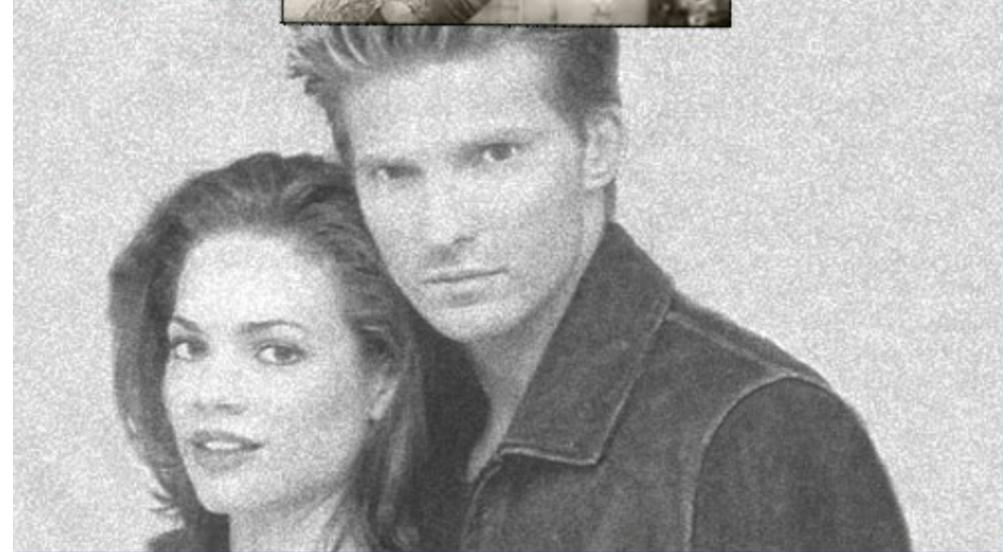


Yesterdays

Love was never the problem



by Melissa (LisseLove)

Background

Inspiration

I'm not sure now what inspired this story, but it's definitely up there as one of my best early pieces. There are things I would do differently today, but I'm still really happy with it overall.

Yesterdays is really close to my heart. When I started writing it, I had never met anyone who had divorced parents. I'm from a small town and we were mostly lower middle class for the majority of my childhood. People would fight, maybe spend nights at different places, but divorce was too expensive. How could you set up two households when just having one was so difficult to afford?

So, I wrote this story without any real experience. About halfway through, I received a message from a reader who told me that this story touched her because it made her think of her own experiences, and I've never forgotten that.

Background

This is an alternate universe in which Elizabeth and Jason are the children of jet-setting wealthy parents who travel the world. They met and married young, then bitterly divorced shortly after the birth of their first daughter.

Table of Contents

[Background](#)
[Table of Contents](#)
[Chapter One](#)
[Chapter Two](#)
[Chapter Three](#)
[Chapter Four](#)
[Chapter Five](#)
[Chapter Six](#)
[Chapter Seven](#)
[Chapter Eight](#)
[Chapter Nine](#)
[Chapter Ten](#)
[Chapter Eleven](#)
[Chapter Twelve](#)
[Chapter Thirteen](#)
[Chapter Fourteen](#)
[Chapter Fifteen](#)
[Epilogue](#)

Chapter One

The first time Elizabeth Webber saw him, she was nineteen and vacationing in Spain with her parents. The only child of wealthy jet-set parents, she'd spent most of her childhood traveling Europe, Asia and South America.

But she'd never seen anyone as handsome and charming as Jason Morgan. He was the twenty-one-year-old son of some of her parents' friends. He grew up the same way she did—traveling from place to place.

She met him at a party in her parents' penthouse suite of their hotel. She was dressed to the nines—looking far more mature and sophisticated than her nineteen years. Standing near the bar and serving—that was her job at these things.

He came up to her, smoothly asked for a dry martini. She served him with a graceful smile.

“I've never seen you at one of these before,” he remarked.

“I'm with my parents,” Elizabeth replied. “I'm on summer break from Cambridge University.”

“Which ones belong to you?”

“Cheri and Chris Webber—they're over by the piano player,” Elizabeth gestured. “What about you?”

“I'm on break from Yale,” he told her. “And mine are the ones next to your parents—Heather and Chad Morgan.”

They'd bonded over their similar childhoods and exchanged stories about all the different places they'd been. He'd convinced her to abandon the bar and join him out on the terrace.

“So what are you studying at Cambridge?” he asked, sipping his second martini of the night.

“English Literature,” Elizabeth replied. She laughed. “I'm really only getting my degree because my parents insisted. I'd rather just continue living like they have—from place to place, you know?”

“Is that what you plan on doing after graduation?”

She nodded. “If I can, I'm going to graduate this year—early. I really want to travel without my parents. They're always monitoring the places I go.”

“I feel the same way. I'm graduating this year from Yale and after that, I get my trust fund.”

She smiled and tilted her head to the side. “I guess we've got quite a lot in common.”

He'd kissed her for the first time that night. As night slid into dawn, he slid his hand over the nape of her neck and tugged her close to him. He was intoxicating—his smell, his taste, his touch—she wanted

to drown in him.

She was in Spain for two weeks and even though his parents were leaving the next day, he stayed behind to be with her. They spent every moment of those two weeks together and by the time it was over, she knew he was the one.

But at the end of the summer, he went to Connecticut and she went to England. They wrote and called each other—she flew to see him over Thanksgiving and he came to England for Christmas.

It was over Christmas that she realized he was just as serious about them as she was. He rented the biggest suite in the most lavish hotel in London for the week he was there. She pretty much moved in with him during that time and she'd been floored when he mentioned his preference for that.

“This feels right,” he told her, wrapping his arms around her waist as they stood out on the large terrace. “I like going to sleep holding you and waking up with you.”

She smiled. “It doesn't bother you that we haven't slept together yet?”

“No, not really,” Jason replied. He kissed her neck. “When you're ready, and it's right it'll happen. We have the rest of our lives.”

“We do?” she asked a little surprised. She twisted to look at him.

“Yeah.” He smiled at her—the little tender half-smile that never failed to make her melt. “I love you.”

She turned his arms and slid her fingers through his hair. “I love you, too,” she whispered.

They'd married the day after she graduated from Cambridge. He went to work at his father's investment firm, taking a job that allowed him to travel extensively. And for the first two years, it was perfect. They were in love and doing exactly what they wanted when they wanted.

They'd been staying in San Francisco the cold winter during their second year of marriage. She'd been feeling kind of ill and she'd suspected she might be pregnant for almost a month before she finally bought the test.

And when she'd seen the positive result, a cold and clammy fear gripped her heart. Jason liked their life as it was. Would he welcome a baby? A baby that would throw their entire lives into whack—disrupt their every routine and change them—who they were, what they did...would he want that?

As soon as he'd come in from a meeting, she'd thrown herself into his arms, burying her face in his neck. Alarmed, he held her tightly, smoothing her hair down. “Baby?”

“I'm pregnant,” she reported, her voice muffled.

He drew away then, forcing him to look at her. Her eyes were wide with fear and she was shaking. “Pregnant?” he repeated.

She nodded. “Yeah.”

“Pregnant.”

“Yeah.”

He grinned then and twirled her in a circle before setting her on her feet and kissing her with more passion and desire than ever before. He broke it off abruptly and fell to his knees to raise her shirt over her stomach and kiss it gently. The action brought tears to her eyes and they slid down her cheeks soundlessly.

He got back to his feet and kissed her again, brushing the tears from her skin. “This is incredible,” he breathed. “You’re the most beautiful woman in the world.”

“You’re happy?” Elizabeth asked, genuinely surprised. “Really, truly happy?”

“Aren’t you?” he asked, suddenly paling. “Elizabeth—“

“Oh, God, I am happy,” she assured him, pressing a kiss to his lips. “Wildly ecstatically happy. I just...didn’t know if you would be.”

“I’m thrilled,” he replied. He kissed her again, his hands covering her abdomen. “We’re having a baby,” he whispered against her lips. She laughed and threw her arms around his neck and he twirled her again.

Her pregnancy had been relatively normal until the seventh month when she’d been diagnosed with hypertension and restricted to bed rest. Jason had promptly bought a large penthouse apartment in the town they were in at that moment—Port Charles, New York—and he told her in no uncertain terms that they weren’t moving until the baby was born.

Olivia Webber Morgan had come into the world eight weeks later and the moment Elizabeth held her tiny precious daughter, she’d fallen head over heels for her and decided that she would have the life Elizabeth hadn’t.

Jason was just as smitten with her. Within days, the nursery at the penthouse was overflowing with stuffed animals and all kinds of toys that Olivia wouldn’t be able to play with for years. Touched by her husband’s bottomless love for their daughter, Elizabeth decided it was a good time to tell him her decision.

“I want us to spend more time in one place,” she told him one night while breast feeding the baby. “I want Olivia to have the home I didn’t.”

“Whatever you want, baby,” Jason promised, kissing her forehead.

“I’d like to buy a house here in Port Charles,” Elizabeth continued. “And you can still travel but right now I want to be home with her.”

“I completely understand.”

She'd thought he did. She'd really believed it. But he didn't. He expected her to do the same thing his mother and her mother had done. Spend time with Olivia for a few months and then put her in the care of well-trained nannies while they continued their former life. When Olivia was old enough and on vacation from whatever boarding school she was attending, she'd join them.

But Elizabeth didn't want that. She wanted to raise her daughter herself—to be present when she took her first step, said her first word. She wanted to take her to her first day of kindergarten. She wanted Olivia to have a normal childhood.

And once Jason realized that Elizabeth intended on staying in Port Charles permanently...that's when the trouble began.

“We always go to Paris in the spring,” he argued.

“Olivia's not old enough to travel,” Elizabeth replied. She finished changing the baby and set her back in her crib. She smiled at the cherubic face. “Maybe I'll go next year.”

He frowned. “We can just hire someone. I don't know why we're putting it off. We're going to need to do it before the summer season anyway.”

Elizabeth sighed and pushed him out of the nursery before closing the door softly. “We're not hiring anyone. I'm her mother.”

“I understand that, honey, but—“

“And I'm not going anywhere this summer. She might start talking and I don't want to miss that.”

Jason slid his hands in his pockets and peered at her closely. “What are you saying Elizabeth?”

She bit her lip and looked down at the ground. “I'm not going to travel anymore—not like we did before.”

“Baby...that's how we met,” Jason protested. “That's all we know together.” He slid her hair through his fingers and smiled at her. “We're good at that.”

She shook her head. “And now we're parents and I want to be good at that.”

“Elizabeth, your whole life can't revolve around Olivia,” Jason argued.

“Why not?” she challenged. “Other people do it. They spend their days carting their children from place to place. And they're happy doing it.”

“Yeah, normal people. We're not like them.”

“I hated not knowing my parents until I was old enough to join them on summer vacations. When I was

four, I thought my nanny was my mother.” She shook her head. “Olivia needs this time with us. To learn our voices and become attached—to realize that we’re her parents. This is the time when bonds are formed. I can’t abandon her.”

“You’re not abandoning her—“

“I’m not going, Jason. And that’s final.”

She’d thought it would be okay. That eventually, he’d understand and he’d even appreciate the love she had for their daughter. She didn’t even begrudge him his own trips. She knew he loved to travel—he went to the posh places that people in their set was expected to go but he also went other places. He’d been thrilled to go to Hong Kong and Cairo. He’d visited Russia and Argentina, Kenya and Israel. He lived for those kinds of trips and she’d always understood. When she’d gotten sun poisoning in Egypt so he could visit the pyramids and when she’d gotten pneumonia visiting Siberia...she’d just accepted it as part of loving him.

He went about his own schedule—their usual one. He’d come in for some weekends but most of the time she rarely saw him and then the day came when she opened up a newspaper from France and she’d seen a picture of him attending some stupid party with a busty blonde on his arm.

Her heart had shattered and she wasn’t sure that it had ever recovered. While she was at home raising their daughter and setting roots down in the community for their daughter to thrive on...he was off in France, substituting a blonde for her.

When he’d come home from that particular trip, she’d given him both the newspaper and a copy of divorce papers. She loved him but she couldn’t—wouldn’t—deal with infidelity. He’d fought her—insisted that they’d just posed for the picture together. He loved her, he said, but he couldn’t understand why she didn’t love him anymore.

The thought that she didn’t love him was absurd—just because she wouldn’t put their daughter in the care of nannies and be like their parents—she loved him with everything inside her. She’d screamed that at him but he only shook his head. If she loved him, she’d compromise. And if he loved her, he would understand why she couldn’t.

And in the end, it’d been left at that. After days of arguing and getting nowhere, he’d thrown his hands up and signed the papers. He’d moved out the same day.

The actual divorce proceedings had been simple. She asked for nothing and wanted nothing. He’d argued for joint custody and it’d been awarded. Olivia would spend summers and various vacations with him while spending the bulk of her time in Port Charles with Elizabeth.

Jason had insisted on child support and signed an agreement to pay both support and alimony. After the divorce had been granted, he’d taken off for Europe.

And Elizabeth, shattered, had thrown her life into Olivia. After a while, her entire world revolved around the angelic little girl. Anything that didn’t have to do with her Elizabeth didn’t allow herself to

think about it. When Jason remarried two years later to a woman named Elise Jacoby, she'd allowed herself one night to cry and scream before going on with her life.

The times Olivia was staying with Jason, Elizabeth would numbly move through her life, attending charity functions and doing various fundraisers. She never dated—never even thought about another man. Jason had been it for her and she'd always known that.

The spring that Olivia turned five years old marked the fourth year of their divorce. By this time, Olivia had spent half her life traveling on yachts and planes while Elizabeth served on the PTA, the Knights of Columbus and joined the country club.

For the first time since their divorce, Jason brought Olivia home personally instead of sending her with a driver or something. The young girl had been ecstatic—practically forcing her father inside the home to see her bedroom.

It was the first time Jason had seen the house since moving out four years earlier and the first time he'd seen Elizabeth since their last divorce hearing three and a half years ago.

The changes between the vivacious and carefree girl she'd been and the mature and demure woman she was now stunned him. She wore her long brown hair straight, her makeup was natural, her sundresses and evening gowns exchanged for a pair of blue jeans and a tank top.

“Elizabeth,” Jason said, nodding at her.

“Daddy’s gonna see my room!” Olivia announced gleefully. She tugged on her father’s hand. “Come on Daddy!”

Elizabeth barely had time to greet her daughter after not seeing her for two months before she'd dragged Jason up to the second floor. A little hurt and thrown by seeing Jason after so long, she followed them.

“This is my bathroom,” Olivia directed, “and that’s Mommy’s room—”

Jason glanced inside Elizabeth’s open bedroom door and saw that it looked exactly as it had the last time he'd been home—down to the comforter and sheets. Before he could see anymore than that Olivia was dragging him to the large and open room at the end of the hall.

“This isn’t the room we had the nursery in,” Jason thought out loud as he took in the room that had once served as his wife’s art studio.

“She liked this room the best,” Elizabeth said softly from behind him. He turned. “My studio is downstairs in the sunroom.”

“Look, Daddy,” Olivia gushed, holding up a picture frame. “That’s you and Mommy and me!”

He took it from her, drinking in the photograph that his mother had taken the day he'd brought Elizabeth and Olivia home from the hospital. His arm was around her shoulders, holding her to him

tightly while she cradled their daughter. "I remember the day this was taken."

"Mommy says it was the day I came home," Olivia said, excitedly. Her face fell. "It's the only picture I have of us."

Elizabeth came forward. "What did you do this summer?" she asked, setting Olivia's princess pink suitcase on her bed.

"Daddy and Elise took me to see the big clock in E-gland," Olivia said, hopping onto the bed. "It was so cool, Mommy. Have you ever seen it?"

"Your mother went to school in England," Jason reported, trying to divert Elizabeth's attention from the mention of Elise. Elizabeth had never met his second wife and he preferred it that way.

"Wow, that's so cool. I wish I went to school in E-gland," Olivia chirped.

Elizabeth smiled. "Well, maybe you can go to college like I did. But if you went to actual school, you couldn't see Maja or Lily."

Olivia frowned. "Yeah, because I'd be in school all year and then summers with Daddy. I wouldn't be able to play in the playground or go to Kelly's with Em and Lily." She scowled. "I wouldn't get to see you either."

"Who's Maja, Lily and Em?" Jason asked curiously.

"Maja Spencer and Lily Cassadine," Elizabeth replied. "They're Olivia's best friends from kindergarten this year." She looked at him pointedly. "She *loves* her school."

"Yeah, Daddy, I was in a play this year and Mommy says I can take ballet lessons with Maja this year." She frowned. "You didn't come to the play."

Jason sighed and tousled his daughter's dark hair. "I didn't know or I would have been in the front row."

Elizabeth snorted. "Perhaps you should check with your secretary since I left a message about it three times," she muttered.

"Will you come see me in a ballet recital this year?" Olivia asked hopefully.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Jason swore. He checked his watch and sighed. "I gotta go, Princess. I don't want to miss my flight."

Olivia crossed her arms stubbornly. "I want you to," she pouted. "Because then you could stay here and we could be family again."

Elizabeth froze in the middle of the packing, her back to her ex-husband and daughter. Oh, God. They'd tried to make life as normal for Olivia as possible but when she saw people like Emily and

Nikolas Cassadine or Lucky and Jessica Spencer...she had to know that her parents living on opposite ends of the earth wasn't normal.

"We are a family," Jason said, kneeling in front of her. He rested his hands on her scabby knees and smiled at her. "You, me, your mother and Elise. We're a family."

Elizabeth gripped the dresser tightly at the mention of his new wife. Elise Jacoby-Morgan *was not* part of her family. Not now. Not ever. She didn't even have to meet the woman to know she despised her.

"Nobody else I know has two mommies," Olivia sniffled.

A sharp pain lanced through Elizabeth's heart at the very idea that Elise was Olivia's mother. This is what she'd wanted to avoid all those years ago when she refused to hire a nanny.

"You *don't* have two mommies," Jason corrected. "Elise is not your mother. She's just my wife. Elizabeth is your mother and no one else, baby."

"Then why don't we live together like a real family?" Olivia asked, her big blue eyes welling up with tears. "Nobody else I know has an Elise."

Elizabeth shut the last dresser door and sat down next to her daughter. "Sometimes adults don't get along enough to live together," she said softly, wrapping an arm around Olivia. The little girl burrowed into her mother's side. "That doesn't mean they don't love each other or you. It's just that they're better off apart."

"Maja's parents fight and they still live together."

"We're not Maja's parents," Jason told her softly. "'And everyone has different fights.'"

"Then you should find a way to work it out," Olivia remarked stubbornly. She pouted. "If I have to work it out with old meanie Kristina Davis then you should do it too."

"It's not the same thing as when Kristina threw sand in your hair," Elizabeth replied. She kissed her on top of the head. "Say goodbye to Daddy so he doesn't miss his flight."

Olivia pulled away from Elizabeth and threw herself into Jason's arms. "Don't go, Daddy, please!" she cried, burrowing her face into his neck. "I'll be really really good and Mommy will be, too. Just stay."

Elizabeth stood and left the room abruptly. She couldn't do this anymore—couldn't sit there and answer her daughter's questions about why she and Jason weren't together anymore because truthfully Elizabeth wasn't even sure anymore. God, she'd loved him. She still did. She didn't know how he could have married someone else when she couldn't imagine being anyone else's wife.

She busied herself in the living room downstairs working on another fundraiser for the PTA. After a few moments, she heard Jason clearing his throat in the doorway.

“She’s asleep,” he told her quietly. “Cried herself there.”

Elizabeth exhaled slowly. “I’ll take care of it,” she told him. She hesitated. “Thank you for what you said about her not having two mothers.”

He shrugged. “You might not think I was listening back when you explained all the reasons why you didn’t want to hire a nanny, but I was. I had the same childhood you did, Elizabeth. And it didn’t hurt either one of us. So why would you think it’d hurt Olivia?”

Her eyes burned with tears. “You mean any worse than we’re hurting her now?” she asked in a pained voice. She pressed a hand to her forehead and turned away. “Just go, Jason. I don’t feel like having the same argument again. It’s over.”

“Sometimes I think I would have been better off making my own martini that first night,” he told her.

Stung, she turned to him, the tears sliding down her cheeks. “What?”

“If I’d just avoided talking to you, then I wouldn’t have to watch my daughter cry and beg me to stay every time I leave.”

“You wouldn’t *thave* your daughter,” Elizabeth said coldly. “And don’t you dare make this all my fault. I’m not the one who broke my marriage vows.”

“God, Elizabeth, how many times do we have to go over this?” he demanded. “I just posed for a damn picture with her. I don’t even remember her name.”

She snorted. “Yeah. Whatever.”

“I never touched her. You were the *only* woman I wanted—even if you were being incredibly unreasonable,” he spat.

“It was unreasonable to want to raise my own child? To want to have a home?” she asked, stunned. “That’s unreasonable?”

“You wouldn’t bend—not even a little,” he retorted. “You wouldn’t leave her a weekend to go away with me. It was always Olivia with you. It’s like the second she was born, your first thought was about her. You stopped caring what I wanted—”

“*You* stopped caring first,” Elizabeth interrupted. “You were the one who would go on trips for weeks at a time. Half the time you never called, and when you did, you wouldn’t even ask about her.”

“I didn’t need to have a house in some hick town to have a home,” Jason replied, irritated.

“*You were* my home. I never needed some stupid pile of bricks to make me feel secure.”

“You bought this house,” Elizabeth accused. “You decided we were going to stay in Port Charles.”

“I bought a penthouse until she was born. You wanted this house and I bought it because I thought it

would be temporary,” Jason retorted.

“I can’t do this anymore,” Elizabeth cried. She whirled and pushed her way out of the living room and into the kitchen where she leaned against the wall. Oh, God, she still loved him. How was that possible? After all they’d done to each other, why were they still going in the same circles?

She heard a soft knock. “Elizabeth, I really do have to go. Tell Olivia that I love her.”

“Okay.”

“And Elizabeth?”

She closed her eyes. She’d always loved the way he said her name. His voice always dropped an octave and sometimes two after they made love. “What?” she asked painfully.

“I...I never wanted to hurt you. You know that right?”

“I never wanted to hurt you either,” she whispered.

“Goodbye.”

She heard his footsteps walking across the living room and then the door opened and then closed. She sank to the floor and started to cry.

Chapter Two

“Stay in here, baby, I’m gonna run in and get some bread for your lunch tomorrow, okay?”

Olivia nodded and pulled out her etch-a-sketch and started to fiddle with it. “Yes, Mommy.”

Elizabeth put the car in park and left the ignition on because Olivia liked to listen to the radio. She grabbed her purse and headed into the convenience store.

“Hey, Mrs. Morgan,” Georgie Jones chirped as she started to ring up the bread and the candy bar Elizabeth had grabbed for Olivia. “Is this it?”

“Yes,” Elizabeth remarked. She started to count out the change when she heard a high-pitched scream. Her head snapped up. “Olivia!”

She dashed for the door and got outside just in time to watch her gray Mercedes crash into a tractor trailer. She screamed, horrified.

“Oh my God!” Georgie shrieked, heading back inside to call 911.

Elizabeth rushed towards the car and nearly passed out when she realized that the entire front of the car had been crumpled in, trapping her little girl inside. “Olivia!”

“Mrs. Morgan!” Georgie cried, jogging down towards her. “I called 911 and they’ll be in here in a second and they said you shouldn’t try to move her or anything—”

She was numb now. She couldn’t even feel her legs as they gave out and she crumpled to the ground.

“Mrs. Morgan, your daughter’s spinal cord was severed in the accident. We managed to repair most of the damage, but only time will tell if she’ll be able to walk.” The doctor frowned when he realized that his patient’s mother was sitting, blindly staring into space. “Mrs. Morgan, is there someone I can call? Your husband?”

At the word husband, Elizabeth blinked and licked her dry lips. “I’m...I’ll call him. Is there a payphone?”

“Just down the hall.” He helped her to stand and he led her there. “I’ll be in my office when you’re ready.”

Elizabeth shakily put some quarters into the phone and started to dial the direct line to Jason’s cell phone.

A soft voice answered. “Hello?”

She was shaking violently now, her voice hoarse. “Is Jason there?”

“Yes, he is. Who’s calling please?”

This must be Elise, she thought idly. “It’s...it’s Elizabeth.”

“Oh. Um. Let me get him.” She heard the voice call for him and then she heard his voice asking—he was irritated—who it was.

“Yeah?”

“Jason. It’s—”

“I know. What’s going on?”

She closed her eyes at the curt tone. “It’s, uh, it’s Olivia.”

There was silence for a moment. “What’s wrong?” Jason asked, the tone gentle and alarmed.

“There was an accident and she was hurt pretty badly,” Elizabeth whispered. Her voice hitched. “You have to—you should get here.”

“Jesus, what happened? Is she okay?” he demanded.

“The car rolled down a hill and crashed into a tractor trailer,” Elizabeth replied. She felt dizzy again. She needed to sit down. “A-and the doctors...her spinal cord was severed...Oh, God, and she hasn’t woken up.”

“She was in the car?” he asked. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine—I wasn’t in there. I was—” Elizabeth broke off abruptly, bracing her hand against the wall. “I have to go sit down. Will you come?”

“I’ll be on the next plane.”

Olivia had been moved to a private room by the time Jason arrived. Elizabeth was curled up in a little ball on a nearby chair, her face pale, her hair limp and her eyes wide open and blood shot.

Jason stopped just inside the room and had to grip the doorway when he saw his daughter lying prone in a hospital bed. Her face was translucent, her long dark hair limp against the white pillow. There were all kinds of machines hooked up to her and her tiny delicate face had bruises and cuts.

“Jesus,” he breathed.

At the sound of his voice, Elizabeth blinked and looked over at him. “Jason.”

“What happened?” he asked numbly. He entered the room completely, not taking his eyes off the bed.

“I stopped at a convenience store to get some bread for her lunch tomorrow,” Elizabeth whispered. “It was only going to take a minute or two and it takes twice as long to get her unhooked from the seatbelt and inside. So I just left her in the car like I have a dozen times.”

He stared at her. “You left a five-year-old little girl in a car by herself.”

“I put in park but I left it on because she likes the radio and it keeps her occupied,” she continued, closing her eyes to ward off his accusing stare. “I went inside and it couldn’t have been more than thirty seconds when I heard her scream.” Her voice hitched. “She’d put the car in drive and it started rolling down the hill. She was screaming because she couldn’t get it to stop and she couldn’t get her seatbelt unhooked.” She broke off on a sob and had to take a moment to get her emotions under control. “There was a tractor trailer at the end of the hill and the car barreled right into it, and she was trapped inside.”

“Jesus.” He lowered himself into an empty chair. His hands started to shake. “What do the doctors say?”

“They reattached her spinal cord,” Elizabeth replied. “But they won’t know anything until she wakes up.” Her voice was tiny and incredibly hoarse from hours of crying but he heard her next words clear as day. “If she wakes up.”

“If?” Jason repeated sharply.

“She hit her head on the dashboard,” Elizabeth said painfully. She covered the mouth to try and control her sobs. “She’s in a coma.”

“You left a little girl in a running car by herself,” Jason remarked incredulously. “I can’t believe this.”

She closed her eyes. “I’m sorry. Oh, God, I’m so sorry.”

“Sorry isn’t going to make her live,” Jason told her angrily. He lunged to his feet. “If she dies, this will be your fault.”

Elizabeth stared at the floor blankly. “I know,” she said bleakly. “It should have been me. I should have been in that car.”

Shaken by the idea of Elizabeth lying in the hospital bed rather than Olivia, Jason started to pace before ending up at a window across the room. The last time he’d been in a hospital room had been the day he brought Olivia home from the hospital. She’d been so tiny—so delicate. He was afraid to hold her for fear he’d break her.

Elizabeth had been born to be a mother, Jason thought reluctantly. The moment Olivia had been born, there’d been no one else more important in Elizabeth’s life. And motherhood had agreed with her, Jason remembered painfully. She’d been so beautiful in the months after Olivia’s birth. Not that she hadn’t been stunning before but there was something that just ignited in her when she became a mother. She glowed—she sparkled. He’d thought he was going to die when he was told she had to wait

six weeks after childbirth to make love again.

