

# Chapter 1

Cecil Jordon couldn't quell the excitement of having her six-year-old son, Donald Dixon Jordon, back with her. She didn't even want to try. Over a year had passed since she had seen him in person. He lived with his father, Donald Alexander Dixon (Don) on the East Coast for his first year in school. Her life was so empty without him, but he would be arriving in San Diego that day to spend the summer with her. She had her former roommate's, Janice Atterly Dixon's, bedroom and bathroom freshly painted and gaily decorated, befitting her young warrior. A mountain of books and educational videos were shelved. New clothes hung in the closet and new shoes were neatly arranged. His favorite toy, a computer, was in the den at his own desk near hers.

She sat down on one of the double beds in his room, her uncharacteristic nervousness causing her to sigh in the stillness. She was so excited about having her son back that she could barely sit still for a few seconds at a time. She had raised her son alone for the first five years of his life, unbeknownst to his father. When Don discovered he had fathered a child and she had kept her boy's existence a secret, to say that he had been very angry was a gross understatement. Ballistic came to mind. As a result, Don insisted the boy live with him for at least a year. She relented in part because of her feelings of guilt. Also because, unlike her, Don was a part of a large, close-knit, loving family. She knew what family meant to Don and what it was growing to mean to her boy. It was a hard decision for her to make, but her son's welfare was the most important thing in her life. He was ready to attend school and her schedule would have made it extremely difficult for her to be the type of mother that he deserved. She also believed that her boy deserved to have a male role model to help shape his formative years. She negotiated a lesser amount of time, agreeing that Donald Junior could spend nine months with his father, but the summer months with her.

She knew so much about what he liked now or what he had experienced since she last saw him. They had communicated several times a day while he was away. She heard about what new foods he liked, what television shows he watched, and his budding interest in football and baseball. He was well fed and taken care of, but she had expected no less than the best treatment and care from his father and his family.

Donald Junior was an extremely bright little boy who made it clear what he wanted to do over the summer. She reached for the list of summer events to be held in and around San Diego that he sent to her and added a few of her own. A summer outdoor camp would interest him and they would find many things that they could do together. It didn't matter. She would do anything to keep him with her.

A smile crossed her light, brown-sugar colored face, as she checked the last detail of his bedroom. Everything was neatly arranged and within easy reach for a six-year-old.

Cecil knotted her hands before her, resting her elbows on her knees. Leaning forward, she bowed her head against her hands and tightly closed her eyes. "Breathe," she commanded. Deep cleansing breaths calmed her anxiety, but only for a moment. Her thoughts turned to dread, cold and hard as steel, as memories crowded into her mind, raising the hair on her neck. An ache crept up inside of her. Her shoulders sagged. She hoped the anger and bitterness between her and Don had dissipated, but she knew that maybe it had not. "No," she said aloud to the still air, as she pushed aside her fears and shoved to her feet. She was nothing if not determined to put the past behind her. Too much was at risk.

Yet, there were other emotions still foreign to her. The year had come to an end. Little Donald would live with her for the summer, but at summer's end would come the choice.

Cecil slipped into her designer slacks and quickly tucked in her raw silk blouse before pulling up the side zipper. Turning toward her mirror, she ran her hands over her flat abdomen and then raked her perfectly manicured nails through her short, naturally silky hair. She vigorously shook her head, her healthy crowning glory bounced neatly away from her face and settled into place. Sliding her feet into a pair of high-heeled, bareback Prada sandals, she checked her makeup and her clothes in a mirror one more time and then reached for her Hermes purse, keys, and designer sunshades. Something caught her eye and her hand stilled. There, in her jewelry box, was a tangible reminder of a time in her life, which simultaneously held both unbelievable joy and paralyzing fear. Just for a moment, her fingers glided over the sturdy gold chain and she remembered. Remembered that no matter what happened to her, no matter what happened between her and Don, it was that chain, that link that was the source of untold happiness embodied in her six-year-old

son. Although she no longer wore the chain that linked her to his father, she fiercely loved her son.

Shaking herself from her melancholia, Cecil ended Diana Ross' "To Love Again" in mid-syllable on her high-end, audio sound system. When the telephone rang, she started not to answer it, but then thought better of it. After all, it could be her son calling. She only hoped the call didn't involve a delay in Donald Junior's arrival.

"Hello."

"Cecil?"

Cecil sighed, rolling her eyes to the ceiling and pursing her lips. "Yes, Candice."

"Shit! You don't have to give me attitude whenever I call! Always Miss High and Mighty!"

She placed her keys, handbag, and sunshades on the modern marble-top coffee table. "Is there a problem, Candice?" Cecil asked dryly, while settling down on one of her sofas. Leaning forward, she tunneled her fingers through her hair, frustration evident in her body language.

"I just wanted to know when you're coming to LA and bringing that little Negro up here to meet us."

Cecil flinched and then bristled. "Look, Candice, my son is no 'little Negro!'"

The sharp reproach silenced her caller for a moment.

"Damn, Cecil, you got PMS or something?"

"That's not the point! I resent—" She took a deep breath, trying to calm her anger. "Never mind! Look, I'm running late. I'm leaving for the airport now to pick up my son. I'll call you later in the week and let you know my plans, all right?"

Candice said coyly, "Well, there was just one other little thing..."

Cecil rolled her eyes again. She knew what was coming. "How much, Candice?" she asked curtly.

"It's not just for me, uh, you know I need to buy summer clothes for these little crumb-snatching Negroes and I'm a little short on the rent and I need to get my 'do done...ya know what I mean?"

"How much, Candice?" she dispassionately asked again.

"Fifteen hundred."

"*Dollars?*"

"Shit, Cecil! What's the big fucking deal? You got it! Fifteen hundred ain't nothin' but chump change to you."

Cecil sighed heavily, but she did not answer her sister.

“So what? Now you gonna go into that bullshit again about gittin’ a job, aren’t you?”

“I’m not going into anything! I’ve had it with your claims that ‘the kids need this or that’ and ‘the rent’s short’! Every month it’s the same damn thing! You’re a bright, intelligent, beautiful woman. Get your life straight!”

“I don’t have to take this shit from you! After all, you are my *little* sister!”

“You’re right! Don’t take it! Goodbye, Candice!” Cecil bristled, slamming down the telephone.

She started for the door again and the telephone rang. This time she ignored it.

Cecil stood in the lobby waiting for the valet to bring her car. She was still fuming over her argument with her sister, when a deep, male voice sensually called to her.

“Dr. Jordon?”

She turned to see Richard Steel Tucker, Esquire, approaching her. He smiled broadly and kissed her on the cheek.

“Mr. Tucker,” she acknowledged dryly.

His eyes washed over her and his face split into a broad grin. “Mmm umph, lady! You sure do look good, but then you always do. How about me and you tonight? Say about eight o’clock?”

“Sorry, Tucker, I have other plans. My son is coming home today. I want to spend the evening with him.”

“That’ll work,” he said, slipping his arms around her waist and drawing her up close. “I’ve got my kids for the weekend. We can share a sitter and hit a few clubs,” he said, an octave lower in a more husky voice.

She saw her custom, late model, forest-green Jaguar roll up to the front door and eased out of Tucker’s grip. “Thanks, but no thanks.”

Tucker’s eyes narrowed and his jaw tightened. “Look, Cecil, I think that you’ve been avoiding me and I don’t like that.”

“That sounds like a personal problem to me, and by the way, I don’t like being pressed,” she said, setting her jaw. “So just back off.”

“There’s someone else, isn’t there?” he asked, demandingly.

“I don’t owe you an explanation,” she quipped.

“I want one anyway. I’ll be by your place tonight.”

“No,” she said, backing up toward the plate-glass doors.

“Count on it!” He was firm, eyeing her retreating figure from head to toe.

Cecil turned on her heels and walked away. Getting into the car waiting under the Porte Cohere, she slipped on her sunglasses and adjusted her mirror.

“Uh, Dr. Jordon?” Vince, the valet, suggestively eyed her body, lazily leaning into the car. “You know, I could really do a job on...uh, your car. Handle it just like I do a woman. Caress it. Stroke it. Wash it and wax it real slow and easy. I can make it glow.” He grinned at her while slowly rubbing a cloth over the car’s highly shined finish.

“Vince, I’m sure you’re good...uh, with cars, but I don’t need a challenge. I wouldn’t keep that do-rag ready, if I were you.” Squealing tires punctuated her point.

Cecil’s XM Radio kicked in an old Anita Baker song as she checked her watch. Three strikes and the day wasn’t over yet. First, Candice. Then Tucker. Now Vince. This certainly wasn’t going to be one of her banner days and the biggest test for plucking her last nerve hadn’t even landed yet! She tried to relax, but hell, PMS is a bitch!

She’d have to make up the time on the highway, she thought, as she accelerated and skillfully maneuvered the Jaguar through the late morning San Diego traffic. She wanted to be at the gate when her son came off the airplane. He wouldn’t be alone though. His father would be there, too. She was having disquieting thoughts about seeing Don again. The meeting wasn’t going to be easy, but for her son, she would do anything. Including facing Donald Alexander Dixon again.

Heaven help her, this was not going to be a good day.

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Hands in pockets, head down, Don Dixon’s tall, masterfully sculptured frame paced the fuselage of the private jet. The aircraft banked right, forcing him to balance himself before he settled in his seat. He needed to finish a few loose details before arrival in San Diego—and he was making no progress. Yet he knew why. The thought of seeing Cecil Jordon again had consumed him in ways that he loathed to admit; in ways that his usually uncluttered mind could focus on. He had sent e-mail reports to her about their son’s progress in school and pictures of special events, but had otherwise not participated in Donald Junior’s daily Skype conversations with his mother.

For the past nine months, he had altered his life to get to know his son, who he didn't even know existed before that year, and brooding over his own vulnerability. Now he was again in full possession of his emotions...or so he hoped.

