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Angels Breathe

CHAPTER ONE

One minute she was humming quietly to herself, the next she wasn't. It happened in an instant, one split second, so fast that Gina Holt couldn't gather her wildly spinning senses fast enough. Having been so engrossed in trying to maneuver her large Chevy Blazer over the thick ice on the little country road, she did not hear the urgent cries of an unseen man on horseback. Nor had she been prepared for the ghastly vision of the rider and horse getting brutally struck down by her own vehicle.

This just couldn't be happening she told herself. No one was supposed to be out riding in weather like this. Didn't they know a severe winter storm was already brewing?

Gina quickly brought the sliding vehicle to a halt. She opened her door and slid off of her car seat, only to discover herself crumpling in an ungraceful heap onto the hard ice underneath her feet. Her head was spinning; she had bumped it on something.

The snow was falling harder now than she remembered. Had she been unconscious? She didn't think so. The last thing she remembered was getting out of her truck.

Gina scrambled over the treacherous ice, not even bothering to try and stand up. She made her way to the brown mass lying deathly still in front of her truck. Yes, the poor animal was undoubtedly dead as she gently raised its heavy limp head, only to lay it back down again. Hastily she looked for the form of the rider.

Her eyes stung with the fierceness of the wind and cold, filling them quickly with tears. She searched the cold ground frantically with her gloved hands for the rider before hearing a slight moan to her left. If she could only see good, then she would be able to find the person a lot easier.

Finally, a moment that seemed like an eternity later she bumped into the person laying twenty feet off of the road itself. She realized how hard the impact must have been to throw them so far. It was a man. She was barely able to see him clearly but she could make out that he was trying to sit up on his own.

"No, don't move yet. Are you badly hurt?" She silently prayed he wasn't. Gina fumbled with her words, trying to make her soft voice heard over the sound of the furiously blowing wind.

Oh how did this happen? She was usually so careful. What if he was seriously hurt? It could take forever to get some help out here in the middle of virtually nowhere like this.

"I ah... don't know," came the groggy reply. "I really think I'm going to..." His voice trailed off, carried away by the wind. He didn't have to say any more, she knew he was close to fainting on her. She put her hands on his shoulders to brace him.

"No don't." She warned him hastily, like he might have some control over it. "Wait until I can get you to the truck. I don't dare leave you here and I certainly can't lift you by myself." Her voice rose hysterically, knowing full well that what she spoke was the truth.

Strangely enough he raised a bare hand and laid it on hers. Was he trying to reassure her? His hand felt as cold as the ice itself. She quickly sized him up. He appeared to be tall and muscular and compared to her slight build Gina knew she wouldn't stand a chance of moving him on her own.

Sliding her slender arm under his shoulder and around his waist she made an attempt to move him to no avail.

What on earth was he doing out riding in weather like this? Didn't he know how dangerous it was? There had been some notice of the impending bad weather and she

could tell he wasn't dressed properly for prolonged exposure in this kind of inclement weather.

"Lets try and make it to the truck." She commanded firmly, her voice sounded unusually harsh to her own ears. She really had no reason to get angry with him; she was the one who hit him!

The man nodded his dark head in acknowledgement. After two rather unsuccessful tries they finally managed to stand together and stagger in the direction of the blazer. It was a comforting sight indeed. Gina, after pushing his massive form onto the front seat and then over to the passenger side, let out her breath in a bursting sigh. She hadn't even been aware that she had been holding it until then.

Grabbing her keys, she was quick to locate the blanket she had thrown in the back of the truck earlier. She was thankful she had thought ahead for any emergency. It wouldn't do to get stranded in weather like this without some kind of protection from the cold. After sliding back onto her seat none to gracefully, Gina quickly covered the still man next to her.

He had rested his head against the window, his eyes were shut tightly and she noticed that he was very, very pale. His long dark eyelashes looked like tiny fans laying flat against his cheekbones. Despite every thing, he was quite an attractive man. She dreaded to think about his anger when he realized what had happened.

Gina tried starting the blazer. She prayed it would start; recalling that hitting the horse had been like coming to an abrupt halt with a brick wall. She tried over and over again until the truck finally sputtered and responded in protest.

Gina's first thought was to run the heater full blast to attain some warmth for her and the man. She was beginning to feel the effects of the numbing cold in her limbs. Her head was throbbing; she hoped she hadn't been unconscious for long. Turning in the direction of the man, she worried. She knew he had been lying on the ground in the bitter

cold. He looked so dreadfully pale and washed out. Why didn't he open his eyes? Why didn't he let her know how he was doing? What if he was seriously hurt or something?

"I've got to get you into town." Gina talked more to herself than him. Panic was about to overwhelm her and she knew she must keep her head at a time like this.

He shuffled at the sound of her voice.

"Bridge.. .bridge is out, tried to warn you." Not opening his eyes he added softly, "sleep now."

Gina cringed, at least now she knew how he had come to be in her way. Why hadn't she seen him earlier? Sleep? How could he sleep at a time like this?

Oh God, she thought, maybe its hypothermia. Gina knew she would have to hurry, on top of his injuries he appeared to be about to succumb to the cold. She had no way of knowing how long he'd been out in this weather before she ran into him. Her heart went out to the poor horse. There was nothing she could do about it now though. She knew that with the bridge out she would have to go back to the lonely farmhouse that she herself had just come from. She could do something for the man. He was her main concern now.

Hastily turning the Blazer around Gina heard the ice crunching underneath her wheels. She headed back in the opposite direction. The only direction she could!

Her eyes strained to see the road. It was barely visible through the snow crashing onto her windshield.

What normally would have only taken ten minutes seemed to take forever now. Just a little farther to go she told herself, knowing that it would be getting dark soon. She wondered where the man lived. Then she started worrying. Someone would surely miss him and think the worst when he didn't return home. Maybe he had a wife and kids waiting on him. If only she knew her way around better. Things had changed so much since she was little.

There was going to be no escaping the force of the oncoming blizzard now, by going into town like she wanted. She knew she herself had waited too long to seek other shelter. How was she to know that the little farmhouse would lose its power because of ice on the lines? Someone in the town would have offered her shelter.

Gina found the snow covered dirt road leading to the farmhouse. She pulled the Blazer over the field and into the yard in front of the porch. She wanted to get as close to the little house as possible. It would be easier for her to help him inside. Who was he?

Gina shook him gently at first. He would only open his gray green eyes and close them again. He didn't really seem to see her.

"We've got to get indoors." She shook him more firmly, afraid that she might make his injuries worse. Gina could already see a light bruise forming on his cheek.

He did nothing, not even open his eyes. "Wake up. Wake up, I tell you." Gina screamed at him, no longer caring what she sounded like. She was afraid for him.

Why didn't he wake up? She prayed he would and that he wasn't hurt very bad. She had no experience at this sort of thing. She could very well do more damage than good. He didn't appear to be badly hurt. "Please help me out a little bit." She pleaded with him.

Green eyes tried to focus on her. He did wake though, only long enough for Gina to help him into the living room and collapse into the nearest chair. He was shivering so badly, Gina had a hard time supporting his weight.

The room was silent, without even the crackle of a warming fire. Gina felt instant relief in this square room with its warm earth tone colors and old battered furniture. The fresh springtime pictures hanging on the walls seemed to be mocking her now.

The man groaned and slumped deeper into the chair. Struggling with the heavy Early American furniture Gina hoped her strength would last. She was awfully tired and her head hurt.

The room, although she had only been gone for a little while was chilled and badly in need of a fire if they were going to keep the cold out. That would take priority next.

Shuffling the furniture about on the wood floor, she moved the couch sideways to the rock fireplace. Tossing the worn cushions into the corner, she pulled on the sofa until it opened out and became a bed. If she could get him close to the fire he would be all right.

Gina felt the dull ache in her head becoming stronger and haphazardly covered the bed with sheets and blankets. Stacking enough wood in the fireplace to keep it burning for hours, she lit it. Hoping for once her fire would stay lit. She turned towards the man. He was huddled deep in the chair and shaking like crazy. His lips were blue.

Going into the kitchen Gina tried the lights one more time. It was no use. The electricity was still off. Reaching in to the cupboards she found the lanterns they needed and lit one. Stopping to grab a bottle of brandy she rushed back to the living room. When she tried to wake the man he just groaned at her.

She gave up when she found it was going to be next to impossible to wake him. She did manage to get him to take a couple of swigs of the fiery brandy by holding the bottle to his blue lips and forcing it on him. He choked and sputtered momentarily.

He groaned and repeated his earlier words. "Sleep now."

"You can't sleep now. " Gina fussed at him. His clothes were damp from the snow. "You've got to take your clothes off and get into the bed where it's warm. I don't even know if you are hurt." Gina tried to help him sit up. He slumped down further in the chair.

"Not now Brenda!" He pushed her hands away. "Not hurt either, just leave me alone." Gina knew he had the idea that she was Brenda, whoever that was, and right now she 'didn't care.

"Open your eyes please," she begged; she just had to have his cooperation for this. "Come on over to the bed. I know you're cold." Still he made no effort to respond to her pleadings. She shook him gently by the shoulders.

"Lord Brenda, don't you ever give up?" He frowned and hugged himself to avoid her hands. Gina was getting upset; she thrust the brandy bottle back to his lips forcing him to swallow. She'd never felt so helpless and yet so determined at the same time.

"No I don't." She quipped. She wasn't sure what she should do next, yet she knew she had to do something. Her grandfather told her years ago what the cold could do to a person if left to themselves. Then it came back to her, she knew what she had to do. If he wouldn't take his clothes off then she would do it for him.

Taking several full gulps of brandy, she started shaking the man again. This time with renewed determination.

When he opened his eyes she told him to stand up. He did. She let him lean on her until they made it to the couch and he dropped heavily on to it.

His eyes were half closed and he squinted at her. "You're not Brenda. He told her and then closed his eyes again. Gina felt it would take all night to get him to do something for himself so she started undressing him. She was exhausted and she couldn't wait on him forever.

When she reached for the jacket he wore, she paused. This wasn't going to be easy for her. She drank the rest of the brandy to give her courage; other people said it worked, didn't they. She kept telling herself that she wasn't going to be nervous. It didn't do any good.

While removing his leather jacket she registered the cost somewhere in the back of her mind. Noticing the rips and tears, she knew she wasn't going to be able to afford this accident. She couldn't get the poor horse out of her mind either. What was he doing

out in this kind of weather with only a light jacket? It didn't even have decent lining. Silk was no match for the cold.

His black hair was as deep as the color of his jacket. She gritted her teeth and strengthened her resolve to finish what she started.

He wore a simple white T-shirt under the jacket and that came off next. She hesitated with his belt buckle as his hand came out to stop her. He grasped her hand for a minute tightly and Gina brushed the hair out of his eyes with the other. He released her then and let her proceed.

"Making love is all we have isn't it?" He sighed.

Gina knew he thought he was talking to Brenda. What kind of a relationship was that when it was all about sex?

Hurriedly she stripped off his shoes and socks and then his jeans. She blushed furiously when she realized he wasn't wearing any underwear beneath his jeans. So much for not being embarrassed. She had intended to leave his underwear on. Now what was she going to do?

"I should have had brothers to prepare me for this." Gina mumbled to herself. Certainly, she'd seen pictures of naked men before. It was something else to have one that was alive and right in front of you.

He had a beautiful well-shaped body. It was obvious that he worked out or got some form of exercise. He looked strangely familiar to her.

When he resumed shaking furiously from being exposed to the cool air in the house she started to rub him down. This was no time to be embarrassed. She had to help him.

Rubbing firmly and briskly, first she rubbed on his muscular arms and shoulders. His skin was smooth, his muscles firm and pliant. She tried not to continue to notice his fine build or the mass of dark glistening hair that covered his chest and tapered down the

length of his flat stomach. She rubbed his chest and ignored the pleasant feelings she derived from it. Nor did she intentionally notice his well shaped thighs and...Gina firmly turned him over. What kind of person was she to be thinking like that when this man needed her help.

Her mind gave her no rest. What would it be like to make love with a man though, she wondered. Was she really already twenty-four years old and never experienced making love for herself? School and her job had always come first, her grandfather, there was so many things that had kept her from making any emotional ties with a man before. Was she an oddity? Probably.

Gina rubbed his broad back generously, his color was returning slowly. She vigorously massaged him some more. She insisted he drink some more brandy. After she finished rubbing down his legs and his feet, she covered him with the blankets.

Pushing on him she got him to turn his back to the warming fire. Gina was suddenly feeling very sleepy herself as she watched him. She needed rest too. He was still shivering and she wondered how long it would take him to get warm. What else could she do for him?

Gina poked the fire once again and got it to a nice "roaring" stage. The chill was less pronounced in the house. She knew she still had lots to do to help the man. She took a couple of more swigs of brandy and then began stripping her clothes off. Clear down to her under things! At last when she found the courage to slide under the covers with the man she was surprised to find that he still did not have enough body heat to even warm the sheets. Gina knew then that she was doing the right thing, embarrassed or not, she was doing the right thing! Wasn't she?

He looked so handsome with his black hair tousled every which way despite his paleness. His masculine features were strong, a square chin and jawbone being the most impressive thing about him except for those gray green eyes that she knew him to have.

Those penetrating eyes disturbed her for some reason. Once again she got the impression that she knew him.

When Gina jostled him getting in the bed, the corner of his mouth lifted. He gave her a crooked smile despite the fact he wasn't alert and didn't have his eyes open. She wondered what he would look like if he really smiled at her.

Wriggling as close to him as she could get, she placed her back to his front and snuggled close to the cold form next to her.

He was still so very cold, so she pulled his heavy arm over herself in order to make as much bodily contact as possible between the two of them. Her eyes widened when he instinctively cupped her breast with his large hand. She moved it away and he sighed in disgust.

It was hard for Gina not to notice the soft hair on his chest tickling her back or her bare skin touching his no matter how hard she tried. Sensuous was the only word for it.

It wasn't long until her mind started to wander and she heard herself giggle, no doubt, from the brandy. At least her head didn't hurt any more. He pressed his lower body closer to hers and Gina laughed some more. Thank goodness he wasn't an ugly old man she thought to herself. She hadn't intended on falling asleep but blissful sleep claimed her too.

CHAPTER TWO

Gina felt warm and secure when she was on the verge of waking in the morning and smiled faintly to herself. She'd had such pleasant dreams and she didn't want them to end.

Startled, she was brought wide-awake by a slight touch to her forehead. Someone was brushing a wisp of hair from her eyes. There wasn't supposed to be anyone in bed with her.

Wide eyed, she remembered and looked up into the amused twinkling gray green eyes of one of the most handsome men she had ever seen in all of twenty-four years. Which after he got a hold of her for killing his horse and nearly him may be the whole span of her life, she thought dejectedly.

Stunned momentarily they both just looked at each other. Gina could see the unmasked puzzlement on his face. Then she became aware that she was the one who had her arms around him. She pulled back abruptly from that contact. He lifted an eyebrow at her actions and spoke mockingly.

"Am I in heaven, Angel face?" The deep male voice reverberated in her ear. Angel face? Was that all he had to say for waking up in a strange bed with a woman he didn't even know? What was he thinking? And why did he look like he wanted to pounce on her?

Her bare leg brushed against his and she felt an electric shock run all the way up her leg. He saw her expression from the fleeting contact and got a speculative look in his eyes.

"Not hardly Sir." Gina answered him harshly, aware of her own undressed state and his close proximity. What must he think?

He braced his head on one elbow and hand to look down at her. Gathering the sheet around her she quickly made to get up. She knew she was going to have to put a great deal of distance between herself and this vital man if she was going to be able to think straight.

He raised both dark eyebrows inquisitively at her tone of voice. Seeing that she was about to leave him he grabbed a hold of the sheet and stopped her flight.

"Wait, tell me where I am at least." He frowned at her. "How in earth did I get here and more important who are you!" Not giving her time to respond, he went on. "Do I have something to be sorry for?" He looked at her again and paused. "Or something to be grateful for?"

"Grateful for?" She looked at him funnily, trying to figure out what he was talking about. How could he be grateful to her for killing his horse? Then she decided he must have been referring to her saving his life.

"Exactly just how much appreciation am I expected to show?" He asked her flippantly with a rather disgusted look on his face for her.

Gina just stared at him opened mouthed. Surely he wasn't thinking what she thought he was thinking.

"You know, how much is this little excursion going to cost me?"

Gina felt her temper rising. The nerve of the man! What was he trying to imply? She watched as he scanned the sheets under which she was hiding as if he could see her through it clearly.

Snatching at the sheet he was holding on to so as not to be tempted to go for his eyes she pulled away from him and stood up.

" I don't think I like that insinuation." She gathered her clothes from the pile where she left them. "You'll just have to wait until I get dressed and then I'll try and explain."

He frowned at her as if he were trying to remember her. Gina didn't care; let him worry over it a little bit. The arrogant pig! He was some kind of grateful, to imply that she had rendered him services of an intimate nature. She only hoped that by being snide and calling him Sir, she had put him in his place. She wanted to remind him that they were strangers. Really, how could a man so good looking be so crude?

Gina hurriedly left the room moving down the hall that led to the bedroom, the only one. It used to be her grandfathers room. Digging in her dresser drawer she found a clean pair of jeans and a cream colored blouse to put on. She reminded herself that she would have to get her suitcase out of the truck latter on. Stopping at the dressing table she applied herself to brushing out the tangles in her long blonde hair. It was no easy chore since it had already grown down to the middle of her back. Gina with her oval face and blue-green eyes didn't wear any make up, she didn't feel the need for it and her grandfather always told her that it hid the woman underneath. Pausing only a moment she was relieved to see that the bruise on her forehead was only a little one and was hardly even noticeable.

Upon returning to the living room, still barefooted, to retrieve her shoes she glanced to where the man was. He was sitting up now, fully clothed in the wing-backed chair with his hands to his head rubbing his temples firmly with his eyes closed. He was seemingly oblivious to her return.

"Does your head hurt?" Gina asked softly, remembering the injustices she had done him. Her own anger was gone now.

"Yeah, but actually I feel like I've been run over by a Mack truck or something. I hurt everywhere."

Gina cringed, that was close, only she was the Mack truck.

"Where am I?" He asked.

Gina ignored his question; she wanted to get him as comfortable as she could before she sprung it on him. She knew he didn't remember yet and she was glad, it gave her a little more time.

"I've got some aspirins in the kitchen, just a minute and I'll go get them." Gina started to cross the room to the kitchen, she saw him stagger as he attempted to rise out of the chair and follow her. Worried, she told him to lie back down on the bed and that she would bring them to him. He did as he was told reluctantly.

No sooner had she returned with the aspirins and he had taken them than he started questioning her again.

"Now will you please tell me what is going on here?" There was some anger in his voice that he couldn't hide. "Where am I? And how did I get here?" He rubbed his head unconsciously.

"Don't you remember the accident?" Gina asked him, trying to gently jog his memory. He stared at her for a long time and appeared to be thinking back.

"What is the last thing you remember?"

"I ah remember heading for home after visiting an elderly neighbor of mine. I wanted to be sure that she would be alright with the bad weather coming since I couldn't reach her by phone." He paused. "Then I tried to warn this truck that the bridge was out. Were you driving? Did I fall or something."

"Or something." Muttered Gina. He was clearly puzzled. At least he wasn't being rude anymore. Gina didn't know how to tell him but she knew she would have to do it sometime. She took a deep breath.

"Yes I was driving." He looked at her expectantly. "I didn't mean to hit you or kill your horse. I swear it." She let it all out in a long rush of words. "I didn't even see you until it was too late and then I couldn't do anything to avoid it." She chewed on her lip,

worried over what his response was going to be. "There was so much snow and ice and I couldn't see well."

Why did everything always have to happen to her? He just lay there very still for the longest time while she waited to see what he would do. She watched him with fearful eyes.

"I think I do remember now." He paused. "Yes I can remember the accident, it wasn't really all your fault. I couldn't get you to see me or hear me over the storm. Had to stop you somehow. The bridge was out. However, I was hoping to pass in front of you on the road to draw your attention. I guess I misjudged your speed. How did I end up here though?"

"Why, I brought you in my truck of course." She wondered why he was having such a hard time remembering things. "It's parked right out front, what's left of it that is." She motioned to the front door. He looked around the room. She watched as something akin to anger and frustration chased across his face. Who was he angry at, himself for not remembering or her for bringing him here? Was he mad that his horse was dead?

"Look Miss." With nervousness in his voice, he began to speak. He searched her eyes for understanding. "I am really sorry but I don't remember anything about last night either. I don't even remember your name and I find it hard to believe...well...what can I say, I hardly make it a practice of taking strange women to bed with me."

Stunned, Gina's mouth unconsciously fell open and she gaped at him. He really didn't remember. He thought... Stammering to correct him she blurted out a mess of words that didn't even make sense. She couldn't let him think that they had slept together as lovers; it was far from the truth.

"Oh no you didn't...I mean I took you...I mean, oh hell, now you've got me all confused." She was frustrated and indignant. "You've got it all wrong." Seeing the upswing of his eyebrows again she started to blush. He probably thought she was some

kind of scarlet hussy that pursued him and lured him into bed. "Don't look at me like that, it is not what you think."

He laughed then.

"What is it I think?" He questioned her, a gleam of amusement in his sparkling eyes. Those eyes mesmerized her as no others had ever done before.

With a heavy sigh Gina sat down on the chair across from him, deciding now was the time to tell him everything so that there could be no more misconceptions between them.

She went into the long-winded story of the accident sparing no details. How they came to be in bed together and why. She told him how sorry she was about his horse being dead. Until at last she rested not aware of how he was watching her in fascination. Gina couldn't even meet his eyes for fear of the condemning she might find there.

He started laughing hesitantly, and then all of a sudden as if he couldn't hold it in any longer he cut loose with a hearty barrage. His deep laugh angered her. Who was he laughing at? Surely he wasn't laughing at her. What was so funny to him? What about his poor horse?

Incredulous, she demanded of him. "What is so funny? How can you laugh! I don't believe it. You can just sit there and laugh after everything that's happened. It was awful, just awful."

He looked at her and started laughing again. She was next to tears now but determined that this arrogant man wouldn't put her down.

"I don't even know how I will ever begin to pay you back for all the damage." He looked at her now and seemed to hold back his laughter with great difficulty, his eyes still laughed at her though.

"Look Angel face, you don't know the half of it. Unknowingly, you've put me in quite a predicament. There are some, one person in particular that I can think of who

would love to get their hands on a juicy story like this. You can't imagine how it would sound after they were done with it. Your reputation and my own would be ruined."

Then as if he had thought of something else he started laughing again. "Personally, I think you must watch too many old movies or something." He paused when he saw her anger. "There was no need for you to ah...sacrifice yourself to keep me warm. I'd have done quite well with just the brandy, the fire and the covers."

Gina was immediately swamped with anger. She was infuriated. How dare the man take things so lightly. She should have left him on the road to freeze to death and saved herself the trouble.

Jumping to her feet she hollered at him. "Well, I thought I was saving your life, God knows why. You were pretty well out of it you know."

He stopped laughing and looked at her. She didn't know what a picture she made with her flashing green eyes and cheeks tinged pink with anger. "You can leave anytime." She stormed towards the kitchen.

Leave, he didn't want to leave he wanted to stay where he could observe this tantalizing creature with the shy eyes and fiery temper.

"I wouldn't want to keep you from something important." Her blonde hair flowed behind her in defiance. She stopped and turned towards him. "Here, take my car, by all means." She flung the keys at him from across the room barely missing him. "And send me the bill for your inconvenience, the bigger the better." She flew out of the room.

He started laughing again.

Gina slammed cabinets and pots around like a person possessed. She was going to start on breakfast; she wasn't going to starve just because of him. Secretly she was thankful for a well-stocked pantry.

"I hope he busts a gut," she mumbled under her breath. "The sheer nerve of the man too, after all I've done for him." Gina was so busy consoling herself childishly that

she didn't hear the heavy footsteps come up behind her. "At least I wear under wear." She exclaimed.

Gina didn't see the man look down at his pants and nearly start laughing again.

"I am sorry Angel face, really I am." Gina swung around when she heard his voice. "It's just that it's all so funny, that's all."

He tried hard to keep the laughter out of his voice without much success.

"Are you still here?" She snapped. "And quit calling me Angel face."

"What should I call you then?" He asked undaunted by her anger.

"My name is Gina, Gina Holt." She returned, what did it matter if he knew her name.

"Okay Gina Holt, but you forgot something. I can't go anywhere in this weather and neither can you. This blizzard has us socked in here for the duration."

Gina looked up in shock at his words. How could she have forgotten! Even if the snow and wind had stopped there was no place for them to go that the roads would be passable. "Unless." He continued with a twinkle in his eyes. "You still insist on throwing me out to fend for myself."

She wanted to! Moving to the kitchen window she lifted the shade and peered out into the brilliant landscape. It looked so peaceful and beautiful with the snow covering everything. Yes, it was still snowing even now; at least there were no high winds like the day before, just sudden bursts of blowing snow every now and again.

"That's all I need right now." Gina sighed. "As much as I hate to admit it you're right. And I certainly won't send you packing either, that would be cruel and deadly."

"Thank you." He told her. He had an unusual glint in his eyes and he didn't appear to be upset by their predicament. She wished he would just go back into the living room and leave her alone to think. He was apparently enjoying himself too much for that.

"Granted you called me sir earlier to put me in my place, but it's so formal. Especially for two people who have been as ah...intimate as we have." He taunted her.

So he was back to that again was he? Gina thought she might change her mind and kick him out if he wasn't careful.

"I would like it, if you would call me Alan, Gina, Alan Sullivan." He made to leave the room and hesitated when she shrunk back in horror.

"Oh no." She breathed in a shocked voice.

"Oh yes," He laughed mocking her not knowing why she should be so surprised. Maybe she just felt safer calling him sir. "Do you know me?" He asked, admitting to himself that some people would if they kept up at all with the business world. She shook her head no quickly. Alan was glad she didn't, he wanted to be known as the man he was not by the money he made. "I will go get us some firewood, it is getting chilly in there." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder towards the living room. "There's no electricity and that means no heater, but I guess you already knew that didn't t you?" He frowned and looked at her puzzled with those stunning gray green eyes then turned to leave the room.

Gina, still standing rooted to the spot in shock grabbed a chair to sit in after he left to think things out. It wasn't possible was it? Yes, he was here as big as life. Shaking her head in disbelief and crossing her throat in mock death she started thinking to herself. How on earth could this happen to her? Of all the people to run in to, it had to be 'him'. She remembered seeing a picture of that face only once before. No wonder he looked so familiar. Well, at least he hadn't recognized her!

Once again she thought back to the bitter memories all too recent in her mind. The heated phone calls from this man, the language and insults he had hurled at her raced through her mind. The bad part was she had brought it all on herself. Gina vividly remembered the slanderous article she wrote on Alan Sullivan, businessman

extraordinaire. She grimaced at some of the comparisons she had made, man or beast, genius or swindler, and there were many more.

Anything for a story, her boss had told her. When she wrote the article it was in hopes of drawing him out of his self imposed isolation. He had refused to be interviewed so many times. It didn't work though; all it netted her was a lawsuit and very nearly the loss of her job. Granted Alan Sullivan was the president and owner of two very large computer companies that seemed to swallow competition at will. She never did find any more proof than unfounded rumors for her article. She felt bad about it now. The whole article was a mistake from start to finish. A whopping mistake!

After all, wasn't that what she was doing in Connecticut in the first place? Recuperating from her emotional and financial losses. Wasn't this the man who had successfully sued her for a bundle, nearly all of her life savings in fact? A man she had never met and never had any intention of doing so until now. He hadn't even bothered to show up for any of the court dates, sending his lawyer instead because he was too busy to be involved.

Now what was she going to do? Don't panic she told herself. There has to be a way out of this predicament. She didn't dare tell him who she really was. He'd never believe it was an accident; she wouldn't if their places were changed! He would think that she deliberately set him up, that the whole accident was on purpose, just to get another story on him or to get revenge.

A plot began to form. Since he'd never seen her. How was he to know that Gina Holt was the real name for Gina Habersham, junior reporter for the Gazette? It might be second rate but she knew he read it. If she could just keep her real identity from him a secret until they parted ways, she would be safe. There was no telling what he might do to her if he found out. That was it; she would just have to keep her secret.

Oh, Gina sighed. What was this man doing in Connecticut of all places anyway, instead of being in New York City where he belonged? Gina decided then and there that she would have to make a quick agreement for restitution with him about the damages before he could accidentally find out who she was. He'd probably want her skin next if he found out, or her life.

Concentrating hard on breakfast, Gina turned out the lightest best omelet's she'd ever made. She wanted to use up the last of the eggs and milk before it went bad. The rest she put outside in the cold hoping they wouldn't spoil. It was a meal that was sheer bribery of course. She convinced herself that all is fair in love and war, and this was a definite case of all out war on her part.

Drying her hands on a dishtowel she walked back into the living room. After having brought in some firewood for the fire, Alan had stretched out on the bed again and fallen asleep. How could he look so peaceful? How did he get such a roaring fire going without much effort? Gina always cursed her dying fires; they never stayed lit for her.

Despite everything Gina felt herself being drawn physically to this mysterious man, who she knew shunned publicity at all costs. He was every girl's dream of the ideal man, handsome and rich, yet like everything he had his flaws, in this case it was that he could be cold and ruthless. For a young man of thirty three Gina knew that Alan Sullivan had come along way over the years, and she couldn't help but wonder how he did it. Then again, every reporter was after that story, weren't they? Gina had heard how ruthless he was in his business dealings and wasn't her own case a testimony to that fact.

She hardened her heart against him and determined not to let his handsome face get to her. She put on her sweet airs and made for battle.

"Breakfast." She called to him in her most gentle voice, with the biggest grin pinned on her face.

He roused easily.

“Not unwelcome I assure you. I’m just famished.” He flashed her a warm handsome smile and Gina returned it with venomous ease.

As they sat across from each other at the kitchen table Gina couldn’t help notice that Alan stared at her. She plotted to herself as the color grew in her cheeks. ‘Alan Sullivan, you are going to be in for one heck of an awakening once I get this settlement made with you. You won’t know what hit you. There has to be a good story in this somewhere.’ How many other reporters could claim to have spent a few days in an isolated house with him?

How about; ‘Snowbound with a ruthless millionaire,’ by Gina Habersham. She was sure she would think of something good before the next few days were up. She wanted to get down to the business at hand, first the accident.

“I assure you Mr. Sullivan.” She amended. “ Alan. I assure you that I intend to pay you for any damages or inconvenience that I’ve caused you. If you could just give me an idea of an amount I could...” Gina was using her most business like voice yet Alan interrupted her anyway.

"Nah, don't worry about it." He brushed her attempt to offer restitution off lightly. Then he started teasing her. "After all, you did save my life didn't you? You could have left me laying in the cold, instead look how you warmed me up."

Then he had the nerve to laugh. Gina’s blush turned to rage immediately. The insufferable clod!

"No doubt you still think that's funny." She snapped.

"Now don't get all upset again," he coaxed, reaching for her hand over the table. Gina pulled it back and put it in her lap.

"To tell you the truth," he smiled at her obviously not the least bit embarrassed. "It's not every day that a man is undressed by a beautiful woman without him knowing it, if you know what I mean."

Gina nodded her head silently. Beautiful! He thought she was beautiful? Gina couldn't find the words to answer him; she just wished that the weather would change so she could put as much distance between this disarming man and herself as possible.

As the day wore on and Gina overcame her nervousness in his presence, Gina found herself actually relaxing in Alan's company. He was amiable and pleasant. Before long all thoughts of a revenge article went out of her mind completely. She couldn't have done it anyway.

She realized that she was seeing a very personal side to the man that others had not. Her natural curiosity got the best of her and she longed to know everything there was to know about him.

He seemed pleased by her inquiries. Alan told her about some of his more adventurous travels and some of his friends. He even remarked on the demands of running a New York company. Gina knew she was growing to like him in spite of everything. She also knew that she was attracted to him. But as much as she wanted to she couldn't bring herself to tell him who she was and how she knew him. Gina didn't want him to dislike her yet and she knew he would when he found out. She would make their budding friendship last as long as possible.