From the moment he'd seen her across the hotel room in Spain, she'd been his whole world. He'd be at Yale and would spend whole classes thinking about her—about her smile, her laugh, her voice. He'd known almost immediately he wanted to spend his whole life with her. And then that Christmas when she'd told him she loved him—he thought he could fly.

He could still picture her the day she walked down the aisle in a church in Paris, dressed in a simple white silk dress with flowers twisted in her hair and lilies in her hands. He'd never wanted anything else but her. He hadn't been lying when he told her she was his home. Elizabeth Webber was the first person that he'd ever really trusted—depended on.

They'd come to Port Charles so he could make a business deal and they'd been out to dinner when she'd suddenly fainted. Jason could still feel the terror he'd known then as he'd rushed her to the hospital.

He'd barely survived their divorce and part of him wondered if she was right. If maybe he'd been too unwilling to compromise. He could understand her love for their daughter. God knows, he thought the sun rose and fell on Olivia. And until he'd met Elise, Jason had been working out ways to prove to Elizabeth how much he loved her.

If Jason wanted to be honest with himself, he'd admit that Elise was just another version of Elizabeth. She was a petite brunette with porcelain skin and blue eyes. They were almost the same height and Elise reminded him a lot of Elizabeth the first years he'd known her. They'd gone into the marriage knowing there was no love on either side. Elise liked the money and the influence Jason wielded in his world and he liked having someone to hold at night—he'd gotten too used to that during his marriage.

Elise never argued—picked up and went where he wanted to go. And the only time she'd complained was when she'd gotten sun poisoning in Egypt. She'd put her foot down and told him she wasn't going to go on any of those trips anymore. When he was going out on his so-called adventures, she'd be in a spa, thank you very much.

He couldn't blame her—but he couldn't help but compare her reaction to Elizabeth's during the first year of their marriage.

"I'm sorry, baby," Jason remarked, lathering hydrocortisone cream over Elizabeth's boiling skin. She just moaned and buried her face in a pillow. "Maybe you should stay in the hotel tomorrow."

Elizabeth abruptly lifted her head and looked at him oddly. "But you're going to the pyramids tomorrow."

"I know." He took out an anti-histamine tablet and handed it to her along with a glass of water. She took it and swallowed it quickly.

"It's just a case of sunburn. I can go."

“It’s sun poisoning and I don’t think it’s a good idea,” he told her stubbornly. “You could get heatstroke or pass out.” He brushed her hair off her face and smiled at her tenderly. “Listen, I’ll skip the tour group and we can hang out here.”

“You’re not skipping just because I’ve got some sunburn,” Elizabeth protested. “You’ve been looking forward to this for weeks.”

“You’re more important to me than some stupid pyramids. We can come back.”

“No, you go tomorrow. I’ll be fine in the hotel.”

He leaned down and kissed her softly. “If you’re not going, I’m not going.” He kissed her again. She moaned and tried to pull him closer but his skin brushed a particularly sensitive area of her sun poison. She broke away and winced.

“I guess I’m not getting any tonight,” he remarked amused.

She laughed and kissed him lightly. “Jason, please go tomorrow. I’ll be right here waiting when you get back.”

“You promise?” Though he meant the question to be light, it came out serious and his eyes were sad. As if he’d been disappointed by people before—and he had. His parents had missed a lot of birthday parties, his middle school graduation, his high school graduation and his college graduation. The only person who’d never let him down was her.

And she knew that.

She threaded her fingers in his hair and smiled up at him. “I’ll always be here waiting for you,” she replied softly before pulling him into another kiss.

The memory faded and he turned to look at her. She was still curled up in a ball, her arms wrapped around her knees, her eyes trained on the hospital bed. God, he’d loved her. She’d been his first thought when he woke and his last before he went to sleep. Even after his daughter had been born, he’d lived for his wife. For her smiles, for her laughs, for her happiness.

But he’d failed. The most important thing he’d ever had in his life—he’d failed. She’d been miserable with him and he could see that during that horrible week she’d begged him for a divorce. Such misery and loneliness in her eyes. He’d just wanted to take her in his arms and forget the rest of the world. They’d had that ability once. To just crawl under the covers and make love until nothing else existed.

And in that week, he realized that somewhere, they’d lost that. He’d spent a lot of time trying to figure out exactly when and he thought it might be after that first fight about her not traveling. Before he brought up the spring trip to Paris, they’d still had the illusion of happiness. He still kissed her on the neck when he came up behind her. They still made love every moment they could find. He’d thought at one point Olivia brought them closer together. God, she was the mother of his child. Elizabeth was perfect, Olivia was perfect—he’d thought their entire life was perfect.

But after that fight—after he'd left for three weeks in Paris, things changed. If they made love, it was perfunctory and almost an afterthought. He'd slip into bed with her, she'd turn into his embrace during her drowsy period between dreams and reality and as usual, just the touch of her—the smell of her—it would arouse him and he would initiate it. If they kissed, it was quick as he was leaving the house or when he came home. Things were just different.

He'd noticed it then but he'd thought it was an adjustment period—that eventually they'd get into a new rhythm and things would be like before. She had probably thought the same thing. And maybe it would have worked itself out on its own.

But that picture... that damn picture. Nearly five years later, he couldn't remember the woman's name or even what she looked like but there was a picture of her on his arm at some fundraiser in Paris and it'd gotten printed in a French paper—Elizabeth's favorite to read. And then just like that, he'd lost her. She'd stopped trusting him somewhere along the way and the picture had been the last straw.

It still tore at him that she didn't believe him—that she thought he'd touch another woman while he had the perfect one at home. Nothing had hurt more than the look in her eyes when she'd showed him the clipping. He'd thought he was going to die when she'd asked him to sign divorce papers. He'd literally felt like she'd reached in and tore his heart out. She wanted a divorce. The best thing that had ever happened to him was meeting her—loving her—and she wanted to end it.

He'd argued against it—he would have promised her anything at that point. If she'd never wanted him to set foot outside the house again, he'd have done it gladly. But she didn't want that. She didn't want to compromise. She just wanted it over.

And in the end, the only thing he'd ever wanted was to make sure she had everything she wanted.

So he agreed.

A rustling sound roused him from his thoughts and he looked over to see Elizabeth standing next to Olivia's bed, adjusting her sheets, tucking her in. She smoothed Olivia's hair away from her face and kissed her forehead before sitting back in her seat. She sat forward, her elbows digging into her knees, her shoulders hunched.

“I shouldn't have said it.”

His voice broke the tense silence and she looked up at him, startled. She cleared her throat. “What?”

“It's not your fault.” He drove his fingers through his hair and exhaled slowly. “I know you'd walk through fire for her and that you'd trade places with her in a second.”

She stared at him, surprised at his words. “Where is this coming from?” she asked softly.

“And that thing I said last month when I dropped Olivia off about being better off if I'd made my own martini—I didn't mean that.”

Elizabeth stood and rounded the bed to stand in front of him. “Jason—”

“You were the best thing that ever happened to me,” he found himself telling her. “You have to know that. Tell me you know that.”

Her eyes softened. “Jason—”

“I’m glad I asked you for that martini, I’m even more glad that I stayed in Spain and most especially I’m glad I asked you to marry me,” he continued. Her eyes were bloodshot and if she hadn’t already exhausted her poor body of tears, she would have cried at the tenderness in his eyes. He hadn’t looked at her like that for so long—she didn’t realize how much she’d missed that look.

“I’m glad I said yes,” she said tremulous.

“Do you remember that day?” he asked. He reached out and tucked her hair behind her ears. “We hadn’t even known each other for a year, but I think I knew that day in Spain I wanted to spend my life with you.”

“I think I knew the second you kissed me,” she whispered.

“We were in Ireland,” he continued in a hushed voice, his hand lingering at her cheek. “Outside one of those small villages you used to love to visit. It was my spring break from Yale and I’d convinced you to skip the week of classes with me. God, I wanted to spend every moment with you.”

“The feeling was entirely mutual,” Elizabeth breathed.

“I bought the ring after winter break, after we said I love you, after the first time we made love. I carried it around for weeks, practicing the way I would propose.” He closed his eyes and shook his head. “But in the end, I did it outside a little village in Ireland. A gust of wind blew your hair in your face and you pushed it back. You were laughing and you just...you took my breath away. I’ve never known someone as beautiful as you—inside and out. I knew in that moment I could never love anyone the way I loved you.”

“You just blurted it out,” Elizabeth remembered with a soft smile. “One second we were just walking and the next you were asking me to marry you.”

“You didn’t even hesitate. I was terrified you would say no—that you’d look at me like I was nuts. Because, God, you deserved a romantic proposal. I even made reservations at a restaurant in Dublin. Violins and candlelight. It was going to be perfect. Instead I stumbled over the words I’d practiced and I fumbled like I was a ten-year-old idiot. But I got it out and the second I closed my mouth, you jumped into my arms and you were saying it over and over again. *Yes*. I thought nothing would ever top that moment.” He opened his eyes to find her staring at him, tears streaming down her face. “God, I loved you so much, Elizabeth. All I ever wanted to do was make you happy.”

“You did,” she whispered painfully. “You did.”

He still loved her. Right this second—in this moment, he loved her. God, he wished he could say it. He wanted to tell her and pull her to her and kiss her. He wanted her back. He wanted turn back time to

that day he'd tried to make her to go Paris and tell her that of course he understood how she felt and he wasn't going to Paris either. Because what if Olivia rolled over and he missed it? Or what if Elizabeth smiled and he missed it?

Jason cleared his throat and looked away. "I need to check in at a hotel. I came straight here from the airport."

She opened her mouth to offer him a guest room at the house but then she saw that the wall was down in his eyes again. Like the past ten minutes they'd spent reminiscing about the day he proposed hadn't happened.

Elizabeth blinked and took a few steps away from him. "I got the penthouse as part of the settlement—you know we never sold it even after we moved out. The keys are at the house."

Jason nodded. "Just let me know where they are and I'll get them. I want to go and get back."

She went back to the other side of the bed and fumbled in her purse for her house keys. She found them and gave the ring to him. As he took them from her, he gripped her hand for a moment. "You, ah, you still wear your wedding ring."

She flushed and stared down at the golden band around her ring finger. It was accompanied by the delicate diamond ring he'd given her that day in Ireland. She cleared her throat. "I tried taking them off after it was final, b-but my hand felt different—it just..." she faltered. "Olivia would think I didn't love you anymore."

His grip tightened for a moment before letting it drop. His throat felt tight and he had to look away for a moment. "Is there anything you need from the house?"

"Could you grab some of her stuffed animals?" Elizabeth asked, casting a look at the plain room. "And some of her picture frames. It looks...it's too white in here—too sterile."

"I was thinking more along the lines of clothes for you but I can grab some of Olivia's things, too." He hesitated. "You still keep your luggage pieces in the closet in the hallway?"

"Yeah," Elizabeth replied softly. "Thank you. The, ah, keys for the penthouse are in my desk in my bedroom—they should be in the first drawer on the left."

"I...I'll be right back."

It felt surreal to be standing in the bedroom where he'd once made love to her—where he'd known some of most intimate moments of his life. During those nights Olivia would cry to be fed or changed, they would often be making love or just talking softly. He always held her at night—whether they were both on their sides or he laid on his back—he held her tight as if scared she'd slip away during the night.

He would watch her get up—no matter what they were doing, the second Olivia began crying, she was

out of bed and on her way to her. She'd slip out of bed and reach for the turquoise silk robe her mother had sent her after the baby was born. She'd knot the tie and leave the room, his eyes trained on her every step of the way.

And now, four years later, he was standing in a bedroom that was no longer theirs but hers. He was in a house that he didn't have keys to. He was married to a woman that wasn't Elizabeth.

He sighed and rubbed his forehead. All this regret was coming a little too late, he decided. Besides, he had to get this done, drop his things at the penthouse and get back to the hospital to see his daughter.

He pulled open the first drawer on the right and it was halfway open before he remembered the keys were in the first drawer on the left. But his eye caught a couple of photographs and he pulled them out.

They were of him and Elizabeth. The one on top was taken just after they'd returned from their honeymoon cruise in the Greek Islands. They'd gone to some party that his parents threw and she wore this red dress with a slit to her mid-thigh and a corset top. Her hair was in messy curls, her makeup smoky and her mouth was open in mid-laugh.

The rest of the photos brought back other pleasant memories. One taken on their Ireland trip, a picture of an Elizabeth with sun poisoning, smiling proudly at his side as they stood in front of majestic Egyptian pyramids and then one taken at the San Francisco Opera. This one was a newspaper clipping. They were smiling—truly ecstatic smiles. The caption read *Jason Morgan, the son of Wall Street financier Chad Morgan, announced at a performance of La Bohème that his wife of a year is expecting their first child.*

He closed his eyes, picturing Elizabeth in his mind the moment she'd announced her pregnancy. She'd been so scared he wouldn't want the baby—that he'd be upset. He'd never loved her more than in the moment she told him they were going to be parents. That their love had created another life.

He coughed, clearing his throat. He set the photographs back in the drawer and shut it tightly. He grabbed the keys from the other drawer, threw some things in a bag for Elizabeth before moving to Olivia's room.

He put some of her stuffed animals into her pink suitcase before heading for the shelf full of picture frames. He found one of himself and Olivia as well as one of Elizabeth and Olivia. He put those in the bag, added the picture of the three of them the day they came home from the hospital and left the room.

Elizabeth bit down on her nail nervously as she watched her little girl sleep. The doctors had been in and told her that as long as Olivia continued to breathe on her own that it was a good sign. She was still alive—she still had a very strong chance to pull out of the woods.

The door clicked open and Jason entered. He set Elizabeth's bag by the door and put Olivia's next to the bed. He had a two paper cups in his hand. "I got coffee but I know you hate it so I got you a hot

chocolate,” he said, handing her one of them.

“Thanks,” she said softly, taking it. It warmed her cold hands. “The doctors came by while you were gone. They said that it’s a good sign she’s breathing on her own.”

“Good. That’s good.”

After a moment, Elizabeth took a deep breath and looked down into her hot chocolate. “Did, ah, did Elise come with you?”

He shook his head. “No. She stayed back in Spain.”

She winced at the mention of Spain and bit her lip. “You don’t normally go to Spain this time of year. It was always too hot.”

“Elise likes it. She’s got a favorite spa.” He didn’t want to talk about Elise. He wanted to talk about her—to tell her that he still remembered the look in her eyes right before he’d kissed her for the first time. He didn’t tell her that but he didn’t talk about his wife either.

He unzipped Olivia’s suitcase and took out the picture frames first, arranging them on the table next to him. Then he took out the stuffed dog he’d given her on her third birthday. He set it next to her on the bed before reaching in for a soft brown teddy bear. He set it next to the dog and slid the suitcase under the bed.

“Did the doctors say when she would wake up?” Jason asked.

Elizabeth shook her head. “It could be five minutes from now, it could be tomorrow…”

He exhaled slowly and sat back in his chair to wait.

Chapter Three

Jason blinked and slowly stood up from the chair. He stretched his arms over his head and rolled his head from side to side to work out some of the kinks in his neck.

Olivia was still sleeping and so was his ex-wife. Elizabeth's head was resting the bed, her hair tangled and in her face.

He kissed Olivia's pale forehead before kneeling down in front of Elizabeth to gently shake her awake. "Hey."

She jerked her head up and blinked, trying to adjust to her surroundings. "What-?"

"We have a meeting with her doctor in a half hour," he told her. "I thought you might want to get up, get a shower or something."

She wiped her eyes and yawned. "Yeah. Thanks." She stood and grabbed the bag from underneath the hospital bed and went into the private bathroom.

When he heard the water turn on, he took Elizabeth's vacated seat and took Olivia's tiny hand between his larger ones. "Hey, Princess. I wish you'd open those big blue eyes of yours. You're really scaring your mother and I."

"It's a girl!" Dr. Meadows announced with a large smile as she handed the baby over to a nurse to clean and wrap in a bundle.

Elizabeth laughed and gripped Jason's hand more tightly. "A girl...we have a daughter."

He kissed her lightly as the nurse placed the baby in Elizabeth's arms. "Look at her—she's so tiny."

"She's perfect," Elizabeth whispered. She looked up him, adoration and tenderness shining in her eyes. "I love you so much."

He kissed her forehead. "I love you more."

"You were the most beautiful baby I'd ever seen and I don't think I'm biased because you're my daughter." He kissed her hand and sighed. "I know you want me around more and I've been thinking that I want to be around more. So, you can help me decorate your new room at the penthouse and maybe we can do more things as a family. You, me and your mom."

He heard the shower click off and he sighed. "You're lucky, baby, you've got a mother who would walk through fire for you and give up everything. I was dumped off with a nanny until I went to boarding school." Jason shook his head. "I argued with your mother when she didn't want to do the same thing and I was wrong—I was *very*wrong. I didn't understand how much I could love another person. I thought I did—because I loved your mother more than anything else in this world. But, man,

the first time I saw you, it was like my heart was going to burst. You were created out of the best love I've ever known and even though your mother and I aren't together, I want you to always remember that.”

The bathroom door clicked shut at that point and he turned to see a freshly showered Elizabeth standing there with a soft look in her eyes. He hadn't even heard the door open.

She crossed to the other side of the bed and kissed Olivia's forehead. “It was the best love I've ever known, too,” she said softly. She met Jason's eyes over the bed. “We should go meet the doctor.”

He cleared his throat and looked away. “Yeah, just let me change.” He grabbed his own bag and went into the bathroom. He was done in a few minutes.

They both kissed her goodbye before leaving the room and heading down the hall to Dr. Jones's office. He was waiting for them outside and Elizabeth quickly introduced them.

“Well, Mr. and Mrs. Morgan, your daughter was extremely lucky. I've take a look at all the x-rays and the test results and I don't think there's a doubt in my mind that she'll recover.”

Elizabeth let out a huge rush of breath and her eyes teared. “Oh, God, thank you.”

Without thinking about it, Jason reached across the space between their chairs and took her hand in his. “So she'll wake up?”

“Yes, when her body's had a chance to adjust to the trauma, she'll wake up any time now,” Dr. Jones replied. “Now, we're a little concerned about her spinal cord. It was severed in the accident, but we were able to reattach it. Now, she'll need therapy and her mobility will be limited for a little while.”

“But you think she'll regain full use of her legs?” Jason asked.

“With time and patience, I don't see why not.” Dr. Jones hesitated. “This will be a very difficult time for Olivia. She'll need a lot of love and a lot of attention. I understand the two of you are divorced.”

Jason frowned. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“Well, I've come across patients whose parents fight over every little thing—from the type of flowers to put in the room to the therapy their child needs. I just want to be sure that it's not the case here.”

“Nothing is more important to us than our daughter's health,” Elizabeth said firmly. “Yes, we are divorced, but it was...” she took a deep breath. “It was mutual and amicable.”

Jason scowled. Amicable, yes. Mutual—never. He exhaled slowly. “She's right. There was no bitterness and Olivia is our top priority.”

“Good. That's good to hear,” Dr. Jones replied. “Until Olivia wakes up, we can't make any plans, so that's about it for right now.”

Once they were back in the hallway, Jason took a deep breath. “Don’t tell people our divorce was mutual, okay? That really pisses me off.”

Elizabeth frowned and shook her head. “What? We both agreed that—”

“You wanted a divorce and I gave it to you.” He looked away. “I never wanted it. I argued against it but you wanted it and I always tried to give you what you wanted.”

“You. . .you cheated on me,” Elizabeth replied, flustered. “Did you really think I’d stay with you after that?”

He had to get away from this conversation before he punched a hole in the wall. “I can’t have this argument again. I’m going to get something to eat. Do you want anything?”

“Yeah, sure.” After giving him a strange look she turned and went down the hall towards Olivia’s room.

She still thought—after *all* this time—she still thought he’d cheated on her. She still that that some nameless woman he couldn’t even remember had been in his bed. He’d been with a total of four women in his life and two of them had been before he’d ever met Elizabeth.

Elizabeth sank into her chair back in Olivia’s room. She rubbed her forehead. “God, baby, how did I ever get to this place in my life?” she whispered. “It feels like my whole life has just blurred past me and the only things that stand out are you and your daddy.”

She took Olivia’s hand in hers and rubbed it a little—her hand was so cold, so still. “You’re the only thing I have left, Livvie. If you don’t wake up, I don’t have anything else to live for.”

“That’s not a real healthy way to live,” Jason said from behind her. Elizabeth sat up, startled. He had a tray in his hands. Two cups and two plates. He set it on the little table across the room and beckoned to her. “Come on and eat before it gets cold.”

She shuffled over to one of the tiny chairs and sat down. He sat a plate in front of her with scrambled eggs, two sausage links and three pieces of toast—one with strawberry jam on it. He’d remembered her favorite breakfast.

“You used to have other interests besides Olivia,” Jason began. “What ever happened to your art?”

Elizabeth shrugged and picked at her food. “I still paint. Olivia’s my child. She’s my first priority.”

“Since the day she was born, she’s been you *only* priority,” Jason corrected. “What do you do when she’s with me?”

“I organize fundraisers,” Elizabeth murmured. “Go to charity events.” Tears burned at the back of her eyes. “Thanks for making me feel pathetic.”

He exhaled slowly. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it that way. I just. . .your mother called me last winter.

She's worried about you."

Elizabeth blinked. "My mother called you." She ripped the top off her hot chocolate and tossed it to the side. "She always did take your side."

"Because you were telling her that the way she raised you was wrong," Jason reminded. "At that point, I was championing her ways. Of course she took my side."

"What'd she tell you? That I was wasting my life in a hick town doing nothing but raising my daughter?" Elizabeth asked pointedly. She scooped some of the eggs onto her fork and shoved them in her mouth, already feeling the anger boiling in her blood. "I think you took my statement a little literally. I have a life here. I have friends. But none of that means shit if she doesn't wake up." She dropped her fork and put her head in her hands. "She's the only thing I have left of a life that meant everything to me, do you get that? If she doesn't wake up, no charity ball or fundraiser or PTA meeting is going to mean a damn thing to me."

He sighed. "Okay. Yeah. I get that. I'm sorry—"

She closed her eyes and shook her head. "It doesn't matter anymore." She pushed her chair back and returned to her seat, her breakfast mostly untouched.

The time passed slowly. Doctors and nurses were in and out, taking her vital signs, examining her, changing bandages. It was all blur to her and before she knew it, Jason was leaning forward to switch a lamp on.

She blinked in the sudden light and sat back, rubbing her head. "What time is it?"

"A little after six," Jason replied. "I was going to go to the cafeteria to get some dinner. You need to eat."

"I can't," she said softly. "I don't think I could keep anything down right now."

"I'm beginning to realize that no matter how long we sit here and stare at her, it's not going to make her wake up any sooner." He crossed to her chair and pulled her to her feet. "And when she does wake up, I don't want you in a bed next to her being treated for dehydration, okay?"

"Okay. Fine. Get me a piece of bread or something," Elizabeth murmured. She rubbed her head again.

"Do you have a headache or something?" he asked. "You keep rubbing your forehead."

"I have a migraine." Without thinking, Jason slipped a hand to the nape of her neck and put the other one on a pressure point just behind her ear. He started to move his fingers in a circular motion and the sensation made the pressure on her brain start to loosen. She closed her eyes and let out a little moan. Entranced by the sight, Jason moved a little closer. Feeling his breath on her face, Elizabeth opened her eyes to find his lips a few inches from hers. She licked her lips in anticipation.

"Mommy?"

A slurred voice broke them apart and Elizabeth whirled around to find Olivia blinking slowly.

“Oh, God,” Elizabeth choked. She rushed to the bedside and was aware of Jason hovering over her. “Baby, how are you feeling?”

“It hurts,” Olivia whimpered. “Daddy, is that you?”

“Yeah, Princess, it’s me.” Jason leaned down and kissed her forehead. “You scared us.”

“What happened?” Olivia asked. “Mommy?”

“You were in a car accident, sweetie,” Elizabeth said tearfully. “And we’ve been waiting all day for you to wake up.” She straightened. “I should get a doctor.” She touched Olivia’s hand. “I’ll be right back, okay baby?”

“Okay, Mommy.”

Elizabeth exited the room and Jason pulled a chair closer so he could sit down. “Do you want anything?”

Olivia frowned. “Are you gonna leave again?”

Feeling his heart break, Jason’s throat tightened. “No, baby. I’m not going anywhere. In fact, I’m going to move to Port Charles. I want to be around you more.”

Olivia smiled brightly. “Really, Daddy?”

“I’ve made so many mistakes, Princess, but from now on, you’re my first priority, okay?”

“Okay.” Olivia yawned. “I’m so tired, Daddy.”

“Then go to sleep, baby.”

Her eyes fluttered shut and Jason sat back in his chair. He should have moved to Port Charles years ago.

He never should have left.

“The doctor will be here in a few minutes—” Elizabeth froze when she saw Olivia’s eyes closed. “She’s just sleeping right?”

“Yeah.” He rubbed his eyes. “Thank God she woke up.” He hesitated. “I’m going to move to Port Charles. I can’t...she’s gonna have a long recovery time and she needs both her parents in the same town.”

Elizabeth pressed her lips together and looked away. Which meant she’d probably come face to face with the second Mrs. Morgan. “That’s good,” she told him. “Olivia would love that.”

“If it’s okay, I’m going to stay in the penthouse. I know its yours—”

Elizabeth waved a hand. “No. I don’t even go there anymore. You can have it.”

The door opened then and Dr. Jones entered with a smile. “I hear our girl woke up.”

“Yeah, but she was tired and went back to sleep. Is that okay?” Jason asked.

Dr. Jones nodded. “That’s fine.” He rubbed his hands together. “We’re going to have spend most of the night giving her tests so the two of you can go on home if you’d like. She won’t wake up before morning anyway.”

“Come on, Elizabeth,” Jason said before she could protest. He put a hand on the small of her back and grabbed their things in the other hand. “You could use a good night’s sleep.”

“I don’t have a car,” Elizabeth realized in the hallway.

“I’ll give you a ride.” He steered her towards the elevators.

“What if she wakes up and I’m not here?” Elizabeth asked. She turned abruptly. “I should stay here.”

Jason blocked her path. “No. You heard the doctor. Look, you’re no good to her if you’re exhausted and cranky from lack of sleep.”

Elizabeth scowled. “I do *not* get cranky.”

“Yes you do,” Jason argued. “If you don’t have at least ten hours of sleep, you get all cranky and irritable. You could make a grown man cry on those days.”

“Maybe four years ago, but having a small baby to take care of all by myself kind of made me adjust to less than eight hours,” Elizabeth retorted.

“You made that choice by yourself,” Jason shot back. “Even before the divorce, you’d never let me get up in the middle of the night. And afterwards, well, you brought that on yourself. Instead of trusting me—”

“It’s been four years—why can’t you just admit what you did!” she hissed.

He took her by the elbow and roughly pulled her towards the elevators. He jabbed the button roughly. “We are not having this conversation in the middle of the hospital hallway.”

“What does it matter? It’s not like you’re going to tell me the truth!”

The doors opened and thankfully, the car was empty. He all but pushed her inside and then pushed the button for the third parking garage level. When the doors slid shut, he turned to her. “I never cheated on you. God damn it, Elizabeth, how many times am I going to have tell you that before you believe it?”

“Because I’m not stupid!” Elizabeth snapped. “You abandoned your wife and your child to go cavorting in Europe. I remember how you hate going places alone. Hell, you probably got married again so you wouldn’t have to travel alone!”

“This is the only life I’ve ever known!” Jason exploded. “You wanted me to change everything about me and you weren’t even going to give me any time!”

“I told you to go and do whatever the hell you wanted, just not to expect me to hand Olivia off to some nanny! I’m not my mother!”

“And I was wrong! I know that—but I got tired of competing with Olivia for your time!”

She frowned. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“From the moment she was born, she’s all you ever thought about. It was all Olivia and I couldn’t take it! You wouldn’t even let your mother fly in and stay with her for a weekend while we went away!”

“So you’re saying *I* drove you to adultery?” Elizabeth asked, scathingly.

