

Another
Point of View

Family Reunion—In the Wisdom of the Ancestors Series

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The journey continues and the struggle for
literary perfection shall never end.

“Whether or not one perceives it, whether or not one welcomes it, there is a universal communality which united all of man’s acts and ideas not only in space but primarily in time. This intuitive, always present perception of time is after all the greatest gift available to us with which to grasp the inner meaning of all that the passage of the world has left behind, like a river leaves its alluvium. One can understand everything if one returns to the source. An African carving and a Greek marble sculpture are not as far apart as one may think.”

Elie Taure
L’Esprit des Formes, 1939

“That which permeates and motivates humanity is, in the last analysis, the search for the eternal, life beyond death, which is also the search for our origins, the lost paradise of the Garden of Eden.”

U. Bär Verlag,
Zurich, Switzerland, 1989¹

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TITLES BY ANN JEFFRIES
In the *Family Reunion—Wisdom of the Ancestors Series*

Southern Exposures

Another Point of View

An Unguarded Moment

Touch Me In The Morning

Chapter 1

On the day of her wedding . . .

JeNelle Towson awoke as the early morning salt-water breeze from the Pacific Ocean gently blew through her rear bedroom French doors. She did not open her eyes immediately, but listened to the ocean crashing against the shore and the sound of seagulls squawking as they walked along the beach or flew overhead. Her home on the shore of Santa Barbara, California, was quiet and peaceful, although she knew her mother, Canty Towson, and her mother's twin sister and her aunt, Bessie Baines, had spent the night. Yet, only the sound of the sea and birds could be heard as she reached for the peach-colored, silk-covered pillow next to her, pulling it tightly against her body. Her fiancé's Paco Rabanne's 1 Million cologne still smelled fresh as she buried her face in his pillow and squeezed it. When she opened her eyes, she glimpsed her wedding gown hanging on a form on the far side of her spacious bedroom. She smiled and felt a rush of excitement flow over her entire body; a tingling sensation that covered her from head to toe. *Could this really be happening?* Lying in the pale-peach and cream-colored bedroom with French provincial furniture, she thought about all the events, starting more than a year ago that led to this day. The day she and Kenneth James Alexander, Executive Director of CompuCorrect, Inc., would be married.

JeNelle gazed at her wedding gown again and remembered the day, the hour, and the very moment that she first saw Kenneth at the San Francisco Airport. She knew immediately that he was someone very special. She rolled onto her stomach and settled on remembering the scene nearly sixteen months earlier when Kenneth's brother, Benjamin, an Air Force pilot, flew her in a private plane from her home in Santa Barbara to a small business expo in San Francisco. As Benny helped her

climb out of the Cessna, Kenneth stepped forward out of the shadows and she lost her heart at the first sight of him.

The memories were a mixture of joy and pain, she recalled. JeNelle sat up in bed, tightly bringing her knees to her chest.

Meeting Kenneth was like turning on a bright light in the darkest night. There was so much bleakness in her life until that point. She had spent years trying to avoid her former husband, Michel San Angelo, and his threats and harassment. Not knowing when or where he would attack next kept her on edge. He neither accepted nor honored the terms of their divorce. He still considered her his wife, his possession, like chattel or property. Admittedly, she was afraid of him and what he was capable of doing. He told her that it would never be over between them. That one day she would be with him again. He reminded her that no wife of an Italian man in his family was ever divorced. His threats had frightened her more than she had ever told her family or friends. Thankfully, she had the support of his family to shield her from him, and her company, INSIGHTS, to occupy her time, so she didn't think about him much. He was busy, too, building his many businesses and investments into an empire.

Michel taught her a valuable lesson though—she could not trust her judgment when it came to men. She surrendered to that prophecy, vowing never to put her judgment to the test or herself in jeopardy again.

Her family and friends tried to convince her that one bad experience with a relationship should not make her adamant against having other relationships, but she was not able to do it. Having no relationship was safe and she found comfort in her career, satisfaction in the struggle to build her business, and love from her family. That had all worked well for eleven years.

At least, it had been until the Alexander tsunami arrived.

Initially, Benjamin Alexander, Kenneth's younger brother, was in hot pursuit of her for months. He did not let her reticence dissuade him. He found any excuse to spend time with her and he was a seemingly incurable romantic, often sending flowers, cards and notes. He visited with her, planned interesting and romantic outings, and introduced her

to his friends and intimating that she was something more to him than just a friend. Of course, on each opportunity she set the record straight, both privately and publicly—they were strictly platonic friends. After enduring life with Michel San Angelo for two years, she vowed that she would give herself to no one.

When Kenneth Alexander entered her life he made her live again.

Benny planned to escort her to a Santa Barbara Chamber of Commerce Gala, but had been called away at the last minute. He asked Kenneth to fill in for him. It was a magical night. She was named Woman of the Year and, floating around the ballroom in Kenneth's arms, her excitement grew...until Michel showed up.

As the evening was ending, Kenneth picked up her award and they headed for the door. Her friend and mentor, California Supreme Court Judge Johnston White Worthington and his wife, Constance, followed with their entourage. Kenneth went to retrieve her fur wrap and to order the car. She was waiting for him to return when she remembered feeling a chill come over her. When two men approached her to congratulate her on the award, something about them seemed familiar. She couldn't place where she had seen them before, until...

"Bella, Una bella donna," he said behind her, his voice low and laced with vile seduction. Without turning, she knew who it was.

She tried to walk away, but the two men blocked her path. Then she remembered who the men were and where she had seen them before. They were Michel's bodyguards and every muscle in her body had tensed.

"Michel, I have nothing to say to you," she said, still not turning to look at him.

"Bella, you are more beautiful than ever."

"Please, just leave me alone!" she said through clenched teeth, trying not to show fear.

"But you are my wife. It is time for you—"

"Stop it! I'm not your wife! We're divorced! You know that!"

"You act like a petulant child. You think that it is over because of a piece of paper! That someone, anyone can keep us apart!"

"I don't love you, Michel! I don't want to be with you ever again!"

"You can say that, but you have not looked at me. Look at me!" he demanded

She turned to see those dark penetrating eyes, smooth olive complexion, and impeccably dressed Michel Alvarez Diega San Angelo. His hair was graying attractively at the temples, but his handsome, distinguished exterior did not hide his black heart from her. It was his glare that she could not withstand. His eyes silenced her and struck fear in her heart; a debilitating fear. No one crossed Michel San Angelo and got away with it. His presence made the hair on her neck stand on end. She had witnessed strong, confident men—congressmen and statesmen, captains of industry, and others—break into tears under that glare without so much as a word falling from his lips. She could not look into his face. She fixed her stare on a small cross of unusual design and beauty that hung from his neck below his black tie. She remembered that he never took it off. It was a reminder of how he hurt her, humiliated her. How it swung from his neck when he was on top of her—hurting her so badly that she prayed for sweet death.

His words were venomous and syrupy. *"What will it take, Bella? Must I show you a sign of who I am? Is that what you want to force me to do? Who shall it be, Bella? Whom do you love most? Your father? Your mother? How about your little sister, Gloria; the one I held on my knee? So eager she is for my touch. Such a young, nubile body just beginning to grow into a woman. I could have taken her in my bed many times, but I held back for you. Must you force me to take her from you now before you realize that I am your husband? That you belong to me? That no other man will ever have you? I am the only man who will be in your life and in hers! That I can have you both if I so desire?"*

"What is this? What are you saying to her? You dare to threaten her!" Chief State Supreme Court Justice Johnston Worthington interrupted suddenly, standing beside her, his body shaking with anger.