As lunchtime drew nearer Alan was anxious to help her with the firewood and the chores. He told her he felt guilty because he had slept for several hours that afternoon.

They nearly had their first argument when Alan insisted that he would do the lunch dishes for her. In the end they compromised and he washed while she dried. Gina told him that she would never have expected to find a New York businessman in her kitchen doing her dishes. He told her that she would be surprised at all the things he knew how to do for himself.

"Gina, you still haven't told me what you do for a living or how you came to be here." Alan bluntly hinted that he wanted to know more about her. "It's hard to

understand why someone like yourself is living alone way out here. I can tell from your accent that your not native either, you're a New Yorker if I ever heard one." Alan was sitting on the floor in front of the fireplace now, extending his large hands to meet the warmth of the fire.

Gina was curled up in the wing back chair watching the fires soft glow on his handsome face. She knew he must have lots of women in his life; he was too good looking not to. Brenda was the lucky ones name at present. Gina remembered him calling out for her once in the night.

"Well actually I'm on vacation right now." Gina told him. "I work in New York City too, for a company as a typist." She watched him light up at the mention that she lived in New York City. She felt guilty for lying to him, well, it wasn't a complete lie; she did type her own work.

"Have you lived there all your life?" He asked.

"No I was born in Connecticut, not far from here in fact." She tried to change the subject as best she could without making him suspicious. Gina couldn't afford for him to find out too much about her, he might start putting two and two together.

"What are you doing here Alan if you're supposed to be in New York? What brings you to the boonies so to speak?"

"Oh I came for a rest too but of a different kind." His voice was full of bitterness. "Ever since some dumb broad wrote an article on me accusing me of being a shyster I've been hounded by the press ever since. First it was one paper then another. It was driving me absolutely crazy; I couldn't even get any work done. She made me look like some sort of an animal and it's been my down fall ever since." He paused and looked at her a minute.

This is it thought Gina, he knows.

"Funny." He puzzled. "Her name was Gina too. Although I have to admit you've restored my faith in people with that name." Alan smiled at her sweetly and Gina knew he was trying to impress her, he was. Inwardly Gina grimaced and thought to herself that she would never make it through the next few days. She worried that he would despise her forever for writing that article. How was she to know the trouble it would cause him? She wanted to tell him that if he didn't hoard his privacy so much he might have more of it. There's nothing like a secretive person to draw speculation.

"Want to go build a snowman?" She asked him instead. "I've been wanting to do it all this season."

Alan thought about it for a minute. Didn't he ever do anything just for fun? "Sure, I guess so, but I don't have any gloves."

"Well I've got the solution for that." Gina told him as she dashed off to her grandfather's room to dig out one of his old pairs. She'd never gotten rid of any of his things.

"Here." She handed them to him. "This should do the job. You know you really shouldn't have gone riding yesterday dressed like you were, its a wonder you didn't freeze to death."

"To hear you tell it, I nearly did." Alan reminded her with a scowl. Secretly he was pleased that she was worried about him.

"Beat you outside.' Gina taunted him and dashed out the door before Alan even had his jacket on to follow.

When he stepped out the door a snowball greeted him. "Hey," he called out. "That's not fair." He scooped up a handful himself and got the bending Gina right in the back with it.

She jerked upright swiftly. "Look who is not being fair. Throwing when my back is turned."

Gina waited until Alan was bent down scooping up a handful of snow and she snuck up on him and put snow down his collar.

Alan laughed and tackled her to the ground threatening to put some down the front of her shirt.

"I give up. I give up." She cried laughingly.

"Do you promise to behave yourself?" Alan coaxed her for an answer. He didn't trust her. She was too cunning.

"Yes sir, I promise. Let's work on our snowman now."

They played in the snow like children and Gina could tell that Alan wasn't one to relax and let go very often. Still they had fun. Gina nicknamed the snowman 'Rocky' and they used a stick for his nose and rocks for his mouth and eyes. Before they went back indoors Gina even got Alan to lay in the snow and make snow angel impressions with her. It was then that Gina realized for the first time that Alan might be attracted to her as much as she was to him. While she lay on the snow, ridiculously flapping her arms up and down, Alan rolled over next to her. Pinning her down, he lowered his head to kiss her and instead stopped himself.

"I am sorry." Alan sat up quickly. "I have no right to do that." Gina just looked at him with puzzled eyes. If he wanted to kiss her, why didn't he? "Maybe we should go back inside." He suggested. "Are you cold?"

"Frozen." Gina smiled at him as he helped her to her feet. "My toes are numb."

"Well come on then." Alan pulled on her. "That's something that I can take care of." He led her back indoors after they brushed the snow off their clothes. "Sit down in the chair Gina." Alan told her as he stoked up the fire for them. Alan helped her remove her shoes and socks and gently rubbed some warmth back into her cold toes.

"Ummm, that feels good." Gina breathed and leaned back in the chair to accept some more of his ministrations.

"It is too bad there's no hot water or you could have a nice leisurely soak."

"This is fine." The fire was already warming Gina. Alan's close proximity and the touch of his hands were working wonders too. Then he startled her by asking.

"Do you have a boyfriend Gina? Some man in your life that might not take kindly to our being stranded here together?"

She looked down into his sparkling green eyes and knew it was important to him to know that. Was that why he didn't kiss her earlier when he had the chance?

"No, no men in my life at the moment. I've been much too busy with my career." Gina realized that she let it slip that she had a career and not just a job as she hinted at earlier. Alan didn't seem to notice.

"Is there any reason that I shouldn't kiss you then?" He asked bluntly? Gina couldn't do anything but nod her head.

"Then I am going to." Alan got up on his knees and pulled Gina forward. The whole time his eyes held hers captive. Slowly he brushed his lips over hers, teasing, tasting. Then he covered them completely with his own.

As the kiss went on he pulled her closer so that she was on the floor on her knees with him in a close embrace. The muscles in Alan's arms flexed involuntarily as Gina lifted her arms around his neck, first one and then the other. Softly Alan continued to kiss her, gently, parting her lips, seeming to draw her very soul from her.

Then he pulled away and looked down at her. "Thank you Gina." Was all he said for a while.

Gina moved back up to the chair and sat there. She was much more moved by his kiss than she ever dreamed possible. She may not have had all the experience in the world but she knew that their kiss was something special.

Alan shivered from the chill in the air and his wet clothes. His jeans were soaked. Gina realized that he would be able to wear some of her grandfather's things. They were about the same size. Gina slipped into her room to get them.

"Here Alan, these should fit you." She handed him a flannel shirt and another pair of jeans. "And here is a pair of socks to keep your feet warm until your own things dry." Alan raised an eyebrow inquisitively. "They belonged to my grandfather. I didn't have the heart to pack them away. If they don't fit I will go look for something else."

"These should be just fine." He leaned forward and kissed her briefly. "Thanks Angel face."

"Are you back to calling me that?" Gina quipped.

"I can't help it, it fits." Alan stroked her cheek with his finger.

"You're impossible." She laughed. "I'm going to go change and then I will start some supper."

"Want some help?" He asked huskily.

"With supper?"

"No, with changing." Gina blushed and just left him standing there. No doubt he was experienced at helping women get their clothes off. What would he think if he knew that she had never known a man intimately? Would he even care one way or the other?

After supper was over, they spent the remainder of the day getting better acquainted. Gina couldn't remember when the last time she had so much fun or with whom. It felt good, just to be around him. Her awful secret kept her from relaxing with him completely. Gina realized that Alan knew when she was nervous about something even if he didn't know why. She longed to tell him her secret. Fear of losing his companionable friendship kept her from it. After all she didn't know what he might think or do.

Gina dozed off by the fireplace once while they were relaxing. She woke when Alan gently shook her by the shoulder.

"Hey, sleepy head. There's a nice fire going for you in the bedroom, why don't you turn in?" He lightly touched her cheek.

"Are you going to bed now too?" Gina thought it would be inhospitable to leave him sitting up by himself while she went off to bed. Without electricity there wasn't even a television for him to watch or a radio for him to listen to. He might think her rude if she did.

"I think I will sit up and read for a while. I saw a novel on the shelf that looks pretty interesting." She couldn't know how the peace and quiet was appealing to him. No phones, no faxes, no emergencies. It was more heaven for him than she knew.

"Okay then, I guess I will turn in. Goodnight Alan." It had been a long day.

"Night Angel face." He kissed her forehead leisurely before he let her go.

Once in bed Gina couldn't sleep, her thoughts kept turning to the man in the next room. He seemed kind and gentle. He wasn't at all like she expected. She wondered what it would be like to be held in those sinewy arms all night and loved by that perplexing man.

Gina lay there listening to the sounds of the old creaking house and the quiet sounds that Alan made. The lantern finally went off after a while and Gina knew that he had turned in. He was restless though. She heard him get back up several times. Some times pacing the floor or going to the kitchen for drinks. He seemed to be having as much trouble as she was having going to sleep. She wondered what it was that was keeping him awake.

Finally her mind calmed down and allowed her to sleep. Her dreams were filled with Alan, happy, playing in the snow, and loving her. Before morning they turned to Alan pointing a condemning finger at her for lying and having her drug off to jail.

Alan was up long before Gina, making breakfast. He was a pleasant sight to behold standing in her kitchen, wearing the flannel shirt unbuttoned and sporting two full nights worth of growth on his chin. Gina lent him one of her silly pink plastic razors and he showered not even minding the cold water. Gina did, she just sponged off. The whole day was spent talking and enjoying each other's company.

They made a Mrs. Snowman and gathered up some clean icicles to lick on. It was a marvelous day spent in his company and went way too fast for Gina.

But as the evening drew near the tension was unbearable for her, she was miserable over her deception. Then on top of everything else she knew she was attracted to Alan in a way she had never been to a man before. To make matters worse it was apparently mutual because every time Gina turned around, she found Alan's eyes already on her.

Alan was kind and went out of his way to be helpful. He took care of stoking up the fire all day and even now was in the kitchen fixing them both some hot chocolate. He insisted that Gina stay by the fire and keep warm. She enjoyed being pampered and spoiled. Truthfully, any other time she might have minded the coldness of the house but not with Alan there.

"Here we go Gina." Alan handed her a steaming mug of the delicious smelling hot chocolate. "Make sure you don't burn yourself." Alan chatted to her casually as he moved to sit next to her on the sofa that would become Alan's bed latter on.

"Thank you Alan you're very kind." She was feeling so guilty about keeping the truth from him that she could hardly meet his eyes any more for fear she would give herself away.

"Well I do like to treat women I like special, you know."

He slung a lazy arm over the back of the sofa behind her shoulders. "Is there something bothering you Gina?" Alan questioned her. "You've gotten very quiet, almost pensive."

"No nothing" She lied, hoping it was convincing. Why couldn't she just tell him who she really was and get it over with?

"Are you sure? Do I make you nervous?" Alan was reluctant to let the subject drop, he knew there was something bothering her. Why couldn't she open up to him?

"I guess I'm just a little shy that's all." It was mostly true.

"You don't have to be scared of me." Alan assured her.

Gina knew that. That's part of the reason she felt so guilty.

Alan drew her into the crook of his arm and held her close.

"I would never do anything to hurt you."

"I know." Gina whispered. She bent her head to blow on her hot chocolate. She didn't want to meet those wonderful disturbing gray green eyes that melted the outer core down to her very soul. Just Alan's close proximity was making her feel strange things. Her hands grew icy cold.

Alan took the mug from her hand and sat it on the nearby end table. In one slow movement he pulled Gina towards him ignoring her wide-eyed expression.

Gina knew he was going to kiss her and she found herself wanting it, wanting his delicious kisses.

He paused searching her face, giving her time to pull back if she wanted to. Then he kissed her, tasting her, savoring her lips. His tongue swept into her mouth when her lips parted voluntarily.

Gina felt every muscle in her body quiver with desire and then relax under his warm searching lips. Time was suspended for her as Alan's knowing lips taught hers how to respond to his for their mutual gratification.

Alan gently pushed her back on the sofa, letting her slid out of his grasp as he trailed light tender kisses down the length of her slender throat. Gina gasped audibly as the fire consumed her. Alan returned to kiss her then more firmly betraying the passion he kept concealed within.

Before she knew it Alan had her laid out on the soft couch and managed to stretch out beside her. He kissed her fervently as he placed a sure hand over her breast. Her body responded, brought alive by his touch. She knew she should stop him before it went too far but could not. He caressed her swollen breast lightly through the thin cotton layer of her blouse. She did not wear a bra and knew that it was exciting him. Gina could feel the hardness of his swollen member pressed against her thigh and exulted in the fact that she was affecting him in the same way he was affecting her.

Gina had been kissed before many times and had almost even been intimate with a man, yet there was this unmistakable chemistry with Alan. She wondered if he felt it too.

When Alan paused long enough to take in a steady breath Gina worried that he would leave her and she didn't want that. What could it hurt to prolong their lovemaking just a little bit longer?

She tentatively ran her fingers through his thick dark hair and gently teased the back of his neck. She felt his hand move again as he kissed her deeply. It moved lingeringly over her flat stomach and slight hips before returning to unbutton her blouse to gain him further access. It exposed her small firm breasts for his inspection and to the cool night air.

She heard Alan's sudden intake of breath and the unevenness of his labored breathing. It exulted her. Burying his dark head to kiss her throat, he then teased his way over to her smooth white shoulders. Her naked breasts were already begging for the same attention.

Gina felt the acute longing to unbutton his flannel shirt and run her own fingers over and through the hair covering his firm chest now hidden from her. When she did she felt the muscles in his back quiver at her light touch.

Gina didn't have to see his body she could remember every inch of it from the other night. They were both caught up in the magic of the moment their passion consuming all common sense. Alan moved atop her to cover her with his weight and gently moved his hips against hers. Gina arched against him wanting to feel more of him.

"Gina?" His voice was low and husky. "I want to make love to you." He pulled up to look down at her. "I don't want to scare you but I want you like no other woman I've ever known. I can tell that you're not very experienced at this." He waited for her to respond to his speculation.

"I'm not but..." Gina swallowed hard to clear her throat realizing now that she shouldn't have let it go so far. "But you can't, I mean, you don't know anything about me. As a matter of fact I'm..."

He interrupted her. "I don't have to know all about you Angel face to know that I'm starting to fall for you." He stroked her cheek with his large rough hand. "I've known since the moment I woke and found you so sweet and warm in my arms. For once I actually stumbled across someone special for a change. You're not at all like the women I know."

Gina looked up with near tears in her eyes, she really should tell him who she was now because he would never forgive her if she didn't, he might not now.

"But Alan..." Alan silenced her muffled confession of who she was with his possessive lips. So passionate was that kiss that it left her stunned and breathless. She was unable to speak, she only stared at him wide eyed, bewildered and confused by her own bodies responses. Such all-consuming desire was new to her, not daring to understand that Alan and Alan alone touched off this desire.

Slowly Alan released her. "I think I better let you get to your own bedroom then. "

Alan stood up. "Before I lose what little self control I have left. I didn't mean to scare you or rush you Gina." He slid his hands into his pockets. Gina could still see the passion blazing in his eyes and the rigid ness in his stance. "Will you be warm enough in there? I didn't start the fire until just a little while ago." Alan shifted from one foot to the other.

"I will be fine." Gina's mouth was dry. "Good night Alan." Gina grasped the front of her blouse together with her hand. She saw Alan's jaw tense momentarily. Did he know that she was a virgin still at twenty-four? Was that why he was so anxious to let her go so easily? Did she want him to give up?

"Goodnight Angel face." He whispered softly. "Sleep well and I will see you in the morning. "

Gina rushed out of the room. She knew she'd be warm all right but not in the way he thought. She could still the warmth of his touch and the feel of his taut male body next to hers. She lay in her warm lonely bed for hours thinking of him in the next room. What would it be like to make love with Alan? She already had a little taste of that pleasure and she longed for more.

Then bravely Gina decided what she must do, she couldn't work up the courage to tell him who she really was so she would have to make their break as painless as possible for the both of them. There could be no future for them beyond these few days, she'd already seen to that before they even met. Once more for the hundredth time Gina berated herself for her stupidity. Fighting back the salty tears she laid there dreamily thinking of Alan.

What would a whole lifetime of being loved by a man like Alan be like? Could he possibly be interested in a girl like her for more than a quick roll in the hay, a short fling?

Where had all the years gone? How was it that she came to be twenty-four years old without a man of her own? A future alone didn't look at all inviting. Sure she had her apartment to go home to and her drawing. But what else did she have? Her job?

Yes. Why then did it seem she had so many holes in her life though? You couldn't take your job to bed with you at night to talk to and keep you warm. You couldn't count on your job to fill your old age any more either.

If there really was somebody for every one on this earth, who was her somebody? Then too why hadn't she found him? Was Alan that somebody? Is that why they got along so well? Could he possibly understand the emotions that drove a person like herself? Could he want the same things out of life that she did? Their backgrounds were so different, their lifestyles so opposite.

Gina's anxious mind dreamed of Alan through out the night. Always it was the same, Alan loving her. Always some sophisticated worldly lady coming into the picture to steal him away. Silent tears streamed down the side of her face as she slept.

CHAPTER THREE

Morning came and with it a new hope for the future. Alan had been up since dawn thinking. Knowing that yes, indeed he was starting to fall for the woman child in the next room who slept so soundly. Also knowing that he had every intention of seeing her again, nine years difference in age wasn't all that much difference.

Alan had been in her room once during the night to make sure her fire was stoked up good. She looked like a little girl curled up in her big bed. He longed to go to her and just hold her in his arms. She wasn't aware of her own innocent beauty. Shy or not she was just the woman for him.

Alan thought back over all the lonely years, years he himself deliberately filled with work, pushing himself so that he wouldn't feel the loneliness that threatened to engulf him at times.

Sure, he dated, so many women in fact that he couldn't even remember all of their names. None of them left the slightest impression on him, a small trinket usually got him what he wanted. He knew they were only after his money and his name, not the man who longed to be loved just for himself, the man who had so much and so little at the same time. Yet here was this shy girl who seemed to know nothing about him yet willingly, consciously gave of herself.

Alan secretly prayed for the snow to fall once more and the weather to turn bitter cold again just so he could stay with her longer. He knew that soon the roads would be clear enough to risk leaving. He didn't care about his business. It would survive without him. Alan wondered if Gina knew that the weather was changing and that the roads would be clearing soon.

His thoughts were interrupted as he heard her coming down the hall walking so quietly. Alan allowed his eyes to take in every inch of her soft oval face and honey

blonde hair along with her slight build as she strolled into the room shyly, stretching and yawning. She was a beautiful sight to behold and unlike the women he knew, she wasn't even trying. Maybe that was part of her charm; she just knew how to be herself.

"Morning Angel face." He greeted her cheerfully, watching the light dance in her eyes at seeing him. "Did you sleep well?"

"Ummm, nice and toasty warm." She sniffed the air appreciatively. "What have you been up to this morning? Something sure smells good." She grinned at him sheepishly unaware of how beautiful her smile made her seem.

Alan pulled his eyes away; he had to keep a tight grip on himself. He knew he almost blew it last night by coming on to her so fast.

"That is coffee. Bachelors can learn to do just about everything but I am especially proud of my coffee. Over the years I've even learned to cook in a pinch a time or two." He smiled at her wickedly. "I am out to impress you with my charms and my cooking." He teased half seriously.

Instantly he noticed the slight frown that ran across her face before she hid it, not realizing that he just reminded her of her own bribery breakfast the day before. He took her small hand and led her to the table.

"Breakfast is served Madam." Alan gave her an elegant mock bow and pulled out her chair for her. He served up a batch of light pancakes, bacon, and completed it with his special coffee and juice.

"Aren't you going to join me?" Gina asked when he did not sit down readily and she noticed that there was only one plate.

"I already ate. I got up real early and didn't want to disturb your sleep."

"You could have woken me up. I wouldn't have minded."

"I know." He kissed the top of her head. That is as much as he would allow himself. He wanted her so badly. "I only hope that everything is to your liking. Now, if

you will excuse me I want to go outside and poke around a little bit. See how the road is looking. I'm hoping for more snow myself."

Alan left her sitting there tucking into her breakfast appreciatively. He longed to be close to the girl of his dreams not realizing that she wished she were anywhere but with him.

He wanted to know everything there was to know about her, from her birth to all of the little idiosyncrasies she'd acquired over the years.

As he trudged out to the road through the melting snow Alan determined that he was going to make her, his. One way or the other he was going to find the way to reach her heart.

He couldn't help but notice the tender loving care this little farmhouse needed in its run down condition, as he made his way back across the field in the untouched snow. He wondered how she came by it. She seemed so much a part of the place.

Gina was already doing the dishes by the time he got back indoors and she flashed him an unconscious smile that warmed his heart. "What would it be like to see her smile every morning?"

"Is everything okay?" She asked wiping off the table. He wondered if she would comment on the fact that he used twice as many dishes and pans making breakfast as necessary. His help usually did. They did not like it when he messed in the kitchen.

"It's worse than I expected." He teased her, moving to stand close to her. "Looks like the roads will be clearing off enough to leave tomorrow." He watched as she frowned at that.

"Is that supposed to be bad news or something?" She asked him expectantly. Alan snickered to himself. What if he told her the truth?

"Depends on how you look at it I guess." Alan sat down at the table. "I guess I have to leave sometime before you tire of me and throw me out of the house."

Gina laughed mischievously. "I don't think anyone could make you do anything that you didn't already want to do, you're too big."

"Does that mean you want to throw me out?"

"Not on your life. Who would get those darn pesky fires going for me?"

Alan laughed at their playful bantering.

"Truthfully though, I do need to do something about my horse. I can't just leave him there."

Darn, now he'd upset her. He could see it in her face.

"I'm really sorry about your horse Alan. Will you miss him?"

"A little, but I have others to compensate. I'd like to take you riding some time."

Gina just shook her head yes but didn't answer. She didn't really look all that receptive to the idea. He would try another time when the death of his horse didn't bother her so much.

"Do you suppose everyone thinks the worst has happened to you?" Gina asked with a worried expression on her face.

"I don't think so, so far with the lines down they just think I'm at home." Alan took a deep breath; he was going to ask her about this place. Before, whenever he asked her anything personal she managed to avoid answering it directly or with the minimum amount of words, not really telling him anything.

"Is this place yours Gina?" He realized that they were less than a mile from his place as the crow flies but he wasn't going to tell her that. By road it was several miles. She might want him to leave.

"Yeah it is now. My grandfather left it to me when he died. I was his last heir and unfortunately he was mine also." She tried to keep the hurt out of her voice but Alan picked up on it anyway. He thought her an awfully brave person to have managed on her own. He knew what it was like to be alone.

"I am sorry to hear that. So you don't have any other family then?" Alan inquired, he wanted to know if there was anyone concerned with her well being. He didn't like the idea of her being out here isolated more or less alone.

She thought about it a minute. Was that loneliness he saw in her eyes?

"Not to speak of no, a few distant relatives I've never met. My grandfather raised me since I was nine. My parents were killed in an automobile accident. This place," she waved her hand around the room, "was his dream, he wanted to make it into a self supporting farm again. Unfortunately he died long before it could become a reality. Plus I'm afraid I couldn't do it either. I've had a financial setback of my own recently or I would have started on it this summer." She sighed lightly. "I guess it wasn't meant to be."

"It is a nice place I can see why you both like it so much."

"It is nice but I decided to sell it long before I came for my vacation though."

Alan enjoyed listening to her soft voice and watching her expression filled face, she didn't know it told its own story. He realized this was the first time she opened up to him about anything; he didn't want her to stop.

"That's a shame, there appears to be enough land around here to do plenty with."

Alan made a mental note to find out whom the realtor was that would be handling the property. "What kind of setback did you have?" He asked wondering what could have kept her from realizing her dream.

"Oh just the usual." She clammed up.

"The way the economy is lately it is understandable." Alan wondered what he said this time that was so wrong and caused her to close up on him.

They spent the rest of the morning talking about lighter subjects and Alan helped her with the housework that needed doing. Latter they both worked on lunch together which they kept pretty simple.

When the perpetual boredom was about to get to them Gina pulled an old monopoly game out of the closet and they spent the afternoon wheeling and dealing in high fashion. Naturally Alan tried to let her win but it came all too easily for him even for a game. His business sense just seemed to find its way into the simple game. They laughed and joked, he even got to steal a kiss from her now and then when she couldn't pay all of her rent for landing on his properties. She joked that he was a demanding lecherous landlord and that she wouldn't let him forget it. She was sure that was worth money.

She helped him cart in more firewood for the afternoon fire, and they refilled the lanterns with fuel. Alan was surprised to find out that Gina was the one who had cut and split all the firewood. Then he laughed when she admitted that she had done it over the summer a little bit at a time on her free weekends.

Sitting in front of the fire after supper Gina sketched a charcoal portrait of Alan. He watched her work with determination on her face, so small yet so strong. It turned out very good and seemed to reflect the very happiness that he was feeling at the moment because of her. She told him it was his to keep, joking that it was partial payment for all the back rent she owed him from their earlier monopoly game. They laughed easily together.

Every time she brought up the accident, he squelched her offer to pay for any damage. The way he saw it, it was as much his fault as it was hers, probably more so.

The evening passed all too quickly for Alan, he couldn't imagine ever becoming tired of her pleasant company. He pulled her close and kissed her every so often when he couldn't stand not to anymore. He didn't want to scare her off, she had admitted to not being very experienced with lovemaking and Alan wasn't sure if she was at all. He could tell by the way she trembled in his arms and got a look of sheer amazement on her face.

He knew he would have to go slow with her. She wasn't anything like the women he knew.

Alan spent, another restless night pacing the living room floor and thinking about her. It came as a real surprise to hear her muffled cries later in the night. At first Alan lay on his couch bed with his hands behind his head listening, trying to figure out what it was. When the noise stopped he didn't think any more about it until it started up again. Alan slipped back into his discarded jeans and walked down the hall. Perhaps she was cold and having a hard time sleeping.

Alan paused in the doorway and listened, it wasn't real crying, more of an anguished struggle with herself. He realized that she was asleep.

He stood there listening to her and watching her by the firelight bathing the room, trying to decide what he should do. Bad dream or not he didn't know how she would take to being woken by him.

"Gina?" He called out softly.

She didn't answer. When her tossing and turning threatened to dump her into the floor he intervened. Crossing the room he sat down on her bed and shook her gently by the shoulders. He nearly laughed at the oversized mans shirt she was sleeping in; it engulfed her so. "Gina, wake up Angel face, you're having a bad dream."

When she did wake, Alan was stunned when she flew into his arms and held onto him tightly. "Hey, its alright. You were just having some sort of a nightmare."

She mumbled something he couldn't quite understand and started crying. Alan stroked her hair lightly and let her cry until it was all out of her system.

"Are you okay now?" He asked her once the tears subsided. "Would you like me to fix you a glass of hot milk?"

"No thank you, it's too much trouble." Gina pulled out of his arms and leaned back in the bed.

"It is no trouble. I will be right back and then you can tell me what upset you so bad." Alan left her long enough to make her some hot cocoa since he knew it was her favorite. Then he built up the fire while it was heating. Gina had gone into the bathroom to wash her face. She was back in bed when he returned with the milk. She looked so warm and inviting. Alan wanted to protect her even from the demons plaguing her sleep.

"Here. Now, I expect you to drink all of this." He handed it to her carefully and she cupped it with both hands. She was still shaking slightly. "Now what was that all about? Do you have nightmares very often?"

"No, just once in a while." She looked down at the covers on the bed. "I'm sorry if I woke you up." Alan tilted her chin up so that he could see her eyes. He caressed her jaw line with his thumb. She was so beautiful and she didn't even know what she did to him. "You didn't wake me." He told her calmly. "What were you dreaming about?" He coaxed while she drank a little of her milk.

"I was dreaming about my grandfather."

"And?" Alan knew there had to be more to the story than that.

"I came for a visit and when I couldn't get him to answer the door I broke out a window. I thought he might have been hurt only he wasn't." Gina held back a sob. "He had already been dead for a day or more.

"You found him?"

Gina shook her head yes. "He died right here in this bed. When I came into the room, he was laying here with his eyes open and his rigged hand held up in the air."

Gina shivered. Alan was hard put not to shiver too. "That must have been awful." Silently Alan cursed himself for having brought up the subject of her grandfather that very morning.

"It was, in my dream I thought it was happening all over again." Alan took the empty mug from her and sat it on the nightstand; he took her small cold hands in his to warm them up.

"No wonder you were whimpering. It's all right now though Gina. Do you want anything else?"

"No." Gina sniffled. "Could you just sit in here with me for a few minutes until I go back to sleep?"

He knew she was embarrassed to have to ask him and yet still scared to be alone at the same time. Alan wanted to stay with her, even if her couldn't have her. He didn't mind.

"I will do better than that." Alan made her lean up so that he could sit behind her. "Let me hold you for a little while." He pulled her into his arms along with her pillow so she could relax. "Is that better?" Alan stroked her arm; it was soft and feminine.

"Yes but you won't get any sleep like that." She reminded him softly.

"No problem, I will wait till your asleep and then I'll go back to my own bed." Alan didn't want to leave her; he wanted to stay with her. "Now close your eyes and try to sleep." So this was why she tossed and turned so much at night, Alan had wondered about it.

"I think it is sleeping in his bed, in his room that brought the nightmare about Alan. I'm really sorry."

"There is no need to be sorry." Alan rubbed her shoulder. "Relax, now and go to sleep." She did after trying to apologize again.

Alan held her well into the night until she finally slept calmly in his arms. He didn't have the heart or the will power to leave her so he kissed her on the top of her head and leaned back and slept.

In the early morning they woke to find that they were wrapped in each other's arms. Alan woke when Gina stirred; he looked directly into her embarrassed eyes. The temptation proved to be too much and he kissed her before he let her go.

Once again she was apologetic over her behavior. She worried because she thought he hadn't got good nights sleep. How could he tell her that holding her in his arms all night was like a dream come true for him? He could think of only one thing better and she wasn't ready for that.

Alan determined that after breakfast he would get down to the important things he wanted to talk to her about. She provided him with the perfect opportunity when she asked him about the weather.

"The roads are clear enough for travel." Alan was helping her dry the dishes. "What are your plans Gina? I'd like to see you again." He thought he saw a flicker of pain in her eyes. "Where do you live in New York city?" He asked when she didn't answer right away. He knew it didn't matter where she lived. She could live across the continent for all he cared. What was the use of having a jet if he couldn't put it to good use? He didn't think it would be necessary though, she'd already said she lived in New York City.

"Over by third." She told him finally.

Alan accepted it as the truth. He had no reason to doubt her. "Will you write it down for me?" He waited for her to shake her head in acknowledgement. "It is too bad the phone lines are down or I could just call someone to come pick me up." He knew it wasn't that far from his house, where his own car was parked.

"I really do need to be getting back, I shudder to think how far behind at work I am already."

"Alan you can take the Blazer." Gina spoke softly. "I won't be needing it for a little while. I am planning on staying here for a few more days now that the weather is better." Alan was glad to hear this; it would mean that he didn't need to be so rushed. He

could fly back and take care of any pending business and then rush back here to be close to her. The more time he could spend with her the better they would get to know each other. Once again he brushed off her attempt to pay for the accident telling her in no uncertain terms that she was to forget about the whole thing.

Alan knew that once he was back he would relegate some of the workload onto his employees that was what they were there for after all. He didn't even care what they might think over his erratic behavior. He never left important things to others he usually did it himself, not this time. Working on Gina was going to come first with him for a while. She was too special to let her fade out of his life.

"It's really okay to take the Blazer Alan. I've got another car locked up in the shed out back. It's the one I usually drive anyway, the Blazer was my Grandfathers too."

When he hesitated, she went on. "I'm not worried about it and you can drop it back by at your convenience." Alan relented then; maybe this was her way of keeping in touch.

"Okay, it's a deal." Alan reached and pulled her close and kissed her on the forehead. "The sooner I can get going the sooner I get back. Promise me that you will let me take you out for a big steak dinner latter this week."

Gina hesitated. She hated to lie to him any more but there was no way she couldn't at this point. "If that is what you want."