Donald Junior was everything that he wanted a son to be, Don thought, as he gazed out of the aircraft window. The boy was bright, energetic, happy, intelligent and a joy to be with. He and his son had shared so much over the year, settling into no set regimen, but making their father-son relationship solid. Donald Junior had coerced him and skillfully maneuvered him into a set of agreements, which were against his better judgment, but he would do almost anything to satisfy his son's needs for a family, even agree to see Cecil again.

Don had marveled at his son's ingenuity, how quickly he seemed to master complicated and complex ideas and concepts. Don had to admit to himself that Cecil had been an excellent mother, exposing Donald Junior to so much that shaped his charming character and personality, but being an excellent mother to their son was not nearly enough, he thought.

He gritted his teeth as the old anger began to resurface cold and hard with the unvarnished intensity of a coiled spring. His hostility not quelled, he closed his eyes in practiced meditation until the urgency of the anger dissipated.

Don opened his eyes slowly and looked at his son sleeping peacefully on the sofa bed across from him. The boy had been too excited about being with his mother again to sleep the night before. He had stayed up long past his usual bedtime, asking many questions about his relationship with Cecil. Questions that had no answers. Don knew what his son had in mind, but he also knew that, with the estrangement between him and Cecil, what his son wanted most was not possible. The summer would be enough, he thought, but at the end of that period would come the choice.

"We'll be landing in five minutes, Sir," Don's copilot said, suddenly standing beside him. "The area is being cleared now."

Don nodded his acknowledgement and rested his head against the seat.

"Sir?"

"Yes."

“Are you sure...I mean, is it wise to have an exposed docking? Shouldn't we be more cautious? Perhaps a more secure...”

“Shhh,” Don whispered, nodding toward his son.

“But, Sir, given the danger...” The pilot's eyes narrowed with concern.

Don's eyes rose to the pilot before the pilot silenced, sighing resignedly and moved quietly away.

The landing gear moved into place, the engines slowed to a dull roar, and the aircraft seemed to be on a glide path in the sky over the sunlit City of San Diego. Cecil would be waiting at the airport, he knew. He had already received his reports on her activities, but nothing he knew could prepare him to see her again. He felt his pulse quicken, as the landing gear touched down on the runway and Donald Junior opened his bright, brown eyes, softening Don's heart.

“Are we there yet, Daddy?” he asked with a big, sleepy smile, moving to a sitting position, and rubbing his eyes.

“Yes, DJ.” Don smiled back at him. “We're landing now, but you remember what you have to do, right?”

The boy got up and stood beside his father's seat. “Yes, Daddy, and you remember what *you* have to do, right?” he asked with a quizzical smile, his finger pointing to Don's broad muscular chest.

“Yes, son, I remember.” Don smiled back, rubbing his son's fresh haircut.

“This is going to make Mommy very happy and you, too, Daddy.” The boy beamed.

Don ignored the hidden meaning in his son's words and focused his attention on the lesson that he had taught him.

“DJ, I don't want you to worry about your mother and me or anything else. It's very important that you understand that.”

“I know, Daddy, if I ever feel uncomfortable all I have to do is break it right here,” he said, pointing to the gold chain around his neck.

“That's right, DJ. You and your mother are going to have a happy time together. Remember that. If I'm not around, you know what to do and how to behave.”

“But, Daddy, you promised,” Donald Junior whined, with his big brown eyes searching his father's eyes.

“I know, DJ. I intend to keep my promises to you.”

Donald Junior smiled broadly and Don kissed him on the forehead and held him in a tight embrace. Don's heart nearly broke. The danger

to his son, to Cecil, and so many others was very clear and present. He might have to give his life to protect those that he loved...including Cecil. He was taking a big risk, but he had no choice. He was a target...a marked man and he knew it. It wouldn't be the first time, but it could all too easily be the last.

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When Cecil pulled into the private jetport security gate, Anita Baker had just finished singing "Giving You the Best That I've Got." A valet took her car and she quickened her pace toward a security checkpoint. Standing near the entrance were two men wearing dark sunshades, with their hands clasped in front of them in a military stance, black earpieces hooked onto their left ears. One man pulled, what appeared to be, a photo out of his breast pocket and showed it to the other man. Then, they both looked at her. The guard at the security desk looked up, as she approached and grinned broadly.

"Yes, Miss, may I help you, I hope?"

"Cecil Jordon," she announced.

"Oh, yes, Dr. Jordon. You're on the list. Your party is landing now. They'll arrive at Gate A, momentarily. You may wait in the lounge and help yourself to the buffet," the guard said, as he pushed a button on his console. Glass security doors opened and the guard nodded to the two other men.

As she went through the glass doors, she saw the guard's reflection in the glass, bending to watch her walk by his station. She didn't acknowledge his glare. She never did when men accosted her with their appreciative gazes on her. When she wanted a man, she did the choosing, not him. And today she didn't need another argument. Not now when her hormones were dancing on the edge of her sanity. No, she needed her wits about her to deal with seeing her son's father. Walking into the empty private lounge, she ignored the buffet and went directly to the wide, glass windows overlooking the tarmac. The supersonic jet had landed and was taxiing toward the gate.

Suddenly, her heart began to beat harder and faster. Her pulse quickened. She wondered how Don would react to her. Whether he was still angry. She had visions of Don forbidding her from having her son ever again or restricting her son's visits with her Don Corleone style.

She wondered what kind of role model his father had been. Don, she knew, was gainfully employed, but she didn't have a clue as to what he did for a living. There were two conflicting Don Dixons in her view: The one whose life was so shrouded in mystery that she feared that whatever he did might be considered unlawful, or, at a minimum, dangerous. Then there was the other Don, the man who shared himself with her so lovingly that he had nearly erased her fears about making a family. For little Donald's sake, she hoped that she and Don would, at least, be civil to each other.

*Civil?* she thought. Only two years before Donald Junior was born, she and Don had shared passion the likes of which she had never experienced before or since with any man, and there had been quite a few with which to compare. Now nearly seven years had passed since she and Don had made love. Her last encounter with Don had not been a lovefest, but a bone-chilling, brain-numbing event from which she thought she would never survive.

Cecil watched as the ground crew guided the unmarked, sleek, white jet to a spot on the tarmac and signaled to cut the engines. A black van with darkened windows seemed to appear out of nowhere and rolled to a stop beside the jet. Three men in suits and sunshades hurriedly exited the van and took up positions surrounding the jet. She noticed earpieces in their ears as well and watched, as they seemed to canvass the area and talk into something in their hands. The bulge in their jackets and lower legs indicated to her that the men were carrying weapons. The driver talked into a microphone and opened his door to exit the van. Cecil could see the artillery racked in the door panel of the van, as he got out. She also saw shadows on the ground of the men walking above her head on the roof of the building. They, too, were armed, she surmised, or they had very strangely shaped arms. There were three unmarked harrier helicopters combing the area with marksmen or women standing on the skids, guns at the ready. She had seen less security at a Presidential campaign rally than she did whenever Donald Alexander Dixon was in her presence. She recalled, with growing concern, that Don usually carried weapons, except when he was at home in Summer County, South Carolina, but he would not explain why nor discuss what he did professionally.

Cecil covered her mouth and felt a shudder. *Were these men there to protect or to harm?* she worried. Then she noticed the portal of the jet open and steps unfold to the ground. Two men came out of the jet,

carefully scanning the area before going down the steps toward the man by the van. Perhaps this wasn't the jet carrying her son and Don, she thought. Maybe they were coming to a different gate. She started to turn and look for an attendant when suddenly there was Don calmly coming down the jet's steps, but she didn't see her son. Her concern grew as he walked toward the men on the ground.

As if telekinesis were a fact of life, as natural as breathing in and out, her eyes met Don's over the shoulders of the men to whom he was talking. He didn't acknowledge her even though she felt that his sunshade-covered eyes were fixed on her. She wanted to go out onto the tarmac and look around for an exit, but the security door was locked. She had no choice and never did where Don was concerned. She could only stand and wait. She was totally unaccustomed to waiting for anything—or anyone—but with Don, there was no option. His control was complete, unyielding, and absolute.

Don could clearly see Cecil, as he talked with his men and confirmed their instructions. She looked more beautiful to him than he remembered. An understated beauty that could stop a clock from ticking. Stop traffic on a busy urban street or stop his ability to breathe. Light brown sugar skin tone, sun streaked, golden brown, short, loosely waved hair styled away from her face. Hazel-brown, bedroom eyes and a full, luscious mouth. Her frame was still tight with an hourglass shape and voluptuous, five-foot-nine sculptured body that would turn heads, he thought, as he stood pinning her with his shaded eyes. Her breasts were still full, rounded and erect, with taut nipples protruding just slightly through her raw silk blouse. Her slacks were loose fitting, but did not camouflage her strong athletic thighs and legs. His eyes continued to search her, but the gold chain that he had given to her years earlier was absent. His disappointment was real, but it couldn't show now. He had to keep his mind clear and operating on a myriad of levels at the same time, but the sight of her standing there, looking so impressive and impassive, had him fixated. His slacks tightened measurably.

"Are you sticking to the plan, Sir?" one man asked, slicing through his concentration.

"Hold on that," he ordered, not looking at the men, his mouth barely moving. "Do the cover and I'll signal you. Keep it loose. I don't want any mistakes. There's no margin for error."

“Done, Sir,” they answered in unison.

“All clear,” another man at his back said quietly to him.

“Signal a hand over,” Don said.

Shortly, Donald Junior appeared on the top of the jet’s steps.

“Hurry up, Daddy,” he whined excitedly.

Don finished his conversation and turned toward his young son’s infectious smile, as the boy squirmed to free himself from another man.

“All right, little man.” He smiled at his son and nodded to the man restraining him.

Donald Junior leaped from the top step into his father’s arms, wrapped his arms around his father’s neck, and giggled as Don hoisted him up in the air.

Cecil’s eyes began to mist and water, and the air left her lungs, as she saw her son on the top step. She caught her breath when she saw him leap into his father’s arms, and released it slowly as Don caught him in midair.