Michel did not flinch. She could still feel his steely gaze on her.

"Leave her alone, San Angelo! If you continue to harass her I'll have you back in court so fast—"

"Old man," he said still staring at her, *"Is she not beautiful, my wife . . . a Madonna? My Madonna! Hair spun by the gods. The face of my Madonna—"*

"I'm not afraid of you, San Angelo! I will find a way to take you back into court! You will lose everything! Remember, the court warned you that if you harassed JeNelle even once—"

"The court?" he said with amused disdain and with a dismissive swish of his hand as if Johnston were a servant, *"what can the court do?"*

"If not the courts, then your father!"

That got Michel's attention, she knew. Michel's eyes finally left her. Now they were on Johnston. Locked on.

Their war of words was on. Threats and counter threats until she could take no more.

"Johnston, please, let's just go. I don't want to make a scene," she recalled pleading.

"Remember, Bella. I will come for you," he said. *"No matter what you do, or who you see, you are mine. You are my wife until death!"*

From that wonderful and then horror-filled night came many disasters. The first of which was Michel San Angelo. Then a real bomb. A newspaper reporter overheard and misinterpreted tidbits of conversations during the gala and wrote an article stating that she and Kenneth were engaged. Though she wished it so, nothing at the time could have been further from the truth. So many people called to congratulate her that she had to repeat her denial so many times that she finally refused to accept any more calls. Then her mother called.

"JeNelle, baby, your daddy and I are just so happy for you. That Kenneth Alexander is everything that you said that he was and a lot more, too. You said that he was handsome and well built, but, child, he is a whole lot more than that! Your daddy and I really enjoyed talking with him at the Gala. And the way that he was looking at you ... The way that you were both looking at each other... Well, your daddy and I could just see all the love in your eyes. I just can't get over it. And that article in today's paper! You didn't say a word about your engagement to me. I'll have to get busy looking for the material for your wedding gown. Oh, and that speech that you made—baby, your daddy and I both had tears in our eyes. I don't know where you got all of that talent from, but we are so proud of you. So many people have been calling—"

"Mama, it's not true," she said quietly.

"What's not true, JeNelle? What are you talking about?"

"About me and Kenneth Alexander. We are not engaged. It was all a big misunderstanding."

"Misunderstanding? Your daddy and I weren't misunderstanding how you two were acting toward each other. We saw it with our own eyes. That man is in love, JeNelle, and so are you. You just look at that picture in the paper. I know love when I see it and I saw it at the Gala."

"Mama, Michel was there."

There was a long pause.

"Call your lawyer right now, JeNelle, and have that man locked up!"

"He didn't hurt me. He scared me, but Johnston Worthington made him leave me alone."

"Don't you be foolish, child! That man ain't right! He's crazy in the head! He's not even supposed to be in the same zip code with you! You're too easy going! Anyone who could give a speech like that—and you'd let a low-down scoundrel like Michel San Angelo mess with your head again and ruin your life! No! You do something about that Michel San Angelo right now! Do you hear me talking to you, JeNelle?"

"Yes, Mama."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I'll go to Milo San Angelo and tell him what happened. I saw him recently and he told me that if Michel ever tried to contact me again to call him."

"You mean Michel's uncle? That nice Italian man who manages your restaurant in San Diego? The one who took care of you after Michel hurt you?"

"Yes, Mama, but I don't consider Michelangelo's as my restaurant. I haven't been involved in the business since my divorce from Michel."

"Michel gave that restaurant to you as a wedding gift, JeNelle. The divorce decree says that it is yours and a lot of money, too, that you have not touched. Now I am not going to try to run your life for you, but you were foolish to let Michel get away with what he did to you. You should have had him put under the jail and thrown away the key, but you do what you think is right with

that restaurant and the divorce settlement money. Just do not let that Michel San Angelo drag you down again. I will not forgive you if you do. You make time for that nice Kenneth Alexander. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, but it's not that easy."

"Why isn't it? What's the problem?"

"Kenneth thinks that I'm involved with his brother, Benny."

"You're not, are you?"

"No, but Benny's been on this crazy mission to seduce me. Kenneth loves his brother and I don't think that Kenneth's going to risk doing anything that he thinks is going to hurt Benny."

"The way that Kenneth was looking at you, everybody's going to know how he feels about you. His brother's bright. He's going to get the picture, too. You mark my words."

"You don't understand how important Benny and Kenneth are to each other. I will not come between them. Benny will have to understand that I just want to be his friend—nothing more."

"And what about Kenneth?"

"I don't know. If he reads this newspaper article, he will probably never speak to me ever again. Even before the Gala, he was behaving strangely. He seems to be putting up a wall...I don't know. Maybe it's my imagination, but that article surely did not help. I'm too ashamed to call Kenneth. I just hope that it wasn't in the San Francisco newspapers. If it was, I've probably wrecked his company and his good name."

"You stop hiding from life, child. You handle this situation with Kenneth. I know people and he's good people. Trust him. The man obviously comes from good Southern stock. He'll understand and be in your corner. He'll stand by you, honey."

"I'll think about it, but it's such a mess. Kiss Daddy for me and tell him that I'm sorry about the newspaper article."

She and Kenneth weathered that storm, but the dawn had not broken before another cloud burst forth. Late one night her telephone rang. It was Benny, and during the conversation she learned that Kenneth, and her associate, Lisa Lambert, were involved in an intimate relationship.

Lying awake for hours after talking with Benny, she did not know what to make of what he told her. She did not understand the ache in her heart either. Not able to sleep, she got up, went to the living room, and poured a brandy for herself. The vision of her and Kenneth dancing in the beam of light at the Gala haunted her for weeks. His face was etched in her mind. His million-dollar, polar ice-cap melting smile. The contour of his finely-sculptured body: tall, broad muscular chest and arms, narrow waist, rock-hard abdomen, firm butt and legs, a masterpiece of male physique. It wasn't just his body and handsome face that she admired, although he had more sex appeal than any other man she had ever met, he also had other qualities that she admired more. He had integrity, family loyalty, charisma, character, honesty, intellect, and a sense of soundness and completeness and humor. He was a total package. Everything that any woman would have ever dreamed of wanting in a man. He lacked for nothing. If she could have just stopped the vision of him, perhaps she could have put him out of her head and heart and then put her life back on track.

However, Benny's statement about his brother and Lisa was confirmed by another associate, Paul Garrett. Despite what her parents thought they saw sparking between her and Kenneth, he and Lisa were involved in an intimate relationship. She knew Lisa well. She was cunning and relentless when they played racquetball together. Focused on her objective, and goal oriented. If Lisa set her sights on Kenneth, she knew that Paul was right and her parents were wrong. It would be game, set, and match in favor of Dr. Lisa Lambert.

She did not see Kenneth again until the first meeting of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Youth in Business and Industry in May in Sacramento. The Panel consisted of representatives from both large and small businesses in California. There were both men and women represented on the Panel and people representing most major ethnic groups. She and Kenneth both agreed to participate on the Panel representing their individual companies.