“I never cheated on you!”

She stepped off the elevator into the dark garage and started to stalk away before she realized she didn’t know which car was Jason’s. She had to get out of this conversation. Immediately.

He shook his head as he stormed past her. “There wasn’t an us anymore, Elizabeth. There was just you and Olivia and some guy who donated sperm.”

“That’s not true!” she cried.

He halted and turned around. “Look, I get that you wanted Olivia to grow up differently. I really do understand that now. But I was twenty-four years old then and that life was all I knew. I thought it was great—we both grew up the same way and we were fine.”

“You were fine, I wasn’t!” she burst out. “You might have been okay with never knowing your parents but I wasn’t! Jesus, Jason, I thought my nanny was my mother until I was almost five years old!” Her eyes were glossy with tears and they started to slide her cheeks. “My daughter was *never* going to think someone else was her mother! Never!”

“Okay, okay, I get that. But I’m explaining how I felt then. We were young and we were perfect and for a while I thought Olivia brought us closer together—”

“Don’t you dare blame our daughter for the end of our marriage!” she hissed.

“I don’t, I blame *you*,” he accused. “You were never willing to look past Olivia and see me. And that’s the reason I went to Paris anyway and that’s the reason I kept living the only life I knew. Because I could have stayed in this stupid little town forever, doing whatever you wanted me to and you still would have lived for her!”

“I’m her mother, that’s what I supposed to do!”

“You’re supposed to live for yourself,” Jason retorted. He fished his keys out of his pocket. “Our marriage was supposed mean something to you.”

“You self-centered jackass!” She tore the keys from his hands and moved in front of him. “She is my daughter and maybe I went a little too far trying to give her life I thought she deserved but I don’t regret a damn moment I’ve spent with her. Maybe I shouldn’t live for her, but that little girl has brought me more happiness in the past four years than anything else. She saved me from falling into depression after the divorce and the only thing I wanted to do was give her a life that far exceeded mine. If that’s wrong, fine, but don’t you dare stand and tell me our marriage didn’t mean anything to me because it meant everything!”

She slammed the keys into his chest and stalked away. “I’ll call a cab,” she called over her shoulder.

“Damn it,” he swore. He shoved his keys back in his pocket and went after her. “Elizabeth—”

“Just leave me alone!” Elizabeth exploded. She whirled around and shoved him. “Go away!”

“I made that mistake once, I’m not doing it again.” He took a deep breath. “I can’t change the way I feel about the divorce. You wanted it, I gave it to you. End of story. You were miserable and I wanted to make that end. I didn’t know how else to do it so I tried giving you what you wanted. But I never wanted it. I never cheated on you. In fact, there wasn’t another woman in my mind from the day I met you until the day I met Elise and if you don’t believe me, that’s your problem, not mine.”

Chapter Four

The ride to the house was silent, drenched in tension. She hugged her body tightly and was as close to the passenger side as she could be without actually being outside the car.

His fingers were clenched around the wheel so rigidly that his knuckles were white. “Do you need a ride to the hospital in the morning?” he asked finally when they were ten minutes from the house.

Elizabeth shook her head. “I’ll call a cab.”

“Elizabeth—”

“*Isaid*, I’ll call a cab,” she said coldly.

“You can be mad at me all you want—you’re just angry you ended our marriage because of a mistake,” he replied.

“I know exactly why I ended our marriage,” Elizabeth retorted. She snorted and looked out the window. “You’re just like my father.”

Jason slammed his foot on the brake and the car squealed to a stop. He jerked it over to the shoulder of the car and put it in park. “Let’s get one thing straight,” he said, trying to keep his rage in check. He stared straight ahead through the window shield. “I am*nothing* like your father.”

“For all the trouble I went through to give Olivia a better life than I had, I sure failed since she got the same lying, cheating son of bitch for father that I had!” Elizabeth exploded.

His hands were shaking. He was so scared that he might hit her that he got out of the car and walked a few feet away, trying to regain his composure. How could she compare him to that son of a bitch? Christopher Webber had spent most of his marriage with other women, not even bothering to hide it from his wife or daughter and Elizabeth thought he was like him?

“Does it bother you?” Jason asked.

Elizabeth sighed and looked down at the London landscape from their penthouse suite. “Sure it bothers me. But my parents got married because it was the right thing to do not because they were in love.”

“It won’t be like that for us,” Jason remarked confidently.

Elizabeth laughed. “Oh, it won’t huh?”

“No.” He tucked her hair behind her ear and let his hand linger on her cheek. “Because I love you. And there’s no one else in this world I could imagine being with.”

“Promise?” she asked, her eyes searching his.

He brushed a gentle kiss on her lips. "I promise."

The memory ended abruptly with the slam of a car door. "What's the matter?" she asked acidly. "The truth hurt?"

He swiveled to face her. "I am nothing like him. When I took my marriage vows, they meant something to me."

"Are you insinuating they didn't mean anything to me?" Elizabeth demanded.

"It was pretty easy for you to throw it all away."

"You threw it away!" she shouted. "You left me and you—"

"I swear, if you so much as say that I cheated on you again, so help me God, I will leave you here to walk home in the dark!" Jason cut in, furiously. "I think you were just waiting for an opportunity. Because no matter how much you said I wasn't like him, you think all men are like your father and that's pretty damn sad, Elizabeth."

Her eyes burned with tears. "That's not true."

"I think it is true." He shook his head. "And I think you know that I never touched that woman but you don't want to admit that you threw our marriage away for nothing."

Glaring at him, she jerked the car door opened and grabbed her purse from the seat. She slammed it shut and stalked to walk down the road.

"Where are you going?" he called after her.

"I'm going to walk home. I don't want to be around you right now."

"Elizabeth, I'm not going to run after you this time!"

"Good!" she called over her shoulder. "I don't want you to."

He swore under his breath and went towards the driver's side door. He wasn't going to chase after her. He wasn't going to do it.

"Son of a bitch." He shut the door and when he was just behind her, she spun around, her fist raised in the air as if to hit him. He ducked and put his shoulder into her midsection, lifting her and turning to carry her back to the car.

"Let me go!" she protested. She smacked his back with her hand, but she was tiny and didn't really pack any punch. "Let me go right now."

He shifted her weight to one side and opened the driver's door with his free hand. He shoved her inside and pushed her over to the passenger side. Before she could get out, he put the power lock on

and got into the car. Every time she popped the lock on her side, he relocked it.

“I don’t want to be around you right now!” she said, her face flushed and her eyes ignited in fury.

“That’s too damn bad because we’re going to have to present a united front for Olivia. I don’t want her see us fighting. Now if you love her as much as I think you do, you’ll agree.”

“Fine,” she said her teeth clenched. She folded her arms across her chest and looked out the window. He started the car and pulled back out onto the road. “When’s your little Barbie doll coming to town?” she bit out.

“She’s not a Barbie doll and she doesn’t know we’re moving here,” Jason replied, his voice tight with tension and anger. He wasn’t going to let her goad him into another explosion.

“I’m sure she’ll just love the idea of moving to a hick town in the middle of nowhere so you can spend time with your daughter,” Elizabeth retorted.

“Elise likes Olivia,” Jason shot back. “And you know what? Olivia loves her. So just shut up.”

“I’m so glad you finally have a wife that’ll bow down to you and do whatever you say,” Elizabeth said sarcastically. “You must love being the alpha male.”

“Yeah, because you never did let me win any real argument,” Jason replied angrily.

“We never really argued,” Elizabeth said quietly. She looked out the window. “Not until we moved here.”

He felt some of the tension ease from his body at her soft words. The fight was gone in her voice and he wondered why. She was right—there had never been any real disagreements from the time they met until the day he asked her to go to Paris and leave Olivia. It wasn’t that they’d always gotten along or thought the same about everything. He respected her and he’d thought she respected him. And that was important in a relationship. Just as important as trust. But like respect and love, that had also been an illusion in their marriage.

He pulled into the driveway of the large house they’d bought five years ago. It was an old-fashioned looking house with a large wrap-around porch, white trim and even a picket fence around the yard. He’d never been really attached to it—she’d picked it out, she’d decorated it and it had made her happy to do those things. And it made him happy to see her happy. It’d been his home because she was there.

“Are you sure you don’t need a ride tomorrow?” he asked.

“No,” Elizabeth said, stiffly. “I’ll be fine.” She popped the lock, opened the door and started up the walk. When she’d pulled open the screen door and had pushed open the heavy front door, he put the car in reverse and backed away.

Elizabeth watched his taillights disappear down the street until they were out of sight. She closed the

door and locked them before going into her art studio.

She'd painted and sketched most of her life—she'd never done anything with it, despite Jason's encouragement to try and sell some of it. It was her release, her escape. First from her life with her parents and then later from the divorce. When Olivia would be sleeping or at school, Elizabeth would spend the entire day or night in here, just painting or sketching. She'd forget to eat or sleep but she never forgot to wake Olivia up for the day or pick her up from school.

It was in the large sunroom at the east end of the house. The best sun came in the early dawn hours and she worked best then.

There was a desk in the corner of the room—she didn't use it for anything important and it was mostly just storage space. In the bottom drawer on the right side, there was a gray metallic lockbox that she removed and sat down on the couch to look at. She fished the key from where it hung around her neck on a silver chain and unlocked it.

Their marriage certificate sat on top and she moved her fingers over the raised seal. *Jason Edward Morgan and Elizabeth Imogene Hardy Webber. Married on May 29, 1995. At the Sacre-Coeur Basilica Church in Paris, France.*

Beneath the certificate, there was a picture of them on the day and after that, various clippings from different newspapers announcing their marriage. She'd been so ecstatic—so thrilled at being Mrs. Jason Morgan's wife that she'd saved every mention of the event.

There were other pictures of them and cards. Cards congratulating them on their marriage, cards from Elizabeth to Jason on their anniversaries.

And at the bottom of the pile, there was two newspaper clippings. She stared at the picture of Jason and the blonde. Her arm was wrapped in his, her head against his arm. The caption read *Wall Street financier Jason Morgan out on town with Eloise de Beauchamp, the daughter of the Duke de Beauchamp.*

So many tears shed over this simple picture. This picture had torn her entire world in two. She'd spent three years sure that Jason wasn't like her father. And then this picture had shattered that illusion.

She took out the last newspaper clipping, this one from the New York Times. It was dated three years ago. *Wall Street whiz kid Jason Morgan married Elise Jacoby in a Central Park wedding. Mr. Morgan has been divorced from former debutante Elizabeth Webber for over a year. The former Mrs. Morgan resides in upstate New York. He met the new Mrs. Morgan in Europe. The couple plan to base themselves out of New York City while traveling for his job.*

She'd filed for divorce in early June of 1998, almost three years to the day they'd married. Olivia had been eight months old and the divorce had been finalized by that December. He'd married Elise in the summer of 2000 when Olivia had been two and a half. He'd now been married to the other woman for three years—a year less than their marriage had lasted.

Elizabeth studied Elise Jacoby-Morgan in the faded newspaper clipping. At that time, the woman had had chin-length dark hair and light skin but she couldn't tell more than that from a picture and this was the only time Elizabeth had even seen her. She couldn't allow herself to think that Jason had married someone who looked like her.

She set the clipping back in the box and laid back on the couch, her eyes to the ceiling. Had she been wrong all those years ago? Had Jason not cheated on her with Eloise, the daughter of a duke?

She closed her eyes, troubled at the idea that she'd seen the picture and immediately lumped Jason in with men like her father.

It was almost noon the next day when Jason found Elizabeth still deep asleep in the art studio. He'd gotten to the hospital around eight and was surprised that Elizabeth hadn't made it there earlier.

Olivia had been sleeping but she woke up when breakfast arrived at nine and when she asked about her mother, Jason told her that Elizabeth had pretty much stayed by her bedside for the past two days and was completely exhausted. She'd be there soon.

But as noon approached, he became worried and he'd told Olivia he was going to get her mother.

And now, he found her passed out on the couch, dressed in yesterday's clothes with an open metal box at her finger tips on the floor. He kneeled next to her and went to close it when he recognized the wedding announcement of himself and Elise on top.

He picked it up, concerned by the idea that Elizabeth had clipped it out and saved it. Underneath it was more pictures and clippings, but the one that stood out was the one that had tore their marriage apart. She'd saved it. After nearly four years, she still had it. That said something.

Underneath that, he found their marriage certificate and their own announcement from various newspapers. He smiled at the clipping from the *New York Times*. *Jason Morgan, the son of Wall Street financier Chad Morgan, has married debutante Elizabeth Webber, the daughter of Christopher and Cheri Webber of Philadelphia. The two wed in an elegant and romantic ceremony for friends and family in Paris, France on May 29, 1995. They met last August while vacationing in Spain with their families. The couple plans to live in New York while traveling extensively.*

She'd saved all the announcements. The one in the *Times*, one from the London paper, one from Philadelphia. And there was one from San Francisco as well. He hadn't realized that at the time.

She'd come home after their fight the previous night and had gone through these old memories, going from the good to the bad. And she'd fallen asleep looking at his wedding announcement.

He sighed and set the clippings back in the box and then gently shook her shoulder. "Elizabeth..."

She blinked slowly and smiled involuntarily at the sight of Jason kneeling next to her. *Another dream*, she thought idly. "Hey..."

"Hey," he greeted, returning her smile. "Olivia was worried about you."

Olivia. Oh...*shit*. Elizabeth jackknifed into a seated position and ran a hand through her hair. “What time is it?” she asked, disoriented.

“It’s almost noon. I came to check on you.”

“Noon?” Elizabeth repeated. She swung her legs over the couch and stood. “How could I have slept so late?”

“You were exhausted,” Jason told her. “You haven’t had any real sleep since the accident. Look, go get a shower and change. I’ll make you something to eat and we’ll go to the hospital.”

“Jason—”

“Just go. The more time you argue with me, the more time you’re wasting.”

She scowled at him. “Fine.” She stalked out of the studio and he heard her footsteps on the stairs a few moments later. He exhaled slowly before exiting the studio and heading towards the kitchen.

He made her a quick sandwich and set it on the table with a glass of iced tea. A few minutes after that, he heard a knock on the back door. A brunette entered without waiting for him to answer it.

“Oh.” She stopped awkwardly and shuffled her feet. “I didn’t realize Liz had, ah, a guest.” She jerked a thumb towards the door. “Just, um, tell her that Jessica stopped by—”

“I’m not a guest, I’m her ex-husband,” Jason interrupted.

“Oh.” She shifted again. “Jessica Spencer. I live behind the house—well, I live on the next street over but our backyards connect. Our daughters are friends. Olivia and Maja?” Jessica prompted.

“Olivia’s talked about her.” Jason hesitated. “I’m actually in town because Olivia was in a car accident.”

Jessica paled. “Oh my God. Is she okay? Where’s Liz? What happened?”

“The car rolled down a hill and crashed into a tractor trailer,” Jason related. “Olivia’s fine but she’s going to need some therapy for her legs. Elizabeth is upstairs taking a shower.”

Jessica pressed a hand to her heart. “Jesus. If Liz lost Liv, she’d just go insane. That girl is the best mother I’ve ever seen.”

Jason nodded and glanced towards the stairs. “Yeah, Elizabeth does love her.”

“So, Liz hasn’t really talked about you but Olivia just chatters on and on about her wonderful daddy,” Jessica related. “That girl worships you.”

“The feeling is entirely mutual,” Jason replied. He shoved his hands in his pockets. “So you’re married?”

Jessica nodded. “To Lucky Spencer, the photographer for the *Port Charles Herald*. We’ve been married for seven years.”

Elizabeth entered the kitchen then. “Jess!”

“Oh, honey.” Jessica crossed to her and embraced her tightly. “Your ex just told me about Liv, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Elizabeth replied, hugging her back. “Olivia’s fine. She’s awake. You could even bring Maja down in a few days to see her.”

“I just might do that.” Jessica pulled back and sighed. “Well, I guess you’re going to be going down to the hospital now so I’ll get out of your way. Call me if you need anything, okay?”

“I will.”

Jessica turned to Jason. “It was nice to finally meet you.” She smiled at Elizabeth again before leaving.

“Look, why don’t we just go?” Elizabeth asked. She put her hands in the pockets of her blue jeans. “I’m not hungry and I just want to get to Olivia.”

He pointed to the table. “Eat. You haven’t eaten since I got to town and if you don’t start eating soon, you’re going to get sick and Olivia needs you.”

She glared at him and sat down. “Fine.” She sipped the iced tea. “I don’t remember you being so bossy.”

“I don’t remember you being this destructive,” he shot back.

She glared at him. “What the hell does that mean?”

“It means that you put Olivia before everything—including your health.” He shook his head. “You know, normal people manage to have kids and still keep their marriage together. Where the hell did we go wrong?”

Elizabeth didn’t respond. She just ate half of the sandwich, drained the glass and stood. “Can we go now?”

“Why were you looking at those clippings?” Jason demanded. Elizabeth halted in the doorway, her back to him. “The box was still open when I got here. You were looking at our wedding announcement, mine to Elise and that damn clipping from Paris.”

She slowly turned around and leveled a cool gaze at him. “What business is it of yours?”

“Since you fell asleep holding mine and Elise’s, I think it’s my business.” He folded his arms.

“It happened to be in the box,” Elizabeth bluffed. “I was saving it for Olivia. She does like Elise.”

“Why is it in a box full of our wedding memorabilia?” Jason demanded. “And don’t tell me you were saving that picture of me in that Paris paper for Olivia. You keep that around so you can remind yourself what a jackass I am?”

“Maybe,” Elizabeth hedged. “Can we just go? I don’t feel like having this argument anymore.”

“We keep having this argument because you refuse to believe me. I never touched that woman and until you accept that you were wrong, we’re going to keep having this argument.”

“Why does it matter if I believe you?” Elizabeth demanded. “You’re not married to me anymore. I’ll bet Elise doesn’t care what you do when you’re not with her.”

“It matters because you’re the mother of my daughter and inevitably, the way you feel about me will get transferred to her and when she starts asking questions about why we got divorced, she’s not going to want to hear that it was just because we didn’t get along anymore. And I don’t want you telling her some bullshit about me cheating on you,” Jason shot back.

Elizabeth paled. “I would never...I would *never* tell Olivia about this. This...this has nothing to do with her a-and that picture...that was just the last straw. It wasn’t the reason I wanted a divorce.”

“The hell it wasn’t.”

“Don’t try and tell me why I filed for divorce,” Elizabeth spat.

“You listed it on the divorce papers. Adultery.” He shook his head and looked away. “Do you have any idea what it feels to be accused of something that you didn’t do?”

“I was *miserable*,” Elizabeth whispered. “You were never home and I had this child—this little girl who was always crying and there were some nights I couldn’t make her stop. And then you’d blow in for a weekend or a night and expect me to be your wife when I was already failing at being a mother.” She took a deep shuddering breath. “I was miserable and when she was two months old, I was so tired from being up and down all the time that I started...I started to take sleeping pills to help me sleep at night.” She gripped the doorway. “I started to feel a little better—but one night I slept right through and I missed her crying.” Elizabeth closed her eyes, her throat was tight and she forced herself to keep talking. “She h-had a fever and I rushed her to the hospital and the day I brought her home, I saw the paper.”

“Jesus,” Jason breathed. He stepped towards her. “Why didn’t you tell me any of this?”

“Because you wanted your life.” She opened her eyes and looked at him, her eyes rimmed with red and tears threatening to fall. “You wanted to keep on living that life and I wanted you to be happy—to have what *you* wanted.” She shook her head. “I didn’t think you were adjusting well to being a father and I was—I was willing to wait the extra time until you did. And I didn’t tell you this then because I didn’t want you to feel any more pressure to change and I thought if you had to stay at home with a

crying baby and a wife addicted to sleeping pills, you'd come to resent me for it."

"You didn't trust me." And oh, *man*... that tore at him more than her thinking he'd cheated on her. She'd been in so much pain and all she'd had to do was tell him. He would have stayed home—gladly, he would have done it. He'd loved her so much and to find out she didn't trust him...

"No, I guess I didn't. Because you're right." She took a deep breath. "I do think all men are like my father and he was a playboy right up until he died. And I know for a fact he couldn't have handled it. My mother would have protected him from that sort of thing just like he kept his affairs as discreet as possible."

"You thought that you were protecting me," Jason repeated. He sat down at the table and stared at the floor, stunned. He'd come home during that time for a few weekends and nights. He'd never noticed it. He'd never seen it.

"I was willing to go right on doing it. But I saw that paper and I—" she closed her eyes again. He deserved the truth. "I was so jealous. You were living the life that I had loved. You were her father and you were still carrying on like we hadn't had a child. And I was stuck in Port Charles." She leaned against the wall, her eyes glazed and unseeing. "You were living two lives. You'd come home, play the part of husband and father and then you'd go play international playboy and I had let myself sink into this world where I was just a mother. I resented you so much, Jason. You can't imagine how much I resented you. And after I saw that picture, it was like everything passed in a blur. One second I was standing on the front porch, staring at the newspaper and the next, I was sitting on the couch and contemplating taking an entire bottle of sleeping pills."

His head snapped up and he stared at her incredulously. "What?"

"It was at that point I realized that I had to do something. Something had to change and I obviously couldn't change my role as Olivia's mother but I could definitely change my role as your wife. I didn't want to do it, but I had to. I was losing myself. I was trying so hard to keep it together when you were home and that morning, I realized that I couldn't do it anymore. You wanted that life so much... you could have it."

"So you didn't think I cheated on you?" Jason asked. He stood up.

"No, I definitely thought that and like I said, that was the last straw. If I was going to be at home, taking care of Olivia and putting my life together, I was not going to let you come home when you felt like and then go back and be with other women. I couldn't... I couldn't do that." She shook her head. "Maybe I should have called my mother and asked her how she dealt with it."

Jason moved closer to her until he was right in front of her. "Elizabeth, I am so sorry that I didn't see it. I—I don't know how I missed it. Maybe I didn't want to see it. If I could turn back time, I would do it."

She met his eyes and shook her head. "It doesn't matter anymore. I was tired of you blaming this all on a picture. And it was *just* the last straw."

He took her by the shoulders. "I didn't cheat on you. Please tell me you believe me."

"Jason, it doesn't matter anymore. I'm not going to tell Olivia. In fact, I never want to her to know why we divorced."

"Look, it doesn't have anything to do with Olivia. I need you to believe me," Jason told her. He slid his hands up to cradle her face. "*Please.*"

"Why does it matter so much?" she asked softly, her voice tinged with the exhaustion of having bared herself to him. "We're divorced. It's over."

"Because I loved you with everything that was inside me and it has driven me nearly insane for the past four years knowing you thought I had been with another woman. I need you to believe me. I never cheated on you. I never even thought about it. It wouldn't have occurred to me."

The tears slid slowly down her cheeks and he could feel them on his hands. "Okay," she whispered. "Okay, I believe you."

A weight lifted off his shoulders and they slumped. He rested his forehead against hers. "Thank you."

Chapter Five

She pulled away from him after a moment and took a step back. “We should get to the hospital,” she told him quietly. “Olivia’s probably wondering where we are.”

He gently grabbed her by her forearms to keep her in place. “Elizabeth, you can’t just drop this all on me and walk away. We have to talk about this.”

“There’s nothing to talk about.” She shrugged. “It’s over. It’s ancient history. It was a bad time in my life and I got through it.”

“How?” he demanded. “You just said you were addicted to sleeping pills. I somehow doubt that it just went away because of the divorce.”

“I met Emily Cassadine through her husband—he was my lawyer during the divorce and I...” Elizabeth sighed. “I had a bad night and Emily stopped by the next morning to drop off some papers about the custody hearings and she saw the bottle.”

“How many were you taking?” he demanded.

“I don’t...I don’t really remember. Two or three. Just enough to help me to sleep at night, you know? Sometimes it was more and some nights I didn’t need them.” She rubbed her forehead. “Do we have to talk about this? I just want to get to the hospital.”

“What happened after she saw the bottle?” Jason pressed anyway. She’d been going through this even after he’d moved out. All the times he’d seen her at various divorce proceedings, she’d been dealing with this. He’d once known how to read her every mood—her every emotion. Had she gotten better at hiding it...or had he stopped looking?

“She, ah, she asked me about them. Wanted to know why I was taking them and then it just...I started to cry and she seemed to understand. She was a new mother herself and all. She introduced me to Jessica, because they’re sisters-in-law and I just...they started bringing their daughters over and I stopped needing the pills to sleep. And Olivia was starting to sleep through the night finally. It just kind of...it went away.”

“It just went away,” Jason repeated. “So you never saw any kind of counselor or anything?”

She glared at him. “Why? I didn’t *need* anyone. I got through it. I’m fine. I raised Olivia by myself and she’s fine.”

His jaw clenched. “You did not raise her by herself. She is still my daughter.”

“But I saw her on her first day of nursery school and kindergarten. You got her on summer vacations but I had to do the bulk of the parenting,” Elizabeth retorted.

He released her arms and stepped away. "We are not going to have this argument again. Maybe I haven't always been there every time Olivia's needed me but I am her father and I love her."

"Whatever. Can we just go to the hospital now?" Elizabeth asked. "It's been over an hour since you got here and I just...I need to see her."

"Fine." He left the kitchen, not even waiting for her to follow. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath before following him.

Olivia was sitting up in bed, eating lunch when her parents arrived. She was on a steady stream of drugs so she couldn't feel the different stitches and wounds and her bruises and cuts were already starting to heal.

"Mommy!" Olivia chirped. "You're here!"

"Hey, baby," Elizabeth greeted, kissing her daughter on the forehead. "I'm sorry I'm so late."

"It's okay. Daddy said you really tired from staying up the last two days and you slept in," Olivia replied. "Did you forget to set your alarm clock again?" she chastised.

Elizabeth smiled and sat down. "Yeah. I fell asleep in the sun room and you know I don't have the alarm in there." Her smile was bright. "You feeling okay?"

Olivia nodded vigorously. "Dr. Jones gave me Robacko-syn," she said. "He says I won't feel a thing."

"Robaxin," Jason corrected. He sat in the chair next to Elizabeth. "And that was just through the testing this morning."

Olivia shrugged. "Whatever." She grinned a big toothy smile. "Guess what, Mommy? Daddy's moving home!"

"I know," Elizabeth replied. "I bet you'll be glad when you don't have to get on a plane for six hours to see him."

Olivia nodded again. "Yeah and I been doing some thinking and I wanna be the flower girl."

Elizabeth's smile faltered and she traded a troubled look with Jason. "F-flower girl?"

Olivia nodded. "Yeah. Daddy's coming home so you're gonna have ta get married again. Kristina was a bridesmaid when her mommy married her daddy and she got to wear this really really pretty dress and carry flowers petals. Can I do that?"

Jason sighed and looked away. Elizabeth bit her lip. "Baby, I don't think you quite understand."

Some of the brightness in their daughter's dimmed but her smile stayed strong. "Well if I can't be the flower girl, can I still wear a really pretty dress?"

“Princess, I’m moving to Port Charles,” Jason told her gently. “But I’m not moving into the house. Elise and I are going live in a penthouse downtown.”

Olivia’s lower lip trembled. “B-but I thought you was coming home, Daddy. You said...you said I was gonna be your first pri-rity and I don’t really know what that means but home isn’t with Elise, it’s with me and Mommy.”

“Baby...” Elizabeth trailed off, not knowing to respond to her daughter’s words.

“Youaregoing to be my first priority,” Jason told her, distraught at having upset her. “And that means I’m going to put you first—before anything else in my life. But my home isn’t at the house.”

The little girl’s eyes welled up with tears and she sniffled. “Don’t you love Mommy anymore?”

Elizabeth stood abruptly. “I’m going to leave the two of you alone.” She kissed Olivia. “I want to go talk to Dr. Jones, okay baby?”

Olivia started to cry. “Why don’t you want to come home, Daddy?”

Jason moved into Elizabeth’s vacated seat to be closer to her. “Baby, it’s not that I don’twantto come home—”

“Then do it,” she sobbed. She wrapped her arms around her tiny torso and started to rock back and forth. “If you love Mommy and she loves you, why can’t you just come home?”