Don looked sexier than ever, she thought, drop-dead gorgeous in fact. All six-foot, seven inches of him was a well-muscled Adonis. Broad muscular chest, flat stomach, and a firm butt above his long, thick thighs. His thick arm muscles bunched and rippled, as he caught their son and Don released his polar-ice-cap-melting smile. His dark brown, naturally wavy hair was neatly trimmed. His nicely shaped mustache rode above his pearl-white teeth and his thick eyebrows were perfect against his nutmeg-brown skin, but the eyes that had always drawn her to him, deep, black, impervious pools, were hidden from her view.

Donald Junior looked like his father had spit him out. Even at six years old, there was no mistaking the bloodline.

Cecil smiled and tingled when her son glimpsed her as he rode on his father’s shoulders, coming toward the lounge. Excitedly, he waved both hands before scrambling down from his father’s shoulders, and grabbing his father’s hand, pulling and tugging for him to hurry.

A man opened the security doors to the lounge and Donald Junior burst through, still pulling his father along.

Cecil dropped to her knees and Donald Junior engulfed her, squeezing his arms around her neck and kissing her face wildly. Her arms were full and so was her heart. Her son was gripping her and tugging at her heartstrings. She fought back the tears that rimmed her eyes and basked in the moment of untold joy and happiness.

“Did you miss us, Mommy?” Donald Junior asked gleefully.

The reference to “us” took Cecil by surprise, but she recovered quickly. “Only twice.” She smiled back at him, blinking back her tears.

A quizzical expression crossed his young, handsome face, his head tilted. “When was that, Mommy?”

“Day and night, baby.” She squeezed him close. “Day and night.”

“You didn’t kiss Daddy, Mommy.”

The statement jolted her. She had to recover again. “Uh, I haven’t collected all of my kisses from you yet.”

Donald Junior’s gaze shifted up to his father. “Dad-dy,” he said in a direct manner, clearly signally something, Cecil thought.

She got to her feet and looked from Donald Junior to his father.

“Dad-dy,” Donald Junior prompted again, more forcefully tugging at his father’s hand.

“Hello, Cecil.” Don’s deep, velvet, baritone voice caressed her and his full, sensuous lips brushed her cheek.

“Don, how have you—”

“*Dad-dy*,” Donald Junior interrupted and whined, now tugging forcefully at his father’s hand.

“All right,” Don said, as he swept Cecil into his arms and kissed her, his lips capturing more than just her mouth. His velvet-like tongue glided over her surprised O-shaped lips. She moaned slightly, her heart pounding and head spinning, her blood warming with instant passion.

Don was fighting the feeling, but having Cecil in his arms again and kissing her had his sparks flying and nature rising. He stayed in a state of semi-arousal around her. She tasted even better than he had remembered and her scent was positively intoxicating, but he had to let go or she’d feel the unmistakable effect that she had on him.

Cecil could not marshal her body quickly enough to hold off her response to Don’s spontaneous move. Her nipples went hard as peanuts. Her core ached from want. Before she knew what had happened, she was being swallowed in his powerful arms and his mouth was on hers, instantly recalling to her mind the passion that they had once shared. She fought the urge to wrap her arms around him, as she pressed her hands against the hard plain of his chest. His manly myrrh had her briefly in rapture and then he released her as quickly as he had captured her. He looked away from her, as if embarrassed or perhaps angered by the passion.

“That’s much better.” Donald Junior smiled up at them both.

“All right, man, pay up,” Don said, looking down at his son and holding out his hand, palm up.

“A deal’s a deal.” Donald Junior sighed, fishing in his pocket.

The boy pulled out a quarter and put it in his father’s outstretched palm.

Cecil looked from face to face at them both, narrowing her eyes.

“Where’s the rest?” Don asked his son.

“The kiss wasn’t *that* long.” Donald Junior sighed, as he grabbed his father’s hand and then his mother’s.

“Wait a minute, you two.” Cecil recovered as her ire rose. “You mean my son paid you to kiss me?”

Don leaned in close to Cecil, menacingly, removed the shield from his eyes and narrowed them. “Imagine what my son is going to be shelling out to get me to sleep with you.” His voice impersonal, distant, and icy. “I could end up a very rich man for one night’s work,” Don sarcastically quipped.

Her eyes narrowed more. There went that last nerve. It had been plucked. “Sleep with me? In your dreams, Dixon!”

His look was colder and even more chilling. “You’ve been there before, Cecil,” Don retorted with a cutting edge to his tone and his eyes locked into hers.

They stood glaring at each other in a visual battle.

“Pay up,” Donald Junior demanded, holding out his palm.

They released the tension-filled moment, looked at him and Don sighed, reaching into his pocket. He handed a dime to his son who looked at the coin and then back at his father quizzically.

“It wasn’t a *real* argument,” Don answered his son’s questioning expression.

Cecil crossed her arms over her chest and struck a rather defiant pose. “You two have a real routine going,” she snapped.

Donald Junior pulled at the leg of her slacks and beckoned her to kneel to his level. She released her pose and complied.

“Now, this is how I see things, Mommy,” Donald Junior began earnestly, adopting what Cecil immediately recognized was his father’s usual confident and commanding demeanor. “We’re all going to live together this summer and pretend that we’re a *real* family like other people. Daddy’s going to be nice to you and then you can be nice to

him. Here's a list," he fished in his pocket, pulling out a carefully folded computer sheet, "of all the money I pay if you're nice to each other and what you'll pay me if you're not nice to each other. At the end of the summer, we'll see who has been the nicest—you or Daddy—and that's who I'll live with or maybe we can all just keep living together like *real* families do."

"Live together?" Cecil questioned, briefly taken aback. "Honey, your daddy has to work," she paused, softening her tone, trying to reason with her son, "whatever it is that he does," she said snidely, glancing up at Don.

"No he doesn't, Mommy. He promised that he wasn't going to work and you don't have to work this summer either, if you don't want to." Little Donald held out his palm. "Oh, and that will be twenty-five cents for being mean to Daddy."

"This is blackmail," Cecil said, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a dime. "I wasn't being *that* mean to him," she said, placing the dime in her son's hand and getting to her feet.

"Can we go home now? I'm hungry," Donald Junior said, looking up at them with his arms folded across his chest.

Don covered his face with one hand, stifling his amusement at Cecil's mutinous expression and avoiding her menacing glare.

Donald Junior took their hands again and swung between them as they went through the glass security doors. Her Jaguar was at the curb, she noticed.

"The luggage," she suddenly remembered.

"In the trunk," Don said, nonchalantly.

"How did you manage that?" she hissed.

"Haven't you heard? That's what I do for a living. I'm a magician," he retorted, opening the car door for little Donald to get into the back seat.

Cecil noticed a child's safety booster seat that had not been there when she left her car. "Damn!" she bit aloud, as she watched Don strapping their son in. "I didn't even think about getting a seat for him."

"Good thing I'm around—and—uh, watch your language. He charges big time for profanity," Don said, standing next to her.

There were her eyes looking up into his. Kind of greenish brown and exciting. Then her soft scent assaulted him. His eyes dropped to her fleshy lips. He caught himself and moved away from her as she got into the car on the driver's side. He closed her door, breathed deeply and then

seated himself on the passenger's side. They started to buckle up and accidentally touched each other as they pulled the safety harnesses across their bodies.

Cecil didn't realize how nervous she was feeling until she fumbled to latch herself in. Then she felt Don's hand on hers. He took her buckle and easily snapped it into place. Cecil took a deep breath and let it out quickly. Then she started the car and drove to the exit gate, fishing for her wallet for money to pay the parking fee. The guard at the gate peered into the car and waved her through. She glimpsed Don. "Nice trick," she hissed lowly.

"I'm not wearing a hat so I can't pull any rabbits out of it," he retorted, looking away from her, "or do you want me to do the bra trick again?" he asked sarcastically.

Cecil remembered his trick and rolled her eyes, but her breasts hardened at the memory.

"Are you two fighting?" Donald Junior asked from the back seat.

"Not yet, son. This is your mother's version of foreplay."

Cecil bristled, but mindful of her son in the backseat, didn't answer verbally. She rolled her eyes, gritted her teeth, and gripped the steering wheel.

Cecil opened the door to the condo and Donald Junior scampered in.

"Wow!" he exclaimed, as he went from room to room like a whirlwind.

Cecil smiled at her son, pleased that he liked his new surroundings. She exhaled in relief. *If he's happy here, maybe he'll want to stay with me*, she thought, but if he didn't like the condo, she was prepared to make other choices. Her son's comfort and happiness were foremost in her thoughts. Then she felt Don's eyes on her, but she didn't turn to look at him. She feared what she would see in the coldness of his expression.

"Come here, honey. She smiled at Donald Junior, extending her hand. "I want you to see your bedroom."

Donald Junior took her hand and she led him through the huge, luxury condo to his bedroom suite. He walked in cautiously and looked around.

"It's nice, Mommy," he said in a monotone.

Cecil sensed his disappointment. "What is it, honey? Don't you like it?"

"Yes, but—"

"But what, honey?"

Donald Junior cocked his head to the side, his face void of expression. “But I’m not a baby anymore, Mommy.”

Cecil’s heart sank. She looked around the room and realized that, although decorated for a juvenile, it really didn’t fit the young man her son was becoming. A year away from him and she knew so little now. She should have waited, she silently chastised herself. She should have let him decide what his environs would be. After all, it was his bedroom.

“DJ, your mother has obviously gone to a lot of trouble to decorate this bedroom,” Don spoke with authority. “It will be fine for the time that you’ll be here.”

The statement jolted Cecil. It was obvious that Don didn’t intend for her son to live with her. Her anger began to overtake her disappointment and she spun to pin Don with her eyes. “We’ll start redecorating tomorrow, sweetheart,” she said to Donald Junior while glaring at Don. “We’ll make it *your* home.”