Kenneth's was the first face that she remembered looking for as she entered the crowded conference room. During the sessions, which

lasted three days once a month, Lisa Lambert monopolized most of Kenneth's time. On the final day of the conference when she was leaving the meeting room, she saw Lisa very passionately kiss Kenneth. She remembered how her disappointment grew as she saw Kenneth holding Lisa. He was treating her distantly at each monthly meeting of the Panel members. Desperately she tried to put Kenneth out of her mind; to stop having dreams and amorous feelings toward him. He was clearly having a love affair with her friend and business associate, she kept reminding herself.

Months later, in September, Benny called her and left a message on her answering machine, asking her to return the call and saying that it was very important. She returned the call the next day. When Kenneth unexpectedly answered Benny's telephone, something grabbed her in the pit of her stomach and her heart raced.

Still devastated about Kenneth's coolness toward her, when Benny called her and asked her to come to his condo in San Diego the next day, she agreed. He seemed very excited. She was totally unprepared for what she found when she knocked on Benny's door. Her heart stopped beating when Kenneth opened the door holding a newborn baby in his arms. That was when she learned that the baby girl was Benny's daughter with a young lieutenant, Stacy Greene; a woman who chose a naval career over being a wife to Benny and a mother to their daughter, Whitney Ivy. Since she and Benny had been dating she should have been upset, but she was terribly relieved. It was also the first time that she met Sylvia Alexander, Benny and Kenneth's mother; a woman whose youthful figure did not reveal the fact that she had born five children.

She remembered fearing what Benny and Kenneth might have said to their mother about her, but Sylvia Alexander's demeanor put her at ease. She seemed a woman of substance, JeNelle remembered thinking. The thick hair that cascaded over her shoulders added youth and vitality to her oval face, full lips, wide nose and smiling brown eyes. A healthy, happy looking woman the shade of an evenly brown biscuit next to her one darker and one lighter brown sons who glowed in her presence.

After learning about Benny's child, she visited Benny and Whitney as often as she could. It was Whitney who she was really there to see. Desperately she wanted a baby of her own, but Michel robbed her of her chance. She had also thought of adoption, but didn't believe that she alone could raise a baby. She was giving that idea more thought watching Benny successfully raising Whitney alone. He loved his daughter so very much that it brought tears to her eyes to see them together. He was a single parent raising his daughter and enjoying it thoroughly.

It was the last meeting of the Blue Ribbon Panel in Sacramento before the holiday break when a messenger handed a note to her. She immediately recalled Michel's threat as she read the note and felt faint and disoriented. It was blazing in her head when she grabbed her purse and bolted from the room. Gloria was in the intensive care unit at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, DC, and that she should come immediately. Kenneth dropped everything to get her to DC. There she met Dr. Charles Montgomery, a friend of both Kenneth and Gloria's and an Emergency Room physician. Kenneth and Chuck Montgomery saw her through Gloria's crisis. Kenneth stayed with her in the Georgetown townhouse that Benny owned and leased to his and Kenneth's sister, Vivian Alexander. Vivian was a law student at Georgetown Law and sublet rooms in the huge townhouse to other Georgetown law students, including Gloria. Since it was the Christmas holiday, all the students were away when Gloria was attacked. It took a long time for Gloria to be released from the hospital, but she still couldn't remember who beat her. She was admitted to a rehabilitation facility and JeNelle stayed in Washington as long as she could until Gloria seemed to steadily recuperate. Her housemates stepped in to help Gloria heal, but Kenneth's presence and support were JeNelle's mainstays.

Months later, her father, Harvey Towson, asked, "*Who was that on the telephone, JeNelle?*" teasingly.

"*Can't you tell, Harvey? Just look at her face,*" Canty answered in on the tease.

"*Oh yes, it must have been that man of hers, Kenneth Alexander.*"

“Who else makes our daughter look like she just won the lottery? It was Kenneth, all right.”

“Mama, Daddy, you two should stop that.” JeNelle giggled.

“Okay, JeNelle. Then tell me that that was not Kenneth. I dare you.”

“Mama!” JeNelle said, feigning seriousness.

“JeNelle!” Canty retorted in the same manner.

“It was Kenneth, Mama.”

“See, I told you, Harvey. Our daughter has been walking on air ever since she came back from looking after Gloria. I haven’t ever seen you like this.”

“Don’t you two go jumping to any conclusions. Kenneth and I are just good friends.”

“Hub! Good friends! A good friend is someone you can have a few drinks with at a bar after work or a movie or shopping. Not someone who drops everything, charters a private aircraft to fly you both to DC, takes care of you while you’re going through a crisis, calls up your parents every day to give progress reports on your sister and to check on us and helps to run your business while you’re away all during the Christmas holiday. I’d call Kenneth Alexander a lot of things, but not ‘just a good friend,’ JeNelle.”

“He has been amazing, Daddy. I don’t know how he does it all. He was in the middle of making some big changes in his company when Gloria was assaulted. At the same time he was under subpoena to testify in Washington before a Congressional committee, he was helping his brother, Benny, with Whitney, working on implementing the Blue Ribbon Panel programs, working on next year’s Small Business Expo, and traveling around the state giving speeches at conventions and conferences, but when I was with him, he acted like there was nothing going on. My managers, Felix, Barry, and Luke, called him all the time to ask him for his advice while I was taking care of Gloria. He always helped them come to good decisions. He even had Dr. Montgomery talking to your doctors, Daddy, while you were in the hospital.”

“Yes, and he called me every day while your daddy was in the hospital to make sure that I was all right, too. Your father is right. I’d call Kenneth Alexander more than ‘just a good friend’.”

“You were right about something else. Kenneth comes from good Southern stock. His parents, Bernard and Sylvia Alexander, have been calling us

regularly and so have all of their children. That little sister of theirs, Aretha Grace Alexander, writes some of the nicest letters to us. She's quite a young lady."

"Yes, I know. She has been writing to me, too. I think that young lady is the reincarnation of some wise, old spirits. This couldn't be her first time on this earth. She's been here before."

"You really do look happy, JeNelle. When is the wedding going to be?"

"Mama, Kenneth hasn't said anything about getting married. He hasn't really said anything about being in love."

"Oh, the man's in love all right. He's said it in a thousand ways. Any man with his busy schedule who takes the time to write a letter to you every day is a man who's in love."

"He's an early riser. He says that he likes to watch the sun come up."

"So have you watched the sun come up with him yet, JeNelle?"

"Mama! Kenneth and I haven't been intimate."

"You mean that you haven't slept with that phine specimen of a man yet? All that time that you two were alone in DC together in the same house over the Christmas and New Year's holidays and you didn't sleep together?"

"Mama, Kenneth's not the type of man who has casual affairs."

"Yes, but he's what the young girls around here call a hunk. Tall, broad shoulders, big hands, long fingers —"

"Mama, stop it! You're even making me blush!"

"Well that man is definitely carrying some heavy luggage. I know! Just look at your daddy. Same build! He's going to be a great husband to you, JeNelle."

"When was the last time you made love, JeNelle?"

"Daddy! You're as bad as Mama. What kind of question is that to ask your daughter?"

"JeNelle, wake up! You're thirty years old. You should know that parents today had better start talking to their children as soon as they start walking. I'm ready for some grandchildren now that I've retired from the city bus company."