"Now let me help you get your house back in order before I leave." Alan shuffled the furniture back around as if it was nothing to him. He laughed to himself as he noticed that every time he looked her way she would glance off in another. He chalked it up to her shyness. He didn't have any problem with watching her.

Alan knew he wasn't going to let this one get away if he could help it. She was so different from the other women he knew. His last chore was to get a roaring fire going for

her to keep her snug for a while after he left. When he was finished with the fire she was right behind him, standing quietly watching him.

"Alan?" He picked up on her nervousness and he wished he knew what was bothering her.

"Yeah." He turned towards her and put his arm around her slim shoulders. "What is bothering you?"

"Maybe, just in case I'm out when you come back I'd better tell you that you can leave the Blazer in the shed and put the keys under the seat. Just in case, okay?" Her voice was shaky and uncertain. It made him uneasy and he once again felt the need to be able to make sure he could find her. What if she went back to the city early? He was hoping that when she went back that she would go with him. He wanted to ask her to leave with him today but didn't want to spoil her vacation. Typists probably didn't get much vacation time.

"Sure thing, now how about that address you promised me. I wouldn't want you getting lost on me." He smiled at her gently noting the nervousness she tried so hard to conceal from him. She went and got some paper and wrote it out for him. "I know about where that is. I've got a place on Park Avenue." Alan wasn't trying to impress her with his address; he just wanted her to know where she could locate him if she wanted to. He hoped she might.

"Well I guess I better be saying goodbye then." Alan pulled her close and kissed her thoroughly, he could feel her melting under his touch and kiss.

"Ummm." He murmured seductively. "You make me want to stay."

Her blue green eyes twinkled up at him happily. "And Gina... thanks for everything, really. I know we didn't get off to a good start at first but I'm going to make it all up to you I promise. If you'll let me."

"You are very welcome Alan. Have a safe trip. "

“I will and you be good...” He made her laugh.

Alan hated to leave her there all alone yet he already looked forward to seeing her again. His last glance over his shoulder was to find her on the porch-waving goodbye.

Gina was relieved when Alan was gone and yet something made her notice that even in his absence his presence was still felt. Secretly she wished that Alan hadn't been so nice to her and that she wasn't so attracted to him. Then maybe she wouldn't have such a guilty conscience for deceiving him. She knew she would never see him again now that she had given him a false address and phone number.

There could just not be any future for them no matter how much she wished it otherwise. She knew that Alan was a highly sought after bachelor. What could he ever really see in a person like her? She didn't have the kind of class his other women had. She lacked the culture, the beauty and the style for someone as socially active as Alan. He had his position in life and she had hers. She would be the first to admit the world was class conscious.

Oh, he had been attracted to her all right. There was no doubt in her mind about that. It was a matter of proximity though.

She wondered what Alan would think of her when he found out that she had given him a false lead, the brush off so to speak. Gina found herself next to tears when she thought how Alan might react if he knew that she was his infamous Gina Habersham, the blight on his life for the moment. There was really no way she could make up for all the trouble she caused him. If only things could have been different for them. If only she could have met him earlier, then that article would have never been wrote in the repressive light that it was.

Gina knew that she would go ahead with her plans now. She would sign a power of attorney over to her lawyer and let him take care of selling the farmhouse and the property. She would like to keep it but things just seemed to be going from bad to worse

for her. The upkeep on the farm cost her considerably, not to mention holding down her job and shuffling back and forth all the time.

Gina shed a few tears when she realized that she would never be near this place again. She remembered the thoughts of her grandfather who had agreed with the wise old saying that your home is where your heart is. Gina knew that she was leaving a part of her heart here. If things could have been different for her then maybe she could have afforded to get this place going once again and functioning. She knew she didn't really have the experience or the money for that though and there was no way she could give up her job and live here permanently. Jobs were just too scarce.

Through her own stupidity, she had lined someone else's pockets, so to speak. Alan. Who didn't really need the money and probably cared nothing about it. Hadn't he threatened to make it a lesson she would never forget? If forking over your lifesavings to a stranger and then saving his life to boot didn't constitute going the second mile for someone she didn't know what did. Then she laughed to herself when she realized that Alan didn't think her lifesaving techniques did any good, maybe not, who would ever know for sure.

It only took Gina two hours to pack her belongings and the items that she wanted to keep; the rest could go with the house as far as she was concerned. She had nowhere to store such things. She convinced herself that it was for the best for surely she would want to keep everything. Her long island apartment was small and her life uncomplicated and that is how she wanted to keep it. She shoved the visual image of Alan from her mind. He couldn't be allowed to intrude on her thoughts. They were worlds apart.

Pulling the little green compact out of the shed, she loaded it. Gina trudged back and forth through the snow, until it was completely loaded down.

Her traitorous mind kept wandering back through time to the fresh summer days of her youth, before all the building went on here in their valley. She thought of the days

she spent walking and exploring the rocky fields and the sunny countryside. Those were glorious days for her. She spent her morning's horseback riding over those same fields. Her thoughts filled her with a renewed longing for those hassle free days. Gina knew she would always miss the love and warmth her grandfather used to lavish on her.

He was always her stable rock in her small world after her parents were killed so suddenly. She wondered what he would think of Alan Sullivan if they had the opportunity to meet. Once he got past the money she knew he would have liked him and they would have gotten on along good together.

Again she defiantly threw all thoughts of Alan from her mind. It just wouldn't do to harbor thoughts about a relationship that never had a chance and emotionally she couldn't afford to put herself through that.

The long tedious drive and the lonely night she spent in a motel room only served to heighten her feelings of loss and depression. She didn't want to admit it but she was missing Alan's smile and sensitive touch. Maybe she should have let him make love to her just that once then she would have had something special to remember, now all she had was this empty longing desire.

It seemed she had just gotten back and pulled up in front of her apartment house when one of her neighbors came out to greet her back. At least a few people missed her. Her favorite neighbor was eighteen-year-old Tommy and his wife Adell. He helped her unload her compact car and carry things indoors all the while telling her all of the latest news and gossip.

Not much of importance happened during her absence so he went into his long-winded tale of the latest battle with the in-laws. Marrying so young it had been a blow to both sets of parents and they were still constantly trying to run their lives for them.

Tommy was a strong willed young man and Gina admired his spirit, he alone had enough for him and Adell.

Gina had many friends that lived near her and the first day of her return saw a barrage of them come and go through her tiny apartment. Being only a two-room apartment it wasn't very large and the furniture was part of the lease so therefore it was furnished sparingly. It suited her needs though. The only thing that made it seem like home was the many sketches and paintings she had strung about. The kitchen was a wall covered in cabinets that opened up to expose storage, a small stove, a refrigerator and a minimum of counter space to work on. Gina didn't mind her small apartment, she was thankful that she could even afford this much. Living in the same apartment for three years made it seem like a real home to her even if it wasn't. Most of her money had gone to pay for her education. Journalism had attracted her attention and that was the degree she went after. She had learned the hard way to report the facts and not distort them for sensationalism. The rest of her money went into savings in anticipation of working her inheritance into a farm again. Of course Gina always managed to help out a friend in need of a loan if an emergency came up. They were always grateful enough to see that she was repaid as soon as possible too.

Two weeks passed quickly once Gina was able to throw herself back into her work, covering people in the news and covering events that caught the public eye. She was determined to never go looking for a story that didn't already have some basis to it. She wouldn't make that mistake twice. Writing had become her life and she was thankful for it. It filled her time and kept the loneliness from creeping in. She couldn't imagine her life without it; there wasn't much she could do otherwise.

Alan still disturbed her thoughts regularly and she wondered what he was thinking now that he knew she tricked him. Once or twice she had even thought of calling him and apologizing for the deception. She could never get enough nerve up though. He must not ever know who she really was. She made her own bed and now she had to lay in it, no matter how much she longed for Alan.

The following Monday of the third week back to work since her short vacation, found Gina being optimistic as she rode the bumpy ancient elevator up to the fifth floor. She had always admired the old red brick building that housed the Gazette offices; it had an art deco style all of its own.

Carrie, the nineteen year old receptionist was looking radiant this morning as always and happy to see her. Gina liked the girl who was always pleasant and cheerful, and who never seemed to lack for a boyfriend. Being blonde and quite attractive like she was, she always managed to have a new one tugging on her arm within a few days of the last one. She wondered if Carrie ever tired of her hectic social life.

"Gina, Mr. Matthews wants to see you right away." Carrie spoke in her soft sultry voice. Gina frowned and sighed openly, wondering what she was going to be in for now. Surely it was a bad omen for Mr. Matthews to want to see her right at the start of a new day. She racked her brain trying to think of something she might have done now. Trouble might as well have been her middle name.

"Not to worry." Carrie reassured her. "He's all smiles this morning and guess what? There is the most gorgeous hunk of man with him that I've ever seen." Carrie unconsciously patted her hair. "They came in together. Find out who he is will you? I told the boss I would send you in as soon as you came in."

Gina laughed, that was Carrie always on the lookout for a bigger and better hunk. If they didn't spot her, she spotted them.

"I thought you already had a boyfriend for this week Carrie." Gina teased the younger girl, who only shrugged her shoulders in seriousness and returned her smile.

"One can never have enough. They are so unreliable."

Gina pulled off her pea coat and scarf and hastily tossed them on her desk in a pile. Being only a junior reporter her office was more of a partitioned off cubicle, it did give her some privacy though. Straightening her wind blown hair Gina made her way

down the long well lit hall that led to Mr. Matthews office. The corridor always reminded her of a walk to the gas chamber, it just had that affect on her. She tapped lightly on the door and waited.

Mr. Matthews and his all too familiar gray suit and graying brown hair opened the door instantly for her. Gina noted that he was indeed smiling for a change and she hoped his face wouldn't crack and break under the strain. He was a nice enough man; he just never smiled.

"Gina, thank goodness you're finally here." He had a way of making Gina feel late even when she knew she wasn't. "There is someone I want you to meet. We've been given a second chance; Mr. Sullivan here wants us, you, to write a story for him. It seems he's lost his Cinderella and thinks we can help locate her. Come on in and meet him."

Her mind went blank and then numb.

Gina was frozen to the spot the minute she heard Alan's name. Mr. Matthews grew impatient and took hold of her arm propelling her into his office. She didn't want to go in there. Overwhelming fear and panic gripped her. Alan here?

He shut the door firmly behind her. It was her only means of escape from this unbelievable situation she was in. It was too late now. Gina cringed, what was he doing here of all places?

Alan was just starting to rise up out of his chair with his head bent lighting a cigarette. She didn't even know he smoked! Gina knew it must have cost this proud man an awful lot to be confronting his archenemy for help. She shivered at the thought. She had the sneaky suspicion that he wanted help finding Gina Holt too. He turned slowly to look at the person entering the room. Gina held her stunned breath. What would he think? What would he do?

Gina was quick to catch the flicker of surprise and hurt in his green eyes and knew that her own must have been filled with terror. Then as fast as she had seen it, it

was gone and replaced by something else, something cold that she couldn't name. They ominously seemed to darken a shade darker as she watched him. She wished she could hear what he was thinking. What form of torture would his punishment take? Would he dish it out in front of Mr. Matthews? Gina watched as he deliberately finished lighting his cigarette and then extended his large hand to greet her.

He threw back his head and silently dared her to turn away. His grip was tight but not hurting. What was he thinking of doing to her? She could practically see his mind working.

"Miss Habersham," he nodded in acknowledgement, his voice overstressing her last name. She knew why.

"M...Mr. Sullivan," Gina stuttered not daring to meet his cold eyes head on. Two could play at this ridiculous game she thought. At least he wasn't causing a scene. He had every right. Alan didn't take his eyes off of her and the silence seemed to stretch forever.

Mr. Matthews did not seem to notice the strain and tension in the air between them or if he did, he assumed it was over the lawsuit. Some reporter he would make, thought Gina irreverently. He was just moving to take his place behind his desk when Alan spoke again in a calm controlled voice.

"May I speak to Miss Habersham alone please, Matthews?" It sounded like more of a demand than a question to Gina's frightened ears. She didn't want to be alone with him!

Mr. Matthews rose back up out of his chair and shifted nervously. "Of course, I'll just go get some coffee and pretend to be busy. Would you care for a cup Mr. Sullivan?" It was obvious Mr. Matthews was not used to people practically throwing him out of his own office. This was a new one for him.

"No thank you." Alan was abrupt. He made no attempt to sit back down either so neither did Gina.

"Gina?" Mr. Matthews asked her too, still smiling pleasantly. Gina could only wave him away and flash him with her pinned on smile. Her knees were practically knocking together by then.

When the door finally closed and they were alone together, Gina trembled violently. Alan continued to stare at her with those piercing condemning eyes. He was obviously striving to control his anger, which he was but Gina felt a moment of quickening fear. He was clenching his fists so hard they were white. Gina tried to find the words she knew she must say, words that would sound so lame to an angry man.

"Alan...I can explain." Her voice shook with barely controlled emotion. She knew she had hurt him and made him angry.

"Save it." He snapped. "You've already made a big enough damn fool of me." His eyes raked over her mercilessly.

"I didn't mean to." She had to make him understand. She might only get his one chance.

"Just what did you intend on doing? What is it you have up your sleeve? Another article? I am surprised you haven't run it already." His voice was as cold as steel; it matched his eyes.

Gina swallowed hard and tried again. "I can explain Alan, if you'll just let me." She pleaded desperately, reaching out a hand to lay it on his arm.

Alan pulled away from her touch as if it disgusted him.

"What a nice set up! Did you have to plan a second article? Didn't the first one cut me up enough?" Alan's face contorted with rage.

Gina knew she wasn't going to get through to him when he was like this. Alan reached across the desk and smashed out his half smoked cigarette.

"The way we met really was an accident. I didn't know you would be there." There was so much to say. Where did she start?

"You are a reporter. I imagine it wouldn't be that hard to find out anything you wanted to know." His tone was scathing.

"I couldn't control the weather." Gina snapped. "I suppose I had something to do with that too." She was getting angry herself.

"No but I'm sure you knew how to take advantage of a situation once it was opened up to you." Alan glared at her. "After all aren't you the one that digs up her own stories and makes one where there is not one?"

Why wouldn't he just listen?

"You aren't going to believe me right now, you're upset and..."

He interrupted her. "You are darn right, I'm upset. Was nothing between us real? Is that all I was to you, a story? If what you say is the truth why couldn't you tell me about it when you knew who I was."

"I couldn't." Gina bowed her head in shame. "I was scared of you." How could she tell him she didn't want to alienate him? He wasn't going to believe that for sure.

"Scared of me? What have I ever done to make you scared of me? I may have threatened you with a sound thrashing but I never once actually confronted you." Alan paused and watched her a minute. Then he shook his head as if to clear it. "I won't fall for that little girl lost look anymore so don't try it on me. You should have been an actress."

"Little girl lost?" Gina repeated him incredulously. What was he calling her now? Did he think she was playing for sympathy?

"When is this big story coming out? I'd like to know so I can have my lawyers ready."

He looked cocky and arrogant.

"Look who is hiding behind a barrage of high falootin lawyers?" Gina knew instantly it was the wrong thing to say. She should have denied that there was a story.

There wasn't one but he didn't know that. He had every reason to think the worst of her.

"I'm sorry, name calling won't help. There is no story Alan."

"I'll bet." His eyes showed that he clearly did not believe her. Why should he, every time he turned around she was messing up something else in his life.

Gina just stared at him not knowing what else to say

Alan returned her stare. "I'll decide what I'm going to do about you latter." Alan reached in his suit pocket and pulled out a card. He shoved it in her hand. "This is my address. I expect you to be there Gina. Do you hear me? Be there if you know what is good for you."

"But why? I've told you the truth." Gina pleaded. "There is no story."

"Be there at seven." Alan told her. "I've got to have time to think." Alan paused a minute staring hard at her and then turned on his heel and heatedly strolled from the room.

Gina dropped into the nearest chair and blindly stared at the card in her hand. Now he knew. He hadn't really given her a chance to explain though. How was she going to get out of this pickle she was in now? What could she say to him and why had it hurt her so badly to have him find out? Because, she thought, he thinks I'm a lying conniving witch, that's why.

Carrie came busting in the door a moment latter. "Well, did you find out who he is?" She asked excitedly.

Gina wondered if shed been sitting on pins and needles for the answer.

"He seems so nice, he smiled at me on the way out. Who is he?" She wailed at Gina's lack of response. "Don't hold out on me now."

"His name is Alan Sullivan, I'm sure you've heard of him." Carries eyes grew wide in astonishment.

"That's Alan Sullivan, that good looking man?" Then she drew in a quick breath.

"The same one you had so much trouble with?"

"The same one." Gina answered her dejectedly. Trouble was getting to be her middle name. She might as well change it legally.

"What did he want?" Breathed Carrie excitedly with a wicked glint in her eyes, Gina knew that look; Alan wouldn't be safe around here again. Carrie would pursue him to the ends of the earth. Gina didn't want to go into the whole story with Carrie; she was still trying to shuffle through the bits of information in her own brain. Why had Alan come to Gina Habersham for help? "He wants some help in locating a missing person, some girl. I'm supposed to see him about it tonight."

"Lucky dog you." Carrie told her then added. "Who would be fool enough to run from a man like that? I'd give my eye teeth to have a man like him."

"Only a person that had something to hide. She answered her dejectedly. What would Alan do if she sent the panting Carrie in her place tonight instead of herself? He'd probably come looking for her with twice the ammunition and anger.

"Do you two girls mind if I have my office back." Mister Matthews chased them out of his office. He was still smiling. That was the only bright spot in Gina's day.

Alan spent the remainder of the day in his penthouse, thinking, pacing and rethinking. He knew he wouldn't be able to work even if he had to; he was too upset. A myriad of emotions had him in its grip. He was relieved to see her again safe and sound, he admitted to himself that he had been quite worried over her safety since he couldn't locate her.

He was dumbfounded that his Gina was that Gina, the cause of most of his problems at present. He felt hurt and betrayed that she hadn't told him the truth. He was torn between forgiving her and getting even with her.

Alan wondered what she was up to; she'd already had plenty of time if she were going to release a story on him. So what was it?

Most of all Alan realized that he wanted her anyway, despite who she was. She was different and caring in spite of her lying. Even if she didn't know it, she was attracted to him.

Mrs. Wells, his housekeeper came in about that time using her key and looked at Alan sitting at the bar. He knew she wasn't used to seeing him home during the day unless he was deathly ill.

"What brings you home at this hour?" The tiny white haired lady came straight to the point.

She was well into her fifties and still managed to keep the figure of a thirty year old. She was in her own stern way like a mother to Alan. He admitted that she was probably the only person in the world who could boss him around. She was always complaining about how he ate or didn't eat. Mrs. Wells could look at a room and tell exactly what went on in it, how many were there, and how long they stayed. She would

fix him food and leave it in the refrigerator, it wasn't a part of her job but she did it anyway.

"I have a lot of things on my mind and thought I could sort it out better here."

Alan told her as she drug out the vacuum cleaner and her cleaners.

"You didn't get some girl pregnant did you? " She looked at him with a scowl on her face.

Alan nearly choked on his drink.

"And now she wants you to do the honorable thing and marry her?"

"No," he laughed. "It is nothing like that."

"Well that's good, ain't no way to start a marriage." She sniffed at him. "Wouldn't surprise me none to find that out, lands sake, that redhead and you have been tumbling enough."

Alan groaned, she probably knew when, how often and how good it was.

"How did you know she has red hair?" He asked curiously. She was right; Brenda had red hair, even if he hadn't seen her in several weeks. He hadn't been able to think of anyone except Gina.

"I change the bed sheets remember. Besides they cling to your suits too. Hair is mighty revealing." She frowned at him. "Aren't you going to fix me one of those drinks now that I'm here? Wouldn't want to see you drink alone." She sauntered over to the bar.

"By all means." Alan busied himself. He didn't mind her familiarity. She had always been like this. "So what is bothering you then if it ain't a girl?" She asked.

Alan didn't mind talking to her, she wasn't a blabbermouth and she'd saved him more than once from gossipmongers.

"It is a girl." Alan told her briefly how he had come to know Gina and what their past relationship entailed. Mrs. Wells listened attentively.

"So what's the problem?" She asked when at last he stopped talking.

"Did you ever think that she might have good cause to lie to you?"

" I try to keep that in mind. She doesn't know me that well, even after the time we spent together. I don't know how to proceed with her. I don't want to lose her again and she's so shy sometimes. I can't explain it, it's just that I feel things for Gina that I've never felt before."

"It will come to you," she assured him. "I think what you need to do is pursue this girl all out. Sweep her off of her ever-loving feet. Don't even give her time to take a breath. Besides you aren't a spring chicken anymore." She threw in for good measure.

"It sounds so simple." Alan laughed knowing it wasn't. Nothing could be simple where Gina was concerned. "How did you and Mike meet?" Mike was her husband of twenty years and together they had four sons. It was something he envied them for.

Mrs. Wells spent the next hour telling him how she met her husband, how they didn't even like each other at first and how Mike pursued her to the bitter end. She told him that the secret of their romance was because Mike never gave up on her and because of his persistence. He practically forced her to marry him.

Alan thanked her for sharing with him. Mrs. Wells began cleaning and left him to his own thoughts

If he wanted Gina, why shouldn't he have her? What better way to get even with a gold digging female reporter than to domesticate her? He would reap the benefits wouldn't he?

Alan convinced himself that she must indeed have a story on him and was only waiting to spring it on him. He also convinced himself that their meeting by accident couldn't have been a coincidence. That she must have followed him to Connecticut, scheming and plotting how she could put her plan into action. Perhaps that was part of her ploy, to make him fall for her and make a fool out of himself. She'd definitely done that.

Alan knew how to make her keep her mouth shut though, unless she wanted to look like a fool herself. He hesitated only momentarily before he put his plan into action. Alan picked up the phone to put his half-baked scheme into the works.

He waited, it was five after seven now, he was going to wait ten more minutes and if she weren't here by then he would go and get her. He had a pretty good idea where she was now; private detectives were so accommodating. He tensed and sat down his drink when he heard the light tap at the door. Why didn't she just ring the buzzer like everyone else?

Alan's cool resolve almost melted when he saw Gina's paleness and stiff wide-eyed expression.

"Come on in." Alan spoke when she hesitated to cross the threshold. Did she think he was going to eat her alive? Probably.

"I...ah...came like you asked Alan. I really do want to explain to you." Alan surveyed the navy blue pea coat covering her slight shoulders. He expected something nearer to a fur. Surely someone that stirred up their own stories could afford one. Then it hit him, what if she was expecting him to bribe her to hold back the story? He didn't think so but he would wait and see what she said.

When they were both seated across from one another on his leather pit group Alan watched her nervously twist her hands together.

"There is no need to explain Gina, I think I've got it all worked out. There won't be a story here for you though." Alan spoke harshly, deliberately, to watch her squirm.

"I wasn't after a story, we met by accident I swear it! I didn't have any idea who you were when I took you into my house, and I certainly didn't hit you and kill your horse on purpose."

Alan could almost believe her. He baited her again; he had it all planned out in his head. He couldn't slip up now. "Do you honestly expect me to believe anything you say? You forget I've learned how good you can lie."

"I wasn't lying, I was just trying to tell you how it came to pass. Once I found out who you were I was only trying to protect myself." Her wide blue-green eyes nearly sunk his intentions. He couldn't be swayed now.

"Sure," Alan scoffed. "Remember the address you gave me?"

Gina shook her head.

"A little old lady lived there and I nearly scared her out of her wits. She didn't like the idea of a stranger giving out her address, much less one showing up at her door."

He watched the expression of panic cross her face. What bothered her? The lie or the fact that he had scared a little old lady because of her? He found he wanted to gather her up in his arms so strong was her appeal.

"Why not? It's the truth, us meeting like we did. I'm sorry about the address it was just that..." She swallowed hard. "I realized that there could be no future for us."

No future? That is what she thought. Alan was going to see to it that he was her future. And what a delightful little future it would be.

"You'll be glad to know that I've already decided what I'm going to do about you." He paused to let it sink in.

Gina scooted back further in her chair.

She must expect the worst, he thought. "Would you care for a drink first?" Alan offered aware that he wasn't being his most hospitable since he was on a quest. "You can take your coat off and stay a while."

She pulled the coat together nervously.

"No thank you to either." She replied.

He knew she was poised for flight.

"What...what do you mean you've decided? There is nothing for you to decide. I came to tell you the truth and that's it." She brushed the hair out of her eyes. "I don't have much money left if that's what you mean, you and your lawyers just about cleaned me out the last time." Was that real fear in her voice?

"I'm not interested in your money Gina." He told her calmly.

"I did try to offer to pay for any damages if you'll remember."

"I remember." Alan took a swig of his drink. He needed it.

"Then what is it? I swear to you Alan that I had no intention of writing another story on you either; I learned my lesson the first time. Oh I'll admit I thought about it for a while when I first learned who you were just to get even, but I didn't."

She thought of it? That one statement bothered Alan enormously.

"And now you expect me to believe that you changed your mind, right? I'm afraid I don't believe that anymore than your profession that we met strictly by accident. Sorry, you'll have to come up with something a little better than that."

Alan paused looking at the petite form of the determined woman sitting across from him, not quite trusting her but wanting to. It still sounded too incredible to him. Yes, he decided he would go through with his plan. He wanted her too badly not to, he didn't want to risk losing her again. She was the kind of person that could find a million reasons why they shouldn't be together. If it worked for Mike, then it would work for him too. She would become Mrs. Alan Sullivan.

Gina had hardly met his eyes all night so far and now he was going to make her take notice of him. He knew he really couldn't force her hand like this. If she didn't want to marry him there was no way he could force her but...maybe she wouldn't notice how easy it would be to get out of it until it was too late. Perhaps she wouldn't want out of it.

"I have decided that you're going to marry me Gina." Her head jerked up and her eyes grew wide. "I won't be made a fool of again. This way I can ensure your silence. " He held his breath, waiting for her reaction.

"What?" She spit out the word.

Gina was afraid to utter anything else.

Alan shrugged; at least he had her whole attention. "You heard me the first time."

Alan lowered his voice, he wasn't sure he could even say it again.

Gina sprung to her feet. "Is this some sort of a weird joke? I'd never marry you. I don't even know you." He watched as she started pacing the floor in front of the pit group, the same area he himself had been pacing before. She looked like a caged tiny wild thing. "You can't be serious."

"I'm quite serious." Alan warned her.

Gina looked at him long and hard, she was about to laugh, and was waiting to see if it was a joke or something.

Alan frowned at her to show her he was very serious. He knew this came out of the blue at her and she wasn't expecting it.

"You aren't just pulling my leg?" She asked quietly.

Alan shook his head no. She didn't know how serious he was. "You will marry me Gina, or... not only am I going to take you to court over the accident. Which like me, no one will believe was an accident, but I will thoroughly enjoy putting that rag you work for out of business so fast your head will spin. I think I can safely say that if I do you will never have the opportunity to write again under any name."

The room was deathly silent. She didn't move. Alan waited tensely.

"But...but that's inhuman and barbaric. You wouldn't do that and put a lot of people out of work would you? I haven't written anything further on you." She moved

closer to him. "And it was an accident." Gina wailed at him. Her face flushed red with anger. "I haven't done anything wrong. Why won't you believe me?"

They stood eyeing one another in a stand off. Alan calm and determined and Gina nervous and angry. Alan thought she looked even more beautiful when she was angry. It only strengthened his desire to have her.

"Then why didn't you tell me your real name Gina? It was because you knew I would recognize it, wasn't it?" He watched as she visibly tried to calm herself. Alan needed a drink to steady his faltering nerves. He mixed himself another.

"Gina Holt is my real name, I didn't lie to you about that.

Just since I started writing for the gazette did I begin to use Habersham. I didn't tell you Alan because I knew you would think exactly what you're thinking now, that I trapped you."

"How convenient." He chided, "you'll forgive me if I don't fall for that one. Look, I'm tired of playing games with you. I've told you what I expect and furthermore..."

"You can't really expect me to... to just up and marry you. I mean I don't even..." Her voice gave out helplessly.

"Oh, but I can and I do." Alan moved over closer to her and tried to put his arm around her. She just backed away. "You know Gina, the performance you gave me at the farmhouse had me so smitten that I even came back and told all of my friends about you. My Cinderella as Mr. Matthews puts it. I won't look the fool for you again." He hoped he sounded convincing, she wasn't finding this easy to accept, he could see that much.

"But Alan I can't." Gina protested still, but he could tell that anger no longer drove her, curiosity did. "You will Gina, now I've already given you a choice to make, you can sleep on it and let me know your decision in the morning. Don't try running off, it won't work." Alan warned her solemnly. He worried that she would just take off.

"I suppose you're having me watched." Gina pouted at him. He could tell she didn't like him having the upper hand.

"Figure it out for yourself, you're the ace reporter." He wasn't having her watched but she didn't know that. He'd only used a detective to find out where she lived, since she wasn't listed in the phone book and couldn't be trusted to tell him the truth. What she didn't know wouldn't screw up his plans. If this was the only way to have her, then so be it.

"I think I want to go home now, it has been a long day." Gina moved towards the door. Alan didn't stop her; it suddenly felt like a long day to him too.

"I will walk you out to your car and see you off." Alan held on tightly to her arm, she barely reached his shoulders. He escorted her out of the building. When he saw her dirty green compact car, he nearly laughed. He expected something bigger and newer. He watched her puzzled face as she unlocked the door. She was studying him, no doubt to see if he was serious or not about his threats.

Alan would have much rather kept her there or gone with her, yet he knew he couldn't push her too hard, too fast. He waited until her car was out of sight before he returned to the penthouse.

Alan noticed that the doorman gave him an inquisitive look as he walked by. Alan remembered all of the girls that had passed that door to see him; Gina wasn't anything like them at all. "My fiancé." Alan answered the unspoken question of the man he had never once even spoken to beyond a polite hello.

His mouth dropped open. Alan smiled to himself and went on inside the glass and chrome structure with his eyes following after him. Everyone would probably do that.

Alan lay in his lonely massive bed, latter that night. He had one arm behind his head smoking a cigarette and contemplated the evening. He couldn't get the blonde headed Gina out of his mind. What would her answer be? He knew that even if she didn't

agree to marry him he wouldn't carry through with his threats. He wouldn't give up trying to see her either, one way or another she was going to be his. There was something about her that made him feel alive whenever he was around her. He'd noticed it right away that morning he woke up to find her wrapped tightly around him like a blanket. It felt right, she felt right. Gina even had a way of making him want to become actively involved in the human race again. He realized that he hardly knew anything about her though. Alan remembered the false name and address she had given him to trick him. He had a trick of his own to play on her; the only difference was that she would realize that he was serious.

Alan smiled wickedly to himself and rolled over and put out his cigarette, anxious to have her learn of the rude plot that she would have to face in the morning.

The bedside clock showed that it was three fifteen when the phone rang and woke him. Alan knew who it would be, Brenda.

She'd been calling him every night for the last several weeks. He didn't want to see her again; she really cared nothing for him only the nice trinkets he could buy her. Once again Alan patiently explained to her that there could be no future for them. Alan regretted ever having had anything to do with her at all.

She was a pushy arrogant lady and thrilled to playing the possessive lover to the maximum. He was sick to death of it.

After breakfast, Alan showered and shaved readying himself for another day at the office, only this one would be different and he knew that. He actually hummed to himself while he read the morning paper.

The office was bristling with the usual morning activities. Everyone he saw stopped to congratulate him; he registered the shock in their eyes. Secretly he wondered how Gina was taking her surprise. Alan knew it was a dirty trick to play on her. Underhanded or not it would net the right results. She couldn't get out of it now and save face. He strolled into his window-lined office and picked up the phone. He couldn't keep

from smiling. He only wished he could see her pretty face, Alan calmed his voice for the confrontation. She was in for the shock of her life.

CHAPTER SIX

Gina sat at her small desk staring wildly at the small article on the front page of the gazette. She had taken refuge in her cubicle not daring to go out, torn between anger and murder. Just who did that man think he was, pulling something like this on her? She read it over again not believing her own eyes.

