him. “I love you, buddy.”

Payton was completely unaware of Reina in the doorway watching until she turned to leave the room. Reina’s eyes twinkled at her along with her deep dimples as she smiled.

“Molly is tucked in and almost asleep.”

“Good, she was exhausted.”

“Now, I remember something about a promise some gorgeous woman made to me earlier in the evening. Something about kisses.” Reina smiled, pulling Payton down the hall to the bedroom.

“Lots and lots of kisses, and some other ideas I’ve been thinking about all day.”

“Some other ideas?” Reina was rapidly removing Payton’s clothes while Payton did the same for her.

“You don’t know it, but you’re marrying a very creative person, with lots of wonderful plans.”

“Oh, I think I know how creative you are.” And creative she was, as Payton made love with Reina until long after midnight.

“Payton, are you still awake?” Reina whispered in the dark.

“Yes, honey.” Payton was holding Reina as they lay quietly in bed. “Give me your hand.” Payton did as she was asked and Reina placed it on her stomach.

“The baby moved!” Payton announced, amazed. “The baby is moving!”

“It just started.” Reina smiled at Payton’s astonishment.

Payton pushed Reina gently on her back and placed both hands on her stomach. Reina enjoyed watching Payton’s fascination with the baby’s movement, and placed her own hands on top of Payton’s.

“The baby is kicking.” Payton laughed and kissed Reina stomach. Reina’s eyes became teary watching Payton. Payton continued kissing

Reina's stomach, covering every inch with her mouth and tongue as she told the baby how much she and Reina loved the child. It was Reina's undoing when Payton whispered to her unborn child.

"You are the luckiest baby in the world. You have an older sister and brother who will love you and take care of you. Your mother is perfect, she is beautiful, smart, and funny, and she already loves you very much. My name is Payton, and I promise I will love you and keep you safe. I can't wait to meet you."

Reina's face was covered with tears as she listened to Payton speak. If she had not already asked Payton to marry her, she would have done it at that moment. "Payton, come here."

Reina pulled Payton into her arms and kissed her passionately. "I love you, Payton."

"I love you, Reina." Reina folded her arms around Payton, holding her close. "Honey, should I be laying on top of you?"

"I want you on top of me and the baby, and I'm fine. I want to hold you."

"Reina, thank you." Payton leaned up on her elbows and looked at Reina.

"For what?"

"For everything, this, our family, your love."

"Honey, I'm the one who should be thanking you. You made this family whole, and I think this baby is going to be very lucky to have you as a parent."

Payton began to cry as Reina whispered to her how much she loved her and how lucky she felt. Payton put her head on Reina's shoulder as she stared at the beautiful, pregnant woman she was a partner with. That was the way they fell asleep, Payton with her head resting on Reina's shoulder, her arm resting protectively on Reina's stomach while Reina's arms held her tightly.

Sunday was spent making and mailing the invitations and playing with Max and Molly. It was a perfect day. Monday evening Lindy and

Payton found the most wonderful dress and a gift for Reina. Payton was extremely excited everything was coming together.

“Don’t you peek,” Payton warned Reina.

“I won’t.” Reina laughed good-naturedly.

“I think we need to get presents for Max and Molly. It will make them feel special, and I don’t want them to feel left out.”

“That’s a good idea. Why don’t you and I go shopping tomorrow night and find something for them?”

“Good. How was your day?”

“Crazy busy, and I have to fly both Saturday and Sunday.”

“That’s okay sweetie, the kids and I will be fine. How long are you allowed to fly while you’re pregnant?”

“As long as my stomach doesn’t get in the way and my blood pressure stay’s normal.”

“Is it safe?”

“Honey, I am the best bloody helicopter pilot you’ve ever met!”

“You are the only helicopter pilot I have ever met, and I know you are the best. I just worry.”

“I know you do, sweetie, and that’s okay with me.” Reina kissed her. “How was your day?”

“Good, very busy. I’ve been given responsibility for the design of a new sales and marketing group. I’m going to be very busy.”

“And very happy,” Reina teased.

Payton laughed. “You know me very well.”

“I love you, of course I know you very well.”

“Are Max and Molly asleep?”

“Yes. They were so excited about the remodeling that it took me all night to settle them down.”

“Want to go with me and look at what they did today?”

“I’d love to. We will need a flashlight.”

“Let me change shoes.”

“Okay, love. I’ll meet you in the kitchen.”

The two of them laughed and giggled as they prowled around the yard looking at the start of the remodel. “The neighbors probably think we’re casing the joint and will call the police,” Payton chuckled as Reina trained the flashlight on the gaping hole in the ground.

“They should have the foundation poured in two weeks, and then the building will begin.”

“Great. It’ll be a huge mess when your parents get here.”

“And your brother.”

“It’s a good thing they’re all staying at a hotel.” Reina grinned as Payton looked at her.

“Are you nervous?”

“About meeting your parents? Of course I am. What if they don’t like me?”

“Honey, they already do like you.” Reina held hands with Payton. “And they’re arriving the week before the ceremony.”

“Excuse me?”

“They’re arriving next Friday around eight. They called tonight.”

“That early?” Payton looked terrified.

“Everything will be fine, honey.” Reina reassured her. “Come inside.”

“I hope so.” Payton shook her already tousled brown hair.

Reina watched Payton walk into the house. She looked so beautiful. She was still wearing a cranberry red business suit that fit her perfectly, showing off her slender figure to perfection. Reina hadn’t known it was possible, but she fell more and more in love with Payton every day. She no longer worried about whether Payton loved her pregnant, even though she did worry that Payton might find her unappealing, as she got heavier. She just prayed that Payton would still love her. She couldn’t imagine life without her. She followed her into the house thinking that she and the kids were very lucky to have found Payton.

## CHAPTER 8

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“*T*hey should be coming out any time,” Reina announced, her voice full of excitement. Payton just held her breath, waiting while Max sat on her shoulders, his chubby arms tight around her neck. “Relax, Payton.” Reina hugged her around the waist as Molly held onto her other hand.

“Grandma!” Molly cried out, as a very nice-looking older couple came through the airline gate.

“Max, go say hello to your grandma and grandpa.” Payton put the little boy down on his feet and he immediately ran to the couple, along with his sister.

“Max and Molly, you have gotten so big,” Their grandpa announced. As they got closer, Payton could see the resemblance between Reina and her parents. Her mother was very pretty and had the same blue eyes and dimples as her daughter. She and Reina’s father hugged the two children tightly.

“Mom and Dad, how was your flight?” Reina hugged them hello.

“Good.” Her father answered as he picked Max up in his arms. He had the same dark curly hair as his grandson, with very little gray in it.

“You must be Payton.” Reina’s mother touched her arm. “It’s wonderful to finally meet you in person.” She hugged Payton.

“Hi, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Payton, this is my father. Dad, this is Payton.” Reina smiled proudly.

“Hello, it’s nice to meet you.” Payton smiled and reached out to shake his hand.

“Hello, Payton it’s a pleasure to meet you.” He shook her hand as he juggled his grandson in his arms, while Molly enjoyed standing in the arms of her grandmother.

“Let’s go get your bags and get out of here,” Reina suggested, touching Payton’s back to reassure her. She knew how nervous Payton was about meeting her parents.

The children walked with their grandpa, while Reina’s mother walked with the two of them. “They have gotten so big.”

“They’re growing very fast.”

“How are you feeling?”

“Good, Mom. I feel very good. The doctor says I’m healthy as a horse.”

“Is that true, Payton?”

“It’s true. I’ve gone to the last three doctor’s appointments with her and the doctor says she’s in perfect shape.”

“Okay. Now Reina, I understand you have to work tomorrow and Sunday, so Payton, what can we do to get ready for next weekend?”

“I think we have everything covered until next week. Then we’ll need all the help you can offer.”

“Good, put us to work.”

“The kids and I wanted to know if you would like to spend the day with us at the zoo?”

“We’d love to.”

“Great. We will come pick you up around nine in the morning.”

“Reina, your dad rented a car for the week and we need to pick it up.”

“No problem, Mom. We’ll show you the way to the hotel and get you checked in.”

It wasn't long before they picked up the luggage and headed for the rental car. Once everything was settled they prepared to leave.

"Max and Molly, do you want to ride with your grandma and grandpa to the hotel?"

"Yes, please."

"Dad, Payton and I will go get the car and meet you right outside the parking lot. Then you can follow us to the hotel."

"Okay, honey. Give your Dad a hug."

Reina happily hugged her father, while Payton buckled the children into the back seat of the rental car. "I'm glad you are here, Mom and Dad."

"We wouldn't have missed it, honey." Reina's father hugged Reina again and then Payton, drawing a look of surprise from her.

Reina and Payton walked quickly to their parked car and, as they drew closer, Payton spoke. "I like your father and mother."

"They are very good people."

"How come they don't have an Australian accent like you?"

"They are both from the United States, and only went to Australia when Dad was transferred for work. I grew up there until after high school, so Australians surrounded me. My parents never picked up a strong accent, and what little they had disappeared after they moved to Boston, ten years ago."

"I like the way you talk," Payton admitted as they got in the car.

"You bloody well should if you are going to marry me," Reina teased her with a grin and a kiss.

Payton laughed as they headed back to Reina's waiting parents. "I like everything about you."

"You do? Like what?" Reina placed her hand on Payton's leg as Payton drove.

"One of my favorite things is the way you smell. It's sweet and floral, and fits you. I also love the skin on your shoulders with the freckles. It's so soft and when I kiss you there you shiver just a little so I know you like my kisses."

“Payton, you’re driving me nuts,” Reina whispered, her hand sliding along Payton’s thigh.

“Reina, watch that hand please, I’m driving,” Payton groaned, as Reina’s hand tightened against her upper thigh.

They pulled up next to the rental car. “Dad, the hotel is only about twenty minutes away. Payton and I will lead you there. Just follow us,” Reina called to her father.

“Okay, sweetie.”

As Payton and Reina pulled out and headed for the hotel, Reina turned to face Payton. “You know what I love about you? When I make love with you, you look so intently at me and your eyes fill with tears. You touch me all the time in the smallest of ways just to let me know you love me. I love the way you look at me when I take my clothes off. From the first moment you looked at me I knew you wanted me. Your eyes grow dark brown and they travel over my body and I can almost feel them touching me, and then you smile, that sexy smile that you get right before you touch me, and I melt.”

Payton’s mouth grew dry listening to Reina. “I love the sigh you make when I wrap my arms around you, and I especially love it when you wake me in the middle of the night to make love with me.”

Reina held onto Payton’s thigh as she spoke, trying hard not to move her hand but wanting so badly to feel the muscles of her leg. “My most favorite thing is the look you get when you watch Max and Molly. I can see in that one look how much you love them.”

“Reina,” Payton whispered as she glanced at her, her body flushed with heat. “I love everything about you, especially that you are going to have another child.”

“Payton, I am going to make love to you all night long,” Reina promised with a whisper and a smile.

They pulled into the parking lot of the hotel and slowed to a stop in front of the entrance, Reina’s father right behind them. Payton spoke quietly to her very sexy lover. “Honey you have to work tomorrow. You are flying and need your sleep.”

“What I need is you.” Reina smiled as she got out of the car. Payton was still vibrating from the delicious words her girlfriend had spoken.

“Max and Molly give your grandma and grandpa a hug and kiss and go get in the car with Payton. You’ll see them tomorrow when you go to the zoo.”

“Okay, mom. Goodbye, Grandma and Grandpa.”

“Goodbye Molly and Max, we’ll see you in the morning.” They scrambled out of the car and into Payton’s, where she buckled them in.

“Mom and Dad, Payton will pick you up at nine with the kids. You get a good night’s sleep. You’re going to need it.” She kissed the two of them. “I’m sorry I have to work this weekend, but at least I don’t have to work next weekend.”

“Honey, we understand. We’ll see you in the morning, Payton.”

“Okay, guys. Let’s get you home and into bed. It’s pretty late and you have a long day tomorrow.”

“Will we see monkeys?” Max asked.

“Of course, monkey man. Molly, we will see the baby panda bear,” Payton reassured the kids.

The four of them were home within ten minutes, and both children climbed immediately into their pajamas and bed. Reina and Payton headed for their own bedroom to prepare for bed.

“I’m going to take a quick shower,” Payton volunteered, as she headed for the bathroom.

“Okay, honey.” Reina washed up and put her nightgown on. She was rubbing lotion into her hands when Payton stepped out of the shower and began to towel off. Reina stopped what she was doing to watch. Payton slowly rubbed her legs dry, and then her backside and her arms and back before beginning to dry her chest. Reina couldn’t wait any longer.

“You know what I love about your body?” She spoke just loud enough to get Payton’s attention. “When I first met you, you were

wearing shorts and a tee shirt. You were playing soccer with the kids, and I thought, you have a nice body, small but muscular, trim and shapely, and a very nice backside. But the first time I saw you without any clothes on, you astounded me. Your full breasts and long legs made me want to wrap your legs around my waist and put my mouth on those beautiful breasts.”

Payton dropped the towel to the floor as she watched Reina look at her and listened to what she was saying. “The first time we made love, you were so wet and so soft all I wanted to do was slip inside you and feel you tighten around my fingers. I loved how you opened up to me as I touched you. I’ve never wanted someone as much as I wanted you, and I get that same feeling every time I look at you, every time I touch you.”

“Reina,” Payton pleaded when Reina slowly approached her.

Reina’s mouth met Payton’s as their bodies collided. Payton’s hands ripped the nightgown off Reina in one swift move. Reina’s hunger for Payton was immediate and overwhelming as her hands and mouth were all over Payton’s breasts. Payton was insatiable, covering Reina’s breasts with kisses, pulling on her nipples with her lips, her large breasts in her hands. Payton pulled Reina to the bed, but before they could fall onto it Reina stopped her. “I want to make love with you standing up, right here.”

She stepped away from Payton to look at her. “I’m going to slide my fingers inside you and drive you wild until you cry with pleasure.” She moved closer to Payton and stopped inches away. “I love your body, and I’m going to show you just how much.”

Reina’s mouth once again covered Payton’s breasts and then slid over her stomach, her fingers leaving hot, tingling, touches across her skin stroking her body. She kneeled in front of Payton and her mouth and hands traveled over both legs, sliding over her muscles, heating up her skin. Payton was moaning with passion by this time, her breathing heavy, and the pressure between her legs building. Reina stepped behind Payton, and her mouth and tongue traced and

kissed patterns along her shoulders and back before she once more kneeled and kissed the backs of her thighs, her fingers sliding across Payton's buttocks. Payton's body shook, as Reina's lips reverently kissed the sensitive skin of Payton's backside, as her fingers touched and kneaded the muscles. Payton, gasping for breath, could barely stand up.

"Reina, please."

Reina's finger slid between Payton's cheeks, tantalizing her, before touching her very wet, pulsing center.

"You are so wet, so swollen," Reina whispered, her fingers gently probing and stroking as Payton's hips began to move. Just when Payton was about to beg, Reina plunged her fingers inside Payton.

"Oh God, Reina!" Payton cried as Reina drove her closer to an orgasm. Her other hand joined, teasing the very hardened pulsing tissue, until Payton was wracked with a series of orgasms that left her weak and trembling.

"I need to hold you," She gasped, as her body shook and tremors made her weak in the knees. Reina gathered her in her arms, holding and soothing her while Payton cried softly on her shoulder.

"You are so beautiful, Payton," Reina whispered, kissing the hot tears away as they slid from Payton's eyes.

"Reina, you're the beautiful one," Payton replied, covering Reina's lips with her own. As Reina's mouth opened to Payton's tongue, she moaned. Payton's mouth was heaven to Reina, kiss after kiss creating a fever in Reina's body. From the very first kiss, Reina had loved what Payton did to her. Payton's hands floated over Reina's body, touching here and there, making her skin tingle. Her fingers surrounded Reina's breasts causing them to sweetly ache, and her breathing becoming labored. Payton's tongue softly touched Reina's nipple, teasing the hardened peak until she surrounded it with her wet, hot mouth. Reina gasped as she cradled Payton's head, reveling in the feelings Payton was creating. A kaleidoscope of pleasure splintered

through her body. Never before had anyone ever made her feel this way.

“Payton,” Reina cried as her body shimmered and shook and the familiar ache began in the very center of her body. Payton’s mouth seared Reina’s skin, covering her stomach and hips, her hands sliding over Reina’s buttocks and thighs. She kneeled in front of Reina and her lips traveled lower and lower, until she parted the soft curls between Reina’s legs and found the waiting tissue. Payton’s tongue tasted Reina’s sweet wetness and she sucked gently, teasing and tantalizing Reina until her body fractured into a thousand streaks of pleasure shooting through her body. Payton felt Reina’s orgasm and slid her fingers into her, stroking her, creating a cascade of blissful ecstasy. Reina could barely hold herself upright as she melted against Payton. Payton stood up and surrounded Reina with her arms, holding tightly as Reina clung to Payton trying to catch her breath. Payton gently laid Reina onto the bed and covered her body with her own. Reina pulled Payton’s face down to kiss her, her lips tenderly tasting Payton’s.

“I love kissing you, Payton. I could kiss you all night long. I love the taste and feel of your lips against mine.” Reina continued slowly kissing Payton, passion building again. It was a slowly burning fire that started with a few sparks and then flared and heated up until their bodies were once again consumed with fiery passion. They made love again, relishing the feelings they evoked in each other.

“You need to go to sleep, doll.” Payton suggested several hours later as they lay, sated, against each other. “You’re going to be exhausted tomorrow.”

“Honey, making love with you doesn’t tire me out, it rejuvenates me.”

“Well, I still want you to get some sleep. Humor me, please.”

“As long as I can hold you all night.”

Payton pulled Reina tightly against her, breathing in her scent. “You just try to get away from me.”

They drifted off to sleep, Reina firmly surrounded by Payton's arms, her fingers threaded in Payton's hair, secure and safe, and full of love.

By Sunday evening, Payton had gotten used to Reina's parents and was finding them very enjoyable to be around. By mid-week they were pitching in without being asked and making the week move smoothly by. Nevertheless, by Thursday evening, Payton was full of worry as the weekend drew closer. She and Lindy picked up the boys tuxedos and shoes, checked on the hall, followed up with the caterer, and made sure the flowers would be picked up on Saturday morning. Everything was proceeding as planned, and this still did not alleviate her fears. What if Reina changed her mind? Payton sat out in the backyard after putting the children to bed. Reina's parents had been over all day and stayed for dinner. She had left Reina and her parents reminiscing in the kitchen and was hiding out on the patio.

"Mind if I join you?" It was Reina's mother, Virginia.

"Certainly. It's a beautiful night out."

"It is. It's going to be a perfect weekend." Virginia sat in the lawn chair next to Payton. "Payton, do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

"Not at all." Payton liked Reina's parents. They were open, honest, and affectionate, and she intended to be the same with them.

"Were you of sound mind when you agreed to be with my daughter and her children?"

Payton looked startled at Virginia, until she saw the smile on her face, and she laughed. "Yes, I was of sound mind. I consider myself extremely lucky and blessed to be a part of their life."

"From what I see, my daughter and her children are equally blessed."

"Thank you. That means so much to me coming from you."

"So tell me, why do you have such a terrified look on your face?"

Payton struggled with her words. "I'm afraid Reina will change her mind."

“Oh honey, wild horses wouldn’t make Reina change her mind.” Virginia took Payton by the hand. “It wasn’t easy for Reina’s dad and myself to get used to her being gay, and it was just as hard watching her choose to be a single parent. Don’t get me wrong, we’re both extremely proud of our daughter, and wouldn’t change her for the world. But, I have to tell you, watching you and Reina commit yourselves to one another will be the single most precious thing her dad and I will get to do. My daughter loves you, Payton, from the depths of her heart. I know, she’s my child.”

Payton felt the tears welling in her eyes.” I love her and the kids.”

“Honey, you don’t have to tell me that. I can see it with my own eyes. I can hear it in your voice. I know you love Molly and Max unconditionally, and they love you.”

“They are terrific kids.”

“And they will become terrific adults with you and Reina raising them.” Virginia patted Payton’s hand. “What would your mother say to you if she was here right now?”

Payton sat for a few moments to collect her thoughts before she answered. “She would say you are one lucky woman, Payton. Be true to your heart and never fear loving Reina. She would tell me to be open and honest with my feelings, and to thank God every day for sending Reina and her family my way.”

“She would also tell you that you are a beautiful, loving woman, and Reina should consider herself lucky to have you in her life.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, honey. Saturday you gain a family and I gain another wonderful daughter.” Virginia leaned over and hugged her. “I think we are both lucky.” Payton was too overwhelmed to respond, as her emotions got the best of her.

“Can we join you?” Reina’s voice floated to them in the darkness, as she stepped up behind Payton and slid her arms around her neck.

“Certainly, honey,” Her mother responded with a smile.

Reina's dad sat next to his wife. "Payton, Reina was telling me you are pretty good with a computer."

"I'm not bad, why?"

"I'm thinking about getting one. Do you think you could help me pick one out?"

"Certainly, I'd love to." Payton relaxed against Reina's body and reached up and clasped Reina's hands in her own. Reina squeezed her fingers in acknowledgment.

"Good. Now, Virginia, we need to get going and let these girls get a good night's sleep."

"We'll be back early tomorrow morning to watch the kids while you two are at work. Payton, what time does your brother and his family arrive?"

"Their airplane arrives at ten o'clock. He decided to go straight to the hotel since it'll be so late by the time they get their luggage and everything. Reina has invited them over for breakfast with all of us Saturday morning. So you'll get to meet them then."