"You're going to have your hands full managing Towson & Towson Couture."

“Don’t try to change the subject, JeNelle. You heard what I asked you.”

“I know, Daddy. I haven’t been intimate with a man since I was married to Michel.”

“What! JeNelle that was a lifetime ago! I’d better loan you some of my books so that you can read up on how it’s done these days. Does Kenneth know that he’s dealing with a virgin?” Canty asked.

“Mama, I’m not a virgin. Far from it. I was married once, remember?”

“Yes, JeNelle, you are. You were barely seventeen when you married Michel and only barely nineteen when you divorced him. Things have changed since then. You have the right to enjoy making love. You’ve got to be able to tell Kenneth what pleases you and learn what pleases him. It’s not just that bim-bam, thank-you-ma’am scenario anymore. He’s going to know if you try to fake it with him.”

“Kenneth strikes me as a man who’s going to be a good teacher, Canty. He’ll be patient with our daughter.”

“I know he will, Harvey, but JeNelle needs to learn to be creative when they make love. I’m loaning you my books and you had better read them. I’m going to quiz you after every chapter.”

“I don’t believe it. Look, you two, you’ve already got me wedded and bedded just because Kenneth happened to call me while you were here. Let’s finish our dinner and start working on the plans for the grand opening of Towson & Towson Couture. You know that Valentine’s Day is right around the corner and we still have a lot of work to do. Constance Worthington is going to be here soon and you know how excited she is about working on the plans for the new business with you two. I need to focus on this Congressional inquiry that all these small businesses, including Kenneth’s, are involved in.”

“Don’t worry about, Kenneth, JeNelle. That man didn’t do anything illegal. I’d bet my pension on that.”

“I’d bet my life on that, Daddy, but Kenneth isn’t even going to hire a lawyer to defend himself. I’m worried about all of this negative publicity. The press has been crucifying these companies that have contracts to provide services to military installations and bases throughout the country. Kenneth’s name and his company, CompuCorrect, Inc., have been mentioned prominently in connection with other companies that have received a large number of very

lucrative military contracts. Kenneth acts like there is nothing going on. He won't even let me help him."

"Kenneth knows what he's doing. He is nobody's fool. I will bet that he has an angle on this that nobody is aware of. You have to trust him and let the man do his business. You spend some time reading your mama's books and thinking about those wedding plans and my grandchildren. Let Kenneth handle this foolishness with Congress. That man didn't get to where he is without knowing how to handle something like this. You mark my words, JeNelle."



After he left her in Washington, Kenneth talked with her at least once every day. She looked forward to their conversations. She also realized that she was falling in love with him from the moment she first met him. She had to do something to help him. He was too important to her to let anything happen to him or his company when she knew that she had the means to help him through this crisis.

It took every fiber of her being, but she drove to San Diego to see Milo San Angelo at the restaurant. He was surprised, but happy to see her and they went into the kitchen to talk. Milo insisted on cooking for her, and she agreed.

"Milo, I'm here to ask a favor of you and your family. Someone who means a great deal to me is in trouble and I need your help. His name is Kenneth Alexander. He owns a company, CompuCorrect, in San Francisco. Anything that you can find out that will help him prove his innocence of these potential charges would be appreciated. I pledge on my honor that I will do whatever you ask of me in return for this favor—including reconcile with Michel."

"You're in love with this man, JeNelle?"

"Yes, Milo, I am, but he does not know that."

"Michel was not the man for you. He didn't understand who you were. That you were not Christiania."

"You mentioned her before, Milo. No one ever told me about her. She died before I met Michel."

"She was beautiful—like you—when Millos and I first saw her." He cut off his thought.

"How can you protect yourself, Milo? Michel has powerful connections everywhere."

"Familia. Family is perpetual. Should anything happen to one of us, the ultimate price must be paid."

"Vendetta."

Milo did not answer. He got up from the table and stirred the pot of sauce. He seasoned it and tasted it. He picked up a particular combination of seasonings and herbs and called to his cooks. He warned them in Italian never to use those seasonings and herbs in combination. He was noticeably angry when he returned to the table with the pasta dishes.

"You have nothing to fear, JeNelle. You have a new life with a fine man," Milo said, serving her and pouring more wine. *"This man is right for you. You have many babies together. Be happy, JeNelle. La Bella JeNelle. We will eat and laugh. Then, you will go home, JeNelle. Go back to this man, Alexander, and be happy. We will not speak of this matter again. My family owes you a debt far more than what you have asked. You will not ever have to sacrifice yourself. It shall be done."*

JeNelle recalled feeling warm and relaxed sitting in the kitchen of Michelangelo's sharing a meal with Milo. Michel gave that restaurant to her as a gift when they were first married. The same restaurant where he had publicly beat and raped her, and where she finally found the courage to leave him. She and Milo did not talk of Michel again during their meal together.

When she drove back to Santa Barbara, it was very late and her Arts Manager was camped on her doorstep. Kenneth called all over town looking for her. Felix promised Kenneth that he would not rest until he found her.

The next day she called Kenneth and he seemed to breathe a sigh of relief.

"I'm fine, Kenneth. You shouldn't worry about me so much. I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself—most of the time," she remembered saying jokingly. *"You didn't have to send out the National Guard to find me."*

"I only made a few telephone calls, JeNelle. Can I help it if Santa Barbara swings into action when its Woman of the Year comes up missing for a few hours?"

"You had people camping on my doorstep when I got home. I'd say you made more than just 'a few' telephone calls. Johnston scolded me unmercifully this morning. He told his secretary to find him no matter where he was when I called. He even left the bench when I called to say that I was fine."

"You're very important and precious to a lot of people. Especially to me."

Her heart leaped into her throat, making it hard for her to speak. *"I didn't mean to worry anyone, especially not you. You've got a lot going on with the Congressional hearings starting tomorrow. I wish that you'd let me come and be with you and help you get through this. You've done so much to help me and my family."*

"No, it's pure chaos here. There are people everywhere. My sister, Vivian, and her housemates, the Legal Dream Team, have turned this place into a legal fortress. My partners, Tom and Shirley, were saying a bunch of Hail Mary's this morning. I don't want you to be caught up in all of this confusion. It's going to work out fine and it will be over very soon."

"The press reports are vicious and slanderous. There are rumors flying all over the place, linking these allegations to people high up in the National Security Agency NSA and even to the California Governor's office. This could hurt you personally and professionally. I can't help it. I'm concerned for you, especially since you won't even hire legal representation to defend yourself. Everybody else who was subpoenaed called out the biggest legal guns that they could find."

"CompuCorrect has done nothing wrong. You'll simply have to trust me on that point."

"I'd trust you with my life. It's the politicians and the Fifth Estate who I don't trust."

"I'm glad to hear you say that."

"Say what? That I don't trust the politicians or the press?"

"No, that you'd trust me with your life."

"It's true. You're the most trustworthy, honest, upstanding, responsible—"

“Are you trying to finesse your way out of the payment that you owe me for my massage services?”

“Kenneth Alexander, how can you joke with me at a time like this?”

“Temper, temper, Ms. Towson. Remember, you’ll have to trust me.”

“You won’t let me help. You won’t let me come there. I’ve got to find a way to repay you for all that you’ve done for me, for Gloria, for my family and my business. At least, if I were there, I could find a way to say more than just thank you.”