Mr. Alan Sullivan announces his pending marriage to Miss. Gina Holt, otherwise known to us at the Gazette as Gina Habersham. Mr. Sullivan told editor Mr. Carl Matthews that it was a storybook romance. That in fact Miss Habersham had saved his life and he was captivated ever since. Congratulations Alan and Gina, your friends at the Gazette.

Gina was still simmering with rage when the phone rang and she snapped her hello into the receiver.

"Hello Angel face, I'm calling to..." She recognized the deep male voice instantly. How could he sound so pleasant? What was he up to now? If she only had her hands around his neck right that moment.

"You..." she accused. "You..." She knew she wanted to call him something. She stood up abruptly bracing herself for the battle that was about to ensue. If he thought he could get away with this, then he had another thought coming. She wanted to scream.

"I know. I love you too." Alan interrupted smoothly.

Those three words stopped all coherent thought for a moment. Even said in jest they took her breath away.

"I'm calling to make sure you'll keep yourself free for lunch at one." Her brain started functioning again on impulse power. If he thought for one minute... You've got some nerve!" She shot back at him upset that he seemed so calm and unruffled. "Lunch?"

Forget it, I'm not going to see you, not after what you've done." Gina ranted at him hardly taking a breath; she had so much to say to him. "If you think that you can manipulate me this way..."

"Gina, calm down honey." Alan tried to sooth her but Gina wouldn't be soothed.

"Remember our bargain."

That last sentence nearly threw her. Did he actually think he could get away with this?

"I won't calm down." Gina hollered at him. "It was your bargain, not mine, I had nothing to do with it. I don't make deals with the devil!" She ground her teeth together getting ready for the brunt of his anger.

"I'm not going through with this ridiculous charade of yours." Gina was frustrated. She wished she could see his face to really see how he was taking this or if his notice in the paper was just a joke or something. Maybe he just did it to get even with her and then embarrass her when he backed out of the whole thing.

"I knew that, that's why I took out a little insurance of my own. I take it then that you've read the morning paper." He didn't wait for an answer. "I only beat you to the punch darling."

"What do you mean you only beat me to the punch?" She queried warily.

"You were going to do an article on me, I just got ahead of you with one of my own."

"Now, just listen here Alan Sullivan I want you to have a retraction printed immediately."

"Not on your life Gina." Alan quipped. "Any way, I'll pick you up at one. Bye."

"Gina spluttered helplessly for a minute before she hung up the phone. She could just imagine him sitting behind a big desk laughing his head off at her expense. Gina decided right then and there that she would see Alan at lunch; she would even be waiting

at the door for him. She would tell him exactly what he could do with his whole absurd idea and tell him where he could put it.

The problem was, as hard as it was for her to admit it to herself, she wanted to catch another glimpse at that handsome impossible to understand man!

As the day wore on Gina found that she wasn't even truly annoyed at all the incoming calls from her shocked friends. It was almost worth it just to see the beautiful Carrie staring at her. Gina knew she was comparing the two of them and wondering what Gina had that she didn't, in order to snag a man like Alan Sullivan.

Everyone, including Mr. Matthews couldn't get over how she managed to capture one of New York City's most eligible and sought after bachelors. If they only knew, she thought. If they only knew how opposite it was.

Gina had half way decided that Alan was crazy the night before. Today, she was sure about it, he was crazy, no, probably deranged.

Gina stood nervously by the office building side entrance on the main floor. She still wasn't sure she wasn't going to run away when she saw him. Her indecision was great. She wanted to see him and yet in a way, he frightened her.

Gina didn't want Alan coming up to the fifth floor to get her; there was something too possessive about that. When she did see him, it nearly took her breath away and all of her well intentional ideas of running out the side door went up in smoke.

Alan was wearing a slate blue three-piece suit with a light blue shirt and tie. The suit was well tailored to his muscular body. She watched as he paused momentarily just inside the door and ran his fingers through his dark brown hair to straighten the wind blown strands without conceit before moving towards the elevator doors. Even in the crowded lobby his presence demanded attention. She noticed that a lot of the women went out of their way to get a look at him, yet he didn't seem to take notice.

Gina hesitantly made her way over to where he was standing with his back to her.

Before she even spoke his name, he knew she was there.

"Hello Angel face." He turned to meet her stunned expression. All of her resolve to be angry with him left in a single moment.

"B...but how did you know I was here?" Gina had to ask, her natural curiosity over rode everything else. She knew that he hadn't seen her so how did he know that she was behind him?

Alan watched her with smiling green eyes. "Your perfume precedes you of course." Alan laughed. "I notice it because its very unusual, very much like you. Are you ready to go? I've got reservations at a club not far from here." Alan took her hand and led her outside to a waiting car. He was driving a Mercedes. By the time she realized what was going on they were already seated in the car. How did he always manage to send her senses soaring and get her in such a confused state?

"Alan, I think we need to talk." Her voice sounded breathless even to her own ears."

He looked at her only once.

"I know." He pulled the car away from the curb and into the heavy traffic and concentrated on his driving.

Gina sat there huddling against the door, impatiently waiting for him to say some thing. Anything!

After a few minutes when it was obvious that he wasn't going to speak, Gina decided to take initiative and break the long silence. There was no way for her to tell what he was thinking.

"It's my own." Gina whispered into the silence of the opulent car. Even his car resembled his personality. It was powerful and sleek with the defiant aura of class.

"What?" Alan turned his puzzled face to look at her.

"It is my own blend. My perfume." She chatted on unaware of his complete surprise at now being chewed out. "Once I even thought about getting it manufactured but I never could think of a name to call it."

Without even a pause Alan answered her. "How about Angels breathe?" That would be a good name for it."

Gina thought he was kidding and making fun of the nickname he had saddled her with. "Real cute." She rebounded snippily.

"If an angel breathed on you wouldn't you expect the scent to be sweet and mysterious?" He paused.

"It makes sense if you think about it." He told her pleasantly. "Personally I think if you share your personal scent with others then it wouldn't be the same, would it? It would become just another market brand instead of your own defining scent. How many women do you know that have their own scent?"

Gina thought about what he said without turning to look at him. He was right of course, that had always been her real argument anyway but she wouldn't tell him that.

"It fits you and you did a wonderful job with that perfume by the way."

Gina was inordinately pleased with his compliment.

All through their intimate lunch Alan was very attentive and considerate. Gina couldn't help but notice that most of the women present in the dining area looked lingeringly in Alan's direction. They deliberately tried to catch his attention yet Alan seemed to remain oblivious to everything except her. Gina wondered if women were continually throwing themselves at him like that.

She felt a slight stab of jealousy when one lady brushed past the table provocatively rubbing Alan's arm to get his attention. She kept telling herself that this man didn't mean a thing to her.

It didn't do any good. She was drawn to him too much herself, just like the other women who wanted him.

Determinedly she tried to get down to the point of her coming out to lunch with him in the first place. The meal was finished there was no use in putting it off any longer. Alan didn't seem in a hurry to discuss things.

"Alan, can we talk now?" She waited to watch his response. He wasn't ruffled. His face didn't give away any of his emotions. "I thought we had been but by all means, do all the talking you want Gina." Alan told her briskly.

"I'm not going to change my mind though if that's what your after. If you want to spoil a perfectly nice lunch then go ahead, get it over with for all the good it is going to do."

She stared at him and frowned, the least he could do was hear her out first. Was he really made of stone? Perhaps reasoning would work. "We both know that this isn't going to work." Gina told him frankly. "There is no reason to go on with this..."

Alan cut her off abruptly.

So much for logical reasoning. He had his own reasons.

"There is every reason for me." Alan told her coldly. "I have been wanting to take a wife for a long time. You will do just as good as any; probably better since I will know where I stand with you. With the others I would always wonder when they would turn off the charm after they got what they wanted.

She stared at him dumbfounded.

"It doesn't matter to me Gina, you can decide which way you want it, marriage to me with all of the benefits or we can go through the courts again and battle it out." Alan sat back in his chair and finished off the last of the wine in his glass before pouring another. "But there are all the people to think about at the Gazette. Their jobs could very well depend on your answer."

The ball was now in her court. Gina looked across at him and realized his face gave away nothing. It was unnerving not to be able to read him, so to speak.

"I really can't marry you Alan and I just can't believe that you would use your pull to have the Gazette closed down, although I can easily believe you will take me to court." She paused hoping that he would deny either of her statements. When he didn't say a thing she began to wonder, maybe he really would get his kicks by destroying the Gazette. She didn't know and that was the worst part.

Quickly she decided to change her tactics. "Doesn't it bother you that I have my own life to live? I find it hard to believe that you of all people would have a problem in finding a wife, that you would stoop to blackmailing me!"

He finally showed some spark of emotion.

"Blackmail?" He raised an eyebrow. "I would hardly call it that." He was nearly laughing out loud at her. Gina knew she wasn't wrong.

"Just what would you call it then?" She snapped unnerved by his calm demeanor. Couldn't anything ruffle his self-assurance?

"Just a little self protection by way of friendly persuasion."

He was literally impossible.

"I imagine I could find a wife else where easily enough."

Gina didn't doubt it for a minute either.

"However I already have my mind set on you, and even you must admit that we've got something going on in that department."

"Oh and just what is that?" She knew it was a mistake to ask him that the minute the question was out.

"You melt in my arms every time I just hold you and you shiver ever so delightfully when I touch you. I can't believe you even asked me that question." Alan

laughed at her derisively. He was enjoying himself. "Your acting was superb but no one could have faked a response like I got from you."

Gina felt herself starting to blush at the truth of his statement and fought against it. "I am not going to marry you."

"Are you saying then that you would rather ignore what will happen to your editor and paper, not to mention yourself?"

"You wouldn't." Gina was feeling trapped again and she was confused. Would Alan really go through with this strange alliance? Would he really hurt so many other innocent people?

Her attraction to him and their sexual chemistry was causing her to lose sight of giving him the brush off. His eyes that raked boldly over her body didn't help matters either. She already knew what it was like to be held in his arms and found herself longing for his touch. She fought to stay with what was being discussed.

"Wouldn't I? Think about it Gina, it isn't like we haven't had any differences before." Gina bit her lower lip nervously "I've told you how I feel and I plan to see it through to the end one way or the other."

"And if I do agree?" Gina forced the unwilling words to pass her lips. She had to know every angle.

"Then I plan to be married and in the blissful state of matrimony by next Friday evening." He told her calmly, never taking his inscrutable eyes off of her.

Momentarily subdued Gina just sat there staring at him. Next Friday? That was so close. Would she really have to go through with this? Bitterly she realized that Alan was right, no one would believe her story that it was just an accident and not some elaborate set up.

Of all the people in the world to run down in the middle of a blizzard, why did it have to be him? Would he really go through with his threats? She didn't know and she

didn't know if she had the courage to find out either. Yet something else exciting was fighting for control, what would it be like to be married to a man like Alan Sullivan. She couldn't understand the confused feelings she felt for him. They over rode everything else.

"Well?" Alan broke her long silence. Gina just shrugged her shoulders. What could she say to get him to change his mind?

"I take it you are starting to accept the idea at least. "

"What else can I do?" Gina asked him grudgingly. "You seem to hold all of the cards at the present time."

Gina finished her own wine and looked at him defiantly. "The thing that really gets me is that I'm innocent and I can't even prove it."

"Ah don't look so glum." Alan reached across the table and took her hand with his own. "After all, I'm a wealthy man and there are some who tell me that I'm not so bad to look at."

When this failed to net a laugh like Alan wanted he tried again. "Personally I think I'm letting you off easy considering the circumstances." She needed something to keep a wedge between them temporarily and he was willing to play the bad guy for her.

He looked smug and pleased and it only made Gina madder than she already was. He already had a big enough head as far as Gina was concerned. She wasn't going to agree with him and add to it. Her idea of blissful matrimony might just surprise him.

"Spare me." Gina snapped. The arrogance of the man nearly appalled her. "Look Alan, I don't love you, doesn't that matter to you? I'm not even sure if I like you anymore. You'll have to admit that you are not the same man that spent a few days with me. Doesn't it bother you to know what I think about you?"

"Oh I assure you that I'm the same man and no I don't particularly care what you think of me now. I know I can get you to change your mind in time." Gina watched as a

bleak look came over his handsome face. "As for you not loving me, it hasn't got anything to do with anything anyway."

Gina looked at him abruptly. Was that sadness and hurt she heard in his voice? Despair?

"I 'm not getting any younger you know. I've got to start a family sooner or latter. You're young and healthy. It might as well be with you."

Was he serious? Family? As in children?

He went on. "Plus you have to admit we have something special going in that area, and I for one can hardly wait to consummate that something."

Stunned into silence Gina wished she could sink in to the floor out of sight. Alan was enjoying her embarrassment; he was doing it on purpose, the rotten, rotten man.

Latter back at work Gina could hardly bring herself to even think about marriage. Marriage without love would be a hideous way to live in her opinion. Gina had always imagined herself to be madly in love with the man she married and vice versa, not to be coerced into it by a virtual stranger. Her and Alan, she shook her head in disbelief. She kept telling her that if she ignored the whole thing that it would go away. What really frightened her was that she wasn't sure she wanted it to go away. Did she want Alan to leave her alone? The feelings she had for Alan were growing stronger and stronger.

Gina tried to imagine her and Alan as parents. It didn't seem so far fetched. She could even imagine herself as a mother. She liked children and had always planned on having some someday. When the time was right. Could she go through with this and marry Alan? The more she thought of him the more she longed to see him again, to hear from him, to be loved by him.

Carrie cornered her late that same day, she was curious about the marriage announcement.

“That sure was fast work Gina. I didn't know that you even knew Alan Sullivan personally.” Carrie eyed her suspiciously. “I thought you just met him the other day.”

“We did just met recently only it was a few weeks ago.” Gina evaded.

"Must have been a whirlwind romance."

"More like bowled over by a blizzard." Gina remarked wryly.

“What’s your secret Gina? I mean; men like Alan Sullivan don't grow on trees you know." Carrie smoothed her hair into place and pulled out her compact to powder her face. Why after all this time did Gina feel like they were enemies instead of friends?

Did Carrie view her as the competition now? It was true the men working at the Gazette viewed her in a new light since they found out about Alan.

"No secret. “ Gina turned away from her. "I just don't hand out free samples.” It was something Carrie needed to hear. Over her shoulder she could see Carrie actually thinking about it seriously.

By the next evening when Gina hadn't heard a thing from Alan in all that time she decided that her idea of ignoring the whole thing was going to work. When she stepped out into the cold crisp evening air after work she knew it hadn't.

She ignored the tiny surge she felt at seeing Alan. He was standing by his black Mercedes waiting on her. She couldn't help but notice that he had the gall to be waiting in a no parking or standing zone. He was leaning against the car and smiled when he saw her. Alan was dressed in a tan shirt and tight brown slacks; he wasn't even wearing a jacket.

Gina was instantly suspicious of him; she knew he was there to see her. Her walls went up accordingly.

"What's the matter Angel face? Did you think I forgot or some thing?" He walked over and took her elbow. "I didn't."

He leaned down and kissed her affectionately on the cheek. "I could never forget you."

Alan ushered her in to the warm car and strolled around to the other side. He wasn't aware that she watched him shake his head in amusement and laugh in the rear view mirror. Gina felt her anger rising again. This was just a big game to him and once again she wondered how far he would go. Soon he would surely tire of toying with her and leave her alone.

Once he was seated behind the wheel he spoke again, his face was a calm sterile mask. "We've got a lot to do tonight." He explained casually.

Just being around him made her nervous. "I really need to be getting home." Gina lied. She didn't but she would be darned if he would be allowed to start running her life for her.

"Why?" He asked her simply giving her an 'I know what you're up to' look. It wasn't going to work.

She ignored his question. "And I really shouldn't leave my car here."

He'd already pulled out in to traffic. Alan laughed.

He looked so handsome.

"It won't work Gina, I know that you commute." How did he know that? Okay so he had the upper hand for the moment. She would find another way out, perhaps, if she pretended not to take him seriously.

"This is just another part of this elaborate joke isn't it?"

"Gina, you will find out soon enough that I've never been more serious in my life. Actually I've been out all day looking for just the right stuff."

"What stuff?" She asked him trying to ignore the sexual awareness she felt in his presence. The fact was he was hardly out of her mind at all anymore.

"What are you up to now?" Gina didn't think she liked the sounds of this. She added as an after thought. "I don't think I like this game anymore." She pouted at him. The man was completely impossible and he knew it.

Alan reached across the seat and pulled her close to him.

"You don't have to sit way over there you know. I don't bite."

"Don't you?" Gina looked at him as he put his arm around her. It felt good, even if she didn't want to admit it.

"Not hardly," he laughed heartily. "I'll prove it to you, I've got something special planned for you tonight."

"I'm not really dressed to be going anywhere. " She looked down at her brown wool skirt and matching blazer. "Couldn't you just take me home?" It was pleading on deaf ears.

"You look just fine to me as far as I'm concerned, you always do." Alan traced a lazy circle on her shoulder with his fingers, holding her closer.

He wasn't going to let her out of it, she could tell. So Gina leaned back and settled in the crook of his arm to relax.

They hadn't gone far when Alan pulled into a parking lot. He allowed the attendant to take the car and he came around and opened the door for her.

Gina hesitated before getting out. "We can walk the rest of the way. It's not far."

He still wasn't wearing a jacket and Gina wondered how he could stand the cold, she was shivering. He slipped his strong arm over her shoulder and kissed her lightly on the forehead. She relished his aftershave that mixed with his own chemistry for a most masculine scent that was all his own.

They walked together and Alan asked her how her day went. Then he told her a little of how his own day went. He only worked the morning hours. He told her that was a first for him in a long, long time. She already knew he was a workaholic. She'd found that out when she researched him for the article and very little else about his personal life.

Gina hesitated when Alan pulled open the door to a well-known jewelry establishment. "Come on, I told you it was a surprise." His arm tightened on her shoulder. Gina was no longer sure that Alan was kidding. Why was he bringing her here? A small French accented man approached them immediately. He was expecting them.

"Ah Mr. Sullivan, all of the arrangements have been made and we only now await the young ladies choices."

He introduced himself to her and Gina only retained the information that his name was Mr. Cardone; the rest was a blur to her. He happily showed them to some comfortable chairs, and asked Alan what he would like to see first.

More and more, the joke was on her.

"Let's start with the rings." Alan told him. He watched her after the jubilant man left showing no expression on his face.

Was he watching for her reaction? She couldn't figure him out. "You're really serious aren't you Alan." It was a statement more than a question. She waited for his conformation.

"Is it just now sinking into that tight little head of yours?" Alan reached for her hand that she was nervously twisting and gave it a firm squeeze as if to emphasize his seriousness. She jumped. "I would never do anything to hurt you physically Gina."

"But..." Gina looked at him helplessly.

His eyes sparkled coldly. "But nothing, I intend to go through with this and further more I intend to see that you do too. Now, here comes Cardone, please do try and cooperate will you?"

Gina wondered what he would do if she didn't cooperate or if she got up and walked out of there.

"Don't even think about it." Alan warned.

How did he know what she was thinking?

Stiffly, rebelliously Gina sat there as one after one Mr. Cardone showed her the most exquisite wedding sets, the cost of which she couldn't even begin to guess. Alan was handling a few of them, he was looking for something, she didn't know what. Mr. Cardone insisted she try on a few, after he placed them on her finger he would watch her expression to see if she liked them or not. She didn't. Gina could also tell that Mr. Cardone was beginning to get frustrated with her. She had to say something.

"They are beautiful but..." Then she remembered what Alan had told her about cooperating and amended herself. "They are beautiful." Alan was quick to notice her 'but'.

"But what Gina?" Alan coaxed.

"Well don't you think they are a little too fancy, for me I mean. I would be afraid to even wear one like that anywhere, afraid of loosing it or having it stolen."

Alan looked at her quizzically for a minute and then he leaned over the rings and started studying them.

"How about this one?" Her hand was soon engulfed by his. "Here lets see how it looks on your hand." Alan slipped it on her finger gently.

Gina could feel herself shaking and she wondered if Alan felt it. For a moment she couldn't speak. He had picked a wide gold band with only one large diamond on top and a smaller band covered with smaller diamonds to accent it. This was more to her liking; the others were way to fancy.

"It's beautiful Alan." She told him simply.

"I thought you might like that one." He leaned back and smiled to himself. "It matches your personality actually."

"But what about you Alan?" Gina suddenly felt ignorant of these matters. "I mean; are you going to wear a ring?"

"I already picked out mine earlier." He turned to Mr. Cardone. "What next?" Gina just looked at him stunned. What else did they need? This was more than she ever expected already.

"Well, I took the liberty of removing the two rings you admired the most Mr. Sullivan, one moment and I will get them for you."

After the little mans departure Alan confided in her. "I am afraid I wanted to make this selection myself Gina. Selfish of me I know but I think you will be pleased."

Mr. Cardone returned with two rings on a blue velvet ring pillow. Dinner rings? What did she need with dinner rings? One was a cluster of red rubies in the shape of a rose. The other was made of sapphire in elongated petal shapes. They were exquisite.

"Well what do you think?" Alan asked her when she was silent for so long.

Gina fought back her tears, Alan was spoiling her and if there was ever anyone who was less deserving of spoiling, it was her. She had treated him so badly.

"I think I would sound redundant if I told you that they are beautiful." She looked up at him 'wonderingly, her eyes a light.

"That is all I need to hear, your eyes say the rest." Alan looked very pleased.

"That just leaves the necklace and bracelet." He spoke to Mr. Cardone. "I think I would like to save that for a surprise." He looked back to Gina. "Go with him Gina and let him get your sizes. I will wait here for you, I need a smoke."

Alan wouldn't let her thank him for the rings when they left. Gina thought surely that the evening would be over then, she was still speechless when Alan brought the car to another halt a few minutes latter. Her mind was numb and rebelled to work correctly.

She stared at the man next to her trying to figure him out. Why wouldn't he let her thank him? Gina tried to ignore the faint stirrings of love that she felt for him, love that she didn't want to give. Alan helped her out of the car.

"I can't help you with this." He laughed. "But I can walk you in. You can handle picking out your own wedding dress and ensemble can't you?" Gina wondered if he was being snide but she could see he wasn't. "And don't forget to pick out something for the honeymoon."

"H... honeymoon?" She was flabbergasted yet again.

"Yes our honeymoon. I wish you would let it sink into that stubborn head of yours that we are going to be married and quit fighting it." She could tell that he was getting annoyed. "Come on Gina lets go in."

He knew that he had her over the proverbial barrel and she knew it too.

Once again they were hardly in the door of an exclusive dress shop when someone came to greet them. This time it was an elderly plump lady. "Mrs. Peters" Alan acknowledged her. "Let me introduce you to my fiancé, Gina Holt." He hugged her tightly to his side. "I'm afraid she is quite nervous but I'm sure you can put her mind at ease. I'd be quite grateful if you could personally help her with her selections. One more thing before I leave you. Make sure she doesn't leave tonight with this thing on, Okay?" Alan fingered the collar of her pea coat.

"What is the matter with my coat?"

"Be good." Alan pulled her close and kissed her on the forehead indulgently completely ignoring her question. "Don't worry, I'll be back soon, Relax." He warned her before he strolled out of the door.

What was wrong with her coat? It was very practical.

Mrs. Peters laughed and told her that men didn't want their women looking practical they wanted them looking sexy. Her sexy? Gina didn't think that would be possible no matter what she wore. She was just herself. Sexy, applied to other people, not her.

Mrs. Peters did take care of her after that, and once again Gina found herself ignorant of such matters. All through the fitting of her gown Mrs. Peters reminded her how lucky she was to be marrying a wealthy man like Alan and that she should dress according to his position.

Gina agreed politely. The hardest thing to get through was the selection of negligees that Mrs. Peters shoved at her. Gina noted that the lady seemed to know Alan's tastes a little too well, and she wondered if he had brought other women here to do their shopping.

Gina was starting to look at the coats when Alan returned for her. He frowned when he noticed that she was looking at coats that only sported a fur collar. He stood next to her for a minute before he spoke. "Mrs. Peters, send something appropriate out to the penthouse tomorrow with the rest of the things please. You know what I like." Once again Gina realized that he had dealt with this lady many times before. It only served to make Gina more aware of the differences between herself and Alan's past girlfriends. He took her by the arm and propelled her out of the store, not even giving her the chance to say goodbye to Mrs. Peters. "We've got one more stop to make." Alan told her.

Silently Gina let him usher her back to the car, she knew it wouldn't be any use to argue with him. Also she was very tired, it had been a long day. The strain of being with Alan wasn't helping things either. She longed to be at home in her own bed.

"We will just take a little drive." He told her.

Gina relaxed and was enjoying the pleasant drive. Alan made small talk and it was only later that Gina realized the direction in which they were heading.

"This is the way to your penthouse." She didn't even try to keep the surprise or accusation out of her voice.

"I'm glad you remembered." Alan shot back with a tight smile, the kind one might shower on a not too bright child.

She wondered what he was up to. What reason did they have to go to his penthouse? "Why are we going there?" She asked him warily. "I want to go home. I'm very tired." If she thought to dissuade him she realized it wasn't about to work.

"I'd like to talk to you for a little while first." Alan told her easily enough.

To Gina the thought of being alone with him in his apartment had her worried. Things weren't the same since those days at her farmhouse.

"But you don't know where I live and it is awfully far out of your way." She still tried to talk him out of it.

"You live on long island right?" He pulled her close to him.

"How?" She took a quick glance at him. Was there anything he didn't know now?

"How did I know?"

"I've had you checked out of course." He told her simply.

Gina had one of her suspicions confirmed just then. He was having her watched!

"I didn't want you skipping out on me." He paused and then added soberly.

"Again."

Gina sat back and secretly acknowledged defeat.

As the car moved on Gina didn't even know that she had fallen asleep until she woke to find her head on Alan's comfortable shoulder.

He shook her when the car was parked and she wondered how long they had been sitting like that in his buildings underground garage.

Latter in Alan's apartment Gina sat on a cushion that was part of his pit group and sipped at the drink he had offered her. Alan seemed content to stare at her; he wasn't talking like he said he wanted to do. Gina didn't like it. Why did she feel like he had one up on her about something?

"Why are you staring at me?" She asked quietly. "Have I done something wrong?"

Gina watched him cross the room to sit next to her then. She wished he had stayed where he was.

"Because you are so pretty and you look like an angel, even if we both know better."

Why did he continue to cast her in the role of villain?

"I am trying to decide if I want to take you now or wait until after the wedding."

Her eyes popped open in rueful surprise. Alan smiled at her crookedly.

"However, it strikes me that I could do both couldn't I?" Alan reached out and picked up a lock of her long hair. Gina knew that all of his teasing wasn't just a front. He wanted her. There was well-controlled passion glazing over his gray green eyes whether he knew it or not.

She pulled away and extricated her hair. "Alan, I think I better leave now. You didn't really have anything you wanted to talk to me about anyway. You just wanted to torment me. I can always catch the train back if you don't want to drive me."

"I'm not ready to take you yet." Gina struggled futilely as he unexpectedly pulled her close against him and attempted to kiss her.

Countering him Gina turned her head and his kiss fell harmlessly on her cheek.

Undaunted, Alan ran kisses down her sensitive neck and nuzzled behind her ear. She tried to remain passive. Remain passive with Alan? Impossible!

"You really should name that perfume Angels Breath, it makes you smell heavenly." Involuntarily her head fell back and she accepted his tender caresses. "By the way, so that you will quit fidgeting I want you to know that I'm not going to be taking you home. You will be staying here with me from now on."

This revelation was just too high handed. Gina didn't know how to handle it. There was no way she was going to be bull dozed into staying with him and he might just as well find it out now.

"I am not going to stay here." Gina told him forcefully I am going home. It will be quite easy to call a cab. Now if you will excuse me."

"You could. " Alan interrupted her with a sweetly mocking smile. "But, I'm afraid you don't have an apartment to go home to now."

Gina jumped to her feet. He was back to acting crazy again.

"I took the liberty as your fiancé of having your things brought over here. There wasn't much considering it was a furnished apartment."

Gina's mouth fell open. Alan acted as if he didn't tell her anything out of the ordinary. Gina didn't know if he was telling the truth or not. He couldn't be. No one would let him take her things out of her apartment. Would they? Still, Alan could be pretty convincing.

"You what? I don't believe you, you couldn't have...you wouldn't dare." She fussed at him not knowing which line of thought she wanted to pursue first. Her eyes interlocked with his. She was involved with a madman? A lunatic? The nerve of him!

"I did." He told her simply. "Go look in your room. It is the first door on the right. Actually it was quite easy, I bought out your lease and had my trusty housekeeper move all of your things over here. It only took her one trip with the help of her husband Mike. I can't tell you what an inspiration he has been to me...very simple, you see."

She couldn't believe this. And just who the heck was Mike and what did he have to do with anything?

This was the very last straw, Gina was boiling mad. She ran to the room and flung open the door. Sure enough, what she saw was enough to send her into shock. She recognized her personal things that she had left so safe and sound in her apartment just that morning.

Slamming the door violently, wishing his head was in it; Gina sat down heavily on the bed. She would have to kill him that was all there was to it. He was a menace to the whole human race, especially to this one particular female. If she only could, she smiled deviously.

Just who the heck did he think he was anyway? Why did he keep trying to manipulate her this way? What right did he have to meddle in her life! He had a right to be mad at her but really, enough was enough. First he tries to bully her into marriage, and then he threatens her and now this. Would any court in the land blame her for knocking his conceited block off?

Suddenly Gina felt very lonely. She didn't really have any one she could call for help. None of her friends could possibly stand up to a man like Alan.

The more she sat there and thought about it the madder she got, so that when he tapped on the door she flung it open nearly pulling it off of its hinges.

Gina faced him with fire in her lustrous eyes. It was time to set him straight, about everything.

"That does it, I'm not staying here. " She bunched her fists into balls to keep from punching him like she wanted to. Never before had she been pushed so close to an act of violence. She resorted to childish remarks instead. "I hate you Alan Sullivan." Gina didn't care how she sounded to that arrogant brute.

"Now Angel face, is that any way to talk to the man you are about to marry." He taunted her ignoring her withering words.

"Quit calling me Angel face." She screamed at him, articulating each word as best as she could. She couldn't fight her anger. "I am not going to marry you, so get that through your own thick head." She jabbed him in the chest with her pointed finger. It was amazing how much satisfaction she got from that one small action. "Never, not even if you were the very last man left on the face of the entire earth." Oh Lord she'd resorted to clichés too. "Now get out of my way before I follow my instincts and punch your lights out."

He didn't look afraid, far from it. "Okay." He stepped aside nonchalantly to let her pass.

Gina grabbed her coat and purse, not caring where she would go as long as it was as far away from him as possible.

But the front door would not open. It was locked and there was no key in the dead bolt. Why did he always manage to have the upper hand?

Very slowly she turned to face the man leaning nonchalantly against the doorframe of her room watching her insolently. She smoothed her features and asked politely with deceptive calm. "Please unlock this door Alan."

The silence was deafening.

"Sorry, I can't do that. I want you to stay Gina. Face it; you don't have anywhere to go anyway. This will give us a chance to get better acquainted. After all we don't want to start out on the wrong foot do we? The wedding is only two days away, remember?"

How could she forget? He wouldn't let her.

"Alan you can't keep me here like a prisoner." She glanced to the table to where the phone had been. It wasn't there now. "You even hid the phone." She accused him. "That is really despicable." She sighed. "I feel like a captive bride."

"Don't you like being trapped Gina? Well I didn't like being set up either. You are here to stay. I've seen to that and you can make of it what you will." He sounded so cold and uncaring.

That was that, without the key she couldn't get out of his penthouse and leave. She wasn't Spiderman; she couldn't walk down the side of the tall building. He wasn't going to give up that key. Gina slung her coat and purse at him out of frustration and anger and instantly regretted her temper tantrum. It wasn't like her at all.

Alan scowled at her. "Little wildcat, aren't you? I know how to handle that though." He crossed the room threateningly in four long strides and clutched her by the shoulders in a vice like grip.

She thought he might strike her. Gina struggled to free herself but he captured her hair at the back of her neck and forced her head back allowing him to kiss her harshly. The more she struggled the tighter he held her. Finally when Gina could struggle no more, realizing that she was no match for his superior strength she leaned into him to take the pressure off of herself.