Don felt the intensity as well as witnessed it in Cecil’s demeanor. Her evocative stance reminiscent of a time long passed. The artfully veiled pique was better than most seasoned criminals were able to display under duress, but not for long. “The hell you say,” he grunted lowly and derisively.

Their eyes locked and penetrated. The battle lines were being drawn. The war was on.

“That will be a dollar...each,” Donald Junior said, standing between them.

They suddenly looked down at him and released their tension-filled stance. Both retrieved a dollar and handed it to him.

“Good. Can we go swimming now?” Donald Junior asked, looking up at them.

“I thought you were hungry, honey?” Cecil stooped down to his height.

“I am, but Daddy says I can’t swim on a full stomach and you and me... I mean, you and I used to swim together all the time—remember, Mommy? I want to do that again like we used to do before...” he looked up toward his father and smiled, “before I knew I had a daddy.”

Cecil’s heart broke. Simply crumbled. Her son seemed so happy to know that he had a father and a family. Letting him live with his father had been a hard, heart-wrenching decision for her to make.

“All right, honey.” She managed a smile. “Swim first, and then we’ll eat, okay?”

Donald Junior beamed then he looked at his father. “You’re coming with us, too, aren’t you, Daddy?” His words were more of a statement than a question.

Don nodded silently. He wasn’t letting his son out of his sight. Not for one scintilla of a second.

Thirty minutes later, Cecil came out of her bedroom suite and caught her breath as she slung her beach bag over her shoulder. Don was leaning against the corner of a wall with his arms akimbo and one leg crossed over the other at the ankle. His nearly nude body was more magnificent, more muscular, more exciting than ever before. Years had certainly made him riper if not sweeter, but she remembered vividly the juice. A tantalizing flavor that she had bathed in. An elixir that quenched her every need and desire. She dropped her eyes immediately, but could not look away. Slowly, her eyes returned to his firm, muscular legs and taut thighs, tall and tantalizing. The monster in his black swim trunks. The concave of his abdomen covered with soft black hair that disappeared below the waistband into the monster’s den—the den of iniquity. The smooth, brown skin that contoured his perfect chest and rib cage. Up to the thick, solid neck and then the most handsome face imaginable. He reminded her of the actor Henry Simons in height and build. She had forgotten to breathe.

Don was glad that he had something to lean against when Cecil emerged from her bedroom suite. She was so beautiful his heart stopped beating, as she approached. Tall and leggy with a firm, slightly muscular, torso covered by a bandage of a bikini that left nothing to the imagination, but his imagination and his memories had suddenly taken flight, lifting his phallus as they soared. His gut wrenched at the first glimpse of her as he caught sight of the gold chain around her left perfectly shaped ankle. The identical chain that he wore around his neck. The same chain that Donald Junior wore. The chain that spelled out the word **FAMILY**. His practiced stillness was crumbling as the motion of Cecil’s voluptuous body stirred him unabashedly and unmistakably. Beads of moisture sprung to his torso, heating his body beyond its capacity. She had always had that effect on him since the moment he first saw her many years ago. No woman, before her or since, had rung the deep emotional timbre of his soul the way Cecil Elizabeth Jordon was capable of doing with a flash of her eyes, curl of her lips or sway

of her body. The woman was a temptress, and undisputed owner of his mind, body and soul. No matter how he fought it—and it had been a valiant fight—she had been triumphant, welding her in his mind’s eye and causing all of the other women—too numerous to count in his life—to pale sadly by comparison. No one could come close to satisfying his needs and desires as Cecil had done effortlessly, driving him to new heights and plunging him into an abyss for more than five years.

“I’m ready. Can we go now?” Donald Junior’s cheerful voice broke their silence.

“Sure, DJ.” Don smiled at his son.

Cecil opened the front door of the condo for them and they headed for the elevator. Once inside, Don clamped a hand on his son’s shoulder as the elevator started to descend. The glass tube gave a clear view of the posh, atrium-enclosed swimming area that resembled a lagoon with its cascading waterfalls and slides and lush greenery and exotic flowers reminiscent of a tropical rain forest. Exotic birds sang and flew freely within their large aviary structures placed around the pools of water. Tables, some with clear umbrellas and comfortable chairs, strategically placed for privacy, pleasure, or large gatherings interspersed with the thick green and fragrant foliage.

As the elevator descended to the pool level, Cecil noticed more people than usual populated the area, most of whom did not appear to be dressed for an afternoon of swimming. Although more or less casually dressed, she spotted the telltale bulges under wraps in the breasts of the men and women who sat at the bar, or tables or causally strolled around the enchanted forest replica. Cecil turned slowly toward Don and eyed the navy blue gym bag hanging from his shoulder. It seemed heavier than a bag of beach towels should be. When it clinked against the metal rail in the elevator, her eyes went to his in sudden concern and awareness.

Don sensed that Cecil was watching him as the elevator descended, but he gave no indication of concern as he held his son so that he could watch the ground below. When Donald Junior shifted, Don’s bag hit metal to metal. He turned his head into Cecil’s directed stare. He knew what she was thinking and she was right. He was armed and he was ready for any danger that might arise. For that, he would make no apology.

The elevator doors opened and they walked out into the moist, hot, rain forest-like heat. Cecil led the way to an open area on the other side of one of the pools; the largest one that was angularly shaped, deep and

led underwater to the Olympic-sized pool outside the atrium-enclosed area. She put her beach bag in a spare chair and went to the edge of the pool, dipping her toes in the water.

“Cecil,” Joyce Spano called, as she approached.

“Hi, Jay,” Cecil said.

“Who is that vision?” Joyce whispered with characteristic demonstrative interest, nodding toward Don as he and Donald Junior headed toward one of the water slides.

“Oh, that’s my son’s father,” Cecil said, dryly.

“Damn, Cecil, can’t you give a woman a break for a change? You get all the finest, fresh meat!”

“Help yourself,” Cecil snorted. “He doesn’t belong to me. Like I said, he was the sperm donor.”

“I’ll take a lifelong supply, if you don’t mind,” Joyce grinned, seductively eyeing Don, and then she turned back to Cecil. “What’s with you and Tucker?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? Then why is he tracking you so hard? He wants to know every move you make. He’s been questioning me like I had pivotal information on the Martin trial.”

Cecil shook her head. “He’s a lawyer, Joyce. The man doesn’t take no for an answer.”

“Oh,” Joyce said, with a knowing grin. “Well the sperm donor sure will change Tucker’s approach. He staying long?”

Cecil shrugged her shoulders. “Don Dixon doesn’t stay anywhere long.”

“Stayed long enough to donate to that handsome little boy,” she said, grinning.

A slow smile grew on Cecil’s lips. “Donald Junior is a heart stopper,” she said, with characteristic motherly pride, as she watched her son come down a tall water slide between his father’s thighs.

“So is his father, Cecil,” Joyce added, as she watched them swim toward them.

Donald Junior bobbed to the surface and swam to his mother. “Did you see us, Mommy?” he questioned excitedly. “Did you see?”

Cecil beamed. “Yes, baby, I saw you,” she said, giving him a hand up out of the pool. “This is a friend and neighbor, Dr. Joyce Spano, Donald. Joyce, this is my son, Donald Dixon Jordon.”

“How original,” Joyce mused, as she shook Donald Junior’s hand. “Your parents gave you quite a name.”

“That’s my daddy’s name, and I’m going to be big and strong just like him.”

“I’ll just bet you are,” Joyce said, seductively, as she watched Don hoisting himself out of the pool. “Mr. Jordon or is it Dixon?” She grinned, extending her hand to Don.

“Dixon,” he said, shaking her hand, “and you are?”

“Joyce Spano, twenty-seventh floor, 2714, emotionally and literally unattached—at the moment,” she joked.

Cecil shook her head. Her friend, and physician, was in her usual rare form. “Let’s swim, honey,” Cecil said, ushering Donald Junior toward a low diving board.

Don’s eyes scanned the area quickly and furtively watching Cecil and his son as they went to one of the diving boards. Joyce’s head bobbed up and down before him. She was certainly attractive, he thought. Fair skinned, flowing, golden brown hair, narrow features and slim shapely build, but his attention was on the light brown-sugar beauty as she executed a perfect dive into the pool.

“You don’t talk much,” Joyce said, trying to get his attention.

Don’s eyes were never stilled on her. “I do, when I have something to say,” he answered, still panning the area.

“Cecil didn’t tell me much about you. In fact, I didn’t know you existed. I’m a friend of hers and her physician. She told me that she was artificially inseminated.”

“She did, did she?” Don snorted. “Sounds like Cecil,” he acknowledged, for the first time resting his gaze on Joyce. “Well, she’s right, she was inseminated, but there was nothing artificial about it.”

“I can believe that,” Joyce said, dropping her eyes briefly.

Don noticed her glance. “Uh, 2714, huh?” he asked, grinning. “I’ll keep that in mind, but if you’ll excuse me, I need a little exercise.”

Joyce smiled. “I doubt it, but the best way to keep in shape is to make sure that your exercise routine is varied, you know? Exercise *all* your muscles...medically speaking, of course. I’ll look forward to hearing from you.”

“Done,” Don said, as he headed back to the swimming pool and dove in.

The trio swam inside for nearly an hour before they swam through the underwater viaduct to the outside, Olympic-sized pool. They lay basking in the warm, San Diego sun in uncompanionable silence. Cecil noticed that their gym bags had miraculously gotten up and walked to their new location outside the building. That's how things always happened when she was around Don—miraculously.

The sight of Cecil's prone body stretched out on the lounge chair, glistening with sunscreen oil and her thick, healthy hair shining in the sunlight was not just too distracting, she was unwittingly cannibalizing his resolve to remain indifferent to her. Don got up from his chair and walked to one of the bars at poolside. Maybe a cold beer would cool his heat.

Three men came out onto the tarmac surrounding the pool and stood resting against the bar, talking.

"That's her over there," one man motioned to the others, nodding toward Cecil.

"Man! She's all of that! You weren't lying! Look at the body on that babe!"