"You and Reina have enough to do Saturday morning without Frank and I adding to the confusion."

"But I want you to be here, please. I want Ed to meet Reina's family."

"Only on one condition," Reina's father requested. "That I fix the breakfast."

"You got it. But how good are you at making pancakes in the shape of a monkey?" Payton teased as Reina and her mother burst out laughing.

"I may need some help with that," Frank chuckled.

"Max and I will have to show you. It's our favorite." She grinned.

"Let's go, Frank." Virginia led her husband back into the house with Payton and Reina trailing behind them.

"If you bring your clothes with you Saturday morning, you can leave straight from here."

“Honey, you and Payton will have plenty to do with the children and yourselves. We’ll go back to the hotel after breakfast, and meet you at the hall later.”

Payton and Reina kissed the two of them goodnight and watched them leave from the front door. “Payton, can we talk for a minute?” Reina asked quietly as she shut the door.

Payton’s heart leaped into her throat, pounding wildly. “Yes.” She couldn’t even look at Reina, she was so scared.

“Come, sit on the couch with me.” Reina smiled, taking Payton by the hand. Payton sat down not sure what to expect, and thinking the worst. “Payton, look at me, honey. Tell me why you’re so terrified.”

“Are you sure you want to marry me?”

“Is that what this is about?” Reina reached over to hug Payton. “Honey, I would marry you this minute if I could. I thought you were having second thoughts about me because of my being pregnant. I can’t wait until Saturday night. I love you, sweetie.”

“Reina, I find you’re having another child wonderful and exciting. I love you.” Payton breathed a sigh of relief. “I was afraid you would change your mind before you married me.”

“Not on your life. You’re stuck with me forever.” Reina grinned.

“Thank you.”

“You can thank me later.” Reina laughed. “Come to bed and we’ll do something that will make you truly thankful.” Payton just grinned as she followed her beautiful sexy girlfriend down the hall to get ready for bed. She had wonderful thoughts of her own.

“Payton, your brother is on the telephone.” She picked up the receiver in the kitchen where she was setting the table in preparation for breakfast in the morning. It was after eleven on Friday night, but she had asked Ed to call as soon as he got his family settled at the hotel.

“Hi Ed, how was your flight?”

“Good. Are you ready for tomorrow?”

“I think so. I’m looking forward to seeing you and Eva and the kids.”

“We’re all looking forward to seeing you, and meeting Reina, and her family.”

“You’ve got the directions to the house? We’ll have breakfast at nine-thirty. Then in the afternoon, you can go back to the hotel, and change clothes. We will swing by there, and you can follow us to the hall.”

“Good. Payton, I am very happy for you.”

“Thanks, Ed.”

“Eva and I need to get the kids to bed. We will be there by nine-thirty.”

“See you tomorrow. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

“Payton, are you about done in here?” Reina asked as she entered the kitchen. “Everything looks beautiful.”

“It does look nice. And I’m finished.”

“How are your brother and his family?”

“Good. They’ll be here by nine-thirty and your parents will get here by nine.”

“Perfect. The flowers are in the refrigerator. I stopped by on my way home from work instead of waiting until the morning. All of our clothes are ready except yours. It’s just a matter of getting dressed.”

“All my clothes are ready, and the rings are polished and in the bedroom.”

“Let’s call it a night.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Payton, do you understand about our sleeping apart tonight?” Reina had asked that they sleep in separate rooms the night before the ceremony, so Payton was sleeping in Molly’s room and Molly was sleeping with her mom.

“Of course I do, honey. I understand completely.” Payton didn’t like being separated from Reina for even one night but she did understand.

They headed down the darkened hallway and stopped outside Molly’s room. “Goodnight, Payton.”

“Goodnight.” They shared a gentle kiss and parted slowly.

“I love you.”

“I love you.”

Payton watched Reina enter their bedroom and then entered Molly’s dimly lit bedroom and crawled into bed. She would miss holding Reina, but if this was what Reina wanted, she certainly could do it, especially if it made Saturday night even more special. She drifted off to sleep with visions of Reina in her dreams.

Reina was not having an easy time falling to sleep. She missed Payton very much. Finally, about two in the morning, she gave up and got out of bed. Padding down the hallway to Molly’s room where Payton was sleeping, she entered the room and stood next to the bed. Payton was sound asleep on her side facing Reina. One arm was tucked against her body, her hand against her cheek. Her other arm was thrown over her head. Her hair was mussed from sleeping, her face relaxed, a faint smile on her lips. She was wearing her silk night-shirt and, as usual, she had kicked her covers off to reveal her long slender legs. Her nightshirt barely covered her hips, and Reina’s eyes traveled up and down her beautiful body. Her nightshirt was unbuttoned at her neck to reveal the tops of her full breasts. Reina had never seen her so beautiful. She watched her sleep for several minutes before gently touching her cheek.

“Payton,” She whispered.

Payton’s eyelids fluttered several times before opening. “Reina, are you okay?” Payton started to sit up.

“Yes, honey. Don’t get up. I missed you.” She smiled as she sat on the edge of the bed. “I don’t want to sleep without you. I need to hold you.”

“Come here.” Payton lifted the covers up so Reina could slide in next to her. “I missed you, too.”

“I never want to sleep without you again.”

“You don’t have to.” Payton pulled Reina closer to her. Reina’s back was tight against Payton’s chest as they folded against one another. Payton kissed Reina on her neck and folded her arms around her waist. “Go to sleep, honey.”

“I love you, Payton.”

“I love you.” Within minutes both Payton and Reina were sound asleep, relaxed again, and safe in each other’s arms where they belonged.

“Mom, why are you and Payton sleeping in my bed?” Molly inquired as she stood in front of her mother who was still tightly held in Payton’s arms.

“Hi, honey. Payton was lonely in here all by herself.”

“Payton, you can sleep with me if you get lonely.” Molly crawled between Payton and Reina and snuggled with the two of them.

“Thank you doll.” Payton hugged Molly tightly.

“You know Molly, you are one terrific kid.” Reina grinned, hugging her tiny daughter.

The three of them talked and giggled until it was time to get up and Max had joined them. All four took showers and dressed for breakfast. It was a beautiful, warm, sunny day, perfect for a wedding. They were all in the kitchen by the time Reina’s parents arrived and joined them.

“Okay, everyone out of the kitchen but Molly, Max, and I.” Frank ordered. “Scoot, all of you.”

“Dad.” Reina laughed.

“I mean it. You, Payton, and your mom, take your coffee, and go in the living room. The three of us are fixing breakfast.

The three of them chuckled and left Frank and the children to handle things. They enjoyed relaxing and visiting as the three chefs

continued to perform their culinary magic, amid much laughter and the clanging of pans.

The doorbell rang at exactly nine-thirty, and Payton happily went to the door to greet her brother and his family.

“Ed, Eva, come on in.” Payton hugged her brother and his wife. “Hi Randy and Hattie, how are you?”

“Hi, Aunt Payton.” The two children hugged her. The children liked Payton very much.

She directed the four of them into the living room where Reina and her mother waited, smiling. “Reina and Virginia, this is my brother Ed, his wife Eva, and their two children, Randy and Hattie.” Payton proudly introduced them “This is Reina, and her mother, Virginia.”

“It’s nice to meet you Ed, Eva. Hello, Randy and Hattie, welcome to our home. I’ll go get Max and Molly.” Reina smiled in welcome. “Please make yourselves at home.”

Ed and his wife sat down while the children waited silently for Reina to return. Moments later she came out of the kitchen, Max and Molly behind her. “Molly and Max, this is Randy and Hattie.”

“Hi.” Molly smiled at the two children while Max grinned shyly, his dimples deep in his cheeks.

“Hi.” Randy and Hattie smiled at the two younger children.

“Do you want to come to my room and color?” Molly asked. The two children nodded their heads yes and followed Molly and Max down the hall to Molly’s room.

“Anyone want a cup of coffee?” Frank asked as he entered the living room.

“Dad, this is Ed and Eva, Payton’s brother and his wife.”

“It’s nice to meet the two of you.” Ed shook hands with them both. “I hope you’re hungry. The kids and I whipped up a mean breakfast this morning.”

“We are,” Ed admitted with a grin.

“How about some coffee? Why don’t we all go in the kitchen? We can let the children play for awhile,” Reina suggested.

The adults all crowded into the kitchen and took seats around the large kitchen table. “Reina, your children are beautiful,” Eva commented.

“Thank you. Payton has been raving about your children. They sound pretty special.”

“They are great kids, but I think Payton is a little prejudiced. Besides, she spoils them rotten.” Eva teased Payton with a smile.

“Well, we think Payton is pretty darn special ourselves,” Frank volunteered as he patted Payton on her shoulder. She blushed with embarrassment.

“She is pretty terrific,” Ed agreed. “I also know it took someone pretty wonderful to convince her to move down here, and get married.”

“Can you imagine the choice she had? Quit her job, sell her home, move eighteen hundred miles away, into someone else’s home, and help raise two children. And, oh by the way, a third child is on the way,” Reina teased. “And she did it, no questions asked.”

Payton grinned at her. “There was no other choice.”

Reina hugged her tightly. “We are so glad you all could make it.”

“We wouldn’t have missed it.” Eva replied with a smile. “Now tell me, how far along are you?”

“A little over two months.”

“Is it a boy or a girl?”

“We don’t know yet.” Payton squeezed Reina’s fingers.

“Congratulations,” Ed announced. “And you are remodeling your house?”

“Yes, we need another bedroom, another bathroom, and Payton needs an office.”

“Wow, you two are going to be very busy.”

Everyone visited with each other for quite awhile, until Frank suggested that they call the children and have breakfast. It was a very

pleasant meal. While the adults continued to visit, the four children devoured their animal shaped pancakes, giggling and talking to each other. They had obviously hit it off despite the age difference then all four fidgeted at the table until Reina suggested they be excused and go back and play in Molly's room.

"They sure seem to be getting along very well," Payton observed with a smile.

"Good. Because when you and Reina come for a visit, the kids will have a great time together." Ed reached across the table and took hold of Payton's hand. "I am very happy for you and Reina."

"Thank you, that means so much to me." Payton got emotional as she gazed at her older brother. They had always been very close, especially after they'd lost both their parents.

"Now, you and Reina take Ed and Eva out in your beautiful backyard and visit, while Virginia and I clean up the kitchen."

"Frank, I can help."

"Go."

The four did as they were told, and spent a pleasant morning talking and sharing their lives. It was after one o'clock before Molly came out to ask her mother a question. "Mom do you guys want some lunch? Grandma is fixing us soup and sandwiches."

"Ed and Eva would you like some lunch?"

"I'm fine, Reina."

"So am I." Eva smiled at Molly. "You have beautiful hair just like your mother."

"Thank you."

"And look at those dimples."

"Max has some, too."

"I saw that."

"Payton, can you show Grandma how to make our special sandwiches?"

“Sure, honey. I’ll be right back.” Payton walked toward the house while Molly took her hand and skipped alongside her chattering away.

“Payton cuts their sandwiches into special shapes,” Reina shared.

“Your children like Payton.”

“They are our children, and Max and Molly love Payton, and she loves them. You should see her and Max. They have a very special relationship.”

“Reina, I’m glad you came into Payton’s life. All I ever wanted is for her to be happy and find someone to love. She obviously loves you very much.”

“Ed, I love Payton more than I can put into words. I thank God every day for letting her be a part of my life.” Reina’s eyes filled with tears. “The children and I are very lucky.”

“Eva and I welcome you happily into our family.”

“Thank you. It means so much to Payton and me to have all of you here.”

“You’re very welcome. Now, Eva and I need to take our kids and get out of your hair so you can get ready for this evening.”

“We have plenty of time.”

“We still need to get going so you can relax.”

The three returned to the very busy kitchen, where all four children were seated at the table giggling, as Frank teased all of them equally. Payton and Virginia were affectionately watching.

“Hi Dad, Mom. Frank said we could call him Grandpa and Virginia Grandma,” Hattie excitedly shared with her parents.

“That is very nice, Hattie.” Eva smiled gratefully at Frank and Virginia. “They don’t have any grandparents.”

“Well, they do now.” Frank tousled Hattie’s hair as she grinned happily at him.

“Thank you.” Ed clasped Frank’s shoulder. He was overwhelmed by the gesture.

“Mom, do you know why Reina talks funny?” Randy asked. “She lived in Australia.”

“She did?”

“Yes, isn’t that cool! They have kangaroos there.”

“That’s very cool.” Eva grinned at Reina. “Let’s finish your lunch. We need to get back to the hotel so everyone can get ready for tonight.”

“Oh Mom, do we have to go?” Hattie cried. “I want to stay with Max and Molly.”

“Honey, you will be with them all evening, but right now we need to leave and let them get ready.”

“Okay, Mom.” Disappointment showed on all four of the children’s faces.

“Reina, Payton, I have an idea. Can I speak to the two of you in the living room for a moment?”

“Sure, Eva.” Payton and Reina followed her.

“What would you say to Ed and I taking Max and Molly back to the hotel with Randy and Hattie, after the ceremony? The four kids can spend the night together, and we can bring them back in the morning on our way to the airport.”

“I think Max and Molly would like that. What do you think, Payton?”

“I think it’s fine. I can pack a change of clothes and their pajamas in their packs. Are you sure you want to do this, Eva?”

“I’m sure. And I promise we will take good care of them.”

“I know you will, Eva, just like your own.” Reina hugged her. “Do you want to tell them?”

“Sure.” Eva grinned as they headed back in to the kitchen. “Randy, Hattie, would you like to invite Molly and Max to stay with you tonight at the hotel?”

“Yes, can they?” All four children burst with excitement.

“Max and Molly would you like to spend the night with Hattie and Randy?”

“Yes, please,” Molly answered, a big smile on her face. Max bobbed his head up and down happily.

“Okay then, you and Max need to hug Randy and Hattie goodbye, and don’t forget Ed and Eva, then go to your rooms and get your pajamas ready for tonight.”

Max and Molly happily hugged and kissed the four goodbye, and rushed quickly into their bedrooms to find their pajamas.

“They are great kids, Reina and Payton,” Ed remarked.

“You may change your tune after having them stay overnight.” Reina laughed.

“All right Randy and Hattie, say goodbye to everyone.”

The two children exchanged hugs and kisses with Reina, Payton, and Reina’s parents.

“We’ll see you later at the hotel,” Frank told them. “Why don’t you and Eva follow us to the park? That way Reina and Payton can go straight to the hall from here. It will save them some time.”

“Sounds good to me, Frank.”

“Great, we’ll meet you in the lobby at six. That should give us plenty of time.”

“Perfect. Frank and Virginia, it was a pleasure to meet you. Reina, thank you again, Eva and I couldn’t have a better sister-in-law, and the kids are lucky to have another aunt.”

“I’m awfully glad to have the four of you part of our family.”

“Payton, we’re so happy for you.” Eva kissed her.

“Thanks, Eva.” She and the children headed for the door. Ed slid his arm around his sister’s shoulder as they walked.

“Payton, I know Mom and Dad would be very happy for you right now, and very proud of you.”

“Thanks, Ed. I appreciate how wonderful you and Eva are.”

“Honey, we love you, and I think you are marrying into a very nice family.”

“I am.”

“Now, you go take a break. You have a very busy night ahead of you.”

“Thanks, Ed.”

“You are very welcome.” They hugged one last time.

Payton waved from the front doorway and then shut the door. Leaning up against it, she thought about her brother and his family. She was very lucky that Ed and Eva and no problems with her being gay. They were very open with their children, answering questions honestly, just as Reina did with her own kids. They always made Payton feel special, and now they had included Reina and her family. It made Payton proud and very happy.

“Honey, are you okay?” Reina whispered, sliding her arms around Payton’s waist.

“I’m perfect.” Payton smiled, kissing her. “I was just counting my blessings.”

“I like your brother and your family.”

“Our family.”

“Mom, where are my pajamas?” Molly yelled from the hallway.

“That is one of your blessings.” Reina grinned, kissing Payton softly. “I’ll be right there, Molly.”

“I love you, Reina.”

“I love you. And in less than five hours I am going to marry you.”

“Isn’t that amazing, five hours.”

“Are you nervous?”

“No, are you?”

“Not at all. I’m excited and happy, but not nervous.”

“Mom,” Molly called impatiently.

“I’ll go pack Max’s things, while you help Molly. Do you want me to put his things in his pack?”

“That would be great honey, thanks.”

“What are your parents doing?”

“Sitting in the backyard enjoying the sun.”

They headed off to help the children prepare everything they'd need for their overnight stay at the hotel. After they finished that, they suggested that both children go outside and have Grandma read them a story. Both children and Grandma thought that was a fine idea and the four sat quietly outside, Max on Grandma's lap, and Molly on Grandpa's, listening to the story.

Reina and Payton took that time to finish preparing their clothes for the trip to the hall. They would get dressed there. Lindy and Payton would get dressed in one room and Tamara and Reina in the other. All the children would be dressed before they arrived to make it easier.

"Payton, I'm going to wash my hair so I have time to dry and style it."

"Okay, honey. Can I do anything else?"

"I don't think so. We'll dress Max and Molly here. Our dresses, shoes, and things are already in the car. The flowers are in the refrigerator. Don't let me forget them. Rings, do you have the rings?"

"Yes, they are with my dress. What about your vows, do you know what you're going to say?"

"Of course. Do you?"

"Yes. I have them memorized."

"Everything is going to be perfect. The photographer will be at the hall, and Dad is bringing his video camera."

"I think that's it. I'm going to call and see how Tamara and Lindy are doing."

"Good, sweetie."

Payton sat down in the kitchen and dialed the telephone.

"Hello?"

"Hi, this is Payton. Is this Maria?"

"Hi, Payton."

"Are you guys getting ready?"

"Sort of. Banta has to stay in his room for an hour. He's been making Mom and Lindy mad all day."

“Is your mom or Lindy close by?”

“Yes. Mom, it’s Payton.” Maria yelled loudly.

“Hi, Payton. You and Reina want another child?” Tamara sounded frustrated.

“Is Banta having trouble?”

“He’s doing everything he can to irritate all of us. Lindy is talking to him right now.”

“What’s the problem?”

“I’m not sure, but something is bothering him.”

“How is everything else going?”

“Payton, we should have eloped,” Tamara groaned.

Payton laughed out loud. “Are you nervous?”

“No, but the kids are wired and Lindy has been tearful all day.”

“She loves you.”

“I know, and I love her to death.” Tamara sighed. “I just wish her parents had come.”

“So do I. I wish they would treat Lindy better.”

“She is their only child.” Lindy’s parents had never accepted that fact that she was gay, and they certainly didn’t believe in gay marriages.

“Your parents will be there.”

“Still it isn’t the same. At least Reina’s brother sent a card and a present. Lindy’s parents won’t even acknowledge the fact that we are getting married. I hate it that they cancelled at the last minute. It is so unfair.”

“Just love her Tamara. That’s all she needs.”

“Payton, I truly do. I can’t thank you enough for convincing her to tell me how she felt.”

“Oh, I think introducing Reina and I has more than returned the favor. Tell Lindy I called.”

“I will, honey. Thanks for calling. And Payton? I am so happy for you and Reina.”

“So am I, Tamara. Thank you.”

“See you soon.”

“Goodbye.” Payton sat quietly at the table in the kitchen. It must be much harder to have your parents choose not to attend your wedding than not having any around. It made her feel very sad for Lindy. They continually broke Lindy’s heart. Lindy was such a loving, and generous woman, and she didn’t deserve to be hurt.

By four o’clock, Frank and Virginia headed back to the hotel so they could get ready. Reina and Payton had a little more than an hour before they had to leave. Payton took a shower and washed her hair after Reina washed Molly and Max. Then, while Reina helped Molly dress and pin her hair up, Payton dressed Max in his tuxedo and bow tie. She then combed his curly hair.

“You know what, Max? I think you’re going to be the best-looking man there.” Max just grinned. “Let’s go show your mom and Molly.”

“Look, Mom!” Max burst into Molly’s room.

“Max, you look so nice.” Reina smiled at her handsome son.

“Molly, you look all grown up and beautiful.” Payton stared at the little girl. She had on a long navy blue dress on with black shoes. Her hair was full of curls, and pulled up and back into a curly ponytail tied with a matching blue ribbon.

“Thanks, Payton. Mom told me that after tonight you would be just like my mom, only I call you Payton. She said you would take care of Max and me forever, and always be with my mom because you love her.” Molly spoke seriously to Payton as Max listened intently.

Payton’s heart swelled as she responded. “Your mom is right. I’ll love you and Max forever, I will always take care of you, and I love your mom very much. I will always be with her.”

“Good.” Molly smiled happily. Reina and Payton exchanged a long look.

“You make beautiful children, Reina.”

Reina blushed with pleasure. “I wish I could have one that looked like you.”

Payton's heart thudded with Reina's words. "I love that you're having another child."

Reina protectively placed her hand on her stomach. "I'm looking forward to having this child with you."

Max broke the spell by climbing on his mother's lap. He grinned while his mother kissed him.

"Okay Molly and Max, Payton and I know that you'll play quietly in Molly's room until we're done getting ready. And please try and keep your clothes nice."

"We promise, Mom."

"Good, we won't be long."

Payton and Reina rapidly finished their makeup and prepared to leave. "I've got the kid's packs and the flowers."

"And I've got both of our wallets, the car keys, and our makeup." Reina checked the items in her bag. "And the cell phone. We are ready."

"Good. Okay everyone, get in the car."