“It doesn’t work like that, Olivia,” Jason tried to reason. He smoothed his hand over her hair. “We’ve talked about this.”

“But you never answer,” Olivia said mournfully. She wiped at her eyes and tried to calm down, her breaths coming in short hitching gasps. “You just say it doesn’t work like that but I don’t get it. You love Mommy don’t you?”

“More than anything in the world,” Jason confided. “You and your mother are very important to me and all that matters is your happiness.”

“Wearen’thappy,” Olivia complained. “Mommy always looks sad a-and I don’t like when you’re not around.”

Jason filed her words about Elizabeth away for the moment. “I am going to be around. I’ll be ten minutes away and you can spend every weekend with me and I’ll even join the PTA thing that your mom does.”

“But you won’t be *athome*,” Olivia protested. “I can’t get up and go in to see you every morning a-and when I have a nightmare, you can’t come into my room and make the monsters go away.”

Jason lowered his head and took a deep breath. She was right. He couldn’t do that. He’d forfeited his right to be a full-time dad when he’d put his old life in front of his marriage. “I know,” he sighed.

“But I can’t change how things are.”

“Yes you can,” she said stubbornly. “Leave Elise in Europe and come home. She likes it better there and Mommy misses you. She’s always lookin’ at pictures of you and stuff. If you come home, she won’t be so sad.”

“Baby, when you’re older, you’ll understand this better,” Jason told her. “But I’m not moving back into the house. It’s just not going to happen.”

Olivia slid down on the bed, wincing a little when the sheet would catch on one of her stitches. When she was flat on her back, she turned away from him, her tiny shoulders shaking with her sobs.

“I’m so sorry,” he said softly. He stood and left the room. He needed to get out of there and fast.

Elizabeth was leaning against the opposite wall. “Is she okay?” she asked.

Jason shook his head. “She’s still crying. I just...I hate disappointing her. All I want to do is give her what she wants and I can’t do that.”

“I wish we could have handled this better,” Elizabeth murmured. “Presented it in a way that she wouldn’t have gotten the wrong idea.”

He shook his head. “Let’s face it—neither one of us even thought she’d get this idea. I don’t...I don’t understand why this means so much to her. We haven’t been together since before she could remember.”

“I guess it’s because all of her friends are together. Port Charles is very provincial in that aspect. I had to call in a favor just to get Nikolas Cassadine to act as my divorce lawyer. Olivia’s the only child in her class with divorced parents.”

“She’ll get used to it,” Jason said, more to convince himself than her. “She will eventually. She’ll adjust a-and I’ll figure out how I can live in the same town and still not be a full-time parent.”

Elizabeth’s eyes softened. “You can see her whenever you want, you know that right?” She folded her arms across her chest. “The custody arrangement—we can change that now you’ll be closer.”

“I appreciate that,” he replied. He sighed. “Did you talk to the doctor?”

She shook her head. “No. He wasn’t in.” She took a deep breath. “We, ah, should go inside. Maybe she’s okay.”

“You go. I need to call Elise, I haven’t gotten in touch with her since I left,” he told her.

Her shoulders tensed at the mention of his second wife, but she just nodded and entered the hospital room while he went in search of a payphone.

Olivia’s cries had turned into sniffles and she looked at her mother tearfully when she entered.

“Baby, I’m so sorry you’re upset,” Elizabeth said, sitting down and sighing. “We didn’t think...”

“If you weren’t gonna stay together, you never shoulda had me,” Olivia said angrily.

Elizabeth blanched. “Don’t say that, Livvie. I love you so much and your daddy adores you—”

“People shouldn’t get divorced if they have kids,” her daughter cut in with an angry glare.

“It’s *not* that simple,” Elizabeth protested. “Having you in our lives has been the best thing for both of us. Some people just aren’t meant to be together.”

“I don’t get it. If you aren’t meant to be together, then why get married in the first place?”

“We thought we were,” Elizabeth tried to explain. “We were very young when we got married, baby. We didn’t realize how hard it could be—”

“Lots of things is hard,” Olivia interrupted. “Like when I had to learn how to print my name a-and you made me even though I couldn’t do it. You shoulda tried harder.”

“I did try, I tried *so* hard,” Elizabeth said, her throat tight and her eyes burning. “I wanted it to work, baby, you have to believe me. I loved your daddy so much and I loved you so much and I just wanted us to be a family—”

“Why *can*’t we?” she demanded. “Daddy still loves you, he told me so and you always say you love him. He could just leave Elise in Europe. She likes it there anyway a-and you can get married again and you could be in love together.”

“I think you misunderstood him. He’s married to someone else and he’s in love with her—”

“Nuh uh, they never ever said it to each other in front of me and Daddy’s never said anything about loving Elise. He said he loves you more than anything.”

Elizabeth’s breath caught in her throat and she looked away. “Baby—”

“He told me he wants to come home so it’s got to be you who won’t let him.” Olivia leaned forward. “So just tell him you want to be a family again.”

“It’s not going to happen,” Elizabeth told her sharply. She stood abruptly. “Just drop it.”

Olivia glared at her defiantly. “I hate you!”

Stung, Elizabeth looked away. “I’m going to the cafeteria to get something to drink. Do you want anything?”

“I want Daddy to come home!” she shrieked.

“I’ll be right back.” Elizabeth grabbed her purse and hurried out the door.

Jason rubbed his forehead. “El—Elise—Elise, just—Elise, listen to me for a second—”

“No!” his wife snapped. “You just decide we’re going to move to some hick little town so you can assuage your guilty complex about not being there when Liv needed you and you think I’m going to be okay with it?”

“It’s not like we still won’t be around the same friends,” Jason protested. “I just want to be around Olivia more. She’s going to have a long therapy process and she needs both her parents.”

“Well isn’t that just peachy,” Elise snapped. “Look, I let you pretty much decide our entire lives but this is unacceptable. When I agreed to marry you, I was expecting a certain quality of life and living in some crap town in upstate New York is not going to happen.”

“Elise—”

“So you want to live there, that’s fine, but don’t expect me to follow, do you understand?” The sound of a phone slamming down echoed in his ear and Jason gently put hung up the payphone. He hadn’t expected Elise to take the news well, but he hadn’t really expected her violent rejection of the idea either.

He started back towards Olivia’s room just as Elizabeth rushed out of it and took off down the hall. Concerned, he went after to her and caught up to her just as she reached the elevators.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

Elizabeth’s hands were shaking as she pushed the button to open the doors. “I’m going to get a soda. You—you should go sit with her.”

The doors slid open and she hurried inside. Before they slid shut, he entered and pressed the button for the first floor where the cafeteria was located.

“What happened?” he demanded. Her cheeks were tearstained, her eyes were bloodshot. She’d looked fine ten minutes ago.

“I...Olivia kept asking why you couldn’t come home and I tried to tell her all the things we always prepared. About how sometimes people just shouldn’t live together a-and you’ve gotten married again but she kept pushing...” Elizabeth sucked in a deep shuddering breath. “She really wants this Jason. More than I ever suspected. She told me that you told her you wanted to come home and that you still loved me—and that I was the one keeping it from happening...” her voice broke and faltered. “When I told her it just wasn’t going to happen, she said—she said...”

Jason stepped closer to her and touched her arm. “What?”

“She said she hated me,” Elizabeth said tearfully. Her hands were trembling violently as she reached up to brush them away. “She’s never said that before and I just...I’ve sacrificed everything for her—I’ve tried *sohard* to be the kind of mother she deserves...how can she say that?”

Without thinking, Jason pulled her into his arms. “She didn’t mean it,” he told her quietly. Elizabeth wrapped her arms around him and leaned into the embrace gladly. She’d missed so much. “I’ve said it to my parents and you’ve said it yours. Kids say it. They don’t understand how much it hurts until *their* kids say it to them.”

“It just hurts so much more than I ever thought it could. It was like she just sliced right through my heart.” She pressed her face into his shirt and he could already feel her warm tears seeping through his shirt.

“It’s okay, baby, she didn’t mean it,” Jason soothed. He pressed a kiss to her hair and closed his eyes. “You’re so good to her, Elizabeth, you’re exactly the type of mother you wanted to be.”

“I just...I’m so tired,” she whispered. “You’re right. I live for her and it’s so unhealthy and I think I’ve known that all along but I just don’t know to change that and if she’s going to hate me, I don’t know what else to do.”

He smoothed a hand down her spine and then up again. “She doesn’t hate you. She didn’t mean it.”

“You weren’t there,” she whispered. “You didn’t see her face.”

He pulled away and gently kissed her forehead. “She loves you, Elizabeth,” he told her softly. The elevator doors opened then and she looked at him. “You go get your soda and I’ll meet you in the room, okay?”

“Okay,” she replied. She left the elevator and he hit the button for the tenth floor.

Olivia glared at her father as he opened the door and stood at the foot her bed, his face serious and his arms crossed.

“When your mother comes back in here, you’re going to apologize.”

“For what?”

“For saying that you hated her,” Jason replied. He frowned. “You disappoint me, you really do.”

Olivia scowled. “She won’t let you come home. *I* hate her. This is all her fault!”

“This is not your mother’s fault.” Jason hesitated. “It’s mine. When you were born, I wasn’t ready to stop traveling like I do now and your mother wanted me to. She was upset and we fought a lot. We got divorced. It happens every day a thousand different places. Yes, we loved each other. And yeah, we probably still do but we’re not going to get back together and this is not her fault.”

“But you want to come back home and she won’t let you—”

Jason sighed. “Honey, that’s not what I said. Look, it’s complicated and sometime even your mom and me don’t understand. But we both love you and you really upset her by saying that.”

Olivia hesitated. “Did I?”

Jason nodded. “She was crying in the elevator. After everything she’s done to give you a better childhood than she had, you *really* disappoint me.”

“I didn’t mean to make her cry,” she said in a tiny voice.

“Because she sat here for two days straight waiting for you to wake up. I had to force her to leave the room or get something to eat. And she was more ecstatic than anyone when you did wake up, so now you telling her you hate her and making her cry, that’s not very nice of you, Olivia and I thought you were better than that.”

Her lower lip started to tremble. “I don’t hate her, Daddy. I was just mad. Cuz I want us to be a family.”

He sighed and sat next to her. “Baby, we are a family. You, me and your mother. We don’t live together like normal families, but that doesn’t make us any less of a family, okay?”

“Can I still wish you’d get married again?” Olivia asked hopefully.

“You can wish it, honey, but please don’t get angry when it doesn’t happen.”

She nodded. “Okay.”

The door opened and Elizabeth entered hesitantly, a can of Mountain Dew in her hand. “Hey.”

“Mommy!” Olivia cried. “I’m so sorry I said I hated you because I don’t hate you, I love you, and I’m really really sorry.”

Tears sprang to Elizabeth’s eyes and set her things down to go to her daughter and hugged her as tightly as she could without jarring any of the stitches. “It’s okay, baby, I love you, too.”

“I’m really sorry, Mommy, I didn’t mean to make you cry!”

“Shhh...it’s okay, it’s okay now.”

The door opened again and Dr. Jones entered. “Hey, I’m sorry to interrupt. But I need to examine Olivia and take her for some more tests.”

Elizabeth pulled away and wiped her eyes. “Sure. What kind of tests?”

“We’re trying to work out the best type of therapy for our little patient,” he said with a kind smile. “I’m sure Olivia wants to get started as soon as possible.”

Olivia nodded. “Yeah, I do.”

“While he’s doing that,” Elizabeth began, “can I talk to you in the hall?” she asked Jason.

“Sure.” He looked at Olivia. “We’ll be right back baby.”

Once they were outside, she surprised him by hugging him tightly. “Thank you,” she whispered into his chest. “I know you told her to do it, but it meant a lot to me.”

He closed his eyes and wrapped his arms around her slender shoulders. “I hate when you cry. I always try to fix it.”

“I know,” she sniffled. “It’s one of the reasons I loved you.”

Chapter Six

“Your daughter is recovering quite well,” Dr. Jones told them after Olivia’s tests. He opened her folder and took out the recommendations of the physical therapist. “She’s reacting well to the pain meds we’ve given her and her wounds are healing nicely.”

“What about her legs?” Elizabeth asked intently. “Do you still think she’ll regain the use of them?”

“The therapist is optimistic,” Dr. Jones replied. “He seems to think that as long as Olivia puts the effort in, she should be up and around in three to four months.”

“It sounds like so long but I guess when you compare it to being paralyzed for the rest of your life...” Jason nodded. “So what kind of therapy are we looking at?”

“Very intensive while she’s in the hospital. She’ll need to stay here at least another three weeks. In addition to starting her therapy, we do want to teach her a few things about living without her legs.” Dr. Jones sat back. “Because she will be living as a paralyzed person for a while and it will be easier in the long run.”

“Makes sense,” Elizabeth replied.

“She’ll be doing four hours of therapy every day that she’s here. Two hours in the morning, two in the afternoon,” he continued. “And once she goes home, we assume she’ll be going back to school and then we’ll be cutting it back to two hours a day, then an hour and then a few times a week.” He reached for a copy of the preliminary schedule to hand it to them. “She’ll need to come in for a while after her mobility is better just to make sure it’s all okay and of course, periodic examinations after that.”

“It all sounds fine,” Jason told him. “I guess we’ll have to get special equipment out at the house for her, huh?”

Dr. Jones nodded. “A different kind of bed will be mostly the only adjustment. Since her condition is temporary, I don’t recommend anything more costly than that. She’s a tiny girl and she looks like you could carry her quite easily,” he told Jason.

“But we...we don’t live together. And I can’t carry her for long periods of time,” Elizabeth told him. “I certainly couldn’t get her up and down the stairs a few times a day.”

Dr. Jones frowned. “Well maybe if it’s possible, she could move to a bedroom on the first floor?”

“Yeah, I could do that,” Elizabeth agreed. “But I want you to know that money is no expense. Anything that would make this an easier transition, I’m willing to do it.”

“Well, like I said, since her condition is temporary, it’s probably not very effective to have ramps or lifts put in,” Dr. Jones remarked again.

“Okay,” Elizabeth agreed. “Is there anything else we should know?”

“I’ll be reducing her meds a little more every day. She hasn’t complained about the pain and her stitches will be healing more and more so she really won’t need them.”

“Thank you, Dr. Jones,” Jason said. He stood and Elizabeth followed suit. “We should get back to Olivia now.”

They moved into the hallway and went down the corridor towards Olivia’s room. Elizabeth cleared her throat. “Did you get a hold of Elise?” she asked.

He exhaled slowly. “Yeah. She, ah, isn’t very happy that I decided this without her. So I’m probably going to have to fly out there and talk to her.”

“When are you planning on doing that?” Elizabeth asked. “Because I want to give Nikolas a call and get the penthouse signed over to you.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Jason told her. “I think once we make the move, we’ll get a different place.” He shrugged. “I don’t...I don’t think I would really feel comfortable living with her in a place where we lived together.”

“Yeah.” The few months in the penthouse had been some of the last genuinely happy in their marriage. She’d gone into labor there and they’d brought Olivia home to that penthouse. In fact, one of the rooms upstairs was still decorated as a temporary nursery. She’d never touched any of the furniture there after the divorce. She wasn’t even sure why she’d never sold the place.

“Anyway, I’ll probably fly out tonight so I can be back tomorrow night. I don’t want to be away from Olivia too long.” They stopped outside of her room. “Elizabeth, I just...” he took a deep breath. “I just hope we can put the past behind us and be the kind of parents Olivia deserves.”

“I’m not all that sure I’m ready to let go of the past,” Elizabeth admitted honestly.

His shoulders slumped. “Elizabeth, I know I should have been there for you—”

“No, it’s not that,” she replied. She shook her head. “I don’t want to forget us—how we used to be. Is that so wrong?”

“No,” Jason said after a moment. “No, I don’t want to forget either.”

Elizabeth pushed the lock box underneath the couch in her studio and shoved it all the way back. She didn’t want to see the damn thing until she had to move the couch and that wasn’t going to happen any time soon.

She glanced at her wristwatch and decided that Jason had been in Spain for about two hours now if his plane had taken off on time last night.

She’d come home while Olivia was in therapy from ten to twelve and she was going to try and get

some of the housework done as well as start moving Olivia's things to the guest bedroom on the first floor.

She was in the kitchen pouring a glass of water when Jessica strode in. "Hey, babe. Didn't expect to see you home."

"Liv's in therapy," Elizabeth murmured. She sat down at the table. "Thanks for the flowers and the teddy bear you guys sent over."

"No problem," Jessica replied with a smile. She sat across from the other woman. "So, the ex. He's a cutie."

Elizabeth flushed. "You've seen pictures, Jess."

"Well, yeah, but he looks older, more mature you know?" She shrugged. "Anyway, where is he?"

"He's in Spain," Elizabeth said wrinkling her nose. "Trying to convince Elise to move to Port Charles."

"If you want my opinion—"

"I don't."

"—he should leave the gold-digger overseas and move back into this house. It's so obvious neither of you are over each other," Jessica observed. She stood and crossed to the fridge to pour herself a glass of juice. "How are things with him? Awkward?"

"I told him why we got divorced," Elizabeth said softly, using her finger to trace the rim of the glass. She could feel Jessica's eyes on her. "The whole truth this time."

"About the pills?" Jessica asked. "The post-partum stuff?"

"Yeah," Elizabeth sighed. She stared at the surface of the table. "He was upset that I hadn't told him."

Jessica snorted. "When would you have found time in between his affairs?"

"He, ah, he...he never cheated on me," Elizabeth confided.

Jessica's eyes widened and she sat down quickly. "What's this?"

"He didn't cheat on me."

"How do you know for sure? Did you call the tramp or something?"

Elizabeth fought a little smile at Jessica's protective words. "No, he...he told me."

"Yeah, okay. He's been telling you for the last four years. What changed?"

Elizabeth exhaled slowly. “I didn’t let myself believe him before. And this time...it was different, Jess. I just...I know it for sure now.”

“Well, I’m glad,” Jessica told him. “Because I know how much you love him.”

Elizabeth sat back. “You always say that in the present tense,” she muttered.

“Because you still love him,” Jessica said. “That doesn’t go away because you signed some papers ending your marriage.”

Elizabeth sighed. “No. But it went away for him. He’s married again, Jess. So, maybe it’s time I let go and...move on.”

“Well, if you think so...that charity thing you helped raise money for...it’s in three days and I think you should go.”

Elizabeth shook her head. “No. I should be at the hospital—”

“Olivia is not going to miss you for a few hours,” Jess interrupted. “Jason can sit with her. You helped to raise money for this—you deserve to go.”

“Jess—”

“Emily was telling me about a new lawyer at Nikolas’s practice,” Jessica cut in again. “He’s Harvard-educated, supposedly very handsome and charming. I think he’s just the guy to start your post-Jason life.”

“Jess, Jason was it for me. I mean, I can’t imagine myself being interested in anyone else,” Elizabeth replied.

“Well, then you’ll have nothing to worry about.” Jessica patted her hand and stood. “I’ll set it up.”

“Jessica—”

“Later, babe.”

Elise tapped her foot impatiently. “Please tell me you’re going to give up in this ridiculous idea,” she remarked in a short tone.

“Elise,” Jason sighed, tired of having argued this topic for the last three hours. “I want to be closer to my daughter.”

“I can see that and I even understand it.” Elise paused thoughtfully. “Well, there is something we can work with.”

“What’s that?” Jason asked suspiciously.

Elise sat down next to him on the settee and smiled at him. “Get full custody of her,” she remarked. “We can move her to a hospital in London—”

Jason launched off the settee and glared at her. “Are you out of your mind? Elizabeth would never forgive me and I—I couldn’t do that to her.”

Elise rolled her eyes. “You know, eventually Jason, you’re going to have to decide where your loyalty lies. With your first wife or with me.”

He groaned and closed his eyes. “Elise, you don’t understand—”

“You don’t give me enough credit,” the brunette murmured. She crossed to one of Jason’s bags and pulled out a slim photo album he carried everywhere. She flipped it open to a picture of Elizabeth on her graduation day. “I’m not stupid, Jason. I look like her. *I’m* the Elizabeth she wouldn’t be. She wouldn’t abandon her child and go places with you. I, however, let you be in charge of our lives. I don’t argue with you when you want to pick up and leave. I don’t argue when you don’t want to go out at night sometimes. Up until this point, I have been the perfect docile wife that your precious Elizabeth never was.” She chucked the album at him and he caught it, a little off guard.

Elise put her hands on her hips. “Tell me, does the princess know what I look like? Does she realize you married a carbon copy of her? Minus the personality.” She tilted her head to the side. “When you wake up at night and glance over at me, do you think for a split second that it’s her? That the last four years were some kind of nightmare?” she asked pointedly.

Jason hesitated—because he *did* feel that way. And Elise looked enough like Elizabeth that she could be mistaken for her. And one night, he’d been drunk and they’d made love and he’d actually thought it was her.

Jason stood and swallowed hard. “Elise—”

“I understand that you love your daughter. I think that’s a very noble and wonderful part of you. And you know that I like Olivia, so that’s not what this is about.”

“Then what is this about?” Jason asked, throwing his hands up in exasperation.

“This is about you finally having a reason to go back to the woman you’ve loved all along,” Elise remarked acidly. “You say it’s about Olivia, but don’t tell me that a part of you isn’t secretly thrilled that you could walk down the street and see her.”

“Where the hell is all this coming from?” Jason demanded. “You knew from the second we’d met that I’d been married before, that I had a daughter—”

“It’s all well and good for me to be the substitute wife on a different continent,” Elise cut in. “I get the illusion that maybe you really love me. That you’ve let go of the perfect debutante. But if I have to live in the same town as the two of you, there’s no way I’ll be able to keep that illusion.”

“Elise, Elizabeth and I are divorced. Our marriage is over,” Jason said, slicing his hand through the

air. “We barely have civil conversations because there’s so much anger between us now.”

“And anger turns way too easily into sex,” Elise remarked coolly. She arched an eyebrow. “After all, that is how I suckered you into marriage isn’t?” She strode towards him. “I got you angry—I made you furious and it was either hit me or kiss me.”

“Elise—”

“What we have between us, Jason darling, is lust pure and simple.” Elise shrugged her slender shoulders. “I don’t love you. You don’t love me. We’ve never pretended anything else.”

“No,” Jason admitted. “But—”

“So let’s just be honest.” Elise sat back down and smiled at him coyly. “You still love her don’t you?”

Jason hesitated and looked away. “Yeah.”

“Just as much as the day you married her.”

“Yeah.”

“And if she were to call right this second and tell you she still loves you and wants you to come home, you’d leave me in a heartbeat.”

“Elise—”

“Wouldn’t you?” Elise asked sharply.

“Yeah,” Jason admitted. “I would.” He sighed. “Come on, Elise. I told you I didn’t want the divorce, that I gave into it because she wanted it. You knew this.”

Elise nodded, her eyes cold. “You’re right. I did know it. Silly me for having romantic illusions that you’d get over her.”

“Elise—”

Elise crossed to one of her bags and pulled out a sheaf of papers. She looked down at them for moment and then met his gaze. “I had these drawn up six months after our marriage. When Olivia told you that Elizabeth had been sad and you spent an hour telling her all the different ways you knew to make her smile.”

“Elise, this is ridiculous—” Jason protested.

“We’ve been married almost as long as you’d been to Elizabeth.” Elise smirked at him. “Tell me, honey, can you even think of one thing that makes me happy?”

When Jason didn’t answer, she nodded. “That’s what I thought. I think it’s time I remove myself from

this situation, because you know what? I shouldn't have to settle." She shoved the papers at him.
"Sign them."

Jason clenched his jaw. "No."

"Sign them," Elise repeated, glaring at him. "End this farce. Neither one of us are really happy. I'll get the life I want and you'll get the one you want. You want your wife back, then do it. I don't care to be in the middle anymore."

"Elise—"

"Don't refuse just because you don't want to have failed at a second marriage." She shook a little.
"Sign them, Jason."

"No."

"Either you sign them and this ends now or I sue you for divorce and this gets settled in eighteen months. Either way, I want out."

"Elise—"

"You gave your precious Elizabeth what she wanted—give me what I want."

Jason hesitated, looked away for a moment before reaching for the papers and reached for a pen on a nearby table. He initialed all the sheets before signing his name on the last page.

"You're not even going to read through them?" Elise asked surprised. "What if I just made you sign over your entire fortune?"

Jason shook his head. "I know that much about you. You wouldn't. You know I'd pay any alimony you'd ask for."

"Well, now the civilities are over." Elise took the papers from him. "I'll file these. Go home to your family, Jason. Don't you think you've lied to each other enough?"

Chapter Seven

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

Elizabeth sighed and tugged at the bodice of the black dress. She met her friend Emily Cassadine’s brown eyes in the mirror in her bedroom. “I don’t feel right, Emily. My little girl is lying in a hospital bed and I’m getting dressed up to go out with someone.”

“I think it’s about time you did something for yourself,” Emily told her. She pushed Elizabeth’s hands away and straightened the thin black straps holding the ankle length silk dress up. “I’ve never seen this dress before. Where’d you get it?”

“In Paris,” Elizabeth murmured. “The last trip before Port Charles.” She turned to the side. “The cut’s simple—I don’t think it’s too far out of style but it’s really the newest thing I own.”

“You’re fine, you look great.” Emily sighed. “Honey, I’m not asking you to fall in love with Ric. But it’ll be good for you to start moving on. You’ve been divorced for four years.”

“Three years and nine months,” Elizabeth corrected automatically. “It’s September. Four years in December.”

“Okay,*that*’s what I’m talking about,” Emily replied. “I know you guys were in love, but you need to let go. To get out, meet new people.”

“Em—”

“Don’t argue.” Emily checked her watch. “Okay, we’d better get downstairs. Ric will be here any minute.”

Jason frowned when he pulled up Elizabeth’s house and saw two unfamiliar cars—one parked in the driveway and the other right in front of him—blocking where he’d parked before.

He got out of the car and was half way up the walk before he noticed the man in a dark suit ringing the doorbell. He narrowed his eyes.

“Who are you?” he called out.

The man turned to look at him. He was dressed in a tuxedo with dark hair, tanned skin and dark eyes—pretty much the complete opposite of Jason.

“Richard Lansing,” he said, extending his hand as Jason walked up the front stairs and stood on the porch. “Who are you?”

“Jason Morgan,” Jason remarked shortly.

“Morgan,” Richard repeated. “Are you Elizabeth’s brother?”

“I’m her husband,” Jason said immediately. “Who are you?”

Richard stepped back, confused. “Her husband?” he repeated. “I didn’t know she was married.”

Jason stepped closer to him. “Well now you do.”

“Okay, so why is your ex-husband standing on the porch with Ric?” Emily asked pushing one of the sheer curtains aside.

Elizabeth pulled the front door open just in time to hear Ric say, “I’m sure Emily would have mentioned if Elizabeth was married.”

“I’m not married,” Elizabeth said, furiously. She pushed the screen door open and stepped out onto the porch, glaring at Jason. “I’m *divorced* and this is my ex-husband.”

“What the hell is going on here?” Jason demanded.

“I’m going out. Do you have a problem?” Elizabeth asked, putting her hands on her hips.

Jason looked her up and down before clenching his jaw. “You’re going out on date in a dress/bought you?”

“Liz, Ric, you should get going before the party starts,” Emily said, stepping out behind her friend. “I’ll make sure Jason finds his way back to his car.”

Elizabeth shot Jason one more nasty look before taking Ric’s offered hand and walking down the walk to the car.

Jason glared at the red convertible until it disappeared around a corner. He turned to see the taller brunette looking at him oddly. “What?” he demanded.

“Emily Cassadine,” she said, extending her hand. “My husband represented Elizabeth in the divorce.”

“I know,” Jason said, not taking her hand. “Who the hell was *that* and what was he doing with *my* wife?”

“Your *ex*-wife,” Emily corrected. “And he was taking her on a date.” She crossed her arms. “How’s your new wife?” she asked pointedly.

“She divorced me,” Jason muttered looking away. “Said I was still too in love with my first wife.”

“Yeah, I can see where she might get that idea.” Emily stepped towards him. “Listen to me—she’s not your wife anymore and I swear if you hurt her—”

“I’m not going to hurt her,” Jason said, incredulously. “I never wanted to hurt her.”