"I do, man, believe me, I do! Every chance I get! She swims here all the time and I make sure I get a front row seat when she walks by!"

"Makes me wanna holler," the other man said.

"Makes me wanna sweat!" another said.

"You said she's single, but who's the kid next to her?" one man asked.

Cecil turned over onto her stomach and the men demonstratively sucked in ragged breaths through clenched teeth.

"Man! Now I know I want to get sweaty with her!"

"Yeah, I know the feeling well, but Tucker's made it clear that she belongs to him and he's not looking to share her."

Don had heard and seen more than enough. He was about two seconds off breaking those men's necks. He forgot about the beer he wanted and angled his way back to Cecil and his son. "Here, put this on," he barked, holding her cover up out toward Cecil.

Cecil raised her head, narrowed her eyes, and peeked over her sunshades at Don. "I don't need that," she said, turning her head away from him and finding her comfortable spot.

"Let's go," he said in a directed tone. "We're too exposed out here." Don gathered up their bags and helped Donald Junior to his feet.

“What is it, Daddy?” Donald Junior’s brows narrowed with concern.

“Nothing, son, I’m ready to eat, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I’m hungry, too,” the boy said, smiling.

Cecil looked over her shoulder and glared at Don. Then slowly she pushed herself up to her knees as she gathered her towel. Don’s breath caught in his throat. The sight of her perfectly shaped bottom in the nearly nonexistent bikini galvanized his body into a hard, imperious vessel. He had to look away as Cecil bent to slip her feet into her sandals. If he didn’t know better, he’d swear that he was paying for some crime in a previous life. She was magnificent, and he wanted her—badly—but he couldn’t have her. Not now, not ever. The thought tore at his gut.

“Okay, let’s go,” she said to Donald Junior, then glared at Don, snatching the cover up from his outstretched hand and putting it on. “Doesn’t look like I have a choice in the matter.”

Don leaned in close to her and glared. “You don’t,” he hissed barely above a whisper. “Not this time.”

Cecil knew that his restraint was close to the edge. Although deftly veiled, he was angry about something, but she had no inclination to identify the source of his malady. His coiled demeanor bode no argument, however. She turned on her heels and guided her son with a hand to his back. She refused to be intimidated, but the tension between her and Don was becoming unbearable. Noticeably so. Donald Junior was her priority and she would let nothing of her anger with Don affect her son.

Cecil and Don managed to get through the rest of the afternoon without having to pay. They focused their attention on their son, as Cecil made dinner and the threesome talked around the balcony table just outside the kitchen. Donald Junior had great stories to tell about living with his father and meeting all of his relatives for the first time. Cecil had heard most of the stories before, but she patiently listened again and observed how warmly father and son interacted with each other. The two clearly had developed a loving relationship and a strong bond between them.

After dinner and dessert, Donald Junior collected and scrapped the dishes. He climbed on a chair, emptied the scraps in the garbage disposal and began stacking the dishes in the dishwasher. Cecil sat and watched her little man in amazement. She certainly hadn’t taught him how to do that.

“Do you want some help?” Cecil asked, as she watched her son.

“Thank you, no, Mommy. You did the cooking. I can do the cleaning, right, Daddy?”

“That’s right, DJ. I’ll help.”

“Let me do it, Daddy. You and Mommy just watch, and be nice to each other.”

Don and Cecil looked away while he finished his chore.

“It’s time for my bath now,” Donald Junior announced, as he finished.

Cecil rose from the table and escorted him into the bathroom in his bedroom suite. She talked with him while he bathed himself and she washed his back for him. He was considerably taller than she remembered, as she wrapped him in a big, fluffy towel. He dried himself and tears began to form in Cecil’s eyes. He wasn’t a baby anymore. He had learned to do so much on his own. He handled himself like a child twice his age, she thought, as he slipped into his pajamas, folded his towel carefully, and hug it up on a rack.

“Ready for bed yet, DJ?” Don asked, coming into the bathroom.

“Yes, Daddy,” he said, as he finished brushing his teeth.

Donald Junior took his father’s hand and started through the bathroom door. He stopped, turned around, and looked at his mother. His free hand went up to her and she reached for it.

“Where are you going to sleep tonight, Daddy?”

“In here, with you. See, there’re two beds.”

“Why don’t you sleep in Mommy’s bed with her? When we’re at home, you sometimes let those other girls sleep in your bed with you.”

The thought of Don sleeping with other women made Cecil’s stomach clench. What had she expected? She knew that Don had an insatiable sexual appetite. She had experienced it firsthand. Absently, she wondered whether there was some woman who had become special to him. Whether he had found love during the many years that they had been apart.

“I have a choice about who sleeps in my bed when we’re in our home, DJ.”

“Then I have a choice, too, don’t I, Daddy?” he asked innocently.

“Only about where you want to sleep. Not about where I sleep.”

“I’m not sleeping in here then.” He pouted slightly. “I’m sleeping in Mommy’s bed.”

“Well, all right, Donald, just for tonight, you can sleep with me,” Cecil said.

"I can't sleep *with* you, Mommy. You're a girl. Daddy said I can't sleep with a girl until I'm thirteen."

Cecil raised an eyebrow. "Oh, is that what your daddy said?"

"Not exactly," Don hastened to correct. "What I actually said was that you had to be responsible before you sleep with a girl; probably at least a teenager."

"I'll be responsible when I'm thirteen," Donald Junior said confidently.

"We'll see about that," Don and Cecil said simultaneously.

"You have to sleep with Daddy since you're older, Mommy."

Cecil glimpsed Don's stoic expression. The sight of Don's handsome face and agile body would give a nun an endorphin rush. Celibate for more than a year, the thought was wreaking havoc with Cecil's psyche. Sleeping in the same condo would be hard enough, but in the same bedroom, even if in different beds, would require an Academy Award performance to remain unaffected.

Donald Junior went into Cecil's bedroom and climbed into her high, oversized bed.

"Look, Daddy, Mommy has mirrors up there just like you do," Donald Junior said, pointing up into the canopy above the bed.

"The better to see you with." Don smiled tightly, instantly recalling his and Cecil's hot unions reflected in the mirrors, most of which had been secretly captured on video. He couldn't bring himself to erase or destroy his collection. Many nights his need for her had caused him to view those and other video of their times together until the torture of her absence from his life became too much for him to bear. For that reason, he had ordered that no interior surveillance be conducted inside her condo while they were there. "What story do you want me to read to you tonight?"

"Tell me the story about you and Mommy in the hayloft again," Donald said gleefully.

Cecil bristled. "The hayloft? Don, what have you been telling my son?"

Don didn't answer Cecil. "How about the story of the *Little Egyptian Prince*, instead?"

"Okay." Donald Junior sighed.

"Once upon a time, long ago, there was a little boy named Alexander. He lived in a village called Goodwill with his parents and his sisters and brothers. He was the oldest. The first born son and although he was

young, he knew that he had to take care of his family just like his parents and grandparents taught him..."

As he told the story of his family history that had been passed down from generations before, Don noticed that his son's eyes were closing. He leaned over him, turned out the light above his head, and continued the story, kissing his son gently on the forehead. Cecil kissed her son's cheek and pulled the cover up around her sleeping child. Cecil and Don eased off the bed and, as they reached the door, they heard their son's sleepy voice.

"Now you have to kiss each other," he said, yawning.

"But we're not going to sleep yet," Don said.

"Daddy, you promised."

Don looked at Cecil and shook his head. She folded her arms across her chest, creating a barrier between them and pursed her lips. He slowly leaned toward her and kissed her mouth gently, but firmly lingering just a second longer in the doorway. Then he pulled away.

"You owe me, Champ," Don said to his son.

Donald Junior didn't answer. The six-year-old was fast asleep.

Don and Cecil drifted into the living room. She could feel the tension building between them. The awkwardness was broken by the ringing telephone.

"Hello," a male voice said.

"Yes," Cecil curtly answered.

"You want some company?"

"Who is this?"

"Your lover man."

"I'm a lesbian," she snapped and hung up.

Don looked around the chic, classy, and elegant surrounding, as he walked to the bar room partially enclosed in glass walls at the far end of the spacious living room.

"I see you've redecorated. Very continental."

"I take it that you don't approve," she said, taking a seat at the bar.

"Would it matter whether I did or didn't?"

"No."

"I didn't think so. Got any beer?" he asked, standing before the floor-mounted refrigerator.

"There should be some Corona's in the bar refrigerator."

"Want one?"

"You sure are playing this houseboy bit to the hilt. Selecting my wardrobe. Cleaning up the kitchen, playing bartender. What's next, doing the windows and the floors? Sorry I don't have any grass for you to cut, but I have it on good authority that my car could use a good wax job."

Don looked up at Cecil from behind the bar. "I just asked whether I could get a beer for you, Cecil. You don't have to make a federal case out of it."

"Don, why are you here?" she barked at him across the bar.

"My son asked me to come," he said, opening a bottle of beer and tossing the cap in the trash.

"Is that the only reason?"

It wasn't, but he couldn't tell her that he ached to see her again, to spend time with her or that he loved her fiercely. Rather he avoided all of the real reasons. "It doesn't take an Act of Congress." He took a swig and settled the bottle on the bar, resting his hands on the edge. "If you want me to leave, I'll go."

"And leave me to explain to my son why you left? No way!"

"*Your son?*" he raged before he tamped down his anger. "Look, Cecil, this is important to DJ and what's important to him is important to me."

"Yes, I can see that. Getting you to agree to his conditions about how we have to behave. He really has you wrapped around his little finger. How does that hump in your back feel?"

"You should know. You tell me. At least you had five years to adjust."

"Oh, so now we get to it, huh? Because I didn't tell you about him."

Don stood arms akimbo. "All right, Cecil, you win. You've been spoiling for a fight from the minute we met at the airport. Take your best shot."

"Don't play with me, Donald Dixon. I'm in no mood," Cecil hissed, her palms on the marble top bar, as she leaned forward.