The four were quickly on their way, surprisingly on time, and well organized. They arrived the same time as Tamara and Lindy and their children. After several excited greetings they all trooped into the building.

"Do you have the flowers?" Tamara asked.

"Yes."

"Great, let's go put them in the refrigerator until we're ready to wear them," Lindy suggested.

"I want to check the decorations and the caterer."

"Go ahead, Tamara. Why don't you go with her, Payton? Reina and I will put our things in the dressing rooms."

The simple decorations were beautiful and the rows of chairs were perfectly arranged. They weren't expecting more than sixty people so it was going to be a small intimate ceremony. The caterer was busily preparing the food and drink and everything was going according to

plan. Even the musicians were there, along with the photographer, who was setting up his gear.

“Everyone and everything is going according to plan. The minister is due at six-thirty.” Tamara breathed a sigh of relief.

“It’s going to be perfect. Did you bring your rings?”

“Yes, Lindy has them.”

“You have your vows?”

“Yes. Lindy and I wrote ours separately. We haven’t told each other what they are.”

“Either have Reina and I.”

“I’m glad the two of you are sharing this with us.”

“So are we.”

“We’d better go see how Banta is doing.”

“Did Lindy find out what was bothering him?”

“It has something to do about his not being part of the family. We aren’t sure what he’s thinking, but Lindy and I explained that the ceremony tonight would make us one big happy family.”

“Did he understand?”

“I think so, but it is kind of hard to tell. He has so much going on inside him, and he is such a scared little boy.”

“He’ll be fine.”

“I hope so.”

“I know so. He has you and Lindy.”

Meanwhile, Lindy and Reina were dealing with all the very excited children. “Let’s go put these things in the dressing rooms.”

“Okay kids, let’s go join your mothers,” Lindy suggested as Payton and Tamara returned.

“Banta, you look very handsome,” Payton remarked as he and Max stood side by side.

“Thanks, Payton.”

“Everyone of you kids look fantastic.” And they did. All three girls were wearing pretty dresses, their hair styled. The five children

glowed with pleasure as the group walked through the decorated hall.

“Everything looks beautiful,” Lindy acknowledged with a sigh of relief. “I can’t believe everything worked out.”

“Lindy, how could it not work out? You and Tamara have been planning this for months. Besides, you both worked very hard.”

“So have you and Reina.”

“So, best friend, let’s go get married.” Payton grinned.

“Payton, it’s magical isn’t it?” Lindy’s eyes glowed.

“Yes, it is.” Payton squeezed her best friend’s hand.

“Come on guys, let’s go bug Tamara and Reina.”

The five children were showing their excitement as they tripped down the hallway to the dressing rooms. Payton glanced at her watch. It was a little after six. She knocked on Reina’s door.

“Hi, honey. How does the hall look?”

“Beautiful. Everything is going perfectly.” Payton leaned into Reina and whispered in her ear. “One hour.”

“I know.” Reina kissed her gently.

“Can you and Tamara keep the three girls in here? We’ll keep Banta and Max with us.”

“Okay, honey. Will you go get the flowers for me?”

“Sure, I’ll be right back. Lindy, you take Max and Banta with you and start getting dressed. I’ll be there in a minute.”

“You got it. Come on men, you’re with me.”

“Girls, you come in here.”

Payton headed to the kitchen refrigerator for the flowers, stopping to speak to the caterer. Snagging the box of flowers, she went back to the dressing rooms and once again knocked on Reina’s door.

“Flowers, madam.” Payton grinned at Reina.

“Thank you, honey. Take the boy’s boutonnières and the flowers for you and Lindy.”

“Got them, see you shortly.”

“Payton?”

“Yes?”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.” Payton grinned as Reina shut the door, smiling. Payton returned to her dressing room to find Lindy giggling with the two boys.

“Lindy, how about I sit with the boys while you get dressed?”

“They will be good, they promised scouts’ honor. So we can both get dressed.”

“Great.” The two of them visited while they proceeded to get dressed.

“Payton, that dress is gorgeous. It’s perfect on you.”

“Thank you. You look pretty terrific yourself.” Payton meant what she said. Lindy was wearing a coral red, sleeveless, long dress that accented her slender body. The dress clung and shimmered as Lindy moved. She had on matching earrings and shoes; her hair fell to her shoulders in a smooth curtain of shiny brown. She was just finishing her makeup. Payton stood in front of the full-length mirror to see what her dress looked like. It was an oriental sheath dress in a deep turquoise silk, with pale cream-colored orchids painted on the elegant fabric. The long sleeves fit snugly, the dress buttoned at the neck in the traditional mandarin style across the chest and down her left side to just below her hip, where it flared open in a slit to the floor. She was wearing matching shoes and her only jewelry was a pair of shiny gold earrings. She had left her hair in its natural style, loosely waving in a naturally disheveled look. She had applied light eye makeup and a little blush. She wanted to look her very best for Reina.

“What time is it?”

“It’s six-thirty. We had better hurry up. People are going to start arriving, and I need to check on the music.”

“Let me pin your flower on your dress.” Lindy stood restlessly in front of Payton.

“Hold still.”

“I need to see Tamara.”

“Lindy, everything is going to be fine. Relax, please.”

“Payton, all of a sudden I am so nervous.”

“I know, honey.” Payton smiled as she finished attaching the flower. “Pin Banta’s boutonniere on his jacket.”

“Hey, little man, how are you doing?” Payton kneeled in front of Max.

“You look pretty.” Max slid his arms around Payton’s neck.

“Thank you, Max. You look so nice I had to dress up, doll. Let me pin this flower on your jacket and then we’ll go see if Randy and Hattie are here.”

Max stood quietly in front of Payton as she gently finished and straightened Max’s bow tie. “Max, I love you buddy.” Payton’s eyes filled with tears as Max grinned at her.

A knock at the door interrupted them. “Come on in.”

“It’s Frank, Payton. Are you girls dressed?”

“Yes, come on in, Frank.”

“Wow, you girls look beautiful.” His eyes gave away his pleasure. “Max and Banta, you look very handsome.”

“You look very nice yourself, Frank.” Lindy and Banta joined the three of them.

“Thank you, Lindy. Now, I am here to see if you two are ready. Reina and Tamara are waiting to enter the hall with the two of you. I’m going to take Max and Banta with me. The girls are already out there with Ed and Eva.”

“We’re ready, Frank. Banta and Max, you go with Grandpa. We’ll be out in a minute.”

“Payton let me pin your flower. Your orchid matches your dress.”

“Lindy, do you have your rings?”

“Right here.”

“Are you ready?” The two friends grinned widely at each other, and then hugged. Another knock at the door caught their attention.

“Yes?”

“Payton, it’s Reina and Tamara. Are you two ready?”

“Yes, honey.” Payton opened the door. Reina was waiting in the hallway with Tamara. Payton walked toward Reina, her eyes devouring her. She was wearing a deep purple long dress. It was strapless, displaying Reina’s beautiful shoulders. Because Reina knew how much Payton loved her hair, she had worn it loose and full of waves, hanging to her waist.

“Reina, I can’t tell you how beautiful you look.” Payton took Reina’s hands, her eyes filling with tears.

“Payton, I love you in that dress.” Reina pulled Payton against her body, her eyes glittering. “You look so sexy.”

They held each other for several minutes, savoring the moment, their faces tucked against each other.

“Ready, ladies?” Payton and Reina turned to Lindy and Payton, who were standing in each other’s arms.

“Yes.”

The four of them began their walk in the direction of the hall where the sounds of music, and people echoed through the open doorway. They stopped just before entering.

“Lindy, you and Tamara go first,” Reina requested.

“Here we go,” Tamara whispered. She and Lindy held hands as they entered the hall.

“I love you, Payton.” Reina kissed her softly.

“I love you, Reina.” They also held hands as they entered the room. Payton was surprised to see the size of the crowd seated in the room. Lindy and Tamara already stood to one side of the minister. Reina and Payton joined the two of them up in front.

“Good evening, my name is Ruth Bader. I am a Protestant minister and we are all here today to celebrate and bless the union of Lindy Sampson and Tamara Mitchell, and Reina Landers and Payton Bender. These two couples have chosen to commit themselves to each other for life. This takes love, trust, and a lot of hard work.

Please join me in blessing their union while we listen to them exchange their vows. Lindy and Tamara, would you like to begin?"

Lindy spoke first. "From the day I met you I have known we belong together. I love your heart, your mind, and body. I will be your best friend, lover, and family for the rest of our lives."

Tamara held Lindy's shaking hands as she spoke, gazing lovingly. "You make me laugh and see the joy in life and I am blessed to be with you forever. You and your children taught me what family means and I will love each and every one of you for the rest of my life." Lindy couldn't keep the tears from falling.

"My life changed when I met you." Tamara spoke slowly and clearly. "You taught me how to love. You showed me how important honesty, trust, and commitment, was to a lifetime of happiness. I love the way you sleep with your hand against your cheek, and the way you look at me, and without a word tell me you love me. I will love you for the rest of my life. My children are your children. They are lucky to have such a loving woman to help raise them. We are family."

"Reina and Payton, would you like to exchange your vows?"

Payton held tightly to Reina's hands as they faced each other. She was very close to crying, and she could see Reina's eyes were full of tears.

"Payton, I wish your parents were here so I could thank them for raising such a wonderful woman. What do I love about you? The first time I saw you, you were kneeling, talking to our children. All three of you were laughing, and I thought you were the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. But I fell in love with you in one crystal clear moment, when you showed me that loving our children was just as important as loving me. I will love you forever and longer. You are my soul mate, my partner, and my lover, and I will be thankful the rest of my life for you. Our children will grow up to be special adults because of your loving influence."

“Reina, every moment I look at you I thank God for bringing you into my life. You have brought two of the most perfect children into the world. You have opened your family and your heart to me. I will love you for the rest of your life. I will be your best friend and lover. I promise to protect Max and Molly and our new child while they grow into loving, wonderful adults, just like their beautiful mother. I will say thanks every day for all that you and your children are bringing to my life.” Payton’s voice cracked with emotion while tears rolled down Reina’s cheeks as she listened to Payton.

“Now, would Maria, Amena, and Banta, join Tamara and Lindy? Max and Molly, will you come up here and join Reina and Payton?” The minister requested.

The children did as they were asked, and Molly held onto Reina’s hand while Max took hold of Payton’s. Tamara and Lindy’s children stood in front of them.

“These two couples have asked that I bless their families. They have chosen not only to commit themselves to each other but also to their children. I extend the blessings of the people gathered here in wishing all of you a life filled with many happy moments. May you stand by each other during the troubling times, and may your love for each other grow stronger with each passing day.”

As the minister spoke Max began to tug on Payton’s hand. Payton bent down to see what he wanted. “Payton?” He whispered loudly.

“Yes, Max?”

“I love you gobs and gobs.” Max patted Payton on her cheek.

Tears started rolling down Payton’s face as she kneeled down to respond to Max. “I love you gobs and gobs, Max.”

She hugged him tightly. What Payton didn’t know was that the minister had paused while Payton responded to the tiny boy. He grinned happily and grasped Payton’s hand again. She stood up and took hold of Reina’s hand again. It was then Payton realized that everyone was watching her and Max. She blushed and turned to look at Reina, who was smiling lovingly at her.

“Payton, I love you so much,” She whispered. Payton was too emotional to speak; she just squeezed Reina’s hand in response.

“It takes all kinds of families in today’s world. These two couples have committed to each other and their children in front of family and friends. As we have all seen, there is a whole lot of love in these two families.” The minister smiled as she spoke. “Now, please join me in congratulating these two couples and their children with a nice round of applause.”

The happy crowd broke into rousing applause as Reina and Payton and Lindy and Tamara exchanged kisses.

“I bless these families and this union of couples, and may their lives together be rich with laughter, and full of love.” The minister’s voice rang out loudly. “Now both families would like to invite all of you to share in their celebration and enjoy the party.”

“Thank you, Minister Bader,” Tamara said, holding Lindy tightly against her. Lindy was still crying as their children hugged the two of them.

“You are very welcome. It’s a joy to see couples so committed to one another and their families. I have no doubt that you will raise wonderful children.”

“Thank you. Now please come and eat something with all of us,” Payton requested.

“I’d love to, but first I would like to meet all of your children.”

Lindy and Tamara introduced their three beautiful children and then Reina and Payton introduced Max and Molly.

“It’s wonderful to meet all of you. You’re very lucky to have such special parents.”

“Mom, can I go sit with Grandma and Hattie?”

Reina smiled at her impatient daughter. “Certainly, honey. Let me walk over there with you.”

“Max, do you want to go with your mom and Molly?”

“I want to stay with you.”

“Okay, little man, let’s go with the minister and get something to eat.”

Max seemed content to stay with Payton. In fact, he didn’t want to leave her side as he held tightly to her hand. Reina joined the two of them at the food table.

“Max, Grandpa and Randy would like you to join them at their table. Payton, I need to borrow you for a few minutes.”

Reina and Payton took Max to his grandfather and then Reina took Payton by the hand and rapidly dragged her through the crowded room without a word. She pulled Payton down the hall to her dressing room, and once inside she shut the door and turned to Payton.

“Honey, what’s going on?” Payton was a little concerned.

“I need to hold my wife. I need to kiss you.” Reina smiled as she pulled Payton into her arms. Payton didn’t have to be asked more than once as Reina’s lips captured hers. Her mouth wasn’t gentle and her tongue slid against Payton’s greedily. Payton groaned with pleasure as Reina’s mouth devoured hers with kisses that melted her. Payton’s hands slid down the length of Reina’s back, savoring the feel of her body tight against her. Payton was overwhelmed with passion, kissing Reina’s bare shoulders, her hands cupping Reina’s buttocks tightly. Reina moaned quietly as she held Payton’s head in her arms while Payton’s mouth covered the tops of Reina’s breasts with kisses. She stopped at the edge of Reina’s dresses, panting heavily.

“I wish we could lock the door and just stay here,” Reina whispered, kissing Payton slowly on the mouth, reveling in the flavor and softness of Payton’s lips.

“I know the feeling,” Payton groaned. “This sounds selfish but I wish everyone would just go home so we could be alone.”

“Payton, we have the rest of our lives together. You married me.” Reina grinned, hugging her tightly.

“And you married me.” Payton couldn’t help but grin in return.

“I didn’t have a choice. I am madly, happily, totally in love with you.”

“Reina, I can’t tell you how that makes me feel.” Payton felt the tears slide down her cheeks.

“Honey, I think I know how you feel.” Reina kissed the corners of Payton’s eyes. “We’d better go back to the party before someone comes looking for us.”

They headed back into the hall to find they hadn’t even been missed, people were having such a good time. They joined the happy crowd and enjoyed themselves immensely.

“Reina, your mother and I are going to head back to the hotel with Ed and Eva. Molly and Max are exhausted.” The party had been going strong for several hours.

“Where are the kids?”

“Over there with Payton and your mother. Reina, your mother, and I couldn’t be happier for you and Payton. We think the world of her and she loves you very much.”

“Thank you, Dad. Payton is special.”

“I think you both are pretty special.” He hugged his only girl tightly. He was very proud of his beautiful daughter.

“I’ll go kiss the kids goodbye.”

She walked up to the table, where Payton was seated with Molly on her lap, and Max was snuggled up in his grandmother’s lap. Both children were finding it hard to keep their eyes open.

“Here Mom, let me take Max for a minute.” Reina bent over and picked up her tiny son in her arms. He immediately wrapped his arms around her neck, making himself comfortable.

“Honey, your dad and I are going to leave with Ed and Eva. The party was terrific and the ceremony was perfect.”

“Thanks, mom. It was fun, and I’m so glad you both were here. It means so much to Payton and me.”

“Honey, we wouldn’t have missed it. I’m so very proud of you. Besides, it isn’t every day that I get a new daughter and I think this one is the perfect partner for you.”

Reina kissed her mother’s cheek as she became tearful. “Thanks Mom, I think so, too.” Reina gazed at her daughter comfortable in Payton’s arms as she fought against sleep.

“Payton, Mom and Dad are going to leave now with Ed and Eva. It’s time to put the kids to bed. Dad and Ed are waiting with Eva and their children.”

“Sounds like a good idea. I’ll carry Molly to the car.”

The group headed out to the parking lot where the rest of the crowd was waiting. “Here you go, Molly.” Payton gently placed her in Grandpa’s waiting rental car and buckled her up. “We’ll see you in the morning.”

“Okay, Payton. I love you.” She placed a sloppy kiss on Payton’s cheek.

“I love you, doll.” Payton’s throat thickened with emotion.

Reina put Max in the car and kissed both children goodnight. Payton hugged Max and then she and Reina waved goodnight to everyone.

“Do you think we can get out of here pretty soon?” Payton asked.

“Soon, honey.” Reina hugged her. “Let’s go help Tamara and Lindy clean up the hall. We can leave as soon as that’s done.”

It was two hours later before Payton and Reina finally got home. They had sent Lindy and Tamara home an hour earlier to get their children into bed and the two of them had finished cleaning. They were both exhausted but very, very happy.

“Reina, before you change I have something I’d like to give you.”

“I’ve got everything I could ever want.”

“I wanted to give you something to remember this day, besides our license.” Payton held up the document for Reina to see.

“I will never forget today. It was one of the most important days of my life.”

They stood in their bedroom in each other's arms. "This will just help you remember."

Payton handed a black velvet ring box to Reina. Reina sat down on the bed, pulling Payton down next to her, and opened the box.

"Oh my."

Nestled in the center was a gold band with four one-quarter carat diamonds, sparkling with fire as the light reflected off them. "A diamond for each of the three children and one for me, your whole family."

"Payton, it's gorgeous. I can't believe you did this." Reina kissed Payton thoroughly, completely overwhelmed by the gift. "I don't have a gift for you."

"You gave me the perfect gift, you and your children, and another child on the way. What better gift could I ask for?"

"Payton," Reina whispered as Payton slid the ring onto Reina's right ring finger. "I love you."

"I love you, Reina."

They kissed slowly, savoring the moment, before Reina stood up, pulling Payton with her. She kissed Payton's chin and neck while she slowly unbuttoned Payton's dress. She removed it and then, brushing Payton's hands away, she gently slid off her slip and nylons.

"I love touching you, looking at you."

"It's my turn." Payton reached behind and unzipped Reina's dress helping her out of it, then her slip and nylons. Payton stood in front of Reina drinking in the view of her in her very sexy underwear.

"You are so beautiful."

Reina didn't respond with words, she just stood smiling at Payton as she reached up and removed her brassiere and then her panties. Payton removed her own underwear and moved closer to Reina until they were inches apart. Payton and Reina leaned toward each other to kiss, still not touching except with their lips. It was Reina who closed the gap, as she slid her voluptuous body against Payton's, drawing a gasp from her.

Their lovemaking was frantic and wild as they kissed over and over, their hands covering each other, their breathing labored. Payton pressed Reina back onto the bed as her mouth found Reina's nipple, her lips, and tongue teasing Reina, suckling first one nipple and then the other. Reina's legs spread and Payton's hips settled against hers and rolled in a rhythm that Reina craved. She wrapped her legs around Payton's thighs, welcoming the heated friction. Her hands slid down Payton's slender back and hips, holding her flexing buttocks tightly. The familiar heat and fluttering started between Reina's legs. Payton recognized the beginning of an orgasm. Lifting her hips up long enough to place her hand between Reina's legs she began her exquisite stroking. Reina held tightly to Payton's neck with one arm as she slid her own hand between Payton's legs, her fingers finding her wet and trembling lips. She slid her fingers in and out of Payton as Payton's fingers performed the same magic to Reina. The stroking drove them both toward an orgasm and, as Reina's body shuddered and arched against Payton's it tumbled Payton into her own. Crying out, she tried to focus on Reina's pleasure but her body was rapidly dissolving. Reina's body tensed and then fluttered and she began speaking in broken sentences.

"Oh God, Payton, I can't, I love you..." Her words trailed off as she clung to Payton, shivering. Payton was beyond control, cresting with wave after wave of pure pleasure. Unable to speak, she held tightly to Reina, allowing her body to absorb the intense feelings that Reina created. Reina's soft lips traveled over Payton's face as she whispered her love to her. They held each other tightly, enjoying the overwhelming sense of rightness and love. They drifted off to sleep in each other's arms, holding hands, faces snug against one another.

Reina woke slowly from sleep and smiled, holding Payton while she slumbered. This woman sound asleep next to her had changed her life. She had brought such joy and happiness into her life. It wasn't just the physical pleasure that she and Payton enjoyed. It was the enormous capacity that Payton had to love. She made Reina feel

like she was the single most important person in her life. Reina felt safe and she knew deep in her heart that Payton would always be there. She could not describe the feeling she had gotten standing next to Payton and committing herself. It was such an intense love and fulfillment she had felt for Payton from the first moment. It still overwhelmed her at times. She turned to face Payton and enjoyed watching her sleep. She was so beautiful in a natural, wholesome way, her dark hair wavy and snarled, her dark eyes hidden behind her heavy lashes. Her strong jaw and full mouth were relaxed in sleep and her fingers were twisted in Reina's hair possessively. The sheet had fallen down to her waist and she lay on her side, her leg thrown over Reina's thighs. Reina's eyes traveled the length of Payton's body, admiring the line of her hip and thigh. Reina thought Payton was so sexy, so beautiful, and so wonderful to make love to. Payton could one minute fix the kids dinner, carry on a conversation with Reina about work, and an hour later make Reina scream with pleasure as she made love with her. She could make Reina laugh and smile with a word, or burn with passion with just one touch. Reina would love her forever and count herself lucky every single day.