He pulled back and looked at her and then proceeded to kiss her again only more gently this time, insisting that her lips part for the onslaught of his.

Gina felt her anger drain out of her in one long sweep, then it was replaced by something else, a deep longing to be closer to the man that held her. Alan caressed and tantalized her into submission. Did her realize the effect he was having on her?

He released her to stroke her head gently allowing her to bring her head forward and rest it on his chest. His heartbeat thundered wildly in her ear. Alan gently caressed her sides and her back, running his hands up and down causing her to relax even further. She instinctively cuddled closer to him enclosing him in her own arms.

Slowly Alan coaxed her arms up so that they encircled his neck and her breasts were crushed gently up against his chest. His mouth closed over hers and his tongue sought to know the inner recesses of her soft mouth.

Then just when all of her senses were responding to his touch and common sense could no longer tell her what to do, Alan pushed her away from him. Didn't he know that she desired to be taken by him in the way that only he could at that moment?

Gina looked up and what she didn't see shocked her. There was no longing reciprocated in his eyes. Gina realized that it was all a power game to him to pad his ego. He was using her own weaknesses against her. She suddenly felt sick to her stomach. How could he do this to her? Did he think he could caress her into submission? Maybe he could. She looked at him with stunned eyes full of hurt. How could he do this to her?

"Go to bed now love, we can continue this another time."

He seemed to brush her off so easily, he returned to the bar to fix himself another drink. "Unless...you... insist of course."

After a moments hesitation Gina could do nothing but storm out of the room slamming her door in hurt protest. Long after she showered and lay down on her strange bed, she still cried.

Gina lay awake for hours thinking of him. Gina had never wanted a man so much in her life, not the way she wanted Alan. She knew that no matter what, she would marry him and make the best of things. He was good and kind when he tried to be and Gina realized reluctantly that she loved him. When exactly she had fallen in love with him she, wasn't sure. She only knew that her heart was full of him. She loved Alan Sullivan, who distrusted her so. Well, she would just prove to him that he could trust her through time. If proximity had power then so be it, she would make that cynical man love her back. Where there's a will, there's a way.

Apparently he at least wanted her. He'd sure gone to enough trouble if he didn't. Somehow she would find the way to win his heart.

Slowly, deliberately, Gina left her room, walked down the short hall and stood silently by Alan's open bedroom door. She could make him want her too. But then she hesitated as she thought of Alan sleeping in there. What would he think of her coming to him like this? Maybe he was already asleep. If not, would he reject her and tell her to go back to her own room like he did earlier in the evening.

She stood there undecided if she was doing the right thing, opening herself up to him like this. After all how much did she really know him? Her heart tried to convince her she knew enough.

Alan called to her gently from the dark in his room. "Come on in Gina."

Did she dare? Still she hesitated, wondering if it was her over active imagination.

"Gina?" She heard it again. "You can do it. Come on in."

Gina slipped slowly into the dark room to stand by his bed. She didn't know what to do. Alan reached out a strong hand and pulled her down on to the bed with him. His eyes were already accustomed to the dark and Gina felt a soft kiss on her cheek as he held her close. When he made no further move towards her Gina wondered if he knew what

she wanted, that she wanted him to make love to her. Didn't he realize why she came to him? She shifted to look up at him.

"Go to sleep now Gina." He squeezed her tight and nestled her in the comfortable crook of his arm. "You're not ready yet Gina." He told her softly. "I'm not ready. Sweet dreams."

They both lay very still after that, Gina mostly from shock. Finally when Gina's confused mind and exhausted body caught up to her, she slept, comfortable and contented, not knowing that Alan was still wide-awake.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Alan woke first and relished the feeling of Gina lying in his arms. He longed to kiss her into waking but he knew he didn't dare. He knew he wouldn't be able to stop himself. He wanted her too badly. Soon though, he told himself. He wouldn't have to hold back. Silently he extricated himself and moved off of the bed.

He covered the sleeping girl with the warm sheets and watched as she cuddled deeper into the bed with a slight smile on her face. It was the same type of smile he had seen on her that first morning at her farmhouse. He wondered what she was dreaming about.

Alan observed her for a minute wondering why she came to him last night, the way she did. He'd been quite surprised. He expected that she would have been mad at him for several days at least. Alan knew what he hoped the answer was, he just wasn't sure. Maybe she came in search of the key and chickened out.

Going to the kitchen to fix breakfast he was still deep in thought. Gina was bright, beautiful and sensitive, yet she had a vulnerable side to her. There was a lot he didn't understand about her.

The more he thought about the deviousness it would take to set him up like he thought she had, he knew it wasn't possible. He couldn't bring himself to believe that she could do that any more.

Could he really go through with this? Making her marry him? Alan wasn't sure if he wanted to. He admitted that he had fallen for this simple girl in a big way. A way he never thought would have been possible for him.

Alan told himself that Gina might say one thing yet her eyes and her actions told him something entirely different. He also knew he could have made love to her last night

anytime he wanted and yet something had held him back. He told her that she wasn't ready. In truth it was he who was not ready to force an intimacy between them that might hurt things in the long run.

Could he continue to try and control and manipulate her this way? Alan knew he'd already been caught in his own trap. Yet instinct told him that Gina wouldn't have allowed herself to fall into his marriage trap unless she felt something for him too. There were too many holes for her to escape through if she really wanted.

Alan was just putting the rest of the food on the breakfast table when he heard her quiet footsteps on the floor behind him.

Turning around Alan saw her behind him. He could hardly take his eyes off of her. Gina looked even younger than her twenty-four years in the mornings. He silently accused himself of being a cradle snatcher. Gina gave him that special warm smile that was all her own, he knew that she couldn't consciously control them. Alan watched as she shifted nervously in the same spot while he ran his hungry eyes over her appearance. Today she was dressed in a simple pair of navy blue slacks with a pastel pink blouse and a gray vest. It looked good on her, accenting the slenderness of her waist and the fullness of her breasts.

"You're up early, and I see you're dressed already. You look lovely Gina. Did you sleep well? " Alan watched the color rush to her cheeks. She was the picture of innocence.

"Yes thank you." Then she added quietly. "Did you?"

"Just fine." Alan lied. "Nothing ever disturbs my sleep. Sit down, I have something to discuss with you before you take off to work." She did reluctantly. She had a right to be wary, he thought.

"I could have fixed the breakfast." Gina offered. "What did you want to talk to me about?" Curiosity always got the better of her.

"It can wait until after you eat breakfast. There is no hurry." Alan stalled, but Gina didn't give up that easily.

"Aren't you going into work today?"

He could see that she was wary of him; she had good reason to be. He was up to no good. "Not today, I have other things I need to do. Look Gina, I don't plan on going back to the office until after the honeymoon."

"Must be nice." She quipped, nibbling on a piece of crispy bacon. She was starting to let down her guard.

Alan held his breath.

"There's not an easy way to tell you this so I will just come out and say it, the straight forward approach is best." He paused and she put down her bacon and looked directly at him.

Alan saw her pull in her arms close to her body. She was expecting the worst. "I called your boss and told him that you wouldn't be going back to work after today either."

He braced himself for the inevitable fight; it came immediately.

"You did what? You had no right to do that." She jumped up to her feet knocking her chair back to the floor with a loud thud. "It is my job! I like to work and you certainly didn't ask me what I wanted to do. What you can't seem to get into your pig headed brain is that I am quite capable of running my own life without your help. In case it has escaped your attention, I have been taking good care of myself for quite some time. You didn't say anything about quitting my job as part of the agreement."

Alan continued to sit there while she got it all out of her system. He watched as three different expressions crossed over her face in the span of only a moment. It amazed him. First, there was surprise and then anger and lastly something he couldn't quite

recognize. "Unlock that door right this minute Alan. I've had quite enough of this. I am going to work before I do something drastic like take a punch at you." She threatened.

She was gorgeous when she was angry with him.

"What about breakfast?" He reminded her. He thought she might actually take that swing; she clenched her fists so tight.

"Breakfast? You've got to be kidding. How would you like to wear it?"

He raised an eyebrow at her.

I am certainly not hungry anymore. What did you expect after dropping a bomb on me like that." She was still fuming mad and Alan visualized that he could almost see the smoke rolling off of her.

"The door." She reminded him.

"It's already unlocked." He told her and she turned and looked at it. She didn't trust him.

"Come on, if you insist on getting so bent out of shape, I will drive you over then I can pick you up when you are ready to leave."

Alan didn't dare say home, he knew she didn't see it that way yet.

"I will never be ready." She defied him.

"Sure you will." Alan told her calmly, he knew what time she got off. He would get there early.

"Does it really matter what pleases me? You seem to be determined to bully me around, and I haven't done anything wrong. But will you listen to me? No because..."

Alan listened to her rant and rave at him all the way to the Gazette. If she had asked him if he still believed that she hadn't told the truth and set him up he might have even admitted it to her. He laughed all the way back to the penthouse. He'd never met such a small person with such a hot volatile temper.

He tried to imagine what it would be like to be married to such a wildcat. Somehow Alan didn't think that her anger would be that hard to control, not when she practically melted at his every touch. What they had together was special.

The rest of the day didn't go as well as Alan expected. After work Gina locked herself in her room and stayed there, he let her. Alan worried that he might have pushed her too far, too fast.

That night Alan didn't get much sleep either, he waited and waited for Gina to come to him or even talk to him, she didn't.

He supposed she was spending her time sorting through the things he bought for her the night before. Alan had placed them in her room as soon as they came. She was doing a good job of avoiding him. He wondered what she was thinking about. Several times he checked to see if her light was still on. All he had to do was check the crack underneath her door for light. Alan thought about trying to talk to her and just gave it up. He would let her make the next move.

Alan wondered what he could do to get this small woman to love him. It was important to him that she would come to love him. He tried to figure out what it was that made her so special, so different from the others. Even Brenda who he had come the closest to falling in love with didn't hold a candle to Gina.

What if he released her from their bargain? Would she stay or would she run as far and as fast as she could to get away from him? Would she allow him to even see her again if he did? He didn't want to risk not seeing her again. She already meant too much to him. This way he had her, no doubt about it. Alan felt that in time he could win her love, if Mike's example was anything to go by it just might work for him too.

Alan paced back and forth in the darkness of his room wondering what he should do. Things had seemed so easy before. He froze in his tracks when he heard the door to Gina's room quietly open. Did he dare hope? He saw her pass on the way to the rest

room. On her way back she paused by his door, standing to the side so that if he had been in bed he would not have seen her.

She stood there like the night before, not daring to walk boldly in. From the shadows he watched her. He could see the play of emotions cross her expressive face, determination, fear, shyness, questions and then back to fear. He knew she had ended up rejecting the idea. The dim light shimmered off of her long golden blonde hair and fell softly around her petite shoulders. Coupled with her wide eyes, it gave her an angelic appearance. When she turned to leave Alan made up his mind, he wouldn't wait any longer. He would help her take those few daring steps.

Alan stepped through the doorway and enveloped Gina in his arms, noting the moment of tension and surprise to her. She apparently thought she had gone unnoticed.

Alan kissed her deeply with all of the unspoken passion he could muster up, and he was pleased to discover that she was doing the same thing.

He pulled her so close that he could feel the rapidness of her pulsating heartbeat. He expertly molded her slight form to his. His own desire was growing. Alan reached down and lifted Gina in to his arms. He carried her to his soft bed. It was the first time he had ever felt like doing that for anyone. He laid her in the center with infinite care, and stretched out next to her.

"I want you Gina." He told her honestly. "I don't want to just sleep with you, not right away at least. Do you understand?" Alan hugged her tight against his chest.

"I know." She whispered and kissed the strong column of his throat.

Alan wanted her to be sure; he still hesitated. "If I make love to you Gina, you realize that you will be mine. It has to be a commitment between us."

"I know that too. I want the same thing." She told him huskily. "Kiss me Alan." She commanded him softly and eagerly wrapped her arms around his neck.

His slim control was just about to break. "You will never be able to leave me."

Alan warned her seriously, as he ran his hands up and down her sides and over her slight hips. This moment was too important for both of them.

"I don't want to." She paused and looked up at him in the darkness. She kissed him lightly. "But Alan..." He could see her bite her lower lip. God, how he wanted to love her!

"Yes Angel face?" He coaxed as he unbuttoned his shirt. She stopped him and started doing it herself. "Do you still think I set you up? That I intended on doing another story on you?"

He could see how important it was to her and breathed a sigh of relief that he could tell her honestly how he really felt.

"No, I don't." She looked up and smiled at him. "I don't believe that anymore. The more I've come to know you, the more I've realized that you are not capable of being that devious."

"Thank you." She hugged him appreciatively. Then she perceptibly lowered her voice, as she pulled his shirt off. "But Alan there is something else I lied to you about."

Alan tensed, she sounded so serious. He was afraid it would be something bad.

"What's that?" He was almost afraid to ask.

"The other day I told you that I hated you and that I didn't love you." She looked down at her hand lying on his chest. Alan followed her eyes. It looked so small and fragile lying there.

"I remember. And?" Alan coaxed her, to hear the rest.

"It's not true. I don't hate you. I think I knew even then that I loved you." She snuck a peek at him and added quickly. "Is it okay for me to love you?"

Alan hugged her so tight he thought he might break her. How he longed to hear those three precious words from her sweet lips. It made all the trouble and effort to chase her worthwhile. This was even better than he hoped for.

"It's more than okay. It's fantastic. I love you too Gina."

Her head jerked up.

"I have since that first morning." Alan watched as tears of happiness came into her eyes and ran down her cheek and mingled with her smile. "Loving you has become a habit."

"I don't want to disappoint you Alan, when we make love."

"You won't darling, I'm sure of it."

"But you are so much more experienced than I am." She protested quietly. Alan knew that love would make all the difference.

"You won't." Alan kissed her into silence.

He felt her slight shaking as he removed her baby doll gown. His eyes were drawn to the firmness of her small round breasts and the flatness of her silky stomach, then back to the wide-eyed girl watching him. He noticed her withdraw her hand; she had wanted to touch his chest. Was she fearful of her own boldness?

"It is okay to touch me." He told her. Alan clasped her hand to his chest; she began to explore it freely.

Alan knew he had to be gentle, instinct telling him that this night would be important to both of them. He wanted to use all of his experience with this woman, so he kept supreme control on his own desire for as long as he could.

Her touch and caress was as light as a feather as she explored his body. She may not have had lots of experience but she definitely knew how to excite him.

He waited until long after he felt Gina arch her small body into his letting him know that she was ready to receive him. Then he covered her with his weight and slowly

fulfilled them both. Alan waited for her response underneath him then he caressed her and kissed her gingerly till they both lay exhausted in each other's arms.

Alan smiled when he heard her whisper that she didn't know it could be so beautiful. Once more he brought her to the same feverish pitch as his own before morning came. He realized then what it was that made Gina so special, her giving of herself totally and unequivocally.

Before dawn, Alan woke, he felt Gina stirring in his arms. "Are you okay?" He asked. "Did I hurt you?"

The restraint and control Alan held earlier was sheer torture for him. Never before had the act of making love weighed so heavily on him. He longed for and almost dreaded the next time, he wasn't sure he could put himself through it again.

"Fine." She snuggled closer to his warmth. "Alan?"

"Yes?" He tucked the sheets around her gingerly.

"Was it good for you too? I mean did I disappoint you?"

"It was all that making love should be and no you did not disappoint me." Alan knew it was the truth; love had made all the difference. It was more than the act of coupling he was used to. It was the sharing of their souls and hearts, the oneness that made it so special. "You belong to me now Gina Holt, mine, forever."

She didn't hear him, she was already half asleep again.

The woman child in his arms was his. Alan knew he would never let her go now, not ever. She already meant the world to him. It felt good to hold her in his arms. He would never be lonely again with her around to brighten up his life.

CHAPTER NINE

The morning of the wedding Gina still felt she was living in a dream. Alan loved her, how could it be true? How could an important handsome man like that love someone like herself?

Gina lay back in Alan's spacious tub and luxuriated in the rose scented water she had run for herself. In just a few hours she would be Mrs. Alan Sullivan. Alan had left her early that morning to make sure that she had her privacy. She longed to see him again.

Gina was interrupted by a phone call just as she was stepping out of the bath. Wrapping herself in a fluffy towel she went to answer it, maybe it was Alan.

"Hello?" She answered it tentatively. A woman's voice answered huskily. Vaguely Gina was disappointed that it wasn't Alan.

"Is Alan at home? I would like to speak to him please."

"I'm afraid he's not here right now. Can I take a message?"

There was a slight pause. "When do you expect him back?"

"I'm not sure." Gina answered her honestly. She didn't know if Alan planned on coming back to the penthouse before they left or not. "He didn't say." There was a longer pause.

"Who is this?" The woman questioned her haughtily.

"My name is Gina. I'm Alan's fiancé." Gina nearly choked on the words, it was the first time she had ever acknowledged that.

"Well, well, well." There was another long pause.

Gina wondered who she was talking to but didn't want to seem nosy since the call was for Alan. "So it's the little fiancé is it? I hope you know what you are letting

yourself in for." The voice told her enigmatically. Her words were a little slurred. Was she drunk?

"Pardon?" Gina frowned, what was that supposed to mean. Gina didn't like mysterious ominous messages, especially from strangers.

"Alan Sullivan is a hard one to hold on to. If I were you I would be worried about his reasons for marrying you. Alan's not the marrying kind unless of course there was a good reason for it."

Gina felt her anger growing in leaps and bounds.

"Whom am I speaking to?" Gina wanted to know. How dare the woman think that Alan was only using her? They had solved all their problems. They had confessed their love for each other.

"Oh don't worry honey. I'm not trying to stir up any trouble." Gina knew better than to fall for that one. "I was just calling to wish the groom a happy marriage. It is today isn't it?"

"Yes it is." Gina didn't like this person.

"And he's run off already? That's a shame. Well tell him Brenda called and wished him luck will you?"

"I will. Goodbye."

"Ta-Ta." She taunted mockingly.

So that was the mysterious Brenda. Like heck she would give him the message.

Gina brushed off the annoying phone call as a jealous old girl friend just trying to make trouble for her and Alan. They didn't need that. She knew she wouldn't even tell him about it.

Latter she slipped into her pretty white wedding gown. It was white lace over satin with long full sleeves and a floor length veil. She loved it, and just as she thought it looked good on her. Gina wanted to look the part of an angel for Alan.

Somehow their crazy mixed up relationship had turned around and they were going to be married because of love and not coercion.

The only thing that was putting a damper on her day was that she worried that everything was happening too fast. She worried because it seemed they hardly knew each other.

At the appointed time the limousine came to pick her up. She didn't know that Alan's company had a limousine too. She chewed her lip nervously all the way to the quaint chapel Alan had picked out. Was she really going to be married to Alan? She was!

Once inside, a kindly gray haired woman whisked her away to an adjoining room. It was to keep her from Alan's eyes until the moment of the ceremony. She didn't feel so alone when she peeked through a crack in the door and saw that Alan had seen to inviting her coworkers from the Gazette and her neighbors from her apartment complex.

Her heart swelled, it was such a nice thing for him to do. Even Mr. Matthews was there. Gina practically didn't recognize him without his familiar gray suit and every day scowl. He wore a dark suit completed with a carnation in his lapel. She was pleased that he had agreed to give her away. She only wished her grandfather could have lived long enough for that honor. No matter, she felt loved.

When the music started and Gina floated down the aisle she was secretly pleased at the astonished look on Alan's handsome face.

She thought she looked good and Alan's expression revealed to her that he thought so too. Gina found herself drawn to how magnificent he looked too with his dark formal black tuxedo.

She hardly remembered uttering the words of the ceremony and she wondered if all brides had that problem. It was all one long dreamy blur, the wedding, reception, even the ride to the airport.

The Gazette was the only paper allowed to cover the event and other than a professional photographer the others were banned. Mr. Matthews fluttered around looking like a nervous papa.

It was only when Gina was on Alan's private jet that she even halfway relaxed. Alan didn't seem to be having any problem. She didn't tell him that she'd never been on a jet before. Gina just hoped she wasn't turning green as they took off. She couldn't hide anything from Alan though. He was too astute.

"What are you so jittery about Mrs. Sullivan?" Alan teased her. She liked the way he said Mrs. Sullivan so possessively.

Gina shrugged her shoulders, marveling at how handsome her newly acquired husband looked dressed ultra casually for a change, in jeans and a pullover shirt. She'd only seen him in suits or shirts and slacks; this made him look even more rugged.

"Is this your first flight on a small jet before?" Alan asked her trying to guess the cause of her nervousness.

"I'm afraid so. It's my first flight ever." She confessed.

Alan quirked a surprised eyebrow at her confession.

Gina sighed; it was just another difference between his world and hers.

"No problem." Alan took a hold of her hand and comforted her. "Once in the air, its just a hop, skip, and a jump over to the Bahamas." Alan's eyes widened in mortification, when he realized that he let their destination slip out. He had been guarding the destination so secretively. Then he laughed, at her stunned expression.

"The Bahamas?" She breathed, she hadn't expected anything so nice and they were planning on staying for two full weeks.

"Only the best for my wife." Alan put his arm around her and Gina snuggled close to him on the soft velvet covered couch. "Would you like something to drink? There is a bar." Alan's attentiveness put her at ease.

"No thanks, but you have one if you want. Don't worry on my account." Gina looked at him with her love in her eyes.

"Nah." He brushed the back of his hand along her jaw. "I don't need one, I just thought it might help you relax."

"I am relaxed." She lied indignantly.

"Sure you are." Alan laughed at her serious expression. "Well, I could be." Gina frowned, getting an idea.

"How?" He questioned. "What ever it is, I'll do my best to see to what you need."

Gina's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"You always do." Gina drew him closer and kissed him playfully, nipping lightly at his full bottom lip. She pulled away when he tried to deepen the kiss. Would he take the hint?

"I see what you mean." Alan captured her retreating lips for a longer full kiss.

"It doesn't seem to be working though." Alan placed his finger on the throbbing pulse at the base of her neck.

"Trust me." She whispered enticingly. "It's working."

"So it is." Alan admitted as he held her close and kissed her. Gina, felt secure in his arduous embrace, yet she longed for the inevitable intimacy that they would soon share together.

From the airport to the Nassau high rise hotel where they would be spending their honeymoon Alan and Gina both sat quietly enraptured by the beauty of the Bahamas.

"Everything is so green." Gina ventured at last.

"That's because of their sub tropical climate." Alan told her. "They are fortunate to only have an average temperature range between seventy-five and eighty degrees from winter to summer."

"Must be nice." Gina agreed with him rolling down the taxi window to soak in the warm breeze. "Most of the people are dark skinned." Gina observed as they wended their way through the streets. Alan looked so relaxed. Why couldn't she be relaxed?

"True, most of the people but not all of them are of African descent." Alan paused to run his hand along his jaw as he thought. "If I remember correctly many of them were descendants of slaves taken to the islands by Loyalists fleeing the American Revolution." Alan blew teasingly in her ear and kissed it.

"That's interesting. What is the predominate language?" Gina tried to ignore his advances, she felt like teasing him.

"English." Alan threw a lazy arm around her shoulder.

"Have you been here before Alan?" Gina asked; her curiosity was up now since he obviously knew some about the island.

"Once, a few years back I stayed for a few days until the threat of a possible hurricane sent me back to New York City."

Gina longed to ask him if he was alone or if he had a girlfriend with him. She decided he was a mind reader when he answered her.

"I was by myself." Alan laughed. "Did I seem like such a rake?" Gina looked up at him wryly. "The press did manage to paint that picture a few times."

Gina remembered reading about his exploits with the opposite sex.

"This place sure is crowded." Gina changed the subject quickly; she didn't want to think about Alan with other women. The thought of Brenda flashed through her brain.

"That's because half of the population lives here." Alan went on to tell her many interesting facts about the islands. She was surprised to learn that the islands were largely formed by shells and coral material resting on a submerged platform."

By the time they reached the hotel it was close to dinnertime. To Gina it seemed the people were all open and friendly. Their suite was large and spacious. They hardly

had time for more than a quick look around before Alan insisted that they change for the evening meal. Gina chose a pale blue chiffon dress that gathered at the waist with a sequin choker to match.

It was just one of the many outfits Alan had bought for her. She liked Alan's choice of a three-piece steel blue suit. It made his dark hair stand out. His manhood would never be questioned, whatever he wore.

Once seated in the opulent hotel dining room Gina felt nervous and fluttery again. When the waiter came to take their order she let Alan do it for her telling him that for tonight she just preferred a good old steak and baked potato. She admitted she wasn't much for trying new dishes. Alan also ordered them a fruity pineapple cocktail and she sipped at it leisurely.

"Why so quiet?" Alan asked her after a short silence.

Gina knew that he had hardly taken his eyes off of her today. When they changed for dinner, Gina was sure that Alan wanted to make love with her and yet he hadn't made the move. Gina had been disappointed; she'd wanted Alan all day. It was a growing ache inside of her. She wanted to feel him against her.

She couldn't possibly tell him the truth. "I don't know; I'm just nervous I guess." It really had been an eventful day, so much had happened, in the last week for that matter. It seemed her life only started in earnest since she met Alan.

"You're not regretting our marriage already are you?" Alan teased as he reached across the table and took her hand in both of his. His gray green eyes searched her blue green ones.

"No certainly not." Gina assured him swiftly. "It's just that..." Did she dare admit to him how new everything seemed, that there hadn't been enough time for everything to settle in on her consciousness yet? Would he understand?

"Just what?" Alan coaxed. "You can open up to me. I'm your husband remember?" He teased at her hesitation.

She was being foolish wasn't she? He was her husband now for better or worse.

"That's it." She told him enigmatically.

Alan shook his head as if to clear it. He chuckled deep in his chest. "Did I miss part of this conversation or something?"

"It's just that I can hardly believe that we are really married that's all." Gina lowered her eyes to the table shyly.

"I have a license, I can prove it." Alan teased her. "If you want to see it." He pretended to reach in his pocket as if to show it to her.

"If I've counted the days or actual hours we've known each other..." She left the rest hanging in the air.

Alan grew serious.

"Sometimes it happens that way Gina. When two people meet, they just know instantly that they've found their mate."

Gina saw a flicker of desire light up his gray green eyes as he went on to explain. "Besides, after tonight, I think you'll be more convinced. I'm going to make love to you until you feel like you've been married forever." He told her huskily.

"That might take some doing." Gina felt free to flirt with him. She taunted him softly with her eyes. She knew he meant it too.

"Exactly." Alan smiled roguishly.

Gina laughed lightly. She was looking forward to it.

Dinner never seemed to take so long. They held hands like teenagers and swung them back and forth all the way back to their suite.

Alan paused at the door and turned her to face him.

"We could go see some of the local night sights first Gina, if you'd like. I will leave it up to you." Alan watched her.

"I'd rather stay right here... with you." She told him honestly. She could see the sights later; tonight was their first night together as man and wife. This was where she wanted to be.

"That's what I was hoping you would say." Alan smiled at her. He unlocked the door and swung her up in his strong arms. Gina laughed openly. Alan was so big and strong, she felt safe.

"What if someone sees us?" She protested weakly. Gina felt loved, cherished and adored. This was her man, her love.

"Who cares? I don't. Do you really care?" Alan lowered his head for a kiss. "You're my wife. Besides it's a dead give away. They will know that we are on our honeymoon." Alan strode easily in to the room with her and kicked the door shut behind them. He held her tightly for a moment before setting her on her feet in the middle of the room.

Gina knew instantly that someone had been in the room while they were at supper, at Alan's instigation no doubt. The lights were dimmed, giving the room a soft, intimate glow. A bucket of ice with a bottle of expensive champagne embedded in ice stood beckoningly on a low coffee table. Soft music floated seductively around them seemingly coming from all over. Gina recognized the tune as 'Tenderly'. How thoughtful of him.

When Alan slipped out of his suit jacket, vest and tie and moved in the direction of the champagne Gina grasped his arm and pulled him back. She didn't need that; she needed Alan. She needed to feel his arms around her, her body pressed to his.

Wordlessly she stepped into his embrace. Alan gave a contented sigh and expertly molded her slight form to his so that they fully touched from the breast down to their knees. His arms surrounded her and pulled her close.

He murmured in her ear. "My impatient angel." Alan bent his head and caressed her temple with his lips. "We fit together so perfectly."

He didn't have to tell her that, she knew that already. Gina stood up on tiptoe and brushed her lips over his teasingly. Her fingers crept around his shoulders and curled in his silky dark hair. She loved his soft hair, she let her fingers play in it at will. He smelled of aftershave and tasted of pineapple as Gina pulled at the back of his head to bring it down. She kissed him provocatively, nibbling, teasing for all she was worth.

"Gina." Alan breathed her name and deepened their kiss. He parted her lips for the sensuous exploration of his tongue. That delicious yearning was building and growing inside of her.

Alan's hands pressed lightly at her lower spine crushing her against him. They drew apart reluctantly; gasping for air and Gina heard his low husky groan of frustration. She felt it too; their clothes were too much of a barrier.

"Alan?" Gina gave him a questioning look. Couldn't he see the flame of desire about to consume her?

His answer was to slowly swing her up in his arms and carry her through to their bedroom. With one hand, he leaned down and dealt with the bedspread and flung the sheets back before letting her slide to the floor. Her body brushed against his on the way down.

"I want you so badly Gina." Alan whispered in her ear. "I am afraid I might lose control." He looked frustrated.

"Since when have I ever been breakable?" She didn't quite understand his hesitation. Gina stepped back from him, to see him more clearly. She was remembering their first night of such incredible loving. It had been wonderful beyond words.

"I don't think I will have the patience you need. It nearly tore me up the other night. It takes a lot out of a man to have to exert so much control. A drink first might help me."

Now she understood! He was afraid of hurting her or scaring her. He wanted this night to be special. Alan hadn't made a desirous move towards her since that night and now she understood why.

Deliberately, Gina reached behind herself and slowly dragged down her zipper, letting the chiffon dress slip provocatively to the floor. Gina never took her eyes off of him. She loved him with her eyes slowly. "Maybe I want you to loose control." Gina let the little beige wisp of a bra and panties follow the dress. "That drink might get in the way of the reaction I want from you." She warned him.

Alan's eyes darkened perceptibly as he watched her and allowed his eyes to caress her body.

After a moment Gina stepped forward and unbuttoned his shirt. "Love me Alan." Gina tugged the shirt out of his waistband and slid it off his arms letting it drop to the floor by her dress, which looked like a small blue puddle.

"Let me love you in my own way." She whispered huskily, pressing her soft lips to his hair covered chest. "You've been going a little slow for me Alan and well we wouldn't want you to be strained or anything." She teased half seriously. "I better pick up the slack."

Alan's arms closed securely around her and he chuckled. She let her hands run over the hard packed muscles of his broad chest. She reached to unbuckle his belt. Only his hand closed over hers to stop her.

"Enough of your delicious torture. I'm faster." He told her arrogantly as he quickly divested himself of his slacks and briefs in one movement.

Gina wanted to tell him that torturing him was half the fun. At some point he had already stepped out of his shoes. Alan bent to slip off his socks. He trailed warm damp kisses on her legs as he slowly moved up to her again. His maddeningly slow lovemaking was driving her crazy with wanting. Finally he moved to her stomach and aching breasts.

Gina clutched him to her tightly communicating her need or so she thought. "Please Alan." Gina begged as she stepped back and tugged on his hands to lead him to the bed. "Don't you get it? I need you now."

He needed no second invitation.

"You're so beautiful." Alan groaned as they fell back on the bed together clinging to each other. "I want to worship every inch of you." Alan settled himself more intimately over her while her hands splayed across his back. Alan caressed her from shoulder to waist and back up again.

He kissed, suckled and tormented her breasts. Longing engulfed her and still Alan drew their love making out. And he claimed it was hard on a man, Gina laughed to herself.

Gina moved against him provocatively, she was shivering with impatience to have him. Alan's hands roved over her body slowly, touching, tracing and loving. It was exquisite torture.

"Please Alan." Gina arched against him again, wanting him to join with her, to fulfill her and satisfy her. "Take me now."