Don followed suit, as he leaned forward toward her, his controlled rage evident. "No, Cecil, you listen to your own advice and don't play with *me!* You have no idea how dangerous that could be!"

"Don't you dare threaten me!"

"Threaten you? I don't make threats, Cecil! I make promises, remember? And I keep my promises! I warned you never to lie to me! I had a right to know that I had a son! You had no right to keep him from me!"

“A right? You had no rights! We weren’t in love or married. We had sex and Donald was the result! He was *my* responsibility!”

“Responsibility? He’s a little boy! A wonderful, charming, and bright little boy! The responsibility was yours *and* mine! While we were having ‘sex’, as you put it, you didn’t create him alone! Contrary to the story that you’ve been putting out that he came from some damn sperm bank! I was there, too, remember? You had a choice and you made the decision to dismiss me! You walked out on *me*, remember?”

Don took another swing, turned his back to her, and walked to the terrace door, which overlooked San Diego Bay. His temples were pulsating, jaws clinched, his anger palpable. No one could get to him the way Cecil could. No one had ever succeeded in making him fall in love...except Cecil.

Cecil stayed seated at the bar, but spun toward him. “And what would you have said if you had known about him? You told me long ago that you wanted a woman—not a wife or a mother—a sex partner.”

Don’s head spun toward her. “What did you tell me, huh? That you wanted no commitments. No strings. Just sex. I gave you what you said that you wanted!”

“And a hell of a lot more, too!” she hissed.

Don stalked toward her until they were a foot apart. “Is that why you robbed me of my rights? Because I got you pregnant? I didn’t do it on purpose, you know!”

“I didn’t rob you of anything!”

“Oh no? What about watching my son growing inside you? Seeing my son being born! Or watching you feed him from your breast! Or feeding him his first solid food! Watching him take his first steps! Hearing his first words! Watching his face brighten up when he smiles! Seeing his reaction to his first Christmas! Taking him to the park or the zoo for the first time. Helping him blow out the candles on his birthday cake each year for five years. Those things will never happen again. Rob me? Lady, what you did to me was treason of the highest order!”

Don felt the rage building inside him. He put down the half-empty beer and walked out of the bar room. Cecil heard the front door of her condo slam shut and she buried her face in her hands. There it was. The battle lines were drawn. He was still angry. Bitterly so.

Don walked out of Cecil's condo complex, across the grassy lawn, and within a few minutes was at the fashionable San Diego Bay dock. He had promised himself that he would not let that happen. Not let his anger and disappointment loose. He grimaced at how badly he had failed. Losing his perspective or patience wasn't at all what he wanted. He wanted his son to have a healthy and happy reunion with his mother, which was one of the reasons that he had agreed to come to San Diego, to consider whether he should permit his son to live with Cecil or to take him away from her. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out his cell phone and pushed one button.

"Yes, Sir?" the male voice on the other end answered.

"Where's the location?" Don asked, as he continued to walk along the dock.

"Two clicks south on the beach, Sir. It's isolated. Do you want to be extracted, Sir?"

Don paused and let out a breath when he noticed couples strolling along hand-in-hand engrossed in shared intimacy.

"Sir?"

"Delay that," he said tightly.

"Yes, Sir, but, under these conditions, it's hard to—"

Don closed the cell phone and put it back in his pocket. Whom was he trying to fool? Donald Junior's welfare wasn't the only reason that he was in San Diego and he knew it. He dug his hands deep into his pockets and continued to walk along the dock. Cecil hadn't changed. She could still tie a man into knots with a glance, but kept men at arm's length, never letting them get too close to her. She wanted no promises and no commitments, he thought. That's what had originally attracted him to her. She was defiantly independent, devastatingly beautiful, and a total woman comfortable with who and what she was. She asked no for quarter and she gave none. He had gotten to her though. He could feel it even if he couldn't prove it. He had found a way to slip beyond her tough exterior, but then she had cut and run. She ran away to Alaska on the pretext that she was conducting a long-term study, which ultimately would result in her receiving great world acclaim. That's where he had found her again after five years. That's when he found out about his son.

A nearly deserted, bayside bistro caught Don's eye. He sat on a deck at a table overlooking San Diego Bay. Crisscrossing lights of small and

large sea craft moved through the darken waters near the dock. His keen sense of hearing pinned the muffled blades of the hovering drones in the darkness. A jazz combo inside the bistro played and the mellow sounds eased his tension, as the waiter brought his second beer order. He reached into his pocket and pulled out some bills.

“I’ve got that,” a soft, sultry, satin voice purred, handing money to the waiter. “Keep the change.”

Don glanced into the woman’s face, as she seated herself at his table.

“Mind if I join you, handsome?” she purred.

“Handsome,” he smirked, looking at the condensation running down the side of his beer.

“I’ve been watching you.”

“I should have been watching you,” he said, smiling at the beer. He took a short drink and put the bottle down on the table. “The scenery is much better in your direction.”

“Is that why you’re out here all alone? Taking in the scenery? A fine, sexy specimen like you shouldn’t have to be alone on a night like this or any night for that matter.”

“But then I’m not alone, now am I?”

“Not anymore you’re not,” she cooed.

“So tell me, what should I be doing?” He grinned, still not looking at the woman.

“I could think of a few things...”

“For example.”

“Uh-uh,” the woman breathed seductively, “that would constitute sexual harassment.”

“Emory, you’ve been sexually harassing every kid in The Nursery for nine years now. No one’s made a complaint yet.”

“That wasn’t sexual harassment. That was practice in preparation for you. Foreplay. If I ever get my hands on you, you’ll know you’ve been sexually harassed. In the meantime, I’ll keep practicing.”

Don’s grin curled his lips and raised his mustache. “What have you got for me?”

She grinned devilishly with a raised eyebrow.

“SitRep,” he said, smiling back into her nonverbal suggestion.

Emory leaned back in her seat and pulled an iPad from her purse.

“Dr. Cecil Elizabeth Jordon, PhD in Oceanography,” she began. “Anderson professor and a Director for the Scripps Institute of

Oceanography at the University of California at San Diego. Recently appointed to the University Board of Directors. Recipient of the prestigious Buys Ballot Medal from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Science and the youngest woman to be elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences for her work in meteorology and oceanography. Her Alderson Endowed Chair has just been granted for a five-year term.

“She has led many research expeditions around the world, the most recent on the Central Pacific Experiment to determine the effects and implications of warm water ocean temperatures on the world’s climate. Olympic-class swimmer and deep-sea diver. She currently has eight different research programs and projects underway simultaneously and fully funded either by Scripps, the University of California or private sources. And, I might add, that Scripps has one of the largest academic research fleets in the world.

“Professor-In-Residence at UC-San Diego, author of eight science and technology text books and treatises, much sought after orator, and she’s a consultant for Seaquariums worldwide. She’s on the short list to receive the Hutchinson Medal for her outstanding contribution to biological oceanography for her ROVER Project. Rumor has it that a Nobel may also be in the works with her name on it. One of her most important projects may produce a solution for world droughts. Informed sources say that she’s close.”

“All right, now tell me something that I don’t already know.”

“Briefly married to Dr. Rupert Alvin Townsend, III, renowned marine biologist and biochemist, head of the Townsend Science and Technology Foundation and a multibillionaire. Divorced secretly four years ago. Youngest daughter of Jessica Jordon, single parent, sometime domestic worker. Cleaning crew at the Rams’ Stadium during the season. Borderline alcoholic. According to her birth certificate, father unknown.” Emory paused. “There’s a two-year gap in the report that surround a period of Jessica Jordon’s life before Cecil was born. We haven’t found out where she was or what she was doing during that time.”

“Move on,” Don said.

Emory continued. “Cecil has two older sisters. Candice Jordon, single parent of five, welfare recipient, and Cybil Jordon, single parent of two boys. Works for the city sanitation department. Shift Supervisor, night shift. All three girls born and raised in East LA. Family always

hitting the good doctor up for money and she's got it. Well invested in new technology stocks and bonds, ample money market bank accounts, earns in the six digits in salary and another six figures from speaking engagements, consulting, and expeditions. Pulls down a handsome sum from her books and articles, too. Has majority ownership in a car dealership and minority stock in CompuCorrect International. A million two in an investment account for DJ. Lives well within her means, but doesn't deny herself what she wants."

"That's it?"

"You want to know about her lovers?"

"No, that's personal unless one of them is making obscene and harassing telephone calls to her."

"Not according to this report, but you only put us to work on the calls three hours ago. We've been covering her for a year now. She's been getting these calls for about the last six or seven months. Nothing threatening. Just some pervert getting his jollies. She's been handling it quite well. I loved that 'I'm a lesbian' bit." Don raised an eyebrow. Emory knew that look. She raised her hands in mock surrender. "All right, boss, we'll find out who it is and shut him down." Don relaxed his fixed stare and looked away toward the bay. "You know, this sistah's got it goin' on. I don't know whether I want to try to compete. I mean, you're cute, got a body like a Greek God, but you're no day at the beach when you're working, which is twenty-four-seven."

"I'm on vacation, remember?"

"Tell that to the kids back at The Nursery. You've got everybody working triple time. You didn't ask for any advice, but if you had, I'd say take a real vacation. Let go a little. Don't fight with the good doctor over something that can't be changed now anyway. You can't roll back the clock and give her a chance to do it all over again. This is a time for healing, not hatred. It's the first real vacation you've ever had. Enjoy it."

Don didn't look up, as he continued to finger the condensation on the beer bottle. Emory had obviously heard the argument between him and Cecil. He had ordered no video surveillance, but Emory rarely followed all of his orders to the letter. She always took advantage of an opportunity to operate outside the box. Her intuition made her one of his most valuable assets in The Nursery. "Don't I look like I'm on a real vacation?" He took another drink.

"Are you packing?"

Don's eyes lifted to Emory's. "Always." He took another drink.