She ran her finger lightly down Payton's arm and felt the warm skin of her lover. She started to touch her again when the baby moved in her stomach. She placed her hand on the spot as the baby rolled and kicked.

"Hush little one, go to sleep and grow. You have plenty of time before we welcome you into our family. Hush," She whispered quietly as she stroked her stomach. Payton awoke when Reina had touched her, and watched Reina whisper to her unborn child.

"You listen to your mother, she's a very wise and beautiful woman," Payton added, placing her hand on top of Reina's as it rested on her stomach. "The baby is keeping you awake?"

"No, I was already awake watching you sleep." Reina smiled and ran her hand through Payton's hair. "I love watching you sleep."

“Wow, I felt the baby move!” Payton grinned and placed her cheek on Reina’s stomach as she felt the baby kick. “Little baby, we can’t wait until you’re born, but you take it easy on your mother, please?” Payton kissed Reina’s stomach gently.

“You are very blessed little one. You have two mothers who will love you, forever.”

Payton smiled at Reina’s words as she continued to kiss Reina’s stomach, stroking it softly. Reina found Payton’s attentions wildly erotic and began to move her hips. Payton covered her stomach with kisses, her tongue tasting the skin here and there, nibbling lightly with her teeth. Reina grasped Payton’s shoulders while Payton’s mouth drove her crazy. Payton slid over Reina until she was between Reina’s legs, and slipped her hands under Reina’s hips raising them as her mouth found the very center of Reina, drawing a gasp from her. Payton’s tongue teased Reina’s hardened pulsating tissue and Reina pushed against Payton’s mouth.

“I want you inside me,” Reina gasped.

Payton did what Reina asked, her tongue sliding in and out while Reina reacted with pleasure. Payton’s fingers joined her mouth and she slid them into Reina. Her touch drove Reina crazy and she began to moan. Payton loved her reaction and stroked deeper as Reina’s legs raised up to surround Payton’s shoulders. The incredible sensation that Reina felt from Payton’s mouth played havoc with Reina’s senses and she thrashed and twisted, a series of orgasms washing through her. Payton’s mouth never left her body as she moved across the bed, out of control. Reina cried out once, twice, and then shook as she melted. Payton slid up Reina and held her tightly as she cried softly against Payton’s neck.

“I love what you do to me.”

“I love you and making love with you,” Payton responded, kissing her softly.

“Are you going to do that to me again tonight?” Reina grinned as she sexily slid against Payton.

“I thought I would.” Payton grinned as she lay on top of Reina.

“I think it’s my turn.” Reina pressed her body into Payton’s, her hands sliding down Payton’s back. Reina’s hands traced Payton’s sides until she circled her full breasts. Payton sat up on Reina’s legs, and Reina leaned up and surrounded Payton’s nipple with her mouth. As Reina’s mouth caused her breasts to ache with pleasure, Reina slid her fingers between Payton’s legs, finding her wet. Reina’s mouth found Payton’s, her tongue sliding in and out, matching the perfect stroking between Payton’s legs. Payton felt her body flush with heat as her heart pounded and the pressure began to build. She no longer could sit upright as her body screamed for release.

“Reina,” She pleaded.

“Payton, I love you,” Reina pledged, increasing the pressure of her stroking until Payton cried out against her shoulder. She held tightly to Reina, her arms around her neck.

“I love you, Reina.” Reina kissed her gently and lay back, pulling Payton on top of her. Payton could barely catch her breath, tense in Reina’s arms. Reina soothed her with kisses and loving words until Payton’s body began to relax.

“I know this sounds funny but I love the idea that you’re my wife,” Reina admitted, flushing with embarrassment.

“It’s not funny. I love the fact that I’m your wife and you are mine.”

“Really?”

“Really. Forever and ever.”

“And longer,” Reina promised her with another kiss.

Payton was not satisfied with just one kiss and, while she rekindled the passion in Reina, she covered every inch of her body with her lips and fingers. She worshiped her lover’s body with every touch, every word, and every kiss, her fingers again finding her trembling center as Payton’s knowing hands turned Reina inside out. While passion crested through Reina’s body, Payton reacted with her own orgasm, Reina’s cries of satisfaction vibrating through her body.

Her head fell against Reina's as she and Reina clung to each other, a feeling of euphoria surrounding them. Payton reached down and pulled the covers over the two of them, tucking her body around Reina's. Reina grasped her hand and placed it on her rounded stomach.

"Say goodnight to our baby." Reina leaned into Payton. "Our baby."

"Goodnight, Reina and Payton's baby, sleep tight," Payton whispered.

"Goodnight, wife."

"Goodnight, wife."

They once again fell asleep, in love, full of delight and wonder with each other.

It was after nine o'clock before Payton woke up from her sound sleep. Reina was not in bed with her, and Payton started to get up herself.

"No you don't, get back in bed," Reina called from the doorway. She was carrying a tray of food.

"What are you doing?"

"I fixed us breakfast and we're going to eat it in bed."

"Well, isn't that sweet. Here, let me help you." Payton took the tray from Reina and placed it on the bedside nightstand. "Now, before we have breakfast I would like to kiss my wife."

Reina just smiled as she moved into Payton's arms. "Good morning," She whispered, kissing Payton softly several times.

"We don't pick up the kids until noon and it's a little after nine."

"We have plenty of time, then."

"What do you have in mind?"

"It'll be a lot easier if I just showed you." Payton grinned and rolled Reina onto her back on the bed. Payton was as good as her word as she aptly demonstrated what she had in mind. Reina was very grateful, and proceeded to thank her in the most natural and loving way. It was an hour before they paid attention to breakfast,

and then they sat side by side on the bed sharing it with each other. It was a perfect start to a perfect day.

They showered together with lots of kissing and took their time dressing before heading to the hotel to meet everyone for lunch. They said very little to each other on the ride to the hotel, but Payton's hand rested on Reina's thigh.

"I think you are so beautiful," Payton whispered, gazing at Reina, her eyes full of emotion. Reina was wearing shorts, a sweater, and a pair of sandals. She had loosely braided her hair into a single strand down the middle of her back. She smiled in response to Payton's remark and her dimples showed in her cheeks.

"Payton, from the first moment I met you I thought you were the most beautiful woman I know. I love looking at you."

Payton blushed with embarrassment.

"Are you blushing?" Reina teased, squeezing her hand. "You are so cute when you blush. I can't believe this is the same woman who kept me up all night doing such wonderful things with me in bed, and now you're blushing?"

This only made Payton blush worse, and groan. Reina chuckled and pulled into the hotel parking lot and parked the car. Reina slipped her arm through Payton's as they walked into the hotel. She loved the fact that Payton still had times when she could be shy. It just made her lovemaking just that more erotic. She was a very complex woman.

"We're supposed to meet everyone in the restaurant." The two of them walked through the lobby and into the restaurant. They caught sight of the full table as they walked through the door.

"There they are."

Payton and Reina headed for the table and the waiting crowd. "Hi Mom, hi Payton."

"Hello, Ms. Molly and Mr. Max. Did you have fun with Randy and Hattie?"

“Yes, lots.” Max and Molly looked very happy while they bobbed their heads.

Reina and Payton sat down with the happy group and enjoyed a very busy lunch with their combined families. There was much talk and laughter as the large crowd teased each other and shared memories. It warmed Reina’s heart to see her parents so affectionate to Ed and Eva and their two children. It was too bad her own brother hadn’t grown up to be as open-minded as Ed. She missed him. She also knew how much family meant to Payton. It showed on her face as she watched everyone. Reina leaned over and whispered in her ear. “We are all one big happy family now.”

Payton’s smile said it all as she gazed at Reina. She reached for Reina’s hand. “I love my whole family.”

“They love you.”

“And you.”

The combined families stayed in the restaurant for another hour, until Payton’s brother and his family had to head for the airport to catch their flight home. They all walked with Ed and Eva to the car, Hattie and Randy hanging off their newfound grandparents. Max sat on Payton’s shoulders, while Molly held onto her mother’s hand.

Eva turned and hugged Reina goodbye. “You come visit us as soon as you have your baby.”

“We will, I promise. Thank you so much for coming. It meant so much to us.”

“We wouldn’t have missed it, and I’m so glad to get to know you, your children, and your parents. Welcome to the family.” Her smile and her words were warm and genuine. It touched Reina’s heart deeply.

“Thank you.” They hugged affectionately.

Payton and her brother hugged tightly, Payton’s eyes filling with tears. “Ed, I’m so glad you came.”

“Honey, of course I would come.” He held her tightly as Max tried to hug the two of them. He hugged Max gently. “You’re my sister and

I'm very glad you found someone as special as Reina. I'm very happy for you and I think these two kids are terrific." Ed poked Max affectionately. "Max, you take good care of Payton."

"I will, Uncle Ed." Max responded seriously.

"Thank you, Ed. I am very lucky." Payton began to cry.

"You both are. Now Eva and I were serious. We want you to come visit us and bring Frank and Virginia."

"We will, as soon as Reina has the new baby and feels ready to travel. I promise."

"Good. Payton, I really like your family."

"Thanks, Ed, that means a lot to me."

"Randy and Hattie, kiss everyone goodbye, we have to go."

"Bye Grandpa, bye Grandma." The two youngsters kissed Frank and Virginia. It was obvious the four had gotten along famously. The children hugged each other goodbye as the adults did the same and then they left. When the car pulled out of the parking lot the four adults and two children waved goodbye. Payton's face was streaked with tears.

"Honey, we will visit them soon." Reina comforted her.

"I know. I am just so glad they came." Payton smiled sweetly at her girlfriend. "It was the most important day of my life."

Reina smiled and squeezed her hand. "I feel the same way. Well Grandma and Grandpa, how about a swim in the pool and a barbeque?" Reina suggested to her parents.

"Honey, don't you and Payton want to spend some time together without us?"

"Payton and I talked about it this morning, and we want you to come over. We want to spend as much time as possible with the two of you while you're here."

"We appreciate that and we would love to come over. What can we bring?"

"Just yourselves."

The rest of the day passed very pleasantly, as all six swam in the pool and ate a light dinner. It was after seven o'clock before Frank and Virginia headed back to the hotel and Reina and Payton put a very tired Molly and Max to bed.

"Poor guys, they're exhausted. They had a very busy weekend."

"I don't know about you but I'm pretty tired myself," Reina admitted.

"Honey, go crawl in bed. I'll finish cleaning up and be in shortly."

"No way, wife, we're going to bed together." Reina hugged her, grinning. "We're still on our honeymoon."

"Honey, we have the rest of our lives together. You're exhausted."

"I'm not that tired," Reina reassured her, running her hands down Payton's back and hips, as they shared a passionate kiss.

"Let's clean the rest of this up in the morning," Payton suggested when Reina nuzzled her neck.

"Great idea."

Within minutes they were naked, lying on their bed enjoying slow leisurely lovemaking. It was the kind of lovemaking that came from knowing you had the rest of your lives together. There was no urgency, no hurry, and so much love. They whispered words of love, bringing each other pleasure until they were limp with exhaustion. They fell asleep wrapped in each other's arms, deeply in love, and filled with happiness.

## CHAPTER 9

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Reina and Payton's life together was just about perfect. They had not only fallen in love with each other but also become the best of friends. They could sit quietly in the same room reading and enjoying each other's company. They could talk with each other for hours about anything, and they spent a lot of time laughing. Even dealing with a very large remodel project did not create the usual problems between them. They had shared their first fight together the previous week, when Reina objected to Payton's request to take things a little easier.

Payton was just putting the last dish away from their Sunday morning breakfast when Reina joined her in the kitchen.

"Payton, I am going to go out and work in the yard. Max and Molly will be at Mrs. Lenahan's until after dinner." Ruth Lenahan loved to spend time with the children and they loved her in return.

"Honey, I want you to take it easy, please? I don't want you to take any chances."

"Payton, I'm fine." Reina responded with a little impatience. "This is my third pregnancy. I know what I can handle."

The sting of her words hurt Payton to the quick and she responded without thought. "I may not have ever been pregnant but it is almost seventy degrees outside and I think you should take it easy."

“Payton, I’m a big girl.” Reina obviously took objection to Payton’s request by the look on her face as she headed out the back door.

Payton was hurt and a little irritated with her stubborn girlfriend. She headed down the hallway intent on folding the clean clothes. Maybe a little break would do them both good. She nursed her feelings as she tried to calm down while stacking the laundry. The growl of their lawnmower starting up interrupted her. Burning with rare anger, Payton strode down the hallway and out the back door intent on throttling Reina.

“What in the hell do you think you are doing?” Payton’s raised voice and her position in front of Reina’s path on the lawn told Reina she was very upset.

“I’m mowing the lawn.” Reina started to move around Payton.

“Don’t you dare!” Payton bellowed. She reached over and turned the lawn mower off.

“Payton, what is wrong with you?” Reina stared at her before trying to start the lawn mower again.

“Leave the damn mower off!” Payton yelled. “I asked you to take it easy.”

“And I said I was fine.” Reina yelled back, her hands clenched on her hips.

“You are not fine, you are pregnant.”

“I know what I am, now let me finish the lawn.”

“No!”

“Payton.” Reina glared at her unreasonable girlfriend. “Fine, you do it!” Reina stomped away. “I’ll weed the garden.”

“God damn it, Reina. Why can’t you take it easy?” Payton yelled at her.

“Because I’m pregnant, not sick.” Reina screamed back.

“I’m asking you to take it easy.” This request was yelled at full volume.

“Fine!” Reina fired back. “I’ll go take a nap, will that make you happy? Maybe I can read a book, if that doesn’t take too much

effort!” Reina stomped into the house, the sliding glass door slamming behind her.

Payton simmered in anger as she watched Reina enter the house. She knew better than to follow her. Payton started up the lawn mower. She might as well finish mowing the yard. She was too angry to do much else.

Reina swore loudly when she heard the mower start up. Who did Payton think she was telling her what to do? Reina fumed while she paced in her bedroom, she was furious. She whipped her bedroom door open. She had something more to say to Payton.

Payton shut the mower off and stood in angry silence. Didn’t Reina understand how worried Payton was? She just wanted her to be careful. She wasn’t being unreasonable.

“You are being an ass!” Reina hissed. “I am perfectly fine mowing the lawn. I took care of this home while pregnant with both Max and Molly. Why should this be any different?”

Payton saw red. “Because I’m here.” She stalked off into the house. Waves of hurt and anger shimmering through her body. She was so devastated that Reina didn’t understand.

Reina stood still, a look of surprise and comprehension on her pale face. Oh God, what had she done? Reina had seen the look of pain on Payton’s face. She hurriedly entered the house, heading for the bedroom. She needed to apologize to Payton and beg her forgiveness.

“Payton, I’m sorry.” Reina blurted out the words as she entered the room. Payton sat on the edge of her bed, her back to Reina. She remained silent as Reina approached her. “Payton, please forgive me.”

Payton’s tear streaked face turned to Reina and Reina’s heart ached. She had hurt Payton deeply. “Honey, I’m sorry. Please, don’t cry.” Reina sat down next to Payton and wrapped her arms around her. “I love you. I shouldn’t have behaved that way.”

“Reina, if you don’t want me here, just tell me.” Payton gazed at her, her heart in her eyes. It took every bit of courage she had, to speak her words to Reina.

Reina’s heart shuddered when Payton spoke. Losing Payton would kill her. “Payton, I love you.” Reina kissed Payton’s tears away. “I want you here. I need you here.” Reina’s soft lips captured Payton’s in a kiss full of love and hunger.

“You don’t need me. You proved that today.” Payton’s eyes were full of hurt.

“I do need you. I’m not used to having someone help me. I’m sorry, honey. I want to share everything with you.”

“Even the lawn mowing?” Payton’s eyes glistened with tears but her mouth had a slight smile to it.

“And the dishes, and the laundry, and the vacuuming.” Reina punctuated her words with kisses as she covered Payton’s face.

“You can keep the vacuuming.” Payton whispered, her arms pulling Reina onto the bed with her. “I hate vacuuming.”

Reina sighed as she lay on top of Payton. “I’ll make you a deal. I’ll do all the vacuuming if you promise to love me for the rest of my life.”

“I promise.” Payton sealed her promise with a kiss that took Reina’s breath away and directly into passion. They made love slowly as they renewed their commitment and healed the wounds that angry words had opened. Several hours later they sat in the living room, still in each other’s arms.

“Payton, I promise I will take things easier but you need to promise me something.”

“What, sweetie?”

“Will you fight with me once a week so we can make up?” Reina’s smile was full of love as she held Payton’s face in her hands. “I love you.”

“I love you, Reina. So much so, that it is overwhelming. And, I promise I will fight with you as often as you need.” Payton grinned and kissed her slowly.

## CHAPTER 10

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The children were also a source of pleasure, as they thrived with Payton and Reina's love. It was a very happy and healthy family. Reina had grown quite large in the last four months, but Payton found her even more beautiful as she showed more and more of her pregnancy. They started to attend birthing classes every other week so both Reina and Payton knew what to expect. It was more for Payton's benefit, since she agreed to be with Reina during the natural childbirth delivery. Reina and Payton worked hard on their relationship. Reina was learning to share responsibilities and Payton, her feelings. They were strengthening their bonds and their love.

"Payton, will you please start getting ready? We have to be at Tamara and Lindy's in a little more than an hour," Reina called down the hall of the new addition.

"Almost done, honey." Payton was putting the final coat of paint on the nursery. The remodel was just about complete. Just completing the trim, flooring and carpet, and then it would be ready for furniture. Payton looked around at the nursery and grinned. She and Reina knew the child was going to be a little girl, so they had chosen bright colorful fish to decorate the room. Payton was just finishing the bright blue trim around the windows and the closet. She couldn't wait to set up the crib that was waiting in the garage.

"Payton, it looks beautiful," Reina raved as she entered the room.

Payton grinned as she approached. Reina had tied her hair up and was wearing a sleeveless sundress. Her advanced pregnancy showed in her rounded stomach that pushed against Payton when they hugged.

“You look beautiful.”

“Thank you. You did a terrific job on the nursery. The baby is going to love it.”

“We’ll be able to put the blinds up next week and the carpets are being laid next Thursday.”

“I can’t believe it’s almost finished.”

“What time do we pick up Max and Molly?”

“I told Mrs. Lenahan we’d pick them up around nine-thirty.” Reina kissed Payton. “Now, honey, could you please go get cleaned up. I need to stop at the grocery store on the way to the barbeque.”

“Okay.”

“And Payton, please leave your camera at home.”

Payton grinned at Reina. She had been documenting Reina’s pregnancy with photographs and Payton had taken hundreds of snapshots. Reina had good-naturedly gone along with the project, but at times requested Payton give it and her a break. Today was one of those days. Actually, Reina was thrilled that Payton still found her beautiful and sexy after growing so large. She still had a fear deep inside her heart that Payton might find her advanced pregnancy unappealing.

“How are you feeling?”

“Oh I don’t know, fat, my back aches, and my feet are swollen,” Reina responded. She had bouts of depression once in awhile but for the most part she was feeling pretty good.

“You go put your feet up while I take a shower and get dressed.” Payton smiled at her.

“I think I will, and Payton, I love you.” Reina’s smile was full of love.

“Reina, I love you.” Payton couldn’t help but grin as Reina walked out of the room. As Reina got larger she tended to walk more and more like a duck. Payton marveled at how much she enjoyed watching Reina go through the pregnancy. She found herself falling in love with Reina over and over again. She put her paint things away and headed for the bedroom.

Thirty minutes later Payton entered the living room to find Reina sound asleep on the couch. As her pregnancy advanced, Reina found herself running out of energy midway through the day. Some days Reina came home from work so exhausted she would immediately take a nap before dinner. Her lack of energy changed their sex life only slightly. They didn’t have sex quite as often but the intensity had only grown. Many nights they were content to remain in each other’s arms for hours, talking, kissing, and enjoying their physical closeness.

“Honey, do you want me to call Lindy and Payton and cancel? I’m sure they would understand.” Payton gently touched Reina’s hand.

“No sweetie, I’ll be fine.” Reina sat up and clasped Payton’s hand tightly. “Have I told today how much I love you?”

“I love you.”

“Even as I grow larger by the minute?”

“Especially as you grow larger, honey. This is our child that you’re carrying, and I find you infinitely sexier and more beautiful because of that.” Payton demonstrated her words by pulling Reina into her arms and kissing her.

“Since you love me so much, could you help me stand up?” Reina grinned.

“Of course.” Payton supported Reina’s back as she helped her up off the couch.

Forty minutes later they joined fifteen other people at Lindy and Tamara’s back yard barbeque. It was a celebration of Tamara’s promotion at work and, as Lindy admitted, “An excuse to have a party.”

Everyone there was in a festive mood and the music and the conversation added to the atmosphere. Payton and Reina were having a wonderful time visiting with friends. As they talked to two of their friends, Payton noticed Reina rubbing her lower back. She stepped up behind her and began to massage her lower back, leaning against Reina to take Reina's weight against her. Reina smiled and pulled one of Payton's hands around until it rested on her protruding stomach, her arms holding it tightly against her. Reina's whole body leaned back against Payton's, as she felt relief from her backache. Lindy and Tamara watched from their kitchen window as they prepared more food.

"Look at those two." Tamara smiled. "I need to take a picture of them."

"You sound like Payton." Lindy laughed.

"Isn't that the sweetest thing you've ever seen?" Tamara left to get her camera. Lindy had to agree with her. It was obvious that Payton was supporting Reina as she held her, rubbing her back. Reina's head was resting back against Payton's shoulder, her arms holding Payton's against her stomach. They practically glowed with love. Tamara returned with her camera and went outside to take pictures, while Lindy finished preparing the food before joining everyone outside.