"Slow down baby. We've got all night." He paused and nuzzled her neck. "Two weeks." He corrected himself and blew in her ear. Then he brought his head up to look at her. "All the rest of our lives." He kissed her tenderly.

Gina opened her mouth to his hungry searching kisses and her body responded to his hungry searching caresses. She wanted to feel him inside of her.

Realizing that he couldn't be rushed just yet Gina explored his male body with pride. She forced her hand between them to stroke and capture the evidence of his desire. Alan reciprocated by seeking out the heart of her womanhood.

"Ummm, so warm, so moist, so ready." His hands and fingers worked their magic. "I will never get enough of you Gina." He sighed.

"I am ready for you Alan. You don't have to go slow this time. I love you." Gina moved against him, rotating her hips. Surely he would end this tantalizing torture soon for both their sakes.

"Love you too Angel face." Alan's gentle hair roughened knee parted her thighs and accepted her loving invitation. Gina gasped out loud, her passion, her pleasure making itself known as he entered her.

Alan thrust hard and rocked and held her to him tighter. He brushed the hair out of her eyes so that he could see her love filled face.

Gina arched and pushed and held onto him fiercely. The need grew and grew between them until Gina thought she might cry out her desire.

Alan's hands ministered to her, coaxed her and loved her.

When the culmination finally came, Gina closed her eyes tightly and let it sweep her away on undulating waves of intense pleasure.

Alan's control finally snapped and he thrust more forcefully until he followed her into their own world where nothing else mattered or existed.

Gina clung to Alan desperately feeling the fine sheen of perspiration on his back.

"We are so good together." Alan told her at last as their breathing slowed and he moved to her side still caressing her, soothing her.

Gina sighed contentedly. This was loving!

"You won't hear any complaints from me." Then to Gina's surprise Alan jumped up, his glorious body for her to see. Her eyes soaked in the sight of his hard male body, she didn't ever think she could see enough of it. Renewed desire shot through her. His body shimmered under the dim light.

"Where are you going?" Gina pulled the sheet over her; she wasn't as self-assured of her own body to flaunt it.

"Be right back." Alan shot over his shoulder. "Stay put."

When Alan returned he was carrying two glasses of the chilled champagne. "The nights still young." He hinted, handing her a glass. Then he lifted his glass to touch hers in a toast. "Here's to us, to the truth."

Gina thought it was a strange toast. To the truth? What did he mean by that? She decided he must mean that he believed her. After their lovemaking, how could he doubt it?

Things couldn't have been better since they both knew the way it was between them.

It indeed proved to be a long wonderful love filled night. They loved, laughed, shared and even showered together. There was no denying the wonderful sexual charisma that they shared.

Two glorious weeks sightseeing the Bahamas went fast, way too fast for Gina. They saw everything there was to see.

Together they even spent a day deep-sea fishing. Alan hired a local to take them out. Gina never did catch anything but Alan did. He struggled for hours with a marlin sized fish before it finally tired and they pulled it inside the boat. When Alan took one look at Gina, he told the guy to let it go again. They did, and Gina was pleased.

They spent days and days lazing on the wonderful beaches soaking up the warm sun. Only because of Alan's attentiveness and his insistence to rub lotion on her kept Gina from burning.

All too soon the honeymoon was over and they returned to, not New York City but to Alan's Connecticut home.

Alan's home was a large English Tudor. It had two stories and plenty of land around it. Gina could tell that the house wasn't very old. Together they set up housekeeping for real now and Gina loved it.

Taking care of Alan was everything to her. She didn't even miss working yet. Alan told her she could go back to work if she wanted. She turned the offer. Now it just didn't seem worth the effort. She had Alan. She was content in a way she never had been before.

Gina had also never known the depths of love such as she had experienced with Alan over the last month. The honeymoon in the Bahamas was something that Gina would treasure forever. Those two incredible weeks of loving and living had been more than she had ever dreamed of. Alan had seen to that. Since they had professed their love for the other so openly everything seemed right with the world. Was this wonderful man really hers? Did she really belong to him?

As Gina, sat on the soft bed in her bedroom, the one she and Alan shared together in his Connecticut home tears sprang into her eyes. He was so good to her. She missed him terribly when he went to work during the daytime. She remembered the diamond necklace and bracelet Alan had given her on their wedding night. It was such a surprise to open the gay package and discover the angel in a diamond-studded dress that hung from a thin diamond choker. The bracelet matched the choker but did not sport the delicate angel. Gina wasn't used to receiving such elaborate gifts and told him so.

Alan told her that he wanted to give her things. The whole honeymoon had gone like that, one surprise after the other. Alan denied her nothing and even though she didn't ask for things he always seemed to know what pleased her. He did little things for her too that made her feel special and loved. When they made love, Gina knew she was making him happy and contented too.

This day started out bright and sunny. As the day drew toward night it grew cloudy and started to rain relentlessly. Gina hated for Alan to fly back and forth in his jet morning and evening and she wondered when he would grow tired of it. It had been his own idea to live in Connecticut; she knew he liked the solitude of his country house because of the privacy it offered them.

Tonight would be her and Alan's first attempt at entertaining, even if it was only to be Mr. Hurst and his wife, He was Alan's lawyer and friend. Gina had never met Carol but she sure remembered the lawyer Mr. Hurst from her own trial. They had lunched together once since the honeymoon with Alan. Gina learned from that one lunch that the man was nothing like the hard cold lawyer she had met in court.

Gina wondered if she would be able to handle the social obligations of Alan's. He didn't push her about it but she knew that he had turned down several invitations since their return from the honeymoon.

Well, she couldn't worry about that now, she had to get ready. She wanted to look special for Alan tonight. Gina picked out a lovely silver colored evening gown with a modest bust line because she knew that it was Alan's favorite and it showed off her petite figure well. It was their one-month anniversary and she wanted to look her best. She lifted her hair up on top of her head in a popular upswing and pinned it up, hoping to make herself look more sophisticated.

Gina studied herself in the dressing room mirror. She looked different. If this was what love could do for a person then she had every right to look stunning. Her heart was filled with love.

Once she was dressed and laid out Alan's things on the bed for him she went downstairs. She wanted to take one more look over things just to make sure that everything was perfect.

Alan wasn't home yet and she was getting worried. It was already six thirty. Maybe the weather had held him up. Just as Gina was getting ready to phone his office and find out what time he left Alan came racing through the door, smiling.

"Sorry Im late love." He gave her a big bear hug and a gentle kiss. "I'll go shower and change and then I'll be right down to help you."

Alan paused at the foot of the stairs and turned towards her again. "God you look beautiful, it makes me wish we weren't having company tonight." His eyes darkened instantly as they slid over her slight form. "Happy Anniversary Gina." He smiled at her sweetly realizing that she thought he wouldn't remember. "Have I got a surprise for you latter!"

"What is it?" Gina asked curiously.

"I'll never tell." He quipped back over his shoulder as he took the steps by twos.

Gina smiled; he was such a boy at times.

When Alan finally joined her downstairs to wait for their guests he was immaculately dressed in a dark suit, looking ever so handsome to Gina. He poured them a before dinner drink.

"You look gorgeous." He told her again. Alan sat down beside her and handed her the drink. "Perhaps we could call and cancel. I think I'd rather have a quiet dinner and ravish my wife for dessert."

"Not that it wouldn't be nice," Gina taunted, enjoying his playful bantering.

"What would people say about such behavior?"

"They would say that I am a very lucky man and wish that they were in my shoes." He pressed his lips to her cheek. "You're wearing that perfume again. You know it drives me wild."

Alan reached for her to pin her to the back of the couch. Gina slipped out of his arms.

"That is exactly why I wear it." She laughed at him.

"Come here and kiss me my devilish angel." Alan's eyes were alight with desire.

The evening turned out wonderfully even if the weather was nasty, causing Richard Hurst and his wife Carol to be late.

Nothing could dampen her happy spirits tonight. One month of marriage might not have seemed like a lot for them to celebrate. It was to Gina, who looked forward to many more. She tried to show Alan the love she felt for him even in the littlest of things. It was second nature to pamper him.

Gina had planned a simple hot meal, nothing elaborate. Everyone seemed pleased by her efforts, especially Alan.

"That was a superb meal Gina." Alan praised her, handing her an after dinner drink. He looked so handsome in his black evening suit and crisp white shirt. Gina longed to be alone with him and judging by the glint in his eyes, he wanted to be alone with her too. Richard sat next to his lovely wife Carol on one of the couches, putting his arm around her and sipping his drink."

"Yes, I second Alan's opinion. It's been a long time since Carol and I have had an old-fashioned spaghetti dinner. It was a real treat." Gina basked in the praise; she had really put her heart into that meal to make it perfect.

"Thank you. It was nothing really."

Alan put a Cd on the stereo and the room filled with Neil Diamond. He turned to Carol. Alan had always been good at starting conversations.

"Did you know that you and Gina have drawing in common?"

Gina knew that Alan was trying to make her more relaxed and that he truly wanted them all to be friends. Gina did also.

"No. Really Gina?" Carol turned her typical red heads freckled face towards her. She looked so different to her husband's dark hair and dark eyes, not to mention that he was a good thirty pounds overweight while Carol was at least ten pounds underweight. There had been an instant bonding between the two girls when they first met. Gina wasn't surprised to find that they had quite a few things in common. "What do you use and what kinds of subjects do you prefer?"

Alan and Richard were discussing one of Alan's employees and were only half listening to them.

"I like to work with charcoals mostly and I generally tend to chose people." Gina didn't know if her meager self-taught talents would compare with Carols if she had any kind of training.

"That's interesting. I like sketching landscapes. Just recently I've been working with watercolors. I like them best because of the gentle pastel colors and the relaxing effect they can have on the eye. I have to confess that I haven't had any formal training though, it's just a hobby."

"It's a hobby to me to." Gina admitted, feeling a little more at ease now. She felt more on the same level as Carol. "I'd love to see some of your work." Carol told her.

"Well, I..." Gina blushed uncomfortably, "since Alan and I...there really hasn't been time to..." Alan laughed, coming to stand next to her, he'd been listening to them even if they hadn't been listening to the men. She felt secure in his embrace.

"What Gina is trying to say is that I haven't given her much time to do anything else but pay attention to me." He gave Gina a swift kiss on her grateful lips. He could put it much more delicately than she could have. "They understand what it is like Gina, after all, they've only been married two years themselves."

The rest of the evening went quickly. They enjoyed each others company and the conversation never lagged. With Alan's help Gina overcame the nervousness of entertaining and she decided that there wasn't much to it after all. Alan really did have likeable friends. Carol practically talked non-stop. She was the type of person who could easily be the life of the party. It came as no surprise to Gina, when Carol asked for a tour of the house. Gina admitted that it even felt like home to her no longer just Alan's house but theirs together.

"I'd love to show you the house, lets start down here and work our way up." Gina was eager to show her around.

"I've always wanted a two story house." Carol told her fancifully. Mr. Hurst raised an eyebrow at his wife's comment; apparently it was news to him.

"How come you never told me," He pouted playfully. Carol just shrugged her shoulders. "You spoil me too much as it is." Alan laughed.

Gina gave Carol a thorough tour of the house and Carol marveled over it. Gina thought it was a grand house too; Alan had excellent taste.

"Go ahead and go on downstairs Gina, don't wait on me. If you don't mind, I think I will just touch up my make up first before I join you. Richard gets worried if I start looking too pale."

It dawned on Gina that something was being said that she didn't understand. She tilted her head to the right. "Aren't you feeling well?" Gina queried softly of her new friend. She didn't think Carol would reject her concern.

"Absolutely wonderful." Carol replied, her face lighting up instantly. "We are going to have our first baby come this next May." Gina was truly happy for her. She didn't have to ask if she was pleased about it. No wonder Richard had been hovering around his wife all evening.

"I am so happy for you." Gina was sincere; they deserved children.

"Me too. I thought I would never get pregnant it seems like we've been trying forever. Not that I would want to stop trying but Richard wanted children so bad." She looked at Gina from under her red tipped lashes. "Are you and Alan planning on having children?"

Suddenly Gina was mortified, she hadn't even given it a thought. Not even as much as taking precautions. What if Alan didn't want children? Of course he wanted children hadn't he told her that very thing? But so soon? She knew Carol was watching and waiting for an answer. What could she say?

"We haven't really discussed it to much length yet." Gina hedged. She only hoped Carol understood and didn't question her.

"Well, don't feel bad, there is plenty of time for that latter, after all you're still newly weds. I didn't even feel I really knew Richard until after we'd been married a year." Carol turned towards the bedroom where her purse was. "The war paint covers a multitude of sins don't you agree." Carol went off laughing to herself about her make up. She actually wore very little.

Gina walked slowly down the stairs, thinking to herself about Alan. Would he want a baby this soon? The thought of having Alan's baby actually thrilled her. She would ask him how he felt about it tonight.

Her happy steps came to a halt as she realized that Alan and Richard were keeping their voices deliberately low to talk about something. A foreboding shiver of apprehension shot through her body. The closer to the study door she got the worse it

shook her. When she reached for the doorknob to open the door she paused, she didn't want to walk in unannounced if it was a business discussion.

"When?" Asked Richard dryly; he didn't sound like his cheerful self. Gina heard the tinkling of ice in their glasses; one of them had stopped to take a drink.

"Tonight." Alan answered him hesitantly. "It's going to be a big surprise for her. Gina has no idea at all that it is coming."

What was it that she had no idea was coming? What did Alan sound so down about if it was supposed to be a big surprise? Something just didn't jive here and Gina didn't know what it was.

There was a long pause and when they started talking again Gina assumed it was on the same subject. Richard's voice was strained. "I don't understand Alan. Didn't you love the girl?"

Tears burned at her eyes.

"No I didn't." Alan snapped at him impatiently. "I wanted to domesticate her and get even with her for using me and tricking me. Surely you remember that whole affair." Alan paused again and sighed deeply. His voice when he spoke sounded almost clinical. "I had this idea that I would break her spirit and then send her packing. It would be so easy to take everything from her and leave her with nothing."

Gina stiffened; she wasn't really hearing this was she? Her mouth was suddenly dry and her throat ached from trying to hold back the tears. Tears burned on her pale cheeks already. This was Alan talking, her beloved Alan, and the light of her life. He was talking about her as if she was nothing to him. Was she nothing in his eyes?

"I wanted to take her so high that she would never survive the fall, not without a lifetime of scars." She listened to the cold strained inflection of his voice, it didn't even sound like the Alan she knew. This man talking sounded like a complete stranger.

Gina stumbled back in to the foyer a few steps. What had she heard? Alan didn't love her? How could that be? Things whirled around in her mind relentlessly. Things started coming together that she had thought strange before. The strange toast Alan had made on their wedding night. 'Here's to us, to the truth.' The truth? Was what she overheard the real truth for Alan? Was he planning on humiliating her 'Tonight?' In front of his friends? Did they know about this? No, she didn't think so. He was warning Richard even now.

Her brain screamed its pain. It was all a lie. A LIE !

Alan didn't love her. He was trying to get even with her in a morbid way. He was using her. Gina nearly laughed hysterically. Hadn't she asked herself a hundred times what a man as successful as Alan could see in a simple girl like her?

She couldn't let anyone see her like this, especially not Alan. She had to have time to think, time to absorb all of this. She couldn't face anyone just yet. Above her she could hear Carol closing one of the doors and in a flurry of movement Gina grabbed her purse from the shelf in the entry way closet and dashed out the front door.

Her heart was surely numb. She felt violated. She wouldn't let Alan have his revenge, she wouldn't.

Her feet reacted despite the condition of her shocked state. This way he would never know the deathblow he had dealt her. She could rob him of that much satisfaction, if nothing else. The rain streamed down over her face and mingled with her tears. The darkness swallowed her up. Alan would never know how much he had hurt her. He would never know just how well his plan had worked.

Days latter Gina still sat in a run down motel room figuratively licking her wounds. Unable to call Alan for fear of hearing the worst, Gina made up her mind to leave Connecticut and never return.

There was nothing left for her here. If Alan was searching for her, she didn't want to be found, she would go far, far away. To where, she didn't know. She didn't have any particular place in mind, just away from here, away from Alan, away from the memories that were burned in to her brain.

What was Alan thinking? What was he feeling? He was probably relieved to be rid of her.

Gina sighed; nothing was going to be easy. Willpower would keep her going; it never failed her in the past.

AND BLESSINGS ON THE FALLING OUT
THAT ALL THE MORE ENDEARS,
WHEN WE FALL OUT WITH THOSE WE LOVE,
AND KISS AGAIN WITH TEARS.

TENNYSON

Hazily, in her drug-induced state Gina remembered back. She hated to do that, but sometimes she just couldn't help herself. It had started out as such an enjoyable evening. Then with horror that hadn't been diminished over time she remembered how that evening had come to an abrupt halt. Her happiness had been shattered so swiftly in one stroke.

Had it really been two years? Two long, lonely years, the pain was still unbearable to even think about it. The rest of that fateful evening was a total blur to Gina. She had left Alan's house with only her purse, not even a coat to protect her from the cold and the rain. If a nice old farmer hadn't of come along when he did, Gina might have been forced to turn back. Gina had left with a broken spirit all right, Alan had seen to that. Once she made up her mind to leave him for good, she did. Even now Gina could hardly accept what happened.

Alan had been so loving, so kind to her, and then to learn that he was really using her and that he was actually cold, callous and ruthless. To this day she could hardly believe it.

Gina had lived virtually from hand to mouth holding down odd jobs as she made her way out of state until the day she learned that she was pregnant. After she had a good long cry, not knowing if she was happy or sad about it, it gave her the strength to go on.

She determined that she was going to make the most out of her life for herself and for her child. She could put the pain and the bitterness behind her and go on,

Little Alan, her son, was her whole life now. He looked so much like his father that at times Gina cried over it. She had thought several times of letting Alan know that he had a son but she was afraid to. He might try to take him from her and little Alan was all she had. She was so fearful of Alan finding her that Gina didn't even find out if the sale of her grandfathers house went through or not.

Gina worked and worked to do the very best for her little son. Sometimes the bills were just too much for her though. She had no idea that it could cost so much to have a baby and then see that it was well looked after during the first years of its life. Now with another hospital bill on top of the last one and everything else, Gina wasn't sure she was going to make it.

Having left Connecticut she had eventually found her way to San Antonio, Texas. She couldn't work as a journalist for fear of Alan finding out.

She occasionally wondered if he even ever looked for her? If he did it was to cause more trouble. She sighed wearily, would she never get Alan out of her mind, her heart?

With her new identity as Maria Holt she somehow felt safe. Safe from Alan, safe from the world. The drug induced haze floated back over her again and Gina could no longer remember anything, she didn't want to anyway.

Much, much latter from somewhere she heard a mans deep voice filtering through her sleep to wake her. It was a grating sound and she didn't want to wake up, she wanted to sleep. Gina pressed her swollen lids tighter. Go away she pleaded silently.

"Miss Holt...Maria." Fingers closed around her arm and shook her gently. Gina tried to ignore it, she tried to turn over but they would not relax their grip. The disembodied voice persisted. The shaking became harder. "Miss Holt, wake up, I need to

talk to you for a little while, then you can go back to sleep. No one will disturb you again."

Gina knew that voice and it wasn't going to go away, she knew that too. He'd been coming every day to pester her. Doctor Morgan was her self appointed guardian.

Her eyes flickered open hesitantly. "Yes Doctor." A more persistent man she had never met except one. The doctor was a likeable man in his own way.

"Maria, Maria." He sighed expressively. "What am I ever going to do with you?" He looked at the woman thoughtfully. "Didn't I tell you that you could not go on working yourself so hard like before?" He frowned; he could tell that she wasn't really listening to him.

Doctor Morgan was a middle aged man about forty-five, and nearly bald already. He had little patience where Maria his patient was concerned. His high blood pressure was surely due to the fact that he was overweight and had a keyed up personality.

Doctor Morgan took his profession and his patients seriously. It greatly distressed him to see someone deliberately misuse their health; such was Gina's case. The fact that she was a repeat offender did not help matters any. This time he was determined to see that these episodes stopped. One way or the other he had to get this young woman to realize just how run down and sick she was. Didn't she realize that she was risking her life unnecessarily? What could he say to get through to her that he hadn't already said several times over?

"Listen to me Maria, can't I get it through your thick skull that you are a very sick person." Still there was no sign of life to her eyes that she had even heard him even though she was looking directly at him. He suppressed the urge to shake her.

"If you can't think of yourself then think about your son, woman. He needs you. You are his mother, you are all he has." At least she looked like she was listening.

"I know Doctor and I love him terribly." She looked towards the window wistfully. "More than anything in this world. I've got to feed him and take care of him." She sighed. "I can't very well let him starve and go without clothes you know." It was the same thing they always went over. Her reasons for working so hard were valid.

"We've been through this a hundred times before." Doctor Morgan's voice rose so that he was practically yelling at her. "I know what good care you take of your son." It was like trying to convince a brick wall. It was all so senseless.

"I know." Gina agreed quietly, still, what could she do? She had to keep working.

"For the last time." He calmed himself. "If you try to go back to work, before you are released from my care, it will only make things worse for you." The doctor knew the possible consequences.

"I know." She agreed. "I have tried to cut back on my hours but I have to work."

"That is not enough." The doctor's eyes rolled. "Are you trying to kill yourself?"

"No of course not." She denied it vehemently. She loved little Alan too much to abandon him that way.

"Don't you understand how close you are to total exhaustion? It is not something to mess around with. Any complication could easily push you over the edge. I'm surprised the way that you've been disregarding my advice that you are even alive at all."

Gina bowed her blonde head to avoid his solicitous gaze. "I have been trying to slow down honestly, I have." Gina, felt trapped, there wasn't any simple way out of her predicament.

"But you still work in that office by day and half the night at that club. Can't you quit your second job at least? With a child to care for it is just too much for you to handle alone."

"Not if I want to eat." Gina hoped to put him off; she didn't want to go through this again. Doctor Morgan was much too persistent.

He sighed visibly. "It's hopeless then. I'm wasting my breath." He paused and looked at her seriously, studying her condition, which was very poor. "Do you remember the first time you were brought in the emergency room Gina? How scared you were?"

She nodded her head. "Yes, I remember. " Gina whispered, pulling her sheet up over herself nervously just to have something to do with her hands.

"You told me then that you didn't have any relatives." She just looked at him warily and he continued. "Well, if you persist in being such a stubborn mule then I demand that you tell me who your next of kin are. If something should happen to you, heaven forbid, but if it should, that child of yours will need to be looked after. What if you should collapse again and not be able to tell us? What would happen to him?"

Gina stared at the sheets morosely; she didn't like to be reminded of that.

"I have no next of kin." Gina wondered fleetingly if she should confide in her doctor about Alan. Should she tell anyone?

"That boy has a father somewhere." He snapped. She wasn't going to get out of it that easily. "Would you have him end up in an orphanage as a ward of the state?" He saw her visibly cringe and knew that he had hit a nerve.

"Yes he does but..." Gina didn't finish when she looked up into the doctor's angry face. Her son in an orphanage, it was too horrible to even think.

"Maria." He took her hand in his own, much like a father would talk to a recalcitrant daughter. "I will only contact the father if it is an emergency. You needn't worry." He persisted at her hesitancy. "There has to be someone? Who is it? Tell me and let me help you." He patted her slim hand with his chubby one. May the Lord forgive him for lying to this girl, but it was for her own good and the good of her son. Doctor Morgan admitted he had never been put in a position like this in his life. She just did not realize the gravity of the situation. Her health was much too fragile and she would not survive if she left here before she was totally healed.

"I'll take better care of myself this time, I promise." She still hedged and it annoyed the doctor. What did she have to hide? Her eyes pleaded with him to understand. This time he would ignore them. This time her evasions would go unheeded. She was too close to death and couldn't even accept it.

"Maria." He snapped, not caring now if the good sisters over heard or not. They could think what they wanted. It was only important that he reach this woman in any way he could.

Shocked blue green eyes met his in a battle of wills and Doctor Morgan knew that the woman wasn't going to change her plans. She wouldn't get the chance to waste her life away, not if he could help it.

"You might as well confide in me because I will not give up. You rejected every other offer of my help so the least you can do is put an old mans mind at rest. I worry about you and the boy. See to his future Maria, for the day may come that he has no one."

Eyes met in conflict. Gina's eyes were clearly reflecting her turmoil. His heart went out to her. He did not know what she had to hide. It was inconceivable that one so young could have such a dark past that they needed to hide it, so what was it?

"You will only contact little Alan's father if something should happen to me?" She questioned him reluctantly.

Doctor Morgan nodded his head solemnly; the guilt he bore for deceiving her was great but not as great as the possibility of a wasted life. She was so young though, not any older than his own daughter.

"His name is "Alan." She told him softly. Her whole manner was subdued. Doctor Morgan pulled a notebook out of his jacket pocket to write on. "Alan Sullivan. New Age Electronics. New York City, New York." She sighed deeply. "Can I go back to sleep now?" He nodded, and she turned away from him to sleep but not before he saw the tears forming in her eyes.

Much latter, Doctor Morgan left the old hospital giving the nurse explicit directions to keep Miss Maria Holt under sedation as much as possible. He knew she would leave as soon as she felt she had enough rest and he knew it wouldn't be as much as she needed.

Doctor Morgan knew what he must do and exactly everything he was risking to do it. He justified his actions by thinking that his obligations as a human being came before his obligations as a doctor. He'd had too many sleepless nights over this particular patient as it was. The plane ride was well worth the effort.

Later doctor Morgan threw back his head and walked with determined steps into the well-lit spacious office. He glanced around quickly. This man was no pauper by any means. The whole building spoke of incredible wealth. Vaguely he wondered how his patient Maria would know someone like this. She didn't look the type to appeal to this man.

His eyes traveled over to the tall, muscular man standing in front of the big plate glass window gazing outward over the city. He was assailed by uneasiness. Could he really betray her confidence and tell this man that Maria was in need of help? Would he care? Did he even know the girl? Maybe there was really nothing to her claim that she knew this man. They didn't look like they could be related, complete opposites in fact. The boy did have his first name. There was only one way to find out.

"Mr. Sullivan?" He inquired, wondering if the man had heard him enter the room, he didn't give any indication of it.

"Yes, what can I do for you Mr. Morgan?" His tone was impatient to say the least and bored. "I'm a busy man and as you wouldn't tell my secretary what it was that you wanted to see me about I won't waste much time. Come to the point please."

Alan's bluntness on top of the fact that he didn't even have the courtesy to turn around and face him when he spoke, threw the doctor for a minute. He continued though, he hadn't come this far to turn back now. Maria meant too much to him. He for one knew what it was like to go through life with no one to care for them.

"It concerns a client of mine." He paused to wait and see if Alan would face him. He did not. "I am a doctor and by even being here I am breaking a confidence." He paused again, wishing the big man would make it a little easier on him, he felt bad enough as it was. When he still didn't turn around he continued on. "It was either take this chance or risk a life." He lowered his voice. "I hope you will understand why I'm here."

"Yes?"

The doctor noted with growing exasperation that Alan wasn't going to be least bit helpful. He continued to stare out the window with his back to him. Doctor Morgan didn't want to tell this man any more than he had to. First he would have to find out if he even knew the girl without giving away her full identity. There was too much at stake.

"Do you know a young lady by the name of Maria? She lives in San Antonio, Texas." He waited, as the man appeared to be thinking for a minute and glanced around at the opulent office.

"No." He shook his head. "I don't know anyone by the name of Maria or anyone in San Antonio for that matter that isn't a business acquaintance."

"Are you sure Mr. Sullivan? It's important and I was given your name specifically."

Maybe it was just a name she had heard before and made it up? Maybe she just wanted him off of her back. This man and Maria were two people that were worlds apart.

"Yes I'm sure, no Maria's in my life." Alan was tired. Was there someone claiming a paternity case against him? That would be funny. Alan knew that there hadn't been any women in his life since Gina left him and likely it would be years before there was again.

The doctor shrugged, damn, the man wasn't even going to turn around and face him so he could see if he was lying or not. Maybe Maria was the one who lied. Why wouldn't the man admit it if he knew any Maria or not? So much for his efforts.

"Well, thank you for your time Mister Sullivan. I should have known that the girl wouldn't be honest with me. She led me halfway around the country for nothing. "

Doctor Morgan wasn't sure what he would do with Maria now. Perhaps he could offer again to help take care of her and her small son. Maybe she didn't know who the boy's father was? He'd offered before, he would offer again.

"Yes, you are welcome." Alan told him, he wished the man would just leave. He had enough problems of his own without hearing about someone else's. He'd become a cold and callous man, he realized.

The doctor rose to leave. He paused at the door and muttered under his breath. "Wait until I get my hands on you Maria Holt, you will regret lying to me and sending me on a wild goose chase." He stepped outside and silently closed the door.

Alan stood rooted to the spot, unable to move or speak. His hearing was exceptional. Was there a coincidence about the last name? Could it be Gina? The girl claimed to know him! He'd given up hope of seeing her, finding her again a long time ago. She disappeared off the face of the earth. Every avenue had turned out to be a dead end.

"Wait." Alan's voice boomed through out the room and even penetrated the door. "Wait Sir." Finally springing into action, he crossed his office in three easy strides and

opened the door. His secretary looked at him with her mouth hanging open and the man was frowning at him.

Alan composed his features. "Please do come back in." Alan instructed the man, for the first time even looking at him. "I used to know a Gina Holt. Could it be the one and the same?" Alan asked anxiously. He held his breath; it had to be Gina. It just had to be! He'd worried so much over her the last two years, ached for her.

The Doctor strolled back into Alan's office smugly, at least now he had Alan's full attention. He did not know that Alan had heard his mutterings; only that he had connected the last name with someone he knew. Perhaps Maria hadn't lied at all.

"I do not know, I only know Maria, my patient. Let me explain. I have in my care a very sick young woman. If not for the fact that I convinced her that she might leave her son motherless some day I would have not even dragged your name from her."

Alan raised his eyebrows. If it was Gina, was she a mother by now? Was she dying? He was only half listening to the doctor. He didn't care how many kids she had. She was still his wife.

"I want you to understand that I was only supposed to contact you about the boy if she were to...ah...but I thought." He rushed on not wanting to reveal how run down Maria really was. "Since she seemed to know you, that you could help me get through to her. I haven't been able to. She's very ill."

Alan pondered this for a minute. "She gave you my name you say?" Could it really be Gina? Who else would give out his name? She could have changed her name or something. And what of this child? How did it figure into the picture? Alan rose out of his chair and grasped the small picture off of his desk. He handed it to the doctor. There was only one-way to find out if this woman was Gina or not. "Is this your patient Maria?"

The doctor studied it quickly. He voiced his doubts, even if he really didn't have any. So she knew the man after all and he apparently didn't even know he was a father.

No wonder she was reluctant to tell him who the boy's father was. Doctor Morgan hesitated. Would he try to take the boy from her? Was he hurting her more by asking for this mans help? "Yes, I believe it could be but I am not sure." If the man looked like he was gloating over finding her he would claim it was not her, if he didn't then he would take it from there. Immediately he had his answer.

Alan closed his eyes for half a minute and let out a long pent up sigh, two years worth.

The doctor noticed that the man looked relieved to have found the girl and was he was relieved himself. There had been no gloating. "She is far from this healthy and the hair is shorter." The doctor offered lamely. He noticed that Alan's hands were shaking as he got up and took the picture back.

Alan couldn't even speak for a minute. He rounded the front of his desk, as the doctor watched him. They stared at each other silently. "Thank you." He said simply.

"Miss Suggs," he finally pushed the intercom button. "Come in here please." The secretary joined them almost immediately, she was aware of the tightness in Alan's voice. Alan didn't have to thank the doctor; the gratitude was in his eyes.

"I am leaving." He told her peremptorily. "First I want you to phone my pilot and have him meet me at the airport right away. Tell him to file a flight plan for San Antonio." He looked from the stunned girl to the equally stunned doctor. Now that he knew where she was, he was going to go get her. He wouldn't risk losing her again. Alan could hardly believe it; he'd found Gina, after all this time of not knowing what had happened to her. "What hospital Doctor Morgan?" Alan knew he couldn't stay away.