“We do a lot of things we never wanted to.” Emily tipped her head towards his rented Porsche. “Why

don't you go now?"

Jason glared at her. "Who the hell do you think you are?"

"I could ask *you* the same question."

Settling for glaring at Elizabeth's friend once more, Jason stalked down the steps and went to his car.

This wasn't over. Not by a long shot.

"I'm sorry about Jason," Elizabeth apologized as they drove towards the Port Charles Hotel where the charity ball was being held.

"It's fine," Ric replied. He shrugged. "He seemed like he hasn't accepted the divorce. How long has it been?"

"Four years," Elizabeth replied. "And he's remarried."

"Oh. He didn't seem like it."

Elizabeth folded her arms. "Can we not talk about him?" She forced a smile. "Tell me about yourself."

Five hours later, Elizabeth refused Ric's offer to walk her to her door. He was disappointed—since he was in the middle of another story about his days at Harvard.

When she'd told him to tell her about himself, she hadn't meant for him to take it quite so literally. From the moment she'd said it until about five seconds ago, he hadn't shut up.

She'd never been quite so bored in her whole life and truth be told, she'd stopped listening to him about halfway through the second course. Her mind had wandered to more important things—such as Olivia's recovery or why Jason had been so adamant about being her husband.

She jerked her black shawl around her shoulders a little more tightly to brace against the chilly winds of late September. She reached into the tiny matching black purse and started looking for her house keys.

"Paris. September 1998."

His voice startled her and she jumped away from the door. "Where the hell are you?" she demanded.

She heard some rustling from the far end of the porch and she heard the scrape of one of the porch chairs. "Paris," he repeated, bleeding out from the shadows. She was stunned to see him stumbling just a bit—his blonde hair tousled, his eyes bloodshot—and a bottle of Jack Daniels vodka in his hand.

"Jason, what's wrong with you?" Elizabeth asked. She set her purse and keys down on one of the tables and moved towards him.

“Our last trip there,” he continued. He leaned against the wall and took another pull from the bottle. “We were invited last minute to an opera and you had sent all of your dresses ahead to Port Charles so we went out an hour before the show and bought that dress.”

She folded her arms. “You remember that?”

“I remember that you didn’t want to spend so much money on the dress but it was cut just right so that you could wear it during the pregnancy and afterwards.” He shook his head. “You were always worried about looking fat.”

She tilted her head to the side. “Why are you drinking? You never...not like this.”

“I guess I’m just trying to get used to the idea of seeing *mywifewearthatdress* on a date with another man.” He finished the bottle and tossed it aside. It landed in the grass with a soft thud and he stumbled back to his former seat where Elizabeth was stunned to see six empty beer cans and another full bottle of Jack Daniels. He reached for it and twisted the cap off. He tossed it aside and took a long pull.

Alarmed, Elizabeth reached for it and yanked the bottle from his grasp. “Jason, we’re divorced. We have been for years.”

“Was this your first date?” he asked, falling into the porch chair. Elizabeth sighed and crouched down to cap the alcohol bottle and put into the brown paper bag she found underneath the table.

“Yes,” Elizabeth said quietly. She shoved the empty cans into the bag to and stood up. She set the bag on the table. “Why?”

“Are you gonna see him again?”

She sighed and rubbed her head. “I haven’t decided. Jason, what in the hell is going on?”

He shifted to one side and reached into his back pocket. He pulled out his wallet and opened it. “It’s not fair.”

“What’s not fair?” Elizabeth asked, patiently. She sat across from him and sighed.

“She looks like you.”

Elizabeth raised her eyebrows. “What’s that?”

“Elise. She knew it, I didn’t want to think about it, but she looks like you.” He held up the wallet but it was too dark to see.

“Jason, you’ve had a lot to drink tonight—”

“It’s your fault, you know that?”

She pursed her lips. “What’s my fault?” she asked, narrowing her eyes. She sat back and crossed her

legs.

“She divorced me,” Jason reported. He leaned forward and pulled the bottle out and had it uncapped again before she could stop him. He took a long pull and wiped his mouth afterwards. “And the real kicker? She had the papers drawn up six months after we got married.”

Elizabeth’s mouth was dry. “Jason—”

“Said she was tired of me not loving her—of wishing she was you. She didn’t want to settle.” He chuckled bitterly. “Until she said that, I didn’t really see it—didn’t want to see it. But she was right. And you know what? It’s not *fair* that you get to move on—date someone who doesn’t look like me when the only woman I’ve even been remotely attracted to since the day we met could be your sister!”

Elizabeth stood abruptly. “Jason, that’s enough—”

“You’re right. It is enough.” He stood and set the bottle down with a loud CLACK on the glass topped table. “You pushed me away when we were married. You would never let me get up in the middle of the night when Olivia was crying. You wouldn’t let me change her—you wouldn’t let me kiss you if she was in the room.” He glared at her. “Were you protecting me then too?”

Stung, Elizabeth blinked, her vision blurry with tears. “My mother—she said that, ah, when she came to see me in the hospital she told me that I had to...I had to do a lot of that myself...that my father had never liked to check on me when they were home and he’d been angry when she’d suggested it and I just...I thought...”

He looked away. “You can’t blame everything on your mother.”

“I was twenty-two years old!” she cried. “What the hell did I know about raising a kid?”

“You knew enough that you didn’t want to raise Olivia like you were raised! Why the hell would you take advice from your mother?”

“You were never here!” she shot back. She wiped her tears away roughly and glared at him. “Olivia barely knew who you were half the time.”

He paled and stepped back. He tripped a little bit and went sprawling into the chair. “That was low. Even for you.”

“It’s the truth,” she spat. She saw the bag of empty beer cans out of the corner of her eye. “We’re not doing this anymore. It’s over. We’ve both moved on—”

“I haven’t *moved on!*” he said, lunging out of his seat. He grabbed her by the forearms roughly and pulled her towards him.

“Jason,” Elizabeth began carefully, “You’re drunk. You don’t know what you’re saying.”

“I know exactly what I’m saying,” he retorted. “Maybe you’ve moved on to pretty boy but I haven’t! I married a woman who looks just like you—who acts a little like you sometimes. I couldn’t have you but I damn sure tried!”

“Jason,” she said softly trying to pull out of his tight hold. “Let me go.”

He shook his head. “No.”

“Jason—”

Her protest was cut off when his mouth covered hers. Surprised, Elizabeth’s struggle ceased and her eyes fluttered shut at the familiar touch.

The kiss itself was almost bruising in its intensity but she almost forgot to fight to pull away until he thrust his tongue past her lips and she tasted the alcohol. She jerked away and nearly fell but he tightened his grip on her arms to keep her upright.

He stared at her in surprise—as if he’d forgotten he was even here. Jason licked his lips and tasted her there. He saw her swollen lips, her tear-stained cheeks.

“Jesus.” He let her go abruptly and turned away, driving his fingers through his hair. “Jesus, I-I’m sorry.”

“I don’t think you should drive home,” she said softly. She took his arm and pulled him gently towards the house. “I’ll put you in the guest room.”

“Elizabeth, I’m sorry,” he apologized again. He allowed her to lead him to the door and then into the house. “I didn’t—I didn’t want to hurt you. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” She propelled him towards the stairs and they stumbled together as they climbed it.

She even helped him take off his shirt and pants until he was just in boxers. He let her do this without a word and not long after he was in the bed, he was asleep.

She changed into a pair of pajama bottoms and a tank top and went downstairs to clean up the porch. His wallet was on the ground and she picked it up. Unable to contain her curiosity, Elizabeth flipped it open to the pictures.

He had a picture of Elizabeth alongside Elise and she rocked back on her heels, stunned.

He really had married someone who looked like her.

Chapter Eight

Some clanging from the first floor woke him the next morning and he wasn't altogether sure if the clanging was actually downstairs or inside his head.

Jason sat up and rubbed his head. He recognized the guest room at once and then he got a whiff of the alcohol from both his body and his clothes folded on a nearby chair.

The events of the previous night were starting to come back to him. He remembered watching Elizabeth drive off with some guy, he remembered a trip to a liquor store where he'd stocked up and returned to the house to await her return.

It was fuzzy from then on but he distinctly remembered her crying and telling him to let her go—but he'd...he'd kissed her instead. He groaned and put his head in his hands. Could he been any *more* of an ass last night?

He stood and decided to get a shower and then go apologize to her. He'd come back to Port Charles intent on putting out feelers. Was she open to a reconciliation? Would it work? Was it worth the effort?

And yet, he'd screwed it up the first night out. Good for him.

Elizabeth heard the shower running and started the pot of coffee. She took the aspirin out of the cabinet and put it next to the place she'd set for him on the table. Despite her resolution to just go to the hospital and leave him on his own, she'd woken up, checked on him, got a shower, checked on him again, got dressed, checked on him, went downstairs to make him breakfast.

She was a schmuck. Plain and simple. But she still knew her ex and after a night of drinking, he'd want clean clothes to change into. So she'd dug up some things he'd left here and put them in the bathroom.

Ten minutes later, he entered the kitchen to find a plate of scrambled eggs, toast and bacon waiting next to a steaming cup of black coffee with two aspirin at its side.

“Elizabeth, I—”

“Sit and eat,” Elizabeth said simply putting the frying pan in the sink and rinsing it. She stuck it in the dishwasher and moved to make her tea.

“But—”

“Visiting hours begin in forty-five minutes. Eat. I want to get a good parking spot,” Elizabeth interrupted again.

“I wanted—”

“It’s going to get cold,” she said without looking at him. She dunked a tea bag in the mug and let it soak for a few seconds. She heard the chair scrape against the linoleum floor and then his knife and fork as he cut up the eggs.

When she finished her tea, she took the seat adjacent to him and pulled out her collection of bills and the checkbook. He ate, she paid bills—all in silence. Someone might think this was the normal way of business in the Morgan household.

He finished the food and pushed the plate aside a little. “I’m sorry. I was an asshole last night and you didn’t deserve it.”

“It’s fine. We all have our bad moments,” Elizabeth said absently. She frowned a little at her phone bill but wrote out the check for the specified amount. “You said something about a divorce, so I can understand you getting drunk to block that out.”

“That’s *not* why I sat on your porch getting smashed,” Jason protested.

“It doesn’t really matter—”

“Will you stop brushing me off like I’m stupid teenager?” Jason demanded.

Elizabeth sighed and looked up. “Okay. Fine. Why did you choose last night to get drunk on my porch?”

“Because you had a date and he didn’t look like me,” he replied immediately. “And I thought you were moving on and I really didn’t think that was very fair.”

She snorted. “Coming from the man who remarried two years after the divorce, that’s *salmost* amusing.”

“She looks like you,” Jason said, without embarrassment. He was pretty sure he’d told her this last night—that he’d even showed her a picture. And besides, it was time to be honest. He’d never get anywhere protecting himself. Apparently, she’d been taking care of that for him.

Elizabeth hesitated. “We both have brown hair and light skin,” she allowed.

“She has blue eyes, she’s tiny and she talks a lot with her hands,” Jason continued. “She likes art galleries, going to the opera and she got sun poisoning in Egypt.”

Elizabeth pursed her lips and looked away. “I don’t know what you’re trying to accomplish—”

“When she got the sun poisoning, she refused to leave the hotel or even return there again. And the whole time she was complaining about it, all I could think about you. How you argued with me to go to the pyramids anyway. You wanted me to go and I refused to leave you alone. You went.”

Elizabeth sighed. “Jason—”

“The first time I saw Elise, we were in Spain and I saw her from the back and I thought for a second

it was you,” Jason admitted.

She stared at him for a moment. “Are you trying to tell me that the reason you were attracted to her at all was because she looked like me?”

Jason nodded. “I know it’s a horrible thing and I’m not proud of it. But I missed you and she was sort of like you and I didn’t think I could get you back.”

“So you settled for the next best thing,” Elizabeth remarked. “When you tell Olivia this story, you should probably leave that part out.”

“Elise divorced me. She had the papers drawn up six months after we got married,” Jason told her. “Because Olivia was upset because you’d been crying at the airport and without really thinking about it, I was telling her all these ways to get you to smile.” He shook his head and stared down at the table. “I think she knew then that I was still in love with you.”

Her breath caught in her throat. “I—”

“She didn’t want to admit it to herself and we both let each other lie to ourselves. It’s so much simpler when you don’t admit the truth, you know?” He exhaled slowly. “But she thought me wanting to move here was about more than just Olivia and I don’t know, maybe she’s right. Because as much as it hurt not to be with you, it was more painful not see you.”

Elizabeth stood abruptly. “We should go to the hospital. Olivia will be expecting me—”

“Of course since you don’t trust me, it doesn’t really matter how I feel does it?” Jason asked, rising to his feet. “We could get back together right now and I wouldn’t know if you were keeping something from me in some misguided attempt to protect me.”

She frowned. “And I wouldn’t know if this was just a temporary stop on your itinerary. If you weren’t planning on staying for a few weeks and then heading off God knows where. So, it really *wouldn’t* work now would it?”

“And that goes back to you not trusting me,” Jason challenged. “Because if you trusted me, you’d believe me when I say that I want to be around Olivia more. That I don’t want to have to her see her upset because I missed some school play. But you don’t trust me and I’m beginning to wonder if you ever did.”

“That’s not fair,” she argued. “Of course I trusted you. I followed you like some puppy dog for nearly three years. You wanted to go out, we went out, you wanted to stay in, we stayed in. I was the docile wife you wanted but I wanted more—I *wanted* a real family in a real home and you didn’t. So you know what? Maybe Elise and I really are alike. Neither of us were willing to settle for what you were willing to give.” She grabbed his breakfast plate and coffee cup and stalked to the dishwasher where she shoved them inside and then clicked the button to start.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Jason scoffed. “Like you were an unwilling participant in our

marriage. All you had to do was say the word and we'd have stayed in one place. And we did. You wanted Port Charles, I gave it to you."

She narrowed her eyes. "With the condition that I'd never see you." She shook her head. "We're not going over the same ground again. I don't even know why we're talking about what would happen if we got back together because it's not going to happen." She turned the coffee pot off and unplugged it.

"Why not?" he demanded. "Why do you get to just decide that?"

"Because we're over!" she shot back. "You don't still love me and even if you did, you don't know me any more. I'm not that girl who made a martini and let you kiss her on a balcony in Spain and that's who you want."

"Don't tell me what I want or how I feel!" He grabbed her wrist to keep her from walking away. "You are still that girl but you're more than that. You're the mother of my child and I will always love you."

"Let me go," she hissed, trying to jerk her wrist from his grip. "You don't own me, Jason. Not anymore."

Surprised, he let her go and stepped back. "Own you?" he sputtered. "I never tried to own you."

"Oh, don't be obtuse," she cried, frustrated. "You controlled my entire life—who I knew, what I wore, where I went, you paid for it all and we did everything you wanted to do!"

He swallowed hard. "I...I didn't...that's never what I meant to do. I just...I thought we were happy. You...you never said anything."

"Because it wasn't until I was on my own that I realized it. I had no opinions of my own, no hobbies, nothing that was mine. I was just an extension of you. I was Jason Morgan's wife. The wife of an investment whiz kid. The mother of Jason Morgan's child." Her eyes narrowed into slits. "You know why Olivia is my whole life? Because I don't *have* anything else."

"I..." Clearly unprepared for this line of attack, he fumbled for something to say. Some defense. But she had a point. She'd been wealthy in her own right—her father a wealthy lawyer who made his fortune representing clients all over the world. But she'd always been listed as "Jason Morgan's wife" in newspaper mentions. Not Elizabeth Webber-Morgan, former debutante or Elizabeth Webber-Morgan, daughter of Chris Webber. Just Jason's Morgan's wife.

And their trips had been dictated by his business. They'd gone where he had a client. Sure, he'd taken her other places. Famous museums for art but those times had been far and in between. They'd gone out to dinners with his clients and his friends. They'd been invited to operas and parties by those same people. Her clothes had been picked out by a nameless secretary who traveled with them. That dress from Paris had been one of the few things Elizabeth had picked out herself.

She'd even had some trouble doing her art because some hotels were unhappy with her setting up her supplies and her easels on expensive carpets and rugs. One of the few things she'd truly loved and

because of him, she hadn't had the opportunity to really explore her talent because he'd held her back.

Stricken, Jason sat back down, his face pale, his eyes distant. "I'm sorry," he managed to say faintly.

She instantly felt a sharp sting of guilt and knelt in front of him. "No, I'm sorry. None of that was your fault, Jason. God, I didn't mean it."

"No, you're right. Your life revolved around my schedule," Jason replied. He shook his head. "I never meant it that way—I tried to...take you other places. To museums and I thought...I thought we were happy. I thought you were."

Her eyes filled with tears. "I'm sorry, Jason. I just...you know how I am. When I open my mouth and I get angry, things just come spewing out you know? I didn't...I loved being your wife. I did. I was so proud of you, Jason and I really didn't mind being called your wife. None of that really mattered to me. The clothes, the parties, none of that mattered." She forced him to unclench his fists and she slipped her hands in his, lacing her tiny fingers through his larger ones. "I just wanted to be with you."

"What about your art?" Jason asked pointedly. "You were never able to work on it like you deserved to. Because I kept moving you around. Your supplies got lost a lot and then that fire that destroyed half the ones you had in storage—"

"None of that was your fault," Elizabeth cut in. "Painting was just an escape for me and I really didn't need it while we were married. I painted before I met you because I wanted a reason to ignore my parents and I painted after the divorce because I was lonely but *I never* needed an escape from you."

"I never wanted to control you, Elizabeth," he told her again. "I just...I—"

The phone's shrill ring interrupted him and Elizabeth took a deep breath. "I should get that. It might be Olivia."

"Right," Jason agreed. She stood and crossed to the wall phone near the doorway.

"Hello?" Her face paled and she bit her lip. "How long? What—Yes...no, of course not—We'll be right there." She slammed the phone back onto the receiver and turned to him, her face stark white and her eyes huge on her face. "That was the hospital," she whispered.

He lunged out of the seat and was in front of her in two seconds. "What's wrong?" he demanded.

"Olivia," Elizabeth choked out. She closed her eyes. "She...one of the meds...she had an allergic reaction—a bad one and she's...oh, God, Jason, she's back in a coma."

He reached out and gripped her arms to keep her upright. "Deep breaths, baby, deep breaths, okay?"

"Oh, God, Jason, I can't...we have to get to the hospital. I need...I need to be there...we need to be there."

“Okay, I need to find my keys. They weren’t in my pockets—”

Elizabeth pulled away and crossed the kitchen to one of the drawers. She pulled out his wallet and keys. “I f-found them on the porch last night.”

He took both from her and put an arm around her firmly guiding her to the front of the house.

“I knew I s-shouldn’t have gone out—I should have been in the hospital last night—she needed me—”

“It’s okay,” he said, pulling the front door open with his free hand. “It’ll be okay.”

She stopped abruptly and threw her arms around his neck, burying her head in his chest. “I’m scared,” Elizabeth sobbed. “I don’t know what I’ll do if I lose her.”

He wrapped his arms around her waist and felt her body trembling violently. “We’ll get through this. Olivia’s going to be okay.” He pressed his lips to her soft brown hair. “We’ll get through this.”

Olivia was hooked up to more machines this time and her skin was paler than before. An allergic reaction, the doctor had said. One of the interns gave her the wrong dosage of the wrong pain medications and it had interfered badly with not only her system but the medication she’d already had in her body.

Later Jason would remember the doctor apologizing to them and letting him know that they were expecting a lawsuit and the intern in question had already been fired.

But the only thing that registered in his mind was the look on his ex-wife’s face when she was told there was a chance their little girl would never wake up.

And if she did, brain damage was nearly certain. There was no telling how much or how it would effect her but she would never be the same.

Because one intern got her mixed up with another patient.

Elizabeth curled up next to her daughter and the doctors let her. It wasn’t the first time they’d seen a grieving mother. Jason sat on the chair next to the bed and kept Elizabeth’s hand tightly in hers.

“I should have been here,” Elizabeth said dully. “I could have told the intern that it wasn’t right—that it was the wrong patient. But I spent five hours with some jackass who never shut up about himself.”

“It happened this morning,” Jason told her. “Around 4 AM. You wouldn’t have been here anyway.”

“All she ever wanted was her family together,” Elizabeth whispered. She feathered her fingers over Olivia’s delicate skin. “I swear, baby, if you wake up, I’ll find a way to make it happen.”

“Dr. Jones is bringing in some medicine from California. They think it will counteract what’s wrong and bring her out of it,” Jason said softly. He rubbed his calloused thumb over her soft knuckles.

“He’s got a lot of hope for this, baby.”

“I spent this morning arguing with you and I can barely remember why.” Tears were falling from her eyes but she could barely feel them. “I would give anything to take those five seconds back. To take be able to turn off the car and take the keys in with me. I’d sell my soul if it meant my baby could go on.”

“This isn’t your fault,” Jason told her intently. “She was fine. She was recovering and in therapy. Someone else made a mistake—”

“She wouldn’t have been here if it weren’t for me,” Elizabeth whispered. She kissed Olivia’s forehead gently and sat up to rub her eyes. “I’m numb inside,” she murmured. “Nothing’s moving. I can’t...I can’t feel anything.” She slid her legs off the bed and stared at him intently. “When she wakes up—a-and they’re right about...the damage...I won’t hire someone to take care of her.”

He took her hands in his and pulled her towards him. She slid off the bed and into his lap. She pulled her legs up and tucked them under the chin.” He pushed her hair out of her pale, worn face. “We’ll take care of her together,” he promised.

Elizabeth leaned her head back until it rested in the crook of his shoulder and let her eyes drift close. He smoothed his hand up and down her spine, the rhythm eventually lulling her into a dreamless sleep.

He kissed her forehead gently and tightened his arms around her. They’d get through this somehow.

Chapter Nine

The door clicked open so softly that it didn't wake her. Dr. Jones stood there with a nurse at his side.

It'd been six hours since Elizabeth had fallen asleep and she hadn't woken up yet—Jason surmised that this past week had caught up to her.

Dr. Jones cleared his throat. “The medicine is here. We just need you to sign papers giving us clearance to administer it.”

Jason pinched the bridge of his nose. The medicine was a shot that was supposed to counteract the damage done to Olivia's system. It was mostly experimental but it was one of the few options the doctor had been able to offer them. But if it didn't work, he was afraid of what it would do to Elizabeth.

“How soon will we know?” He asked, careful to keep his voice from jarring Elizabeth from sleep.

“Ten minutes,” Dr. Jones replied. “At the most.”

“Give me a minute or two alone to wake my wife and let her know that?” he asked.

Dr. Jones nodded and motioned to the nurse to follow him back into the hallway

Jason stroked the back of his hand down her face. “Baby...wake up...”

She stirred, her eyes opening briefly before closing again and snuggling more into his embrace. He smiled a little but tried again. “The medicine is here.”

That got her attention and Elizabeth sat up a little, lowering her legs to the floor. She flushed at finding herself in his lap. “Jason, I—”

“I asked the doctor to give a minute alone,” he told her, keeping his arms around her waist so she couldn't stand. “I wanted to know how soon we would know after it's administered.”

She searched his eyes. “What did he say?”

“Ten minutes. At the most.”

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “And if this doesn't work, we're pretty much just crossing our fingers from this point on?”

“Yeah. I think so.”

She opened her eyes. “Okay. Then let's do it.” She moved to stand up again but he didn't let go. “Jason—”

“Stay,” he said quietly. “Please.”

Elizabeth nodded. “Okay.”

He raised his voice then. “Dr. Jones?”

The doctor entered again, this time by himself. He had the needle in his hand and he hid a quiet smile at the divorced couple holding onto each tightly. He said silent prayer that he’d be able to bring their daughter back to them.

Dr. Jones moved to Olivia’s IV and injected the medicine. He stepped back.

And waited.

Time clicked by slowly. Jason felt Elizabeth’s body begin to tremble and then shake. He gripped her tightly, his fingers laced through his. Their eyes trained on their daughter’s elfin face, each expecting the worse but desperate for the best.

Seven minutes had passed and Elizabeth let out a tiny whimper. He tightened his grip on her waist in reflex. It wasn’t going to work. She wasn’t going to wake up.

And then Olivia opened her eyes.

Elizabeth let out a sob and buried her face in Jason’s neck. He pressed his face into her hair and rocked her as she sobbed her tears of joy.

Dr. Jones smiled. “Hello, princess.”

Olivia blinked a little before looking at her parents. “Mommy?” she asked softly. “Why are you crying?”

“She’s happy, baby,” Jason told her. He smiled. “Very happy.”

Shortly after she woke up, Olivia went in for some tests to discern the damage done. She had seemed alert and aware of her surroundings and Dr. Jones was extremely optimistic.

Elizabeth wiped her eyes. “I can’t stop smiling,” she told him. “She woke up. And she...she knew who we were!” She laughed and threw her arms around him.

“I know. It’s incredible,” he agreed. “I just—I wanted to believe it would work, but—”

“Yeah, I wouldn’t let myself really hope for it either,” Elizabeth replied. She stepped away from him. “It...thank you for today. I just—it felt good for someone to hold me again.” She hesitated and smiled at him shyly. “It felt good for *you* to hold me again.”

“It felt good to hold you,” he admitted. He tucked a piece of her hair behind her ears. “Thank you for letting me do it.”

She flushed and looked away. “I just—it’d be so easy to get caught up in this moment and think everything is great but...it’s not. You know?”

“I know.” He took her hands in his. “I want you back, Elizabeth. I want to give you the family I should have given you in the first place—the kind of family and love you deserve.”

Elizabeth bit her lips and looked down. “Oh, God, Jason, I want that too but I’m scared. We...we screwed it up so badly the first time and there’s so much at stake now. Olivia—if we were to attempt reconciliation and for whatever reason, it didn’t work...she’d be crushed.”

“I understand and the last thing I want to do is hurt her. But I think that means we should just be more careful.” He stepped closer to her and tilted her face up so he could see her eyes. “Take it slowly. There’s so much hurt and anger between us still. What happened this morning shows that much. But I want...I want to work it out. To earn your trust back.”

“Do you really think we could make this work?” she asked, her eyes lighting up with hope.

“I’m willing to find out,” he replied. He brought one of her hands to his lips and kissed it softly. “We’ll take the long way this time. We took it too fast the last time—we were married before we knew each other a year and that kind of love—the intense and passionate love we had then...it’s a good kind. But it doesn’t always last and it burns out.”

“It didn’t for me,” Elizabeth confessed. “I—I still love you as much as I did the first time I met you.”

“I love you, too.” He smiled tenderly. “More. You gave me a life I never could have dreamed of. I never thought I’d love anyone like I love you—I thought I’d end up in a marriage like my parents or the one I had with Elise. One of respect and tolerance. You gave me so much more than that, Elizabeth. I would spend hours thinking about you when we were separated by an ocean. I literally counted down to the seconds how soon I’d see you again. I wanted to be around you every second—I was terrified you’d become bored with me and go away and I don’t know if I could have survived that.”

“You never had to worry about that,” she told him intently. “The day at the airport in Spain—when you flew home and I went to England...you smiled at me and I decided right then and there that I had to have you smile at me every day for the rest of my life.” She smiled tremulously. “I knew then that I’d never love anyone else the way I love you. And I know what you mean about not expecting it. It came out of nowhere. I was nineteen—the last thing I was thinking about that night was getting married or finding the person to spend my life with.”

She took a deep breath. “But it hit fast and it hit hard and loving you has been the best thing that’s ever happened to me.” She laced their fingers together and it felt like every part of her was smiling—glowing even. She couldn’t imagine a more perfect moment. There was still hurt—still anger, disappointment and problems to work out. But just to be able to tell him she loved him and to see that smile again—the only thing that possibly compared was Olivia opening her eyes fifteen minutes ago.

“So...will you do this with me?” he asked. “Work this out? Give each other another the chance to create the family and home we both want?”

“Yes,” Elizabeth agreed. She nodded firmly. “Most definitely yes.”

It was another hour before Olivia was returned to the room. She was sleeping and Dr. Jones said she’d sleep through the night and advised them to go home. He’d have the test results for them in the morning.