"Reina, come join me by the pool. You can sit down," Lindy volunteered, walking up to them.

"Sounds good Lindy, thanks." Reina followed her to two open chairs while Payton stayed to talk with Tamara. "I need to get this rather large body off my feet."

"How are you feeling?"

"Pretty good, other than am tired all the time. Poor Payton, I'm either sleeping or taking care of the kids. She doesn't get very much of my time."

"What does the doctor say?"

“She says I’m fine, very healthy, and that it is normal.” Reina sighed. “I’m just afraid Payton’s going to find my fat, tired body a little less than appealing.”

“Honey, you obviously haven’t paid attention to how she looks at you. She devours you with her eyes,” Lindy teased. “I’ve known Payton a long time and I’ve watched the two of you grow together. She loves you, Reina, and I know for a fact she thinks your being pregnant is beautiful.”

“I know she loves me, Lindy. I have no doubts about that.”

“Then what is worrying you?”

Reina’s eyes searched Lindy’s face before answering. She blushed as she spoke quietly. “I’m worried that Payton will find me unappealing to touch and after I have the baby she won’t want to make love to me.”

“Reina, Payton isn’t like anyone else. Has she given you any indication that she isn’t physically attracted to you?”

“No, she’s as attentive as she’s always been.”

“Then why are you worried?”

Reina just looked at Lindy, her eyes filling up with tears.

“Honey, what is going on?”

“Lindy, I love Payton. I can’t tell you how much I love her. I’ve been here before, remember?”

“Oh, I think I know, sweetie.” Lindy knew about Reina’s girlfriend, who left her weeks before the baby was delivered. It had angered her very much when she heard the story, but she knew Payton very well. Payton loved Reina. “Payton loves you.”

“Lindy, I don’t want to lose her.”

“I’ve never seen anyone more in love than Payton is with you. She loves you, honey. Talk to her about how you’re feeling, she will understand.”

“I don’t know, Lindy.”

“Yes, you do Reina. Talk to her.”

Reina was unable to respond as Tamara and Payton joined the two of them. She appreciated Lindy's advice. They all visited until after eight-thirty. Reina was tired and they needed to pick the children up.

"We need to go and pick up the kids."

"Thank you both for coming, and thanks for the card." Tamara hugged the two of them. "Don't forget, you invited all of us over for dinner next Wednesday."

"We can't wait." Payton hugged Tamara.

"Tell her," Lindy whispered to Reina as she hugged her.

"I will. Thank you," Reina whispered in return.

Reina and Payton picked up the two very sleepy children and took them home. Reina was uncharacteristically quiet on the car trip.

"Honey, you get your pajamas on and I'll put the children to bed."

"Thanks, Payton, but I want to help put them to bed. And then I would like to sit in the living room with you."

"You got it, honey. Okay guys, let's put the two of you sleepy kids to bed." Payton carried the sleepy little children into their rooms. Payton hugged Max goodnight and left Reina to say goodnight while she tucked Molly in.

"Payton, I love you gobs."

"You know, sweet little girl, I love you gobs. How was your day with Mrs. Lenahan?"

"Good. Payton, when Mom has the new baby will you love it more than you love me?"

Payton knew how important Molly's question was and she sat down on the edge of the bed as she responded. She held tightly to Molly's hands as she spoke. "You know Molly, when I met you and Max, even before I knew your mom was having another baby, I fell in love with you guys. I couldn't love you any more than I do, you are my Molly. You are special. The baby that your mother is going to have is very special, too. She is Molly and Max's younger sister, and I know you will be a great older sister."

"I will, Payton, and I will love the baby."

“Older sisters are very important and their younger sisters love them very much.”

“Really?”

“Really. And I know this little girl is going to be very lucky to have you as a big sister.”

“I love you, Payton.”

“You know what, Molly? I love you, gobs.” She bent over and hugged the happy little girl. “Your mom should be right in to tuck you in.”

“I’m right here.” Reina was standing in the doorway.

“I’ll let the two of you say goodnight.” Payton walked toward Reina. “How about I make you a hot cup of milk.”

“Thanks, honey.” Reina clasped her hand as they passed. “Payton, I love you.”

Payton just smiled and squeezed her fingers. “And I thought you just like me a lot,” Payton teased.

“I do that, too.” Reina grinned.

“I’ll be in the living room.”

“I’ll be out in a minute.”

Payton went into the kitchen and prepared the warm milk for Reina and herself. She knew something was bothering Reina, and she was hopeful that Reina would talk to her about it.

“Hi.”

“Are they all tucked in?”

“Yes. Payton, can we talk?”

“Certainly.” Payton’s heart thudded in her chest as she carried cups of steamed milk into the living room. “Here, sit down.”

“Payton, look at me.” Reina sat down next to her. “You look scared to death, honey.”

“I am. I know something has been bothering you.”

“Payton, I love you more than life itself and that will never change. I married you because I want to spend my life with you.”

“I don’t understand then, what is the problem? I feel the same way.”

“I feel fat, honey, and I am afraid you will find me unappealing. It has happened before.” She hung her head as she admitted her worst fear.

“Reina, look at me, please.” There were tears in Payton’s eyes as well as Reina’s. “I love the way you look right this minute. I look at you and I see our child growing inside you. I love your body and I will never turn away from you. Don’t I touch you enough?”

“Payton, I’m just scared.”

“You have nothing to be scared about. You can’t get rid of me. I know you have been hurt very badly and all I can do is tell you how I feel. I want you all the time. I just don’t want to bother you, especially if you’re tired. I know at some time you will have to refrain from having sex because of the baby. You just need to know, my feelings for you just get stronger and deeper every day.” Payton kissed Reina gently.

“Payton, we’ll never have to stop making love except just before I have the baby and right after. But that doesn’t mean I won’t be able to make love with you.” Reina touched Payton’s cheek.

“Reina, make me a promise, please.”

“What?”

“Please talk to me when you get scared, and please tell me if you want to make love, because I always do.”

“I promise, Payton. Now, since you always want to make love how about I take full advantage of you tonight?” Reina snuggled up against her.

“I believe I could be talked into that. It may take a lot of convincing, though.” Payton kissed Reina slowly as her hands slid around her neck.

“Do you think you’d mind if I took advantage of you here?”

Reina’s eyes sparkled as she began to remove Payton’s shirt. Payton’s words of agreement never left her mouth because Reina’s lips

covered hers while her hands found Payton's breasts, drawing a moan from her. It was several hours before Payton and Reina made it to their bedroom. Once in bed, Payton showed Reina how much she loved her body by kissing every inch of it before her mouth drove Reina crazy while she dissolved into a series of orgasms that left her gasping and weeping. Pleasure coursed through her body as Payton's tongue stroked her and she shuddered. She reached down and pulled Payton up into her arms.

"I need to hold you."

Payton couldn't lay directly on top of Reina, but she pulled her into her arms and they held tightly to one another. They lay for a long time in that position before Payton suggested Reina roll over on her side so Payton could rub her back. Within minutes Reina was asleep, and Payton watched her slumber until she too nodded off.

## CHAPTER 11

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The weeks of waiting were pure agony for Reina, as she drew closer and closer to her due date. Payton though she would go crazy watching Reina get more uncomfortable and irritable. She and the children kept busy and made sure they made Reina's life as quiet as possible. Today the children were over at Lindy and Tamara's swimming while Payton worked in the yard and Reina rested. Payton would swing by and pick Max and Molly up in the morning. She'd been working for several hours in the heat, and stood up to stretch her back when she noticed Reina standing behind her.

"Honey, you've been working all day long. Come inside. I promise I won't bite." Reina was very aware that at times she was a little irritable.

"I just finished, honey. Let me put my things away and I'll come in and clean up. Then I'll make us dinner."

Reina watched Payton as she gathered her gardening tools. She was wearing a pair of button-up jeans on her slender hips and an old work shirt, the sleeves rolled up to reveal her tan arms. Her hair was wavy from the heat. Reina thought she looked beautiful. She waited in the kitchen for Payton; she had plans. Payton entered the back door and smiled as she went to the sink to wash up.

"I should take these clothes off before I track dirt into the house," She suggested, unbuttoning her shirt and the top of her pants.

Reina's eyes glowed as she glimpsed the slim tan stomach of her lover, her hips revealed as she unbuttoned her pants.

"Payton," Reina said softly to catch her attention.

"Yes, honey?" Payton looked up and couldn't mistake the look she saw on Reina's face.

"I want to make love with you," Reina whispered as she drew closer to Payton.

"Honey, I'm all sweaty from working outside." Payton wrapped her arms partially around her very large girlfriend.

"I don't care. I want to make love to you now." Reina kissed her as her hands reached inside the open shirt and found Payton's breasts. "You are so beautiful."

"Reina." Payton sighed with pleasure. "You know how I feel about this."

"Honey, I need to touch you, love you. I promise, as soon as I have the baby and I feel up to it, you can make love with me for hours. Right now I miss touching you, and I think you miss me."

Payton couldn't argue, as Reina's hands were creating a heat in her body that needed release. Reina's kisses were full and wet, and Payton drank in the sensation as she succumbed to Reina's attentions. Reina's hands slid Payton's jeans down her hips and she felt the muscles of Payton's buttocks.

"I love touching you, looking at you. You are so sexy," Reina whispered as she created the magic that Payton craved. When Reina's fingers slid between her legs, Payton was drenched and craving the touch that only Reina could provide. "Love, you are so wet."

Payton's body melted while Reina's fingers touched her. Her response was immediate as she was engulfed with an orgasm. She clung to Reina's neck as Reina stroked her and entered her with words of love. Payton was lost, shivering and shaking. Reina held her tightly as Payton gasped and began to weep.

“Honey, I love you, I love how you react to me when I touch you.” Reina held Payton and soothed her as her body continuing to tremble.

“I can’t believe we’re standing in our kitchen fully dressed,” Payton admitted with a smile, nuzzling Reina’s neck.

“Are you complaining?” Reina teased.

“Yes. I want to make love with you. I miss touching you,” Payton complained as she kissed Reina.

“Would you settle for a massage?”

“Really?”

“Really.” Reina slowly moved out of the kitchen with Payton in tow. She found it difficult to walk comfortably but right now she was in a hurry to get to their bedroom. “Payton, I love your hands on me.”

“Good, because I plan to keep them on you all evening.” Payton rubbed lotion onto Reina’s body and slowly massaged the aches and pains away as she loved Reina with her touch. They fell asleep that night, Reina tucked against Payton, Payton’s arms stretched around Reina holding her tightly, both of them happy and content, their love as strong as ever.

Payton sat at her cluttered desk, immersed in reading a thick report when her talented assistant interrupted her. “Payton, your meeting starts in ten minutes.”

Rikki Anderson was always a welcome interruption. Not only was she very skilled, she had a personality and friendliness that just made you like her. She and Payton worked well together and Payton thought the world of her. She was a beautiful young woman with a huge heart.

“Thanks, Rikki. I’m on my way.”

“Do you have your beeper on?”

“Yes, I just checked it.” Payton grinned. Rikki was worth her weight in gold. Not only was she a good assistant, she understood Payton very well.

“Good. How is Reina doing?”

“Reina is fine, considering she’s three weeks overdue. I’m the one who’s a basket case. She just laughs when I go nuts.”

Rikki laughed with Payton. “I’ll be at my desk in case she calls.”

“Thanks Rikki, I appreciate that.”

“You’d better get going.”

“I’m gone.”

Rikki grinned as her boss left for her meeting. Payton was always organized and well prepared for everything, everything that is except Reina’s impending birth, and then she fell apart. It was comical to watch her talented and brilliant boss become a blithering idiot with one telephone call. Rikki knew it was because Payton was worried about Reina and loved her to death. It made Rikki smile. She hoped she would meet someone who would love her that much. Payton kept telling her she was young and it would happen, but so far the only men Rikki met were not the commitment kind.

Thankfully, the rest of Payton’s Friday was uneventful after her meeting and she headed for home. She called Reina on the way to see if she needed anything, and stopped at the store to pick up a few groceries. Reina had been off work for over a month and was home with the children three days a week. They attended daycare the other two days. Reina had gotten so large she couldn’t sit comfortably. This last week the baby had dropped lower and she was finding it hard to sleep at night. If she didn’t deliver soon, the doctor was going to induce labor.

Payton entered the unusually quiet house and found all three laying on her and Reina’s bed reading a story. Reina looked tired as she held the two children against her.

“Hi, guys.”

“Hi, Payton.” Max scrambled to his feet to hug her.

“Hey, little man, how’s Molly and your mom?”

“Molly’s good, Mom’s tired.”

“She is? Hi, Molly girl.” Payton kissed her. “Hi sweetie, how are you doing?”

Reina kissed her hello. “I’m fine, just a little tired. What do you think about having soup and grilled cheese sandwiches tonight? Max put in a request.”

“Perfect. Let me change my clothes, and Max and I will fix dinner. You and Molly can read.”

“How was your meeting?”

“Great!” Payton called from the walk-in closet. “Reina, I got a raise today.”

“Payton, get out here! You got a raise, that’s fantastic.” Reina started to get up.

“Don’t you dare move.” Payton warned her, grinning as she came into the room wearing shorts and a tee shirt.

“Then come over here and let me congratulate you.”

Payton and Reina hugged tightly while Max and Molly watched, grinning. “I think I’ll have you congratulate me later,” Payton whispered as they kissed softly.

“I’d love to.” Reina’s eyes twinkled.

Reina and Payton’s relationship was stronger than ever since they had learned to talk about their feelings. Reina still made love with Payton even though she had to abstain. The fact that Payton grumbled about it made Reina smile. She knew in her heart that Payton missed making love to her and that made Reina feel more beautiful and sexier than any words. She no longer worried that Payton wouldn’t find her appealing in her present state. Payton had done a very good job of convincing her.

“Come on, Mad Max, let’s go fix dinner. What did you do today?” Payton and Max headed down the hall hand in hand while Max explained in great detail what he had accomplished. Reina and Molly remained on the bed and finished her favorite story.

“So how big a raise did you get?” Reina asked as she waddled into the kitchen.

“You sit and then I’ll tell you.”

“Okay I’m sitting, now tell me.”

“A big one!” Payton grinned.

“How big?”

“I received an eight thousand dollar a year raise, another week of vacation, a new title, and a five thousand dollar bonus!”

“Wow, what’s the title?”

“Program Manager of Business Systems.”

“Payton, that’s wonderful. You must feel very good. You’ve worked so hard. You haven’t even been there a year.”

“I know, but I have a family to support.” Payton twinkled her eyes at Reina. She worked because she enjoyed working, and Reina knew that. “Max buddy, let me help you open that can, please. Do you know we’ve been together eight months on Wednesday?”

“As a matter of fact, I do remember.” Reina grinned. “This is going to sound funny but I feel like we’ve been together forever.”

“It’s not funny. I feel the same way. I can’t imagine my life any other way.” Payton smiled at Reina. “It was meant to be.”

“Max honey, you let Payton help you, please,” Reina called as her independent little son tried hard to make dinner. “Molly, why don’t you and I set the table? Payton, I’m so proud of you.”

“No, you don’t. You stay seated. Molly, Max, and I can handle everything. You just put your feet up,” Payton demanded with a smile. “And thanks.”

It was a short, pleasant meal and after, while the two children quietly watched a video in the living room, Payton and Reina sat with them. When it was over, Payton put the two children to bed and she and Reina sat together in the living room. Payton leaned up against the couch holding Reina as she lay back against Payton. It was one of the few positions she was comfortable in. Payton massaged her swollen feet and aching back, and they now lay quietly enjoying the evening.

“Your parents are arriving Sunday afternoon?”

“Yes, Mom got tired of waiting.”

“Good. I’ll be glad to have them here.”

“You say that now, but will you feel that way in a couple of weeks?” Reina chuckled. “We’ll never be alone.”

“We’ll work it out.”

“Ouch.” Reina flinched. “My, she’s busy today. Payton, give me your hand.”

Payton let Reina place her hand on her firm stomach, and she felt the baby kick. “She is busy. Maybe she’s telling you to get this show on the road.” Payton teased.

“Good idea. Any suggestions?” Reina poked her good-naturedly.

“We could go jogging.”

“This body can barely move at a slow crawl and you want me to jog?” Reina’s look of disbelief made Payton laugh.

“This body, I love.” Payton ran her hands down Reina’s ribs and settled them on her stomach.

“Honey, you better love two bodies, because I’ve gained enough weight for two.”

“I love the way you look. If you weren’t so close to having this baby I’d make love to you.”

“Payton, I can make love to you.” Reina leaned back, her lips sliding deliciously down Payton’s neck.

“Not until I can make love with you.”

“This is a silly rule. I want to make love with you. I love touching you.”

“Honey, it’s important to me.”

“I bet I could change your mind,” Reina teased as she kissed Payton. The rule had only been in place a week.

“I’m sure you could. But I know you understand how I feel and it’s just until you recuperate.”

“I love you, Payton.”

“Reina, I love you so much it amazes me. I never thought I would find this with anyone.”

“Honey, I feel the same way. It just gets better and better every day.”

Payton and Reina sat in each other’s arms enjoying their closeness. They both knew life was changing rapidly within their small family.

“Honey, let’s go crawl in bed. You’ll be much more comfortable. Besides, I want to give you a massage.”

“You don’t need to do that, but I sure would like to get out of this dress. Would you help me up?”

Payton gently helped Reina to her feet and followed her into their bedroom. “Here, let me do that,” Payton requested as Reina struggled out of her dress.

Payton undressed her very pregnant lover and then helped her into her nightshirt and shorts. She assisted Reina in getting comfortable on the bed before she changed her clothes.

“Reina, I’ll be right back.”

“Where are you going?”

“To put your suitcase and the car keys by the door.”

Reina just grinned as Payton headed down the hall. Payton wanted to be prepared and she had everything organized, but Reina knew when the time came that Payton would panic. It made her happy that Payton was so excited about the baby. Reina knew what to expect and didn’t worry so much. To Payton, all this was brand new and she was terrified.

“Okay. The suitcase and keys are by the back door and my clothes are ready.” Payton glanced around the bedroom.

“Payton, come here,” Reina demanded with a smile. “You’ve taken care of everything, now come to bed with me. I would like to hold you.”

Payton scanned the room once more before doing as Reina asked, being careful not to jostle her. “Maybe I should go check on the cell phone.”

“Honey, it’s already been charged and it’s on the kitchen counter. Now, come over here.”

Payton slid next to Reina and put her arms around her neck. “How are you feeling?”

“Actually I’m a little tired, but I feel surprisingly well, considering.”

“Why don’t I rub your back and you try to sleep?”

“I want to hold you for a while, please? Can we just lay here and hold each other?”

“Of course. Are you comfortable?” Reina found lying on her side was the only way to get any relief from her backaches.

“I’ll be perfect if you curl up with me.”

Payton got as close as possible to Reina, considering her size. Her stomach rested snugly against Payton’s as their faces lay on the pillow inches from each other. Reina’s arms were tucked against Payton’s chest while Payton’s were wrapped around Reina’s neck.

“Payton honey, wake up,” Reina called softly as she stroked Payton’s cheek. Oh, how she loved to watch Payton sleep.

“Reina, what are you doing up?” Payton sat up quickly. “Why are you dressed?”

“Honey, it’s time to go to the hospital.” Reina smiled and kissed her.

“Now? Okay, let me get dressed and call Mrs. Lenahan.”

“Payton relax. Mrs. Lenahan is on her way. I’ve already called the doctor and told her we’re on our way.” Reina sat calmly on the side of the bed. “You just need to get dressed.”

“Reina, how long have you been up?” Payton’s face had turned white with panic.

“Not very long, honey.” Reina hugged her. “Now, go get dressed. I think I’m going to sit right here until it’s time to leave.”

Payton scrambled out of bed and began throwing on her clothes. She’d seen the grimace of pain on Reina’s face. In minutes she was fully dressed and kneeling in front of Reina.

“Can I do anything?”

“Honey, I’m fine. You go let Mrs. Lenahan in and start the car, then come help me.”

“Okay, Reina.” The fear in Payton’s voice caused Reina to reach out and touch her face.

“Payton, everything is going to be fine, honey. I love you.”

“I love you.” Payton leaned forward and kissed Reina gently before standing up. No amount of preparation had made her ready for this moment. She was scared to death. She rapidly headed out of the room and went directly to the garage door. Reina’s suitcase and Payton’s bag were waiting to be loaded in the car. Reina had even placed the cell phone on Payton’s bag. Payton opened the door and triggered the garage door opener. She rapidly placed the bags in the backseat and then started the car just as Mrs. Lenahan pulled up in front of the house.

“Hey, Ruth, thanks for getting here so rapidly.”

“How is Reina doing?”

“She’s doing okay. I’m going to help her to the car. The children are sound asleep and the hospital number is on the refrigerator.”

“The kids and I will be fine, Payton. Go get Reina.”

“Thanks, Ruth.” Payton hugged her quickly and then went in to Reina. “Okay, honey. Ruth is here and the car is running. Let’s get you moving.”

It took Reina and Payton several attempts to get Reina off the bed, causing Reina to giggle as Payton helped her slowly down the hall.

“Payton, you should see your face.” Reina grinned. “You look scared to death.”

“That’s because I’m terrified,” Payton answered indignantly.

Reina just smiled. “Hi, Ruth. Thank you for helping us with the kids.”