Emory leaned forward with her arms on the table, but she knew she didn't have his full attention. "That's what I mean. You're making the kids nervous. They're wound too tight and so are you. I've never seen you this way. I know what you're worried about. You've literally got the weight of the world on your broad shoulders, but everything is under control. The Mark won't get anywhere near you and your family. Now, if the sight of the good doctor doesn't do it for you, if you want, we can slip down the coast a couple of clicks and I'll show you how to really relax on a vacation," she purred.

Don showed no reaction and he didn't look up at her. "Don't write checks that my body can't cash, Emory," he said blandly to the beer.

"Boss," she leaned in closer to his ear, "there's no rubber in that check, but I suspect a helluva lot of bounce to the ounce! Your body is on the top of the TO DO list for every female back at The Nursery.

Don leaned back in his chair, laced his fingers behind his head, and stretched his body full length. Emory took a long, slow, scintillating look, following the frame of his torso with her eyes.

"One of these days, Emory," he said without expression, but noticing her sensuous perusal of his body.

"Promises, promises, promises. Now that's a check I want to take to the bank and cash!" she said lowly, as she slid out of her seat coming within a hair of brushing him with her body.

Don shook his head and covered his face, releasing his fatigue. "Satin," he called her by her code name as she started to walk away.

"Yes." She grinned.

"Take him out. Relocation. I don't want her harassed again," Don said, not looking at her.

The gleam left her eyes. "Done."

"Close the gap in Jessica Jordon's life. I want to know everything about her before Cecil was born."

Though he didn't look at her, Emory nodded and slipped silently into the darkness like mist.

Don again covered his face with his hands. Emory, Code Name: Satin, was certainly a knockout. One of his best operatives. Bright, aggressive, articulate, and a research and strategy expert, a fully trained soldier, but as a woman she couldn't hold a candle to Cecil for him. As if any woman could. Don took a deep breath, rose from the table, and

fished his pocket for his money. He left a generous tip and slowly walked the few blocks to the condo, taking a roundabout route to clear his head. He could feel the eyes on him; hear the drones stalking his path. It was times like this that he yearned to be back on his family's farm in Summer County, South Carolina, watching the grass grow or ice melt. His head was always clear there and relaxation was a given, not an occasional gift.

\* \* \*

Cecil heard the knock at the door and sprung from her reflective position on the sofa. She had been sitting there castigating herself for hours. She needed to apologize to Don. Her hormones were going haywire. "PMS is a bitch!" she flung out, as she headed to the door. She opened it without looking and Richard Steel Tucker stalked in.

"Where is he?" he bellowed.

Cecil narrowed her eyes and her fist punched one side of her hip. "My son is asleep!" she bristled. "Now, you can leave!"

"Your son? I'm not talking about your son! I'm talking about that bastard that you were with down at the pool today! I heard about it from some buddies of mine who saw you. They said that you were with some big, muscle-bound brother."

Cecil's nostrils flared, as she jerked open the door. "Get out!" she said in a deadly calm tone of voice.

Tucker slammed the door shut and backed her against a wall. Cecil pushed against his chest. He grinned at her efforts to free herself and lowered his mouth in an effort to capture hers. He liked this part of his assignment. His orders were to seduce her, gain her confidence and then...but this was a rare woman. He needed more time. She hadn't fallen under his control as he had expected. That fact frustrated him... wanting her badly was another. Cecil stilled to stone, pursing her lips while Tucker tried, without success, to arouse her.

"Mmm, you smell so good," he groaned. "I want to..." he whispered in her ear.

Cecil rolled her eyes and looked away disinterested. Tucker noticed and he released her slightly. Cecil moved out of his grip coldly and toward the door.

"You're old enough not to let your wants hurt you," she said, with an icy glare, as she snatched open the door again and stood her ground.

Tucker eased up to her. "I'll see you in the morning—early." He grinned, his fingers slowly trailing her jaw line.

She rolled her eyes only toward him and defiantly lifted her chin. "Not if I see you first."

Tucker was speechless, consumed by coldness, the glacial stare in her eyes. He didn't want to cause a scene or press too hard. He needed to know the identity of the man she had been with at the pool. He had warned several men that she was off limits. He would have to do it again, but for now, he would have to be patient. There was a great deal at stake. He crossed the threshold and she closed the door in his face.

"Men!" she spat to the air.

Later that night, Cecil came out of the shower and sat on the sofa in her son's bedroom, sipping a glass of wine and rubbing the hot, scented oil over her body. The hot shower hadn't relaxed her. The tension was still there. She glanced at the clock. It was after midnight and Don had not returned. *Why do I do that every time we talk?* she wondered. Why was she always so adversarial, combative? So distant, not only with Don, but also with every man. No man could get to her or, at least, no man had until Don. She massaged her neck muscles and stretched. The tension was so deep; nevertheless, she brushed it off. Maybe it was just PMS, but then it shouldn't be that time of the month.

Don was right, she admitted to herself. She had been baiting him. It was her defense mechanism; the solution to a problem she found no other way to handle.

Taking another sip of wine, she grabbed the back of her neck again with both hands and stretched.

She easily recalled how Don had overwhelmed her that magical night in the hayloft at his home in Goodwill, Summer County, South Carolina. It was during his family's annual reunion. They had climbed up into the hayloft to get a better view of the Fourth of July fireworks display and created fireworks of a different kind. Don seemed much different when he was at home around his family than he did at other times and in other places when they were together. There, he was very relaxed and sensual. They had lain in the hay playing finger games. Listening to the music from the family band and drinking in the happy voices of hundreds of his family members. She remembered lying there, looking up at the rafters and fanaticizing about having sex with him. He had fulfilled that fantasy. Her body had tingled with each touch and caress, sending her to higher and higher levels of ecstasy. Making her

quiver uncontrollably, as his mouth had covered every inch of her and his hands lovingly reshaped her. The euphoria had lasted throughout the fireworks display that they never saw, heard or felt except in their idyllic cocoon. The straw had clung to their perspiration. They were calling for divine intervention each time the waves of physical elation seized them. They had repeated the bliss that night until the crows of the roosters found them spent, holding each other locked in a final rapture.

Cecil slowly stoked her body, as she applied the oil, rubbing the palm of her hand over her hardened nipples. She lost herself recalling to mind each encounter that she and Don had shared. In Chicago. On his jet, miles high. On a deserted, private island in Bimini. In his bed in Goodwill. In her condo, in her bed, the kitchen, the den. The little remembered things had nearly driven her crazy. How his body felt when he stretched. The gait of his confident stride. The look he gave her while they had sex. How they swam in perfect harmony together in deep, and sometimes dangerous, waters. Damn, he even sent her into orbit when he was sitting, surrounded by little people telling them stories about their ancestors.

“Get a grip, Jordon!” she scolded herself, as she swallowed the last of the wine, but she remembered that night. The night that her son was conceived. They had been unintentionally unprepared. An unguarded moment. A chance happening and then, months later, a gut-wrenching choice that she had to make alone. She crossed the first hurdle. Even the notion of an abortion had been abhorrent. The decision was made to keep the baby long before it was conceived and then the decision to break it off with Don without telling him why. It had seemed like the best decision at the time, the right choice to make. The baby had been created in lust, not love. She had never regretted having his baby, but she lamented many times over the past year the choice she made not to tell him. Men didn’t want to be tied down, she had reasoned at the time. They didn’t stick around when the babies started coming. She and her other fatherless sisters were clear examples of that. Three different fathers, none of which were in residence when they were born or as they grew up, but she knew that in her heart the reason was simple: She was not in control. Not with him. Not with Donald Alexander Dixon.

Cecil turned out the light by the bed and slipped between the cool, soft, high-thread-count sheets. She let the pillow accept her silent tears.

Don slipped into the bedroom where his son lay sleeping. He recovered him, stroked his small head, and kissed him on the cheek. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when he eased into the whirlpool tub and turned on the jets. The magic bubbles massaged him and he felt most of his muscles relaxing and the tension leaving his neck and shoulders. One muscle would not be tamed or soothed. Surrendering to the penetrating pulse of the water, he let his head slip below the surface for a moment. Leaning back, he propped his arms on the side of the Jacuzzi and closed his eyes. The tightness left the rest of him. From his head to his toes, he felt invigorated. Then it started. It always did when he relaxed. Like the mist rolling into San Diego Bay, thoughts of him and Cecil together glided in, blurring his vision of everything else but her on the Fourth of July in the hayloft in Goodwill. That vision would seep out of his subconscious when he slept and blaze in his dreams. The dreams were so real that he had called her name in his sleep and a few times when he was sleeping with other women. His recreational sex partners had certainly not been amused when he called out Cecil's name in the heat of passion. Each one had abruptly walked out on him, leaving him to deal with his frustrations and desires alone. Now Cecil was in the bedroom where he would sleep only a few steps away from her, but, in his thoughts, she was outside of his reach.

Don wrapped a Velcro towel around his waist and noticed the twitching bulge beneath the towel. It always happened when he permitted himself to think about Cecil. "Get a grip, Dixon!" he admonished himself in a terse whisper. He turned out the bathroom light, waited while his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and then walked carefully and quietly into the darkened bedroom. Cecil's beautiful, sleeping face was illuminated by the clock dial on the nightstand between the two beds. She was beautiful in any light, he thought, as he permitted himself to pause to gaze from her bare shoulders to the crease of the soft sheets barely covering her full breasts. Her arms above her head buried beneath her pillows gave an unobstructed view of the soft silk caressing her form.

He had been informed about her visitor, Richard Steel Tucker, purported to be a wealthy attorney who lived in the condo complex. The thought of Cecil with another man had tied his gut into knots, but she was a woman who held on fiercely to her freedom and independence. Many years ago he had tried to make her his, but he had failed. He

wasn't going to make that same mistake again. Nor was he going to interfere in her life, especially not since nothing had changed between them. The report indicated that she had handled the situation without outside intervention and that his son had slept through the argument between Cecil and Tucker. Maybe Tucker was the man she needed, someone who could live outside in the world. Not someone who could not even tell her whether he would be around the next day to love her. She deserved to have joy and a normal life, even if it came from another man. Still, his son's life was woven into the fabric of her life. If Cecil were seriously interested in Tucker, he would have the man investigated. He would take no chances with his son's safety.