Reluctantly, they left and through no prior decision, they went back to the house together. She locked all of the doors and then they walked up the stairs together.

She stopped walking at the guest room and he knew that this was how it was going to work. She was letting him back into her home, into her heart—but not her bed. And he didn’t think either of them was ready for that. The first time around, they’d waited four months—until vows of love had been exchanged. He didn’t mind waiting.

He’d waited four years to get back into her heart, after all.

“Tomorrow,” Elizabeth began softly. “If you want...we can move your things here from the penthouse.” She bit her lip. “I think Olivia would want you around.”

“Wouldn’t she ask why I’m not in my own place if we’re not getting back together?” Jason asked her pointedly.

“She might,” Elizabeth allowed. She smiled then. “But then you can tell her that in order for her to keep her room where it is, someone has to be able to carry her up and down the stairs for a while. She adores her room.” She hesitated. “But if you’d rather be at the penthouse—”

“No,” he cut in. “Tomorrow, we’ll bring my things here.” He smiled then—the same rakish grin he’d exhibited the moment before he’d kissed her for the first time. He slid his hand over the nape of her neck and tugged her close.

And this kiss was every bit as intoxicating as their first.

“Oh my God...you should have called me!”

Elizabeth sighed and leaned back against her headboard. “Jess...it’s okay now. And...if I’d been thinking clearly, I would have. But I just...I was numb and I think I slept all day in my ex-husband’s lap.”

Jessica was silent for a moment. “Um...what was that?”

“I told him that if she woke up and something...if there was damage, I wasn’t going to hire someone to take care of her. And he pulled me into his lap and told me we’d take care of her together.”

“Oh. Wow. If you hadn’t filled me with stories about him being a jerk, I’d fall in love.” Elizabeth heard Jessica’s husband Lucky Spencer’s voice in the background. “Oh, be quiet, Lucky, I’m speaking figuratively.”

“He’s not a jerk, he’s the most wonderful man I’ve ever known.”

“Oh, no.” Jessica sighed. “Please just tell me you didn’t already elope to Vegas.”

Elizabeth laughed then. “You’re so dramatic. Look...this whole week I knew something was happening between us. We were talking—finally talking about what went wrong and even how we fell in love in the first place.”

“Sounds great. Are you sure this isn’t just...because of Olivia? Bonding because of tragedy?”

Elizabeth frowned. “Tragedies are famous for bringing people together. It’s legendary even. You know...take something bad to realize how much we all need one another and all that?”

“Yeah, I get that, but, ah, you don’t feel a little pressure from your beloved daughter here?” Jessica pressed.

“There is an added bonus of Olivia getting her parents back together and yes, I realize that we both want to give her that desperately but I promise you it’s more than that.”

“Are you sure? Because he is going through a divorce of his own—“

“To a woman who had the papers drawn up because he was telling his daughter how to make her mommy smile. He wasn’t happy with Elise.”

“Is that something you know for sure?”

“Yes,” Elizabeth sighed. “He said that it was a marriage he’d expected to have—his parents were the same way. Respect and tolerance. He didn’t love her. He loves me.”

“And you just believe that after all this time, after everything you’ve gone through?” her friend asked skeptically.

“If you could have been in the room when we were talking about trying this again—when he told me how much he loved me...” Elizabeth sighed. “Jess, it was just...it was what I needed. I believe that he loves me and I know he believes I love him.”

“Honey—“

“I know that it doesn’t solve jack shit between us but after four years of wondering if he loves me, it’s gonna help me sleep at night.”

“Well...” Jessica paused. “As long as you know that, I think you’ll be fine. Sweetie, it’s not that I’m not thrilled for you...I just...I worry about you.”

“I know.”

“I mean...I know Emily knew first but I live right next door. Our girls are practically sisters. And I

remember the late night calls—when she was crying and you couldn't sleep but you didn't want to take a pill. I remember that it was because of your marriage and you protecting him—and I just...I want you be absolutely sure you're ready to put yourself back in that position.”

Elizabeth closed her eyes. “It's going to be different this time, Jess.”

“Yeah, I believe you believe that. And I even think *he* believes that. But it can be so easy to fall into routines. He could get comfortable. Take one a trip a year. It could turn into two, three, four...you could get back into that routine of taking care of him—making sure his clothes are washed and he's fed. And it might eventually end up that you don't tell him when Olivia gets into a fight at school because you don't want him to worry about things he can't change. You might start trying to protect him again and well...that really didn't work the first time did it?”

“It won't be like that.”

“Why?”

“Because I know it didn't work the first time. I know what went wrong. I know where it started. I'm not sure everything that went wrong and how to fix it all but...we want to fix it. We want to work this out. And I think...I think that's the first step.”

“Okay. Well, then as soon as you know Olivia's test results and things settle down, you're bringing him over to meet Lucky.”

“Jess—”

“No arguments. Now, have you called Nikolas yet?”

Elizabeth sighed. “No. We didn't...we haven't discussed it yet. I don't know if Jason would even be comfortable if we used my divorce lawyer.”

“Look, Nikolas is a friend. He knows Olivia, he knows you. And he knows Jason a little. There's no one better to handle this. You are going to sue?”

“I don't really know what the point would be. It's not like we need the money to pay the bills and they fired the intern.”

“Honey, at least promise me that you'll discuss it with Jason and think about it. For the emotional trauma at least.”

“Yeah. Okay. Listen, it's been a long day—”

“Yeah, yeah. Sure. Call me when you hear about Livvie, k? Love ya.”

“Love you, too.”

The next morning, Elizabeth was up at dawn and the sound of the shower woke him as well. He went

downstairs and started a rudimentary breakfast—he wasn't a great cook but he could handle eggs, toast, some coffee and of course—her tea.

He was just setting things down on the table when she entered the kitchen in jeans and a long-sleeved shirt. She'd towel-dried her hair but it was still damp and was curling around her shoulders.

“You didn't have to make breakfast,” she said, clearly surprised. “I didn't even know you knew how.”

Jason smiled ruefully. “I had to learn. Sometimes Olivia wasn't really in the mood to wait for room service.” He handed her the cup of tea. “Dr. Jones called. He wants a meeting at noon.”

“Noon?” Elizabeth frowned. “I thought...?”

“He had a trauma emergency early this morning and he had to put a few things off,” Jason explained. “He asked about a lawsuit and I told him that we hadn't discussed it.”

“I talked to Jess last night,” Elizabeth remarked. She sat down and sipped her tea. “She thinks we should at least call Nikolas and think about it.” She hesitated. “I know you might be comfortable with my divorce lawyer but—”

“If you trust him, it's not enough for me,” Jason interrupted. “He's a good lawyer—he took care of you in the hearings. And I think your friend is right. We should at least talk to someone.”

“I'm not sure what suing would accomplish. The hospital didn't try to hide anything—they fired the intern before we even got the hospital. And it's not like we need to worry about hospital bills.”

“Yeah, I know. But it still happened. There was a security lapse at the hospital. Interns shouldn't be able to administer that kind of pain meds to a small child without a nurse present. Elizabeth, we almost lost our daughter.”

She closed her eyes. “I know. We should definitely talk to Nikolas about our options.”

“I think we should talk about broaching the subject with Olivia,” Jason said. He broke apart his toast and took a bite. “I mean...about me living here and whether we want to tell her about the reconciliation.”

“I don't think we should tell her anything about us trying to work this out. She's still recovering and I don't want to get her hopes and I'm just trying to be realistic Jason—this might not work.”

“No, it might not,” Jason allowed. “I'm not even sure where to start, to be honest.”

“I know. I was thinking...” Elizabeth chewed her lip. “Maybe we should try a marital therapist or something. You know?”

“If that's what you want.”

“I want to know what *you* think,” Elizabeth pressed.

“I think we might be rushing it by going to see someone,” Jason admitted. “We just decided last night we wanted to get back together. We should at least try to see if we can work this out for ourselves.”

“Okay.” Elizabeth finished her tea and stood up to take her half-empty plate and cup to the sink where she put the leftovers into the garbage disposal. “Visiting hours aren’t until ten but since she’s a minor we could get in earlier so maybe we should head over to the penthouse now.”

He finished up his coffee and nodded. “Yeah.” Jason stood. “Have you been to the penthouse since we moved out?”

Elizabeth shook her head. “No. I think the nursery is still set up. I never...I couldn’t go back afterwards, you know?”

“Yeah. I...I slept on the couch the night I was there. I didn’t want to go upstairs,” Jason admitted. He took a deep breath. “This just feels...awkward.”

She laughed a little. “Yeah. I guess we’re trying too hard now. I don’t want to fight with you Jason but I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to tip toe around you.”

“I guess we just have to find a new rhythm,” Jason agreed. “So you want to get out of here and get my stuff so we can get to the hospital?”

Elizabeth nodded. “Yeah. Definitely.”

Chapter Ten

The trip to the penthouse was quick—she sat in the car while he grabbed his bags. She hadn't been to the penthouse since they'd moved out and for some reason, she felt uncomfortable in there.

It was odd, she thought, to be so uncomfortable around him. It was a new feeling. From the moment they'd met, she'd felt like they were supposed to be together. They'd just fit together from the start and now...they were trying to make each other fit again and it worried her that the reason it was so uncomfortable was because they were trying to fit each other into the places they'd once held in each other's lives.

She'd told him she wasn't the girl from Spain and it was a struggle sometimes to remember that he wasn't the man from the time just before their marriage ended. It was going to be difficult to discover who they were now and it occurred to her that maybe...maybe the people they were now weren't *meant* to be together.

She heard the trunk shut behind her and a few moments later, he got into the car and smiled at her. The little tender, half-smile that had made her decide nine years ago that she wasn't going to spend her life without him.

Maybe this wasn't going to work but if it didn't, it wasn't going to be because she hadn't tried hard enough.

It was nearly noon when they stopped off the elevator on Olivia's floor. Elizabeth fought the urge to peek in on her daughter but instead, she followed Jason and went to Dr. Jones's office.

"I'm sorry I had to postpone," the doctor began with an apologetic smile. "I have her test results."

Jason took a deep breath. "And?"

"The drug worked nicely—just as we hoped. It brought her out of the coma and it went a long way to helping her body cope with the different medication."

"But?" Elizabeth prompted.

"But Olivia's heart *did* stop briefly and her brain was cut off from necessary oxygen," Dr. Jones told them.

Elizabeth gripped Jason's hand so tightly he could feel the bones squeezing together. "What does mean exactly?" she asked.

"Her cognitive reflexes are still good as could be told from her immediate recognition of her mother upon waking," Dr. Jones began. "Her memory is intact and for the most part, you won't notice a difference."

“But there is a difference,” Jason finished with a sad sigh.

“Yeah. She’s going to have some mobility problems,” Dr. Jones began. “She’ll need therapy—more extensive than we hoped. And even then, we can’t guarantee anything. Also, she can’t grip with her hands very well. This has nothing to do with her muscles exactly but with the way her brain sends the message to those muscles. That can be improved—also with therapy.”

“Improved but not cured,” Elizabeth sighed.

“There’s no cure for most kinds of brain damage. Mrs. Morgan, your daughter has been extremely lucky. She survived an accident she shouldn’t have and came out of a coma that she shouldn’t have. She’s a very strong little girl and we have very high hopes for her.”

“Is there anything else we should know?” Jason asked.

“At an age when she should be very active and outgoing, Olivia is going to be forced to sit inside and have therapy instead of playing with her friends. She’s going to know that she’s different from them and she’ll need patience because she’ll probably be very demanding and cranky a lot. She’s young and she might not understand why she can’t do all the things she could just a week ago.” He took a deep breath. “Now, I understand if you both have time-consuming jobs—”

“I can take a leave of absence,” Jason said immediately. “I work for my father and he’ll understand.”

“I don’t work,” Elizabeth said faintly. “Just...charity and different organizations in town.”

“Well, that’s good.” Dr. Jones hesitated. “Now I understand that you’re divorced but I wouldn’t rule out the option of seeing a family therapist. The adjustment is going to be hard on everyone, more so on parents who are no longer together.”

“Thank you,” Elizabeth told him. “When do you expect to start this therapy?”

“Immediately,” Dr. Jones told her. “We still want her to go home in three weeks. For such a small child, it’s not good for her to spend so much time in a hospital, so we’re going to be working as hard as we can to keep that date in sight.”

“We understand.” Jason stood. “I should go make the arrangements with my job. Elizabeth, you can approve any schedule or program right?”

“Sure,” Elizabeth said, a little surprised by his eagerness to leave. Didn’t he have questions? She had a million herself. Forcing herself to smile at him briefly. “Go make the...arrangements.”

“I’ll meet you in Liv’s room when I’m done.” He hesitated, thought about kissing her on the forehead like he might have in a previous time but he didn’t and just left instead.

“Now about this gripping thing,” Elizabeth began turning back to the doctor. “Does this apply to anything else?”

Jason followed the signs for the hospital roof and once he was up there, he dialed a familiar number. “Keesha?”

Keesha Ward held a finger up to her companions at the table in the posh restaurant she was sitting in and turned away. “Jason? Hey. I heard about Elise—“

“Keesha, I’m in Port Charles now,” Jason told his longtime friend. He sighed and stared out of over the towering view the roof offered him. “With Elizabeth and Olivia.”

Keesha hesitated. “Jason. Just because you divorced Elise, it doesn’t mean you can automatically go back to your old life—“

“That’s not what this is about,” Jason remarked. “I should have called you a few days ago. Olivia was in a car accident and...there’s just been so much going on—”

“Jesus, Jason, hold on a second.” Keesha quickly threw some money down and left the restaurant. He heard the sounds of cars and the streets. “I’m in New York now. I can rent a car and be in Port Charles in two and a half hours.”

“You don’t have to come all the way here, I just wanted—”

“Jason, how long have we known each other?” Keesha demanded.

He felt himself cracking a small smile. “About thirty years.”

“Yeah. And how many times have I seen you naked?”

“Keesha—”

“You are my best friend, Jason Morgan. After everything you’ve done for me, it’s about time I get to do something for you,” Keesha said. She hailed a cab. “You fought with your parents when they didn’t want you to play with the nanny’s granddaughter. And you helped me get into Princeton. And that’s just the big things. So you know what? Just shut up and give me your address in Port Charles.”

He reeled off Elizabeth’s address. “Keesha, I really appreciate this—”

“It’s about time I get to meet this Elizabeth that broke your heart in the first place. I’ll call you if I get lost.”

“You will.”

“Yeah, I always do. I couldn’t find my way out a paper bag with out step by step directions. Talk to you later.” Her end went silent and he knew she had hung up. He closed the phone and slid it inside the front pocket of his pants.

Keesha Ward had been his nanny’s only grandchild and since Mary Mae Ward had lived in the Morgan home, Keesha had as well. They’d grown up together and been best friends most of the time—

despite his parents' dislike of the idea.

After he'd gone to Yale and she'd gone to Princeton, they'd lost touch for a little while until she'd seen the announcement of his marriage to Elizabeth. She'd called him up and reamed him for not inviting her. And after that, he called her once a week and she likewise. Because of her busy schedule with college and law school and his job and traveling, he'd been unable to introduce her to Elizabeth but Keesha had met Elise a few times and couldn't really understand his attraction to the shallow woman. Keesha adored Olivia though and it didn't surprise him that she was driving up to Port Charles after just hearing about the accident.

When he'd told Elizabeth that she'd been the only person he'd ever really trusted and depended on, he meant that. Because Keesha was more than that to him. She was the only real family he'd ever known and he was actually glad she'd be in Port Charles. She'd let him know if he was doing the right thing by giving his relationship with Elizabeth another shot.

He pulled the phone back out a moment later and called his father in Hamptons. Chad Morgan was not a family man by any means but he knew his son worshipped Olivia and despite their differences, he knew that if he didn't give Jason his leave, his son would quit.

"Call me when you know more about her condition," Chad told him before they hung up. Jason agreed but they both knew it was just a formality.

He hung the phone up for the second time and sighed. He was so far apart from his parents. He wished he'd realized how much he'd wanted something different before. Maybe he would have understood more where Elizabeth was coming from back then. She'd wanted to give Olivia the family they hadn't had and he didn't understand why she'd hated it so much. He was okay—she was okay. They'd done okay for themselves.

But every time that Olivia smiled at him or called him Daddy or showed him something new she'd learned, he couldn't believe he'd ever wanted to leave her alone with some nanny. He couldn't believe his arrogance in wanting Elizabeth to do it either. He was ashamed of that fact now and man, he'd do anything to take it back.

Olivia was sleeping peacefully when Jason entered and Elizabeth was sitting in a chair, staring at her with a smile on her face.

"Hey, how'd it go with the schedule?" Jason asked taking the seat next to his ex wife.

Elizabeth shrugged. "It was basically the schedule we approved before only bumped up to three hours instead of two." She frowned at him. "Why did you leave so quickly? I had so many questions..."

"I wanted to get a hold of my father before he left for the city," Jason told her. "It's Sunday, he and my mother are in the Hamptons."

"Oh." Elizabeth shook her head and sighed. "It's been such a long week...the days have blurred together."

“I called Keesha Ward too,” Jason told her. Elizabeth frowned for a moment but recognition flickered in her eyes.

“Oh. The girl you grew up with?” Elizabeth nodded. “Olivia likes her. She wants to be a lawyer just like her.”

“Yeah, well Keesha’s driving up,” Jason told her. “She didn’t want to pass on the opportunity to meet you, I guess. She’s wanted to ever since she saw that announcement.”

Elizabeth smiled briefly. “Well, since you once told me she was the only person you really considered family, I really want to meet her.” She hesitated. “What did your father say when you told him about Olivia?”

“Just to keep him updated.” Jason shrugged. “He’s not big on family—you know that of course but even Olivia managed to charm him on the few occasions they’ve met.”

“Olivia could charm anyone,” Elizabeth replied, casting a smile at their daughter.

“Elizabeth, I just—”

“Jason—”

They broke off and he gestured towards her. “You first.”

“I think I know why this is so awkward,” Elizabeth told him. “I think...it’s not that we’re trying so hard not to fight that we’re uncomfortable but it’s just...we haven’t spent any real time together since...almost before Olivia was born. Since then, it’s just been juggling our lives around her and I...don’t think we quite know how to act around each other now that things are so drastically different.”

“Yeah.” Jason nodded. “We went from a pretty good marriage to an almost bitter divorce to four years of not speaking. Even if we weren’t attempting reconciliation, this would be a difficult situation.”

“I don’t...” Elizabeth bit her lip and flushed a little. “I don’t know if it’s a good idea for you to stay at the house after all. I mean...right now. When it’s just the two of us. When Olivia comes home—”

“I agree.” He reached out and took her hand. “I’ll stay at the penthouse after all. I love you, Elizabeth. I want this to work out.”

She smiled. “Thanks for understanding, I just...I feel like if we try too hard and rush this...it won’t work. We need...” Elizabeth hesitated, trying to put it into words. “I feel like we need to start over almost, you know?”

“We can’t start over—not really,” Jason replied. “We’re in love—we have a daughter. It’s naïve to think that we can start over.”

“But we can’t just jump back into a life together,” Elizabeth reminded him. “It’s *naïve* to think that we haven’t changed that drastically. I told you yesterday—I’m not that girl from Spain anymore.”

“I know,” Jason argued. “But I’m not that nervous guy proposing either. Yes, we’ve changed. But who we used to be is still part of who we are now.”

“I just—” She stopped. “You don’t understand what I’m trying to say.”

“You’re not making any sense. We can’t start over—because that would be saying that we failed at everything—”

She rolled her eyes. “For Christ’s sake Jason, we did fail. We got divorced. That’s what it means to get divorced. It means you failed.”

He narrowed his eyes. “Do I have to remind you again that I didn’t want a divorce?”

“You don’t get to use that anymore,” Elizabeth snapped. She stood up and walked across to the window. “We both made mistakes.”

“Once of went to Paris and the other became a drug addict. That’s some mistake.”

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he wanted to take them back. Her head snapped around and her eyes filled with tears even as the anger in them made him take a step back. “Elizabeth, I—”

“You know what?” she asked softly. “You’re right. It’s naive to think that we can start over. It’s naive to think that we can do this again at all.” She brushed some of tears from her cheeks and kissed Olivia’s forehead. “I’ll be back in an hour or so.”

“Wait,” he protested. He caught her arm and pulled her back. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it—”

“No, you definitely meant it,” Elizabeth remarked coolly. She yanked her arm away from him. “You don’t tend to say things you don’t mean. Not even when you’re angry. Yes, I took sleeping pills. Yes, I took them more often than I should have. And I know it was wrong but you are not going to make me ashamed of how I got through that time. You had no idea what I was going through—”

“Because you refused to talk to me,” Jason challenged. “How could I know if you wouldn’t tell me?”

“You’d think you would have gotten a clue when I fell asleep during sex,” she spat out.

He stepped away from her and looked at the floor. “I don’t think we should be in the same room right now. We’re going to keep doing this and I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Fine.” She grabbed her purse and stalked out of the room.

Chapter Eleven

“Sir, Elizabeth Morgan is here.”

Nikolas Cassadine set a file aside and smiled at his secretary. “Show her in, Gia? Thanks.”

After a moment, a flushed and clearly upset Elizabeth entered his office. “I’m not interrupting anything am I?”

Nikolas stood and rounded the desk. “It’s a slow day. I’m between appointments.” He gestured towards a seat. “I was actually expecting you. Jessica told Lucky what happened and he told me.”

Elizabeth frowned for a moment before shaking her head. “No. I’m not here about Olivia. I—I need...” She took a deep breath. “When Lily was born, did you and Emily have any problems?”

Nikolas sighed and took the seat next to her. “We had some adjustment problems at first. It was hard to find time together but eventually Lily started sleeping through the night. Emily quit her job here to stay home with her. Things just got easier.” He took a deep breath. “Honey, I know Jason is in town. Emily was worried about that.”

She sat back in her chair. “I love him, Nikolas. It’s as simple as that. He’s always been it for me and...for a long time—after the divorce I mean, I thought...I thought I might have just been another girl for him. Just someone he’d been comfortable with enough to marry and that if I hadn’t turned into such a hovering mother, he would have stayed.”

“I only met Jason during the few hearings and meetings we had,” Nikolas began, “but I got the distinct impression that he did love you. He never argued with the proposed alimony, doubled that and child support. He gave you a very generous custody agreement. He gets his kid for an average of three months a year while you get her the bulk of the time and also about a million a year in combined child support and alimony. He’d have to be either crazy or in love to have agreed to that.”

Elizabeth glanced at her hands. “He says he loves me. We...talked yesterday about it and for a little while, it felt like we still had a chance.”

“There’s always a chance,” Nikolas assured her. “Even the most bitter divorces...there was love once.”

“I picked a fight with him today,” Elizabeth admitted. “I can say that now. I purposely set him up to say something hurtful so I could have a reason to call it off.” She met his eyes with a sheepish smile. “I still know how his mind works to a certain extent.”

“Why did you do that?” Nikolas asked.

She took a deep shuddering breath. “Because I’m scared. Because some of the most vivid memories of my marriage are the times he walked out the door, leaving me with a nightmare.”

“He didn’t know you were suffering,” he reminded her gently. “What do you think he would have done if he had?”

“I...I never let myself trust him,” she confessed in a tiny broken voice. “Not with Olivia, not with my heart. I couldn’t. I knew...I knew all too well what our marriage could turn into if I let him have all of me.” She exhaled slowly. “I remember hearing my mother crying a lot when my father would be out for the night. I remember hearing their arguments and then later, all of the rumors about women and I just—this was the model I set my visions of marriage on.”

“So why’d you marry someone who had a lifestyle so close to your parents?” Nikolas asked curiously.

“Because I loved him,” Elizabeth told him tearfully. “And I swore to myself that I’d leave him the second I found out he was cheating on me. I also...I never gave him the chance at first. We went everywhere together. I went out with him every night a-and I did everything I could to make him want me—desire me. I worked over time to keep him focused on me.”

“You did this all consciously?” Nikolas asked surprised.

“No. Not at first. I loved him, Nikolas. Almost from the moment I saw him, I loved him and I was selfish enough to want him to be mine forever. I saw the way my mother tried...but she made mistakes, she let him go out too often by himself and she stayed back at the hotel or went to a spa and I just...I guess I figured that’s where she really went wrong. She let him out of her sight.” Elizabeth sighed, her cheeks stained with embarrassment. “I didn’t...after Jason and I got married, it didn’t seem like a lot of work. I really did want to be with him all the time and—” she hesitated.

“You can be blunt with me, Liz,” Nikolas assured her. “I can handle it.”

“Our sex life was good,” Elizabeth said. She took a deep breath. “Really good. And it was...it was *constant*. He always seemed to want me—even when I just woke up or when I’d be dressed in t-shirt and jeans. He couldn’t...it just felt like he wanted me all the time.”

“Was that a problem for you?” Nikolas asked.

She shook her head. “No. I wanted him just as much. He made me feel damn good, Nikolas. It really didn’t feel like it was real though. I mean...who has a husband who wants her day and night without it tapering off? It was like the honeymoon period never went away.”

“But you still didn’t trust it,” Nikolas said, voicing the obvious. “You didn’t trust him.”

She shook her head slowly. “Looking back, no, I didn’t. I didn’t realize a lot of this then, Nikolas. I really did love him and it never occurred to me at the time that I didn’t trust him. But I don’t. I don’t really trust anyone.”

“And now that he tells you he loves you and wants you back, it’s making you realize this,” Nikolas told her. “That now that you’re confronted with the idea of returning to being his wife, you realize that

you put more work into it than you thought at the time.”

“Yeah. I’m scared, Nikolas. Because I want to trust him and I want this to work and it will never work without trust. And he knows I don’t trust him right now so he’s going to be working at trying to regain that but I don’t even know if I’m capable of trusting someone like that.”

“You said you *want* to trust him,” Nikolas said slowly. “You want to be married to him, to be with him. What’s really keeping you from doing that?”

“I…” Elizabeth hesitated and furrowed her brow. “I guess I’m scared. When you trust someone, you…give a part of yourself to them. And…Nikolas, it almost destroyed me when I ended my marriage. If I let him in…if I really give him my trust along with everything else…when it doesn’t work…what will I be left with?”

“Why are you so sure it won’t work?” Nikolas asked pointedly.

She frowned. “What?”

“You said *when* it doesn’t work…instead of *if*.” He shrugged. “Just sounds like you’re expecting it to fail.”

“I guess that goes back to my trust thing,” Elizabeth decided. “I think the only person I trust is Olivia and that’s because I’m always sure of where I stand in her life. I’m always going to be her mother. Nothing can change that. But what am I to Jason?”

Nikolas stood and gave her a small smile. “Maybe you should ask *him*.”

“You think I should talk to him about this?” Elizabeth asked. She stood and shook her head. “He wouldn’t understand. He’ll think he did something—that I didn’t trust him because of him and it’s not true. It’ll only hurt him—”

“You have to be honest with him, honey. You’ll never get anywhere if you’re not. That’s really where you went wrong the first time. You didn’t tell him about the pills because you didn’t trust him to stay. And he knows that. But he won’t ever understand unless you tell him why.”

“Thanks, Nikolas. As always, you’re the voice of sanity in my life.” She hugged him tightly. “I’m going back to the hospital okay?”

“Will you call me and tell me how it went?” Nikolas asked.

“Of course.”

Not long after Elizabeth had fled the room, Jason found himself calling Keesha’s number for the second time.

“Calm down, Morgan, I’ve barely gotten out of the city so I’m not lost yet,” Keesha said immediately.

He chuckled a little. “No. That’s not while I’m calling. What’s taking so long to get out of New York?”

“Traffic is a bitch.” Keesha paused. “If you’re not calling to rag on me, why are you calling?”

“Change of address.” Jason reeled off the penthouse instead. “I’m staying there.”

“What happened? Your motel kick you out?”

“No.” Jason hesitated. “I was staying with Elizabeth but now I’m at the penthouse.”

“Ah, shit. I knew you were doing something stupid. The second you said her name I knew—“

“I love her,” Jason interrupted. “If I do stupid things, it’s understandable. Now that I’ve admitted to myself what disastrous idea my marriage to Elise was, I want to get my life back. I want my wife back.”