“No problem, Reina. You just worry about delivering this new one.”

“I don’t need to worry, Payton is doing enough worrying for all of us.”

While Reina and Ruth laughed, Payton glared at them. “I’m glad you two are finding me so amusing. Now can we get you to the car, please?”

Reina and Ruth exchanged grins while Payton disgustedly assisted Reina out the garage door and into the car. “Ruth, I’ll call you as soon as Reina’s settled at the hospital.”

“Don’t worry about Max and Molly. They’ll be fine.”

Payton raced to her door of the car and started to back out. The hospital was twenty minutes away and Payton had practiced the route several times. She knew it by heart. Reina began to pant as they passed the halfway mark and Payton’s irritation with her and Ruth evaporated.

“How far apart are the contractions?”

“About twenty minutes.” Reina gasped as she fought against the pain.

“Twenty minutes? When did they start?”

“Last night when we went to bed.”

Payton glanced at her watch. It was a little after three in the morning. “That’s four hours ago.”

“Payton shut up and help me concentrate on breathing.” To take the sting out of her words she grabbed Payton’s right hand and squeezed. Payton squeezed in return and started counting for Reina. Ten minutes later they pulled into the emergency entrance.

“Stay here, I’ll go get a wheelchair.” As Reina started to protest, Payton cut her off. “Don’t argue.”

Reina grinned at Payton as she held her argument. “I love you, Payton.” Reina leaned toward her and kissed her.

“I love you. Now, don’t move.” Payton kissed her again and touched her cheek with her palm. “You are so beautiful.”

Reina's eyes filled with tears as Payton stepped out of the car and walked rapidly toward the entrance. She was overwhelmed with emotion.

It was only a couple of minutes before Payton returned with an orderly and a wheelchair.

"Reina, this gentleman is going to take you inside while I park the car. I'll be right in to fill out the paperwork while they get you settled."

"Okay, honey." Reina struggled to get out of the car.

"Let me help you, Reina." Payton leaned over Reina and spoke softly. "Put your arms around my neck honey, and I'll lift you up."

Reina did as Payton asked and Payton supported her back while she lifted and pulled Reina out of the car and gently set her into the wheelchair. It was none to soon, as Reina's face indicated she was having another labor pain. Reina pulled Payton into a hug and whispered to her. "Hurry, honey, I want you with me."

"I will, sweetie." Payton stood up, her eyes full of tears. "I promise."

While Reina was pushed into the entrance, Payton found parking for the car and then ran back to the hospital entrance. Reina was nowhere to be seen.

"Are you Payton?" A young nurse asked from the desk.

"Yes."

"Your partner has been taken to the maternity ward."

"Do I need to fill out any insurance papers?"

"No, it's all been taken care of. Go down the hall to the end and turn left. The maternity ward is the second door on the right."

"Thanks." Payton practically ran down the hall to find Reina. She burst through the double doors and immediately looked around. A nurse came out of one of the rooms.

"I'm looking for Reina Landers."

"Are you Payton?"

"Yes."

“Follow me. We’re just getting her comfortable.” Payton followed the nurse and found Reina lying in her bed in a hospital gown.

“Reina!” Payton didn’t say anything else as she rushed to her side.

“I’m okay, honey. Relax, it’s going to be a little while.” Reina held Payton’s hand. “Sit here.” She patted the side of the bed.

Payton sat down and sighed. She was terrified beyond belief, and was praying that she could help Reina through everything. “Payton, look at me sweetie. Everything is going to be fine. We’ll have this baby together. It’s our baby.”

Payton was unable to respond, holding tightly to Reina’s hand. She bent over and hugged Reina snugly as she tried to control her tears.

“Did you bring your camera?”

“Of course.” Reina just laughed as she held an indignant Payton. She didn’t go anywhere without her camera.

“Honey, why don’t you close your eyes and get some rest?”

“Why don’t you lay down next to me and hold me?”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

Payton lay down next to Reina on the outside of the covers. “Roll on your side, honey.”

Payton pulled the covers around Reina and held her tightly, her face tucked against Reina’s. Reina closed her eyes and leaned against Payton. “I love you Payton.”

“I love you, Reina.” Payton could feel Reina’s body relax as she breathed slowly. For about ten minutes they lay there, halfway between awake and asleep, until Reina’s contractions began again and her body tensed against Payton’s.

“Breath, Reina.” Payton panted with her as she worked through the contraction.

Dr. Levin entered the room briskly. “Reina, how are you doing?”

“Hello, Dr. Levine,” Reina gasped out.

“She’s having a contraction.” Payton volunteered, her face pale as she held Reina.

“Hello, Payton. How far apart are they?”

“About ten minutes.”

“Why don’t I examine Reina?”

“I’ll step outside.” Payton rolled off the bed and started to leave the room.

“Payton, stay, please,” Reina asked as she continued her breathing.

“I will, honey,” Payton pledged.

“Okay, Reina, let’s get you through this contraction first. How long have you been in labor?”

“They started around ten last night.”

“When did your water break?”

“About an hour ago.”

“How are your contractions?”

“They’re lessening now.”

“Good. Let’s see how soon we’re going to welcome this baby into the world.” While Dr. Levine examined Reina, Payton stood next to her head, holding her hand. “Well, Reina and Payton, I hope you have your nursery ready because this little girl is on her way. Reina, you’re dilated about four centimeters and are well on your way to delivery.”

“Is the baby doing okay?”

“Payton, do you see that machine over there? It’s monitoring both Reina and the baby’s heartbeat and they are steady and strong. The baby is just fine and so is Reina.”

Payton looked at Reina and squeezed her hand.

“So what name did you two decide on?”

“Melinda.”

“That’s a beautiful name. Now Reina, you’ve been through this before but I still want to go over everything. As the baby crowns we will do an episiotomy to allow more space for her to slide through.

You've decided on natural childbirth, so unless you change your mind right now you will be given no drugs for the birth."

"I don't need any drugs. I had Max and Molly by natural childbirth and I will have Melinda naturally. This is our last child."

"Okay Reina, but you know that once you start the delivery it's too late to give you anything."

"I know, Dr. Levine. I will be fine."

"Are you sure, Reina?" Payton gazed at the woman who meant more to her than life itself.

"Honey, I'm sure."

"Payton, you and I will make sure Reina and the baby come through this just fine. Now, you go out and ask the nurse at the desk for a gown and hat. We need you suited up and ready to help deliver this baby. I'll stay with Reina until you get back."

"Okay. I'll be right back, honey." Payton kissed Reina gently and left the room.

"She's scared to death." Reina chuckled. "And she is trying so hard not to show it."

"Reina, childbirth can be very frightening to someone who has never seen it before."

"She'll be fine. She's wonderful, isn't she?"

"She is very nice, Reina, and she obviously loves you very much."

"I'm crazy about her. I can't think of anyone else I would rather have a child with."

"That's good, because you are about to have this baby."

Payton re-entered the room in a gown, a hospital hat covering her hair. All you could see in her face was her eyes large with fear and wonder.

"Okay, Reina. Let's get you ready to have this baby. I'm going to have the nurse come in and prepare you while I go change my clothes. I won't be long."

“Thanks, Doctor.” Reina felt the start of another contraction and began her cleansing breaths. Payton joined Reina and supported her while she struggled through her contractions.

Within half an hour, Reina was in full-blown contractions with less than a couple of minutes between. Reina dripped with perspiration, and she was showing signs of exhaustion as Payton sat behind her supporting her back and coaching her.

“Good, Reina. I see the baby’s head. Now, I’m going to make a small cut. You might feel a pinch.”

Reina rested her head against Payton and closed her eyes. Both of her hands clasped Payton’s. Payton whispered quietly, which made Reina smile and tuck her face into Payton’s neck.

“Okay, Reina, when you feel the next contraction, I want you to push. It’s time to deliver this baby.”

When the contractions began again, Reina leaned forward and cried out as she strained to push out the baby. She clung tightly to Payton’s hands as she cried out again and pushed like mad.

“That’s good, Reina. Push. We have a little girl just waiting to be born.”

Reina braced herself against Payton and cried out, pushing as hard as she could. “Here she is, Reina. One more huge push.”

Reina moaned and strained, tears running down her face. Payton had been crying for the last twenty minutes. Another cry caught the attention of everyone in the room, as the doctor pulled the baby free.

“There you are, little girl. Welcome to the world.” The doctor held up the tiny little girl so Reina and Payton could see her.

“You did it, sweetie!” Payton cried as she hugged Reina. “Look, she’s beautiful. Your little girl is perfect!”

“Our little girl,” Reina cried as she leaned back against Payton, her exhausted body slumped tightly against her.

“Payton, do you want to cut the cord?”

“Me?”

“Honey, cut the cord and hold the baby.” Reina kissed Payton softly. “Go hold our little girl, and give your camera to the nurse.”

Payton gently slipped out from behind Reina, handed her camera to the nurse, and walked to where the doctor was holding the baby wrapped in a blanket. “Okay, Payton, take these scissors from the nurse and cut the cord between these two clamps. The baby and Reina won’t feel a thing.”

Payton quickly cut the cord before she fainted, and then looked closely at the tiny baby. Her little face was scrunched up as she hollered loudly. “Here is your new daughter.”

The doctor handed the tiny little bundle to Payton. She held the crying baby against her chest and felt her heart leap. This was their baby. She began to cry as she stared at the miracle. Reina watched while Payton held their child and also began to cry, seeing the look of pure love and awe on Payton’s face as she hugged their baby. The nurse took several photographs of Payton and the baby and she too was overcome by the reaction Payton had when she held her child for the first time. There was nothing like a new parent’s love.

“Why don’t you show Melinda to her mother?” Doctor Levine suggested.

Payton slowly walked to Reina and placed Melinda in her arms. “Here is your daughter, honey.”

“Our daughter,” Reina reminded her as she looked at their baby. She pulled the blanket away from the tiny girl. She and Payton bent over and looked at the very unhappy child. She had a thatch of curly black hair, her skin wrinkled and very pink.

“She’s beautiful.”

“She looks like you, Payton.”

“She does not.”

“Yes, she does. She’s gorgeous.”

“She’s perfect. Look at her little feet, her little ears.” Payton touched the tiny ear and her tiny hand. Melinda’s little fingers

wrapped around Payton's and she stopped crying. "Reina, thank you." Payton burst into tears.

Payton kissed Reina. "Payton, I love you." Reina began crying again. They clung to each other, holding their child.

"Reina, Payton, we need to take the baby and clean her up. Let the nurse take her while we take care of Reina." The two of them kissed the squalling baby and handed her to the nurse.

"This little one is pretty feisty," The nurse remarked as she carried her out of the room.

"Reina, we need to place a few stitches to close the small cut, and you need to expel the afterbirth," The doctor informed her.

"Payton, why don't you go call my parents and tell them all about Melinda?"

"I don't want to leave you."

"Please, honey, go call them." Reina pleaded. She didn't want Payton to see her get stitched.

"Okay, honey. But if you need me send the nurse to come get me."

"Payton, come here one minute." Reina smiled at her as she approached the bed. "I love you."

"Reina, I love you. You have got to be the most beautiful woman in the world." Payton kissed her, holding her tightly.

"Go call Grandma and Grandpa." Reina gently pushed her toward the door. As Payton left the room Reina lay back down on the bed, a smile no longer on her face.

"How are you doing, Reina?" The doctor asked as she checked her blood pressure.

"I'm tired and sore. Otherwise, I am fine. Did you see the look on Payton's face when she saw the baby?" Reina lay back exhausted but she smiled as she remembered the expression on Payton's face.

"I did. I think Nurse Holman got several pictures of Payton and the baby. She also got some great ones of the three of you. Now Reina, we need to take care of you."

Payton found the nearest chair outside Reina's room and sat down before she fell down. Her legs shook as she sat in stunned silence. She was so overwhelmed after seeing Reina deliver the baby. She'd been so scared that she was going to lose Reina and the baby, and now they were both fine. She dropped her head in her hands and began to pray. She would thank God every day of her life for delivering a healthy baby and keeping Reina safe. It was several long minutes before she went and located a telephone. She dialed Reina's parents' number, hoping to catch them before they left for the airport.

"Hello."

"Virginia."

"Payton, is that you?"

"You're a grandmother again."

"Reina had the baby? How are they?"

"She had her a little less than an hour ago, and both are doing fine."

"Congratulations, honey. You both must be very happy."

"Happy and so scared."

"Honey, you'll be fine. It's natural to be nervous with a new baby. But you and Reina are wonderful parents."

"Thank you, that means so much to me."

"Payton, Frank and I love you, and we think you and Reina are wonderful together."

"I love you and Frank very much. Now, what time does your airplane get in?"

"Three-thirty and we'll come directly to the hospital to see the three of you and then go to the house and watch the kids."

"That'll be great, Virginia. Mrs. Lenahan is staying with them until you get there."

"Honey, you go give Reina and the baby a kiss. Grandpa and I will be there as soon as possible."

"Thanks, Virginia." Payton stood holding the receiver in her hand for several minutes before hanging up. She not only had acquired a

girlfriend and three children, but also a new set of parents. She was beyond lucky. She decided to call Lindy and Tamara since it wasn't too early.

"Hello."

"Tamara, it's Payton. Reina had the baby."

"How are they?"

"Good. They're both fine. I don't know how big the baby is yet. They're checking her out now."

"Payton, are you okay?"

"I'm fine, just overwhelmed. Tamara, it was incredible." Payton burst into tears.

"Lindy and I will get there as soon as possible, honey." Tamara grew tearful as she listened to the emotion in Payton's voice.

"Thanks." Payton was still too overcome to say much more. She needed to see Reina. "I've got to go back and check on Reina."

"Congratulations, Payton."

"Thanks, Tamara."

Payton headed back to Reina's room after calling her brother. She promised to call them later after she knew more about the baby. The nurse was just leaving as Payton entered.

"How's Reina?"

"She's very tired. Could you convince her to get some sleep?"

"I think I can do that." Payton entered the dimly lit room to find Reina's eyes open and watchful. "Why aren't you sleeping?" She whispered, approaching the bed.

"I can't sleep without you." Reina's exhausted smile made Payton's heart flip.

"Well, I'm here now and I want you to close your eyes."

"Payton, I need you to hold me." Reina began to cry.

"Honey, I can hold you." Payton gently climbed onto the bed next to Reina.

"I can't tell you how much it means to me to have you here. I love you."

“Reina, I love you. I’m still so amazed about everything. Melinda is beautiful.”

Reina rolled onto her side and tucked herself against Payton. “She looks like you, Payton. She’s our little girl.”

Payton also began to cry as she held Reina tightly. They both wept, as the emotion of the event overtook them. It was how Lindy and Tamara found them an hour later tucked against each other, sound asleep. They had already stopped by to see the baby and now wanted to congratulate the new parents. Reina’s eyes flickered open as Lindy and Tamara entered the room with balloons and a teddy bear.

“Hi.”

“How are you doing, Reina?” Tamara walked over and hugged her.

“Good. Did you see the baby?”

“Yes, she’s beautiful.”

“She looks like Payton.”

“Speaking of Payton, how is she doing?” The subject they were speaking about was sleeping soundly, holding Reina tightly in her arms.

“She’s exhausted.” Reina smiled and hugged the sleeping woman. “She was there for the whole delivery. She cut the cord and took the baby from the doctor.”

“I’ve never known anyone who sleeps as soundly as Payton.” Lindy chuckled. “I’m going to wake her. Payton, wake up and talk to us.” Lindy demanded as she poked her gently.

“Hi guys.” Payton’s sleepy smile greeted them. She tightened her hold on Reina. She wasn’t about to let go.

“Payton, she’s a doll,” Tamara raved. “She’s so tiny.”

“She is beautiful, isn’t she? They should be bringing her back shortly.” Payton turned to Reina. “How are you feeling, honey?”

“Pretty good. I’ll be better when I go home.”

“When is that?”

“We can go home this afternoon if the doctor releases me.”

“Don’t you want to stay one night and rest?”

“No, I want to be home with my family. I’ll rest better at home.”

“Is there anything we can do?”

“Lindy, you can let Rikki know that I won’t be in this week. She knows what to do.”

“I will, Payton. Now, tell me did you take any pictures?”

Payton blushed with embarrassment. “I forgot.”

“She was too busy.” Reina hugged her with a grin. “But the nurse took quite a few.”

“Good. We can’t wait to see them.” Tamara and Lindy smiled at the two very happy women.

“Thanks for the teddy bear and the balloons.”

“You’re welcome. Wait until you see the outfit we found for Melinda.” Lindy giggled. “We’ll bring it over once you’re home and get settled.”

“Thanks guys. We appreciate all your support.” Payton couldn’t help the tears. “I seem to be crying quite a lot lately.”

“Payton, we know exactly how you’re feeling, don’t we Lindy?” Tamara tugged on her arm. “We love our family, too.”

Reina and Payton smiled at each other and shared a kiss. “We are very happy,” Reina admitted.

The nurse entered the room pushing a rolling basinet. “Is there someone here waiting for a Miss Melinda?”

Payton rolled immediately out of bed and went straight to the nurse. “What did they say about the baby?”

“Melinda is a healthy six pound eight ounce baby girl. She’s a dainty looking little thing, but believe me when I tell you she has a set of lungs, and a little temper.” The nurse grinned.

“Reina, do you want to hold her?” Payton asked, staring at the wide-awake little girl.

“Why don’t you bring her to me, Payton?” Reina smiled, as Lindy and Tamara watched grinning.

“Hey little one, you want to go to your mother? She has been waiting for a long time to hold you.” Payton gently picked up the little

girl and carried her to her mother. Reina took the child from Payton and put her on the bed next to her. Payton, Lindy, and Tamara crowded around.

“Look at that hair,” Tamara remarked.

“Let’s look at you, Melinda.” Reina carefully unwrapped the blanket from her daughter. She was wearing a tiny undershirt and equally small diaper. Her arms and legs wiggled when she was released from her blanket.

“She’s so small.”

“She’s perfect,” Reina announced.

“Well, ladies, we know you’re exhausted. We’ll let the three of you go back to sleep. Payton, call us when you know when Reina goes home. We’ll come over to the house once you get settled.”

“Thanks for coming.” Payton hugged first Lindy and then Tamara. They both kissed Reina goodbye before leaving.

“Goodbye, Melinda. You have two very special parents,” Tamara whispered to the very active little girl.

“See you later.” The two of them left the room.

“Honey, will you get my bag and bring it to me?”

“Sure.”

“I want to put my own nightgown on.”

“Can I help?”

“Yes, you can hold Melinda while I change.”

Reina slid out of her hospital gown and into her own while Payton and Melinda studied each other. “Can she see me?”

“I don’t think so, honey. She can only see shapes and shadows. She’ll recognize your touch and your voice first. Now, I think it’s about time to try feeding her.”

“Really?” Payton knew that Reina was going to breast feed the baby but she wasn’t quite sure how it got started. She handed the baby to Reina who had unbuttoned the front of her nightgown. Reina placed the baby against her breast and with her fingers put her

nipple against the baby's lips. The little girl's response was to whimper for a moment until she very naturally began to suckle.

"That's it, little one," Reina cooed, as Melinda's little hands clenched against her breast while she nursed. Reina's arms cradled the baby. Payton was too overwhelmed to speak, and she sat on the side of the bed, tears slipping from her eyes. She had never seen anything more beautiful than Reina and Melinda at that moment. She gazed lovingly at them, her daughter, and her mother.

Reina couldn't help but notice Payton's reaction and her heart leaped in her chest. Over and over she fell in love with Payton, as she encountered the depth of her feelings for her. She smiled to herself. She had no more doubts. Payton loved her and the children, it was very obvious.

"Could I take a picture of the two of you?" Payton asked her eyes still wet with tears.

"On one condition." Reina smiled at her. "Only if you come here and kiss me first."

Payton didn't have to be asked twice as she stood up and moved close to Reina and the nursing baby. She kissed Reina slowly, her lips gliding softly against Reina's, full of love. Reina reached up and wrapped her arm around Payton's neck, holding her as they kissed.

"God Reina, I love you so much," Payton admitted as she touched Reina's face.

"Payton, I love you. We are so lucky."

"Thank you so much for this."

"It's you I need to thank. Having Melinda with you has meant so much to me. I love Molly and Max, but you weren't there. Melinda will be special because you are. If I had it all to do over again I would have waited to have Molly and Max with you." They shared another kiss, before being interrupted by a fussy Melinda.

"Okay, Payton, you need to burp her."

"What do you mean, burp her?" Payton responded fearfully.

“Put her on your shoulders and pat her on her back.” Payton gingerly picked up the fussy little girl and laid her against her shoulder. She very gently patted her. “Is this okay?”

“That’s perfect, honey. Why don’t you sit here on the bed?” Payton sat down next to Reina on the bed and swung her feet up. The baby squirmed against her shoulder while Payton rubbed her back. Reina slid her arm around Payton and snuggled up against the two of them. Within minutes, Melinda nodded off to sleep. Reina and Payton were content to lay back with the baby between them sound asleep. Before too long all three were slumbering peacefully.

Reina and Payton and their new baby Melinda slept for a good hour and a half before the doctor arrived. “Reina, how are you feeling?”

“Sore and tired, but not too bad.”

“Have you gotten up and walked yet?”

“No.”

“Well, let’s do try that. I don’t want to send you home too soon.”

The doctor looked at the sleeping child between them. “How’s Melinda doing?”

“She’s already had her first meal and if I’m not mistaken she will be in need of a diaper-changing.”

“Good. Do you want me to send a nurse in?”