"St. Mary?" He answered him, amazed at Alan's fast action in the matter. The man looked like he wanted to cry from relief.

"See to it that Maria Holt is put into a private room and made as comfortable as possible. You can assure them that I will be responsible for the bill and that I am on my

way." Alan drew a deep breath. "Then have the limo sent around front. After I'm gone you must cancel all of my appointments for this afternoon and indefinitely. Let Briggs and Firth handle anything that can't be put off. Have you got all of that Miss Suggs?" He looked at her.

"I will try and keep in touch as much as possible." Alan turned back to the doctor after the girl nodded and left to do her chores.

Looking back over her shoulder the secretary thought to herself that it was the most animated thing she'd seen her boss do over the last few years. She wondered what this strange man said to him to get him so worked up. Who was the mysterious Maria Holt?

Silently closing the door she did not hear her boss say. "Your patient is my wife Gina." Alan told the doctor as he pulled things from his desk drawer that he thought he might need. "I haven't seen her in two years. Come on and I will explain everything on the way."

It was just before dark when the Leer jet touched down on a small San Antonio airstrip. A weary Alan and doctor made their way to St. Mary's. Alan still didn't know what he was going to say to Gina or what her reaction would be after all this time. Would she be glad to see him? Would she give him a chance to explain that she had taken things wrong that night so long ago? He didn't even enjoy the sights of the city after they rented a car and made their way across town, Alan's mind was in too much of a whirl.

Doctor Morgan felt better about what he had done since talking to Alan. It was obvious that he loved his wife very much. He told him everything he knew about Gina since their first meeting in the hospital emergency room when she fainted due to

exhaustion. He looked at the pair as ill-fated lovers that he was helping to reunite and he felt better.

Gina's heavy eyes flickered momentarily, she vaguely remembered being moved to another room. It wasn't her room; this one was much larger and smelled of flowers. There was no one sharing it with her. Gina tried to force her eyes open and focus them. Something was making it very hard. Why couldn't she keep them open?

Distantly she could hear voices, male voices and footsteps nearing her room. Still failing to focus her eyes she heard the voices grow quieter and stop. Very slowly the door to her room opened allowing the bright light from the hall to fall across her bed. Gina's hazy eyes took in the form standing there; she would recognize Doctor Morgan's paunchy form anywhere. Then following him was another man, taller, more muscular. Hazily as her mind tried to recognize whom it was. She heard him speak and her mind jolted with the reality.

"I'm sure." There was a pause. "It is Gina alright."

She bolted to an upright Position. "Alan, oh my god, no." Gina swayed then she heard someone screaming. Was there someone else in the room? Feeling the prick of a needle in her arm, Gina closed her eyes. Sleep, blissful sleep overcame her again.

Alan paced the hall of the tiny hospital restlessly, waiting for Doctor Morgan to join him. There was still so much he needed to know, even if he knew Gina was in no shape to tell him herself. Where had she lived? What had she been doing for the last two years? Was there another man in her life? If there was, why wasn't he here with her? What about the child? Was it his? Someone else's? She looked even worse than he

thought she would and Doctor Morgan had tried to warn him. Was she that frightened of him that she screamed at the very sight of him? What was taking that Doctor so long?

The nurses and sisters that passed him in the hall stared at him curiously. Why? So many people seemed to be checking on Gina. Alan shoved his hands in his slack pockets. God, he wanted to go to her so bad. He wanted to hold her and comfort her.

Gina, Gina, what ever had become of the two of them? Alan knew that it was going to be all up hill from here. Just then another nurse came from the room. He stopped her. "Can I go in yet?" He asked.

"Doctor Morgan will be with you presently." She turned and left him. Alan went on in Gina's room anyway, he couldn't stand it any longer.

Alan paused at the door of the manager's office. He didn't like this apartment complex or this neighborhood, he only hoped it was better during the daylight hours. What was Gina doing living in a place like this? The area was dirty and trashy. It was run down from neglect.

He frowned to himself as he tapped on the gray metal finger printed door. He wondered if it was safe to leave his rental car where it was. Then he assured himself that if Gina was living in these apartments then they couldn't be all that bad.

It opened to him immediately and Alan found himself suddenly grasped in the embrace of a small Mexican lady. Stunned momentarily Alan fought to regain his composure. "Mrs. Gonzalez?" He asked noting her plump pleasant appearance. He had talked with her on the phone but she was smiling at him broadly like she recognized him. She reminded him of his grandmother in a way. That she was so friendly, it was a relief.

"Si, yes, and you are our little Maria's husband no?" She looked at him with excited eyes. Did she know Gina well?

"I'm Alan Sullivan." He wondered how she knew without him telling her. "I called you earlier about seeing to G... Maria's apartment for her."

Alan was curious as to how well this lady knew of Gina. Were they friends? She seemed concerned enough. "She's not well." He tacked on lamely not knowing what else to say. He felt like an outsider, prying into Gina's world.

"Si, I know. But she will be better now that she have you. You will take care of our Maria and her boy?"

"That is my intention, yes." Why did Alan get the feeling that she was searching him out to see what his intentions were. She studied him and seemed to make up her mind.

"You have kind eyes, I will get the key. Maria is my friend I do not wish to see her hurt." She paused and her dark eyes pierced him again. "Do you wish for me to wake the boy Senhor?"

"Is he here?" Alan's heartbeat quickened. He was surprised to find the boy so easily. Doctor Morgan had only known that Gina had left him with a neighbor. He thought he had a lot of searching to do. Now he was confronted before he was ready.

"Si, he is sleeping now. Little Alan cries for his mama at night."

Alan felt an incredible tightness around his chest at hearing that the little boy carried his name. He had so many questions that were still unanswered at this point.

"Please." It was the only response that Alan could manage at being confronted with seeing his son for the first time. The boy that he did not even know existed until this morning.

Mrs. Gonzalez showed him to a little room at the back of the office. She flipped on the overhead light and stood back proudly. The light didn't even disturb the sleeping infant.

Alan took a deep breath and walked over to the youth bed that held him and looked down on his son. Sticking out from underneath the covers was a small head covered with dark hair the color of his own. Alan slowly reached down and pulled back the covers, so he could get a better look at the small round face.

A momentary flutter of eyelashes revealed to him green eyes like his own. His heart seized up and for a moment Alan couldn't even speak. This was his child, his son. He touched the soft cheek where the stains of tears remained.

Mrs. Gonzalez spoke from behind him, he'd almost forgotten she was there, in fact he did.

"He is like you, no?" She spoke softly so as not to wake the sleeping child. Alan wondered if she knew it was the first time for him to see his own so? "He even carries your name."

"Yes, he is." It was hard for Alan to control the shakiness of his voice, so moved was he. He actually had a son!

"Maria is a good Mama, Senhor." She told him sternly as if she was warning him.

Alan never doubted that she wouldn't be a good mother. He nodded his head to let her know that he understood and agreed.

"May I see her apartment now?" Alan wanted to get back on track. He would hate to cry in front of a complete stranger, maybe in his own bed at night with no one to know but never in front of a stranger. This was going to be a long night.

"Si, Senhor, it is across the way. I will open it for you and then I must get back. Maria no like me to leave little man alone."

Alan stood in the middle of the one room efficiency apartment and soaked in Gina's surroundings. How could they have come to this? Alan tried to be analytical about things; the couch must be her bed he thought. His eyes were involuntarily drawn to the far corner of the room where he saw a baby crib with fresh blue sheets and a folded blanket. A toy box was underneath. The place was sparsely furnished with old battered furniture; he did note that it was immaculately clean. There were no friendly pictures on the walls, nothing to reflect Gina's personality, except a few sketches tacked up over the couch. He moved to take a closer look. Gina no doubt still sketched when given the opportunity. There were two of the baby, one at his newborn stage and one more recent.

Alan realized that he didn't even know the age or birthday of his son. How could Gina have kept something like this from him? He drew himself up short. He knew why.

His eyes traveled to the sketch that was of him two years ago. She would have to add a few gray hairs and perhaps some worry wrinkles around the eyes. At least she still thought of him that was a small relief considering how much he always thought of her over the last two years.

The last sketch was of a kindly looking old man with Gina's eyes, he knew it was her grandfather.

Latter, Alan decided that there wasn't really all that much to keep so he pulled the sketches off the wall and put them in the toy box which he filled with other things he thought they might need or want. There was no way he was going to let them stay here now that he had found Gina again. What ever it took, he would convince her that she would be better off with him at least until she was well and back on her feet again.

Alan sat down on the couch, and fought back the depression that threatened to engulf him. He was worried about Gina; she looked so thin, so pale, and so sick. He knew it was his fault that things had been such a struggle for her. Alan knew he should never have forced her into marriage so soon. If only he would have given her time to get to know him better, things might have been different. He wondered what things would have been like if he would have let things take their natural course. Where would they be now?

Alan remembered vividly the night he had heard Carol call him out into the foyer only to find the front doors swung open wide and Gina gone. At that moment he knew that she had over heard him and Richard Hurst talking and drawn the wrong conclusions. Not all of it, she hadn't heard all of it! Why couldn't she have trusted him enough to face him with what she had heard? He wouldn't have denied it; instead it would have been a relief to get the guilt off of his chest.

Alan cringed when he remembered how Gina screamed in sheer terror at just the sight of him and it filled him with anguish. He couldn't bear for that to happen again. Alan knew he would never forget those tear filled eyes that went into shock. He hadn't expected a joyful reunion but then again, he hadn't expected that either. Alan burrowed his face in his hands and it was a long time before he looked up again.

Trying to make plans was suddenly hard for Alan. He knew he had to be careful now where Gina was concerned. It was going to take a long time to win back her trust and the love that she had given him so selflessly. He knew he could not rush it either. Some- how he would do it, he couldn't stand to loose her again. There was his tiny son to consider too.

Deciding that it wasn't worth the effort to go find a motel room Alan walked back to Mrs. Gonzalez and explained to her that he would be staying the night in Gina's apartment. He had a long talk with the friendly lady and found out that she knew quite a bit about Gina Maria Holt. It hurt him to realize that he had not even known that Maria was her middle name. It explained to him though why the private detectives he hired to find her couldn't ever track her down. Apparently she had moved around a lot the first year too before settling in San Antonio. He realized that the kind lady did not realize why he and Gina were not together and she didn't press him about it. Talking to her helped him so very much.

Little Alan still did not wake even when Alan carried him across the courtyard to Gina's apartment and put him to his own bed. He covered him with the sheets and couldn't help but wonder what the boy would do when he woke up in the morning and found a stranger with him. He was comforted by the thought that at least he was in his own bed and his own familiar surroundings, all the surroundings he had known for his short life.

Oh how Alan wished he could recall the last two years and live them over again.

He wouldn't have made the mistakes he made where Gina was concerned.

Taking off his suit jacket, Alan leaned back on the couch without even opening it up into a bed. Sometime in the early morning hours he slept and then none too soundly.

A light tapping noise on the door woke Alan and he realized that it was morning already. It seemed he had just gotten to sleep. A quick glance around and he saw that his son was sitting up with his head leaned against the bars of his crib.

He was studying Alan and was very much confused. Another glance at his watch told him it was already eight o'clock and that the boy would be getting hungry soon.

His son's little face was animated and full of life. Alan smiled at him reassuringly.

Upon opening the door Alan was surprised to find a little boy standing there who was about ten years old with sandy brown hair and freckles. He was holding a small bouquet of wild flowers. As he stood there looking down at the boy and pondering over the flowers he spoke.

"You go to see Maria in hospital?" He waved past Alan to little Alan, who returned the greeting with a giggle. Alan realized they knew each other.

"Yes, I am leaving to go there in just a few minutes." Alan looked him over wondering what it was he wanted. He just hoped that his car was still in one piece, Alan still wasn't very happy about the neighborhood.

"Would you please to give these to Maria? Si?" He handed Alan the flowers.

"Of course I can do that for you. Who do I say they are from?" Alan inquired, touched by the boy's actions and thoughtfulness. "I am Manuel" He puffed himself up in size and faced Alan proudly.

"Okay Manuel, I will see to it that she gets these first thing. How do you know Maria?" Alan couldn't help but ask.

"Maria, she teach me to speak this good English, good no?" He smiled proudly at Alan. That sounded like something Gina would do. Alan remembered all the friends he encountered at her old apartment. They were very upset when he told them that she was missing.

"Your English is very good." Alan smiled back at him. Gina was lucky to have found a place with so many nice people. He watched as the small boy turned to leave and then paused frowning and looked back up at Alan. He looked into his eyes for some sort of an answer. Alan noticed that this boy was the second person to watch his eyes so intensely. He realized that it wouldn't matter how he answered what was asked as long as his eyes told the truth.

"Are you going to take Maria away now? You make her happy? Mrs. Gonzalez says to my mother that you take her far away and we no see her any more. Maria is like Mrs. Gonzalez, she got no one, till you come. You make Maria happy?"

Alan could see that the boy was determined and protective of Gina. It made him smile. Trying to reassure the boy he answered him honestly.

"I'll do my best Manuel. The very best I can." He shook his small head and he smiled again. This appeased the boy and Alan watched as he walked down the sidewalk, tucking his hands into his front pockets very pleased with himself.

Alan closed the door and turned to look at his small son. He knew he would have to get a move on if he was going to get all the arrangements made in time. Starting with Mrs. Gonzalez to help with little Alan. If she agreed, he would take them all back to Connecticut with him. Then Alan wondered what he should feed a small boy who was nearly fifteen months old. Then he decided that maybe McDonalds would be the answer for them both.

“Okay fella.” He smiled at his son. "I think its time we get to know each other."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Alan entered his wife's bedroom. He still wasn't sure how she was going to react to him, but at least she didn't scream at the mere sight of him. Now he had to contend with something much more stressing. Alan could have handled anger or even hate but he did not know how to handle this far off indifference she was presenting to him. Gina had withdrawn into her own personal world since their return to Connecticut and Alan hated it.

He knew that she was quite aware of everything going on, she just didn't want to be a part of anything that had to do with him. Mostly she slept, letting her body heal and recuperate.

She was sitting up, hanging her feet off of the bed and reached for her robe when he entered.

"I am glad to see that you're awake now." Alan chatted casually trying to put his wife at ease. "I thought you might like to see little Alan before Mrs. Gonzalez puts him to bed."

He paused, noticing that she wasn't looking at him. "He's been anxious to see you all day." So have I.

Gina had lost so much weight that Alan was worried about her; the doctor told him that it would be a long while before she was back to normal again. She looked so different now. Long gone was the carefree girl he had once known and he blamed himself. She hardly talked to him at all and when she did it was always at his instigation. She stayed in her room until he would come and insist she join the rest of them.

"Yes, I would like to see him, please." She barely spoke in more than a whisper and she was always nervous whenever he was around.

“You can see him any time you please, Gina.” Alan reminded her. Putting his arm around her tiny waist to help her down the stairs. He noticed that she was shaking and also knew that it was because he was too close. Some how Alan knew that he would have to make her get used to him again. When she was well enough again he would explain to her about that awful night.

If she would let him, this time he would make things work out. Alan caught the questioning look on her face as she studied him. It was the first time she had even really looked at him. He knew she probably wondered why he had brought her back. She probably expected the worst from him.

She startled him out of his thoughts. Her blue green eyes were thoughtful, watching him.

“You look good Alan. Two years haven’t done you any harm.

A faint hope started to build in Alan; he realized that this was the first thing she had said to him that he hadn’t had to drag out of her. Without thinking he blurted out. “Wish I could say the same for you.” He didn’t mean for it to sound so harsh and quickly amended. “But another few weeks and you will be back to normal and be your old self again Gina.”

Immediately she fell into silence again with that far off look in her eyes, the one he hated. What had he said that was so wrong? Then he knew, by saying she would be her old self, he had reminded her off the past. He longed to wrap her slim form in his arms and smooth away all the pain. She wasn’t ready for that yet and that it might do more harm than good if he tried. Alan sensed that she would never trust him again easily. Time would tell and he would have to build a whole new relationship with her.

He was aware of the fact that the only thing that brought any life to her eyes was her son. Helping her to the sofa he lifted the small eager boy to her lap. “He’s missed you.”

She wasn't listening to him. She'd already put him out of her mind. Would she ever let him close to her again? She talked to her son instead. Her voice soft and crooning relayed her love.

"Have you been a good boy for Mrs. Gonzalez? I told her you would be." She gave the happy boy a big hug and lots of kisses.

"Cookie mommy." Little Alan hinted, wiggling and hugging her back. Alan loved that they were so very close. He was proud of them both.

"Okay fellow, I'll go get you one, you visit with your mommy." Alan offered, wanting to allow them some time alone together. Softly he walked to the kitchen.

Returning with a handful of Oreo cookies, little Alan's favorite, and three glasses of milk he wondered if he would ever be a real part of this family. He loved the boy already yet Alan knew that Gina would be the one who could ever hold his whole heart.

Latter when Mrs. Gonzalez appeared and whisked little Alan off to put him to bed Alan watched Gina. She was deep in thought. Normally she would have left the room by now so that she didn't have to be around him. He might as well have been sitting on the moon for all the notice she took of him. He frowned to himself; he had to do something about it. He couldn't keep letting her go on this way. Politely he asked. "Would you like something to drink or a snack or something Gina?" She could only look at his feet not daring to lift her eyes to him. Well that would stop too.

"No thanks, I'm not hungry either. Thank you." was her brief reply. Alan squatted down on one knee and gently tilted back her head to get her to look at him. Her blue green eyes widened in surprise.

"You know that you've got to start eating better if you are going to get well. Right now you don't even have the strength of a kitten. I noticed that you didn't touch your milk or cookies." Good grief he felt like he was lecturing her and he didn't want to do that.

She only shrugged her shoulders and looked away again. Alan decided this was just too much. He didn't know how much more of this attitude he could take. This was worse than not having her at all. His temper sprung forth unchecked.

"Darn it, Gina. You've been here two days now and I've hardly left your side. You won't even talk to me. Can't you talk to me?"

He watched the shutters cross her face, he felt her tighten up and start to pull away. Alan held on to her chin more firmly. "I will talk to you Gina and you will talk to me. Can't you see that I only want to help you?" What could he say to get through to her? What would it take to reach her?

"I know," was her short reply, yet Alan knew that she only agreed just to get rid of him. He wouldn't let that happen. He would get her to listen one-way or the other.

"You know, do you? Do you really know Gina? I haven't had a minute's peace since you left me and now after everything else you won't even talk to me. How am I supposed to know what you are thinking or what you are feeling if you don't tell me?"

She sighed. "I think you should have left me where I was."

"It hurt but at least she was talking. Now if he could just keep her talking. Perhaps a taste of the truth wouldn't hurt.

"Why? So you could waste away into nothing. That won't accomplish anything. Can't you even think of our son if you can't think of yourself?"

If the boy were the only way to get through to her then he would use it to his full advantage. It worked; he didn't have to say anymore. Gina broke into tears and screamed at him. Her fists clenched and unclenched frantically.

"You can't take him from me. He's mine, I raised him..."

Alan realized then what was bothering her; she thought he was only after the boy. Why hadn't he thought of it before? The signs had all been there, the tears in private, the over protectiveness of the boy whenever he was around and so much more.

Instinctively Alan reached for her. It was the first time he had actually tried to hold her and comfort her. He wrapped his arms tight around her and gathered her close.

"Gina, please listen to me. I'm not trying to split you and little Alan up; I swear I wouldn't do that to you. Please believe me, I just want to help you, that is all." She was tense in his arms, he could feel it but at least she was allowing him to hold her. He waited for her to relax and quite crying then he went on as he stroked her head calmly. It felt so good to hold her in his arms again. "I only want you to get well Gina. I think it's time we talk, don't you?" He paused but she didn't say anything. "What you thought you heard two years ago, you didn't, not all of it anyway."

She pulled away from him violently then. "I heard what I heard are you going to deny it?" Tears glistened on her cheeks.

"No but Gina..." She interrupted him before he could finish his sentence.

"I want to go upstairs and lay down." Her voice sounded so weary that Alan didn't have the heart to press her any further.

He sighed to himself.

"I don't want to talk about it. Just leave me alone please." She begged.

"Okay Gina, I will stay out of your way." Alan walked her back upstairs. He waited until she was in her room and shut the door for her. Then he wandered back downstairs knowing that he couldn't sleep anyway. He wondered if she would ever be ready to listen to him? Alan was very worried. He poured himself a drink to settle his nerves, and sat staring blindly at the corner of the room.

Hours later upon returning upstairs a disheartened Alan heard something and paused in his steps to listen closely. He knew the crying he heard came from Gina's room. So she still had nightmares. Bitterly he thought to himself that this one was probably about him. He wondered if she imagined him in a red suit, brandishing a pitchfork.

Tapping on her closed door there was no answer. There was just the sound of her muffled crying. She was going to wake up little Alan and Mrs. Gonzalez.

Alan opened the door and ventured in. His heart went out to her when he discovered that she was so involved in her nightmare that she wasn't even aware of his presence. He silently walked over to the bed and sat down on the edge. It was hard to be so close to her yet so distant at the same time. She looked so beautiful asleep, so vulnerable.

"Gina wake up. What are you crying about?" He gently turned her over fully to face him, she was still gently weeping. Smoothing the thick blonde hair off her oval face he saw the tear filled lashes that remained closed to him. If she only knew how beautiful she was to him, even now, pale and sickly she made his heart do flip-flops.

Alan wanted to kiss her so badly; he longed to make love to her. He wondered if he would ever get the chance again. God, if she only knew how much he had missed her and longed for her. Alan thought he knew what loneliness was before he met her. It was nothing compared to the agony after he lost her. Sitting until nearly dawn, he held her in his arms long after the tears stopped. Alan knew she wasn't really aware of his ministrations or his presence. And she certainly didn't know that she had snuggled up closer to him. Alan was content to hold her for now; at least she was home.

Not wanting to wake her or frighten her when she woke Alan laid her gently back on the soft bed and covered her with the sheets. Stealing one last glance over his shoulder, Alan left her and closed the door, all the while hoping that it wouldn't remain closed to him forever.

Gina woke to the sound of dishes clattering in the hall and birds singing cheerfully under her window. Mrs. Gonzalez shouldered the door open, carrying a full breakfast tray. She was looking happier than Gina could ever remember seeing her look.

Gina wasn't sure if she liked the idea of Alan hiring her friend to be her servant. Mrs. Gonzalez didn't seem to mind, or notice that Gina was uncomfortable with it.

"You eat now. Si?" Her cheerful voice relieved some of Gina's misgivings. "I bring you breakfast in bed like Mr. Sullivan asked. He says you must eat it all." She reached over and sat the tray on Gina's lap, then busied herself with tidying up.

"Thank you!" Replied Gina stiffly. She didn't like being ordered to do things by Alan. She was afraid he might try to start manipulating her again. Gina poked at the food in front of her gingerly; she wasn't really hungry. She tried to look interested in it anyway. The way Alan and Mrs. Gonzalez hovered over her all the time trying to get her to eat, she knew it wouldn't do any good to tell them that she didn't feel like eating. She would just scoot it around on her plate to make it look like she'd eaten. When she saw Mrs. Gonzalez looking at her pointedly she knew it was no use, she wasn't going to get away with it. She took a few bites of scrambled eggs and washed it down with the orange juice. It was hard to eat when you had no appetite.

"Where is Alan this morning?" Gina asked thinking about her son that was usually trotting around her feet. Everywhere Mrs. Gonzalez went he went too while she worked around the house.

"He is riding this morning." Mrs. Gonzalez countered. She was smiling brightly obviously pleased about something.

"Riding?" Riding at his age? That was ridiculous "I mean little Alan, where is he this morning?" Gina corrected, thinking that she had been misunderstood.

"Si." She shook her head to show that she understood her perfectly. "The Senhor, he takes little son for a horseback ride. See for yourself, they are only out front. Your husband, he is a good man." Gina ignored her last remark; she didn't like to think about Alan. It just plain hurt too much.

Moving the tray and throwing back the covers, Gina traipsed over to her window that overlooked the front of the house.

Sure enough, there on the front lawn for all to see was Alan. He was riding a sleek brown horse, holding little Alan in front of him between his arms. All that showed of the boy was a swatch of hair in the circle of his arms.

"Won't he be going off to work soon?" Gina asked, it bothered her to see them together so much because she knew that it would only make it harder on all concerned when the time came for her to leave. Alan couldn't offer them hospitality forever.

Gina's thoughts and emotions were so mixed up where Alan was concerned.

"Si, he will be leaving for work soon. Why the rush to see him go?" Her eyebrows shot up accusingly. "Is it not good that he get along with his son?"

Gina realized she sounded like a shrew. "No it isn't that." Gina's conscience bothered her; maybe it was because they seemed to be naturally close. "No reason really." Gina climbed back into the bed to resume eating the unwanted breakfast.

Mrs. Gonzalez came to sit by her. She confronted Gina with her usual straightforwardness. "Will you not even talk to Alan, Maria?" She lapsed into calling her by the name that they first knew each other under.

Gina knew she could confide in her friend but she didn't really know what to say, things were so messed up between her and Alan.

"He is using the patience of a saint with you. Do not push him too far." She warned. "I see the way he longs to be with you and talk with you."

Gina had seen it and ignored it. "I know." Gina bent her head. "There is nothing left for us to talk about." She couldn't stand being rejected again.

"What about your marriage? Your son?" She stated boldly.

"Alan is just waiting for me to get well and then I am sure he will send me on my way. It's hard to explain but Alan never really wanted me." It hurt to say the words that she had hidden in her heart for so long. Alan didn't want her.

"Can you not see the love that man holds for you? I don't believe you know what you are talking about. It shows in his eyes whenever he looks at you,"

Gina wished she could believe that but she didn't want to go into all the details of how they met and came to be married. It was all so complicated. "I would rather not talk about it." Gina pushed the tray away; her appetite was never there in the first place.

"Avoiding it will not make it go away Gina. Soon you will have to talk to him. I do not think that Alan Sullivan is the type of man to be ignored or put off indefinitely, Have it your own way for now,"

Gina didn't think she could go on much longer trying to ignore Alan either. It was getting harder and harder.

Mrs. Gonzalez gathered up the tray with a pout on her face and told Gina that she would be in the kitchen baking some bread if she should need something. Gina knew that she had hurt her friends' feelings by not confiding in her but she just couldn't help it. Leave it to Mrs. Gonzalez to start spoiling Alan with her homemade light rolls. She could smell them already.

Gina stood in front of the window again an hour later. She couldn't help but admire the inviting springtime weather. Already things were in bloom and she longed to

go for a walk and wondered how she could manage it. She needed to be alone with no one to interrupt her thoughts or try to sway her actions every minute.

While she dressed Gina knew that sometime today, somehow she was going to sneak off and enjoy herself.

After playing with little Alan, Gina spent some time in the kitchen with Mrs. Gonzalez. She was happy to find that there was no conflict between them now. Mrs. Gonzalez told her what a good boy little Alan had been for her already that morning. She told her that he had dunked his face in the bathwater for the first time without getting scared and that she should be proud of him.

Gina realized that her son was growing up fast. She almost wished that she could put his growth on hold for a while until she was healthy again so she wouldn't miss any thing.

Gina heard nothing but praises from her friend about Alan too, which caused an undeniable prick at her heart. She would have to take that walk soon and do some thinking.

Gina excused herself and told Mrs. Gonzalez that she was going upstairs to lie down for a nap and let herself out the back door instead. They wouldn't have let her go on her own for fear of tiring herself out. She felt a bit deceitful for having to lie. Alan would never know; he had gone to work.

The warm sun felt good on her cheeks. The wind blowing through her shoulder length hair made her feel free and easy like a teenager again. She remembered back to the time when she used to roam the countryside, exploring, walking or riding the horse that her grandfather had gotten her. She fleetingly wished that Alan would offer to let her ride one of his many horses. He still kept them and it had been so long since they had been riding together. She remembered those first glorious days of their marriage and the early morning rides.

Gina walked on and on, crossing open fields, panting for air on small hills and rocky paths. She found herself enjoying the calming effect of the green scenery and wildflowers. There seemed to be so much that she needed to think about. Alan always seemed to be upper most on her mind. She didn't know how long she walked on. Judging by the sun it was getting close to *noontime*. Too tired to go straight back to the house, Gina sat down underneath a large old tree to rest. She hoped fervently that Mrs. Gonzalez hadn't gone up to check on her and found her missing. If she did and Gina got caught she knew that it would mean the end of her walks and at the moment she planned many. There was nothing like Mother Nature to put a person at rest. Daydreaming, her thoughts turned to Alan once again. Gina knew that she had changed. Alan had changed too and not for the better either, he looked older and tired all the time. Especially that morning when he came to tell her that he was taking her home with him. It was a shock to see him and an even bigger one to find out that he wanted to take her back to Connecticut.

She listened to him talk for hours and somehow he managed to talk her into the idea against her better judgment. With Doctor Morgan on his side, she hadn't stood a chance. Gina wasn't sure then why she agreed and she still wasn't sure, unless subconsciously she wanted to be with him again and see him again.

Alan had helped coax her by telling her that he promised not to put any demands or holds on her. He assured her that even Mrs. Gonzalez was coming with them. He told her that it was for little Alan's sake. He convinced her that it was going to be bad enough on him getting uprooted, much less dropped into the middle of a bunch of strangers. She suspected it was as much for her sake.

Alan had seemed so cold and formal about the whole thing, even on the jet ride back to Connecticut he hardly said a word to her directing most of his talk to his son and Mrs. Gonzalez. The rest of the time he seemed preoccupied with some work he brought

along to go over. He was a polite stranger. Over and over she wondered why he did it, why he wanted to take care of her.

Gina secretly wondered if there were other women in Alan's life now since she left, maybe there was one now. He wasn't the kind of man to go without female companionship for very long. She told herself that she didn't care one way or the other even if she knew deep down inside that it wasn't true.

Gina quickly faced the fact that she still loved Alan, even after all this time of being apart from him. She had never hated him, it was more like she had cut out a little piece of her heart and left it somewhere. Seeing Alan again had been harder than she ever imagined it would be. Gina still felt that pull that attraction to him that left her feeling weak at just the mere thought of him. Alan was still as good looking to her as always and the times he got close to her it reminded her of the days when they were together, sometimes spending half the day in bed.

That was so long ago, Gina sighed wistfully. She pulled off her light sweater and rolled it up and placed it under her head. The shade made by the tree was inviting. Gina didn't mean to fall asleep, she only wanted to rest in the cool, comfortable, green grass and soak in the warm spring weather.

Much later startled into waking up by a bug crawling on her arm she became aware of where she was and the time. She must have slept away the afternoon.

Gina sat up and brushed the sleep out of her eyes. Cursing herself, Gina hurriedly made her way back to the house. In her haste she tripped and fell, not hurting herself just getting dirt on her yellow slacks. Gina brushed herself off and went on, worried that by now Mrs. Gonzalez would have discovered that she was missing and called out the National Guard to search for her. Gina stopped once more to sit on a rock and take a short rest before she was even half way home. Her strength just was not up to normal.

Long before reaching the house she spotted a man off in the distance riding towards her on horseback. As he got closer, she could see that it was Alan. When he caught sight of her he spurred his horse into a gallop. Something about his posture warned her that he was angry and Gina knew he had every right to be upset with her. She could imagine the scene Mrs. Gonzalez would have caused as over protective as she was.

Alan brought the large brown horse to an abrupt halt in front of her. He jumped briskly from the animal and came towards her.

Gina didn't realize what a sight she was, her hair wind blown and her clothes dirty from the fall. Her fears about his anger were confirmed, when she stared up into Alan's red anger filled face.

Gina automatically stepped back from him only to have Allan reach out and grab a hold of her shoulders. His fingers bit painfully into her soft flesh as he shook her furiously.

"Just what the hell did you think you were doing?" He released her abruptly nearly causing her to stumble. "What's gotten into you Gina? Do you know how long I've been searching for you?" She didn't but he didn't have to holler at her. Gina had, never seen Alan so angry and it frightened her. What was he doing home so early? Mrs. Gonzalez must have called him.