“Uh huh. Have you told your wife this?”

“Yes. It’s...not going as well as I would have hoped but I’m optimistic,” Jason told her.

“Jason, I don’t think you should waste your time on—“

“She loves me, Keesha. I know it. And...I just...I have to earn her trust that’s all. I can do that.”

“Jason, what makes you think you even had her trust in the first place?” Keesha demanded. “It always felt like she was just waiting for a reason to end it.”

“You only say that because you don’t know her,” Jason argued. “She’s...she’s different. She grew up like I did but it was different for her. It hurt her in ways I don’t think she’s even realized yet.”

Keesha sighed. “You’re too nice, Morgan. You’ve always been a bleeding heart.”

“Keesha...just go to the penthouse. We’ll talk when you get in okay?”

“Yeah. Yeah. I’ll be calling you in an hour. I’m sure I’ll have gotten my self lost by then.”

He slipped the phone in his pocket and turned to look at Olivia who was still sleeping. He was going to make this family work if it killed him.

An hour after she’d run out on him, Elizabeth slowly pushed the door to the room open.

Jason was looking out the window and the bed was empty. “Hey,” she said softly. “Liv at therapy?”

He looked at her in obvious surprise. “You came back.”

“Yeah. We, ah...” she took a deep breath. “We need to talk.”

He stepped towards her. "Elizabeth, what I said before—I didn't mean it—"

"No, I know that. I set you up to say it so it doesn't matter." Elizabeth sighed. "Come take a walk with me."

Mystified, he followed her down the hall and into the elevator. "Where are we going?"

"The Port Charles park is next to the hospital," Elizabeth answered. The elevator opened on the lobby floor and they left the hospital in silence.

They were nearly to the fountain before she started to speak. "I don't want you to be hurt or misunderstand what I'm going to tell you because this isn't really about you. It's about me."

"Elizabeth—"

"I deliberately picked a fight with you," she told him. She sat on the edge of the stone fountain and looked up at him. "I know how your mind works and I set you up to say something that would give me an excuse to walk away."

He inhaled sharply and his face paled. "You...you don't want to work this out?" Jason asked in a quiet, stunned voice.

She closed her eyes. "See, I knew this was going to hurt you and God, Jason, that's the last thing I want."

"I don't understand." He sat next to her. "Elizabeth, if you didn't want to get back together—"

"No, that's not it. Please just let me explain." She hesitated. "I was scared. When we were together before, it would have never occurred to you that I didn't trust you. You always assumed that I did and now...now you have a pretty good idea that I don't and you...you'd be working to make me trust you and that scares me."

He took a deep breath and clasped his hands between his spread legs. "You didn't trust me when we were married," he concluded.

"I don't trust anyone," Elizabeth said softly. "I didn't...I didn't realize I didn't trust you until it occurred to me that it didn't surprise me about the clipping."

He glanced at her with some confusion. "What?"

"When I saw that clipping of you with the woman, it hurt. It upset me. It made me want to scream and rip my hair out. But it didn't *surpriseme*."

He stood suddenly and took a few steps away. He couldn't look at her. Not only did she not trust him now, but she'd *never* trusted him. She'd always expected him to do what her father had. Oh, man... he'd never seen this coming.

“Some of the most vivid memories of my childhood are my parents fighting about other women,” Elizabeth confessed brokenly. “And you...you were so much like my father, Jason. You led the same life style, you had almost the same type of job. I just...I did everything I could to keep myself from being my mother and I did such a good job of it that I never even knew I was doing it.”

He turned to face her, her eyes bloodshot, her lips trembling. “What exactly do you mean by that?” Jason asked carefully.

“The reason I went to every business dinner I could...why I never really argued when you wanted to go out or take a spontaneous trip was because I wanted to avoid what I had obviously decided my mother had done wrong.”

“You didn’t want to let me out of your sight.” He blinked and swallowed hard. “You didn’t even trust me a little.”

“I’m sorry,” she whispered. She stood and hugged herself tightly. “I’m so sorry, Jason. I didn’t even realize I was doing it. Until I was faced with the idea of being with you again and it scared me. Because now you knew I didn’t trust you. And you would want me to trust you so you’d be working at it and I realized that I don’t...it terrifies me.”

He could see it. Her body was trembling, her arms were wrapped tightly around her upper body, her eyes were glossy with tears. “Why?” he asked hoarsely. “Why does the thought of giving your trust to me terrify you?”

“It’s not just you, it’s *everyone*,” she whispered. “When you trust, you give a piece of yourself away. It’s something that’s more intimate than love, that goes *deeper* than love, it’s something that is it at the very foundation of any relationship you ever have.” She took a deep breath. “I r-remember my mother crying so much. Because to the public, she was a society wife. One that expected her husband to seek a life outside her bedroom but she loved him. A-and it tore at her for him to be with other women.”

He stepped towards her. “You are not your mother and I am *not* your father. Baby, what we had—what *we have* is so different from them.”

“I know,” she managed to say past the tightness in her throat. “And that scares me. When I...after you packed your bags and moved out, I could barely function. It nearly destroyed me—losing you the first time. I only had Olivia to keep me going. But if I do this...if we make an attempt...and I give you my trust and something happens, I really think that it’ll be the end of me.”

He put a hand on her shoulder then. Slow, cautious steps. He didn’t want to spook her—she was already so shaky he was afraid she’d call the whole thing off right now. “Elizabeth, trust...it’s a risk and I want you to know that I understand. I know how much your parents marriage hurt you and that I think you’re still hurting from it. But I love you. I love you so much and when I lost you, it did destroy me. You can ask Keesha. I spent that first month in her apartment in New York. That’s why I didn’t respond to your attorney’s motions and letters. I wasn’t ignoring it, I couldn’t...I couldn’t deal with it.”

“I’m so sorry I hurt you,” she whispered. She stepped towards him and rested her forehead against his chest. “I’m so sorry...” she started to cry then and he took her in his arms then. “I just...I don’t want to be scared anymore.”

He held her tightly and after a few moments, her arms slowly moved around his waist and she clung to him.

The sound of his cell phone broke their embrace and he pulled away with an apologetic smile. He took it out of his pocket. “Hello?”

She was close enough to him that she could hear a woman’s voice. *“Okay, so I was on the highway and I think I accidentally took an exit and it’s possible I’m on my way to Ohio or something.”*

He started to laugh then. “Oh, Keesha, you really need to take some map courses.”

“Ah, bite me Morgan. Will you just get me back on the right road? I have no inclination to visit the Midwest today.”

Chapter Twelve

Olivia was tired when she got back from therapy and didn't even seem to notice the difference in her parents or the blood shot look in her mother's eyes.

"Keesha will be here soon," Jason told Elizabeth. He looked at Olivia. "You remember her, right Princess?"

Olivia nodded. "She bought me a doll last Christmas and came to see us in London."

"That's right." He stood. "If I'm not in the parking garage when she pulls in, she'll assume she's in the wrong state."

Elizabeth managed a weak laugh and closed her eyes when Jason kissed her forehead.

Olivia blinked. She'd never seen her daddy kiss her mommy before. Then again, before last month, she'd never seen them in the same room together.

"I'll be back later, Princess," he promised her. He kissed her cheek and left the room then.

"Daddy kissed you," Olivia said immediately.

Elizabeth opened her eyes and sighed. "Yeah, he did, Baby. We're getting along better now. No more fighting."

Olivia nodded. "Good. Can I watch cartoons?"

—

He was standing next to the parking garage attendant's booth when he saw Keesha's dark curly hair behind the wheel of a black Jaguar.

She glared at him and he slowly followed her car until she parked it. "No faith in me huh?" She pushed the door open and grabbed a bag from the passenger's seat.

"Well, I didn't think I could trust you to find the penthouse," he told her easily. "After all, you were the girl who confused Harvard and Yale. Twice."

"It's not like it's *that* uncommon," Keesha huffed. Jason took her bag from her and led her to the elevator.

"They're in two different states."

"Details," she shrugged. "Anyway, I'm eager to find out how you've screwed up this time, oh and I want an update on the Liv babe."

He punched the button for the penthouse floor. “We’ll start with Livvie. She was in the car accident but she seemed to be recovering from that when some god damn intern gave her the wrong medication.”

“Oh, Jesus...”

“She came out of *that* coma but the doctor thinks she’s going to have some problems and will therefore need additional therapy.” He sighed. “She’s had some trouble with her legs and now she’s going to have some trouble gripping things with her hand.”

“The poor kid,” Keesha sighed. “I’m so sorry, Jase. But she’s going to be okay, right? I mean, that’s all that matters.”

Jason nodded and looked at the row of numbers watching the elevator climb higher. “I think that if we’d lost her, we both might have gone insane.”

“How is Elizabeth taking all of this?” Keesha asked. Despite having never been formally introduced to Jason’s ex-wife, after supporting Jason through the divorce and the last four years, she felt like she knew the other woman intimately.

“I think she’s doing better now,” Jason hedged.

“Better *now*?” Keesha echoed. “As opposed to last week?”

“As opposed to five hours ago,” Jason answered. “Look, I’ll tell you everything—let’s just get to the penthouse and let me do it in my own way.”

“Okay, it’s your life I’m criticizing, we’ll do it your way.”

—

She tossed her bag in the guest room and headed right for the stairs, intent on getting to the bottom of things. But there was an ajar door and she thought she saw a crib, so Keesha pushed the door completely open.

There stood the nursery that they’d never taken down. Elizabeth had started decorating it even though she’d been on bed rest and there were things here she’d never moved to the new house. Stuffed animals, a mobile, the crib and a dresser.

A cluster of photos were on the dresser and Keesha moved closer into the room to get a better look. A picture of Olivia and Elizabeth in the hospital, one of Jason and Elizabeth holding Olivia and then just one of the happy parents before the birth. Jason had hid most his pictures with Elizabeth and this was the first chance Keesha had had to see them together.

She picked up the one of the three of them and studied it. They looked happy. Jason had the adoring husband/father look on his face, Elizabeth had the radiant new mother glow and Olivia’s face was all scrunched up. Elizabeth was in the hospital bed, cradling the baby and Jason was to her right, one of

his arms braced over Elizabeth's head. Just one big happy family.

"Keesha, there's three rooms and a bathroom. I know you didn't get lost!" Jason called to her.

Replacing the frame, Keesha closed the room. "I think I'm still in New York if it that helps."

She went down the stairs and settled herself on the couch. "Okay, bard, tell me a story."

He rolled his eyes. "You have problems."

"So you've been telling me since we were five. Go please."

Jason took a deep breath and crossed to the terrace doors where he had a view of the harbor. "Almost from the second I arrived, something was different." He hesitated. "Maybe I shouldn't say that. You know that Elizabeth and I didn't see each other after the divorce was finalized. We spoke through our lawyers, through notes, through Olivia, but never on the phone, never in person."

"I know. You said you didn't want to fight with her but I got the distinct impression that it hurt too much to see her."

Jason nodded. "But Olivia wanted me to see her room last month and I didn't want to let her go. I hated when the summers ended and she had to fly back. Usually, I'd send her with someone but this time, I came in with her and...I brought her home." He shook his head. "Elizabeth is so different from the girl I once knew. She's grown up, she's matured. I hoped that whatever her childhood had done to her had finally let her go."

Keesha scoffed. "Oh, poor Elizabeth, having to grow up with a nanny and travel everywhere and go to a privileged school."

"Keesha..." Jason shook his head. "That's not what I meant. It's her parents. Her father...her father cheated on her mother every second he could. Everyone knew it. Everyone including Elizabeth."

Keesha sighed. "Yeah, I guess that would be hard to deal with."

"I'd heard the rumors and once Elizabeth and I were together, we talked about it. Or at least, I tried. She never wanted to go into any kind of depth but she told me she used to hear her parents fighting viciously about the affairs, that her father would tell her mother he didn't love her, that he needed to get satisfaction somewhere." His eyes were distant. "She used fall asleep to the sound of her mother crying."

"Why didn't—" Keesha stopped. "That's a stupid question to ask. Women in that world don't leave their husbands."

"No, they don't. They deal with it in private and put on a good face for everyone else. I told you on the phone that it hurt her, the marriage did, the crying, the fighting, it hurt her and I thought I understood that. Even after the divorce, I thought I knew. But...I had no idea."

“What do you mean?” Keesha asked. She stood and joined him by the window.

“There are some women who grow up with mothers who have a constantly revolving door of men... these women grow up either to be the same way or distrustful of men.”

Keesha nodded. “I know. I told you about that once—after a family psych class in college. Why do you bring it up now?”

“Elizabeth never had anyone she could depend on growing up,” Jason told her. “Her parents weren’t around much and when they were, they were always fighting. She lived in a suburb of Philadelphia and had as many as three nannies by the time she was nine and her parents deemed her old enough for boarding school and to join them on trips.”

“So you’re saying that Elizabeth grew up learning she couldn’t trust anyone?” Keesha sighed. “I suppose that makes sense. Not having your parents around at that crucial time in your development, she would have either not learned to trust at all or learned that it didn’t pay to trust because you just ended up abandoned.”

“I had the same life but I guess because my parents weren’t the same. Because my father wasn’t an asshole. He may not love my mother like I love Elizabeth, but he respects her and she respects him and they’re not those kinds of people.”

“I know. I know your parents. I think they love each other, I think they’re fond of each other. But no, it’s not the kind of love you have for Elizabeth and they’re happy with that.”

Jason nodded. “Right. So/was okay. But Elizabeth wasn’t.”

“Women who hate their fathers swear they’ll never marry someone like them but usually end up doing so,” Keesha said. “I wonder why that it is.”

“The *only* thing I had in common with that asshole was we both had jobs that travel. I would never cheat on Elizabeth—” he broke off. “But none of that explains the last week.”

“No, so why don’t we cut the psychological profile and get to the good stuff.”

“I brought Olivia home last month and Elizabeth was here of course and we all went upstairs to the bedroom. Olivia wanted to show me her things and Elizabeth unpacked her things.” Jason sighed. “It was fine at first. We weren’t really talking to each other but then Olivia tried to keep me there. She started crying and telling me she’d be good if I just stayed...” Jason scrubbed a hand over his face. “We tried to explain to her why it couldn’t happen but it didn’t work and eventually Elizabeth left the room.”

“After Olivia cried herself to sleep, I went downstairs and we ended up getting into a huge argument. She was upset and ran out of the room and I left.”

“You told me this last month when I came to Spain,” Keesha reminded him. “So what’s going on?”

“When I came to the hospital, Elizabeth was curled up in a chair, her eyes bloodshot and her face tearstained. I started to think about our past and we...talked about the day I proposed. Like I said, things felt different.”

“You still love her, Jase. There’s no shame in that. There are some men who never get over the great love of their life.”

“It’s not just that.” Feeling restless, Jason started to pace. “She loves me, too. I can feel it. And we’ve been talking about it all this week. What went wrong, why our marriage didn’t work. She...there were so many things I didn’t know back then, that I didn’t realize. We were so young when we got married that neither of us really thought about what we were getting into.”

Keesha nodded. “These days, a lot of young marriages end in divorce.”

“I was wrong to leave her alone with Olivia so much. I should have gotten a job based out of this town. But I left and I left her alone with a little baby that sometimes cried so much she couldn’t handle it.”

“Jase—”

“She started taking sleeping pills,” Jason said softly. “And the morning she saw that god damned clipping in the paper, she’d just brought Olivia home from the hospital after she’d slept through Olivia’s cries. She was tired and she was exhausted—”

“That doesn’t excuse her not believing you,” Keesha said. “She should have realized she was over her head—”

“It’s easy to look back and criticize her now but she did the best she could,” Jason interrupted. “I should have come home more. I should have realized she was unhappy—that she was miserable.”

“Jase—”

“She never trusted me,” he blurted out. “She told me that just today. That she realized she never trusted me. Not completely, not even when we were first marriage. That she realized that the clipping hurt her but it didn’t surprise her.”

“Oh, Jase, that must have been so hard to hear,” Keesha said. She touched his arm. “I’m so sorry.”

“It was hard to hear,” Jason admitted, “But it hurt more to stand in that park and watch her cry, watch her body trembling because she was trying to explain it in a way that wouldn’t hurt me. It tears me apart inside because I should have seen this then. No woman goes to ever business dinner, every party, every social function her husband asks her to.”

“She wasn’t going to let you out of her sight,” Keesha deduced. “She was keeping you from cheating on her.”

“It’s so easy now to look back and see it now. Why couldn’t I have seen this? And why didn’t I see

her unhappiness after Olivia was born? She was always so tired and one night, I was home, we were kissing and well..." he hesitated.

"You were about to do the nasty?" Keesha supplied.

"Yeah, for want of a better phrase. I went to turn off the light and when I turned back to her, she was asleep." He sighed and rubbed his temples. "I knew she was with Olivia a lot and I just assumed she was tired."

"It was the sleeping pills, wasn't it?"

He nodded. "She'd taken some before I'd showed up at home unexpectedly. And they kicked in." He sighed. "Why didn't I see that? How could I miss her pain? Her lack of trust?"

"Because you weren't looking for it and men tend to be oblivious." Keesha sighed. "Look, I'm not saying I'm not sympathetic towards her. I haven't met her but the way you talk about her—the way you've always talked about her...it speaks volumes about both you and her. You guys made each other your entire world when you were together and there's nothing wrong with that. But Jason, you're divorced now—"

"I want her back," Jason interrupted. "I love her and she loves me. And we're going to get back together."

"Do you think that's a good idea?" she asked. "I mean, with Olivia's recovery and the obvious problems Elizabeth is still suffering from...to put a reconciliation on top of that..."

"I can't live without her and if it takes years before she's ready to get married again, I'll wait that long," Jason told her. "Keesha, Elise was a mistake—an attempt for me to get a piece of Elizabeth in my life. It didn't work and all I want is the real thing. I want her in my life."

"Fair enough," Keesha sighed. "I just want you to be careful, Jase. Take this slow."

"I plan to. Elizabeth and I have done the whirlwind relationship and now I want give her the life and love she deserves. To give us both the family we never had, to give Olivia the parents she needs."

"All right." Keesha shrugged. "I'm not going to try and talk you out of this because I don't really want to. I want you to be happy and you're happy with her—or at least when you're talking about her or thinking about her. That's all I really want for you."

"Thanks, Keesha."

"Of course, I want to meet her," she told him. "So, set that meeting up. It's time I met the woman who's turned you into this blubbering mess."

Chapter Thirteen

Olivia was doing some of the gripping exercises that her therapist had given her when Jason and Keesha came into the room a little while later.

Her eyes lit up. “Daddy! Aunt Keesh!”

“Hey, Liv babe,” Keesha said. She plopped right in the seat next to the bed that Elizabeth had hardly vacated and dropped an oversize teddy bear on the bed. “This dude is for you.”

Olivia reached for the caramel colored animal with a bright smile. “He’s so fluffy,” she said, enthused. “Thanks!”

“Where’s your mother, Princess?” Jason asked, kissing his daughter on the cheek.

“Aunt Emily came by with Lily and they’re in the cafeteria.” Olivia pouted. “They wouldn’t let Lily in to see me. That’s so mean.”

“They don’t let little kids to visit in the hospital all that often but maybe we could sneak her in later,” Jason suggested. “How hard did your mother fight before she finally went?”

“Ten minutes,” Olivia replied. “I told her that I would be just fine by myself for a little while so she finally went. I think that Mommy needs a nap. She’s awfully cranky.”

“Mommy’s been worried about you,” Jason reminded her. “Now we know you’re going to be okay, she’ll get some sleep.”

“Good.” Olivia smiled brightly. “You know what I think Daddy?” she asked.

“Oh, no, Jase, it’s that smile,” Keesha said, tickling Olivia’s neck. She giggled.

“What do you think?” Jason asked.

“I think that you should take Mommy out to dinner,” Olivia announced. “I don’t think I seen her eat the whole time I’ve been awake. You should make her eat something.”

Keesha shook her head. “Wheredoyou get that devilish gene?” she asked with smile.

“You know what, honey?” Jason kissed her forehead. “You have a very good point. Now that you’re getting better, we should really turn our attentions to your mother. She’s definitely not eating enough.”

Olivia beamed. “So you’ll take Mommy out on a date?” she asked, hopefully.

Jason took a deep breath. “You’re a big girl, right Olivia?”

“I’m five years old. That’s older than four,” she said seriously.

“Right. So I’m going to try and tell you something and you really have to listen to me here, baby, okay?”

Olivia nodded. “Okay.”

“I love your mother very much,” Jason informed her. “And she loves me. And when we were younger, we thought that was all we ever needed.”

“Love is all you need,” Olivia recited. “Lil’s dad likes that song.”

“Love is important but it’s not always enough in a marriage,” Jason tried to explain. “I was young and I was stupid.”

Olivia giggled. “Daddy was stupid,” she told Keesha gleefully.

“He sure was,” Keesha agreed.

With a glare at his best friend, Jason continued. “And we got divorced.”

Olivia sighed impatiently. “I know that, Daddy, and I know you’re not getting back together again—”

“That’s not entirely true,” Jason admitted.

Olivia blinked. “I don’t understand, Daddy.”

“We’re trying to see if maybe we could,” he told her.

“You mean...we might be a family again?” Olivia asked. Her eyes lit up. “Really?”

“Maybe,” Jason stressed. “I didn’t want to get your hopes up and your mother was concerned that you might be really upset if it didn’t end up working out.”

“Why wouldn’t it?” Olivia asked innocently.

“Because grown up relationships are complicated,” Keesha explained. “And sometimes...no matter how much two people love each other, it doesn’t always work.”

“Right, so I need you to be a big girl and try to understand that while we’re trying to work it out, it might not happen.”

Olivia nodded. “Okay, Daddy, but just for the record, I think you will.”

He kissed her forehead. “I think we will, too but don’t tell your mother I told you.”

“Cross my heart.”

Emily stirred her hot chocolate. “You look better,” she told Elizabeth. “But you still look tired.”

“Yeah...I haven’t gotten a lot of sleep this last week,” she sighed. “But now that we know for sure Olivia’s going to be okay...”

“So, this reconciliation with Jason...” Emily trailed off. “Are you sure about it? I mean...you worked so hard to put your life back together after the divorce. I don’t want anything to ruin that.”

“I am sure about it,” Elizabeth replied. “I love Jason, Em. Since I was nineteen years old, I knew he was the one for me. We made mistakes and...a lot of them were mine and a lot of them were his. We were so young when we got married—too young to know any better.”

“I agree with that but it still doesn’t change the fact that he left you with a newborn to fly all over the world.”

“No, it doesn’t. And it doesn’t change the fact that I didn’t trust him enough with my heart or our daughter. I didn’t trust him enough to tell him about the sleeping pills.”

“Okay, okay, you know what you want and I really hope it works out for you.”

Elizabeth finished her hot chocolate and stood. “I want to get back upstairs. Jason’s bringing his best friend Keesha Ward by to see Olivia and I’m dying to finally meet her.”

The first thought that entered Keesha’s mind when Elizabeth Morgan entered Olivia’s hospital room was *Wow, Jason really had gone and found her look alike in Elise.*

“Keesha, this is Elizabeth,” Jason introduced them. He stood and crossed to his ex-wife. “Elizabeth, Keesha Ward.”

“It’s nice to finally meet you,” Elizabeth said warmly shaking the other woman’s hand. “I was beginning to think you didn’t exist,” she joked.

“Yeah, I can’t believe y’all were married for three years and we never even met,” Keesha replied. She leveled a glare at Jason. “I blame him.”

“And this is my best friend, Emily Cassadine,” Elizabeth stepped back. “Emily, you remember Jason.”

“Yes...our first meeting wasn’t exactly a good one,” Emily remarked sheepishly. “That was the night of um...Ric. And Jason was just being—well, I shouldn’t have been so...I’m sorry.”

“No—I was in a really bad mood that night,” Jason apologized. “I’m sorry.”

“Clean slate?” Emily proposed.

“Sure.”

“Cassadine,” Keesha murmured. “Why does that sound familiar?” she asked Jason.

He rubbed the back of his neck. "Because you kept sending letters and stuff back to him for the first month afterwards..." he trailed off.

"Ah...the lawyer's wife."

"Daddy," Olivia whined.

Jason turned and sat on her bed. "What is it, honey? Do you need anything?"

"Ask her," she whispered loudly.

"Ask who what?" Elizabeth asked suspiciously.

"Ask her," Olivia huffed impatiently.

"Okay, okay." Jason stood and took Elizabeth by the elbow. "I need to speak with you in the hallway for a minute."

He closed the door behind them and took a deep breath. "I told Olivia about the reconciliation."

Elizabeth's eyes widened. "Why?" she demanded. "Jesus, Jason, I thought we agreed--"

"We agreed that we wouldn't tell her because we didn't think she'd understand." He took her hand in his. "She does understand. I told her that while we were going to try our best--it might not work out and she said that was okay."

"I just--I don't to hurt her anymore than she already has." Elizabeth massaged her temple with her free hand. "But if you think she understands then I believe you."

She was looking down at the ground and didn't notice the surprise in his eyes. She trusted him. Just a little right now--but it was a start.

And he was determined to build on that.

"She suggested I take you out to dinner," Jason informed her.

Elizabeth glanced up, a small smile on her face. "Oh, she did, huh?"

"Yeah, she's concerned you're not eating," Jason said, returning the smile. "So...I was thinking maybe tonight...we could go out to dinner--do some dancing...like we used to?"

"I'm not that girl anymore," Elizabeth told him. She slid her hand up his arm and rested it on his shoulder. "When I go out dancing these days, it's for charity events and you know how much *I hate those.*"

"Okay, so what girl are you now?" Jason teased.

“Tell you what. Pick me up at seven. Wear jeans, okay?” she suggested. She kissed his cheek, “I’ll drive.”

“Liz?” Jessica called, shutting the kitchen door behind her. “Maj, go color at the table,” she told her daughter. Maja obediently climbed on to one of the chairs and spread her coloring book and crayon box out.

“Liz?” Jessica called again.

Elizabeth entered the kitchen as she finished hooking a hoop earring in to left ear. She’d showered and let her hair dry out in her natural curls. For the first time since Jessica could remember, Elizabeth was wearing makeup. Not just light touches here and there for her social events but—smoky gray eye shadow, black eyeliner, black mascara, pink lip gloss. She wore a tight melon-colored tank top with a tan suede jacket thrown over top.

“Are those the jeans I made you buy last year?” Jessica demanded with a grin on her face. “The tight ones that showed off your ass?”

“You mean the ones that have been sitting in my closet since I bought them?” Elizabeth teased. “Yes.”

“You look fabulous—where are you going? I know that’s not for sitting around Livvie’s hospital room.”

“I want to see Liv!” Maja piped up.

“Soon, baby,” Jess promised. “Well?” she prompted.

“I’m taking Jason out for a night on the town,” Elizabeth informed her friend. She slid into a pair of high-heeled sandals and crouched down to fasten them.

“Ah. I can’t see Jason in something that matches what you’re wearing. All I’ve seen are pictures of him in suits.”

“Oh...he has jeans,” Elizabeth assured her. “He never wears them in public. His parents never let him when he was younger so he just...never did it any differently.”

“Freaky,” Jessica mused. “Where are you taking him?”

“He wanted to go dancing—do all the smooth, sophisticated stuff we did when we first met,” Elizabeth replied. She ruffled Maja’s hair as she passed by her and opened the fridge to take out a bottle of water. “That was fun when I was younger but I’m a whole new person now and I think Jason needs to be introduced to her.”

“So...?” Jessica slid her hands in her jeans pockets. “Kelly’s? You don’t think it’s a bit much for a man of the world?”

“He needs to understand that I haven’t just been existing—suspended in air without him. I have a life—I

know people, people know me—I have friends, you know?” She sighed and took a long gulp of the water. “I want him to know me, Jess. *I want* this to work.”

“Okay, Kelly’s is a good place to start. What about afterwards?”

“Some ice cream—a walk on the docks. I need to know if he can live a life—that’s so ordinary.”

“Ah...you both kill me. What time are you meeting him?”