“I’ll help you find some new words to say.”

“You said that before. What did you mean by that? Have you thought of something that I can do to help or to say thank you?”

“I’ll tell you later.”

“There are times that you can be the most exasperating person I know. Have you always been this stubborn?”

“I’m sometimes an acquired taste, JeNelle. You’ll get used to it.”



She recalled that on the day that Kenneth was scheduled to testify, she was nervous and antsy. She wondered whether Milo found out any information that would help Kenneth, but she would not call him again. She knew that if he could find a way to help her, he would do it.

She stayed home that day and turned on the television in her study. Commentators were discussing the hearings and the list of witnesses that were scheduled that day.

“What do we know about the first witness today, Kenneth Alexander, and his company, CompuCorrect?” the program moderator asked one of the panelists.

“Good reputation from all accounts. Started the company four or five years ago after leaving Sandoval Anniston as its lead industrial engineering specialist. Worked on some top secret projects for the CIA and NSA,” the panelist answered.

“Could be some tie in there to some covert operations. He was certainly in a position to know what was going on in the Pentagon and in the CIA and NSA,” another panelist added.

“Are you suggesting that his company is some kind of a front for the CIA or NSA?” the moderator asked.

“I’m just saying that where there’s smoke, look for a fire.”

“According to CompuCorrect’s Annual Report, most of their clients are non-military,” another panelist added. *“There are some pretty prestigious A-list organizations listed as clients.”*

“I don’t need to tell you that that’s how the CIA and NSA operate. Just look at what Oliver North was able to do and before that G. Gordon Liddy. I still question what Reagan or Bush knew about this investigation and when did they know it. Bush was head of the intelligence community at one time, you will remember.”

“We’ll have to get back to this discussion after the testimony. The hearing is about to begin. We’ll take you live to the Congressional chamber after a few words from our sponsors,” the moderator said.

What do they know? JeNelle recalled thinking. Kenneth was not a man who would permit himself to be used. She was positive of that.

When the coverage resumed, she could see that the Congressional chamber was packed. Television cameras panned the room. All of the major networks were carrying the hearing live. She saw the Alexander family as they entered and took seats directly behind the table where Kenneth sat alone. She saw Shirley and Tom enter the hearing room looking very nervous. She recognized Colonel JC Baker, who sat with other high-ranking military officials in the hearing room, attired in his full dress uniform. She remembered meeting Colonel Baker outside of Kenneth’s home and remnants of the argument that she overheard between Kenneth and Colonel Baker. She also saw that Lisa Lambert, Kenneth’s former lover, was in the hearing room. She wondered whether that was the reason that Kenneth didn’t want her to be there. Was he still involved with Lisa? She couldn’t think of that then.

The Congressmen and Senators entered the chamber and took their seats. Chairman Marshall called the Joint Committee of the House and Senate to order with a large gavel. The throngs of people were silent. The Chairman announced the purpose of the fact-finding, investigative

hearing and then turned to the first witness of the day, Kenneth James Alexander.

“Mr. Alexander, would you state your name and address for the record?” Chairman Marshall asked.

“I am Kenneth James Alexander, formerly of Goodwill, South Carolina, currently residing in San Francisco, California,” Kenneth said in a clear, cool, and crisp voice.

The room was silent.

“And your occupation, Mr. Alexander?”

“I am the Executive Director and Managing Partner of CompuCorrect, Inc.”

Just then, the camera caught sight of a group of people arriving who created quite a commotion as they entered. They quickly took seats with the Alexander family members behind Kenneth.

“Mr. Alexander, are you represented here today by legal counsel?”

“No, Mr. Chairman, I am not.”

The spectators gasped.

“Well, Mr. Alexander, do you have an opening statement that you would like to read into the Congressional Record?”

“No, Mr. Chairman, I do not.”

The audience gasped again. Her stomach was in knots.

“Mr. Alexander, this is highly irregular. You’re not represented by legal counsel and you have no statement for the record. Either you’re very confident of your position or you’ve made a fool’s mistake.”

“My parents did not raise any fools, Mr. Chairman.”

The audience roared and she did, too. Score one for the good guys. Even the Congressmen chuckled, but Kenneth sat straight and confidently in his chair without flinching. Calmness began to flow over her as the Congressmen began to ask questions in the order that the Chairman called their names. Kenneth answered each question clearly and concisely. The cameras captured him from every angle as other reporters snapped pictures of him. He was in full control. For that reason, as she sat there watching Kenneth testify, she knew that

everything would be all right. Even from three thousand miles away, he could put her mind at ease.

“Mr. Alexander, did your company bid on ten military contracts and receive all ten?” Chairman Marshall asked.

“Actually, eleven military contracts. Yes, we did, Mr. Chairman.”

“Isn’t it highly unlikely that a small company like yours should be so favored as to have received all of the contracts that it bid for?”

“No, Mr. Chairman. CompuCorrect is a growing company with highly-trained, competent, qualified, and energetic people.”

“But, weren’t these contracts inflated, Mr. Alexander?”

“Yes, they were, Mr. Chairman.”

The spectators gasped. Reporters pulled out cell phones and started calling in their stories. The video media took close-up views of Kenneth. JC Baker shifted; it seemed uncomfortably, in his seat and whispered something to the other military officers. A murmur could be heard through the room. The Chairman banged his gavel and the noise ceased.

“Mr. Alexander, are you admitting wrongdoing in the acceptance of these contracts?”

“Absolutely not, Mr. Chairman.”

Kenneth’s words were still hanging in the air when a woman came into the chamber, handed a copy of some papers to Chairman Marshall and whispered something in his ear. The Chairman covered his microphone, looked over the papers while the woman handed a copy of the papers to each member of the Committee. There was a flurry of activity from the congressional aides as their congressional representatives conferred with them. The Chairman returned to the microphone.

“Would William Anthony Chandler, David Burnham Carter, III, Alan Keanu Lightfoot, Melissa Bernice Charles, and Vivian Lynn Alexander please rise if you are in this Chamber?” Chairman Marshall asked.

They all rose and she recognized David and saw Kenneth’s sister, Vivian, and the other housemates. Vivian was very attractive, she had thought, but she wondered what the housemates had all done to be singled out by the Chairman in that manner.

“Mr. Alexander, do you know these people?”

A slight amused smile crossed Kenneth's face.

"Yes, Mr. Chairman, I do know them."

"Have you authorized them to act on your behalf, Mr. Alexander?"

"No, Mr. Chairman, but I'll take full responsibility for whatever they have done."

"Thank you, Mr. Alexander," Chairman Marshall had said, *"you are excused while we examine certain new information which has been brought to this Committee's attention."*

Suddenly, she thought of Milo San Angelo. She had a strong feeling that he may have been successful in finding some vital piece of information that would help Kenneth.

Kenneth got up and sat next to his parents.

"This Committee calls a Corporal Samuel Yeager to the witness table."

The crowd began to murmur loudly. Reporters started looking around to see the witness. She noticed that JC Baker seemed to nearly leap out of his skin. The Committee room doors opened and Corporal Yeager marched in. He was attired in his spit and polish, full-dressed military uniform. He marched to the front of the room, the clerk swore him in, and he took a seat at the witness table.