“No, Payton and I can handle things.” Payton nodded her head, but the look of fright on her face made the doctor chuckle.

“Payton, relax, you are doing fine, all of you are doing just fine.” The doctor patted her on the arm. “If you promise me that you will get up and go for a couple of walks Reina, I will sign you out around four-thirty.”

“Great, we’ll take one now.”

“I’ll check back later. Congratulations, you two.”

“Thanks, Dr. Levine.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Okay, Payton, let’s change the baby’s diaper. There’s a washcloth and a diaper in the bassinette. Go wet the washcloth with warm water and bring everything over here.” Payton did as she was asked and rejoined Reina. “Okay, Melinda let’s change this wet diaper. She removed the newborn baby’s diaper and gently washed the little girl clean and dried her off while Payton watched fascinated. “Okay Payton, you can put the new diaper on Melinda.”

Payton hesitated for a moment and then slowly folded the miniature diaper on the docile little girl. “There you go, Melinda, you’re all done,” Payton announced as she patted the little girl’s stomach.

She heard the click of the camera and looked up to find Reina taking their picture. “I couldn’t miss your first diaper change.” Reina laughed.

“Does she need to eat again?”

“Soon. Why don’t you wrap her in her blanket and we’ll go for a walk.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, but you’ll have to carry the baby and let me lean on you.”

“I can handle that.”

“I thought you could.” Reina chuckled.

Reina, Payton, and Melinda took a slow walk down the corridor and back. Reina was very uncomfortable but, with Payton’s assistance, she made the trip. The three of them headed back to their room again after all the nurses took a peak at the content little girl nestled in Payton’s arms.

“We need to take Melinda one more time to check her vitals, weigh her, and prepare her to go home,” The nurse announced as she entered the room. Reina and Payton hated to see the baby leave but the two of them crawled back on the bed intent on napping until they returned her.

“Honey, I’m going to call home and check on Max and Molly.” It was a little after lunchtime.

“Good, I want to talk to them.”

“Okay, but then you’re going to sleep.”

“I will, honey. I promise.”

It was an excited Molly and Max that visited with them. They both wanted to see Melinda. “We’re bringing her home tonight, we promise. And you both can hold her,” Reina pledged. “Are you taking good care of Mrs. Lenahan?”

“Yep, we took her swimming and floated with her.”

“Good. We love you guys.”

“We love you, Mom.”

Both Payton and Reina found it difficult to hang up the telephone. They missed their kids. “Okay, now you go to sleep,” Payton demanded when she and Reina said goodbye to Max and Molly.

“Can you hold me, please?”

“My pleasure.” Again, Payton lay next to Reina and wrapped her arms around her. “I love you. Now, sleep.”

“I love you, Payton.” Reina tucked her face against Payton’s neck, her arms sliding around her waist. Within minutes she was sound asleep. Payton was no longer tired but she relished the feeling of holding Reina while she slept. The nurse returned Melinda very quietly about twenty minutes later, and placed the sleeping little girl in her bassinette right next to Payton. With her arm around Reina, Payton placed her hand on the sleeping child’s back. She could now go to sleep.

“Is this Reina Lander’s room?” Virginia asked the nurse, as she and Frank approached the nurses’ station.

“Yes, it is. The three of them are in there sound asleep. Come with me.” The nurse opened the door of the very quiet room. “Aren’t they beautiful?”

Frank and Virginia had to agree. Payton had picked Melinda up earlier when she became fussy so that Reina could feed her. After she was fed and burped she had fallen asleep on Payton’s stomach. Payton had one arm protecting the baby and her other arm around

Reina, who was asleep on her shoulder. Payton was also sound asleep, her head resting against Reina's.

"We keep coming in to look at the three of them, they're so cute. We took several pictures with their camera. Isn't it just perfect?"

"It is." Frank hugged his wife to him. He felt the prick of tears as he stared at his daughter, Payton, and his new granddaughter. When Reina first told her parents years earlier that she was gay, it had broken their hearts. Not because they were ashamed of her, but because it was not an easy life to live and they wanted her life to be perfect. At that moment Frank knew his daughter had found her perfect life, and it made him profoundly humble. Virginia hugged him tightly knowing exactly how he was feeling as she smiled at the sleeping trio.

"I hate to disturb them, they look so peaceful."

"We need to wake them up. They're going home in an hour and the doctor will be here any moment."

"Virginia, you wake them up," Frank suggested.

Virginia approached the bed and kissed Payton's cheek and then Reina's. "Girls, wake up."

Payton's eyes blinked open and she smiled when she saw Virginia and Frank. "Hi, Grandpa and Grandma. You want to meet Melinda?"

She pulled her arm away from Reina and picked up the baby. "Here is your Grandma Virginia, Melinda." She handed Melinda to Virginia, who hugged the little girl to her chest.

"She's beautiful, Payton." Virginia turned to show Frank his granddaughter.

"Just like Reina," Payton agreed as she gently woke her up. "Sweetie, your parents are here."

Reina snuggled closer to Payton and then opened her eyes. "Hi Mom and Dad. Did you just get here?"

"Yes, honey. How are you feeling?"

“Good. In fact, I feel so good I just might think about having another baby.” She grinned. Payton’s look of astonishment made Frank and Virginia laugh out loud.

“Relax, honey, I was just teasing.” Reina kissed her on the cheek. “Payton needs time to recuperate,” She explained as she gathered Payton’s hand in her own and gazed lovingly at her.

“Grandpa, here, it’s your turn.” Virginia started to hand the baby to Frank.

“Wait. I need to take some pictures.” Payton scrambled for the camera.

After taking several pictures of Virginia holding the baby, she took a few of Frank. He held the very cooperative, sleeping child while they all quietly visited until the doctor arrived.

“Reina, are you ready to go home?” The doctor asked after she was introduced to the proud grandparents.

“Yes, please.”

“Okay, you know the drill. Stay off your feet, no heavy lifting, and Payton is to wait on you hand and foot.”

“She will.” Reina chuckled.

“You and the baby need to come see me next Thursday morning at nine.”

“We’ll be there.”

“If you have any questions, call me any time.”

“We will. And thank you, Dr. Levine.”

“My pleasure. Now I’ll let you get ready to leave. The nurse will bring the wheelchair in after I sign the papers. Probably in about twenty minutes.”

“Mom, can you and Dad help Payton and me by watching the baby for a moment while I get dressed? You can take her in the hall.”

“Okay, sweetie.” Frank and Virginia did as she asked.

“Payton, you’re going to have to help me put my sweats on. I’m afraid I can’t bend over too far.”

“No problem, honey.” It took awhile for Reina to be fully dressed since she found it hard to move at all. Payton put her shoes on and packed her things.

“I look a mess,” Reina grumbled as she sat back on the bed.

“You couldn’t look more beautiful to me.” Payton promised, hugging her gently.

“Is everything packed?”

“Yes, honey.”

“Good. You want to go let Grandma and Grandpa back in.”

Within half an hour, Reina was being wheeled down the hall with the baby in her arms. Frank and Virginia had already left and would meet them at home. They’d taken the flowers and the teddy bear with them, leaving Payton to carry Reina and the baby’s things. Her arms were full but she was still managing to take pictures.

“I’m going to destroy that camera when I get my hands on it,” Reina warned Payton teasingly.

“You won’t feel that way when you see the pictures.”

“Payton, go get the car before I kill you.” Reina grinned.

“Okay, honey.” Payton took off.

“She’s pretty excited.” The orderly remarked.

“She is very excited, and if I don’t strangle her first I’m going to enjoy watching her deal with all of this.” She laughed as they headed out the front door. She loved how Payton was reacting. Payton pulled the car around and was waiting by the open front door.

“Payton, put the baby in the car seat while this nice gentleman helps me into the car,” Reina instructed.

Payton took the baby and set her in the waiting car seat. By the time she had her strapped in, Reina was in the car ready to leave.

“Good luck.”

“Thank you.”

“Reina, are you ready to go home?” Payton faced her and grasped her hand.

“Yes, are you?”

“All three of us are.”

Payton’s drive home was nerve wracking, knowing her car carried not only Reina but also Melinda, and she was overly cautious. She had never paid more attention to her driving. She sighed with relief when they pulled into the garage.

“How about I help you into the house and come back for Melinda?”

“No, you carry her. I can lean on your arm.”

Payton un-strapped the sound asleep little girl and helped Reina out of the car. Slowly, they made the trip into the house.

“Here, honey, let your old dad help.” Frank took Reina’s arm and assisted her down the hall to her bedroom.

“Where are Max and Molly?”

“They went with Mrs. Lenahan to get you and the baby a card. We thought you might want to get comfortable before they see you.”

“Thanks, Dad. Payton, can you help me, please?”

“Sure, honey. Virginia, will you take Melinda for me?”

“Sure, Payton. Come on, Frank.”

“Reina, honey, I have to tell you. I’ve never been more pleased or happy to have you as a daughter. You and Payton make me proud when I see how wonderful you are. I think all three of your children are lucky to have you as parents.”

Reina was surprised and moved by her father’s words and burst into tears, while her father hugged her. “Thanks, Dad.”

“You’re welcome, sweetie. Now, Grandma and I are going to check out Melinda. You let Payton take care of you.”

“I love you, Dad.”

“I love you, honey.”

“Thanks, Frank.” Payton hugged him before he left the room, her face streaked with tears.

“Payton, I should be thanking you. You have brought love and joy into all of our lives. We love you, honey.”

Payton turned to Reina, crying like mad. “Damn it. I can’t seem to stop crying today.”

“Payton, come here.” Reina hugged her tightly. “He’s right, you made my life perfect.”

“I’m the one who’s lucky.” Payton kissed her softly. “Now, let’s get you comfortable and in bed.”

“Can I take a quick shower, please?”

“Is it okay to?”

“I think so, but you’ll have to help me.”

“I love showering with you.” Payton grinned.

“Come on, you.” Reina laughed. She loved the fact that Payton still thought of her as her lover. With Payton’s help, Reina stripped herself of her clothes and wrapped a towel around her body. She was a little embarrassed to have Payton see her naked.

“Reina, I have turned the shower on.”

“Thanks, honey. I’ll only be a few minutes.”

Payton walked up to Reina and slipped her arms around her, sliding the towel from her body. Reina, you are so beautiful right this minute.” Payton’s eyes glistened with tears. “This gorgeous body was part of a miracle. I will spend the rest of my life thanking you for loving me, and sharing this day with me.”

Reina cried while Payton gazed at her, she was too overwhelmed to speak. Payton’s hands traveled over Reina’s stomach and breasts. “I want to memorize you and this moment.”

Kneeling in front of Reina, Payton laid her face on Reina’s stomach and kissed her reverently, her arms around Reina’s hips. “Payton, kiss me, please.” Reina whispered, tugging Payton to her feet.

Payton did as Reina asked, kissing her with a heart full of love and passion. They stood in each other’s arms for several moments before either one spoke. “Honey, you go climb in the shower, while I get you a clean nightgown.”

“Payton, you are my heart. I love you so much.”

“I love you, too.”

Twenty minutes later, Reina was once again comfortable in her own bed, the baby in her arms, nursing. “When I get done feeding her, can you braid my hair? It’s driving me crazy.”

“Of course,” Payton agreed as she watched the two of them. “I don’t think I will ever get over how beautiful you look when you’re nursing.”

“Ha, I know you. You just like my overly large breasts.” Reina chuckled.

“That, too.” Payton colored as she blushed.

“I love that about you.”

“What?”

“That you still find me physically appealing.”

“You aren’t going to like it when I start whining about not being able to touch you.”

“We’ll work something out.” Reina’s eyes twinkled. “I think this little doll is done. Okay Payton, do your job.”

Payton took the satisfied baby and sat in the rocking chair to hold her. “I hear Max and Molly,” Payton said as she burped her daughter.

“Mom, Mom, where are you?” Max burst through the bedroom doorway.

“Right here, Max. Come, give me a hug.”

Max ran immediately to his mother and smothered her with little boy kisses. Molly entered the room much more sedately.

“Hi, Mom.”

“Molly, I missed you.” Reina held her arms open for Molly.

“I missed you, too.” Molly clung to her mother, obviously a little scared.

“How’s my perfect little girl?” Reina held her and soothed her as Max stood by Payton and the baby.

“Hi, Payton. I missed you.”

“Hi, little man. I missed you gobs. Can I have a kiss?”

Max kissed Payton and then stared at the sleeping baby. “Is that my sister?”

“Yep. You want to hold her? She wants to meet her older brother and sister. She is pretty little, she needs you and Molly to take care of her.”

“Can I hold her?”

“Sure you can. You go sit next to your mom and Molly on the bed. You and Molly can both hold her.”

Molly still sat in her mother’s arms, her eyes as big as saucers, as she watched Payton place the baby in Max’s arms after he sat down. Grandma, Grandpa, and Mrs. Lenahan watched from the doorway.

“She’s asleep,” Molly remarked as Max held very still.

“Yes, she is. She will sleep a lot until she gets bigger,” Reina explained. “But wait until you hear her cry. She’s as loud as Max.”

Molly giggled as she listened. “Does she have hair?”

“Yes. Payton, take her hat off. Little babies get cold very easily so they wear hats.”

“Look Max, her hair is like Payton’s!” Molly exclaimed.

“I told you she looked like you,” Reina gloated.

“Molly, would you like to hold your younger sister?”

“Yes, please.”

Payton started to take Melinda from Max but he protested. “Wait, Payton. I have to kiss her,” Max explained as he leaned over and kissed Melinda on her lips. “I love you gobs, Melinda.”

Payton sighed loudly knowing she was going to cry again. She gently lifted Melinda out of Max’s lap. Melinda very conveniently slept through everything. “Molly, here is your little sister Melinda.” Payton placed the baby in Molly’s arms.

“She’s little.”

“Yes, she is. That’s why she needs an older sister and brother to take care of her.”

“We will, won’t we Max?”

Max vigorously bobbed his head up and down. As Molly held her sister, Reina and Payton smiled at each other. “Love you,” Reina

mouthed to her, and Payton responded with the same words as she struggled unsuccessfully to keep from crying.

After Molly held her for a while, the baby woke up and began to fuss, so Reina suggested they show her to Mrs. Lenahan and then she feed Melinda. While Reina fed Melinda, Molly and Max helped Grandma and Grandpa fix dinner. Payton attempted to get some laundry done but between the two very excited children and her own nerves she didn't get a whole lot accomplished. Reina joined all of them for dinner, bringing the baby monitor with her. Max and Molly were still full of questions about the baby and Payton and Reina patiently answered them all.

Frank and Virginia watched a movie with Max and Molly while Reina climbed back into bed and Payton cleaned up the kitchen. After the movie, Max and Molly went in and kissed their mother and Melinda goodnight and Payton put them both to bed.

"I think we're going to take Max and Molly to the aquarium tomorrow. That'll give you and Reina a break," Virginia suggested, while she and Payton folded the last of the laundry.

"Max and Molly will love that."

"Good, now you go to bed. You're exhausted."

"I think I will go to bed. You and Frank make yourself at home. How do you like your new bedroom?"

"We love it. They did a nice job with the remodel, and the nursery is fantastic."

"Reina did most of that."

"It's just darling, I love the fish."

"Everything did turn out nice. Frank, Virginia, I want to thank you for staying with us. Reina and I both love that you're here."

"Thanks, honey, we appreciate that. Now, go to bed."

"Goodnight." Payton was exhausted.

"Payton, did you call your brother back?"

"I did, thanks. He and Eva said to say hello."

"Goodnight."

Reina and the baby were sound asleep when Payton entered the room, so she tiptoed into the bathroom and quickly took a shower. She dressed in her nightshirt and then checked on the baby. Melinda was sleeping on her stomach all scrunched up, and Payton covered her with her blanket. She stared for several minutes before she turned away to find Reina watching her.

“She looks so little.”

“She is little, honey. Come to bed, sweetie. You look very tired.”

“You’re the one who should be asleep. You just had a baby.”

“I’ll go to sleep as soon as you get in bed with me.”

Payton took one last look at the baby and then slid under the covers and turned to Reina. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m sore, honey, but I feel pretty good. The stitches are a little irritating but that should go away.”

“Reina, I have to tell you, I’ve never been so scared in all my life. I never want to see you in pain again. I couldn’t stand it.”

Reina hugged Payton. “Payton, I love you.”

“I love you, and I love Melinda, and Max, and Molly.”

“Payton, go to sleep.” Reina requested, sliding her arms around Payton’s neck and resting her head on her shoulder.

Within minutes, both Reina and Payton were sound asleep in each other’s arms. They both slept soundly for several hours, until the baby began to cry.

“She’s hungry,” Reina whispered as Payton got out of bed.

“Here you go, honey. Your mom is going to feed you,” Payton whispered to the unhappy little girl. She handed Melinda to Reina who was sitting up in the bed waiting.

“You are hungry.” Reina talked to her little daughter as she breast-fed her. Payton lay on the bed next to Reina watching. She placed her hand on Reina’s thigh as she watched mother and daughter. After she was finished nursing, Reina held the baby for a long time rocking her and speaking softly to her. She finally fell back to sleep while Payton and Reina gazed at her.

“You want to check her diaper before we put her back to bed?”

“Okay.” Payton took Melinda from Reina and laid her on the bed. She expertly had Melinda changed without disturbing the sleeping angel.

“You’re pretty good at that.” Reina grinned.

“I’m learning.” Payton smiled in return. “All right little Mel, let’s put you back to bed so you can get lots of sleep and grow up big and strong.”

Payton returned the sleeping baby to her crib and cleaned up the mess. She was back in bed in a flash. Reina lay on her side away from Payton and Payton ran her hands down Reina’s hips and around her waist. Reina reached down and laced her fingers with Payton’s, pulling her tightly against her back.

“Goodnight, Payton.”

“Goodnight, Reina.”

The baby woke Reina and Payton up five times during the night. Only once was she not hungry, just unhappy, and Payton rocked her until she fell back asleep. Max woke them up at seven-thirty when he crawled into bed with them. By eight o’clock, Molly had joined them and the baby was awake so all five were in bed when Virginia knocked on the door.

“Molly, Max, come eat breakfast with Grandpa and I.” She suggested.

“Okay, Grandma.” The two children happily padded out of the room.

“Reina and Payton, go back to sleep,” She commanded with a smile from the doorway.

“I see where you get your bossiness,” Payton teased, and Reina poked her.

“Thanks, Mom.”

“Enjoy it while you can, honey. And Payton, she gets it from her dad.” Virginia’s laugh could be heard as she shut their door.

Payton chuckled too, as Reina glared at her. Payton held Melinda against her shoulder. “She isn’t asleep, Reina. She’s just cuddling.”

“She’ll nod off if you put her to bed. She’s been awake for over an hour.”

“She’s been pretty good.”

“She’s been very good.”

“Come on, little girl. Let’s put you back in bed.” Payton put Melinda down and turned to Reina.

“Payton, I wish we could make love.”

“Reina, I love you honey, and as soon as you feel better and it’s okay with your doctor, we will make love. I promise you.” Payton crawled back into bed. “Until then I will hold you whenever you want.”

“I want.” Reina met Payton in the middle of the bed with a kiss. They shared several kisses before closing their eyes and drifting off to sleep.

“Reina?” Payton whispered.

“Yes?”

“It’s a good thing we aren’t having any more children.”

“Why do you say that?”

“We would have to get a bigger bed.” Both Payton and Reina giggled quietly as they held each other tightly. They couldn’t have been happier.

## CHAPTER 12

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The week that Payton stayed home with Reina and the baby was hectic, and wonderful. Not only did Payton get to spend time learning how to take care of the new baby, it also gave Reina some much needed recuperation time. On top of all that, Payton spent a lot of time with Max and Molly.

One night Payton and the kids planned to sleep outside in a tent in the backyard. Payton had promised and it seemed as good a time as any to spend a night camping. After borrowing a tent from Lindy, it took over an hour for Frank and Payton to put the tent up, both of them grumbling as they did.

“Look at those two. It’s a tent. All they have to do is read the directions.” Virginia laughed.

“Then they would miss all this fun.” Reina chuckled as Payton and Frank became particularly disgusted. She was seated in the kitchen holding Melinda and watching out the window.

“Mom, don’t say a word when they come inside.”

“Really, Reina, I haven’t been married to your father for forty years because I don’t know when to keep quiet,” She responded indignantly.

“Hi.” Payton smiled at Reina and her mother.

“Hi, honey. How’s the camping party going?”

“Good. I’ll go grab the sleeping bags and get everything ready before I call the kids. Thanks for helping with the tent, Frank.”

“You’re welcome, Payton. I didn’t think we were going to figure it out.”

“We did good.” Payton grinned. “As soon as I get the beds ready I promised Max and Molly we would have hot chocolate and s’mores. You want to join us?”

“I think Virginia and I are going to call it a night and watch a video in our room. But thanks for the offer.”

“Reina, you want to join us?”

“No thanks honey. I’m going to feed Melinda and put her to bed, and I’m going to do the same.”

“Okay, sweetie. Goodnight, Melinda.” Payton kissed the top of her head and headed out of the kitchen.

“Honey, we will see you and Melinda in the morning. You get some sleep.” Virginia advised.

“I will, Mom.” Reina smiled. “Goodnight.”

Frank and Virginia hugged and kissed Reina and the baby, and then headed for their bedroom. Reina followed them as she and Melinda headed for their own room. Melinda wouldn’t be moving into the nursery for several months so her crib was going to remain right next to Payton and Reina’s bed.