"I only meant to go for a walk..." Gina tried to tell him what happened, why she'd been gone for so long.

"A walk?" He boomed. "What the hell for? You are in no shape to be taking walks alone yet. Where have you been?"

He looked like a man who was at the end of his rope. There was concern mixed with the anger?

"I went for a walk to be by myself." Alan cut her short again

"Have I been bothering you? Has any body? We've all gone out of our way to make you happy." Gina started crying now, he was right everyone was being extra good to her. Alan had kept his promise too about not bothering her. She wasn't sure any more if that was even what she wanted. What did she want?

If only he would listen to her, she could explain. Maybe she couldn't undo the damage but she could explain matters.

"No, no one has been bothering me. I just wanted to be by myself. I needed to think. I...never meant to fall asleep. It was so calm and peaceful I just wanted to rest for a little while. Please don't be mad. I really didn't mean to cause so much trouble." Gina could barely get the words out choking and sputtering like she was. That was another thing about being worn out so much, she had flimsy control over her emotions and it was frustrating. She didn't want Alan to see her as a crying, blubbing idiot, which made her cry even harder.

Alan saw her distress and pulled her close, stroking her hair gently with his large hand. She could feel the warmth of his body through his clothes. He smelled of cologne and horses, a very contrasting scent. It felt so good to be in Alan's arms. Gina wanted to tell him, wanted to show him how he made her feel. The minute he spoke it was her undoing.

"I'm sorry Angel face, I didn't mean to be so rough with you."

Alan thought she was crying over his treatment of her. "It is just that you gave me such a scare disappearing like that. We didn't know where you were and I thought you might have run off again or gotten hurt or something. God Gina, promise me that you will never do that again. I couldn't take it another time."

"Not ever again." She whispered turning her face up so that she could see the anguish on his face, Gina wondered over it.

Alan hugged her tight in the strength of his arms. "Sweet, sweet Angel face."

Alan murmured in her ear.

Angel face? He called her Angel face, not only once but twice. It brought all the old memories flooding back and with the bittersweet memories came more tears. Gina thought Alan must have been born a saint to listen to her crying all the way back to the house. He asked her over and over again why she was crying and Gina couldn't tell him. The words just wouldn't form.

Upon returning to the house Alan walked her to her room and left her without saying another word. Gina wished she could tell what he was thinking behind those unblinking green eyes.

By the time she had finished showering and changing Gina was exhausted again. The tongue-lashing she got from Mrs. Gonzalez didn't help matters any either. Little Alan had missed her too and Gina felt guilty that she had stirred up so much trouble.

Lying down on the bed Gina began to think again. What was she going to do? Loving Alan like she did, she didn't know how much longer she could stay here without revealing it. Yet she didn't know what she would do with herself otherwise. She had no job, no place to go. Then there was little Alan to take care of. She had a responsibility to her young son that weighed heavily on her. Gina didn't know how Alan felt; she sensed he had been holding himself back. From what? Surely he wouldn't want her to stay for much longer. There was nothing to do but ask him. She had so many things to ask him, like why he was taking care of her? He said that he wouldn't take little Alan from her. What did he want?

It seemed that she had just dozed off when she felt something lightly brush her cheek. It felt like warm lips. She opened her eyes to find Alan still bent over her. He looked embarrassed that he had kissed her, like he hadn't intended on getting caught.

"I thought you were still asleep." He whispered. "I wasn't going to wake you if you were." Gina shook her head. Was she mistaken about the desire lighting up his gray green eyes? Her nerve endings all tingled in response to his closeness.

"Did you want something?" Gina asked. Alan didn't usually come in her room for more than a second or two. The way his eyes immediately darkened she knew that it was the wrong thing to ask him. His eyes quickly scanned over her body as if he could see through her robe to the flesh concealed underneath. Perhaps he could, perhaps he could imagine her in his mind's eye the way she could imagine every inch of his male body. Ever so slowly Alan lowered his head to kiss her. His eyes never left hers, his intention clear. Yet there was something besides desire in his eyes that she didn't recognize. Was it desperation? It frightened her. Gina didn't want to let him kiss her, something was wrong and she knew the sensuous power he could hold over her if she let him.

Gina started to struggle away from him. Alan pinned her arms against her sides and kissed her hungrily. His need was clearly showing. He was acting like a starved man. She jerked her head away.

"No Alan." Her voice sounded husky as she tried to squirm out of the tight grasp he had on her. He didn't release her.

"Yes Gina." He groaned. "I've got to have you. You don't realize how badly I've needed you, wanting you. To have you so close and not be able to..."

In one lithe movement Alan covered her with his taut body, pressing her down deeper in the bed with his weight. His urgent hands seemed to caress her everywhere at once through the robe. So intense was his need that Gina was truly frightened. This was another side to Alan she had never seen. She didn't want to see it.

"Don't Alan." She pleaded before his lips could once more lay claim to hers. "You're scaring me." She blurted it out. "You're not going to force me are you?" All she

could think of was to get away from him, to make him stop. Gina knew that something would die inside her if he did this.

Alan froze; he was as suddenly as lifeless as a piece of dead wood. He took one look at her pale face and dropped his head to her shoulder drawing in a ragged breath. The desire died instantly from his eyes.

"It's that damned perfume. I'm sorry Gina." His breath was warm on her neck. She could still feel the warmth of his lips on hers. The evidence of his desire pressed against her. "This wasn't intentional I assure you. One little whiff of that perfume and it drove me crazy. It made me remember how it used to be between us." Alan swallowed nervously and sat up freeing her at the same time. "I only came to wake you up for dinner and..." He broke off abruptly and ran his fingers through his dark hair. "I'm very sorry." He finished simply.

"It is okay." Gina didn't know what else to say to him, instead she changed the subject, sensing his discomfort, knowing her own.

"Is little Alan eating with us tonight or did Mrs. Gonzalez already put him to bed?" Her body was turning traitorous, crying out for its need of Alan. It's need of fulfillment.

"Yes he is. Alan was already walking around the table in anticipation. Mrs. Gonzalez gave him a cracker to keep him happy." Alan stood up and shoved his hands into his beige pants pockets. "He's been asking for you."

"I'd better hurry then." Gina slipped off the bed and stood next to him. Alan touched her arm then he stopped himself and stepped back. Their eyes met and Alan started to say something and then clearly changed his mind. He dropped his arm and solemnly preceded her out of the room. Gina could tell that he was consumed with guilt over what happened.

After a long stilted dinner where neither of them did much talking beyond pleasantries Gina took another nap. It was close to nine when she woke again feeling refreshed. She played with little Alan and read him a nighttime story before she dressed him in his pajamas and put him to bed. Gina was starting to feel like a whole mother again. Soon she would be able to look after him by herself. Guiltily, Gina knew that things were still not resolved between her and Alan. So much needed to be said.

Alan spent most of the evening in his study with the door closed. He was avoiding her trying to stay out of her way and Gina knew it. It was what she wanted wasn't it? No it wasn't, Gina wanted to talk to him, listen to him and hear what he had to say about things. She didn't want to disturb him though so she chatted with Mrs. Gonzalez instead hoping that he would put in an appearance.

Before she knew it the time slipped by and it grew late. Mrs. Gonzalez went on to bed and Gina decided that she wouldn't wait any longer. She tapped on the door to Alan's study and waited for an answer, none came. Opening the door she found the small room empty. His study had only one access and that was via Alan's bedroom. Gina hadn't been there since her return. Alan let her take the room they used to share and took another one. As she turned to leave, four pictures caught her eye. They were her sketches, only now they were framed and backed and hung over Alan's desk.

Gina didn't know what to think about this. She thought they had been left behind in her San Antonio apartment with the rest of her things. What was Alan doing with them? This really had her confused. Why did he keep their presence from her, hidden away in his study where only he could see them? She picked up a picture off his desk to study it. It was a picture of their wedding. The one where Gina was looking up into his handsome face after the ceremony waiting for his kiss. She put it back down. Did Alan remember those times fondly too? Looking around the rest of the room, she didn't see anything else of special interest.

Going back through Alan's room she took a quick look around.

She'd been curious about where Alan was sleeping. Then she spotted it and her heart gave a lurch. It was her wedding ring set; the one Alan bought for her, sitting in its original case on top of Alan's dresser. She went to take a closer look. Yes, it was hers. Gina thought that too had been left behind and wondered why Alan had it and had not said anything about it. The mystery was growing. Why would he keep it if he didn't care something about her? Oh sure, he would keep it because it was valuable, but would he have it sitting out on his dresser?

Gina set it down and closed the door to his room and went back to her own. Like her, Alan had snuck off somewhere, perhaps earlier in the evening. Minutes later as Gina sat on her bed she heard heavy footsteps in the hall. Quickly she put on her robe and opened the door.

It was Alan all right; her heart did little flip-flops. He didn't look quite right though. His hair looked ruffled and uncombed. He had loosened his tie and unbuttoned the top two buttons of his dress shirt. It wasn't tucked in to his pants evenly either. Alan never let his appearance go so sloppily, never. He looked unkempt and flustered.

Gina wondered what was wrong with him. He didn't look as if he felt good. He'd come in the back door; she would have heard the front one. He looked up and saw her standing in the doorway and smiled at her sardonically.

"Well, well, well..." He looked her up and down. "If it isn't the prodigal wife." His words were slurred and Gina realized with a start as he ambled towards her that he had been drinking. More than that, judging by his uneven gait he was drunk. "What do you want? To take a look at me when I am down?"

"I... just wanted to talk to you." She stuttered. "But it can wait until morning." Gina backed up and started to close the door to her room and leave him on his own. She didn't know this Alan.

Alan had different thoughts. He was quick to block the door with his body, leaning against the doorjamb.

"My, my, aren't I privileged." He drawled. "She wants to talk to me." He gave her a mock bow and smiled at her cynically. "I've only been around here for days and practically gotten down on my hands and knees to get you to talk to me. So talk to me Gina... What is it you want?" He sounded bitter and gruff.

Gina didn't know whether to try and talk to him when he was like this or not. What was bothering him? Alan never drank enough to get drunk. He was waiting for an answer.

"I...was....I was just wondering why you are letting me stay here. Actually she had so many questions crowding in on her mind that she didn't know where to start. There was so much she wanted to say to him.

His laugh was actually a smirk. "Well you are my wife aren't you?" He looked at her sharply. "You didn't manage to get a divorce did you and forget to tell me about it." He asked her urgently.

Gina shook her head no. It had never crossed her mind more than once because she couldn't bear to do it. Had Alan? He looked relieved and went on. "That is my son." He sighed futilely. "We've been through all of this before at the hospital. I just wanted to help that is all. God, I know you hate the very sight of me and wish you weren't here but I just had to do something." He looked so dejected that Gina reached out a hand to comfort him only Alan pulled back and looked at her angrily.

"What is it you expect now Gina? An undying profession of my love? Do you need more ammunition to taunt me with? Wasn't leaving me before with the knowledge that you didn't trust me enough? You even kept the knowledge of own my son from me. Well, I do love you, so now your victory is complete. But did you even care if I loved you or not? No! Did you ever listen to me or give me a chance to explain? No."

Gina stood there condemned by his withering words. "You went running off into the night and disappeared. Oh I know." Alan raised his hand to keep her from interrupting. "You thought I was going to throw you out, didn't you. You heard it all wrong Gina." He articulated carefully. "Did you give me a chance to explain by confronting me on it? No! You would rather believe I was a cold heartless bastard."

Gina began to shake her head no.

"No don't deny it" Alan halted her denial before she could even get the words out. "It doesn't matter what you think of me. You didn't want to know the truth about what you heard Gina, did you? That is what hurt the most." He looked as if he wanted to shake her thoroughly.

"I thought that was the truth Alan." Gina couldn't even look him in the eyes. Most of what he was saying was too close to the truth. Why hadn't she simply confronted him?

"Well you know something Gina. I don't give a damn anymore. I'm not going to keep trying to love someone who doesn't love me back. Over and over again I've tried to show you how much I care since I found you. I'm starting to believe that I was better off not knowing where you were or even if you were alive or not." Alan halted his tirade and ran a hand through his hair. "So there. I talked and you listened. Now, I am going to bed before the rest of my animal instincts take over and decide to ravage you or something. Go to bed Gina. Go to sleep."

Gina stood there with her mouth open as Alan strode down the hall to his own room and slammed the door. Gina had expected a lot of things but not this. Gina went over and over everything he said until her tired body finally overcame her mind and she slept all the while seeing Alan in her dreams.

In the middle of the night, Gina woke from a deep sleep. She didn't know exactly what woke her. After lying there a while unsuccessfully trying to return to sleep she decided to go down to the kitchen for a snack. Gina slipped into her familiar robe. Some

of the things Alan told her earlier during his heated refrain kept coming back to mind. It was possible she had been wrong about Alan, wrong about what she'd heard. Could there have been a logical explanation for what Alan was saying that night? Could she have heard things all wrong?

Gina saw Alan's anguished face in her mind's eye. His flat statement that he didn't give a damn anymore about how she felt about him, hurt her. She stopped in her tracks on the stairs in thought. She searched her mind for exactly what he'd said after that. 'I am not going to try and love someone who doesn't love me back'. Alan said he loved her? He was right when he said that he had been trying to show her since he brought her back to stay with him. Gina pondered over everything as she resumed her purpose of going to the kitchen.

The light was already on. Gina hesitated when she looked through the doorway and saw that it was Alan. He was sitting at the breakfast table with a cup of coffee in front of him. She studied him while he was unaware of her approach. His dark head was bent and he was holding it in his hands, slumped a little in his posture. Gina figured he was trying to finish sobering up. He had sounded much more sober at the end of his lecture than at the first of it.

"Alan?" Gina called to him quietly. Perhaps he wouldn't want to be disturbed by her. He looked up and for a moment blue green eyes searched gray green ones as if he didn't believe she was standing there.

Alan jumped to his feet jerkily. "Sorry, I didn't hear you." He told her. "Is everything alright?"

"No problem." She assured him. "I thought I would fix myself a sandwich to snack on." Gina noticed the tired lines around Alan's eyes in the bright florescent light of the kitchen.

"Sit down." Alan motioned towards the table. "I will do it for you." He waited until she was seated. "How about a tuna sandwich and some fruit?" He offered rummaging around in the refrigerator pulling out what he needed. Every so often he would glance in her direction. When at last he sat a plate in front of her, he spoke.

"I owe you a big apology, Gina." She looked at him thinking that one should be coming from her too. "My behavior earlier was abominable. I'm truly sorry. I had no right to paw at you that way and then to top it off I really lit into you latter."

"It is alright Alan." Gina nibbled on half of her sandwich. She waited until Alan seated himself across from her at the table.

"Alan?" He seemed deep in thought, far away in spirit.

"Hmm?" He questioned absently. "Need something else?"

"No.." Gina cleared her throat. "I've been thinking a great deal about some of the things you said earlier. You were right. I never did give you a chance to explain." Gina swallowed the lump in her throat. Things had to be cleared up and it was now or never. "Running away like I did only made things worse. It was wrong of me, I know that now."

"Gina what you heard was a confession, no more. When I first found out who you really were I felt betrayed. "

"That is easy to understand." Gina admitted. "I should have been honest with you from the start and never kept my identity from you."

Alan slammed a fist down on the table.

Gina jumped.

"I don't want you to blame yourself. Everything has been my fault from the start. I tried rushing things, manipulating you. There should have been a better way. Do you remember the day you confessed to me that you had thought of doing a revenge article on me and then changed your mind and I didn't believe you?"

Gina nodded. She remembered every single moment of their time together. "At the time I couldn't understand that, how you could change your mind and not do what you intended. Now I understand." He paused and took a sip of his now cold coffee.

He looked nervous, and gave a halfhearted laugh. "For the last two years I've rehearsed what I was going to say to you when I found you. Now I can't even get the words to come out right."

"You kept looking for me?" Gina interrupted. She had to ask.

Alan smiled ruefully. "Everywhere." He stated simply. "I never gave up hope. It seemed useless at times but deep inside I knew that someday, somehow we would be together again. You never even contacted your lawyer about the sale of your grandfathers house." Alan took a hold of her hand and held it tightly, looking deep into her eyes. "Anyway, as I was saying, I couldn't understand your initial thoughts of revenge and how you discarded them until I had some myself. Yes, I planned to do all those horrible things against you that you overheard me talking to Richard Hurst about. It didn't happen that way though Gina. I was in love with you even then. It was all just empty threats, a ploy to get you where I wanted you...with me. At first I tried to fight it but the love I had for you was too strong. My need of having you for all time overcame everything else. No one ever reached me before the way you did? Can you understand what I'm saying to you? By confessing to Richard about my misplaced motives it was a way of easing my conscience because I couldn't tell you. Understand?" Alan questioned her.

Gina could hardly see him for all the tears in her eyes. She'd been so wrong, so terribly wrong. Alan came to her then and knelt down in front of her, gathering her in his arms to his chest.

"God, I didn't mean to upset you again. That is all I've done today is manage to upset you every time I turned around. I was going to wait to have this talk with you when you could handle it better. This is twice today I've screwed up."

Gina threw her slender arms around his neck and clung to him. How unfair she had been to him. She had hurt him so badly.

"Alan?" Gina choked back a sob. "Do you still love me?" She had to know, she had to tell him what she felt for him.

Alan tensed and pulled back. "I can't answer that." He brushed the tears from her cheek gently. "When the time comes, I believe you will know the answer to that question. Gina I don't want you to stay with me for any other reason than because you love me and want to live the rest of our lives together. It's too important to me to try and coerce you, threaten you, tempt you or make you feel guilty about anything. Do you understand what I'm saying? God I don't want to screw up again where you are concerned. I vowed to myself that I would give you time to think things through and come to your own conclusions where we are concerned." Alan rose to his feet and kissed her on the forehead. "The future will take care of its self Gina. Think on it. What becomes of us must not be forced it should be allowed to happen naturally when we are both ready. I won't rush things again. I can wait as long as it takes."

Gina sat and stared at Alan's retreating back as he left her. She wanted to run to him and throw her arms around him and tell him how much she loved him but it was too soon just like he said. It couldn't be rushed. The sandwich forgotten, Gina went back to bed.

The next day, the strain wasn't any better. Alan had left for work earlier than usual and Gina hadn't got to see him. She decided it was just as well; it gave her all day to think about Alan, his love, and her love. Why had she been so blind?

Why hadn't she believed his love for her was real? How many times had Alan tried to explain to her about things since her return? Suddenly Gina was filled with hope. Then there were the sketches to consider and the ring. Alan had them. If they didn't mean

anything to him he wouldn't have kept them. He certainly didn't have to take care of her and little Alan, yet he was, would he do that if he didn't want to? And he never once pressed her about helping them. When he kissed her with the hunger it frightened her but it was the desperation of a man with unfulfilled needs. Gina knew she had been all wrong and wondered if Alan could ever forgive her. Could she forgive herself?

There was so much she had to make up to him for. There was still so much that had to be said. Perhaps there was another way Gina could show Alan that he meant the world to her.

Gina thought Alan would never come home. She waited on him all evening. It was well after ten thirty when Alan did finally come home. She held her breath when she heard him pause outside her door and then go on.

Gina gave Alan an hour to get ready for bed and then she went to him. His light was out in his room. Slipping down the hall, Gina opened the door to his room letting the light from the hallway fall across Alan in his bed. She closed the door silently behind her and carefully made her way over to stand beside his bed. What if he turned her away? He wasn't sleeping; he was staring at her with a blank expression on his face. He was lying shirtless under the covers with his hands behind his head. For Alan that meant he wasn't wearing pajamas. Gina waited anxiously for what seemed like an eternity before Alan made a move. Then it was only to put his hand out and lightly brush her arm. It was enough for her. It was enough of a sign.

Gina slid into the bed next to him. Still Alan made no attempt to move until she cuddled herself into the crook of his arm. He hugged her so tightly then that Gina thought she might break. She groaned softly in response.

"I thought I was dreaming." Alan whispered huskily in her ear. "No dream, only me. Alan?" He stopped her explanation with his feverish but gentle kisses. "No more talk for now Gina."

“We have all the time in the world.”

Gina had waited so long to say what she had to say and she was determined to say her bit. It was now or never as far as she was concerned.

“Alan wait.” She pushed back on him. “I love you. Can you ever forgive me for doubting your love? I've behaved so badly towards you, wasted so much time. If you don't love me anymore then I will understand but I think you do. I think that is what you've been trying to tell me all along with your actions and your words.”

He gathered her close once more. Alan stroked her heated body. "Shhh, my darling. I've never stopped loving you. Once I started Angel face, I never stopped. Let me show you." He kissed her hard. "We will talk latter. For now, let me love you.”

Alan rolled over, half on top of her and half off. He kissed her with so much pent up passion it seemed to Gina that it was like the first time all over again for them. His hand smoothed over her face to capture her jaw. His lips lightly moved over hers in the sweet way she remembered from so long ago. They were tender, warm, slow kisses, drawing a quickening response from her.

They were lost in a ritual as old as time, man loving his woman and a woman loving her man. Alan drew her closer still and let his hands explore up and down her sides before moving to her shoulders. He was exerting so much control it amazed her.

Daringly Gina thrust her breasts up for his touch, inviting his possession. Her lips parted under his gentle insistence. A moment suspended in time, they waited, waited, their mouths open to each other in trust, in love. Simultaneously their tongues brushed past each other on the way to enjoy the others inner sanctum. Alan groaned softly as Gina clutched him tightly, her passion carrying her away. It had been so long, so long.

"Alan?" She broke free from his kiss breathless. "I. I need you so badly, it has been so long, I ache for you." Gina admitted the depths of her need. A need only he could fill.

“What a coincidence.” He chuckled. “I ache for you too. Gina I want you to know something, there hasn't been anyone since you. Even though we weren't together our marriage vows meant everything to me.”

That pleased her. It had been the same for her. “For me too, Alan. Love me Alan. Love me.”

He did, the slim control he held over himself snapped as Alan slipped off Gina's nightgown. Gina was right. Alan wore nothing to sleep in. Bare flesh touched bare flesh. Jerkily Alan covered her with his heated body.

Gina was both frightened and excited by his hunger, her hunger.

Then sensing her predicament Alan slowed his pace. His hands sought out the soft curves of her breasts, touching them, cupping them, caressing them. He lowered his head and followed the path of his coaxing hands with his wet tongue, claiming his willing prize. Her hands dug into his shoulder blades to pull him closer. She arched against the length of him, needing to feel more of his arousal. Alan slid up the length of her to capture her parted lips. His mouth swallowed up her groan of ecstasy.

“There was a time I thought I'd never get to love you again Gina.” Alan whispered, staring into her eyes, compelling her to understand his longing. “I've needed you so bad Gina, in more ways than just this one. You were the only thing that made life worthwhile. God, I thought I would die from wanting to find you.”

“I am here for you now, Alan.” Gina rubbed her hips against him provocatively in open invitation. Her heart was pounding wildly as her fingers searched over his hair-covered chest, familiarizing themselves with the feel of his body. There was an answering need in her vitals to his as she squirmed against him. “Please Alan.” Gina felt Alan's answering shudder. There was a fine sheen of perspiration covering his body. Gina loved the pure male scent of him. He smelled of soap and cologne and aroused male.

"God, you're wearing that perfume again. You know that it drives me wild." Alan groaned expressively.

"Exactly." Gina nipped at his ear playfully. Suddenly with out warning Alan pulled away from her. What was happening?

"Wait a minute, I just thought of something. You're not ready for this Gina." Gina grabbed him to keep him close to her. He wouldn't pull away now would he?

"Of course I'm ready." Gina insisted. How could he do this to her? "I am practically begging for you to make love to me. I have to have you. I need you so much." She moaned.

"Don't do this to me Gina." Alan groaned as she ground her hips to his. "I am not made of steel. Trust me, you're not ready. What I am trying to remind you of is that fact that if we are not careful little Alan might be acquiring a sister or brother sooner than expected." His eyes lit up with amusement.

"Oh." Gina mouthed the word. Personally at the moment it didn't sound like such a bad idea to her. Alan sensed her surrender. He pulled away and took a deep breath, sitting up.

"Gina, I can't take the risk. Your health is bad at the present. Besides we need to get to know one another again. There is a lot of adjusting that we both need to do together yet." Alan stood up then. "You mean so much to me, I want things to be perfect in our marriage this time." He looked down on her longingly. "Keep your motor running. I will be right back, there's got to be something around this place. "

Gina laughed. Keep her motor running? I was frozen in fast idle now and racing. Moments later Alan returned to her with a relieved expression on his face, carrying something in his hand. "You won't believe where I got this." He laughed. "There hasn't been a rubber in this house since I don't remember when.

"Then where did you get it?" Gina was baffled by his amusement. She wanted him to return to bed quickly.

"It was in your bathroom medicine cabinet." He looked at her.

"I didn't put it there." Gina frowned. How did it get there?

"Three guesses?" *Alan* looked at her pointedly.

"You." She smiled wickedly.

"No, not me try gain." He coaxed.

"Mrs. Gonzalez?" Gina rolled with laughter. It sounded like something she would do. She knew them even better than they knew themselves. The lady knew they couldn't live under the same roof with out some fireworks happening. Alan slipped back into the bed and picked up where he left off, giving Gina pleasure while he took his own. His hands worked wonders as he coaxed her pliant body to awareness with his tender caresses. Alan chuckled in her ear. "Still running?"

"Hmm." Gina answered as Alan playfully nipped at her stomach with his warm lips.

"Is that a hmm yes or an hmm no?" He moved up to trace the shape of her ear with his tormenting tongue.

"Definitely a hmm yes." Gina told him. All of her senses were swamped long ago. "Come to me Alan. Love me." She coaxed, pulling at him to complete their joining. The joining that would be a symbol of their new beginning together.

This time there was no hesitation as Alan brought her body once again to fever pitch. Slowly intently they explored each other's bodies, delighting in their shared intimacy.

Suppressed instinct had Gina arching against him, accepting his fullness when he parted her legs with his own. Alan gripped her taut buttocks and brought her hips up to grind against his.

His mouth covered and swallowed her moans of ecstasy. Gina moved in her own counter rhythm. Her tiny moans urged him to thrust deeper into her waiting depths. Her senses were in that glorious state of turmoil where everything spun out of control. Gina's fingers dug freely into Alan's muscular back, his shoulder muscles convulsing at her touch, as he drove them both over the edge into the land of pleasure and love.

The only sound in the room was a pair of lover's ragged breathing and contented sighs. The moment savored for all eternity. "That was beautiful Gina. I've missed you so much." Alan stroked his lazy fingers over her shoulders and arms. He pressed his lips to her slender throat. Then he kissed her lightly, flicking her lips with his ardent tongue. "Are you alright?"

"Umm wonderful" Gina sighed contentedly. Love was what made their joining special, because they loved each other. She felt the vibration of his chuckle deep in his chest, recognizing that Alan wasn't quite sated. There would be more loving before morning.

"You are falling asleep on me aren't you Gina?"

"What?" Gina snuggled closer to his warm form.

"Nothing Angel face. Go to sleep. Sweet dreams." Alan hugged her tight.

"Lumb youlen." Gina mumbled in his chest.

"What sweetheart?" Alan looked down at the half asleep girl in his arms.

"I love you Alan." Gina articulated each word carefully so that he would understand; she looked up at him with her love in her eyes for him to see.

"Love you too." Alan held onto her tightly and Gina knew he would never let her go again. Gina drifted off to sleep, contented. She was loved and she loved Alan in return. This was their new beginning with no misunderstandings or hurt feelings. It looked bright and inviting.

Before morning Alan woke her once more to enjoy their love. Latter as Gina lay curled in his strong arms listening, to his even breathing she knew it was true. Alan had never had stopped loving her. She would spend the rest of her life proving her love for him also. This was the way it should be. Man and wife together.

The next day was like a dream to Gina. Alan said he had a surprise for her, one that was long over due. They drove in silence, Alan insisting that she had to cover her eyes or it would spoil the effect. They traveled for some distance before he allowed her to open them again. Gina couldn't imagine what the surprise might be because they hadn't really driven far.

Gina wiggled like an anxious child.

Alan stopped the car and turned towards her so that he could put his arm around over shoulders.

"Okay now you can look. I hope you will be pleased Gina." He kissed her on the cheek affectionately. Upon opening her eyes, she was confused. They were parked in front of her grandfather's house, the one she sold. She and Alan had first gotten to know each other in this house.

"Lets go in and take a look around." Alan urged her out of the car, holding tightly to her arm.

"Won't the people that live here mind?" She asked, hesitating to butt in where they might not be wanted.

"Certainly hope not." Alan laughed. "Gina come on, I've got a key." Still Gina was confused. What were they doing here?

She looked around; the place had really changed. The fields that used to lay barren were in use now, growing a crop. There were cows in the far pastures. The whole out side of the house that she could see from the front had been painted a crisp yellow. There were blooming rose bushes in the front garden.

Gina wondered if the owners had changed the inside too? If Alan had a key, why shouldn't they take a quick peek?

"Okay Alan, I really would like to see the old place one more time." Gina missed his knowing smile.

Alan unlocked the door and let her enter first. Gina was more than surprised at the change. The plain square front room didn't look the same.

The massive rock fireplace now sported a large metal sculpture in the shape of a leaning tree instead of a single wooden shelf. It's fine gold finish reflected the light. On both sides of the fireplace, instead of blank walls were floor to ceiling built in bookcases.

The scratched up wooden floors that she loved so much had been sanded down and refinished in a dark teakwood stain. There was a beautiful red Oriental rug covering the area between a cream colored couch and matching armchairs.

Glass end tables and porcelain lamps, new pictures, it was all done differently. The room just didn't look the same anymore.

The kitchen, she discovered was now done in a pale yellow, her favorite color. In the middle of the room was a cooking island. There was a built in breakfast table and new cabinets. Gina couldn't believe her eyes, the whole place looked so different. She practically ran to see how the bedroom had been redone. It had all new bedroom furniture and a much bigger king sized bed covered with an expensive looking velvet patchwork spread. She was so involved in her discovery that she almost forgot that Alan was watching her.

"It's so beautiful, the whole house." Gina gushed. "Someone must love this old farm very much to have spent so much money on remodeling and getting it to go as a functional farm again." Gina sighed, she was glad to see the dream come true for someone, even if she didn't do it.

Alan walked up behind her and without saying a word he turned her to face him and gathered her up for a passionate kiss. Gina balked when he showed no signs stopping his quest. His desire showed in his eyes.

"Alan, not here. What if somebody comes? Won't we be in trouble?" She puzzled how Alan should have a key."

"Don't worry. No one is going to interrupt us here." He kissed- her again and this time he swung her up in his arms and started to lay her on the bed.

"Alan." Gina exclaimed. "Really, we are not supposed to be here."

Alan silenced her complaints with a gentle kiss.

"Surprise Gina." He whispered in her ear sending chills up and down her spine.

"What?" Just then realizing why Alan had a key and wasn't worried about getting interrupted.

"It is two years long overdue Gina but I just couldn't wait any longer to give it to you. This was...is the surprise I had for you that night on our one month anniversary. Things just didn't work out for me to give it to you though." Gina was overcome with love. What a sweet, sweet man he was.

"Oh Alan, I love what you've done to the house, its marvelous. In fact it's everything I dreamed it could be." Gina's heart was soaring happily in a sphere all of its own.

"Great. I am happy you like it because it is now officially our own personal hideaway from the world. He looked at her seriously, pulling her wedding ring set out of his pocket. He slipped it on her finger. "Never take it off again." He scolded her. I told Mrs. Gonzalez that we wouldn't be back tonight. I hope you don't mind. I wanted to be alone with you Gina, here, where we first met. There's just one thing wrong though." He frowned. "But I guess it can't be helped."

"Wrong? What is that?" Gina was too happy to believe that anything could be wrong ever again. Alan loved her.

"Well, I guess a blizzard would be too much to ask for wouldn't it? Especially at this time of year." He chuckled boyishly.

"Oh Alan, I do love you." Gina twined her arms around his neck lovingly as he dropped her gently to the bed.

"Good Angel face, because I'm going to give you the opportunity to prove it and right now." Alan joined her on the bed.

It was a long time before they left their own personal hideaway. Alan saw to that.