When Don could no longer stand to feast his eyes on the woman that he desperately wanted, but could not have, he turned toward the other bed and a sharp pain grabbed his toes.

"Damn!" he bit out, nearly buckling in pain.

Cecil awoke with a start and looked around wildly. She could see Don bending at the waist. "Are you all right?" she asked quietly.

"Yes, I'm all right. I stubbed my toes on the bed," he whispered apologetically, "I didn't mean to wake..." he started, but the words caught somewhere in his throat.

The sheet slid away from Cecil's silk-covered breasts to her flat abdomen. Her hair slightly mussed, she looked sleepy, but so sexy.

Cecil looked up at him and they stared into each other's thoughts. She could see the droplets of water glistening on his tight, muscular frame. Her eyes followed every curve. His gold chain was tangled in the hair on his chest, but she knew what it said. She had one that read the same thing: **'FAMILY'**.

They did not speak words, but communicated on another level. The feelings were so strong between them. A defining moment. A choice was looming before them and they made it.

Cecil reached up to him with one hand, her fingers trembling as she felt the soft mass of hairs matted on his damp chest following the soft hairy trail down to his abdomen to where it disappeared beneath the towel hung low on his hips. Her eyes never left his, as she stroked him.

"Here, lay beside me and I'll make the pain go away," she whispered.

She slipped her fingers inside the terry cloth and felt his stomach muscles tighten, as he grabbed her hand and held it in his.

“I don’t want ‘just sex’ with you, Cecil. If we’re not going to make love, let’s not start anything at all. I can’t and I won’t accept anything less. I’m not just another piece of meat and I won’t let you treat me as if that’s all I am to you. Not now and not ever again. Don’t touch me if you can’t love me and don’t ask me to touch you if I can’t love you.”

Cecil slipped her fingers from his hands and rose from the bed. The fear of rejection uppermost in her mind, but she had to love him or die from the want. She looked up into his eyes. Her body trembled against his hard length and her hands shook as they smoothed over the hardened muscles of his chest to his neck. Tenderly, she caressed his jaw with both hands and fixed her stare deep into his eyes. “I stopped having ‘just sex’ with you the day our son was conceived,” she said slightly above a whisper. “After that ‘just sex’ was not enough for me and neither was ‘just making love’. I’ve craved you, not just your body, for far too long. You’re here now and I don’t intend to let this moment pass between us without making love with you. You’re stronger than I am. Stop me, if you can, but know this: I won’t let you rest until you give me all of you. Not just your body, but your heart, your soul, and the truth about who and what you are. Love is not enough. What has happened between us goes far beyond that. We have a bigger hurdle to cross and I’m not going to make that leap alone. I’m going to touch you and make you feel what’s in my heart until you tell me the truth. Before this summer is over, you’re going to trust me. I don’t intend to give you a choice to make.”

“Cecil, I can’t...I can’t tell you who I am or anything about what I do,” he started to plead.

Slowly her arms circled his neck, as she went up on her toes. Don didn’t move to stop her. He couldn’t. He wanted her. Hot, butterfly kisses feathered his face before Cecil’s lips rubbed over his, pressing against them for entry. He could not tell her the truth that she wanted to hear. He tried to remain passive, silenced by her raging heat at the entry to his mouth, but the licking at his lips would have brought down the walls of Jericho and his resolve fell more rapidly than that. He lost the battle at his wall. The groan from his core rose in direct proportion to the application of her hot, satiny skin against his. The walls tumbled, he opened to her and she dove into him with the ferocity of the Olympic-class swimmer that she was. The inaudible sounds that drummed through her lips and into his mouth vibrated in his brain. She staked her claim on her conquest. Pulling her deeper into his body, he felt her hand

rip the Velcro towel from his waist and move on to a mission for which she was imminently qualified and well prepared. Her hardened nipples stroked against him, causing the friction to ignite him. Her mouth slipped slowly from his, trailing the heat from his chin. His fingers laced through her silky hair, tightening his grip. She exercised and sheathed him in her heat, bringing him to the edge of oblivion over and over again. His muscles strained and his abdomen contorted to hold him together. Her longer hair feathered his body, each stroke causing him to lose his slim hold on his sanity.

Don repeatedly breathed her name, at first as a prayer rising to a chorus and then a full-throated hallelujah choir, as he pleaded for divine intervention to protect him from Cecil's excruciating pleasure. None was forthcoming as his knees nearly buckled, as he grabbed for Cecil's hands before she erased him from the universe.

He moved her back across the bed, keeping control of her skillful hands and clever mouth until he could control the thunderous, painfully throbbing manly core. His body still shaking with unleashed passion, he sank to her breasts, worrying her hardened nipples. Cecil heaved her body upward to meet his in anticipation of the union to follow.

"Not yet," he whispered against her lips in answer to her silent invitation. "Six years I've been without you, I won't end this in six minutes..."

His words were swallowed by her mouth as her arms went around him and her fingers remolded his back. He slowed the pace to a manageable level, bringing his body to rest on hers. Deepening his kiss, she accepted his pace. His hardened ridge worrying her inverted Y-axis in a slow, firm cadence. Cecil sucked in her breath against each roll of his firm, muscular hips against her and moved in tandem with him. His body a multitude of motions, all moving her further along an invisible, erotic path. His whispered needs in her ears giving rise to each step along the way. The beads of moisture giving a telltale sign of the journey. He had not forgotten the route to her core, as he sucked on her earlobe while his mustache played havoc with her ear. Him whispering decadent words in her ear gave rise to her need to mate hard and fast.

Cecil's passion and longing undiminished, she closed her eyes as Don adoringly stroked her body with both hands, taking care to suck in her essence. Her thighs straddled his, offering up her trembling core to his caresses. He moved her firm thighs, settling comfortably between them.

The hairs of his mustache tantalizing her soft, exposed, inner thighs. Her breath pumped out in quick, short pants by her rapidly expanding and collapsing rib cage. She held a death-like grip on the spindles of the bed as Don's journey ended when he found the portal to her core. Every fiber of her being reacted independently to his rediscovery. His strong hands holding her shaking and trembling body in check, as he grazed in her fertile field. He entered the portal, making her cries unintelligible. Her body jerked violently, sending her spiraling, but Don was there to catch her firmly in his grip. Nearly dazed by the currents that passed through and around her, she released her grip on the spindles, allowing her heated blood to again course through her numbed fingers. Her heart pumped fast and furiously. Her abdomen concaved and convex rapidly.

Slowly, Don continued his control of her body, lathing her navel. His finger intertwined with hers. In one deft motion, he sat back on his haunches and raised her up astride his corded muscular thighs. His strong hands gripped her, as he suctioned her breasts. She kissed his brow, cradling his head in her arms.

"Forgive me for how I've wanted you, needed you," he groaned against her throat, his voice thick with passion. "I should have come after you six years ago. I let so much come between us."

Between the tears and the ecstasy, Cecil clung to him. "It wasn't your fault that I ran away. I didn't know then what I wanted. I couldn't have admitted that I needed you. Not to you and not even to myself. I was afraid of my needs. I've never needed anyone until I met you and that still frightens me."

"I know. What you don't know or can't control has always frightened you."

"It scares me to death," she breathed, finding his mouth in a mind-bending kiss.

Heated sensations coursed through them, continuing the journey to recover the years that had separated them. Their breath temporarily lost in the building ecstasy. Their moist bodies matted together. Don moved Cecil onto his hard, broad rounded shaft. She whimpered from deep within and he groaned his pleasure, as she partially sheathed him. They fixed their gaze in the dim room light into each other's eyes, marking the slow growth of the desire beginning to grip them. She was so wet, so tight that he nearly lost it on entry like some randy schoolboy. He slowed the pace even more. The power and the beauty of the union not

lost through the years that had come between them, Don rocked her back and forth, never penetrating too deeply.

Cecil's body stiffened, tremors beginning to sweep up from her core again. Don locked his jaw and tried to focus his thoughts away from the persistent pressure building in his hardened muscle, but the depth of penetration became harder to control. He could govern events in any other aspect of his life, except with her. He was physically inside her, but she was also emotionally inside him. His tempo became more rapid when she enticed his tongue from his mouth into hers. That velvet-like inner chamber, her domain to control.

When their desires reached critical mass, Don lowered Cecil onto her back, coming down on top of her without breaking the union. Her strong, shapely legs raised and found their resting place around his waist, locking him into a deeper penetration.

Don slipped his fingers between them, finding the protruding key that he knew would further unleash Cecil's passion. He manipulated it, bringing enough pressure to bear for her womanly tide to course through the portal. She shrieked in ecstasy and he deepened his thrusts, not letting her body rebound from each tremor. He paid dearly for his *faux pas* as Cecil griped his tight buttocks and thrust upward while simultaneous lashing his tongue with hers. The air rushed from his lungs in a loud moan. Her body recovering quickly and attuning itself with his. Her agile, undulating hips drawing on his fleeting ability to withhold himself from her. Fully in the grip of sweet torture, hot sweat pouring over them, their passion broke free and released them in thunderous vocal harmony. Both shaken beyond words, heaving their chests in a vain effort to control their breathing, they held each other close. Still fully encased in her, Don looked down into Cecil's sparkling eyes. He kissed her tenderly and lovingly as they shared their euphoria.

Words were totally inadequate, Don thought, lying atop Cecil, feeling her body move beneath him. She was the epitome of sensuality. She was a woman fiercely comfortable with her own sexuality. Nothing about her was reserved or aloof when she made love to him. She challenged him to make their unions better each time they were together. A challenge that he relished and sought with fervor. No coyness or uncertainty. No inhibitions or feigned reluctance. No regrets. Cecil was a total woman as skillful in their intimacy as she was professionally.

And he loved her madly.