"Corporal Yeager, I'm holding an affidavit, which appears to have your signature affixed and notarized," Chairman Marshall said.

The Clerk handed a copy of the document to Corporal Yeager.

"Is that your signature?"

"Yes, Sir," Corporal Yeager had said.

"Son, would you tell us in your own words what is contained in this document?"

"Yes, Sir. I have been Colonel JC Baker's assistant and driver since he came to the Pentagon, Sir. During that time, Colonel Baker and other military officials attempted to coerce Mr. Alexander into overpricing projects while he was at the Sandoval Anniston Corporation. Mr. Alexander refused and left the company. Since then, Colonel Baker worked with Dr. Lisa Lambert to distract Mr. Alexander while he slipped some RFPs through Mr. Alexander's company. Colonel Baker was concerned that Ms. Shirley Taylor, a partner of Mr. Alexander's, might discover the overpricing and alert Mr. Alexander,

so he started an affair with her to keep her from finding out. Colonel Baker instructed Dr. Lambert to use Ms. JeNelle Towson, or anyone else, to distract Mr. Alexander. They were concerned about using Ms. Towson because of her relationship with California State Supreme Court Judge Johnson Worthington and the San Angelo family in New York; Ms. Towson and Judge Worthington were two people who they thought wouldn't permit themselves to be used. Colonel Baker and Dr. Lambert have been pushing overpriced RFPs into California and other states so that the military budget could not be cut, and so that military bases would not be closed. Colonel Baker and other military officers have had their intelligence operations going in each state similar to the one in California. In Florida and Texas..."

She recalled that the mentioning of her name sent shockwaves through her body, but even more importantly, she was overwhelmed by the soldier's testimony concerning Lisa Lambert. She recalled wondering whether Lisa was simply using Kenneth for all those months to slip the military contracts into his company. However, something about the company, Sandoval Anniston, stuck in her mind. She couldn't remember why, but she had other things to think about. She would have to Google them. When she did, she knew why the corporate name sounded familiar. It was because Michal owned it.

The audience sat in absolute silent amazement as Corporal Yeager spoke for nearly an hour of other transactions he witnessed. When Corporal Yeager finished, pandemonium broke loose.

The Chairman banged the gavel loudly several times.

"Corporal Yeager, do you have anything else to add to your testimony?"

"Well, I left out the part about Dr. Lambert and Colonel Baker having sex in your office, on your desk, Sir, and in the Heritage Foundation Board Room, but I'll put that all in my book when it's published," Yeager said proudly.

Pandemonium broke out again and the Chairman banged the gavel, again.

"In my office! On my desk!" the Chairman yelled. *"Son, do you have any evidence to back up these allegations?"*

"No, Sir, just my word, but I am from Holly Hill, South Carolina, Sir, and in South Carolina, a man's word is his bond."

The audience laughed.

"I'm sure that's true, Son, but we can't charge highly-decorated officers of our military with these unspeakable acts without proof."

"I have proof, Mr. Chairman," Kenneth interrupted, as he walked to the witness table.

The audience hushed.

Kenneth took his pager off his waist and placed it before the microphone. He flipped a switch and his and Baker's voices could be heard arguing over many of the facts to which Yeager testified.

Then Kenneth gave a closing statement without benefit of notes or teleprompter. She beamed with pride at his words and his demeanor. Score another one for the good guys. Tears filled her eyes. He was magnificent. She tingled all over just thinking about him. Her telephone began constantly ringing, but she refused to answer it. She sat in the glow of her admiration for him for hours. When she heard Kenneth's voice come over her answering machine, she leaped for the telephone.

"Kenneth, you were brilliant. I'm so proud of you. I could hardly believe it."

"You've been a busy lady, Ms. Towson, haven't you?"

"Me? You're the one who the television commentators are saying ought to be in public office. They're praising you on every network and on every channel!"

"Don't try to change the subject. I believe that you had something to do with Corporal Yeager's key testimony."

"Now, Kenneth, I only made a simple request of an old friend. Can I help it if this country turns out in force when its Man For All Seasons skips by a little bump in the road?"

"Touché, Ms. Towson, but from now on let's not be out of touch so that neither one of us has any reason to worry. Agreed?"

"Agreed, Mr. Alexander."

She recalled how they continued to talk on the telephone several times each day. She thought that they were beginning to find any reason to call each other. One day she did not hear from him at all. She was swamped with preparations for the grand opening of Towson & Towson,

the renovations to INSIGHTS, and the student trainees running her new mail-order business. She recalled not feeling comfortable because Kenneth hadn't called. She went into her office to call him.

"Greetings, this is CompuCorrect, Northern Division. How may I direct your call please?" Sara McDougal answered.

"Sara, good morning. This is JeNelle Towson. How are you?"

"Hi, JeNelle, I'm fine. How are you?" she answered with a strange lift in her tone. *"I'm fine, Sara. Is Mr. Alexander in the office this morning?"*

"No, JeNelle. He left on an extended business trip."

"That's funny. He didn't mention anything to me about going away."

"Oh, I'm sure that he'll be in touch with you real soon," she recalled Sara saying with a giggle.

"What are you so happy about, Sara?"

"Love, JeNelle. Ain't love just grand!" she said rhetorically with wistfulness in her voice.

"I suppose so, Sara," she said, but was confused by Sara's statement.

"Will you tell Mr. Alexander that I called?"

"Sure, JeNelle, but I'm sure that you'll probably hear from him long before I do," she said with a certain joy in her voice that made her even more confused.

"Thanks, Sara. My best to everyone."

She recalled shaking her head and going back to work. She had a full day of work ahead of her.

"Ms. Towson, would you come to the front desk. You are wanted on the telephone and you have a special delivery," Wanda said over the store's intercom.

She was a little annoyed because she asked Wanda not to interrupt her when she was meeting with her student trainees. Excusing herself, she went to the front of the store. It was quite a walk since, what used to be a stock and storage room, was now an active back-office operation. The store had now doubled in size. The finishing touches were also being made on yet another project next door to INSIGHTS for the opening of another small business venture. She and her new partners would unveil the new business at an open house celebration over an upcoming

holiday weekend. She and her parents went into partnership in Towson & Towson Couture. Her mother taught a group of young people to sew and make clothing that they sold to their customers, some of whom were very wealthy, like Mrs. Johnston White Worthington, who had become a regular customer and who had brought many of her friends to the shop. Others were young people looking for the latest new outfit.

“Wanda, I thought that I asked you not to disturb me when I’m working with our new employees, unless it is very important.”

“I know, Ms. Towson, but this seems to be very important,” Wanda said apologetically. *“Mrs. Worthington is on line three and you have a special delivery.”*

She looked at Wanda’s very apologetic demeanor, smiled at her, and shook her head. She took a deep breath and answered the telephone.

“Constance, I’m sorry to keep you waiting. How can I help you this afternoon?”

“Oh, I know how busy you are, JeNelle, and I won’t take up much of your time. I just need to get a few details cleared up.”

“All right, Constance. If this is about Towson & Towson Couture, what do you need to know?”