“He’s coming over here in about fifteen minutes and then I’m going to drive.” Elizabeth smiled. “For once—I’m wearing the pants in this relationship.”

Jason shifted uncomfortably in the jeans, sneakers and t-shirt he’d bought that afternoon. Not all of his clothes had been shipped from Spain yet and even so—he wasn’t even sure he *owned* a pair of jeans.

He knocked on the door and Elizabeth opened it so quickly, he wondered if she’d been looking for him out the window.

“Hey, good you’re on time.” She stepped onto the porch and locked the door behind her.

He dragged his eyes over her body and decided that he could learn to like jeans very much.

“So where are we going?” Jason asked as he followed Elizabeth to her car. She unlocked her door and then hit the automatic lock to open his side.

“I’m going to show you what we small town people do for fun,” she said. “Buckle up.”

Jason stepped inside the small diner hesitantly. Elizabeth had taken him on a small tour of the town that had been his home for a year and it saddened him that he couldn’t even remember small details.

“Come on.” She tugged his hand and led him towards the counter. “Hey, Maxie,” she greeted the blonde waitress warmly. “How’s school?”

“It’s okay,” Maxie replied. “I heard about Livvie, how’s she doing?”

“Much better,” Elizabeth took a handful of Jason’s blue t-shirt and yanked him towards the counter. “Maxie, this is my husband, Jason. Jason—this is Maxie Jones. She and her sister baby-sit for Olivia sometimes.”

“Okay, yeah, she’s told me about you guys,” Jason said.

Maxie frowned. “I thought you were divorced.”

“We are,” Elizabeth replied. “But hey, you live in this town. How many divorced couples are *actually* divorced?”

Maxie laughed. “Good point. Well, have a seat and Lucas will be right with you.” She leaned towards

Elizabeth. "He's out back with his girlfriend, Sage," she confided in a hushed voice.

"We're not in a hurry." Elizabeth pushed Jason towards a table. "There's menus at the table," she told him.

"I don't believe I've ever eaten in a place like this," Jason remarked, pulling out a chair for her before taking a seat across from her. "You seem friendly with the people who work here."

"Well, yeah, like I told you—Maxie and Georgie baby-sit Olivia. This is her favorite place to eat, so we know everyone who comes in and out of here and Georgie works at a convenience store up the street from our house, so I know her. Does that bother you?"

"No. It's just different." Jason plucked the menu out of the stand. "What's good here?"

"Elizabeth Morgan—I haven't seen you in here in almost two weeks!"

Elizabeth stood and embraced a redheaded older woman. "Bobbie! Hey, how's Carly and the boys?"

"Oh, they're great. Just got back from the Caribbean with their stepfather," Bobbie replied. "Carly's so tan and Michael's sunburned," she laughed. "How's Olivia? I heard about the accident. I've been on vacation myself with Lucas out in California or I would have stopped by."

"We were worried for a while but she's doing really well now." Elizabeth touched Jason's shoulder. "Jason, this is Bobbie Spencer. She owns the place and she's a nurse at the hospital. Bobbie, this is my husband, Jason."

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you," Bobbie said, shaking Jason's hand. Jason stood.

"Nice to meet you," Jason said politely.

"Are you two...back together?" Bobbie asked with a smile towards Elizabeth.

"Working on it," Elizabeth said. "This is Jason's first time here, actually."

"Oh, well then he has to have the chili." She touched Jason's arm. "My aunt's recipe. She passed away a few years ago but Kelly's will always be known for Ruby's chili."

"I'm sorry?" Jason offered, crinkling his eyes.

Bobbie laughed. "I'm making him uncomfortable. He's adorable, honey," she kissed Elizabeth's cheek. "I'll stop by and see Olivia this week, okay?"

"See ya," Elizabeth took her seat and after a moment, Jason sat back down, too.

He tilted his head to the side. "*Everyone* knows we're divorced?"

"Everyone knows everything in this town," Elizabeth told him. "It's just the way things are. If you

really mean it—about living here—you need to come to terms with that.”

Jason frowned. “What is this...some sort of test?” he asked. “Did you bring me here to see if I could handle people knowing everything about me before we even met?”

“I brought you here because it’s my favorite diner, because it’s our daughter’s favorite diner, because it’s where everyone goes to eat out. Everyone who is ordinary and boring—whose highlight of the day was their kid’s finger painting or something at work. Yeah—I’m curious if you can really live in a place like this.”

He took a deep breath. “I love you, Elizabeth. I love Olivia. If this is the life you guys live—then this is the life I want to live to. I’m tired of living in hotels—never unpacking, never having my own place.” He ran a hand over his face. “Of not being to tuck my daughter in at night or waking up next to you in the morning. I’m twenty-eight years old, Elizabeth and I’m *tired* of just existing.”

Chapter Fourteen

Jason slid his hand into Elizabeth's and glanced over at her as she offered him her vanilla ice cream cone. He declined, content to watch her tongue dart out for tiny licks.

They'd dropped serious discussion over dinner and afterwards, she'd taken him to an ice cream vendor and he'd insisted on paying for her ice cream. This was a date, he'd told her, and he was going to do this right.

"It looks even better during the winter," Elizabeth broke the silence. She smiled up at him. "With all the snow and the lake freezes over just a little—not enough for skating or anything—it feeds into the river, you know and the current's too strong to freeze over."

"Isn't it too cold to walk here in the winter?" Jason asked.

"It's more than too cold," Elizabeth admitted. "But I don't care. I bundle Olivia up in layers of clothing and I wear like eight sweaters but it's so worth it."

"Well then I guess I better get some winter clothes," he remarked casually.

"Yeah—I remember you never did like to winter anywhere where it felt like the actual season," she laughed. She finished her ice cream and offered him the cone again. "Want to eat the cone?"

He shook his head and she tossed into a nearby trash can, licking the excess vanilla from her hands. "We should talk about Olivia," he said.

She sighed and stopped walking. She slid her hands in the pockets of her suede jacket. "What about her?" Elizabeth asked.

"I know we talked about me staying at the house and that we decided it was a bad idea," Jason began, "but she's going to be home in a few weeks and we don't know what stage of her recovery she's going to be at and I want to be there for her—"

"We don't know what stage in our reconciliation *we'll* be at in a few weeks," Elizabeth interrupted.

He regarded her with suspicious eyes. "I'm not exactly sure what pint you're trying to make there."

"Well..." Elizabeth drawled. She danced her fingertips across his broad chest and smiled up at him. "If I were to ask you to come with me tonight..."

He caught her hand in his and brought them to his lips. He kissed each finger softly and shook his head. "As tempting as that offer would be, I would say no."

She surprised him then by smiling brightly. "And that's exactly why I think everything is going to be just fine." She stood on her tiptoes and pressed her lips chastely to his. "If we're not at the stage

where we're ready to be living together when she comes home, there's always the guest room."

"You sure about that?" Jason asked apprehensively.

Elizabeth nodded. "I love you, Jason and I love that you love our daughter. I remember when she was born and you just—went insane," she laughed. "You bought out FAO Schwarz—you bought all these things—some she still can't use..."

Jason shrugged and ducked to hide his smile. "I couldn't help it. You know—I have to admit that I always thought I'd be disappointed if I didn't have a boy but I wasn't. When you told me you were pregnant—I didn't even care if we had a boy or a girl—just the thought of us having a baby..."

"I thought you'd hate the idea—having a baby would tie us to one place more—we couldn't just pick up and leave anymore—" Elizabeth sighed. "You're a good father, Jason. I don't know if that's important to you or not but it's important to me—"

"It is important to me." Jason twined his fingers in hers and they started walking again. "The older I get and the more time I spend with Olivia, the more I realize you were right. It appalls me that I was willing to do what my parents did to me." He glanced down at her. "What your parents did to you."

"Your childhood—it was different than mine. Your father—if he's ever had an affair, I've certainly never heard of it and he clearly loves your mother even if it's a safe, friendship kind of love, you know? And I happen to like your parents."

"Yeah—I have to admit what they lacked in affection they made up for by at least pretending they were my parents." He shrugged. "But they still missed important things in my life. Graduations, birthdays—our wedding." Jason rubbed his thumb over her wedding and engagement rings. "I've missed all of Olivia's birthdays because I was an idiot."

"Jason—I was so horrible to you," she sighed. "I didn't trust you—not with me, not with Olivia and you never did anything to deserve that mistrust and I didn't give you much of a warning that I wanted to change our lives."

"You were my wife, Elizabeth. My entire life." They started up the dock stairs to where her car was parked near Kelly's. "I should have made whatever sacrifice was necessary to keep you in my life."

He stopped her when they reached her car and gripped her shoulders. "You and Olivia are *still* my life—the most important people in the world to me and I want to make sure you believe that. No matter how long it takes for you to trust me."

Elizabeth wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her cheek against his chest. "Do you remember what you said about not needing a pile of bricks because I was your home?"

"Mmm-hmm."

"You were my home, too...I just didn't realize it until I lost you."

Keesha was studying a map of New York State when he came into the penthouse a little later. “It’s amazing how big this state is,” she murmured. “No wonder I always get lost.”

“You got lost in Rhode Island,” Jason reminded her.

Keesha shrugged. “It’s a gift. How did it go?”

He lifted her feet up and sat down on the couch, putting her legs in his lap. He thought about his answer for a few moments as Keesha tried to calculate the distance between New York City and Port Charles. It looked like it was three inches apart but that couldn’t be right.

“It was—a little weird at first. She took me to this diner where she knew everyone and everyone knew me.”

“Sounds like the Cheers theme song.”

“Everyone knew we were divorced and I bet they even know why—it’s like a real small town, Keesha. No one has any privacy.”

She wrinkled her nose. “God, I’d never survive here.”

“It’s—it explains why she’s so different than she used to be. She was always an incredible woman but—” he shook his head, a little awed by the whole idea. “There’s whole air about her now—like she’s really happy here. I never realized how much setting down roots could matter to her but it’s really been good for her.”

“She’s different,” Keesha said slowly. “Too different?”

“No—I wasn’t in love with her because she loved to travel or play the socialite—those were things people in our crowd do but it was always different with her. She went to Egypt with me, to Siberia, Turkey—China. So many places that no respectable woman would. She got sun poisoning but still went to the pyramids with me because she knew I’d stay with her and miss the tour group otherwise. She got pneumonia in Siberia.”

“A sane woman would have let you traipse on your own,” Keesha grimaced. “I’d have stayed behind in a hotel with room service.”

“Elise did after the first few trips,” Jason said quietly. “I took her for granted, Keesha. I didn’t realize just how incredible Elizabeth was until I was married to someone else.”

“So...tonight?” Keesha prompted.

“Tonight—I got to return the favor. She went to exotic places with me—smiled through it and I think she really enjoyed some of it—and tonight, I spent an ordinary evening eating hamburger and fries at a diner where everyone knew everything about me before I opened my mouth. I walked on the docks with her and bought her a vanilla ice cream cone.”

He looked at his best friend with a small smile. “And I really enjoyed it. I could do this, Keesha. I could live here, live this life and it would be okay. I could really do it.”

“And never resent giving up the life you live now.” Keesha sighed. “It’s a beautiful fantasy life you lead there, Jase.”

“What *lifed* I have, Keesha? All of my possessions can be packed in forty-five minutes. I don’t see my daughter three thirds of the year—I’ve never celebrated her birthday with her, I’ve missed three out of five Christmases, I missed her ballet recital...”

Jason shook his head. “And I missed seeing Elizabeth smile every day—missed holding her and being with her. If I could go back in time and fix it so that I hadn’t missed a thing, I’d pay any price in the world. But since I can’t change the past, I’m sure as hell going to prevent the rest of my life being that miserable.”

“I want you to be happy,” Keesha assured him. “I just want you to be sure that you’ve thought this through.”

“I have. I’m told Elizabeth this tonight and now I’m telling you. I’m twenty-eight years old and I’m tired of just existing. I want my life back—I want Elizabeth back. Our marriage worked before because I loved her—because I was with her. It had nothing to do with the parties, the money, the hotels. I love my daughter and I want to be there for her every moment of her life. I’ve made a lot of mistakes, Keesha and I don’t aim to make them over and over again.”

Elizabeth pulled the thin blanket over her legs and reached over to switch off her bedside lamp. The room plunged into darkness and just before her eyes got too heavy, the phone rang.

Worried that it was the hospital, Elizabeth snatched the receiver up. “Hello?” she said urgently.

“Hey—it’s just me,” Jason said. “It’s not about Olivia.”

She exhaled slowly. “Thank God. I called her when I got home earlier and she seemed fine so—” she shook her head. “Sorry—hi.”

He laughed. “It’s okay, I would have been worried it was the hospital too.”

“So—what’s up? Why’re you calling this late?” Elizabeth asked.

“I’m trying to fall asleep and I realized why I couldn’t.”

“Oh, really?” Elizabeth’s lips curved into a smile. There were nights when they’d both been separated by an ocean, stranded at their respective schools and though England was in a different time zone, she loved the late night calls from Jason. They’d spend hours talking on the phone, yearning for the next time they could steal a weekend to see one another.

“Yeah—see, I had this incredible date tonight,” Jason began. “And I just can’t get this girl out of my head.”

“Sounds bad,” Elizabeth said. She closed her eyes. “Why do you think you can’t stop thinking about her?”

“Because she’s just–amazing. I think I’m in love and I couldn’t sleep without hearing her voice again.”

“Well–you’re in luck. I had a date with the cutest guy I’ve ever seen,” Elizabeth teased. “And I couldn’t sleep without hearing his voice again.”

“I–I love you, Elizabeth.”

“I love you, too.”

“Good night.”

“Good night.”

There was a pause and she could still hear his breath on the line. “You going to hang up?”

“You first.”

“Ha–I remember these arguments. What was the record? An hour to decide who’d hang up first?” Elizabeth recalled fondly.

“Yeah–but we’re not nineteen and twenty-one anymore,” Jason sighed. “We have a daughter who’s going to want to see us before therapy tomorrow.”

“Mmm...yeah, and this twenty-six year old would like some hot chocolate in the morning. With scrambled eggs, toast and bacon.”

“That place–Kelly’s...does it serve breakfast?” Jason asked curiously.

“Sure does, best eggs in town.” Elizabeth yawned. “Okay–so I’ll pick you up around eight?”

“It’s my turn to pick you up. Eight it is. Good night, Elizabeth.” There was a click this time and she smiled.

“Good night, Jason.”

Chapter Fifteen

Three Weeks Later

Olivia struggled up the front walk with her crutches and bit her lip as she concentrated on her next step.

Jason was in front of her, taking a step backwards for every step his daughter took towards him and Elizabeth followed behind Olivia.

“You okay, baby?” Jason asked when he saw her tiny arms shake a little.

“It’s hard,” Olivia admitted in a small voice. She stopped moving. “Why can’t I walk anymore?”

“Your accident hurt your spine,” he kneeled down. “But you’re doing so much better than when you woke up. You remember being in the wheelchair?”

Olivia nodded miserably. “You and Mommy had to push me around all the time and I couldn’t go nowhere without you.” She sniffled. “Still can’t.”

“But you can use the crutches now,” Elizabeth pointed out. “And with all the therapy, you’ll be back to normal in no time.”

“Now let’s get you in the house,” Jason stood up.

Olivia shook her head. “I can’t go any further.”

Dr. Jones had told them not to push her more than she was comfortable so Jason didn’t argue. He took the crutches from her and lifted her into his arms. “Come on, honey.”

Elizabeth retrieved the crutches and shifted Olivia’s bag higher on her shoulder as she followed her husband and daughter into the house.

“Do you want something to eat? Something to drink?” Jason asked as he settled Olivia on top of the her bed and moved to take her sneakers off.

Elizabeth set the crutches by the door and started to unpack the bag, dumping most of the clothes into the hamper and setting Olivia’s stuffed animals and pictures back in their proper places.

Olivia nodded. “Could I have some apple juice? And maybe you could get my Beauty and the Beast tape from downstairs?”

Jason nodded and kissed her forehead before moving towards the door. Without thinking he kissed Elizabeth before exiting the room.

Olivia’s eyes lit up. “You really *are* getting back together!” she cried with glee.

Elizabeth flushed and approached the bed, tucking her hands in her back pockets. “We’re working on it, baby. I know how much you want us to be together.”

“I do,” Olivia nodded. “But...” she bit her lip. “I only want it if you guys still love each other.”

Elizabeth’s eyes filled with tears and she sat on the edge of the bed. “I love your father—more than anything else in this world. The reason we’re getting back together is not solely because of you, baby. It’s because I can’t live without him and I’m tired of pretending I can.”

Olivia nodded. “But it is *alittle* because of me, right?”

“Right.” Elizabeth ruffled her daughter’s hair. “If we hadn’t had you, we would have gotten divorced and never seen each other again. Having you in our lives has been such a blessing, honey. You know that we love you more than anything else in this world.”

“Up to the sky and around the world,” Olivia said, repeating one of her father’s favorite sayings. “And Mommy? I love you the same way and I know Daddy loves you.”

“I know it, too.”

“Mommy?” Olivia struggled to sit up a little. “What if I never walk right again?”

“Baby—” Elizabeth hesitated, not wanting to lie to her. “The doctors say that if you try hard and work at your therapy, there’s no chance you won’t walk again.”

“But what if I can’t?” Olivia’s lip trembled. “I was gonna do ballet this year, Mommy. What if I can’t do that anymore?”

“We will make sure that never happens,” Elizabeth promised. “If we have to search the whole world for a doctor, a treatment, a surgery...you’ll be okay again.”

Jason reentered the room—glass in one hand and video tape in the other. He set the tape on top of Olivia’s TV and crossed the room to hand her the apple juice.

Olivia reached for it and Jason waited as she tried to grip it. Finally, she had to use both her hands to wrap around the glass and even though it was difficult for her.

Elizabeth swallowed hard and clenched her hands in Olivia’s bedspread. After a long moment, Olivia was able to sip from the glass. She looked at her father hopefully. “Will you and Mommy watch the movie with me?”

“Sure, honey.” He got up to turn on the TV and put the tape in. He grabbed the remote and sat back on the bed, kicking his shoes off and putting his legs up. Elizabeth mimicked the motions and Olivia reveled in the idea of spending time with her parents like they were an actual family.

Olivia fell asleep during Belle and the Beast’s snowball fight so the two turned off the television and tucked her in.

“It’s good to have her home,” Elizabeth remarked as they moved downstairs. “This house didn’t feel the same without her.” She glanced at him as he followed her into the kitchen. “Are you okay with being in the guest room?”

Jason took a glass out of the cabinet and poured some iced tea from a pitcher in the fridge. “Elizabeth—we agreed three weeks ago on this arrangement. You’re not ready to go back to the bedroom.”

“It’s not that I’m not ready—it’s more that...I haven’t made love with anyone since you,” Elizabeth admitted.

Though he’d figured as much since her date with Ric Lansing had been her first and only foray into post-divorce dating, it was still jarring to hear it out loud. His wife was one of the most beautiful women he’d ever met and it humbled him to know that he was the only man to be inside her bedroom.

She flushed and looked away. “How—many women...?” she trailed off.

“Just Elise,” Jason assured her, wishing he could tell her no one. Elise had been a distraction from the void his divorce left in him and nothing more. He tucked her hair behind her ear and trailed a finger down her jaw. “There have been four women in my life and two of them were before I laid eyes on you.”

She took the iced tea from him and set it on the counter before wrapping her arms around his neck. “You know...the last time we made love was in this kitchen.”

“Yeah?” He slid his arms around waist and rested his hands on the small of her back.

“Mmm-hmm.” Elizabeth stood on the tips of her toes and started planting soft kisses on her ex-husband’s jaw. “I was doing the dishes and you came up behind me and kissed my neck.”

He did that now—having missed the taste of her skin. He nipped at it and she giggled. “Mmm, yeah, just like that.”

“I turned around to get you to stop and instead, you kissed me and we made love...” she closed her eyes as his mouth moved from her neck to the curve of her jaw. “Right...against...this...counter.”

He lifted her onto the counter and kissed her hard. She wrapped her legs around his waist and clung to him, opening her mouth to deepen the kiss.

Jason slid his hands underneath her t-shirt and wrapped them around her rib cage unwilling to go further without some sort of sign from her. Elizabeth threaded her fingers through his hair, scratching his scalp with her nails.

They finally broke apart a few moments later, breathing heavily. Elizabeth rested her forehead against his and smiled. “I’ve missed that.”

“Me, too.”

He pulled her off the counter and kissed the top of her head. "I don't want to do anything you're not ready to do, Elizabeth. But I love you."

She bit her lip and smoothed her hands down his shirt. "Maybe...you could move back into the bedroom," she began. "We don't—we don't have to do anything."

"Kind of like London?" Jason asked. "We would just hold each other at night?"

She nodded. "I know we're older than that—I'm not some naïve virgin anymore b-but in a way, I feel like I am."

"It's a good idea. Sex isn't everything," he assured her. "You're not ready go back there and neither am I." He stepped away from her. "It seems to me that while things were good in the bedroom—they weren't so good out of it and I really want to make them better here before we take this in there."

Elizabeth nodded and smiled easily. "I agree. And I think we're already doing better so—acting more married would be the next step."

"Also..." Jason hesitated. "I think I'd like us to get remarried before we make love again."

Surprised, Elizabeth blinked. "Really?"

"Maybe it's a little—old-fashioned," Jason admitted, "but I think it would help to make a fresh start."

"I just...I never thought you'd make a suggestion like that." Elizabeth shrugged. "It's surprising."

"Bad surprising or good surprising?"

"It's good surprising." She pressed a light kiss to his mouth. "And I think it's a great idea."

"Good." Jason reached into his back pocket and withdrew a long velvet jewelry case. She hesitated as she took it, knowing some slinky sophisticated bracelet or necklace would be inside. He used to give her these before parties—they'd been specifically picked out complement what she'd be wearing that night.

And somehow, it wouldn't seem right to her now. To be given diamonds, sapphires or pearls while she wore a pair of jeans and a t-shirt that proclaimed her to be a PTA mom. She wore a pair of tennis shoes and her hair was in a messy pony tail.

The days of sophisticated party dresses, high heels and extravagant jewelry could no longer be her every day life and she was terrified Jason hadn't accepted that yet.

So when she opened the case and saw a simple gold chain with a charm that read #1 MOM, she burst into tears.

Alarmed, Jason yanked some paper towels from the roll on the counter and handed them to her. "You don't like it? Did you want something else? I just—"

“I love it,” Elizabeth said, holding it out of his reach when he went to take it back. “It’s perfect...I was just expecting...”

“Some horribly inappropriate diamond necklace?” Jason asked wryly.

She flushed and nodded. “Yeah—I just—it’s hard to believe that you’re really accepting this life—where we stay in and we eat hamburgers instead of caviar and where the only jewelry I wear are my rings...”

“I know—but this life appeals to me now,” Jason told her. “I like the idea that we’re a family—that I don’t have to constantly share you with everyone.”

She took the necklace out of the case and held it out to him. “Put it on?” She turned so he could drape it around her neck and fix the clasp.

“How does it look?” Elizabeth asked, turning back around.

“Perfect.” Jason kissed her forehead. “Absolutely perfect.”

Epilogue

“I can hardly believe it’s Christmas Eve,” Elizabeth murmured, tilting her face up to the falling snowflakes.

Jessica lifted her daughter Maja into her arms. “Look at the Christmas tree, Maja-bear. It’s bigger than last year, isn’t it?”

“Daddy takes pictures,” Maja said decisively. “They’ll be on the front page.”

“That’s right.” Jessica kissed Maja’s cheek. “And Liv and Lily will be here soon and you can all play while us grown ups do boring things.”

Maja squirmed. “Wanna play now!”

Jessica lowered her to the ground and watched as Maja ran off to join the crowd of children watching city council members decorate the large tree in the courtyard outside General Hospital. “Today’s Liv’s last therapy appointment isn’t it?”

“Mm...Dr. Jones said that as long as she keeps doing her exercises at home and come in for some follow ups this spring, she’s healed.” Elizabeth smiled at her best friend shyly. “We told her last month she’d be the flower girl at our wedding and it seemed to help her progress.”

“Yes, the omniscient wedding which there is no date for yet.”

“And no agreement about,” Elizabeth nodded. “But it’s going to happen, Jess, I know.”

“Hey, I know the sucker’s crazy for you and I applaud the abstinence thing. I just...don’t want you to get hurt.”

“I know but these last three months have been the most incredible of my life,” Elizabeth murmured. “I’ve loved Jason since I was nineteen years old but I’ve fallen in love with him all over again. He’s just...he’s so warm and generous—he’s still the man he used to be only...”

“Not a jackass,” Jessica said dryly.

“Yeah, there’s that.” Elizabeth slid her hands into the pockets of her winter jacket. “Jason and I were meant to be a family, Jess.”

“Speaking of the family...” Jessica nodded to the front doors where Jason was exiting with Olivia in his arms. He set the girl on her feet and she ran unsteadily towards her friends.

“Livvie!” Maja chirped. “You didn’t miss the star!”

“Oh, I hope she doesn’t try to climb the tree again this year,” Jessica muttered as she moved quickly to supervise.

“It’s so good to see her running,” Elizabeth murmured as Jason joined her side. She toyed with the necklace hanging around her neck. “How did the appointment go?”

“Dr. Jones is very pleased with her progress. She’ll be walking and gripping normally by this time next year and she’ll be doing it so well, you would never know she was sick.” Jason wrapped an arm around her shoulder and tugged her to his side.

“You ready to be woken up around dawn and spend most of the day putting together those ridiculous presents you bought her?” Elizabeth asked, smiling up at him.

“Am I ready to spend my first Christmas with my daughter?” Jason asked instead. “To spend the day with my family? Yeah, I think I can handle it.”

A few hours later, a fire lit was in their living room. Olivia had been fed and bathed and was sitting between them on the couch as Jason read her *‘Twas The Night Before Christmas*.

“Nothing against Mommy,” Olivia said as Jason closed the book, “but it’s really nice to have you read the book with.” She hugged him tightly. “Do I get to open a present tonight?”

“Well…” Elizabeth hesitated and then smiled at Jason. “Sure.”

“Excellent.” Olivia scrambled off the couch and stood in front of them in her long blue cotton nightgown with a lacy collar. “Can I pick the present?”

“Whatever you want, Princess.”

Olivia reached under the tree and pulled out a tiny wrapped box. “Okay, so I’ve got a present for Mommy that I want her to open and it’s kind of for Daddy. And when you open it, Mommy, I’ll tell you which present I want.”

Elizabeth smiled and took the box from her daughter. She opened the top and blinked at the ring inside.

“It was in the gumball machine at the hospital,” Olivia explained. “Kristina told me that you guys can’t married again without a ring so I got one that looks like the one Daddy gave you before.”

Jason looked at Elizabeth’s stunned expression. “She kind of jumped the gun on me,” he said, with a half smile as he reached into his pocket and removed a velvet box. He flipped the lid open to reveal an amethyst stone set in a gold band. “It’s Olivia’s birthstone, I didn’t want you to feel you had to choose between the rings.”

Elizabeth licked her lips. “Jason…”

“Say yes, Mommy,” Olivia stamped her foot impatiently. “I wanna be a flower girl.”

Elizabeth laughed and pressed a hand to her eyes to wipe a few errant tears. “Well, how can I say no to that?” she murmured. She slid the ring from Olivia onto her pinky and then looked at Jason. “Yes.”

He took the ring from the box and slid it onto the ring finger of her right hand and then used that hand to tug her into his lap where he kissed her. "I'm going to make you so happy this time, I promise you that."

"Yay!" Olivia squealed. "Now I can tell you the rest of my present!"

Elizabeth and Jason turned to their daughter. "What is it Princess?"

Olivia grinned. "A baby brother." She frowned. "Or a sister. It doesn't really matter—I'm not picky."

"Oh, really?" Elizabeth grabbed Olivia around the waist and planted her daughter in her own lap.

"Well, maybe if you're really good, Santa will bring you one next year."

"Oh, he will," Olivia said seriously. "I asked for Daddy to come home last year and look, now he's home." She planted a kiss on her father's cheek. "Santa freaking rocks."

The End