Payton finished preparing the beds for her and the kids and returned to the house to start the hot chocolate. She put graham crackers, each with a piece of chocolate and marshmallow on top, on a cookie sheet. Then she turned the broiler on to toast them. Once she had everything prepared she went to her bedroom to put her pajamas on before collecting Molly and Max. Reina was their sitting in the rocking chair feeding Melinda.

“Are you all ready?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be.” Payton grinned. “I’m going to miss you.”

“I’m going to miss you. Can I get a kiss goodnight?”

“Of course.” Reina and Payton kissed thoroughly. “Who’s idea was this anyway?”

Reina just laughed. “The kids are very excited.”

“I know, I better go get them.”

“I love you.”

“I love you, honey. If you need me for anything you know where to find me.”

“I’ll be fine, Payton. Have a good time.” Reina smiled, watching Payton head out of the bedroom. She loved Payton for making Max and Molly feel special.

“Thanks honey, I’ll see you in the morning.”

Payton stuck her head in Molly’s room, where she and Max were busily coloring. “Are you two ready for your treat before we go outside?”

“Yes!” Max yelled.

“Payton, we made a picture for Melinda.”

“That’s very nice, honey. Why don’t the two of you take it to her and say goodnight to her and your mom. I’ll be in the kitchen, and Max, remember that Melinda might be sleeping so you should try to be quiet.”

“Okay, Payton.” The two children raced down the hall. Both were already in their pajamas and were very excited and very loud. Payton just watched them and grinned. A couple of minutes later they joined Payton in the kitchen where they all sipped hot chocolate and snacked on their treats.

“Okay, grab your flashlights, campers. Do either of you have to go to the bathroom?”

“No. Can we go in the tent now?”

“Okay, let’s go.” Max and Molly turned on their flashlights and trooped out the back door and across the yard. Payton had to grin at the very happy children. You would think they were in the middle of the wilderness. “You two climb into your sleeping bags.”

Payton zipped the tent shut and crawled between Max and Molly. She covered the two of them to their chins and lay down in her own bag.

“Max, turn your flashlight out.”

“Okay, Payton.” As Max turned off his flashlight he turned with it in his hand toward Payton and smacked her right in the lip. She hissed with pain as her lips smashed against her teeth.

“Sorry, Payton.”

“No problem, buddy. Let’s put your flashlight right here in case you need it.” Payton tried very hard not to let Max see that he had hurt her, but she could feel her lip puffing up as she spoke.

“Payton, are there wild animals outside?”

“No, Molly. The only animals around here are cats and dogs and one monkey named Max,” Payton teased, tickling the two children. They giggled and squealed until Payton held them in her arms.

“Let’s cover up now. It’s time to get some sleep.”

“Payton, how come Mom and Melinda aren’t sleeping with us?”

“Melinda is still too little to sleep outside, and your mom would love to be with us but someone needs to watch Melinda.”

After several more minutes of conversation, Molly and Max began to yawn and, before Payton knew it, the two of them were fast asleep. For two hours all three slept soundly, until Max woke them all up.

“Payton, I have to go to the bathroom.”

“Okay, Max. How about you, Molly?”

“I have to go, too.”

“Okay, let’s all go.” The three of them entered the darkened quiet house and Max shut the sliding glass door with a slam. Intending to stop it before it woke everyone up Payton grabbed for the door, catching her three middle fingers between the door and the jam. The heavy door smashed her fingers, bringing tears to her eyes. Biting her already sore lip so she wouldn’t cry out loud, Payton shook her crushed fingers.

“Sorry, Payton.” If Payton wasn’t in so much pain she would have laughed, but it was all she could do not to cry.

“That’s okay, honey. Let’s go use the bathroom.” The three headed down the hall. As they reached the bathroom, the hall light turned on and Reina came out of the bedroom to meet them.

“We needed to use the bathroom.” Payton informed her. “Max, you use this bathroom and Molly you go use the one in your mom’s room.”

The two children disappeared as Reina stared intently at Payton. “Honey, what happened to your lip?” Reina rushed to her.

“The same thing that happened to my fingers.” Payton held out her throbbing fingers.

“Payton, you’re bleeding.”

“It’s not that bad, and please don’t say anything in front of the kids.”

“Let me clean your fingers and bandage them. What happened?”

“Max happened. He accidentally hit me in the mouth with his flashlight earlier when we went to bed, and my fingers were caught in the back door when he slammed it. I was afraid he would wake everyone up so I tried to catch it. We were coming in to go to the bathroom. I missed.”

“Honey, if I send you back outside you might break something,” Reina whispered, hugging her. “It’s dangerous business, camping.”

“You are so funny.” Payton grinned.

“If I kiss your lip will it make it feel better?”

“I’m sure it will.”

Reina kissed Payton gently several times. “Do you think you could be real careful when you get back outside? I like these lips.”

“I’ll try.” Payton laughed. “Now what’s a person got to do to get a band aid around here?”

A couple of minutes later the three campers headed back out to bed, Payton with a bunch of Band-Aids around her crushed fingers. The rest of the camp out went much smoother and the three of them

slept until after nine in the morning. The children helped Payton put the sleeping bags away, and dismantling the tent took far less time than putting it up.

“Payton, another night of camping outside and we would have had to take you to the emergency ward,” Virginia teased.

“They were accidents.” Payton tried to smile but her lip was so swollen and sore it made talking painful. Her fingers were even worse, black, and blue from the bruising, swollen, and unable to be used. “Besides, Max and Molly had a good time.”

“They had a wonderful time, honey. Thank you.” Reina kissed her softly. “But I think we’ll wait awhile before you sleep out again. I’d hate to see what you would look like after two nights of sleeping outside.”

“Ha ha.” Payton rolled her eyes as Virginia and Reina laughed loudly.

## CHAPTER 13

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Payton regretted having to go back to work on Monday. She was working at home two days a week for the next two weeks, but it wasn't going to be the same. Frank and Virginia were an enormous help, but she would have liked to spend more time alone with her family. A week later, when Frank and Virginia headed home, things started to settle into a routine. Reina was feeling much better and the baby was proving to be a very easy baby to take care of. She was starting to stay awake after being fed, and she especially liked bathing, which Max and Molly enjoyed helping with. They had even been able to get out of the house and go to Lindy and Tamara's for dinner one evening, where Melinda was the hit of the party.

Within six weeks, Payton was back to working full time, Molly and Max were back in preschool, and Reina was doing light work out of the house. Life was wonderful.

"Payton, I'm going to put Melinda down and take a shower."

"Okay, honey. I'm going to finish folding these clothes and then I'm coming to bed."

It was after ten o'clock on Friday night, and Max and Molly were already in bed. They were excited about their trip to the zoo. The whole family, including Melinda, would be making the trip. Payton carried the basket of clean clothes into the bedroom to put away. It was amazing how much laundry one little newborn produced. She

headed for the bathroom while Reina showered and washed her hair. Payton pulled a silk nightshirt out of her drawer and put it on. She took a look at Melinda asleep in her crib and she smiled. You couldn't have asked for a sweeter baby. She was even sleeping through most of the night.

"She looks more and more like you every day," Reina whispered, sliding her arms around Payton, her lips finding Payton's neck.

"She looks like Max and Molly, and she's going to have wavy hair just like her mother." Payton turned to face Reina.

"Payton, I'm all healed and I feel fine."

"You are." Payton grinned as Reina's hands slid under her shirt.

"I am. And I really need a favor." As Reina spoke, her hands traveled down Payton's back and hips, pulling her snugly against Reina's body.

"What favor?" Payton's body reacted to Reina's, flooding with heat while she gazed into Reina's eyes.

"I need a willing volunteer to make mad passionate love with."

"A volunteer, huh?" Payton slowly began to unbutton Reina's nightgown. Her fingers drifted between Reina's breasts and her lips made the same path. Payton's tongue tasted the flavor of Reina's skin as she slid the nightgown from her shoulders.

"Honey, let's turn the lights out." Reina was still self-conscious about her body.

"Reina, I want to see every inch of your gorgeous body. I love the way you look." Payton looked into Reina's eyes. "Honey, your having Melinda made you more appealing to me."

Reina's eyes glowed as Payton's fingers and mouth floated over her body. When Payton's mouth surrounded Reina's nipple, she groaned. Payton maneuvered them to the bed and gently pushed Reina onto her back. Within minutes Payton's attentions had Reina gasping with pleasure. Payton's tongue sliding inside her was her undoing, and she dissolved into a series of orgasms that threatened to melt her body to the bed. Just when she caught her breath, Payton

renewed her efforts, and Reina again fell into pieces as another orgasm rippled through her body.

“Reina, I’ve missed this,” Payton admitted, covering Reina’s body with her own.

“Then we’ll have to make sure that I make it up to you.” Reina grinned as she rolled Payton onto her back, her thigh sliding between Payton’s legs. Reina’s mouth spread wet hot kisses all over Payton’s body, while her hands drifted over every spot until she was driving Payton crazy with desire.

“Reina!” She pleaded, arching against Reina’s mouth and exploding. Payton’s body jerked as Reina’s fingers joined her mouth and she created a riot of feelings that overwhelmed Payton. She pulled Reina up into her arms as they shared kiss after kiss. Payton’s craving for Reina was not satisfied, and she again covered Reina’s body with her mouth and touch. Payton loved the taste and the fragrance of her lover, and she showed Reina in the most perfect way how much she loved her body. As she made love to her she shared her feelings out loud, and this, more than anything brought tears to Reina’s eyes.

They lay quietly in each other’s arms, overwhelmed and full of awe at the intensity of their love. The house was quiet for the longest time until Melinda’s fussing told them she was hungry.

“I’ll go get her,” Payton volunteered. She pulled on her nightshirt and went to get a clean washcloth. “Let’s check your diaper, little girl. Are you hungry? You are such a good little girl.”

Reina smiled as she watched Payton change Melinda’s diaper, talking to her the whole time. “Okay missy, let’s take you to your beautiful mother.”

Reina kissed Payton and she took the fussing baby in her arms. Melinda immediately rooted around, until she found her mother’s nipple and began to nurse. “She’s such a little pig.” Payton laughed as she kissed Melinda on the head.

“She has a healthy appetite.” Reina laughed with her and kissed Payton slowly.

Payton couldn't resist the urge to kiss Reina's breast right above the nursing child. "You both are so beautiful."

"Payton," Reina whispered. "Hold me while I nurse Melinda."

Payton slid under the covers next to Reina and wrapped her arms around Reina and Melinda. Reina leaned her head back against Payton and they both watched the baby nurse. It was an overwhelming love that both Payton and Reina felt at that moment.

"Reina, will you marry me?"

"Honey, I already did."

"I know but I want to marry you again."

"I'd love to, Payton. I'll marry you as many times as you want."

"I just feel so damn lucky." Payton's voice cracked.

"I know. I feel the same way."

## CHAPTER 14

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“Payton, I have the diaper bag,” Reina announced.

“Great. Max and Molly, do you have your packs?”

“Yes, Payton.”

“Okay. Ms. Melinda, do you have your bathing suit?” Melinda gurgled in response as Max and Molly giggled.

“She said yes, Payton.”

“I heard her.” Payton carried Melinda in her baby carrier, as they headed for Lindy and Tamara’s door. They were attending a barbeque to celebrate Lindy and Tamara’s commitment ceremony a year earlier. It was also Reina and Payton’s anniversary. Melinda was dressed in her party hat and shorts, having turned into a very stylish five-month old.

“Hi guys, come on in,” Lindy called from the open door. “Max and Molly come here and give me a kiss.”

Max ran to Lindy and planted a kiss on her cheek, and Molly hugged her happily. They both liked Lindy very much.

“Happy Anniversary.” Reina joined her children as she hugged Lindy.

“Same to you, doll.” Lindy grinned. “Payton, bring my god child here!” She demanded.

Payton just grinned in return as she handed Melinda to Lindy. “Don’t spoil her.”

“Of course I’ll spoil her. Come here you. Don’t you look cute.” Lindy kissed the happy little girl. “I can’t believe how fast she’s growing.”

“Here, let me take her out of her carrier.” Payton took Melinda back.

“Come on in, everyone is in the backyard. Molly, Max, the kids are in the pool. Why don’t you go join them? Tamara is in the pool with them.”

“Lindy, Melinda can swim, too.”

“She can?”

“Yep, she’s been taking swim lessons with Max and me.”

“Well, we have to see this little fish do her thing.”

Payton and Reina had decided that if they were going to have little children around their pool, all three would learn to swim. It was actually amazing that all three of them loved the water and took to their swimming lessons like little ducks. Their instructor called them all water babies.

“She has a bikini and everything.”

“I can’t wait to see this.” Lindy laughed as they all joined the crowd and exchanged greetings. Many of Payton and Reina’s friends were there.

“Honey, I’m going to swim with the kids before dinner.” Payton announced.

“Okay, sweetie. Payton, could you come here a minute?” Reina crooked her finger at Payton.

“Yes.”

“Have I told you how sexy you look?” Reina whispered.

“You look pretty luscious yourself, and I plan to have a private anniversary celebration later.”

If people didn’t know Reina had recently had a baby, looking at her they would never know. She had lost all of her weight and had

worked very hard to get back into flying shape. She was back at work and all three children were being taken care of by a wonderful older woman they had hired as a nanny. Her name was Lucille Minor and she was a dear. She loved the children and they loved her. It had worked out very well.

“Come on, Payton,” Max yelled, his snorkel hanging off his neck. Both Max and Molly had snorkel sets. They were getting the hang of them before their vacation in October. They were all going to Hawaii with Grandma and Grandpa, and Payton’s brother Ed, his wife Eva, and their children. Two weeks of sun, surf, and family. It was Reina and Payton’s anniversary gift to themselves and their children.

“Okay, honey. I’ll continue this later,” Payton promised, kissing Reina slowly. She loved kissing her. Reina watched Payton and the three children head to the pool.

“You look very happy, Reina.”

“I am beyond happy, Lindy. I never knew I could be this happy.”

“Payton feels the same way.”

“Look at her, Lindy. She loves those children so much, and they love her. She makes a wonderful parent.”

“Who wouldn’t love her? She is as special as you are.”

“Thanks, Lindy. We are taking lessons from you and Tamara. I never would have taken the chance if it wasn’t for the two of you.”

“I think Payton had a lot to do with your taking that chance.”

“Boy, I can’t believe you just had a baby,” Tamara grumbled as she joined the two of them, a dripping Banta standing next to her. “How do you do it?”

Reina laughed and hugged a bathing suit clad Tamara. “You look pretty good in that bikini.”

“I didn’t just have my third child. It must be all that extra-curricular activity.” She teased.

“Like you don’t get enough activity of your own,” Reina retorted, causing Lindy to blush.

“Isn’t she cute.” Tamara hugged her embarrassed girlfriend. “She blushes whenever I mention the word sex, but let me tell you the first night I made love with Lindy she amazed me.”

“Tamara,” Lindy groaned.

“Lindy, you’re my partner and I love everything about you, especially the fact that you love making love with me.”

“I do enjoy that.” Lindy grinned.

“The fact that you are insatiable is just an added blessing.”

“Tamara,” Lindy glared, as Tamara and Reina laughed.

“Come on, Banta, let’s go check on the food so we can go swimming again.” Tamara and her young son left her irritated girlfriend, grinning.

Lindy watched Tamara and Banta enter the house. “She drives me crazy, but I love her to death.”

“I believe the feeling is mutual,” Reina responded. “Now tell me, is it the water that makes all the women in Seattle insatiable?” She teased.

“I’m not going to answer that.” Lindy grinned. “Come on, let’s go watch Melinda swim.”

Payton had removed her shorts and tee shirt and was in the shallow end of the pool with Max and Molly, Melinda in her arms. Melinda wore a miniature bikini. She loved the water and was busily slapping her arms, splashing in it.

“Okay, water baby, let’s see you swim.” Payton lowered Melinda into the water like she had learned at the swim lessons. Melinda gurgled and grinned, floating on her back and kicking her feet.

“Look at that bathing suit! Where did you find it?”

“Payton found it.”

“I can’t believe Melinda can swim.”

“She loves the water.”

“They are awfully cute, she and Payton.”

“She and Payton have a special relationship. She looks like Payton.”

“She does.”

“It’s almost like Payton and I had her together.”

“You did.”

“You’re right, we did.” Reina smiled. “I love how Payton is with the kids. She just loves them unconditionally.”

“Just like you.”

“Yes, she does love me unconditionally. She also has this capacity to make you the center of her world, like nothing else matters.”

“You are the center of her world, Reina. She loves the children because they are a part of you. Why do you think she loves you?”

“Well, I know she is attracted to me, I make her laugh, and I love her.”

“Reina, you know why she loves you. You make her the center of your world. Even with three children to take care of, you take time for her. You shared your children and your life with her, but most of all you had a child with her, and my friend, that meant more to her than any words of love. You can see it in the photographs she took of you when you were pregnant. They are the most beautiful pictures I have ever seen, because she took them with such love in her heart.”

“They show me when I was at my worst.”

“Reina, have you really looked at those pictures? Payton didn’t see you at your worst, she saw a very sexy beautiful mother-to-be and lover.” Lindy hugged her. “Take a real good look at those pictures. No words could express her love for you as well as those pictures. Do you remember how worried you were to tell her you were pregnant, and how you feared she wouldn’t find you sexy?”

“I was scared.”

“Reina, honey, Payton made love to you every time she took your photograph.”

Reina was overwhelmed by Lindy’s speech. “Thank you, Lindy.”

“Don’t thank me, honey. I think all four of us found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.”

“We did love, we did.”

“Look Mom, Melinda’s swimming!” Max yelled. He had become a very proud older brother and loved to point out Melinda’s talents.

“I see that.” Reina laughed. “She’s a mermaid just like Molly.”

“Maybe she’s a frog!” Banta yelled.

Payton grinned at Reina, holding Melinda while she splashed in the pool. “She’s a duck,” Payton admitted.

The afternoon was a lot of fun. The kids laughed and played while Reina and Payton visited and caught up with friends. Melinda went to sleep in Tamara and Lindy’s bedroom after Reina fed her. It was a happy but tired group that made the trip home later that evening.

“Reina, I’ll put Max and Molly to bed, if you want to take Melinda and put her to bed.”

“Okay, honey. I’ll come in and kiss them goodnight in a minute.”

“All right little man, mermaid girl, let’s go to bed.” The tired trio headed for the children’s bedrooms, and quickly put on their pajamas and crawled in bed.

“Goodnight, Max. I love you gobs.”

Max kissed and hugged Payton goodnight. “Night.”

Payton went to Molly and kissed her goodnight, then turned out the light as she left the room. She met Reina in the hallway. “Is Melinda sleep?”

“Out like a light.”

“Max and Molly are waiting for you.”

“Okay, honey. Could you do me a favor?”

“Sure?”

“Meet me in the office.”

“Okay.” Payton wasn’t sure why but she headed for the office anyway. She sat in her chair at her desk and waited. She had no clue what Reina was up to, and usually she knew.

Reina entered the office moments later. “I want to look at the photographs you took of me when I was pregnant.”

“Okay. They’re in the photo album. Here.”

Reina pulled up a chair next to Payton and opened the book. Payton was still uncertain why Reina was looking at the pictures at that particular moment. She had already seen all of them. Payton watched her closely for some indication of what she was thinking or feeling.

Reina started at the front of the book and saw photographs of her and the kids before she and Payton had moved in together. As she turned the pages, she saw herself and the children through Payton's eyes, and she melted. Lindy was right. Payton did make love to her every time she took her picture. One photograph brought tears to her eyes as she gazed at it. It was a picture of the two of them.

"Tamara took that picture."

It was shortly before Reina had delivered Melinda and she was very large. The two of them were standing in each other's arms, Reina leaning back against Payton. Payton's arms were around Reina resting on her stomach with Reina's hands clasped in her own. Reina's head was resting on Payton's shoulder, and she was laughing while Payton grinned at her. Reina stared for the longest while at that picture as her eyes blurred with tears. She turned to the next page and found a picture of herself standing in front of their bedroom window. Her long blond hair was loose and hanging down the middle of her back. Her nightgown was unbuttoned in order to nurse Melinda, who was cradled in her arms. She was turned toward the camera smiling as Melinda suckled. Reina's breath caught in her throat.

"You take beautiful pictures of our family." Reina turned to Payton.

"I have a beautiful family." Payton smiled.

"Payton, I love you."

"I love you."

"Happy Anniversary."

"One year since you married me."

“And you married me. Payton, I want at least fifty more.” Reina kissed her slowly.

“Fifty at least,” Payton promised as they kissed again.

“Let’s go to bed.” As they walked down the hall, Melinda began to cry.

“Our daughter needs us.” Reina clasped Payton’s hand in her own.

“Isn’t that a perfect anniversary?” Payton smiled. “Friends and family.”

Reina picked up her unhappy daughter from the nursery and walked over to Payton. “Hold us, Payton.”

Payton drew them both into her arms. Melinda was content to be held between them.

“Melinda, do you know how much I love Payton? She is as much your mother as I am. She loves you and me so much. We are so lucky.” Payton and Reina kissed as they held their little daughter. “And you look just like her. You’re very beautiful.”

“I love you,” Payton whispered. “Happy Anniversary.”

“I love you.”

Neither one could have asked for a more perfect day, or a more perfect life.

**The End**

## *About the Author*



Jeanne is a native of the Pacific Northwest where she currently lives with her partner of over sixteen years in West Seattle. She has been writing for over twenty years and this is her third book to be published. She has many others to follow along with more stories to be written. She only hopes that you enjoy reading them as much as she enjoys writing them.