“Well, I’ve got the announcements and invitations all worked out. I’ve been working with that nice young man, Paul Garrett. He really selected a beautiful beige onion-skin paper and the raised embossed printing in script is simply divine. He thought that you might like that. He’s worked with you before and I think that he’s captured your spirit—and Kenneth’s, of course. Well, anyway, the guest list is completed. It’s just going to be a small affair with just your family and Kenneth’s and three hundred of your closest friends. Johnston and I are so glad that you and Kenneth agreed to let us host your engagement party. The catering is all arranged, but I need to know what color scheme you’re going to have at the wedding so that I can incorporate those colors into the decorations for the engagement party. Kenneth didn’t say. All he said was that you would tell me later. I know that he’s just as busy as you are with his new office, but color schemes are very important, too.”

As Constance Worthington spoke, her eyes had grown wider and her mouth had dropped open. She didn’t believe what she was hearing,

but then there was that noise from the construction going on across the street. Or had Constance finally gone ‘round the bend’! She wondered whether Johnston knew that his wife had flipped her wig.

“Engagement party! Color scheme! Catering! Invitations! Constance, are we talking about the opening of Towson & Towson Couture?”

“Oh, JeNelle, I know that these are not things that you have a lot of time to deal with right now, but since the announcement is already in this afternoon’s newspaper, I thought that I’d better get it all cleared up before we’re swamped with calls and acceptances. So you just think about it, dear, and give me a call later when you and Kenneth have made a decision.”

Constance hung up and she was in total bewilderment. Wanda quickly placed a stool behind her and helped her to sit down. She handed her a copy of the Style section of the afternoon paper and stepped back. Wanda remembered the last time that she got news from the newspaper. She was not taking any chances this time. She was completely innocent.

“It wasn’t me, Ms. Towson. I swear!” Wanda said, holding her hands up in the air.

She began to read the article.

“Dr. and Mrs. Bernard Alexander of Goodwill, South Carolina, are pleased to announce the engagement of their eldest son, Kenneth James Alexander, formerly of San Francisco, to Ms. JeNelle Elise Towson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Towson of Santa Barbara. Ms. Towson is the owner of INSIGHTS, and Towson & Towson Couture of Santa Barbara and is a leading citizen of the Santa Barbara community. She was named Woman of the Year last year by the Santa Barbara Chamber of Commerce and currently serves on the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Youth in Business and Industry and as the President of the California State League of Business and Professional Women.

Mr. Kenneth Alexander, the Executive Director of CompuCorrect, stated, in an exclusive interview, that he and his lovely bride-to-be will reside most of the year in Santa Barbara where Mr. Alexander is opening his new offices, but that they would also maintain a home in Goodwill, South Carolina.

Judge and Mrs. Johnston White Worthington will host the happy couple’s engagement party at their estate on Valentine’s Day. Mr. Alexander stated

that the date of the engagement party was chosen carefully to coincide with the one-year anniversary of their love for each other. The wedding date has not yet been disclosed, according to Mr. Alexander, but he stated that he would prefer a short engagement since the couple is planning to have a very large family.

It was nearly one year ago that this reporter covered the selection of Ms. Towson as the recipient of the prestigious Chamber of Commerce award. The question then was, 'Who would move for love?' It appears that Mr. Alexander has answered that question loudly and clearly. We wish the happy couple well."

Just as she finished reading the article and looked up, the noise from the construction stopped and she saw a sign going up on the building across the street. The sign read, in bold letters:

**FUTURE HOME OF COMPUCORRECT, INC.
SOUTHERN DIVISION
KENNETH J. ALEXANDER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

She had blinked her eyes rapidly. She couldn't believe what she was seeing.

"First Constance, then the article, now this? What is going on!" she exclaimed aloud.

"You forgot about your special delivery, Ms. Towson," a very familiar voice said to her.

She turned to see Kenneth leaning against the bookshelves in that same sexy stance of his, wearing that same warm, million-dollar, polar-ice-cap-melting smile. He walked toward her, took a box from behind his back, and handed it to her. She looked at him, still dazed by the events.

"Kenneth, what ..."

He kissed her on the lips. Her bewilderment grew. It was the first kiss that they shared. She dreamed of what his kiss would feel like. She totally underestimated how wonderfully powerful it actually was.

"Open the box, JeNelle," he said, looking into her eyes.

She took the box and started to open it, but kept looking at him as she fumbled with the ribbon and paper. As she unfurled the tissue paper

inside the box, she saw the beautiful crystal bowl that she admired in Tiffany & Company in San Francisco. Her eyes began to water. It was more beautiful than she remembered.

“Kenneth, how—”

He kissed her on the lips again, and she started to feel those amorous feelings growing rapidly inside her.

“Open it, JeNelle.”

She had looked at him as she removed the lid of the crystal bowl. The aromatic scent of rose petals wafted out of the container and into the air. A red satin box sat in the middle of the white rose petals.

“Kenneth, who—”

He kissed her lips again, and she felt pure excitement building up inside her. Her heart was racing.

“Open it, JeNelle.”

She opened the box and found a beautiful star, diamond engagement ring with many beams of light. Tears were rolling down her cheeks.

“Now, if you’re ready for your vocabulary lesson, Ms. Towson, repeat after me: Kenneth James Alexander, I love you as much as you have loved me. We will love each other more tomorrow than we do today. We will love each other and our children—”

She didn’t let him finish. She leaped from the stool and kissed him with all of the passion that she had locked away for far too many years. She was oblivious to everyone and everything around her. She only felt the bliss of holding the man that she loved in her arms.

In the early morning the next day, Kenneth stood on the deck of her home looking at the beautiful beginning of a new day and the peaceful ocean as it rolled gently onto shore. He folded his arms across his bare chest and looked up at the last glimmer of the stars as the day began to overtake the night. He seemed to be saying a silent prayer.

She went out onto the deck from her bedroom where they had shared their first night together making love. She kissed his bare back, put her arms around him, and stroked his chest and his abdomen. She laid her cheek against his warm back and pressed her body against his.

He kissed her fingers and the ring on the third finger of her left hand.

"I missed you when I woke up and you weren't there," she said, as she held him.

"I came out here to thank my ancestors for bringing me to this point. I'm in love for the first time in my life."

She moved around to face him, put her arms around his neck, and kissed him with all of the passion within her. She looked into his eyes.

"And I'm in love for the last time in my life."



As Constance Worthington had promised, there was only Kenneth's family, her family, which numbered more than three hundred of their closest family members and friends. It was a beautiful afternoon engagement party on the lawn of Johnston and Constance's palatial estate in Montecito. She and Kenneth walked hand-in-hand, greeting each of their guests. People from his office in San Francisco were there, her employees, and people who she worked with on different projects, including the mayor and city council. Both their parents and siblings attended. It was a long afternoon, but she didn't feel fatigued with Kenneth by her side.

Lights illuminated the lawn and Kenneth led her to a beautifully-decorated chair that was placed on a platform in front of the bandstand. She did not know what to expect, but she trusted him unequivocally. The lawn lights dimmed and a single spotlight shined on them as he seated her in the chair. She remembered how she tingled as he smiled at her and knelt before her on one knee. The guests at the reception all gathered around.

"JeNelle Elise Towson, I'm in love with you. I have loved you since the first moment that we met. I love the warmth in your eyes when you look at me. I love the excitement in your voice when you speak to me. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Loving you. Sharing every day and every night with you. Raising a family with you. I promise you that I will always be there for you whenever you need me. I want you

to reach for each and every dream that you have and I will be there to help you make each one come true. I promise you this before God and all of our families and friends who are gathered here today. JeNelle Elise Towson, will you marry me and make me the happiest man in the universe?”

She remembered crying as he spoke to her so tenderly, but her answer came without question or reservation.

“Yes! Yes! Yes! A million times yes!” she said, as she cupped his face in her hands. He rose and held her close to him. She kissed him with all the joy in her heart, body, and soul. The combo began to play “You Are So Beautiful,” as they again danced in a single beam of light with their families and friends surrounding them, cheering and clapping wildly.

She was glad that Kenneth asked Benny to be his best man. She and Benny were good friends now. They talked about his feelings for her and resolved them. She knew that he was not in love with her, but with Navy Lieutenant Stacy Greene and she hoped that one day soon Stacy would come back to him. He and their daughter, Whitney Ivy, needed Stacy in their lives.

Her sister, Gloria; Kenneth’s siblings, Vivian, Aretha, Gregory; his business partners, Tom Jenkins and Shirley Taylor; their friends, Chuck Montgomery, Janice Atterly, and Cecil Jordon; her cousin, Timothy Baines, and his cousin, James Dixon, also agreed to be in the wedding. Gloria was reluctant since she still had difficulty walking. The scars from the brutal beating healed, but it left deeper scars on her heart and soul. She pleaded with her sister to seek counseling or to join a focus group of battered women, but Gloria refused. Instead she hired the best lawyers that she could find and filed suit against Tony Jamerson, her former fiancée, the San Diego Chargers, because he had played wide receiver for them, and the Washington Hotel because of what she described as their lax security. Gloria, she thought, was on a vendetta. She hoped that her sister would begin to heal herself as she helped her plan for her wedding to Kenneth. It seemed that all the wedding festivities, the bridal showers, and the bridal party dinner only made her more bitter.

David Carter, one of the law school housemates, was constantly with Gloria, providing moral support.

Although Gloria wasn't enthusiastic about her upcoming wedding, Vivian, Kenneth's sister, was a ray of sunshine as they talked about the plans. She had good reason to be happy. She met Derrick Jackson, Vivian's boyfriend, a former professional basketball icon, who was now a noted pediatrician. They seemed to be floating on air whenever she saw them together. She was sorry that Derrick might not be there for the week-long wedding festivities. His medical practice in Washington, DC, kept him busy for months, but he told Vivian that he would make every effort to be there for the wedding. All of the housemates were there, though, including Anna Menendez-Gaza, the housekeeper and cook, and her two children, Angelique and Miguel.

Aretha Grace Alexander, Kenneth's youngest sibling, was the true cheerleader for the wedding. She would be a junior bridesmaid and asked to play and sing a special song for her and Kenneth during the wedding ceremony. Aretha Grace kept her FAX machine, text, and e-mail humming with wedding information, like bridesmaids' dresses, cake decorations, bridal shower etiquette and a myriad of other details that she didn't want her to forget. She was a real live wire at the bridal shower the week before the wedding, as she folded each piece of wrapping paper carefully after she opened each gift. She asked Aretha Grace why she was treating the wrapping paper so carefully and was told that she should use the paper to line the drawers of hers and Kenneth's bedroom furniture so as to always remember how happy they were. Aretha also threaded each ribbon through a hole in paper plates. She didn't know why Aretha did that until last night at the wedding rehearsal. As the members of the wedding party came down the aisle, they carried the ribbons on the paper plates as if they were real flowers. Aretha didn't miss a trick, but she would not divulge what she decided to perform. It was a secret.

Dr. Charles Montgomery was there as a member of the wedding party. He was a friend of the housemates and had personally taken care

of Gloria after the assault. He took good care of her, too, with his warm and caring ways. She could hear the excitement in his voice when she and Kenneth called him using a speakerphone and asked him to be in the wedding. He let out a yell that would have made the rodeo circuit proud. He helped Benny, Gregory, and Tom plan Kenneth's bachelor party, too. Judge Johnston White Worthington, her friend and mentor, attended that bachelor party and he turned beet red whenever she asked him what went on. He consistently took the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination and swore that he would take the secrets of that bachelor party to his grave. He still said that he would perform the wedding ceremony with a clear mind, but a guilty conscience.

Vivian and Chuck looked cute pretending to be her and Kenneth at the wedding rehearsal, but Gregory Alexander, Kenneth's youngest brother, got most of the attention. He had all of her young cousins salivating—some of the older cousins, too. The young female students in her store and her parents' couture boutique couldn't function whenever he was around during the week-long festivities. She noticed that Raymond, one of her clerks, who happened to be gay, actually did cartwheels down the aisles whenever Gregory was in the store. Gregory did have sex appeal, but all of the Alexander men did. Even her future father-in-law, Dr. Bernard Alexander, had a striking appearance with loads of charisma, but he clearly only had eyes for one person, Sylvia Benson Alexander, his wife and the mother of their five children. They still held hands after thirty-six years of marriage.

Even her parents, Harvey and Canty Towson, were thrilled after finally meeting them in person. They spent many days together sharing stories and no doubt, secrets about their children, including her and Kenneth, she was sure.

Meeting so many of the Alexander family was bewildering. So many of them and the people from Kenneth's company in San Francisco were coming to Santa Barbara for the week-long festivities that she selected multiple hotels to house them. Their guest list had grown rapidly. Sylvia Alexander e-mailed a list of names and addresses of relatives and friends that took up many pages. She didn't know how the church was going to hold all of the people who were going to be invited to attend the

wedding, but Kenneth insisted that he wanted their wedding day to be the most special day of their lives. He simply decided to change the wedding venue to the Atrium Ballroom. He helped with every detail of the planning, but he was always the calm in the eye of the storm. His calm, careful, and thoughtful demeanor got her through some tense periods of anxiety, like the days after the wedding invitations were mailed when mail trucks of all types and description pulled up in front of her home to deliver wedding gifts. Kenneth simply started stacking them, unopened, in a POD storage container parked next to her house and said that they would open and acknowledge each one after they returned from their three-week honeymoon, but he still wasn't saying where they were going. They were having work done to her bungalow to add two additional levels while they were away. On another occasion, when she began to panic about the wedding costs, Kenneth simply picked up the telephone and called some of his clients. Within a few hours, everything was arranged. Flowers, catering, cars, valet services, wait staff, and the musicians for both the wedding and the reception. He could do anything with such ease and poise. That's why he was the Executive Director of CompuCorrect, Inc., and the man that she loved.

Initially, her relationship with Kenneth was one disaster after another. First, it was Benny's relentless pursuit of her, and then Kenneth's determination not to fall in love with her because of Benny. Kenneth went to great lengths to mask his feelings for her. He even permitted himself to carry on a very open affair with Lisa Lambert.

Disasters kept them apart, but, ultimately, it was another disaster that brought them together: Gloria was allegedly attacked by her fiancée. Kenneth was with her at a meeting when she got the news. It was only his strength that got her through the ordeal, particularly when a newspaper reporter dug up information that she, too, was the victim of domestic violence at the hands of Michel San Angelo that had hospitalized her for six months. Kenneth's comforting presence led her to reveal the whole sordid story to him. She told him how Michel raped and beat her in a fit of rage in a public parking lot while customers were held at bay by Michel's armed bodyguards. Only Milo San Angelo's intervention stopped Michel from killing her.